

## DEBAR TORAH *by* RABBI ROHDE

### The Eternal Cycle of the Season of Return

*Then the LORD your God will turn back your captivity, and have compassion on you, and turn back and gather you from all the nations to which YHWH your God has scattered you there. (Deut. 30:3 word-for-word translation)*  
*Then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. (Deut. 30:3 English Standard Version)*

Here we are, arriving at the Season of Penitence, Elul, Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur once again. We reproach ourselves by reading the rebukes in the curses of the end of Deuteronomy. We once again reprimand ourselves that after vowing to follow the path of the upright we have once more stumbled. And yet we remind ourselves that even so God has chosen to show us mercy and take us back in his love again. But the question begs itself, and is sometimes voiced: Is there no end to this cycle of sin, retribution, and eventual forgiveness and restoration to God's love? The Torah states that time and again we will fail in our commitments to God's covenant. Is there no end in sight?

Although there is a Jewish conception of a more final Redemptive age, leading to a more linear conception of Time, my answer is usually no, there is no permanent end to the cycle of sin, retribution, penitence, and restoration. We Jews, although we have more linear conceptions of history and time, yet we cling also to what perhaps is a more ancient and perhaps more universal and pagan conception of cyclical time, the myth of the Eternal Return or the Eternal Recurrence. For those less familiar with this conception, let's just say that it sees time and history as a series of endlessly repeating cycles, rather than progressing linearly. It has been argued that ancient polytheism, as well as philosophical schools such as Pythagoreanism and Stoicism, saw time more circularly, as an endless series of repeating cycles. Judaism and Christianity, with their messianic/redemptive conception, it has been argued (by such thinkers as the Church father Origen), allowed for a conception of progress or linear time, breaking free of this "fatalistic" pagan conception of cycles of time endlessly repeating and getting nowhere. Some modern writers who argued for a reappraisal of pagan thought, such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Mircea Eliade, sought to defend pagan conceptions of Eternally Recurring cycles of time against our more linear conceptions.

But the truth is, as even early Christian thinkers had to admit, notions of cyclical time are to be found within Judaism - quite explicitly, for example, in Ecclesiastes. And the yearly need for a Day of Atonement and regular offerings to cleanse sin implies that our capacity to progress forward is limited, and we are doomed, to some extent, to repeat our mistakes. In Hebrew the term for repentance, teshubah (תשובה), "turning back" to God, has the same verbal root as the word for "again" (שוב). The very same term "teshubah" which can mean "turning back" for the good to God can also mean "turning back" and "backsliding" away from God and towards evil. The term implies endless cycles of returning to God, turning back away from Him and restoration to His good Grace once again. And the inspiration for a theory of cyclical time very much comes from the yearly seasonal cycles. There will always be seasons and periods of time where we traditionally feel the pull back away from God and it seems God has turned back from us, and yet there will always be seasons when we hear Him summoning us back. There will always be a Tisha BeAb Babylonian captivity: The term "shebut" (שבות) meaning captivity and also meaning a restoration and redemption of that captivity is also related to teshubah. There will always be seasons when our Evil Inclination tends to take our Good Inclination captive, when we are in fact captivated by Evil and taken down to Hades like Persephone. And then there will always be seasons where we are restored to life as the rainy season releases our captivity and God returns us to His Loving Grace.

Hence although we should aim for a true and final Return and Restoration to the Grace of God, we must always keep in mind that there will always be cycles of "back and forth" or "running forward and turning back" (רצות ושוב). In the Northern Hemisphere, Autumn is a season when precipitation begins again and the farmer must return to the discipline of agricultural labor. Autumn is universally a season of reckoning. Our Month of Judgment roughly parallels the pagan constellation Libra, the scale or balance. Although time and progress can have a forward momentum, we must always realize that the cycles of ebb and flow will never cease. And there will always be a need for a seasonal call, the Autumn's call of the Shofar, to summon us back to God's Restored Love and good Grace.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL

The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

**Shabbat Nitsabim-Vayeilekh**

*September 4-5, 2026 | 23 Elul, 5786*

**Consecration Anniversary of 19th Street Synagogue (1860)**

### SCHEDULE

**Hertz:** Parasha: 878 | Haftarah: 883

**Kaplan:** Parasha: 1010 | Haftarah: 1242

**The Choir returns this Shabbat for the season**

**Candle Lighting** | 7:05 pm

**Evening Services** | 7:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

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

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

**Tot Shabbat & Youth 5+** | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

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

**Kiddush** | following services

**Shabbat Afternoon Class** | 6:15 pm | Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

**Teen Shiur** | 6:15 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman

**Evening Services (with *Selihot*)** | 7:00 pm

**Habdala** | 7:58 pm

*Rosh HaShana begins next Friday night. See inside for the full Rosh HaShana schedule.*

### Weekday Service Times

#### **Mornings:**

Sunday & Monday (Labor Day): 8:05 am

Tuesday-Thursday: 7:05 am

#### **Evenings:**

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

***Our office will be closed on Monday for the legal holiday.***

Congregation Shearith Israel | 2 West 70th Street | 212-873-0300 | [www.shearithisrael.org](http://www.shearithisrael.org)

## HIGH HOLIDAYS AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

Learn more at [shearithisrael.org/high-holidays5787](http://shearithisrael.org/high-holidays5787)

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### Shabbat Teshuba Derasha

Rabbi Meir Soloveichik

Shabbat, September 19 | Following Morning Services

To sponsor, go to [shearithisrael.org](http://shearithisrael.org).

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### Your High Holiday Checklist

**The seating reservation deadline has passed and tickets have gone out.**

If you missed the deadline but have an urgent need to make a reservation, submit your information immediately, and we will do our best to accommodate you.

- **Members:** Opt In/Opt out of High Holiday seats | **Non-members:** reserve your seats
  - **Parents:** Make childcare reservations when you reserve seats
  - Make your holiday offerings
  - Order your lulab & etrog set through the synagogue
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### Rosh HaShana Schedule

**EVE OF ROSH HASHANA – Friday, September 11**

**Preparations:** Early Morning Selihot: 6:15 am | Shahrit: 7:05 am

Evening Services (Minha & Arbit) | 6:45 pm

Candle Lighting | 6:54 pm

**DAY 1 ROSH HASHANA – Shabbat, September 12**

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

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

Torah Service | 10:00 am

'Et Sha'arei Ratzon (**No Shofar Service**) | 10:50 am

Musaf & Sermon | 11:20 am

Kiddush | Following services

Evening Services (Minha & Arbit) | 6:45 pm

Candle Lighting | after 7:46 pm

**DAY 2 ROSH HASHANA – Sunday, September 13**

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

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

Torah Service | 9:50 am

'Et Sha'arei Ratzon & **Shofar Service** | 10:35 am

Musaf & Sermon | 11:10 am

**Morning Public Shofar Blowing** | 12:45 pm

Kiddush | Following services

**Afternoon Public Shofar Blowing:** 6:35 pm

Minha, Arbit & Selihot | 6:45 pm

Habdala | 7:31 pm

## COMING UP

To sign up, visit [shearithisrael.org](http://shearithisrael.org)

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### Sisterhood Succah Decoration

Wednesday & Thursday, September 23 & 24 | 5:00 pm-9:00 pm

Friday, September 25 | 8:00 am-12:00 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.

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### Monthly Public Synagogue Tour

**Next Tour: THIS Wednesday, September 9 | 5:45 pm**

Individuals and groups are welcome to attend a free, guided tour on the second Wednesday of every month, led by Rev. Z. Edinger.

*Suggested donation of \$5 per person; any amount appreciated. Tours generally last 45 minutes.*

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### Simhat Torah Kiddush & Ice Cream Extravaganza

**Simhat Torah night, October 3 | Following 7:15 pm Hakafot**

Following evening services and our dignified *hakafot*, we will host a light dairy kiddush with ice cream, outdoors on Paved Paradise. The kiddush is free to attend; no registration required!

Kiddush sponsorships available at [shearithisrael.org](http://shearithisrael.org).

*The Ice Cream Extravaganza is sponsored—as always—by the Haberman and Lustig families.*

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## SELIHOT AT SHEARITH ISRAEL

### At Evening Services during Elul

The Sephardic custom is to prepare for Rosh HaShana by reciting Selihot during the entire month of Elul. Unlike other communities, however, the Spanish & Portuguese custom is to recite a very short form of Selihot following Arbit every evening.

You can help keep this rare minhag alive by attending our daily evening services.

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## KIDS KORNER

To win a raffle ticket at kiddush, find Dalya & Jake with the answer to this riddle:

*When you do something wrong and want to make it right,  
You say that you're sorry and choose what is right.  
You turn back to Hashem and try a new way,  
And start fresh and do better each day!*

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### CSI Youth Succah Decorating: Succot in the Garden

Wednesday & Thursday, September 23 & 24 | 5:30 pm | Paved Paradise

Join Jake and Dalya as we transform our outdoor succah into a beautiful garden oasis.

*RSVP to Dalya & Jake at [youth@shearithisrael.org](mailto:youth@shearithisrael.org).*