

Failing

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

There is no achievement without obstacles and no triumph without reversals. Failure, said Churchill, is not fatal. He would know: Although we reckon Churchill an astounding success, he was voted out of office and despondent in the years before becoming Prime Minister of England. When in the hospital he lost his place in Parliament, writing later: "In the twinkling of an eye, I found myself without an office, without a seat, without a party, and without an appendix."

Every great leader from Pericles to Lincoln was thought a failure by many who surrounded him or her. Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Rachel — all suffered setbacks. Korach rebelled because he thought Moses a failure, a view that was shared by many in Israel.

The measure of human character is our reaction to dark times and not the frequency of failure itself. No one can sidestep darkness. Rabbi Aharon of Apt taught that darkness is the throne upon which the light sits. If a soul has not known sadness and struggle there is no chance of overcoming, no cherishing the dawn.

Churchill once explained that, "success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm." Life is filled with losses, rupture, wreckage; but also with lessons and hard won wisdom. Blessed are the failures that help us grow.