DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

A Hunter's Impetuous Strength vs. Agriculturalist Endurance

Why did Isaac originally prefer Esau over Jacob, and why did Rebecca choose Jacob? In previous weeks, I discussed Abraham as embodying virtues essential to the Israelite farmer and pastoralist: faith and willingness to sacrifice present security for future prosperity. Our Parasha teaches that a farmer must also possess tenacity, patience, persistence and, above all, endurance.

Esau's impatience to eat the pottage disqualifies him. His hunger was temporary, yet he readily pawned his birthright to satisfy it. A farmer with so little endurance might rashly mortgage and surrender the family fields and homestead rather than withstand hardship for future prosperity.

Isaac seems to have been the most successful agriculturalist among the Patriarchs, reaping a hundredfold what he planted. Although he traveled to Gerar and the inland areas near the Philistine coastal cities, he never left the Land—the only Patriarch to remain there. He also persisted through disputes, digging wells until he found sources over which he had uncontested rights.

Rebecca, raised in Laban's household, understood the demands of pastoral and agricultural life. She knew the hardship of watering and tending flocks through scorching days and icy nights. Having grown up alongside her trickster brother in a rivalrous family, she also appreciated cunning. Jacob was a natural competitor, claimant and bargainer. More importantly, he had the patience to tend flocks for future gain, whereas Esau hunted whatever game was at hand. Grand promises meant little to Esau if they could not satisfy him immediately.

Perhaps Isaac's deteriorating senses meant he never learned that Esau had sold his birthright until Esau let it slip in his anger after losing the blessing. A firstborn assumed the heir unless proven otherwise. A hunter, like Nimrod, could become a formidable warrior; staking out and holding the Land, as Abraham had done, required military might. Isaac's taste for game and appreciation of the hunter's scent suggest that he prized masculine valor. Hunting and conquest demand aggression and impetuousness—explosive strength.

My fitness coaches distinguish between "fast-twitch" muscle fibers, which enable explosive power, and "slow-twitch" fibers, which support endurance. Attack-oriented pursuits like hunting do not require the same willingness to sacrifice present security for future promise. My endurance-athlete friends tolerate extreme deprivation better than those engaged in more aggressive sports. The hunter takes what has already grown; the farmer risks present deprivation to plant and nurture a future harvest.

Isaac's reversal in favor of Jacob after the blessing is remarkably quick, with no apparent heartbreak over his favorite son's loss. Perhaps he already sensed Esau's deficiencies, and the episode merely confirmed them. His acceptance of Jacob's victory also illustrates how little emotional attention the Torah gives to fathers' bonds with their sons, whether Isaac to his sons or Abraham to Isaac. The Vilna Gaon commented that Abraham had to learn to subdue his love and become cruel. Yet the Torah is remarkably detached, invoking neither such emotional struggle nor anything resembling Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling or Judah HaLevi's tears. The binding of Isaac is presented as a test, but the horror of child sacrifice lies in the threatened murder under the pretext of pleasing God, not in emotional anguish. Both the sending away of Ishmael and the binding of Isaac involve sacrificing a bird in hand for future prosperity. Esau, the hunter, would rather seize the bird in hand.

Isaac's blessing of Esau is merely a consolation prize, underscoring his trembling but ready acceptance of Jacob's victory. Jacob has shown that his hands are as capable of explosive strength as Esau's. He aggressively stakes his claim to the inheritance and beats his brother to the punch. His greater endurance in agriculture and livestock raising will produce prosperity more reliably than his hunter brother.

Although Esau, too, will accumulate flocks and establish settlements, he will live on the edge of the desert, facing a wandering and often uprooted existence. Jacob, by contrast, has demonstrated that he and his descendants are worthy of taking and holding the Promised Land through grit and endurance: their willingness to sacrifice present comfort, satisfaction and security for the promise of future blessing and prosperity.

CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Toledoth

November 13-14, 2026 | 4 Kislev, 5787

SCHEDULE

Hertz: Parasha: 93 | Haftarah: 102
Kaplan: Parasha: 116 | Haftarah: 1070

Candle Lighting | 4:22 pm
Evening Services | 4:30 pm | Main Sanctuary
Friday Night Lights | following services | Rabbi Soloveichik | *5787 Season sponsored by the Julis-Romo-Rabinowitz family* | *This session sponsored by Manuel Vasquez Senior, in honor of the Congregation*

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
Kiddush | *Sponsored by the Grace & Mercy Foundation*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 3:30 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik | *Session sponsored by Tikvah, in appreciation to Shearith Israel for welcoming their Christian-Jewish Alliance Shabbaton participants*
Teen Shiur | 3:30 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman
Evening Services | 4:15 pm
Habdala | 5:07 pm
Parent-Child Learning: Siddur Decorating | 6:30 pm | Dalya & Jake

---

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**

THANKSGIVING AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

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

Thursday Morning, November 26

7:30-8:15 am | **Morning Services including Special Thanksgiving Hallel**
Following Morning Services | **Rabbi Soloveichik's Thanksgiving Address in the Main Sanctuary**
8:30-11:00 am | **Children's Parade Viewing on the Portico**
9:00-11:00 am | **Faith for Food Pack-A-Thon on Paved Paradise**

~

Faith for Food Thanksgiving Pack-A-Thon

We are proud to join with our community faith partners, **The Jewish Center, West End Church,** the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,** and **B'nai Jeshurun**, to celebrate Thanksgiving in the true spirit of the day – by giving to others. With the help of **Masbia**, we pack over a thousand nutritious food packages for those in need, and Masbia distributes them, free of charge, right to those who need them.

NEW THIS YEAR: At last year's Pack-A-Thon, we announced *Faith for Food,* Masbia's UWS Food Annex at Shearith Israel. It's been going strong, feeding about 300 people every week. This Faith for Food Pack-A-Thon will have two special enhancements in addition to the regular Pack-A-Thon:

- Pack-A-Thon Volunteers will also prepare packages for *Faith for Food* that will be stored in the Masbia Relief Annex and used by clients for future pickups.
- After the Pack-A-Thon ends, Faith for Food Food Annex clients will be invited to come to Shearith Israel to be served a special Thanksgiving Day meal-to-go.

Help us meet our goal of $25,000 and feed thousands of struggling families!
Again this year, all contributions (up to $10,000) will be matched.
DONATE OR REGISTER TODAY!

2026 Children's Thanksgiving Parade Viewing

Thursday, November 26 | 8:30 am-11:00 am | Register today!

Our Portico provides one of the best Thanksgiving Parade views in NYC, exclusively for kids!
***Admission:* FREE** for Shearith Israel member children
$60 for non-member children
Additionally, Pack-A-Thon donors at the $180 level and above can register up to 2 people for free, and donors at $360 and above can register up to 4.

COMING UP

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

Sunday Matinee with Sisterhood

6th Annual Virtual Film Festival

First Film Discussion: THIS 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. Sign up now to get the film link!

Shearith Israel & The League Go To Broadway: *Here There Are Blueberries* + Exclusive Talkback

Thursday, December 3 | 7:00 pm | $149 Group Rate Tickets
Tickets are going fast - sign up now!

The League has reserved orchestra seats for our group for this riveting Broadway play based on true events surrounding the discovery of a remarkable Holocaust-era photo album. Hailed as "the greatest detective story ever told," the production is followed by an exclusive talkback for our group with production insiders.

KIDS KORNER

To win a raffle ticket at kiddush, find Jake with the answer to this riddle:
A hungry brother came through the door,
He wanted something tasty and more.
Yaakov cooked a dish of red,
What was the meal that Esav was fed?

Season Premiere: Parent Child Learning: Siddur Decorating

THIS Sat night, Nov 14 | 6:30 pm | Dalya & Jake

Come ready to learn, decorate, and make your siddur uniquely yours! Pizza will be served.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

This Shabbat, we welcome:

- The **Tikvah Christian-Jewish Alliance Shabbaton participants**, including our friends from the Grace and Mercy Foundation
- A delegation from the **National Library of Israel** who are here to build connections with American Jewish life and expand the library as a resource for world Jewry
- A **Kolot and Zalman Shazar Center mission,** "Building a Shared Destiny," bringing diverse Israeli leaders for an immersive encounter with American Jewish life.

Congratulations to **Rabbi Soloveichik**, who will serve as a distinguished visiting scholar at Hillsdale College's new Judaism and Western Civilization Program, which it has developed in partnership with Tikvah.