

October 8, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Community, Together. We observed October 7 in sadness. And the packed schedule of holidays during the Jewish month of Tishrei is over for this year. Our clergy – Rabbi Soloveichik, Rabbi Rohde, Reverend Edinger, with invaluable assists from Avery Neumark and Rafe Sasson – made sometimes long hours in Synagogue both meaningful and enjoyable. And there are many others to thank, including Barbara Reiss, Bonnie Barest, Sarah Gross, Sarah Meira Rosenberg (aka SM), Ruth Yasky, John Quinones, Olivo Lopez, Miguel Santiago, and Isaid Rodriquez. We owe these overworked colleagues our deepest gratitude.

Here is a gorgeous photo, compliments of Reverend Edinger, of our Ark on Hoshana Rabba. The center three Torah scrolls don our three sets of Myer Myers *rimonim*. Our Congregation's 14-year effort to secure these priceless manifestations of our patrimony is hopefully complete.



Our Congregation's After-Party. The Biblical and Rabbinic observances may be over, but our community isn't done showing its collective gratitude, celebrating that we are indeed ***Here for Anyone.*** This coming Shabbat we will continue to fête our Hatanim and their families at our Hatanim Luncheon: Matthew Kaplan, Hatan Torah; Dr. Andrew Arking, Hatan Bereshit; and Ernest Grunebaum, our Honorary Hatan Torah. Our Hatanim Luncheon is without doubt one of our most convivial congregational moments of the year.

But *next* Shabbat we will be celebrating, too. We have for some years now been observing Parashat Noah as our **Shabbat of Hope**. This year, Rabbi Soloveichik and several others of us will be at Touro Synagogue for the occasion. At Shearith Israel, we will be hosting scholars in residence Erica Frankel and Rabbi Dimitry Eskhtut. They are our neighbors and partners, currently living in the parsonage and

running Base Manhattan, a gathering place for Jewish young adults from across NYC. These will both be special events. I hope you will attend one of them.

Parashat Songs for the Unsung. We already have frankly unbelievably good suggestions for noncentral characters in our parshiot. As Faith Fogelman observes, defining noncentral could be a challenge. It won't be much of one, so don't worry; we aren't going to exclude clever suggestions no matter what the object or genesis.

Let's start with **Parashat Bereshit** – [a very good place to start](#). Faith leads the hit parade with:

- [I'm Glad I'm Not Young Anymore](#), from *Gigi* (the Lerner & Loewe classic), with the lyrics:

*The fountain of youth is dull as paint
Methuselah is my patron saint
I've never been so comfortable before
Oh, I'm so glad that I'm not young anymore*

- [The Begat](#), from *Finian's Rainbow*. Faith knows that Adam and Eve might not be seen as *noncentral* characters in the Bereshit story, yet the Judges love the suggestion with the fun lyrics:

The Lord made Adam, the Lord made Eve, He made them both a little bit naïve.

- [He Ain't Heavy, He's my Brother](#), sung by *The Hollies* (Faith cleverly puts these words in Seth's mouth – the third brother of the Cain-Abel-Seth trio)

Hayyim Obadyah, also for **Parashat Bereshit**, sends in the great

- [Crawling King Snake](#), by The Doors

Ritual Director Jay Harwitt too is already in the swing of it. For **Parashat Bereshit**, Jay likes a different Methusaleh song:

- [It Ain't Necessarily So](#), from *Porgy and Bess*:

*Methusaleh lived 900 years [sic]
Methusaleh lived 900 years
But who'd call that livin'
When no gal would give in
To no man who's 900 years.*

And now comes Andrew Druck, Master Song Suggester, pressing his haftarah talents into service here. For the first parasha, Andrew's on fire:

- **Lemech:** [*Psycho Killer*](#), as sung by the Talking Heads
- **Methuselah:** [*Old Man*](#), as sung by Neil Young; and
- [*It Was a Very Good Year*](#), as sung by Frank Sinatra; and
- [*September of My Years*](#), as sung by Frank Sinatra; and
- [*How Old Am I*](#), also by Velvet Voice
- **Hanoch:** [*Fade Away*](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen

These are *great* suggestions! Faith, Hayyim, Jay, Andrew get the fun in creatively thinking about less-central personages (and animals). They have set the bar high, but the rest of us can meet it (I was going to suggest the [*William Tell Overture*](#) – the apple, get it? Never mind).

Let's have some fun with the parshiot!

Time in Tractate Bechorot. The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying pages 16-22 of Tractate Bechorot. Those pages include Chapter 2 and the beginning of Chapter 3, which starts on page 19b. Like the prior two chapters, Chapter 3 begins with the word "Halokei'ach" (say, does anyone know where else in the Talmudic corpus we have three consecutive chapters each starting with the same word?).

Both Chapters 2 and 3 involve detailed discussions of the laws of firstborns and the circumstances under which they need to be redeemed, or given to the Priesthood, or kept separate and treated with dignity (sometimes giving the Priesthood not the entire animal or its value but the value of the "gifts" or *matanot* that we learned about in Tractate Chulin). Each Chapter also contains discussions of temporal issues, which is of interest here.

We have seen before that our religion adopts an extraordinarily sophisticated view of time. Indeed, holidays begin not when the Torah says they do but when the Torah says they do WITH a large dollop of discretion by human beings (for example, to determine when the new month begins). Just this past weekend we welcomed the Closing Festival of Shmini Chag Haatzeret, a distinct holiday from Succot, but we did so by eating in the Succah both dinner and lunch. How could we be eating in the Succah if it was Shmini Chag? How could both be right? In our religion they are. In this instance, the time meld arises from Rabbinic insistence of observing multiple days of a holiday.

Space, it turns out, is not the final frontier. For space is so vast that, without mastering time, human beings would never be able to experience anything but the tiniest tiniest corpuscle of space no matter how long they lived and indeed no matter how many successive generations were involved. Let's take an example: Let's say you could travel at more than twice the speed of the fastest spaceship humans ever created, the Parker Solar Probe, which travels at 430,000 miles an hour – so let's just say you could travel 1 million miles an hour. Even then it would take you 17.4 *million* years just to get to the edge of

our galaxy -- just to the edge of our tiny, nondescript galaxy, one of about two *trillion* galaxies in the observable universe!

So the last frontier isn't really space but time. That explains the brilliance of sci-fi writers like Adrian Tchaikovsky, who in *Children of Time* tries to explore how time travel might be made to exceed the speed of light and that only then could space be a frontier available for exploring. You can't get there from here otherwise.

The Talmud takes a different approach to time, since it is concerned with **The Things that Matter** to human beings on this earth. Coincidentally (there are no coincidences), two of our Talmud's significant approaches to time occur in this week's pages of learning.

First, on page 17a of the Tractate, in Chapter 2, we learn about whether two things can actually ever happen with total and complete simultaneity. R' Yosei HaGalili says yes, but the Sages say no, it is impossible for things to happen with exact simultaneity:

אִי אֶפְשָׁר לְצִמְצָם

The discussion of the gemarra reveals that what is really being debated is not whether exact simultaneity exists in nature but whether human beings can ever perceive it – or rather whether Jewish law will assume perfect simultaneity. If you don't, there are very practical ramifications – in the discussion here, to the extent our Sages did not recognize perfect simultaneity, there will never be a case where two different firstborns from the same mother will both have to be given to the Priesthood.

There is a *second* time convention that is even more prevalent in the Talmud, and its discussion occurs on 20b, in Chapter 3. Here the Talmud discusses the principle of

מִקְצַת הַיּוֹם כְּכוֹלּוֹ

Or whether something that occurs for part of day should be deemed to have occurred for the whole day. Again the practical ramifications are legion and apply to much of what we do today: we get up from shiva in the morning of the seventh day, for example; we consider that observing a part of the day is tantamount to observing the whole day. (Interestingly, we do not say that observing a few hours of Shabbat is all you need – got an explanation of the difference? The judges will give two points for a cogent explanation of the distinction.)

The Talmud treats time as something people have, if not dominion over, at least a modicum of influence over. It's a remarkable approach to the ordering of human affairs.

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

Bread Givers, by Anzia Yezierska, is no. 7 on the Book Club II's list of 22. I'm only reasonably read in American Twentieth Century literature. I volunteered to read this book because, though I had read or heard of nearly all the rest of the 22 volumes Book Club II is reading, I had neither read nor heard of Anzia Yezierska. Naturally that is my shortcoming, among so many others.

*I finished **Bread Givers**. I respectfully believe that, for anyone who is looking for books among the 22 to skip, this is a good candidate. I say that given that some of the other books in our list are among the greatest novels in Twentieth Century American Literature.*

***Bread Givers** "explores the life of a Jewish-American immigrant girl, Sara Smolinsky, struggling to live from day to day while searching to find her place in mainstream society." That's how Wiki describes it, which also says it's Yezierska's best known work.*

The summary is accurate so far as it goes. What the summary doesn't capture is that to me even more central to the book is Sara's father. He immigrated to New York from Poland. The book caricatures him mercilessly as ultra-religious yet ultra-selfish, ultra-pious yet ultra-sexist. The portrayal is unfair even assuming it is an accurate portrayal of a particular person – unfair because the father's conduct is neither religious nor pious in terms of normative Orthodox Judaism. Additionally, the language attempts the vernacular and thus is both hard to read and unsuccessful in making me believe that that's how people talked. The story-line is stilted and jagged. The character development lacks credibility, and the descriptions and word and phrase choice are flat and just not inspired.

I suppose there was a real purpose to the work when it was written and some arguable purpose in still reading it today: to give a sense of Hester Street circa 1900 and of perhaps the first-generation of women in America who pursued career over family (though even there the plot is schizophrenic by the end). Compared to the great works of fiction on our Book II list, however, it is, imho, not in the same league. It has not withstood the test of even a century of time.

I would be delighted to be disagreed with. In fact I'm pleading with anyone who has read the book and liked it to weigh in.

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

Louis Solomon, Parnas