

## DEBAR TORAH by RABBI ROHDE

### The First Prophetic Diatribe of the Torah

*I will turn against you, and you will be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you will rule over you, and you will run even when no one is chasing you! And if, in spite of all this, you still disobey me, I will punish you seven times over for your sins.* (Lev. 26:17-18)

We have reached the end of the reading of the Book of Leviticus, the Third Book of the Torah, which means that we are three-fifths through the annual Torah-reading cycle which began this year on our People's disastrous October 7th. Our section at the end of Leviticus includes a brief section which is one of the two main examples of alternating blessing/cursing "Reproof" in the Torah, the much longer example of which is at the end of Deuteronomy. These passages, which predict the vilest punishments which will befall Israel for their sins in failure to follow God's Laws, I have argued, are part and parcel of a whole genre of what I think can be called "doom and gloom" prophetic diatribe, which includes much of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and parts and whole sections of other Prophetic and other Biblical works. From what we know of Balaam and archaeologically-discovered Near-Eastern works, as well as what we see portrayed as typical of "seers" in Greek tragedy, it seems probable that these types of diatribes were the standard stock-in-trade of the prophets of the Ancient Near East and adjacent areas; and indeed, among Semitic language-speaking peoples it's even likely that they shared common stock-phrases, turns of speech, bywords, metaphors, and descriptions.

The proclaiming of a curse of imminent doom upon a city-state or empire for their sins of disloyalty and failure to follow their covenanted obligations to people, god, and rulers was indeed perhaps the most pre-eminent role of the prophetic Seer. Indeed, I recently made a discovery during our morning Book of Ezekiel class which deeply resonated with me, gloomy character that I am during this gloomy year: Apparently, Ezekiel seems to state that if you hear a Prophet or Seer state "Everything will be all right, don't worry," or that "any destruction or punishment due will not come about until far in the future," then he cannot be a true prophet. In other words: A prophet who is not preaching doom and gloom, full of hellfire and brimstone, giving the people hell, calling out the people for the direst retribution for their many sins, by definition cannot be a true prophet. The Torah itself does not go this far: Its only criteria to distinguish true from false prophecy would seem to be whether or not the prophet's words seem to find some kind of fulfillment or not, although this seems pretty murky. But Ezekiel's criteria fits in with our more common notion of the prophet's role: To decry sin and corruption, to harangue the people and their leaders, castigate them for their many sins, and forebode the direst destruction which imminently awaits them if they do not immediately desist and repent of their ways. A prophet is by definition one who portends "doom and gloom," and "balls out" the people, threatening them with infernal curse in consequence of the absolute abhorrence of their sins, or else he's not really a prophet. That is one reason, therefore, why the genre of prophetic harangue makes its appearance at these various spots in the Torah: It verifies and validates the Torah as a form of prophecy.

Of course, I've always been our minyan's "tahanun" guy, insisting on the importance of the daily penitential and confessional literature which is such a prominent part of the Sephardic liturgy, emphasizing that it is part of an essential emphasis upon sin and repentance in Jewish religion. But in the present context of this disastrous war and its consequences for Israel and the Diaspora which have befallen us this year I feel I would be remiss if I did not call for my own deepest introspection and apologies for vast sins and my failed performance in my role as a Jewish leader. Yes, anger is called for with regard to our enemies, but so is vast guilt called for with regard to our own misdeeds and, perhaps more, omissions and failures to act. Indeed, to paraphrase the Talmudic maxim goes, it is [natural] law for enemies to be enemies, particularly for Israel's enemies to exhibit enmity, but our own sins have doubtless had a role in alienating ourselves from ourselves, and they have contributed to our failures against our enemies. I confess my role for my unforgivable sins and my failure to galvanize my fellow Israelites towards righteousness, which has led to my own people's alienation, without which our enemies would have never had opportunity to attack. I'm not going to be more specific, and I'm sure I will be interpreted in various ways, in terms of my misdeeds of both commission and omission. My aim is to inspire introspection in others. The next time you hear me lead a long tahanun...well, just think about it. I have always felt that we Jews excel at this type of introspection ("Jewish guilt"), and that it is indeed our "secret weapon" and should be our pride in the world. Yet even Jewish guilt itself can and has been turned by our enemies against us. Hence I want it used constructively, to bring Jews together. Without such introspection and repentance, I would be remiss in my role if I didn't forebode disasters to come. This coming week we mark the reunification of Jerusalem. We also mark Rosh Hodesh Sivan, and the day before it some observe as Yom Kippur Katan, a mini-penitential observance. Let us examine our hearts for this coming month, in order for all Israel to receive the Torah in purity on the upcoming Festival of Shabuot.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL  
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

## Shabbat Behukkotai

May 31-June 1, 2024 | 24 Iyar, 5784

Consecration Anniversary, 70th St. Synagogue (1897)

### SHABBAT SCHEDULE

Kaplan: p. 640 | Haftarah: p. 1178 // Hertz: p. 542 | Haftarah: p. 551

**Candle Lighting** | 8:02 pm

**Evening Services** | 7:00 pm

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

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

At the conclusion of the last word of the parasha, the congregation says:

חֲזַק וְנִתְחַזַּק - חֲזַקוּ וַיִּצְמַח לְבַבְכֶם כָּל הַיְמִינִים לַיהוָה

*Be Strong and let us be Strengthened - Be strong, and let your heart take courage,*

*All ye that hope for the LORD.*

**Shabbat Morning Talk** | At Morning Services | Rabbi Soloveichik

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

**Youth Groups** | 10:00 am | Elias Room

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

**Kiddush** | following service

**Shabbat Afternoon Class** | 7:15 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik | Main Sanctuary

**No Teen Shiur this week.**

**Evening Services** | 8:00 pm

**Habdala** | 9:03 pm

*Yom Yerushalayim begins on Tuesday night.*

*Rosh Hodesh Sivan begins on Thursday night.*

### Weekday Service Times

Sunday Morning: 8:05 am / Monday-Friday Mornings: 7:05 am

Sunday-Thursday Evenings (Minha & Arbit): **6:45 pm (note new time)**

## ANNUAL SPRING FUNDRAISER VIRTUAL LECTURE SERIES

*LAST CHANCE to sponsor or upgrade your sponsorship in time for Sunday's  
live pre-recording event!*

### "A History of Judaism in Five Foods" *A Virtual Lecture Series by Rabbi Meir Soloveichik*

#### FINAL LECTURE

#### FOR \$1800+ SPONSORS:

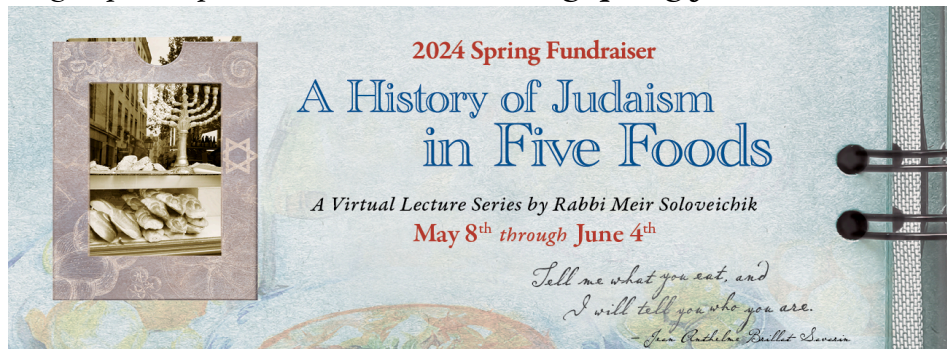
In person, THIS Sunday, June 2 (see below)

#### For all sponsors:

Virtual, Tuesday, June 4 | 7:30 pm

A Talmudic Fisherman, Chagall's Herring, and Rabbinic Sushi:  
The Jewish Affection for Fish from Egypt to Today

*Sign up and sponsor at [shearithisrael.org/spring-fundraiser2024](https://shearithisrael.org/spring-fundraiser2024)*



*All sponsors and underwriters will be recognized in a beautiful content-rich commemorative booklet.*

#### For Sponsors of \$1,800 and above:

**Sunday, June 2** - Be part of a **live studio audience** for Rabbi Soloveichik's last lecture, and enjoy herring and drinks. Details sent by email.

#### For Sponsors of \$360 & above:

**Sunday, June 9** - Special talk with Rabbi Soloveichik and Elizabeth Ehrlich, author of *Miriam's Kitchen*. Details sent by email.

#### For Series Underwriters (\$3,600 & above):

Join Rabbi Soloveichik and others for an in-person **exclusive kosher food tour**, as well as receive access to **recordings** of the lectures after the series has concluded.

## COMING UP

*Registration & additional details at [shearithisrael.org](https://shearithisrael.org)*

### Celebrate Israel Parade

**THIS Sunday, June 2**

Important logistical details from the JCRC have been included in this week's Thursday newsletter.

*A few spots remain - Help us keep this special tradition going!*

#### Be A Girls' Book of Ruth Reader

**Rehearsal: Sunday, June 9 | 10 am | Main Sanctuary**

**Reading on Wednesday, Shabuot I, June 12**

*Interested? Contact Mrs. Lisa Robde at [lrohde-csi@yahoo.com](mailto:lrohde-csi@yahoo.com) to sign up.*

**DEADLINE:** Wednesday, June 5!

### Young Families' "Shabuot on the Slopes of Sinai"

*Festive Catered Outdoor Luncheon with Learning & Activities*

**Led by Baruch-Lev Kelman**

**Wednesday, Shabuot I, June 12 | Register now!**

### Share your news: Graduation Kiddush & Scroll of Honor

**Shabbat, June 22 | Following Services**

*Featuring our annual ice cream cake tradition!*

To submit your graduate's info or sponsor kiddush, visit [shearithisrael.org/graduation2024](https://shearithisrael.org/graduation2024)

### Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabuot Lecture

**Night of Shabuot I, Tuesday, June 11 | 11:30 pm**

Come for the Torah, stay for the cheesecake!

*The Sisterhood presents: **Stitch & Fix***

**THIS Tuesday, June 4 & June 18 | 1-3 pm | Elias Room**

*RSVP to [rgedinger@gmail.com](mailto:rgedinger@gmail.com)*

## COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

West Side Hatzolah is having its annual online fundraising campaign as part of the **Global Chevra HatzalahThon**. West Side Hatzolah provides essential services to our community. Their volunteers are always on the front lines that heed the call 24/7 for us, our families and our community.

**Please let Hatzolah know that the Shearith Israel community cares!**

Please donate at: [hatzalahthon.com/westside/sp](https://hatzalahthon.com/westside/sp)