

DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

Ease (נח) Consolation (ינחמנו) & Grace (חן) turn Curses to Blessings

There are a number of word-plays at the end of our Parasha. The verb root “nahem,” as in God’s “regretting (וינחם)” having made Man, evidently expresses “regret” in the invocation of both curses and blessings, which function similarly in exact opposite directions. A “blessing” which the invoker “regrets” making is a “blessing in vain,” invoked hollowly and falsely, and becomes a curse. Divine blessing thus functions much like Divine adjuration in taking an oath, bringing blessing if faithfully kept but a curse if treacherously betrayed. Conversely, a curse which the cursor regrets imprecating, a “curse invoked in vain,” becomes a blessing—the story of Balaam comes immediately to mind.

It is interesting that “נחם” became the main term for “comforting” a mourner. Perhaps a mourner does “regret” losing his loved one, but wouldn’t that make him want to grieve further—the very opposite of “comfort”? However, it is not the mourner’s but rather God’s regret which is being referred to: Consoling the mourner implies that God “regrets” the “grief” He has caused him and lifts him from the “curse” of death and mourning. The curse of death can then begin to be seen as the blessing of having known the beloved in the first place, as Job implied: “The Lord had given, and the Lord took away - may the Name of the Lord be blessed.”

What changes blessing into curse? The “corruption” of the Land and all flesh, together with Man’s disobedient sin, causes blessing to be invoked falsely and in vain. The Land, originally blessed to produce vegetation, seeds, trees, and seeded fruit, continually regenerating through self-seeding and reproduction, is cursed so that it requires man’s laborious toil to till, seed and produce. Later, corruption, lack of discipline, and the blood of lawless violence turn blessing into curse, requiring cleansing and purification. The Flood accomplishes this cleansing, but at the cost of nearly wiping out Earth’s life.

Noah’s birth-name assigns him the task of turning curse into blessing. His name “נח” seems to mean something like “Ease” or “Rest,” much like God’s Sabbath rest (וינוח). Noah is thus to “Ease” the pain of God’s curse. Yet the verse derives his name from “ינחמנו” - console us.” Consolation does involve “easing” pain, but ultimately Noah’s task is to make God “regret” cursing the Land—to turn God’s curse upon the reproductive cycles of Land, Man, and Woman back into blessing. (The related terms for the curse of the Land, Man’s cultivation, and Woman’s childbearing are עצבון and עצב, words for grief, pain, or misery—the same term used when God “regrets” making Man and is Himself “aggrieved.”) The two letters of Noah’s name are the first of that three-letter verb “נחם” applied to Man, seeking the “consolation” of Mankind from God’s curse. Noah’s name and destiny were charted by his father, Lemekh II. An earlier Lemekh, descended from Cain, had initiated the cycle of violence. Cain murdered one man, but Lemekh I killed two, a man and a boy. Cain deserved recompense for murder, but the multiple murder of Lemekh I rises to the level of “violence,” requiring an exponentially greater recompense. Lemekh II, however, descended from Seth, seeks through his son to reverse this cursed course of sin and misery. Of course, things get worse before they get better, and God makes a further imprecation of destruction upon the World.

But Noah eventually fulfills his destiny, making God “regret” His curse and turning it back into blessing. The Torah again explains through wordplay: The two letters of Noah’s name, reversed, spell “hen [חן],” meaning “grace” or “favor.” Noah found “favor” in the eyes of the Lord, causing God to “regret” His curse. At first there is only a partial reprieve, saving just Noah and his Ark. But Noah’s offering in next week’s Parasha subsequently finds such favor in God’s eyes that He vows never again to curse the entire World with utter destruction. Noah’s Grace and gracious ways “Console” Man and God, Easing the Pain and Grief of Laborious Propagation, thereby transforming God’s curse back into Blessing.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Bereshit (Shabbat Hatanim)

October 9-10, 2026 | 29 Tishrei, 5787

SCHEDULE

Hertz: Parasha: 2 | Haftarah: 948*

Kaplan: Parasha: 2 | Haftarah: 1262*

Candle Lighting | 6:07 pm

Evening Services | 6:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Tot Shabbat & Youth 5+ | 10:00 am | Levy Auditorium

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Hatanim Luncheon | *for registered guests* | following services | Paved Paradise

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 5:15 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Teen Shiur | 5:15 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

Evening Services | 6:00 pm

Habdala | 6:56 pm

Rosh Hodesh Marbeshvan (two-day) begins on Saturday night.

***We add the following verses at the conclusion of the haftarah, in honor of our Hatanim:**

שׁוּשׁ אִשִּׁישׁ בָּהּ תִּגַּל נַפְשִׁי בְּאֵלֵי כִי הִלְבִּישְׁנִי בְּגָדֵי־יִשְׁעַ מְעִיל צְדָקָה יַעֲטֵנִי כְּחַתָּן יִכְתֹּן פָּאֵר

וְכַפְלָה תַּעֲדָה כְּלִיָּהּ:

כִּי־יִבְעַל בַּחֹר בְּתוּלָה יִבְעֹלוּ בְּגִיף וּמִשׁוֹשׁ חֹתָן עַל־כַּלָּה יִשֵּׁשׁ עָלֶיהָ אֱלֹהֶיהָ:

(Isaiah 61:10; 62:5)

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Sunday-Thursday: 6:00 pm

COMING UP

Learn more at shearithisrael.org

Author Presentation & Book Signing: **Dr. Lucienne Carasso**

Presented by the Shearith Israel League

THIS Sunday, October 11 | 4:30 pm | \$5 per person | Walk-ins welcome!

Join our member, Dr. Lucienne Carasso, who will present her recently published book, *The Indigenous People of Israel/Palestine: The Return of the Jews to their Ancestral Homeland*.

Monthly Public Synagogue Tour

Next Tour: THIS Wednesday, October 14 | 5:15 pm

Individuals and groups are welcome to attend a free, guided tour on the second Wednesday of every month at 5:15 pm (prior to Evening Services), led by Rev. Z. Edinger.

Suggested donation of \$5 per person; any amount appreciated. Tours generally last 45 minutes

Scholars-In-Residence | Erica Frankel & Rabbi Dmitry Ekshtut

NEXT Shabbat, October 16-17

Join us for Scholars- in-Residence Erica Frankel & Dmitry Ekshtut. Erica and Dmitry live next door in our parsonage, serving as the leaders of Base Manhattan. They will be addressing the *kehilla* three times: after Friday Evening Services, after Shabbat morning services, and on Shabbat afternoon. Give them a warm welcome by sponsoring kiddush!

Shearith Israel Book Club Luncheon | *Between the Wars: Jewish Characters in 1920s & 1930s American Literature*

Shabbat, October 31 | after Morning Services

You don't have to be a book club member to enjoy this congenial luncheon with insights and guided discussion from Professor Shaina Trapedo of Yeshiva University. But if you would like to read any of the 22 books, you can find them on our website.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Noam Kaplan**, upon his upcoming marriage to Rebecca Roitman.

Congratulations as well to Noam's parents, **Yael Cykowicz & Matthew Kaplan**.

The family will be celebrating *sheva berakhot* next Shabbat at Touro Synagogue.

Mazal tob to **Adele & Ronald Tauber** on the occasion of their granddaughter, Laszlo Rubenstein, becoming a bat mitzvah.

We mourn the loss of **Linda Sterling**. Condolences to her husband, Howard Sterling.

The Sisterhood thanks the following for their Succot Kiddush & Breakfast Sponsorships:

First & Second Days Daytime Succot Kiddushim: Lew Bateman, in memory of his mother

Hoshaana Rabba Breakfast: Lew Bateman, in memory of his mother

Tuesday Hol HaMoed Breakfast Sponsorship: Rachel Neumark Herlands & Jonathan Herlands, in memory of James Herlands

Wednesday Hol HaMoed Breakfast Sponsorship: Arthur & Joel Tenenholtz

COMING UP

Learn more at shearithisrael.org

Shearith Israel Members are cordially invited to this very special program

Presented by Congregation Shearith Israel and the Japan Society

Because One Ought

Celebrating a Japanese Story of Courage, Hope, and Renewal

Monday, November 2 | Doors Open at 6:30 pm

Event starts at 7:00 pm (following 6:30 pm Evening Services)

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

Join us for this first-of-its-kind music and storytelling event celebrating 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. *RSVP to specialevents@japansociety.org.*

Semiquincentennial Event at Fraunces Tavern

"Between Crown and Congress:

New York's Jews During the American Revolution"

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!**

KIDS KORNER

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

*God made me first from dust and clay,
Then put me in Eden to live each day.
I was the first man, strong and glad,
Can you guess my name?*

Wild About Animals for Parashat Noah

THIS Sunday, October 11 | 3:00 pm | Register at shearithisrael.org

Outdoor Pavilion, 8 W. 70th Street (weather permitting)

Join us as we remember Noah's Ark with a fun and interactive animal show!

Register at shearithisrael.org.

Sephardic Shabbaton for High School Students in NYC

Shabbat, November 6-8 | Hosted by Shearith Israel

Special rate for CSI Youth teens, only \$65! Contact breiss@shearithisrael.org.