

DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

Failure is Inevitable; Don't Let It Make You Doubt Success

“The hidden things belong unto the LORD our God; but the things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:28)

The concluding verse in Chapter 29 evokes a shroud of mystery by literally beginning with a word meaning “mysteries,” contrasting them with things “revealed.” As in the foretelling of great destruction which precedes it, Moses is speaking not as Lawgiver but as Prophet. The dots on the words “for us and for our children” emphasize this as a portent, as one would go to a soothsayer or astrologer to inquire what the future might hold in store for himself and his family. This apparent “oracle” is also enigmatic in its message, which I would paraphrase like one “Contemporary English Version” I found: “*The LORD our God hasn't explained the present or the future, but he has commanded us to obey the laws he gave to us and our descendants.*”

The lead-in to this verse describes how some individuals or groups of Israelites might turn away from the LORD to worship the gods of the other nations. Such an individual, notwithstanding having sworn allegiance to the LORD'S Covenant and having heard its terms, including the penalties he faces for violations, nonetheless “fancies himself immune, thinking ‘I shall be safe, though I follow my own willful heart’ (Deut. 29:18).” That individual doubted the enforcement of the Covenant, or at least that such enforcement would affect him. But the consequences of such individuals' folly will be disastrous: Not only will they themselves be wiped out, but utter destruction will be unleashed upon all Israel and its Land, just because of them (although also it's understood to be for the failure of the rest of Israel to punish and put a stop to those individuals' violations). As a result of those individuals' disobedience, even merely for the disloyal thoughts they harbor in the privacy of their hearts, all Israel will be sickened and the Land shall be laid waste, burnt with toxic sulfuric salts like Sodom and Gomorrah. Israel will be “cast out into exile in another land, as is still the case (29:27).” Again, Moses speaks prophetically, picturing himself transported into a future era in which Israel dwells in Exile. But more profoundly disconcerting is the question of injustice posed here: Why should all Israel suffer so on account of the actions of these few individuals who choose, in the secret chambers of their heart, to think of themselves as exceptional to the general rule of law? Why should a couple of bad apples spoil the fate of the whole bunch? Indeed, isn't the sinners' point well-taken: If the nation is overwhelmingly loyal to the God of Israel, why wouldn't God overlook a few individuals' paying some symbolic obeisance to the gods of other nations? But no, we are told: Not only will the full force of the law “pounce” upon the violators, but their sin will bring about the severest punishment and desolation upon the entire Nation.

And yet so it must be: God made the Covenant with all of Israel as a collective group. All Israel is therefore responsible for keeping the Covenant – and for seeing to it that that Covenant is kept by their fellows. They are responsible for strict enforcement of the Torah to stop the evildoing of all in their society, and to see to it that they only act justly with one another. Their failures in these regards, in comprehensively guaranteeing compliance with the Covenant, is what will bring about a downfall Moses foresees as inevitable. There is an implication of Divine injustice in this: Israel is being set-up for failure. Hence our verse is saying that God is not explaining His mysterious ways in the present or future: That is for God to know, and we must not question. All we can deal with is what is revealed before our eyes, and for that we must take responsibility. The question of how it is the wicked think the way they do and manage to get away with it is one of God's great mysteries, not for us to know.

But this concluding mysterious verse moreover serves as a transition to the next chapter in which Moses, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, prophesizes that after calamity, destruction, and exile, Israel will miraculously return to God, to obedience to the Covenant, and to a once-again fruitful Land. Then there will be no more wayward individuals who think to avoid the consequences of their evildoing. For God will circumcise or open up the hearts of all Israel to love Him and see to it that His commandments are followed. Perhaps that will be the result of having suffering all of these consequences – but that too is for God to know, not us. Moses assures us that as long as we don't question God's ways and concentrate upon what God has revealed to us of His Law, it can fully be in our power to keep God's Law and Covenant. This will enable us to stick with God, Who gives us life and tenure upon the land He swore to our forefathers. How God will bring about this “circumcision of the heart” so All Israel will comply with Covenantal Law – that is a Divine Mystery which is not for us to know. It is only for us to assure our own and our fellow Israelites' compliance to the best of our abilities. We must take Moses' word for it that fulfilling the Torah is not far beyond our reach, but rather “the matter is very close to you, in your heart and soul, to do it.” Failure is inevitable. Why you must fail is only for God to know, not for you. Just keep your eye on the doughnut and on what you can do and control. Don't let unavoidable failures cause you to question, doubt, or lose sight of doing what is in your power to ensure your eventual success.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Nitsabim

September 19-20, 2025 | 27 Elul, 5785

Consecration Anniversary — 19th Street Synagogue (1860)

Kaplan: Parasha: 1010 | Haftarah: 1242

Hertz: Parasha: 878 | Haftarah: 883

SCHEDULE

Candle Lighting | 6:40 pm

Evening Services | 6:45 pm | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Kiddush | Paved Paradise

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 5:50 pm | Rev. Z. Edinger

Teen Shiur | 5:50 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

Evening Services (including Selihot*) | 6:35 pm

Habdala | 7:31 pm

Weekday Service Times

Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday & Friday: 7:05 am

Evenings:

Sunday (Minha, Arbit, & Selihot): 6:30 pm

Rosh HaShana begins on Monday night.

For the full Rosh HaShana schedule, see inside.

If you have reserved seats for the High Holidays, tickets have gone out.

*Please remember to **print** your ticket and bring it to services.*

HIGH HOLIDAYS

Your High Holiday Checklist

Get it all done at shearithisrael.org/high-holidays-5786

- Make your holiday offerings
 - Sponsor Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabbat Teshuba Derasha
 - Order your lulab & etrog set through the synagogue
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Shabbat Teshuba Derasha

Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

Shabbat, September 27 | Following Morning Services

"Light and Darkness in Art and Life:

A Tale of Chiaroscuro, Kippur, and our Current Moment"

Sponsor at shearithisrael.org

Afternoon Shofar Blowing

Rosh HaShana Afternoons | 6:20 pm (10 minutes before 6:30 pm Mincha)

In our Outdoor Pavilion

There is an obligation for all to hear the blowing of the Shofar on Rosh HaShana. For those who miss the morning Shofar blowing, we hold an additional Shofar blowing outdoors in the afternoons prior to Evening Services.

THIS SUNDAY

Bedek haBayit Day

Sunday, September 21 | 9:45 am-12:45 pm | with Rev. Z. Edinger

Join us for a special hands-on volunteer opportunity to help care for our Synagogue in advance of the High Holidays. Together, we'll polish ritual silver, reattach bells to Rimmonim, sort and inspect *talitot* for repair, mend *Humashim* and prayerbooks, and inventory textiles.

No experience needed – just bring your enthusiasm and a willingness to help.

COMING UP

Stitch & Fix

Now meets weekly on Tuesdays (except Holidays)

1:00-4:00 pm | Fidanque Room

RSVP to Rose at rgedinger@gmail.com.

ROSH HASHANA SCHEDULE

EVE OF ROSH HASHANA – Monday, September 22

Preparations: Early Morning Selihot: 6:30 am | Shahrit: 7:10 am

Candle Lighting | 6:35 pm

Evening Services (Minha & Arbit) | 6:30 pm

DAY 1 ROSH HASHANA – Tuesday, September 23

Zemiro: 7:45 am | Shahrit: 8:35 am

Youth Programming | 10:00 am | Tots in Fidanque; 5+ in Elias Room

'Et Sha'arei Ratzon & **Shofar Service** | 10:40 am

Musaf & Sermon | 11:15 am

Kiddush | Following services

Additional Shofar Blowing: 6:20 pm

Evening Services (Minha & Arbit) | 6:30 pm

Candle Lighting | after 7:13 pm

DAY 2 ROSH HASHANA – Wednesday, September 24

Zemiro: 7:45 am | Shahrit: 8:35 am

Youth Programming | 10:00 am | Tots in Fidanque; 5+ in Elias Room

'Et Sha'arei Ratzon & **Shofar Service** | 10:30 am

Musaf & Sermon | 11:10 am

Kiddush | Following services

Additional Shofar Blowing: 6:20 pm

Minha, Arbit & Selihot | 6:30 pm

Habdala | 7:11 pm

PREPARING FOR SUCCOT

Sisterhood Succah Decoration

Sunday October 5 | 9 am-12 pm, 12 pm-3 pm, 3 pm-6 pm, 6 pm-9 pm

Monday, October 6 | 8 am-12 pm

As always, our beautiful succah in our Elias Room will be decorated lavishly and lovingly by the Shearith Israel Sisterhood. Teens and adults, women and men, are invited to help decorate in preparation for the Succot Festival.

Outdoor Succah Decorating for Youth

Sunday, Oct 5 | 12:30-2:30 pm | *Crafting with Nicole & Lily Cohen*

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

We welcome new member **Dr. Marilia Kamil** to our growing Shearith Israel family. We look forward to getting to know her and her family.

Mazal tob to **Sarah & Paul Kaplan** on the birth of a grandchild born to Sarah's daughter, Hannah (Bley) and Max Hoberman.

We mourn the loss of our member, **Rudy Stern**.