

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. Welcome one and all 5786 and to our **Year of Allegiance**. Rosh Hashana were blessed days in our Synagogue. *Tizku L'shanim Rabot*. We were reasonably full, and the Rabbi's beautiful talks supplemented our sublime and equally beautiful liturgy and choir. We also yesterday observed the Fast of Gedalia, which I addressed in my [email of 9/21/23](#) and continues to be a day that I believe we should, as a community, take deep cognizance of.

Our Year of Allegiance Hatanim. Although not formally feted until Shabbat Bereshit, the term of our Hatanim began on Rosh Hashana. This year's Hatanim (drum roll) are Steve Beispel (Hatan Torah) and David Adelman (Hatan Bereshit). What a glorious choice! What a privilege for us as a community to be able to celebrate with Steve and Ina and David and Caroline and their families. More on this – but it's not too early to sign up for our Hatanim Luncheon, which will be held after services on Parashat Bereshit, October 18, 2025.

Ner News. One of the great names for our celebration of America's 250th is our *Ner Year* (as independent creators Meyer Solny and Barbara Reiss remind us, *nr* is 250 in gematria and also means *light* as in enlightenment. Forgive the added “e”; I'm willing to discuss whether another vowel (or two) would be better, but a vowel (or two) it surely needs). As the year progresses, it is here where we will record some of what we are doing this, our *Ner Year*. For starters, you need to see, and admire, the masterful rendition of our ancient logo, which the office spruced up for *Ner Year* purposes:



Name That Parasha Tune. We are collecting songs for the few remaining parshiot in the Torah: **Nitzavim, Vayelekh** (this week's parasha), **Ha'azinu**, and **V'zot HaBeracha**.

Postscript on Parashat Nitzavim. Devarim 30:11-14 contains four verses that comprise an entire aliya and that, last week, I quoted a portion of:

לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא יֹאמֵר מִי יַעֲלֶה-לָנוּ הַשְּׁמַיִמָּה וְיִקְחֶהָ לָנוּ וְיִשְׁמַעְנוּ אֹתָהּ וְנַעֲשֶׂהָ:
וְלֹא-מֵעֵבֶר לַיָּם הוּא יֹאמֵר מִי יַעֲבֹר-לָנוּ אֶל-יַעֲבֹר הַיָּם וְיִקְחֶהָ לָנוּ וְיִשְׁמַעְנוּ אֹתָהּ וְנַעֲשֶׂהָ:
כִּי-קָרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשֹׂתוֹ:

Surely, this Instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach.

It is not in the heavens, that you should say: 'Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say: 'Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?' No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.

Three of our best thinkers, communicators, and song mavens separately commented on these verses.

- Claude Nadaf nicely comments (space permits only an excerpt):

The Torah is a book for the average man in average situations. In many places the Torah itself, and certainly the Rabbis in their comments upon it, insists upon this fact - that the law it contains is not lofty, remote or esoteric ... The Sages were fond of saying: "The Torah was not given to ministering angels" (Talmud, Brachot 2Sb). ... The Torah is not for beings who are perfect. It is not for those who live above the problems of ordinary human life.

- Jay Harwitt says of these verses:

I would understand them as an astute nod to the difference between our experience and Greek mythology. ... Those [Greek] stories [like Prometheus stealing fire or Jason and the golden fleece] revolve around stealing vital objects, while our G-d was very open-handed with the same sorts of things. Think about the times at the end of Exodus where a paragraph ends with words from G-d to Moses to the effect of, "Just like I showed you in the plains." No secrets, no treachery, and no punishment for doing the right thing.

- Finally, Andrew Druck would rewrite the verses with R&R in mind:

Not "[Up on the roof](#)" and not "[Under the boardwalk](#)," both as sung by the Drifters. Or: Not "[Uptown](#)" as sung by The Crystals, and not "[Down by the River](#)" (as sung by Neil Young and Crazy Horse").

Andrew says he was just playing around. I think his thought is sublime.

I had one suggestion for **Parashat Vayelekh** itself. One of the most memorable community mitzvot in the parasha is that, every seven years, the entire nation – everyone – gathers to hear the king read the Torah. It's as democratic an institution as was ever created. And so my song suggestion is [America the Beautiful](#), here sung by Ray Charles (Dorky, you say? Ok, come up with a better one.)

Tractate Zevachim and Intention. We have often remarked on how profoundly important intention is in our observance of commandments. It is such a stark antidote to the modern aspersion that our commandments are mindless acts by mindless people.

One can't get off the first page of Tractate Zevachim – actually one can't finish the first part of the first Mishna in this new Tractate and Order – without seeing this very point in **bold and highlighted lettering**. In that very first legal articulation, the Mishna (on page 2a) says that, when it comes to offerings in penance for a sin or other negative act, without the proper intention of knowing what one is doing and why one is doing it, the act is invalid and the sacrifice unfit. Could intention get more important than that?

The theme of the supreme importance of intention continues onto the pages we are learning this week, as part of the global Daf Yomi learning cycle (Zevachim 6-12). This being the *seventh* month of the year (counting from Nissan), it is only fitting to look at the *seventh* saying of Rava, which appears of course on page *seven* (b) of the Tractate. Here Rava says:

וְאָמַר רַבָּא: עוֹלָה הַבָּאָה לְאַחַר מִיתָה; שְׁחָטָהּ בְּשִׁינוּי קוֹדֶשׁ – פְּסוּלָהּ, בְּשִׁינוּי בְּעָלִים – כְּשָׁרָהּ, דְּאִין בְּעָלִים לְאַחַר מִיתָה.

And Rava says: With regard to a burnt offering that is brought by its owner's heirs after his death, if one slaughtered it with a deviation from the type of offering, i.e., for the sake of another type of offering, it is unfit, i.e., it does not satisfy the owner's obligation, and the heirs must therefore bring another offering.

Many different words in English capture the concept: If you want true change to occur, you need *intention, mindfulness, awareness, attentiveness*. If we are not *attuned* to what we are doing, it's as if we are not doing it. This isn't some modern notion that the Enlightenment or more recently the Existentialists claim to have taught us. The concept, written into law, was already a thousand years old when our Sages discussed it in the Talmud. What an important lesson in these Days of Remembrance and Repentance.

Books. I am delighted to report that the book review I had for this week, from me again, has been preempted by someone who actually knows books, Morton Landowne, writer, editor, publisher. Morty knows I didn't love (history professor) Andrew Porwancher's [The Jewish World of Alexander Hamilton](#). My negative reaction wasn't for any reason personal to the author but because I thought he didn't make his case that Hamilton was Jewish. Even with that, Morty still recommends Porwancher's latest book, [American Maccabee: Theodore Roosevelt & The Jews](#). I would have added the book to the list of need-to-reads on Morty's recommendation alone. But Morty goes further, and his analysis is a treat:

No, this isn't an attempt to claim Teddy for the Tribe, but what there is, is a deeply researched and engrossing account of the many ways Roosevelt engaged with the lives and concerns of New York, American, and European Jews, from his early days as the NYC Police Commissioner, in 1895, through his governorship, vice presidency, presidency, and, movingly, even on the day of his death. Porwancher places special emphasis on Roosevelt's efforts to assist victims of the years-long wave of pogroms in Russia, in close cooperation with the leaders of the American Jewish community.

To quote one of the book's blurbs, 'this book is as much a presidential history as a sophisticated inquiry into the status and standing of American Jews in the early twentieth century.'

Morty finishes by noting that Shearith Israel member Neal Kozodoy edited the book. So on the list it goes, with an invitation to send in reactions if you have read it or when you do.

Publication Notice. Next week, we hope to send out our email at 11 am on **Wednesday, October 1, Erev Yom Kippur**.

In this, our **Year of Allegiance**, let us couple our collective **commitment** with a prayer to The Almighty, **Hatzlich'ana, help us succeed**.

