

## DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

### The Torah as Structure and Vocabulary for Expression

*Therefore write yourselves this song and teach it to the children of Israel, put it in their mouths, so that this song may be a testimony to me among the children of Israel"*

(Deut. 31:19)

Our former congregant David Klepper, who now lives in Jerusalem, wrote me last week, reminding me that I had taught him that the Torah is a song. The source for this concept comes from the Rabbinic exposition of the above verse. That exposition derives herein a commandment to write a Sefer Torah, understanding the "song" which Israel must write and must be "placed in their mouths" as referring to the entire Torah, rather than just the Haazinu or VeZot HaBerakha poetic sections which follow. David's correspondent Chris responded that he had heard of referring to the Psalms or the Song of Songs or other limited Biblical sections as songs, but had not heard of referring to the whole Torah or Tanakh as a song. As Chris put it: What a way to praise the Lord!

What do our Sages mean to convey in referring to the Torah as a song? Well, the Torah calls for leading a highly orchestrated life. Orchestrated as well as choreographed, for, as my first voice teacher taught me, song is not completely separable from dance. At times of year such as the one we are currently in, life is quite tightly orchestrated, with so much to do in such specific ways at such specific times, and we must take care to play our part at just the right time and not miss our cue. The Torah's orchestration and choreography is there to give our lives coherent and orderly structure. That type of structuring makes life stable and strong, shielding us from collapse.

And that structuring also serves as a basis for expression. Expression doesn't emerge out of a vacuum. Jazz artists "riff" off of familiar patterns, such as the "blues." All musical artists undergird their musical line with familiar scale or maqam patterns, harmonic patterns, and rhythmic patterns. And the same goes for dance, yoga, and martial arts: There are set optimal positions as well as set patterns of smooth and efficient movement. Expression is facilitated and enhanced through the incorporation of classic patterns, even when this is done unconsciously. There is an underlying grammar and structure to all expression, of course, but when the rules of such grammar are properly followed, the expression gains in grace, beauty, meaning, and depth.

The Torah and Halakha with their regular structure of prayer, laws, and observances were meant to be, as David puts it, "the lines and staffs of the music of my life."

Rabbi A.J. Heschel gave the spiritual advice that one should live one's life as if it was a work of art. But making unique and powerful expressions and art takes much training and practice. Even those who occasionally "break" the rules are usually just "playing" with them and are conscious of the underlying rules nonetheless. Our Hebrew lore and lifestyle, from the Bible to the Talmud to the medieval and modern halakhists and liturgy, can seem exhaustively long, especially at this time of year. But I believe it was deliberately left that way in order to give us a guiding structure and vocabulary for the most meaningful and wide-ranging expression.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL  
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

### Shabbat Vayeilekh-Teshuba

September 26-27, 2025 | 5 Tishre, 5786

**Kaplan:** Parasha: 1018 | Haftarah: 1246

**Hertz:** Parasha: 887 | Haftarah: 891

### SCHEDULE

**Candle Lighting** | 6:28 pm

**Evening Services** | 6:30 pm | Main Sanctuary

**Zemirot** | 8:15 am | Main Sanctuary

**Shahrit** | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

**Shabbat Teshuba Derasha** | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

"Light and Darkness in Art and Life:

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

*Thank you to our sponsors. See the source sheet for full listings.*

**Tot Shabbat** | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

**Jr. Congregation** | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

**Kiddush** | following services

**Shabbat Afternoon Class will not meet this week.**

**Teen Shiur** | 5:35 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

**Evening Services (including *Selihot*)** | 6:20 pm

**Habdala** | 7:18 pm

### Weekday Service Times

#### Mornings:

Sunday: 8:05 am | Monday, Tuesday, & Friday: 7:05 am

#### Evenings:

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

Tuesday (no *Selihot*): 6:30 pm

**Kippur begins on Wednesday night.**

**For the full Kippur schedule, visit [shearithisrael.org](http://shearithisrael.org).**

## PREPARING FOR SUCCOT

*Sign up at [shearithisrael.org](http://shearithisrael.org)*

### 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.

### Lulab Decorating Workshop

**Baruch-Lev Kelman & Z Edinger**

**Sunday, October 5 | 7:00 pm, after Evening Services | Kids welcome!**

Join Baruch-Lev and Z for a workshop of traditional lulab assembly for all ages. Featuring the customs of various Jewish communities from ancient Rome to modern Yemen. Bring your lulab and decorate it with scarlet threads in the traditional Portuguese manner.

## YOUTH CORNER

### Kippur Youth Programming

Children's programming and/or childcare is available on Kippur.

(Kal Nidre & Neila = childcare only; Kippur 10 am-2 pm = childcare and youth groups.)

### Outdoor Succah Decorating for Youth

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

*RSVP to Bonnie at [bbarest@shearithisrael.org](mailto:bbarest@shearithisrael.org)*

**SAVE THE DATE: Shabbat afternoon, October 11**

### UWS Succah Hop

### Bringing the Zoo (and Ark) to You!

**Sunday, October 26 | 3-4:30 pm | Register at [shearithisrael.org](http://shearithisrael.org)**

Hear Parashat Noah on Shabbat and immerse yourself with the animals (yes, real live animals!) on Sunday afternoon! The NJ Snake Man will be bringing plenty of reptiles and birds that we'll get to know up close.

## COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Liliane Marks**, upon the birth of a grandson, born to Lionel & Alexandra Marks.

Thank you to **Fiona Amiel** for sponsoring a Minyan Breakfast this week.

Thank you to our CSS volunteers who assisted with security over Rosh HaShana.

## OUR 5786 HATANIM CELEBRATION

*Registration & Sponsorships at [shearithisrael.org](http://shearithisrael.org)*



*You are cordially invited to  
Congregation Shearith Israel's*

## 5786 HATANIM CELEBRATION

*honoring our  
Hatanim and their families*

**STEVEN BEISPEL**  
*Hatan Torah*

**DAVID ADELMAN**  
*Hatan Bereshit*

**Shabbat Bereshit October 18, 2025**  
Following Morning Services

**Outdoor Pavilion**  
(weather permitting; otherwise indoors)

This annual Shearith Israel event brings our community together in celebration of our devoted congregants and serves as our Fall Fundraiser.

This year we have the added goal of funding our new electric chairlift. This device enables mobility-impaired congregants to access our sanctuary with dignity. We hope you will show your support with a generous sponsorship and join us at this festive luncheon.

*Catering by IZ Events, in recognition of their outstanding cuisine and service at our  
2025 Spring Gala*