

September 17, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Welcome to Our Year of Community. There can be no better way of celebrating our new new year than by thanking Miriam Alvarez, emailing from Asturias, Spain, for wishing our entire Congregation a *Buena anyada ke tengáis!!!*, Ladino for a Happy New Year. Miriam even sent in this beautiful e-card:



Miriam, thank you, and shana tova to you and to all our other friends in that northwest part of Spain.

Rosh Hashana Without Shofar. Both this year and next, we observe Rosh Hashana Day 1 on Shabbat, when we do not blow Shofar. I'm sure all of us wrote sermons in our heads. Mine was about observing the new year having faced loss this past year, with someone or something meaningful now missing. Both of our outgoing Hatanim, one of our youth directors, and several other congregants lost parents and other dear ones this past year. Even indirectly, our Congregation was diminished by these losses. Other setbacks and losses were surely painful to others of us. Rosh Hashana without shofar happens.

But in every year it does happen, it happens on the first day only. And that day is always followed by a day *with* Shofar, with all its promise.

This year, Rosh Hashana Shearith Israel was stirring, meaningful in its own right and ushering in the week of reflection, return, and repentance in which we now find ourselves. Rosh Hashana and these Days of Awe frighten me when I don't anticipate Kippur that soon follows; the Day of Judgment is too harsh, too scary without an impending Day of Forgiveness.

With the Fast of Gedalia behind us (we had close to 30 praying in our Small Synagogue for mincha (with tefillin) on Monday's fast day), two of our year's most beautiful services are nearly upon us: Selichot, which we will recite Sunday morning before services, and then Kippur itself. One lasts just under an hour; one just over a full day. Our community, in both narrow and broad senses, is never stronger than on Kippur. Please be a part of that strength, both for yourself and for others, by attending services.

Our Four Writes. We are delighted to announce this year's winners of our Four Writes:

Naming our Year. Our winner:

- *Year of Community*, first suggested by Faith Fogelman and a clear favorite among a terrific list of other strong suggestions

Word of the Year. Our winner:

- *Together*, first suggested by Dr. Jonah Schein

Phrase of the Year. Our winner:

- *Anenu b'yom korenu, עָנֵנוּ בְיוֹם קִרְאָנוּ, or Answer us on the day we call*, first suggested by Dr. Michael Gelman

For Phrase of the Year, the Judges are asking Faith Fogelman to resubmit *Bravery in a New World* for next year, since it was my favorite and is so timely as to be timeless.

Our Next Song Series. Our winner:

- *Biblical Characters with Less-Starring Roles*, first (most recently) suggested by Beverly Druck, with a helpful assist from Hayyim Obadyah

Let me explain this one. As the year progresses, I think we will be doing what Faith Fogelman suggested (focusing on upcoming holidays) and what WIHOR SM Rosenberg suggested (our typical one-off challenges). But with a little preparation, I think Beverly Druck's idea will permit us to remind ourselves of the parasha and stretch our creative imaginations. If we fail, I'm confident you will let me know, and we can change things before we get to Shemot.

We have a few weeks before we begin Parashat Bereshit. So for next week or the week after, please send in proposed names of "less-starring" characters in **Parshiot Bereshit, Noah, Lech Lecha, Vayera, and Chayei Sarah**. We can publish those names in advance and then collectively find suitable songs for them. This can work, team, especially in a **Year of Community** where our Word of the Year is **together**.

Stray Songs. Claude Nadaf wasn't about to let me get away with Bobby Sherman's [Easy Come, Easy Go](#), as songifying the grand and cosmic do-over that is Rosh Hashana. Claude instead suggests [the Byrds version](#) of the [Pete Seeger version](#) of the King Solomon version (sorry, no YouTube link for this one) of Chapter 3 of Kohelet:

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. — Ecclesiastes 3:1

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted. — Ecclesiastes 3:2

A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. — Ecclesiastes 3:4

Claude says that the song has the “unique distinction of being a thousands-of-years-old biblical text that topped the modern pop charts.” Unique? Boy is that a challenge for this group. Is Claude right? For two points, are there other biblical texts topping the pop charts? Oh I think so.

Name that Haftarah Tune. We are now collecting song suggestions for the remaining haftaroth of this year: Shabbat **Teshuba** (this week, Parashat Haazinu), **Succot**, **Shemini Hag Atzeret**, and **V'zot Habracha** (read on Simchat Torah).

As noted, this week's haftarah is the special one for Shabbat Teshuba, taken from Hosea 14:2-10 and Micah 7:18-20. Consistent with the theme of the Ten Days of Repentance between Rosh Hashana and Kippur, the haftara begins with verses from Hosea:

שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי כָשַׁלְתָּ בְּעוֹגְךָ

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled in your iniquity

And ends with verses from Micah (v.18):

מִי־אֵל כְּמוֹךָ נָשָׂא עוֹן וְעִבֵּר עַל־פְּשָׁע לְשֹׂאֲרֵית גִּחְלָתוֹ לֹא־הִחְזִיק לְעַד אַפּוֹ כִּי־חַפֵּץ חַסֵּד הוּא

Who is a God like You, Who forgives iniquity and passes over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not maintain His anger forever, for He desires loving-kindness.

Song suggestions for these grandiloquent words are inevitably going to pale in comparison to the majesty of the Prophets' own words. That won't stop MSS Andrew Druck from coming up with some great suggestions (Andrew has invoked the once-a-year exception to the no-Leonard-Cohen songs rule):

- [Homeward Bound](#), as sung by Simon and Garfunkel
- [Back in Your Arms](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [Who by Fire](#), as sung by Leonard Cohen

- [*If it be Your Will*](#), as sung by Leonard Cohen
- [*You Want it Darker*](#), as sung by Leonard Cohen

My suggestion is:

- [*Take Me Home, Country Roads*](#), by John Denver

Grace, Mercy, Forgiveness, Renewal: Kippur and Finishing Tractate Chulin. In an excellent recent lecture, Rabbi Shaul Robinson, marvelous leader of nearby Lincoln Square Synagogue, mentioned that there are words that we use all the time in Hebrew but are reluctant to use in English. The first two words of the title here might be candidates. We at Shearith Israel are slightly more comfortable using them, and not just because we have a long tradition of English usage. Our comfort also stems from non-Jewish visitors we have hosted over the past year+, who are members of the Grace & Mercy Foundation. We all have a warm place in our hearts and synagogue seats for these consistent, polite, respectful, and supportive visitors, who come to follow and quietly rejoice in our public reading of the Torah on Shabbat mornings.

Grace, mercy, forgiveness, and renewal characterize our upcoming Shabbat Teshuva and our happiest holiday of the year, Kippur, which we will observe this coming Sunday night and Monday. It also characterizes the last pages of Tractate Chulin, which the global Daf Yomi learning cycle is studying this week (pages 136-142).

In the span of just 13 double-sided pages, Tractate Chulin covers the final three Chapters in the Tractate: Chapter 10 relates to gifts to the Priests, which we discussed last week; Chapter 11 relates to gifts of the first shearings' of wool, which bespeaks analogous principles of mercy and charity; and Chapter 12 relates to the Biblical injunction of shooing away the parent bird before taking its eggs – again teaching grace and mercy as a means of achieving forgiveness and renewal. There are other parts of the Talmudic corpus that pack in so many chapters in so few pages, but there aren't many. And I don't think any are as suitable for teaching the message of Kippur as these Chapters are.

There is another way to see this same thing. The Judges promised two points to the person(s) correctly noting which three capital punishments *may*, according to the Talmud Tractate Sanhedrin (71a), never in fact have been meted out (Larry Kobrin is right, of course; I typoed mete into meet last week). Lester Gottesman (#1) and Claude Nadaf (who is not usually # 2) both got it right: The three instances are the stubborn and rebellious son (*ben sorer u'moreh*) (Devarim 21:18–21); the condemned/idolatrous city (*Ir Hanniddahat*) (Devarim 13:13 et seq.); and the afflicted leprous house (*Beit Hammenogaa*): (Vayikrah 14:33 et seq.). The Torah has detailed rules and punishments for each, yet in never administering these punishments we witness more grace, more mercy shown by the Almighty as a way to teach human beings, made in the Image of the Almighty, how to act.

Our High Holiday liturgy does not include the Ashkenaz *Unetana Tokef*, with its final phrase that *repentance, prayer, and charity alter any ill-fated decree*. We don't need to sing it to experience it.

Come pray with us. As a community, let us renew ourselves. And let us with G-dly charity act as the final pages of Tractate Chulin teach.

Shearith Israel Book Club II: *Between the Wars: Jewish Characters in 1920s and 1930s American Literature*.

I finished my first book, ***Bread Givers***, by Anzia Yezierska. Michael Schulder finished ***The Great Gatsby***, by F. Scott Fitzgerald. We are ready to report on them and hope others are finding time to read and briefly summarize their assigned books, focusing in part on the role of the Jewish character. Book summaries will start here next week.

Shabbat Lunch (Oct. 31) With Professor Shaina Trapedo. In the meantime, for Book Club II members and others who are interested, Professor Trapedo, of Yeshiva University's Stern College, will be joining us for lunch on Shabbat, October 31. Sign up will begin soon, but please save the date.

In this, our ***Year of Community***, we ***together*** pray that the Almighty

עֲנֵנוּ בְּיוֹם קְרֵאֵנוּ, or ***Answer us on the day we call.***

Well over the [Kippur] fast.

Louis Solomon, Parnas