DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

Sacrificing Present Security and Happiness to Trust in God's Future Blessing

My observation last week that Abraham's uniqueness lay in his courage to take risks to follow God despite safer alternatives has dominated my thinking about this week's Parasha. It connects the nuances of the Abraham narrative with the Torah's later teachings about how Israelites should trust and have faith in God. As Deuteronomy explains, the Promised Land is not like Egypt, where irrigation from constantly flowing waterways assures a reliable water supply. Rather, it is a land of mountains and ravines dependent upon God for rainfall. The Torah's warnings against the seeming security of Egypt, which ultimately led to slavery, shape its outlook throughout. Thus, when Lot chooses the well-watered, fertile plain of the southern Jordan–Dead Sea Rift Plain, which the Torah describes was irrigable like Egypt, we should understand this as a pejorative description even before its inhabitants' wickedness is revealed. Abraham, by contrast, settles inland and in more hilly regions of Canaan, where crops depend upon intermittent rainfall from Heaven rather than upon "safer" alternatives.

The Torah does not explicitly explain why assured sustenance leads to depravity in Sodom, nor does it fully explain that connection in Egypt, though it describes how Egypt's population became enslaved. Yet the detailed account of Sodom's fate seems to underscore the contrast between dependence upon assured sustenance with Abraham's reliance upon God. Despite living in a region where food insecurity would seem more likely, Abraham is exceedingly hospitable to his guests. Meanwhile, in a fertile, populous city where lodging should be readily available, the angels find only Lot to welcome them. In areas where abundance is assured, we may infer, the setting encourages people to hoard resources, while those living in regions used to hardship recognize how precious prosperity is as God's special gift, and are more willing to share it with whomever God sends their way.

The Parasha's opening story, heralding the bearing of Isaac by a long-barren couple, likewise evokes faith in God's ability to grant fertility and produce even when the land seems barren and exhausted. Canaan's hills and dales, though seemingly dry, are well suited to gather God's blessing of rain and dew. Though such hope may at times seem nearly ludicrous and as laughable as a 90-year-old giving birth, the Israelite farmer must trust God enough to sow his seed in faith that God will bless it.

The prominence of Ishmael's banishment, both in the Torah and in Jewish practice, also deserves attention. The story immediately precedes the Binding of Isaac, and both narratives involve a son of Abraham nearly dying. Jewish practice underscores their relation by reading the Sending Away of Ishmael on the First day of Rosh HaShanah and the Binding of Isaac on the Second. Sending Ishmael away to stake the future on Isaac and then being willing to sacrifice Isaac himself are both stories of radical trusting in God's promise despite existing alternatives. Abraham's willingness to send Hagar and his firstborn son into the desert, where they nearly die of thirst but for God's intervention, prepares him to be willing to sacrifice Isaac. Both stories require Abraham to set aside emotional attachments to present happiness, but their deeper commonality is his willingness to relinquish present security and trust God to provide for the future, even when that means sacrificing what he already has.

Of course, no one should take unwarranted risks. Had God not specifically commanded Abraham's actions, they would have been gravely sinful. I believe these stories are best understood symbolically, particularly in relation to the later Israelite farmer. He must trust God enough to sow his seed in difficult, mountainous terrain which seems barren and hopeless. He must go on planting even when sowing his last remaining grain leaves little with which to feed himself. He should not abandon his fields for employment elsewhere merely because another place seems to offer greater security. Like Abraham, he must have the fortitude and faith to risk following God's will, trusting in God's promised blessing for the future even when there are safer alternatives available in the present.

CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Vayera

October 30-31, 2026 | 20 Marheshvan, 5787

SCHEDULE

Hertz: Parasha: 63 | Haftarah: 76
Kaplan: Parasha: 78 | Haftarah: 1060

Candle Lighting | 5:37 pm
Evening Services | 5:45 pm | Main Sanctuary
Friday Night Lights | Rabbi Soloveichik | following services | *5787 Season sponsored by the Julis-Romo-Rabinowitz family*

Zemirot | 8:15 am
Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary
Tot Shabbat & Youth 5+ | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room
Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue
Special Shabbat Morning Shiur | following services | Rabbi Soloveichik
Kiddush | following shiur | *Sponsored by Anthony & Malaika Bregman, Bertie & Rachel Bregman, and Peter & Eleanor Bregman, in memory of Viviane Bregman* | *Kiddush supporters: The Sasson-Gelman family, in memory of Udi Sasson* | *The Sasson-Gelman family, in memory of Iris H. Sasson*
Book Club Luncheon | following shiur | Elias Room | for registered guests

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 4:45 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik
Teen Shiur | 4:45 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman
Evening Services | 5:30 pm
Habdala | 6:23 pm

Remember to turn your clocks back one hour on Saturday night.

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:
Sunday: 8:05 am | Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:
Sunday **(Minha & Arbit): 4:30 pm**
Monday-Thursday **(Arbit only): 6:30 pm (note new times)**

THIS MONDAY

*Learn more at **shearithisrael.org***

SOLD OUT

Presented by Congregation Shearith Israel and the Japan Society

Because One Ought

Celebrating a Japanese Story of Courage, Hope, and Renewal

THIS Monday, November 2 | 7:00 pm (after 6:30 pm Evening Services)

Featuring: ***Rabbi Dr. Meir Soloveichik, moderator | Ambassador Satoshi Katahira, Consul General of Japan in NY | Kristina Reiko Cooper, virtuoso cellist, composer, and producer | and more!***

This first-of-its-kind music and storytelling event celebrates the moral courage of Chiune Sugihara and Setsuzo Kotsuji, Japanese heroes who risked their careers and safety to help Jews escape the Nazis during the Holocaust.

Semiquincentennial Event at Fraunces Tavern

"Between Crown and Congress: New York's Jews During the American Revolution"

THIS Monday, November 2 | 6:30 pm | Free for Shearith Israel Members

Fraunces Tavern Museum, 54 Pearl Street

Rev. Z. Edinger will explore how New York's small Jewish community experienced the American Revolution and emerged fundamentally transformed by it. By examining the lives of figures such as Gershom Mendes Seixas, Myer Myers, Uriah Hendricks, and the Gomez and Hays families, together with the stories preserved in Shearith Israel's ritual objects and archival documents, we gain a more nuanced understanding of Jewish life during the conflict than the familiar narrative of Patriots versus Loyalists. **Members, use our code "FRAUNCES" to register for free at tinyurl.com/fraunces-tavern!**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Julian Herschman**, upon becoming a Bar Mitzvah. Congratulations as well to his parents, **Laura & Robert Herschman**, and the entire family.

Congratulations to **Andrew Klaber** and to **Paul Singer,** who are both being honored at UJA Federation NY's Wall Street Dinner on Monday evening, December 7. For details, visit **ujafedny.org.**

Of Interest to Our Community

Early Voting through November 1.
Election Day is **THIS Tuesday, November 3.**
Remember to get out and vote!

COMING UP

*Learn more at **shearithisrael.org***

Upcoming Scholars-In-Residence:

Professors Lynn & Alexander Kaye

NEXT Shabbat, Shabbat Haye Sarah, November 6-7

Following 4:30 pm Friday Evening Services | Prof. Lynn Kaye:

Assessing the Value of Time in Halakha

Following Shabbat Morning Services | Prof. Lynn Kaye:

Lay People's Voices & Advocacy in Rabbinic Courts of the Talmud

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 4:30 pm | Prof. Alexander Kaye:

Halakha and Democracy in Israel

Give them a warm welcome by supporting kiddush!

Sunday Matinee with Sisterhood

6th Annual Virtual Film Festival

First Film Discussion: Sunday, Nov 15 | 4 pm | ***The Garden of the Finzi-Continis***

This year's special lineup will feature four films of the late Arthur Cohn, hosted by his son, Emanuel Cohn, an Israeli film lecturer, actor and screenwriter, who has inspired and delighted us with his insights and interactive discussion over the past several years. Films will be sent to registrants to be viewed at their leisure. Then we will come together on Zoom to discuss the featured film with our host.

Thanksgiving at Shearith Israel

with 12th Annual Pack-A-Thon, Rabbi Soloveichik's Address, Parade Viewing, & More!

Thursday Morning, November 26

*Visit **shearithisrael.org/packathon2026** for all the details!*

KIDS KORNER

To win a raffle ticket at kiddush, find Jake with the answer to this riddle:

"You'll have a son!" God said with a smile,
Sarah thought this seemed strange all the while.
She found it so funny, she chuckled at last,
What did Sarah do when the news came to pass?

Season Premiere: Parent Child Learning: Siddur Decorating

Motzei Shabbat, November 14 | 6:30 pm | Dalya & Jake | Free; registration required

Join us for the first session of the season! Spend special time learning, creating, and connecting with Dalya and Jake as we dive into the world of tefillah. Everyone will decorate their very own Siddur covers for the Siddur booklets we use every week in Jr. Congregation. Come ready to learn, decorate, and make your siddur uniquely yours! Pizza will be served.