

September 3, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. It is a pleasure to announce the Hatanim 5787:

- Hatan Torah – Matthew Kaplan
- Hatan Bereshit – Dr. Andrew Arking
- Honorary Hatan Torah – Ernest Grunebaum

We will have much to say about these fine people and the fine families they represent by accepting the Constitutional position of Hatan for the coming year. For now let me note that this is Ernest's *third* time serving as Hatan, meaning that he has fulfilled the role every 25 years since first being selected, and therefore has been helpfully associated with our great Congregation for over 50 years.

On the four open Naming Writes (btw, exactly no one thought Naming Writes, as opposed to Naming Rights, was funny – it was), we have lots to consider and decide upon:

Naming our Year. After ***Year of Hope***, ***Year of Renewal***, and ***Year of Allegiance***, as of last week we had for the coming year:

- *Year of Progress*
- *Year of Advancing*
- *Year of Advancement*
- *Year of Community*
- *Year of Moving Forward*
- *Year of Continuity*
- *Year of Friendship*
- *Year of Reflection*
- *Year of Elevation*

Additions this week include:

- *Year of Intense Therapy*, a funny double entendre by ad maven Alan Zwiebel
- *Year of Purpose*, suggested by Jonah Schein
- *Year of Perseverance*, suggested by Aura Bijou
- *Year of Light Moments*, a different sort of suggestion from Barbara Shahmoon
- *Year of Cohesion*, suggested by Esther Ingber
- *Year of Commitment*, also suggested by Esther Ingber
- *Year of Standing Proud*, suggested by Bonnie Barest as our response to combatting rising hate and antisemitism

Word of the Year. After *Here! B'yachad (or united together)*, *Gratitude*, and *Commitment*, as of last week we had for the coming year:

- *Stalwart*
- *Uplift*
- *Reflection*
- *Movement*
- *Inspiration*
- *Enhancement*

Additions this week include:

- *Together*, suggested by Jonah Schein
- *Believability* or *Chutzpah*, each suggested by Esther Ingber

Phrase of the Year. After *Kaminado kon buenos, or let's walk with good; Yihiyeh tov, or things will be good; Hoshi'ana, or save us now; and Hatzlich'ana, or sustain us now*, we had for the coming year:

- *Anenu b'yom korenu, אָנֵנוּ בְּיוֹם קֹרְעָנוּ, or "Answer us on the day we call.*
- *Accentuate the Positive*
- *Bravery in a New World*

Additions this week include:

- *It could be worse*, brought to you by Alan Zwiebel
- *Luz min ala tancen, or Let us all dance*, a phrase (with approximate translation) suggested by Esther Ingber
- *Elevating Jewish Life since 1654*, a phrase coined by our Executive Director team who intend it in both the literal and spiritual sense.

Song Suggestions. As of last week, for the coming year or as our next song challenge we had

- *Current Events*
- *Positive Personal Stories*
- *Related to an upcoming Jewish or national holiday*

Additions this week include:

Personally, I'm of two minds on songs. We did really well for many years with mostly spontaneous challenges. But there was something about "parasha tunes" that was also great, with continuity

assured, and in which more of us participated than in nearly any other challenge. WIHOR SM Rosenberg thinks we should go back to shorter challenges that change more frequently. In SMR's words, it "might be better to plan in advance to have, for instance, 6 themes that run for 2 months each. That way, if one theme is a flop [hey!] or doesn't make people feel like they have something to contribute, another one will be along soon to give more people a chance to get involved."

SMR's points are valid and may even be solid. But so too is Faith Fogelman's effort to have continuity across the year, as in trying to do monthly "what's the holiday or event this month." Is there nothing else but parshiot that could do that?

Andrew Druck thinks there is. He thinks that if we took a chapter of the Prophets each week, many of us would read it, be song-inspired by it, and join in with great song suggestions. I love the idea. Anyone else?

We are about a week away from deciding. Voting is going on now. And we do accept early mail-in ballots. Indeed, not to put a thumb on the scale, *Community* is in the lead for Word of the Year (Honorary Trustee Oliver Stanton's favorite, too), but people haven't been able to vote on the new suggestions of this week.

So think, ponder, turn it over in your mind and mouth, and cast your vote now!

Name that Haftarah Tune. We are now collecting song suggestions for the haftarah of the final six parshiot of Sefer Devarim: **Ki Tetzei, Ki Tavo, Nitzavim- Vayelech** (this week's double parasha), a break for Rosh Hashana, **Ha'azinu**, and **V'Zot Ha'Bracha**. Remember that there will also be Shabbatot with other special haftarahs (**Succot, Shemini Atzeret**) before we finish this year's cycle.

Before we get to this week's haftarah, Steve Beispel sends in [a hoot of an article](#) by JTS Emeritus Professor Burton L. Visotzky, titled *G-d's Love Is Here to Stay*. Professor Visotzky quotes the same verse I did in the ***Haftarah for Parashat Ki Tetzei*** and cites the same Gershwin tune that I did. He published his piece after I published mine, by the way, but I'm sure our respective thoughts were derived independently. His piece is also funnier; he says he thinks the younger Gershwin must have been Bar Mitzvahed on this parasha, and the elder Gershwin brother heard the haftarah to create [Our Love is Here to Stay](#), here again by the incomparable Ella.

This week's Haftarah is from Isaiah 61:10–63:9 and is the last of the seven haftarahs of consolation, since next Shabbat is Rosh Hashana! It is the haftarah usually said on Parashat Nitzavim.

Andrew Druck, MSS, aptly suggests:

- [Holly Holy](#), as sung by Neil Diamond
- [I Will Always Love You](#), as sung by the just recently departed Dolly Parton
- [Higher and Higher](#), as sung by Jackie Wilson
- [Nightwatchman](#), as sung by Tom Petty

- [*All Along the Watchtower*](#), as sung by Bob Dylan

I got stuck (yes, in a good way) on the very first part of the very first verse – “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, My soul shall be joyful in my G-d” – our thoughts naturally gravitate to:

- [*Joy to the World*](#), here by Three Dog Night

Parthenogenesis in the Talmud. The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying Tractate Chulin, pages 122-128. We are in Chapter 9, will finish it before we meet again next week, and hopefully will finish the Tractate on Shabbat Shuba.

The Mishna at the bottom of page 126b is our jumping off point for today – jumping off into the weird and arguably fanciful.

מִתְנִי' ב... עֵכָבֶר שְׁחָצִיו בָּשָׂר וְחָצִיו אֲדָמָה – הַנוֹגֵעַ בַּבָּשָׂר טָמֵא, בְּאֲדָמָה טָהוֹר. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: אִף הַנוֹגֵעַ בְּאֲדָמָה שְׁכָנֶגֶד הַבָּשָׂר טָמֵא

MISHNA: ...*In the case of a mouse that grows from the ground and is half-flesh half-earth, one who touches the half that is flesh is impure; one who touches the half that is earth is pure. Rabbi Yehuda says: Even one who touches the half that is earth where it is adjacent to the flesh is ritually impure.*

Now what have we here? Is there really such a being as a *mouse that grows from the ground and is half-flesh half-earth*? The brilliant Rabbi Shalom Rosner describes this part of this Mishna as well known; he cites an array of subsequent commentators trying to make then-modern sense of it. But before we go off ranting about how our Sages didn't know modern science, I would like to offer an alternative explanation that comes from the text of the Talmud itself.

To begin, the Talmud does not have to defend itself, certainly not to the likes of me. One can easily see that the Sages might have been addressing matters that might not even exist and that they didn't care if they existed, since the legal principles are what they were after. Indeed, as we've discussed, the Torah itself provides laws for at least three situations that the Talmud says likely never in fact happened. We've discussed these; does anyone remember the three examples? Any of them? Do you remember where the Talmud discusses it? Two points for each right answer.

But even were there a notion that such a being existed, what is the Talmud describing? To me, the Sages seem to be discussing life forms that do not reproduce through “typical” mating. That explains the very discussion in the gemarra after the Mishna quoted above. For nearly a page that ends at the next Mishna on page 127a, the Talmud addresses life forms that arise from the fire of volcanoes and those that can exist solely in the depths of the sea. The term used on this very page is *שְׂאִין פְּרָה וְרָבָה*, or *that does not reproduce or bear fruit*. That could certainly have included asexual reproduction, or, as it is fancily known, parthenogenetic reproduction.

In the context of the Talmudic discussion, is it really so strange that our Sages might have been considering life forms that reproduce through only one parent, that is, parthenogenetically? The life form is half-animal and half-something-else, and for convenience the phrase “half-earth” is used. Could it be that, in that context, our Sages would see or simply use a phraseology of an animal that is partly “animal” and partly “mineral”?

Parthenogenesis is a real scientific thing. Far from being scientifically inapt, perhaps our Sages knew this and wanted to explore the laws of ritual purity in the face of such beings. **The Things that Matter.**

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

Louis Solomon, Parnas