CARENING CONCERN & THE LEAGUE PRESENT:
Upper West Side Blood Drive
The Esther Goldfarb Memorial Blood Drive
January 7, 2018 | 10:00 am-4:00 pm
The Jewish Center, 131 W 86 St
Kick off the new year by giving the gift of life—a blood donor.
This year, in honor of the 70th Anniversary of the Jewish Federation New York Campaign, the Jewish Center is partnering with numerous congregations on the Upper West Side, so far including: Darkhei Noam, The Jewish Center, Lincoln Square Synagogue, Congregation Shaare Zedek, and Young Israel of the Upper West Side.

Debar Torah: Stealing Esaü’s Blessing
— by Z. Eddinger

The story of Rebekah and Jacob’s deception of Isaac in order to steal Esaü’s blessing is morally problematic. As recounted in Chapter 27 of Genesis, the blind and aged Isaac was tricked by Esaü’s sister, Rebekah, and Jacob. Jacob, dressed in Esaü’s clothes, covers his arms and neck with goat skin, and prepares a meal. Following the scheme of his mother, Jacob then impersonates Isaac, thereby receives Isaac’s blessings for “the dew of heaven and the fat of the land” and mystery over his brother. When Esaü, the deception is revealed, Isaac trembles and weeps. Isaac then gives a blessing to Esaü that although he will enjoy the fat of the land, he will have to live by the sword and serve his younger brother—clearly, a lesser blessing than the one originally intended.

The ancient interpretations, such as those found in the book of Jubilees (c. 150 BCE), Philo (c. 25 CE), and midrashic literature (c. 250 CE), take two distinct tracks in attempting to justify the actions of Rebekah and Jacob. But the actual text of the Tanakh provides no condemnation of their actions.

The ancient interpretations found in Jubilees and elsewhere explain that Rebekah and Isaac were actually perfectly innocent and correct in their actions. Neither Jacob nor Esaü were wholly good or wholly evil, and therefore it was entirely proper for Jacob to receive Esaü’s blessing. Rebekah’s decision to deceive Isaac is justified because of the present situation. The text gives the scenarios for why, besides the nature of Esaü’s actions were not immoral; rather, she made the correct decision in order to fulfill the word of God and to prevent Isaac from making the mistake of giving a blessing to an unworthy recipient. Jacob is even described as not lying and not to lie to his father, despite his father’s obvious confusion as to who was in front of him. (See Rashi on 27:19, cf. Jubilees 26:19 “And he said. Art thou my Esaü’ and he said: I am thy son.”)

In this way, the rabbis interpreted the actions of Jacob and Rebekah as having been morally appropriate.

Alternatively, some ancient interpreters thought that the actions of Rebekah and Jacob were, in fact, deceitful, they were never ordained by God and therefore part of the Divine plan. (Jubilees makes God an active participant in the deception of Isaac, but it does not disavow him because it uses a description from it Genesis 27:30 to remove his power of perception and Isaac disavowed not—Jubilees 26:18.) Similarly divinely-inspired deceit occurs when Moses tells Pharaoh that the Hebrews need to worship in the land of Egypt for three days during their true escape to free Egypt (Exodus 3:18 - 5:3), and when Samuel tells Saul that he came to Bethlehem to deliver to God rather than revealing his true intent to anoint David (1 Samuel, 16). Seen in this light, the actions of Jacob and Rebekah, although deceitful, were part of a larger divine plan to obtain the correct blessing on Jacob. In other words, sometimes deceit is a divinely sanctioned action.

In contrast, the Tanakh itself appears to indicate a moral judgment critical of both Jacob and Rebekah. Explicit criticism of Jacob is found in Hoesa 12:3-4, 13: 1; The Lord will not deal according to his doing, accordng to his doing to him; in the womb he took his brother by the heel. And Jacob fled into the field of Aram, and Israel served for a wife and also in Jeremiah 9:3; “traitor ye not in any brother; for every man taketh his brother in covenant.” In addition to these, criticism of Jacob is included within the biblical narrative itself.

The emotional verses of Genesis 27:30-53 certainly imply a highly critical view of Isaac’s actions: “Esaü heard Isaac’s words, he burst into great weeping and wailing, and said to his father, ‘Bless me too, Father’ But he answered, ‘Your brother came and took away your blessing.’ ” Jacob then flees to Laban, claims to be the Esaü of Esau (chapters 28-29), where he is implicitly condemned for his actions by Laban. When Jacob discovers that Laban tricked him into marrying Leah, he asks: “What is this that you have done to me? I was in your house for nothing and now you have deceived me.” Laban replied, “It is not the practice in our place to marry the younger before the older.” (29:23-20), Laban’s switch in placing of Leah in younger sister is a perfect contrast for Jacob’s deceitful supplanting of himself in place of his older brother.

The implied criticism is clear. Moreover, it appears that the blessing thatJacob received from Esaü was never fulfilled—even the opposite occurs: Jacob is the one who bows down to Esaü (33:5) and Jacob even gives the “blessing” back to Esaü (33:11; “וַיֶּעַנֵּן יִשְׂרָאֵל אָלָלָה). Clearly the attempt to steal Esaü’s blessing had negative consequences for Jacob throughout his life. (continued on side panel)
THANKSGIVING AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2017
Morning Services with our Special Thanksgiving Hallel | Main Sanctuary | 7:45 am
Rabbi Soloveichik’s Address | Main Sanctuary | 8:30 am
Children’s Hessed Craft Activity (during the Rabbi’s Address and Pack-a-thon) | Levy Auditorium | starting 8:30 am
Hot Cocoa & Refreshments | Elias Room | 9:00–11:00 am
Parade Viewing for Youth | Portico
Hunger Alleviation Pack-a-thon (registration required) | 9:30–11:30 am | Levy Auditorium

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 25
Young Couples and Families Thanksgiving Luncheon
See back panel for details.

Would You Like To Sponsor Our Thanksgiving Festivities?
Visit shearithisrael.org/thanksgiving.

A FEW IMPORTANT THANKSGIVING REMINDERS:
• There are barriers and police presence on our block during the parade. Please arrive early (in time for services) in order to ensure access to our facility. If arriving by subway, check for transit alerts. The B/C train subway exit at our corner may be closed. The 1/2/3 train at 72nd street and Broadway may be preferable.
• Our Portico offers a perfect perch for viewing the parade. It is, however, far too small to comfortably accommodate everyone who would like to be there. We therefore respectfully ask you to understand that the portico is designated for the children of our members, PTTS students, and Toddlers. Adults must be accompanied by a young child.
• In order to give as many children as possible an opportunity to get a good view, our staff will be asking people to rotate on and off the Portico. Please cooperate with them.
• Please also note, our office will be closed on Thursday and Friday, and there will be NO Hebrew School on Thursday or Sunday. For funeral arrangements, contact Zachary Edinger at 917-584-3787.
• Finally, we may be able to accept wall-kis at our Pack-A-Thon. If interested, please register outside of Levy auditorium at 9:30 AM. You will be able to make your donation ($18 suggested minimum) by cash, check, or credit card.

REGISTRATION DEADLINE THIS MONDAY, NOV 20
Young Couples and Families Luncheon
Shabbat, November 25 | Following Morning Services
Young couples and families are invited to a Thanksgiving Weekend Shabbat Lunch with Rabbi and Layaliza Soloveichik & Co. Join us for a family-friendly afternoon of Torah and good company. For registration and sponsorship details, visit shearithisrael.org/thanksgiving-luncheon

THIRD ANNUAL THANKSGIVING PACK-A-THON
This Thursday, November 23, 9:30 am | Levy Auditorium
Co-Sponsored by West End Collegiate Church, The Jewish Center, and the Church of Latter-Day Saints.
Together, we will pack 2,000 meals for hungry New Yorkers.
Thanks to a generous 3-for-1 matching grant, we are approaching our $18,000 goal, with less than $3,000 to go.
Register to participate or donate at shearithisrael.org/pack-a-thon-2017.

Special Thanks to our Event Chairs:
Jennifer Ash, Karen Daar, Zoya Raynes, Alessandra Rovati, Marlene Sperling, Michael Sperling, and Adina Wagman.

SAVE THE DATE: Sisterhood Pre-Hanukkah Hands-On Jewelry Making Workshop
Sunday, December 3 | 4:00 pm
Please join the Sisterhood for a family-friendly workshop with handcrafted jewelry designer Ofra. For adults and children 3 and older. Registration details to follow.

EARLY BIRD PRICING ENDS THIS MONDAY, NOV 20
Shabbat Luncheon Featuring A Conversation Between Rabbi Soloveichik and Historian Andrew Porworcher
The Jewish Friends and Clients of Alexander Hamilton
Saturday, December 9 | Following Morning Services
This extraordinary event will reveal incredible, little known details about Alexander Hamilton’s relationships with Jews in New York, mostly members of Shearith Israel. We will discuss fascinating court cases in which Alexander Hamilton represented Jews, and the story of Jews at Columbia College, Hamilton’s alma mater. Questions to be addressed include: How friendly was Alexander Hamilton with New York’s Jews? How did his Jewish friends help form his own views about the future of the United States? Most tantalizingly, what do these relationships tell us about Jewish links in Hamilton’s own past?
Andrew Porworcher is the author of the forthcoming The Jewish Founding Father: The Secret Life of Alexander Hamilton, to be published by Harvard University Press. He is a visiting scholar at the Simons Center’s Program on Early America and the Jews.