



# Shabbat Announcements

Parshat Toldot

December 3, 2016 3 Kislev, 5777

<b>TORAH</b> <b>ARTSCROLL 124</b> <b>HERTZ 93</b>		<b>Rabbi Jonathan Sacks on Toldot</b>		
<b>HAFTORAH</b> <b>ARTSCROLL 1137</b> <b>HERTZ 102</b>		<p>Was Jacob right to take Esau's blessing in disguise? Was he right to deceive his father and to take from his brother the blessing Isaac sought to give him? Was Rivka right in conceiving the plan in the first place and encouraging Jacob to carry it out? These are fundamental questions. What is at stake is not just biblical interpretation but the moral life itself. How we read a text shapes the kind of person we become. Here is one way of interpreting the narrative.</p> <p>Rivka was right to propose what she did and Jacob was right to do it. Rivka knew that it would be Jacob, not Esau, who would continue the covenant and carry the mission of Abraham into the future.</p> <p>She knew this on two separate grounds. First, she had heard it from God himself, in the oracle she received before the twins were born: "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the elder will serve the younger." (Gen. 25:23) Esau was the elder, Jacob the younger. Therefore it was Jacob who would emerge with greater strength, Jacob who was chosen by God. Second, she had watched the twins grow up. She knew that Esau was a hunter, a man of violence. She had seen that he was impetuous, mercurial, a man of impulse, not calm reflection. She had seen him sell his birthright for a bowl of soup. She had watched while he "ate, drank, rose and left. So Esau despised his</p>	<p>birthright" (Gen. 25:34). No one who despises his birthright can be the trusted guardian of a covenant intended for eternity. Third, just before the episode of the blessing we read: "When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rivka" (Gen. 26:34). This too was evidence of Esau's failure to understand what the covenant requires. By marrying Hittite women he proved himself indifferent both to the feelings of his parents and to the self-restraint in the choice of marriage partner that was essential to being Abraham's heir.</p> <p>The blessing had to go to Jacob. If you had two sons, one indifferent to art, the other an art-lover and aesthete, to whom would you leave the Rembrandt that has been part of the family heritage for generations? And if Isaac did not understand the true nature of his sons, if he was "blind" not only physically but also psychologically, might it not be necessary to deceive him? He was by now old, and if Rivka had failed in the early years to get him to see the true nature of their children, was it likely that she could do so now? This was, after all, not just a matter of relationships within the family. It was about God and destiny and spiritual vocation. It was about the future of an entire people since God had repeatedly told Abraham that he would be the ancestor of a great nation who would be a blessing to humanity as a whole. And if Rivka was right, then Jacob was right to follow her instructions. This was the woman whom Abraham's servant had chosen to be the wife of his master's son, because she was kind, because at the well she had given water to a</p>	<p>stranger and to his camels also. Rivka was not Lady Macbeth. She was the embodiment of loving-kindness. She was not acting out of favoritism or ambition. And if she had no other way of ensuring that the blessing went to one who would cherish it and live it, then in this case the end justified the means. This is one way of reading the story and it is taken by many of the commentators.</p> <p>However it is not the only way. Consider, for example, the scene that transpired immediately after Jacob left his father. Esau returned from hunting and brought Isaac the food he had requested. We then read this: Isaac trembled violently and said, 'Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him – and indeed he will be blessed!' When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, 'Bless me – me too, my father!' But he said, 'Your brother came deceitfully [be-mirra] and took your blessing.' Esau said, 'Isn't he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: he took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!' Then he asked, 'Haven't you reserved any blessing for me?' (Gen. 27:33-36)</p> <p>It is impossible to read Genesis 27 – the text as it stands without commentary – and not to feel sympathy for Isaac and Esau rather than Rivka and Jacob. The Torah is sparing in its use of emotion. It is completely silent, for example, on the feelings of Abraham and Isaac as they</p>
<b>Times</b>				
Candle Lighting	4:09 pm			
Mincha	4:10 pm			
Hashkama	8:00 am			
Youth Minyan	8:30 am			
Parsha Shiur	8:30 am			
Main	9:00 am			
Beit Midrash	9:15 am			
Gemara Shiur	3:35 pm			
Mincha	4:05 pm			
Shabbos Ends	5:17 pm			
R' Reisman Video	7:30 pm			
Sun. Dec. 4	7:30/8:30 am			
Mon. & Thurs.	6:35/7:45 am			
Tue., Wed. & Fri.	6:45/7:45 am			
Mincha	4:10 pm			
Latest Times for Shema/Shemoneh Esrei				
Dec. 3	9:23/10:10 am			
Dec. 10	9:28/10:14 am			
Next Shabbat Vayeitzei				
Candle Lighting	4:09 pm			
Mincha	4:10 pm			
		<b>KIDDUSH</b> <b>IS SPONSORED</b> <b>BY</b> <b>GREAT NECK</b> <b>SYNAGOGUE</b>	<b>BIMA FLOWERS</b> <b>IN THE BEIT MIDRASH</b> <b>&amp; SUNDAY BREAKFAST</b> <b>ARE SPONSORED BY</b> <b>ALBERT HALIMI</b> <b>IN MEMORY OF HIS FATHER</b> <b>RACHAMIN BEN AGHABABA</b>	

journeyed together toward the trial of the binding. Phrases like "trembled violently" and "burst out with a loud and bitter cry" cannot but affect us deeply. Here is an old man who has been deceived by his younger son, and a young man, Esau, who feels cheated out of what was rightfully his. The emotions triggered by this scene stay with us long in the memory. Then consider the consequences. Jacob had to leave home for more than twenty years in fear of his life. He then suffered an almost identical deceit practiced against him by Laban when he substituted Leah for Rachel. When Jacob cried out "Why did you deceive me [rimitani]" Laban replied: "It is not done in our place to place the younger before the elder" (Gen. 29:25-26). Not only the act but even the words imply a punishment, measure for measure. "Deceit," of which Jacob accuses Laban, is the very word Isaac used about Jacob. Laban's reply sounds like a virtually explicit reference to what Jacob had done, as if to say, "We do not do in our place what you have just done in yours." The result of Laban's deception brought grief to the rest of Jacob's life. There was tension between Leah and Rachel. There was hatred between their children. Jacob was deceived yet again, this time by his sons, when they brought him Joseph's bloodstained robe: another deception of a father by his children involving the use of clothes. The result was that Jacob was deprived of the company of his most beloved son for twenty-two years just as Isaac was of Jacob. Asked by Pharaoh how old he was, Jacob replied, "Few and evil have been the years of my life" (Gen. 47: 9). He is the only figure in the Torah to make a remark like this. It is hard not to read the text as a precise statement of the principle of measure for measure: as you have done to others, so will others do to you. The deception brought all concerned great grief, and this persisted into the next generation.

My reading of the text is therefore this. The phrase in Rivka's oracle, Ve-rav yaavod tsair (Gen. 25: 23), is in fact ambiguous. It may mean, "The elder will serve the younger," but it may also mean, "The younger will serve the elder." It was what the Torah calls a chidah (Numbers 12:8), that is, an opaque, deliberately ambiguous communication. It suggested an ongoing conflict between the two sons and their descendants, but not who would win. Isaac fully understood the nature of his two sons. He loved Esau but this did not blind him to the fact that Jacob would be the heir of the covenant. Therefore Isaac prepared two sets of blessings, one for Esau, the other for Jacob. He blessed Esau (Gen. 27:28-29) with the gifts he felt he would appreciate: wealth and power: "May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness – an abundance of grain and new wine" – that is, wealth. "May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may

the sons of your mother down to you" – that is, power. These are not the covenantal blessings. The covenantal blessings that God had given Abraham and Isaac were completely different. They were about children and a land. It is this blessing that Isaac later gave Jacob before he left home (Gen. 28:3-4): "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples" – that is, children. "May He give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham" – that is, land. This was the blessing Isaac had intended for Jacob all along. There was no need for deceit and disguise. Jacob eventually came to understand all this, perhaps during his wrestling match with the angel during the night before his meeting with Esau after their long estrangement. What happened at that meeting is incomprehensible unless we understand that Jacob was giving back to Esau the blessings he had wrongly taken from him. The massive gift of sheep, cattle and other livestock represented "heaven's dew and earth's richness," that is, wealth. The fact that Jacob bowed down seven times to Esau was his way of fulfilling the words, "May the sons of your mother bow down to you," that is, power. Jacob gave the blessing back. Indeed he said so explicitly. He said to Esau: "Please accept the blessing [birkati] that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need" (Gen. 33:11). On this reading of the story, Rivka and Jacob made a mistake, a forgivable one, an understandable one, but a mistake nonetheless. The blessing Isaac was about to give Esau was not the blessing of Abraham. He intended to give Esau a blessing appropriate to him. In so doing, he was acting on the basis of precedent. God had blessed Ishmael, with the words "I will make him into a great nation" (Gen. 21:18). This was the fulfillment of a promise God had given Abraham many years before when He told him that it would be Isaac, not Ishmael, who would continue the covenant: Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation." (Gen. 17:18-21)

Isaac surely knew this because, according to midrashic tradition, he and Ishmael were reconciled later in life. We see them standing together at Abraham's grave (Gen. 25:9). It may be that this was a fact that Rivka did not know. She associated blessing with covenant. She may have been unaware that Abraham wanted Ishmael blessed even though he would not inherit the covenant, and that God had acceded to the request. If so then it is possible all four people acted rightly as they understood the situation, yet still tragedy occurred. Isaac was right to wish Esau blessed as Abraham sought for Ishmael. Esau acted honorably toward his father. Rivka sought to safeguard the future of the covenant. Jacob felt qualms but did what his mother said, knowing she would not have proposed deceit without a strong moral reason for doing so.

Do we have here one story with two possible interpretations? Perhaps, but that is not the best way of describing it. What we have here, and there are other examples in Genesis, is a story we understand one way the first time we hear it, and a different way once we have discovered and reflected on all that happened later. It is only after we have read about the fate of Jacob in Laban's house, the tension between Leah and Rachel, and the animosity between Joseph and his brothers that we can go back and read Genesis 27, the chapter of the blessing, in a new light and with greater depth. There is such a thing as an honest mistake, and it is a mark of Jacob's greatness that he recognized it and made amends to Esau. In the great encounter twenty-two years later the estranged brothers meet, embrace, part as friends and go their separate ways. But first, Jacob had to wrestle with an angel. That is how the moral life is. We learn by making mistakes. We live life forward, but we understand it only looking back. Only then do we see the wrong turns we inadvertently made. This discovery is sometimes our greatest moment of moral truth. For each of us there is a blessing that is ours. That was true not just of Isaac but also Ishmael, not just Jacob but also Esau. The moral could not be more powerful. Never seek your brother's blessing. Be content with your own.



**Great Neck Yoetzet Halacha Lisa Septimus**  
 Welcomes your questions about mikvah, observance of taharat mishpacha (halacha relating to married life) and women's health, as it connects to Jewish law. Reach out to her at:  
 Phone: 516.415.1111  
 Email: [greatneckyoetzet@gmail.com](mailto:greatneckyoetzet@gmail.com).  
 All conversations and emails are kept confidential.



**Great Neck Synagogue**  
 26 Old Mill Road, Great Neck, NY 11023  
 516-487-6100

**Rabbi Dale Polakoff, Rabbi**  
**Rabbi Ian Lichter, Assistant Rabbi**  
**Dr. Ephraim Wolf, z"l, Rabbi Emeritus**  
**Zeev Kron, Cantor**  
**Eleazer Schulman, z"l, Cantor Emeritus**  
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Great Neck Synagogue Guest Speaker Series

# Rabbi Jeffrey Kobrin

## December 3, 2016



### Parshat Toldot Drasha Main Sanctuary

Forgetting to Remember  
& Remembering to Forget

Rabbi Jeffrey Kobrin is the Rosh HaYeshivah and Head of School of the North Shore Hebrew Academy.

In addition to rabbinic ordination from RIETS, Yeshiva University, he has a BA and MA in English Literature from Columbia University, where he is currently pursuing a Ph.D.

Rabbi Kobrin lives in Riverdale, NY with his wife and four daughters.

Photo: www.Wall.com



## Mini Shabbaton Grades 3-4 Girls **\*\*New Time & Date\*\***

Saturday Night December 3

6:15-8:15pm Chalfin Room

**COOKIE DECORATING**

**Candy Sushi  
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ALL WELCOME ←



Sunday December 4th

@ 10AM

26 Old Mill Road Great Neck, NY



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**11:30 - 2:00**

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Cindy, Erica, Michelle & Naeema

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**6:00 - 8:30 PM**  
Boys & Girls Gr. 1-7

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Soccer &  
Movie of the Week

**8:30 - 10:45 pm**  
Boys & Girls Gr. 8-12

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917.171.8013 or [yogatopia23@gmail.com](mailto:yogatopia23@gmail.com)



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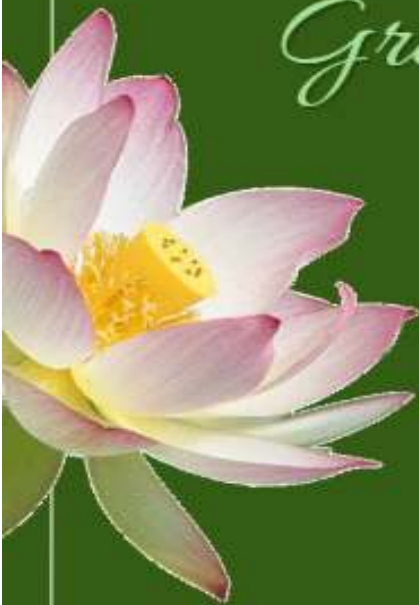
*Sunday, Dec. 11, 2016  
11:00 am - 5:00 pm*

*Great Neck Synagogue*

*For more information, contact:*

*Claudine Amirian 917.309.2758*

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# ANNOUNCEMENTS

RABBI POLAKOFF'S SHABBOS DRASHA THROUGH 5777 IS DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF **PINCHAS BEN YOSEPH** FOR OTHER SUCH OPPORTUNITIES PLEASE CONTACT HOWARD WOLF 212-843-4668

**IF YOU KNOW OF SOMEONE WHO IS MOVING INTO THE GREAT NECK AREA PLEASE LET THE OFFICE KNOW.**

## OFFICE HOURS FOR RABBI POLAKOFF

**Wednesdays from 10 am - 12 pm**

**Thursdays from 1 pm - 3 pm**

He is available at other times by appointment and can always be reached by email at [dpolakoff@gns.org](mailto:dpolakoff@gns.org), or on his cell at 516-637-3674.

## HASHKAMA MINYAN KIDDUSH

Hashkama Minyan Kiddush this Shabbat is sponsored by **Asher Davoudpour**.

## MEN'S CLUB EVENTS

Join this **Sunday morning, December 4th** for a Presentation of Media Bias against Israel at 10:00 am; Complimentary Breakfast.

## SISTERHOOD EVENTS

**December 11:** Women's Spa & Wellness Day 11am-5pm. Come and de-stress, take a break from your fast-paced life and pamper yourself at our Spa and Wellness Day. Experience natural ways to live a happier and healthier life. Our experts include nutritionists, health and life coaches, massage therapists, beauty and essential oil specialists, natural and non-toxic house cleaning methods, acupuncture, healing crystal therapy, dental wellness, healthy treats and much more. This fabulous and free event is open to all women, members and non-members alike. Contact [Naturalhealingny@gmail.com](mailto:Naturalhealingny@gmail.com) or [PamsRecipe@gmail.com](mailto:PamsRecipe@gmail.com) for further information.

## GNS DINNER RAFFLES

We are asking members to donate prizes for the raffle. Contact Robyn Blumner at [robynsherri@gmail.com](mailto:robynsherri@gmail.com) or 516.639.1121 or Steve Blumner at [stevenblumner@gmail.com](mailto:stevenblumner@gmail.com) or 516.639.8941 or Jason Mayer at [jmayer@accountant.com](mailto:jmayer@accountant.com) or 347.262.0102.

## BIKUR CHOLIM

If interested in donating a meal for Shani & Zevi Geisinsky, please sign up at [TakeThemAMeal.com](http://TakeThemAMeal.com). For questions, please contact Robyn Blumner.

## SNOWBIRDS

Please inform the shul office of the date you are moving to Florida.

## UPCOMING EVENTS AT GREAT NECK SYNAGOGUE

November 30: Chaverim Center  
December 3: Guest Speaker: Rabbi Kobrin  
December 4: Men's Club & ZOA: Media Bias  
December 10: GNS Annual Dinner  
December 11: Sisterhood Spa & Wellness  
December 17: AIPAC Shabbaton

## MAZAL TOVS & COMMUNITY NEWS

**Mazal Tov** to **Klara & Sanford Brand** on the birth of a granddaughter, **Bailey Harper Brand**, born to their children **Jessie & David Brand** and siblings **Max and Sophie**.

**Mazal Tov** to **Anita & Hal Beretz** on the engagement of their grandson **Jacob Kestenbaum**, son of **Deborah & Alan Kestenbaum** to **Jordana Alpert**.

**Mazal Tov** to **David & Rebecca Simahee** on the birth of a son.

## NSHA ONEG THIS SHABBAT

The North Shore Hebrew Academy invites Middle and High School students and Alumni to a ruach filled Shabbat Oneg Friday, December 2 at 8:15pm at Great Neck Synagogue. Register at [www.nsha.org/oneg](http://www.nsha.org/oneg). Parents welcome!

## NSHA BOOK FAIR

Please join us at the annual NSHA PTA Book Fair on **Sun. December 4th from 11am-4pm** and evening hours **Mon. December 5th from 6-8pm**. Come and shop for books for toddler age through adult. On Sunday enjoy free arts and crafts, story time, food and drinks for sale and a visit and book signing from famous author David Adler. Questions?

Contact Erica Zucker Heisler [ezh624@aol.com](mailto:ezh624@aol.com), Susannah Malen [susannahmalen@yahoo.com](mailto:susannahmalen@yahoo.com) or Nadine Shatzkes [nshatzkes@gmail.com](mailto:nshatzkes@gmail.com)

## SPECIAL ELECTION FOR GNPS

There will be a special election for the Great Neck Public Schools Board of Education Trustee position on **Tuesday, Dec. 6**, from 7 am-10 pm. Registered voters residing north of the LIRR can vote at the Baker School. Registered voters residing south of the LIRR can vote at South High School. For further info regarding voting, including registration and absentee ballots, phone the district clerk, school days between 9am-4pm, at (516) 441-4020. For information about the candidates:

<http://tv.greatneck.k12.ny.us/boe16.html>

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### Saturday, 3 Kislev

Anthony Berkowitz for Barney Berkowitz  
Cindy Ludwig for Frank Gelber  
Evelyn Henis for A. Richard Henis

### Monday, 5 Kislev

Lili Weiss for David Buch  
Benjamin Linzer for Julius Peter Lunzer

### Tuesday, 6 Kislev

Roya Shavolian for Elyahu ben Hajirabbe Amirian  
Asher Davoudpour for Aharon Dovid Davoudpour  
Evelyn Henis for Albert Noah  
Elliot Diamond for Molly Diamond Shaim

### Thursday, 8 Kislev

Michael Hoenig for Edward Hoenig  
Abraham Krieger for Nathan Krieger  
Magda Yehaskel for Mendel Wohl

### Friday, 9 Kislev

Hava Freeman for Sara Dvora Bont  
Jerrald Weinstein for Lillian Greenberg