

August 13, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. Today and tomorrow are Rosh Hodesh Elul. And you know what that means? Yes, it means that on motzaei Shabbat we begin reciting selichot every weekday evening until the day before Rosh Hashana. We recite bite-size portions of these penitential prayers in a lovely melody that not only puts us in the right mood for the High Holidays but also doesn't take more than about five minutes. Join us for an evening service or two.

Brachot Riddles. This all started when Trustee Avery Neumark challenged us to come up with blessings or *brachot* that we say only once a year. Last week, "we" came up with an excellent list. And I'm happy to say that Avery not only likes our list but didn't come up with any others, mostly. Avery likes the fact that we say Birchat Hachama (or the prayer for the Sun) every 28 years, but that's not once a year, and in any event R' Alexander Grinberg came up with that one too. Avery likes *biur chametz*, or the blessing we say when we burn chametz before Pesah. That's clever and was not on my list last week. But RavDoc came up with it for this week, before we heard from Avery! Avery thinks that Tefillat Tal and Tefillat Geshem shouldn't count. The Judges agree with Faith Fogelman; yes they do. And Avery confirms that there is no special *bracha* for beating the willow branches on Hoshana Rabba, but David Cohen nailed that one earlier, too.

This is fun! It was a clever question, but our congregants and friends required themselves fully.

Dastardly DST. Not only do we still have absolutely no one chiming in to favor daylight savings time all year round; but, responding to Arthur Tenenholtz's comment that *maybe* those living in (far-eastern) Maine *might* not mind it so much, Esther Ingber, who spends time in Maine, "can't figure out why he would think Mainers would want it either". Tee hee!

The Whole Truth and Nothing But the Truth. Claude Nadaf deserves a final word on this. Claude explains that, in Parashat Mishpatim, "in the expansion on the Ten Commandments," we are commanded to "to distance ourselves from falsehood." Claude asks, "Why is lying so evil? We do not have a command to distance ourselves from murder, and that is a cardinal sin". Claude's insight is that "the goal of the Torah is for us to know G-d. G-d is the Truth. We must distance ourselves from a trait that contradicts the Torah. Exaggeration, sarcasm, white lies, and 'just joking' are all allowing falsehood into our lives." Isn't that a wonderful insight?

Name that Haftarah Tune. We are finishing collecting tunes for the haftarot in roughly the first half of Sefer Devarim: **Devarim, Va'etchanan Eikev, Re'eh,** and **Shoftim** (this week's parasha).

And we are opening the lines for tunes for the final six parshiot of Sefer Devarim: **Ki Tetzei, Ki Tavo, Nitzavim-Vayelech, Ha'azinu,** and **V'Zot Ha'Bracha.** There will also be Shabbatot with special haftarot

(Rosh Hashana, Succot, Shemini Atzeret) before we “start all over again,” to quote Bobby Sherman in [Easy Come, Easy Go](#).

For this week, the **Haftarah for Parashat Shoftim** comes from Isaiah 51:12-52:12. It is the fourth of the seven haftarot of consolation.

Ritual Director Jay Harwitt offers three fun facts about the haftarah. One and two are that “the beginnings of two verses of this haftarah found their way into *Lecha Dodi*,” which we and every other synagogue sing virtually every Friday night:

- 51:17 התעוררי התעוררי
- 52:2 התנערי מעפר קומי
- Here is [a rendition](#) that, while beautiful, pales in comparison to ours.

And three, the beginning of Chapter 52 is or should be the genesis of the song

- [Uri Tsiyon](#)

Andrew Druck, MSS, offers his usual, beautiful insights:

Isaiah twice exhorts Israel to wake up and see that, even though they have suffered, Hashem is now with them (see especially the last verses 9-12).

Andrew therefore suggests the following:

- [Chelsea Morning](#), as sung by Joni Mitchell
- [Wake Up Little Susie](#), as sung by the Everly Brothers
- [It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood](#), as sung by (the newer) Mr. Rogers
- [Turn the Page](#), as sung by Bob Seger
- [The Times, They Are A-Changin'](#), as sung by Bob Dylan
- [Good Vibrations](#), as sung by the Beachboys
- [I'll Take Care of You](#), as sung by the Dixie Chicks
- [Someone to Watch Over Me](#), as sung by Ella Fitzgerald

Two Rights Making a Wrong. In our [email of 12/1/22](#), I told the story that everyone knows: Professor Sidney Morgenbesser was a leading light at Columbia University during much of the Twentieth Century. His wit was supposedly unsurpassed. The story is told that Morgenbesser listened to the great philosopher/linguist J.L. Austin lecture that, although a double negative often implies a positive meaning (e.g., "he is not unlike his sister"), there is no language in which a double positive implies a negative. Morgenbesser retorted: "Yeah, yeah."

The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week learning pages 101-107 of Tractate Chulin. Among the lessons taught there is one of which Morgenbesser would approve – and that has a lot to teach us for our lives today.

Page 103b of the Tractate begins Chapter 8, with the famous first words of the Mishna, כָּל הַבֶּשֶׂר אֶסוּר לְבִשֵּׁל בְּחֵלֶב, *all living animals may not be cooked in milk* (except fish and grasshoppers). The Chapter is about milk and meat. The mishnaot and gemarra are accessible, and the Chapter is studded with aggadata.

But let's pass the stories for a moment and focus on the extraordinary fact that, according to the gemarra or its medieval commentators, the prohibition of cooking, eating, and getting benefit from the admixture of meat and milk is quite unique. And what is unique about it is that eating and cooking meat of an appropriate type is permissible, and drinking and cooking with milk (of an appropriate type) is also permissible, but putting them together is not. The commentators identify only one other Torah *chidush* (or a truly novel insight) like that, and that is mixing permissible linen and permissible wool to form prohibited *shatnez*. But even there linen and wool don't grow together, whereas cows *are* meat and *produce* milk, and in the udder, for example, you have both together.

By prohibiting milk and meat, what is being taught here? It's got to be important, since the Torah states the prohibition three times. I can't begin to give the question justice. But it does seem to me that it is sometimes just as important to see how adding even good or righteous acts together may turn sour, may be too much, may lead to a counterproductive result never initially intended since, hey, each of my actions or reactions was justified. Yeah yeah!

Shearith Israel Book Club: *Between the Wars: Jewish Characters in 1920s and 1930s American Literature*. Madelene Towne (madelene.towne@gmail.com) and others have come up with an excellent list of 22 books. Madelene explains that the books were published during the 1920s and 1930s and "contain a Jewish character of some note. The Jewish character may play a more or less prominent role in each work but is nonetheless considered significant by literary critics."

Here is the list of the books and an initial list of which book-club member has agreed to read and report on it. Ideally, first assignments will be completed before we get together at the end of October (Shabbat lunch on Oct. 31 is the initial thinking). We are just starting this second book project; look how many more of these great books there are for you to volunteer for (and you can have mine if you want, too):

- *Hungry Hearts*, by Anzia Yezierska
- *The Professor's House*, by Willa Cather (Stan Towne)
- *Manhattan Transfer*, by John Dos Passos (Lou Solomon)
- *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- *Mendel Marantz*, by David Freedman
- *Arrowsmith*, by Sinclair Lewis (Francine Alfandary)
- *Bread Givers*, by Anzia Yezierska (Lou Solomon)

- *The Sun Also Rises*, by Ernest Hemingway
- *Fifty Grand*, by Ernest Hemingway (short story in the collection *Men Without Women*)
- *Dodsworth*, by Sinclair Lewis (Faith Fogelman)
- *Cimarron*, by Edna Ferber (Diane Sandoval)
- *Jews Without Money*, by Michael Gold
- *Old Mrs. Harris*, by Willa Cather (short story, published in *Obscure Destinies*):
- *A Cool Million*, by Nathanael West
- *Call it Sleep*, by Henry Roth (Roger Mesznik)
- *Absalom, Absalom*, by William Faulkner
- *The Education of Hyman Kaplan*, by Leo Rosten
- *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, by Delmore Schwartz (short story in a book by the same title)
- *The Web and the Rock*, by Thomas Wolfe
- *A Peculiar Treasure*, by Edna Ferber
- *The Day of the Locust*, by Nathanael West
- *You Can't Go Home Again*, by Thomas Wolfe

Condolences. We note with sadness the passing of Ambassador John L. Loeb, who among other things was a generous philanthropist to many causes including Jewish ones. We would see the Ambassador at our annual Chatham Square Cemetery observances on Memorial Day. He was also a generous benefactor to a visitor's center near Touro Synagogue. He will be missed, and we wish his family B'Sorot Tovot.

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