

October 15, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Community, Together. Hatanim Luncheon was marvelous. The weather cooperated, the honorees and their spouses shared touching stories, and conviviality filled our Paved Paradise. For those who couldn't make it, I wanted to mention that, as many of you might have seen, the Mayor's office announced a program and published an on-line pamphlet concerning antisemitism in New York City. Without commenting on the program, I did want to thank Rabbi Soloveichik and Barbara Reiss for expeditiously and effectively getting the Mayor's office to remove a full-screen photograph of Shearith Israel as the front cover of the brochure.

This coming Shabbat, Parashat Noah, a/k/a our Shabbat of Hope, we will be having engaging programs both at Shearith Israel and at Touro Synagogue. At Shearith Israel, we will be hosting scholars in residence Erica Frankel and Rabbi Dmitry Eskhtut, who will speak after Friday Evening and Saturday Morning services and will give the Shabbat afternoon class. At Touro Synagogue, Rabbi Soloveichik and others of us will be enjoying Shabbat with our friends at Congregation Ahavath Israel, and Rabbi Soloveichik will be kicking off this season of Friday Night Lights, which will return to Shearith Israel next Shabbat for the NY season premiere. Please attend one of these special events.

Parasha Songs for the Unsung. Last week's list of great song suggestions for relatively less-well-known characters in **Parashat Bereshit** begat more suggestions for this week's **Parashat Noah**.

Ritual Director Jay Harwitt likes the spiritual

- [*Climbin' up the Mountain*](#), since Ham is a character in the parasha, and one of his sons (also in the parasha) is Mitzrayim – as in going down to Egypt:

*Moses went down into Egypt land
And he told ol' Pharaoh
That the good L-d sittin' on His heavenly throne
Said, "Let My people go!"*

Faith Fogelman has a bunch of great suggestions. She starts with the folks who built the Tower of Babel:

- [*Stairway to Heaven*](#), here as sung by Neil Sedaka (1960)
- The other [*Stairway to Heaven*](#), here by Led Zeppelin (1971) [really Faith is unique in having both Neil Sedaka and Led Zeppelin at her fingertips]
- [*\(I'll Build\) a Stairway to Paradise*](#), by the Gershwin Brothers, 1922, for the Broadway show *George White's Scandals*

Faith then moves to the animals on the Ark and even the Ark itself (ok, maybe it is obvious, as Faith says – but if it's so obvious why didn't anyone else suggest it, certainly not with this great mix of songs!):

- [*Just the Two of Us*](#), here by Grover Washington Jr. (1980)
- [*\(Don't\) Rock the Boat*](#), Hues Corporation, 1974
- [*Fly Like an Eagle*](#), Steve Miller Band, 1976
- [*Accentuate the Positive*](#), here by Bing Crosby and the Andrew Sisters, with the unforgettable lyrics:

*To illustrate my last remark, Jonah in the whale, **Noah in the ark.**
What did they do, just when everything looked so dark?
Man, they said, we better accentuate the positive*

My own suggestion relates to the dove that Noah sent out after the flood:

- [*1,000 Doves*](#), here by Lady Gaga [this is a really good song – lyrics and music]
- [*Wings of a Dove*](#), here by the recently passed Dolly Parton

Judging and Experts in Tractate Bechorot. The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying pages 23-29 of Tractate Bechorot. On page 26b we begin Chapter 4, which, unlike the prior three chapters, does *not* begin with the word *halokeach* (no one was able to advise of any other three-consecutive-chapter occurrences in the Talmud each starting with the same word). Titled *ad kama*, Chapter 4 is short, ending on page 31a. The Chapter discusses [for] *how long* does an Israelite have to raise a *bechor* or firstborn before it can be given to the Priesthood as well as related and increasingly complex temporal issues.

The several Mishnaot beginning on page 28b and running through the end of the Chapter are worth a detour. They involve rules applicable to those who are going to inspect animals for blemishes, to determine if they are disqualified. Summarizing several parts of the several Mishnaot, there are clever and insightful rules that elegantly show the development of law in this context. To take some examples:

- Normally, if a nonexpert examines the animal and makes a misjudgment, that person will need to pay for the monetary loss caused to the injured party for the misjudgment.
- That rule, inevitably, led to experts doing the examining. Being appointed by the court, these experts are not held liable for an error in judgment.
- That rule, in turn, leads to the question, well, can experts charge for their examination? The Mishnaot and gemarra here don't love the idea of charging, but clearly there will be fewer experts to do the work if they are not paid. So the Talmud creates some rules:
 - The examiner can't charge more for a thumbs up than a thumbs down. The examiner must charge the same amount for both.
 - The examiner may charge for the opportunity cost that acting as an examiner entails – that is, by doing this, the examiner is not doing something else that might be remunerative, so the examiner can be paid for foregoing earning amounts doing something else. (כְּפוּעֵל בְּטִיל שָׁל אוֹתָהּ מִלְאכָה).
- These rules, in turn, lead to several more rules concerning what happens when you suspect a judge or examiner of being wrong or crooked. How far away from any such conduct does

one have to stay; for example, if someone erred in one area of law is he disqualified from being believed or relied on in every other area?

These rules are interesting and not arbitrary. They flow in a logical sequence.

Shearith Israel Book Club II: *Between the Wars: Jewish Characters in 1920s and 1930s American Literature*. Last week, I asked if anyone had a positive reaction to *Bread Givers*, by Anzia Yezierska. No one raised their hand. On the other hand, I got a bit of validation from SM Rosenberg, WIHOR, who says of *Bread Givers* (having read it in college):

While overall I found it more readable than many books from that era, I also found the sexism and religious hypocrisy of the father to be so excessive that it felt cartoonish. Which isn't to say that people like that don't exist; they certainly do. But the absence of any complexity and any decent religious representation to provide a richer picture than just the cartoonishly horrible father - we are aligned on disliking that.

And, by the way, if you are looking for another book to skip, add *Returning*, by Nicholas Lemann to the list. The book was recommended independently by two smart congregants with good judgment. Let's see if either of them, now having finished the book, comes clean or disagrees with me.

For this week, Book Club II reader **Diane Sandoval**, integral to our Book Club I readers of Twain, read and here expertly reviews ***Cimarron*** by Edna Ferber (published 1930) (#11 on our book list):

Cimarron is part of the literature of the Great Westward Expansion, when European Americans moved westward until reaching the Pacific Ocean and achieved dominance over the lands now part of the United States. Edna Ferber places this story in Oklahoma, starting with the Oklahoma Land Rush of 1889 and going through the years shortly after statehood in 1907. It is a saga of one family and their neighbors, who all are typical of those who settled the land and of those Native Americans who were there after the Federal government removed them from their homelands in the East. The story also is of the growth of a village of rude wooden houses and shacks into the small city of Osage, which is a fictional composite of several cities in Oklahoma.

There are three main characters: Yancey Cravat, a charismatic lawyer and newspaperman with an excellent education, a restless personality, and undetermined origins, who always is yearning to explore and conquer a new place. He leaves his wife and family for long periods of time and is said to have a true Pioneer spirit.

Sabra Venable Cravat, his wife, daughter of a Southern family that settled in Wichita, Kansas, and was raised according to Southern social and rules in an established town. She married Yancey at age sixteen and personally grows up in Osage, becoming a businesswoman and leader of the community. She builds the newspaper Yancey started and abandoned when his restless personality sent him wandering. However, she never shakes off some of the social and racial attitudes of the Southern culture in which she was raised. She also has a level of naiveté about other cultures leading to disastrous results on some occasions.

The Osage Nation is the third main character: As the book opens, they live on the Osage reservation according to tribal customs and are wary of their contacts with the European town people. The Nation and its members also will change as wealth comes with the discovery of oil on the reservation and with their increasing contact with the world beyond the reservation.

A fourth character of importance to us and to the narrative is Sol Levy, an Alsatian Jewish immigrant who entered the area as a peddler, with a pack on his back. He settled in Osage and built a successful department store serving everyone in town and from the reservation. He was the town Jew and never married. “He was a person apart.” (p 109 – page numbers are to the e-book version on Amazon). He was respected by the other businessmen and remained an occasional advisor to the Cravat family for the rest of the story.

The rest of the characters, both within the extended Cravat family and the community, represent the diversity of people who were part of the culture of Osage. They are fictional representatives of Oklahoma as it grew. Many of the events are based on actual ones, and as Ferber describes in her Foreword, the more incredible, the more likely to be true.

Near the end of the book, Sol Levy says to Sabra: “Some day, Mrs. Cravat, you and I will look back on this and we will laugh--. ‘I will be very rich, and you will be very famous. And Yancey--.

“They will tell stories about Yancey until he will grow into a legend. He will be part of the history of the Southwest. They will remember him and write about him when all those mealy-faced governors are dead and gone and forgotten. They will tell the little children about him, and they will dispute about him—he did this, he did that; he was like this, he was like that. You will see.” (p 139)

As the story progresses, great changes occur in Osage, along with the rest of the West, but the most notable changes are those in the lives of the characters in the story and their descendants. If you read this book, which I recommend, keep Sol Levy’s prescient comment in mind.

I hope to see many of you—Book Club and non-Book Club members alike—at our luncheon on October 31. For details, including the list of recommended books, and to sign up, [click here](#).

In this, our **Year of Community**, we **together** pray that the Almighty **עֲנֵנוּ בְיוֹם קְרָאֵנוּ**, or **Answers us on the day we call**.

Louis Solomon, Parnas