

August 7, 2025

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Renewal. Tisha B'Ab services, both Saturday night and Sunday, were among the most well attended in a long time. So was the Rabbi's talk after Saturday night's reading of the *Eicha*, the Book of Lamentations. Sunday morning – one of Beth's and my favorite services all year – lasted the usual five hours but also had more congregants and friends participating in the chanting of the *kinot* than we have had in years. It was a deeply moving day, made the more moving because we observed it as a community. As Michael Schulder said, at Shearith Israel it feels “like real Tisha B'Ab.”

We are now blessed with the seven Shabbatot between Tisha B'Ab and Rosh Hashana. They are called the seven weeks of consolation, as they feature seven *haftarot* from Isaiah that are as positive and life-affirming as that positive and life-affirming Prophet could compose. Come join us, if your end-of-summer plans permit. This Shabbat will be special as we welcome Rabbi Joseph Dweck and the Habura on Friday evening, and Rabbi Marc Angel, who will be speaking after Shabbat morning services in honor of his grandson's wedding, his bar mitzvah anniversary, and his 80th birthday (Gevurot). Kiddush will be truly a convivial repast, in honor of Rabbi Dweck and the Habura, as well as Jonathan Arking's upcoming marriage to Abigail. Rabbi Dweck will be giving the Shabbat afternoon class.

Napoleon: Poet or Warrior. David Vorchheimer found an 1891 reference to the story about Napoleon I told last week (a people who mourn their Temple are destined to return and rebuild it). Thank you to David, but, as he recognizes, the reference is itself secondary and unattributed. David feels it's “suggestive”. Napoleon died 70 years before this reference, so I'm unprepared to credit it fully. But it's a great find, David, so thank you.

Claude Nadaf, on the other hand, may come closer to what really happened. Claude notes that “Napoleon was a military man his entire life; his biography is the very definition of a tough guy. This man lived by the sword”. Claude feels that it is therefore “highly unlikely that he would praise people for sitting and crying about something”. Instead, Claude cites other secondary sources from the early Twentieth Century telling the story differently: After hearing the weeping of the Jews in a synagogue in Vilnius, Napoleon pointed to his sword and said, “*This is how to redeem Palestine.*”

Claude reminds us of the magnificent quote by Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), and this may be what people are “remembering”:

The vineyards of Israel have ceased to exist, but the eternal law enjoins the children of Israel still to celebrate the vintage. A race that persist in celebrating their vintage, although they have no fruits to gather, will regain their vineyards. What sublime inexorability in the law! But what indomitable spirit in the people!

Mind you all, the interesting question is whether a Napoleon or a Disraeli might have shared this sentiment. BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE: The Talmud said it first, in Tractate Taanit, page 30b:

Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will merit to see its rejoicing.

Photo Finishes. I should have figured that our community would basically Ace the quiz to identify the women in the great photograph of the Sisterhood circa 1955-60 that Abigail Gerstein Chill sent in:



We heard from congregants and friends both near and far, including Michelle Shemaria Soslau, Anita Tamari, Reverend Edinger, Esme Berg, and Steve Beispel. Steve beautifully describes those photographed as the “wonderful women who contributed so much to the congregation”.

We have many but not all of the names of the women in the photograph. So what we are going to do is tell you the names we have, and if you can identify anyone else, please try. So far we have Esther Oppenheim, Amy Gerstein, Selma Guedalia, Hannah Tarry, Irma Cardozo, possibly Mathilde (or Lucy) Touriel, Anne Elias, Dolly Marks, and Dorothy Ain (maybe). You are about to say, oh but which photo goes with which name? We may tell you that, too. But in the meantime, are there any other guesses?

Reverend Edinger, by the way, and contrary to my speculation last week, says that the Elias room is *not* named after Irving Elias' parents. Says the Oracle of 70th Street,

[Irving Elias's father] was from Greece (Ionina I believe). The Elias room is named after Albert Elias and his wife, Rebecca Lyon Elias. They were grandees.

Only at Shearith Israel!

Movies on Paved Paradise. A week from tonight, on August 14, we will be showing *Chariots of Fire* on Paved Paradise. Without a doubt, the movie is one of the best films I have ever seen. I am sympathetic to the objection that the Jewish character is not a model of religious rectitude. But the film teaches life-long lessons about faith, commitment, and the pursuit of excellence. At least two of those themes are deeply Jewish (I would argue all three). And the movie is stunning, both visually and musically. Come, let's watch it together.

Name That Parasha Tune. We are collecting tunes for the first five parshiot of Sefer Devarim, consisting of **Parshiot Devarim, V'Etchanan** (this week's parasha), **Ekev, Re'eh, and Shoftim**.

Claude Nadaf has an interesting way of getting to musical suggestions. For **Parashat V'Etchanan**, for example, Claude reports as follows:

G-d was concerned that during the singular experience at Sinai, the people needed to maintain their distance. Some people may take spiritually dangerous shortcuts to try to get close to G-d. The Talmud (Hagiga 14b) describes four sages who entered the mystical realm of "Pardes" [an orchard or garden]. Elisha Ben Abuya became a heretic -- hence:

- [Losing My Religion](#), sung by R.E.M. [just fwiw, "losing my religion" is about the last way I would describe the majesty of **Parashat V'Etchanan** – oh well, À chacun son goût]

Ritual Director/Cantor Jay Harwitt has a story about the haftarah for **Parshat V'Etchanan**:

I was the Cantor of Beth Shalom of Whittier from 1998 to 2011. My neighbor at Ner Tamid in Downey would regularly be invited to an annual interfaith songfest put on by the local stakes of the Latter-Day Saints. One year he had a conflict and invited me to stand in for him. I pre-recorded my own piano accompaniment When my turn came, I chanted Isaiah 40:4 for the audience, in Hebrew:

כל גיא ינשא וכל הר וגבעה ישפלו והיה העקב למישור והרכסים לבקעה

[Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain.]

*They gave me the blank looks...Then I said, "Now, here it is in the more familiar English version," turned on my recording, and sang Every Valley. **That** they recognized right away.*

- [Comfort Ye ... Every Valley](#), from the beginning of Handel's *Messiah*

I too have a suggestion, from the haftarah for **Parashat V'Etchanan**. The very end of the haftarah leads right into the part of Isaiah that serves as the *haftarah* for **Parashat Lech Lecha**, with the stirring, unforgettable words that Eric Liddell, the Flying Scotsman, says in *Chariots of Fire*. So, anticipating our movie on Paved Paradise next week, I offer:

- [The Theme from Chariots of Fire](#) [surely one of the greatest pieces of synthetic music; by Vangelis]

Who Gets the Neck of the Grasshopper? You either do or should know the great hit from the 1940s, [I Get the Neck of the Chicken](#), here sung by Dale Evans.

Chickens have necks, so it all makes sense. I was puzzled however by our Talmudic discussion this week. We are holding in the Fourth Chapter of Tractate Avodah Zarah, pages 46-52. There the Talmud explains that worshipping an idol is forbidden if done in the way the idol is normally worshipped (seems obvious so far) and even if worshipped in some generally applicable way. Two generally

applicable ways are through food and through either breaking or throwing a stick (there are differences of opinion that don't matter here). Then the Talmud says:

לִימָא כְּתִנְאִי: שְׁחַט לֵה חֲגָב — רַבִּי יְהוּדָה מַחֲיִיב, וְחֻכְמַיִם פּוֹטְרִי

The Gemara suggests: Let us say that one's liability for breaking a stick as a form of idol worship is the subject of a dispute between tanna'im: If one slaughtered a grasshopper for an idol, Rabbi Yehuda deems him liable, and the Rabbis deem him exempt from punishment.

I want to focus on the grasshopper part. What's going on? I don't mean that our Sages disagreed about whether the slaughter of the grasshopper is or is not prohibited. Rather, my question is, simply, how to (ritually) slaughter a grasshopper in the first place? Where does the Talmudic corpus teach us that? The word used is שְׁחַט, which means ritual slaughter, as in readying the animal for sacrifice or consumption. Our son Joseph says I'm being too technical, that שְׁחַט could also mean just plain killing. That doesn't seem like what the Talmud is getting at. So I ask again, how do you ritually kill a grasshopper? Where's the neck of *that* chicken?

Books Redux. I promised to put [Lincoln in the Bardo](#) on my to-read list, since one of our best readers and recommenders, Debbie Sondheim, suggested it. I read it. It is clearly worth a read, but what you will have read when you do read it is going to be a very interesting question. I won't spoil it for you, but I will say two things.

First, unbeknownst to me when I started it – and obviously something I should have looked up beforehand – *bardo*, as my AI colleague tells me, “comes from Tibetan Buddhism and refers to an intermediate or transitional state—most commonly, the state between death and rebirth”; and

Second, there are hints in the writing of Joyce and Faulkner. Before you accuse me of over-hyping, I said hints.

Read the book, and tell us your reactions.

In this, our Year of Renewal, let us feel and express gratitude and pray *Hoshi'á nna, save us now*.

Louis Solomon, Parnas