



Shir Notes

The Official Newsletter of Congregation Shir Ami Volume 22, Number 1,
January 2024. Affiliated with United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Jenn Dollins is our Office Manager. Her email is shirami6353@gmail.com.
Phone: (818) 818-6094.

Events of the Month

Shabbat services at de Toledo High School & on Zoom and Livestream

Saturday, January 6 10:30 am
Birthday Shabbat
Consecration of Officers
Saturday, January 20 10:30 am
Anniversary Shabbat
Linen Shabbat
See article on page 4 and flyer.

Around the Rabbi's Tisch Thursdays January 4 and 18. 7:30 pm via Zoom See flyer for more information

Torah and Shabbat Study Saturday, Jan. 27, 10:30 am at the Schroeders'

Stan Schroeder leads our monthly study and discussion session. See flyer for more information.



Martin Luther King Day
Monday, January 15
(see page 9)

Visit our website:
www.shirami.com

Rabbi's Column



We've begun a new year—2024! But does it feel like the beginning of a year? It is, after all, the middle of winter!

Well, let's compare the Jewish calendar with the Gregorian calendar. Does the Jewish year begin at what feels like the beginning of a year?

The first month of the Jewish Calendar is Nisan—the month of Passover. The middle of spring!

But doesn't the new year begin in September? Yes, but it's actually the seventh month, because we should be asking a different question: when do we feel like a new year has begun? For most, it isn't in the middle of springtime. It's when the summer has come to a close, vacations have concluded and work resumes, fall has begun, leaves have turned, school restarts. This is the emotional beginning of a year. Which is why, while the first calendar month is Nisan—in the springtime, our tradition is that the counting of years won't begin until the 7th month—Tishrei.

Which brings us back to the problem with January 1st. It doesn't make sense that it begins a New Year! Emotionally, there is no significance—it's the dead of winter, the rhythm of the year is interrupted, it feels like an arbitrary date.

But we make do. So we find highlights to help us feel like a year has truly come to a close. Time magazine makes end-of-year pronouncements of significant people. Newspapers summarize the year's accomplishments. New laws take place.

And Congregation Shir Ami consecrates its new officers!

And so we turn our attention, not only to commending and thanking the Board and Executive Board on completing another wonderful calendar year in our congregation's life (half-way through our 26th year!), but on consecrating those who have committed themselves to fulfilling their leadership positions for the year to come.

These are incoming officers with many years of experience. Most have served in various positions over many years. Others are serving well beyond the length of time they originally anticipated serving.

And our opportunity to publicly express our deepest gratitude will be just a few days after we've ushered in the New Year 2024.

Let our congregational family join together on Shabbat morning, January 6, for the official Consecration Ceremony. The month of January may emotionally be the middle of a year, but for our synagogue, it is just the beginning!

Rabbi David Vorspan

President's Report



Happy New Year!

The first order of business is to thank those of you who attended our annual members meeting either in person or via Zoom. For those who were there in person, I want to specially thank you for bringing your reflections in the mirror so we could make a quorum. As is our tradition, please join us for our first Shabbat Service of the year as we consecrate our new Board of Directors and Officers and introduce/re-introduce them to you.

We only have twelve more services before our Summer Sabbatical, so don't miss an opportunity to attend, either in person or via livestreaming or Zoom.

This year, we will be coming up with programming events to bring us all closer together and to give everyone a reason to get out of the house. If you have an idea for a program we can do, don't keep it a secret. Let us know and we'll see about making your idea a reality. There are two theories as to how our Board operates. The first theory is that we don't know everything. The second theory is that we don't know anything. Either way, your suggestions are welcome.

January is another one of the months where our Social Action Committee comes to the front as we have our annual Linen Shabbat to provide for those in the shelters. Blankets, pillows, towels and sheets are always needed so bring them to our second Shabbat service this month and we can begin to put them to good use.

Our Ritual Vice-President will continue to hold the Shabbat/Torah Study Sessions which you can attend in person. Plus, you never know when Stan is going to spring on us a special program on Zoom, so be prepared.

The Rabbi's *Tisch* is still virtual but think of the gas you are saving even if you have to provide your own *nosherei*.

Let's face it, 2023 presented us with a lot challenges and lot of losses. People welcome new beginnings and being Jewish, we get two beginnings. One was last September and the second is now. Let's make the most of it.

As always, if you have any questions or want to provide your input, please feel free to email me at JDPistol@aol.com.

Jordan Pistol, President

Tu Bishvat - New Year for Trees - January 25

from MyJewishLearning.com



The name of this festival is actually its date: "Tu" is a pronunciation of the Hebrew letters for the number 15, and it falls in the Hebrew month of Shevat.

Traditionally, Tu Bishvat was not a Jewish festival. Rather, it marked an important date for Jewish farmers in ancient times. The Torah states, "When you enter the land [of Israel] and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten" (Leviticus 19:23). The fruit of the fourth year was to be offered to the priests in the Temple as a gift of gratitude for the bounty of the land, and the fifth-year fruit—and all subsequent fruit—was finally for the farmer. This law, however, raised the question of how farmers were to mark the "birthday" of a tree. The Rabbis therefore established the 15th of the month of Shevat as a general "birthday" for all trees, regardless of when they were actually planted.

Fruit trees were awarded special status in the Torah because of their importance in sustaining life and as a symbol of God's divine favor. Even during times of war, God warns the Israelites, "When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees... Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city? Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed" (Deuteronomy 20:19-20).

At a later time, the Rabbis of the Talmud established four "new years" throughout the Jewish calendar—Rosh Hashanah, or the Jewish new year for the calendar date; a new year for establishing the reign of kings; a new year for tithing animals of Jewish farmers to be given to the Temple; and finally, Tu Bishvat, the new year for the trees (Mishnah, Rosh Hashanah 1:1). The Rabbis discussed why this date was chosen; saying that Tu Bishvat falls after mid-winter (usually in February), they concluded that the majority of the annual rainfall has usually already fallen by this time in the land of Israel, thus yielding a healthy, water-logged soil in which to plant new trees (Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 14a). (continued on page 4)





DONATIONS

Congregation Shir Ami wishes to
acknowledge the following donations:

Other

Claire and Lew Silverman in memory of Harvey Cohen
Phyllis and Stan Schroeder in memory of Harvey Cohen

Prayer for State of Israel and Hostages

Shomer Yisrael, Guardian of Israel,

We call out to You with fervent plea and prayer to
bless and protect the civilian men, women, and
children brutally kidnapped by Hamas and held
captive in Gaza, along with the members of Israel's
Defense Forces missing in action or held captive.

May it be Your will, speedily and soon, to bring them
out from darkness and the shadow of death. May the
Holy One of Blessing break their bonds, deliver them
from their distress, and release them swiftly back to
the loving embrace of their dear ones.

Do all that must be done so that relief, rescue, and
long life may be the lot of every one of the soldiers
and the civilians who have been taken hostage.

Act on their behalf, Lord. Take up their cause without
delay, so that You fulfill through them Your verse from
Isaiah: "Those redeemed by the Lord will return; they
will enter Zion with singing, and everlasting joy will
crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake
them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away." So may
it be Your will, and let us say: Amen.

Birthdays & Anniversaries

Birthdays

Jacquie Gordon.....	1/1
Jerry Gort.....	1/2
Leon Nachenberg.....	1/2
Neal Tober.....	1/4
Owen Delman.....	1/7
Claire Silverman.....	1/20
Fiona Taylor.....	1/21

Anniversaries

Gale and Jay Cohen.....	1/15	18h
Debra and Wayne Geffen.....	1/23	41st

Martin Luther King Day Monday, January 15

I have a dream that one day even the
state of Mississippi, a state sweltering
with the heat of injustice, sweltering with
the heat of oppression, will be trans-
formed into an oasis of freedom and
justice.



I have a dream that my four little children will one
day live in a nation where they will not be judged
by the color of their skin but by the content of their
character.

I have a *dream* today! MLK (August 28, 1963)

Congregational News

Get well wishes **rafuah schleimah** to:



Jerry Gort Sheilah Hart Phyllis Schroeder

May they be blessed with a complete recovery in
body and spirit.

Congregation Shir Ami Tribute Cards

Our **Tribute Card Coordinator** will send your
cards celebrating *simchas* and conveying your
get-well and condolence messages.

Call **Helga Unkeless** at (818) 340-5751 or
(preferably). email **Helgaunkeless@yahoo.com**

Minimum donation of \$5 per card is appreciated.

2024 Shir Ami Officers and Board

President: Jordan Pistol
Acting Executive Vice President: Alan Burman
Treasurer: Mike Easley
Secretary: Becky Finlay
Program VP: (open)
Ways and Means VP: Sheilah Hart
Membership VP: Jenn Dollins
Ritual VP: Stan Schroeder
Social Action VP: Becky Finlay



Board of Directors: Owen Delman, Fran Feinman,
Lonny Scharf, and Nancy Scharf

Other Board Members (former Presidents)

Helga Unkeless and Jerry Zatz

Social Action Committee

Our Committee met December 16. We encourage any member of our congregation to attend our meetings. Your ideas and opinions are greatly valued and appreciated. The next Social Action meeting will be Friday, February 9 at 11:00 am at Weiler's Deli, 21161 Victory Blvd. in Canoga Park.

It is my honor to formally be the new Social Action Vice President. I can only hope to do **Fran Kobulnick's** memory justice. She thought of others above herself and I was proud to call her a friend.

We will be having our annual **Linen Shabbat** January 20, 2023 10:30 am at our Shabbat service at de Toledo High School, on Zoom, and Livestream. The linens are given to **Jewish Family Service (JFS) domestic violence shelters**. Please bring your twin and full-size linens to the Linen Shabbat service. You may also bring or send your purchases to the JFS Hope Domestic Violence Main Office 12817 Victory Blvd., North Hollywood, CA, 91606. See the flyer with this *Shir Notes* for more information. We are currently working on getting a speaker.



Please save all the greeting cards you do not need and bring them to services. **Claire Silverman** will accept them. I hope everyone has a Happy New Year and it is better than the last one.

We decided the charity we will sponsor for the **Walk Around Lake Balboa** in June will be the **Valley Food Bank**. The Walk will be on held June 2. More information will follow.

We thank everyone who donated **Target gift cards** to the families in the **domestic violence shelters** during our Hannukah season drive.



Once again, we are thanking everyone in advance for their continued support with our mitzvah projects.

Becky Finlay

Social Action Committee Vice President

Tu Bishvat - New Year for Trees - January 25

from MYJewishLearning.com (continued)

In medieval times, kabbalists (Jewish mystics) gave Tu Bishvat greater spiritual significance. Seeing in Tu Bishvat a vehicle for mystical ideas, the kabbalists imbued Tu Bishvat with new religious significance as well as created elaborate new symbolic rituals. According to Luranc Kabbalah (which is a form of mysticism studied by the students of Isaac Luria), all physical forms—including human beings—hide within them a spark of the Divine Presence. This is similar to some kinds of fruits or nuts, which hide within them seeds of new life and potential growth. In Jewish mysticism, human actions can release these sparks and help increase God's presence in the world. On Tu Bishvat, the kabbalists would eat certain fruits associated with the land of Israel as a symbolic way of releasing these divine sparks.

In modern times, Tu Bishvat has become a symbol of both Zionist attachment to the land of Israel and an example of Jewish sensitivity to the environment. Early Zionist settlers to Israel began planting new trees not only to restore the ecology of ancient Israel, but as a symbol of renewed growth of the Jewish people returning to their ancestral homeland. While relatively few Jews continue to observe the kabbalistic **Tu Bishvat seder**, many American and European Jews observe Tu Bishvat by contributing money to the Jewish National Fund, an organization devoted to reforesting Israel.

For environmentalists, Tu Bishvat is an ancient and authentic Jewish "Earth Day" that educates Jews about the Jewish tradition's advocacy of responsible stewardship of God's creation as manifested in ecological activism. Among them, contemporary versions of the Tu Bishvat seder, emphasizing environmentalist concerns, are gaining popularity.



The Fear That Grips us and our Friends

by Lou Loomis



I was born in the post World War II era, the Baby Boom, and as a boomer, until recently never experienced any real antisemitism. I heard about it of course, from my European relatives, and my Russian-born father told me stories only rivaled by my Polish-born grandmother. But I was confident that the pogroms and hatred-fueled violence would never come to the United States. Americans were too stubbornly freedom loving and wouldn't tolerate Jew-hatred. America was the "Shining Light on the Hill." We were safe.

October 7 has changed all that. By October 8, anti-semitism had reared its ugly head on our soil, here in America. It sprung up in full force at our American colleges, and in our American neighborhoods. Our cities suddenly gave birth to an intolerance never before experienced. Not just a few but many of our Jewish institutions had been threatened. Here in our America people became afraid to wear "Jewish clothing or Jewish jewelry." Stars of David, proudly worn outside our clothing, was being tucked in to avoid confrontation with antisemites on the street. It was announced by college campus rabbis that this year the Hannukias would not be publicly lit. America was experiencing something never before seen in its 250+ years as a nation.

It has begun to spread to our media, as celebrities and newspapers began to denounce, subtly at first, but increasingly, Israel and its need for self defense. TV news also is running more stories critical of Jews who defend Israel's right to survive the fascist terror of Hamas and Iran. This isn't just some dystopian science fiction take on current events, but it is real. It's not just Israelis who are being targeted but American, Canadian, and European Jews and Jewish communities.

Last month in my Shir Notes column I mentioned how large civil rights organizations have backed away from denouncing fascist terrorism, either by openly siding with Hamas, or with silence, perhaps out of fear of reprisals. It's more obvious now than ever. We may criticize Jewish or Christian organizations or values without fear of physical blow-back, but not Islamic terror groups or their allies. Black Lives Matter and Antifa, despite their hate and threats, are seen as dangerous, so we don't publicly object. In short, without our voices protesting the hate and violence, we have become terror-enablers. And by "we" I mean us Americans, both politically left, right, or moderate. We have joined with the antisemitic/fascist/Nazis in their quest to destroy Israel and Jews worldwide.

Where once we (me included) declared that "it can't happen here," now we see it happening here. In early December President Biden kicked off his presidential bid with his allies in the Movie and TV industry, and was met with hundreds of pro-Hamas demonstrators in West LA calling for Israel to stop fighting back against Hamas. Residents in nearby neighborhoods, most notably the predominantly Iranian Jewish neighborhood (lovingly dubbed Terangeles) were reminded of the pogroms they experienced in Iran that drove them to flee Iran for their lives. And yes, here in LA, homes were damaged and the nearby Sinai Temple received some vandalism before being stopped by LAPD.

Security at deToledo High School has been increased. For now, the West Valley is still safe, but there has been violence in Ventura County, statistically the safest county in California.

So its no surprise that women's rights organizations, including NOW, Me Too, and the various UN Women's organizations, have been mostly silent over Hamas' use of rape and other atrocities against women, in their war against Israel. They are frightened. And who could blame them? Their traditional (non-Jewish) allies have likewise been frightened into silence. They don't fear criticizing Jewish and Christian organizations, since Jews and Christians are generally peaceful and used to criticism, but Islamic terror? That, unfortunately is a different matter. Black Lives Matter and Antifa are likewise violent, support Hamas, and are dangerous when called out.

If you are reading this and are sufficiently frightened, know this: Hamas and its allies are bullies. They don't allow criticism because, as bullies, they have no rational defense. We actually do have the power to stop them and just by coming together and showing our worldwide support for Israel and the Jewish people all over the world we can (and will) overcome this hate. Where Jews are doing this, coming together and raising up their voices, they are making the terrorists back down. Terror groups fear Jewish unity. Their weapons are useless against unity. It may be that Islamists have many more divisions in their ranks than we know about, and that weakens their resolve. The best example of this is when the Hamas leaders brag before the cameras about the joy in their vicious killing of Jews. They ridicule Israel's military, but when the Israeli military approaches them, they withdraw into their hidden tunnels or hide behind innocent children or women. (continued on page 9)

Biography of the Month: Irving Berlin

by Stan Schroeder

*Editor's Note: I have been Editor and Publisher of the Shir Notes since November 2008. For several years before that I contributed biographies of Jews as a writer. In recent years I have republished earlier bios for various reasons. I am including one my earliest, **Irving Berlin**, because I am writing this on Christmas day and at our Shabbat Torah study last Saturday we discusses Jews who had composed Christmas songs and he wrote *White Christmas* in 1942.*

Irving Berlin was born **Israel Baline** May 11, 1888 in eastern Russia. He was one of eight children born to **Leah** and **Moses Baline**. Moses was a *shochet* and the cantor at his synagogue. His family immigrated to New York in 1893 to escape the pogroms in Russia. His father died when he was 13 and he took to the streets of the Lower East Side to help support his family. He worked various jobs as a busker (street musician) singing for pennies, and then as a singing waiter in a Chinatown cafe. He was a singing waiter in many restaurants and starting writing songs. His first published hit was *Marie from Sunny Italy* in 1907. By 1911 he had his first international hit, *Alexander's Ragtime Band*. Irving married for the first time in 1913 to **Dorothy Goetz**, who died a year later from typhoid contracted on their honeymoon in Cuba.



The U.S. entered World War I in April 1917. By then Irving was the hottest young songwriter in the country. Not an American citizen at the time, he completed the process in February 1918. As an unexpected byproduct Irving was drafted into the army and assigned to Camp Upton in Yaphank, Long Island. He was not used to the life of a private, getting up early, physical drills, etc. His hatred of reveille led to his writing the now famous ***Oh! How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning***.

He persuaded the commanding general of the camp that he should authorize Irving to write a lavish musical revue to run at a Broadway theater. The result was *Yip Yip Yaphank* that previewed at Camp Upton's little Liberty Theater in July 1918. A private train brought 70 celebrities including **Will Rogers** and **Fanny Brice** from New York City to the show. On August 19th a company of 300 soldier performers and stagehands opened the show at the huge Century Theater on Central Park West. The show was such a success that the original eight-day run was extended to a month and then moved to the

Lexington Theater when a previously booked show moved to the Century. The show raised more than \$150,000 to build a community house at Upton that was never built because the war ended. Berlin, himself, reaped vast goodwill and tremendous personal publicity.

In 1926 Berlin married **Ellin McKay**, a journalist and daughter of the president of Postal Telegraph Co. and a leading Catholic layman. They had three daughters and the marriage lasted until her death in 1988.

Berlin was a prolific songwriter with more than 900 songs, 19 musicals, and the scores of 18 movies to his credit. He had no musical education and could not read or write music. He composed using a piano with a lever to transpose to different musical keys. He had an assistant transcribe the music to paper. Among his songs that have become classics are ***There's No Business Like Show Business***, ***White Christmas***, ***Easter Parade***, ***Always***, ***Cheek to Cheek***, ***Blue Skies***, and ***Anything You Can Do I Can Do Better***. He wrote ***God Bless America***, introduced by **Kate Smith** on Armistice Day 1939. The song was originally written for *Yip Yip Yaphank*, but Irving felt it didn't fit the show's upbeat mood. His biggest hit show was ***Annie Get Your Gun*** that opened on Broadway in May 1946.

Irving Berlin was 53 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entered World War II. He wanted to create an all-soldier show like his World War I hit, only bigger and better. He called General George Marshall in Washington who supported the idea of a morale-boosting revue on Broadway and ***This is the Army*** production began. Besides being a huge artistic and financial success, the show was noteworthy because Berlin insisted on black performers in the show and the unit integrated. In those days the U.S. armed services were segregated. Rehearsals started in the spring of 1942 at Camp Upton, the home of *Yip Yip Yaphank*.



Opening night on Broadway at the Broadway Theater July 4 brought together a combination of Broadway excitement and war fever. Berlin managed to inject human touches that brought military life home to civilian audiences. His title song, *This is the Army*, Mr. Jones became an immediate hit and the show was a great success. The one-month engagement was extended to the end of the summer and a national tour followed. A special performance was scheduled October 18th in Washington, D.C. so the president could attend. (continued on page 7)

Biography of the Month: Irving Berlin (continued)

The movie rights were sold to Warner Brothers and the whole company went to Hollywood to make the movie version starring Lieutenant **Ronald Reagan**. The movie made almost \$10 million for Army Emergency Relief.

The musical review was performed throughout England, and eventually for troops in Europe and Asia until the end of the war, finally closing October 22, 1945 on Maui.

At the final performance Berlin, himself, sang *Oh! How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning*. He stated after the show he hoped he would never have to write another war song. And he never did.

In 1924 fellow songwriter **Jerome Kern** said "Irving Berlin has no **place** in American music. He **is** American music." His observation remained true throughout most of the century.

Following a gala 100th birthday celebration concert at Carnegie Hall in 1988, the great American composer **Morton Gould** said "Irving Berlin's music will last **not for just an hour, not for just a day, not for just a year, but always!**"

Following the announcement of his death at the age of 101, the marquee lights of Broadway playhouses were dimmed before curtain time in his memory.

Mel Torme - A Reminder of Jewish Impact

Editor's Note: We discussed several other Jewish songwriters who wrote Christmas songs at the Shabbat Torah study I mentioned in the introduction. Another was Mel Torme who wrote the iconic Christmas Song in 1945. Following his death in Los Angeles in 1999,

A James Rubin wrote this article in the Tampa BayTimes. Stan Schroeder

Mel Torme's recent death is more than the passing of a magnificent singer and composer. His passing at age 73 is another reminder of the extraordinary musical symbiosis of Jews - mostly first-generation Americans - with Broadway and Hollywood, which has so decisively shaped our culture.



Ironically, Torme, born in Chicago and a child of Jewish immigrants from Russia, composed the quintessential Yuletide melody, *The Christmas Song*, with its "Chestnuts roasting on an open fire" beginning.

Another Jew, **Irving Berlin**, who was born in Eastern Europe in the late 19th century, came to the United States as a young man. He wrote the holiday classics *White Christmas* and *Easter Parade*, and his *God Bless America* has been called the country's second national anthem.

Even a partial listing of Jewish composers and their works reveals an incredible outpouring of talent: **George Gershwin** (*Porgy & Bess*), **Jerome Kern** (*Show Boat*), **Oscar Hammerstein** (*Oklahoma*), **Stephen Sondheim** (*Sunday in the Park with George*), **Richard Rodgers** (*South Pacific*), **Frank Loesser** (*Guys and Dolls*), **Jule Styne** (*Gypsy*), **Max Steiner** (*Gone With the Wind*), **John Kander** (*Cabaret*), **Yip Harburg** (*Brigadoon*), **Charles Strouse** (*Annie*), **Leonard Bernstein** (*West Side Story*) and Berlin himself (*Annie Get Your Gun*).

One reason for this explosion of genius was that during the 20th century, American musical theater moved away from the traditional Viennese operetta style with its frothy waltzes, merry widows and student princes.

Instead, Broadway musicals developed into something authentically American. In such a dynamic period of transition there were few artistic bastions that excluded Jews — unlike the top echelons of business and university faculties, which were closed to them. Happily, the movie studios and the musical stage were different.

In those places talent, not religion, mattered, and audiences, many of whom were themselves newcomers to America, cared little whether a composer's family came over on the Mayflower or was a recent arrival. In such an open environment, Jewish composers were free to use their talents to shape new musical forms as they embraced a 20th century America of many different ethnic, religious and racial communities.

Michael Shapiro, a musicologist and historian, has suggested some reasons for the enduring success of so many Jewish composers. He notes that several composers, including Gershwin, employed the traditional cantorial music of the synagogue in their songs, while one of the dominant sounds they integrated into their work was the jazz originating with American blacks.

Like Jews, blacks were a minority group that found most doors of opportunity closed. But musical talent was always noticed, and the jazz sound that began in the American South, especially New Orleans, came north and west to places like Memphis, Kansas City and Chicago. (continued on page 8)

Mel Torme - A Reminder of Jewish Impact (continued)

Benny Goodman, another Chicago-born child of Jewish immigrants, was 16 years older than Torme, and in the 1930s Goodman broke new ground, both musically and racially, by including many great black musicians and arrangers in his jazz band. Their names are now legend: **Teddy Wilson**, **Lionel Hampton**, **Benny Carter** and **Fletcher Henderson**.

Young Torme encountered jazz as a boy growing up in Chicago, and it influenced his personal and professional life. Torme called jazz "our native folk art," and because of his background and commitment, it is no surprise he and Duke Ellington wrote music together.

Because the bridge of musical interplay between Jews and blacks was two-way, it is not surprising that **Ella Fitzgerald's** renditions of songs by **Gershwin**, **Rodgers** and other Jewish composers have been hailed as definitive. While there are more than a thousand recorded versions of *The Christmas Song*, Torme always maintained **Nat (King) Cole's** 1946 version was not only the first but the best reading of the piece.

But Torme's life and career illustrate something beyond the major impact Jews have had on American popular music. When his kind of singing fell out of favor in the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of rock, Torme was forced to perform the new music, which he called "some of the worst *dreck* (Yiddish for "garbage") you can imagine." And it did nothing to resuscitate his career.

In the last two decades of his life, Torme's career revived when he returned to the music that was always his. Coveted awards and large audiences came to him, and a new generation of young people discovered what the rest of us always knew: **Mel Torme**, a superb singer since he was 4 years old, was quite simply the very best.

_ **Rabbi Rudin** was the national interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee.

Benny Goodman: It takes the black keys and the white keys both, to make perfect harmony.

Sometimes when you start losing detail, whether it's in music or in life, something as small as failing to be polite, you start to lose substance.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks:

"Judaism is a religion of words, and yet whenever the language of Judaism aspires to the spiritual, it modulates into song, as if the words themselves seek escape from the gravitational pull of finite meanings. Music speaks to something deeper than the mind. If we are to make Torah new in every generation, we have to find ways of singing its song a new way. The words never change, but the music does."

Asked of **David Lehman**, American poet and critic: **Apart from the fact that so many songwriters were Jewish, what is it that you consider Jewish about the American songbook?**

To me there's something explicitly or implicitly Judaic about many of the songs. Musically there seems to be a lot of writing in the minor key, for one thing. And then there are instances in which lines of songs closely resemble musical phrases in the liturgy. For example, the opening verse of **Gershwin's** "*Swanee*" seems to come out of the Sabbath prayers. "*It Ain't Necessarily So*" echoes the *haftorah* blessing. It's no coincidence that some of the top songwriters, including **Harold Arlen** and **Irving Berlin**, were the sons of cantors.

There are also other particularities about the music, bent notes and altered chords, that link this music to the Judaic tradition on the one hand, and to African-American forms of musical expression on the other. At the same time, the lyric writers set store by their wit and ingenuity, and one could argue that a particular kind of cleverness and humor is part of the Jewish cultural inheritance. It may well be that people will argue this point, and there are people who know a great deal more than I do about music. You have to trust your instincts and your judgment.

Songs like Irving Berlin's "God Bless America" and Harold Arlen and Yip Harburg's "Over the Rainbow" virtually defined a national ethos. Do you feel the Jewish songwriters created a kind of religion of American-ness?

In a way they did. Many were the children or grandchildren of people who escaped from the pogroms of Europe and other depredations, and reinvented themselves as Americans. In the process they kind of reinvented America itself as a projection of their ideals of what America could be. We have a secular religion in the United States that transcends all individual religions. This is not entirely an unmixed blessing, but I think that's exactly what the songwriters were doing.

The Fear That Grips us and our Friends (continued)

Brave and proud? No. They do what bullies do, cower in fear when confronted.

It's the same thing with antisemites. They have disguised their Jew-hatred in normal times but when Israel is attacked they "crawl out of their holes" and loudly berate Israel for the crime of self-defense. You'll see these same so-called Freedom Fighters (terror supporters) disappear once the tide is turned and Israel has defeated Hamas. And may it be soon.



Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Reverend Martin Luther King

Excerpted from an article by **Susannah Heschel**, daughter of Rabbi Heschel

"RACISM IS SATANISM." It was this conviction that launched **Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel**, a religious Jew from a Hasidic family in Poland, into the American civil rights movement. He appears beside **Martin Luther King Jr.** in several of the most iconic photographs of that time: crossing Edmund Pettus Bridge arm in arm in March 1965; standing together outside Arlington Cemetery in silent protest of the Vietnam War in 1968.

We've become so used to these images that it's easy to forget how unusual the friendship between Heschel and King was in its day. The two came from very different backgrounds – King had grown up in Atlanta, Georgia, while Heschel arrived in the United States as a refugee from Hitler's Europe in March of 1940 – "a brand plucked from the fire," as he wrote. Yet the two found an intimacy that transcended the growing public rift between their two communities. Heschel brought King and his message to a wide Jewish audience, and King made Heschel a central figure in the struggle for civil rights. Often lecturing together, they both spoke about racism as the root

of poverty and its role in the war in Vietnam; both also spoke about Zionism and about the struggles of Jews in the Soviet Union. The concern that they shared was "saving the soul of America."



Prophetic rhetoric has a long public history in the United States, yet it was not only the prophets' words that stood out. For King and Heschel, the prophets were extraordinary human beings with passionate emotional lives, people who knew how to pray and created powerful symbolic moments.

Both believed too that the passions of the prophets reflect the passion of God. As Heschel saw it, we learn from the prophets that the God of the Hebrew Bible is a God of pathos who responds with passion to human actions: "With Israel's distress came the affliction of God." Divine pathos is matched by prophetic sympathy, the prophet's ability to resonate to God's inner life.

Shop at Ralphs - Earn Money for Shir Ami

by Maralyn Soifer

Here is an easy way to earn money for our Temple. We

are now officially a **Ralphs' community agency**. All you have to do is follow these simple instructions to help earn money for Congregation Shir Ami.



1. If you don't have a Ralphs' rewards card already, go to the store or go to website **www.ralphs.com** and select **Order a Ralphs reward card**.
2. Once you have your card, go to the website: **www.ralphs.com** and select **Create an account**
3. If you have an account, your email address is your account ID. If you forgot your password, select **Forgot your password?** and you will receive an email with instructions to reset it. Follow the instructions to enter your email address and create a new password.
4. If you already have a Ralphs' reward card and an account, you will see Account Summary when you login. You can change to our Temple by clicking on **Edit** within **Community Rewards**.

You can do a search for Congregation Shir Ami by putting in the number **92785**. Our congregation will pop up and click on the button next to the name. Click on the button that saves the changes.

5. You should also check the bottom of your receipt when you shop. It should say "**At your request, Ralph's is donating to CONGREGATION SHIR AMI**".
6. If all else fails, call me in the evening at (818) 704-0306. I'll be happy to walk you through it.
7. Start Shopping!

Make sure that the clerk swipes your card each time you shop. Verify that your receipt shows a contribution to Congregation Shir Ami at the bottom.

Important Note: All participants must confirm their selection annually starting in September. On or after September 1, sign into your account and reconfirm Community Rewards selection.

Congregation Shir Ami
P.O. Box 6353
Woodland Hills, CA 91365

Thursdays, January 4 and 18 7:30 - 8:30 pm “Around the Rabbi’s Tisch” on Zoom

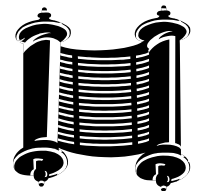


This popular Shir Ami educational series continues its 5784 season. Come join us for our weekly discussion of Rabbi Vorspan’s selected topics of Jewish interest. We discuss Jewish texts and current events as they relate to Jewish values and our lives as Jews. This is a unique opportunity to learn and share in an informal format.

This semester we will again hold our sessions on Zoom. The link is [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86440082040?pwd=bG4venRKTW9lVzhwVWVS
RGgraEFJdz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86440082040?pwd=bG4venRKTW9lVzhwVWVSRGgraEFJdz09)

Meeting ID: 864 4008 2040 Password: 677588

Saturday January 27, 10:30 am Torah/Shabbat Study at Schroeder home



Stan Schroeder continues his monthly Shabbat study sessions one Saturday morning a month at 10:30. We discuss the weekly Torah portion, the Shabbat prayers that are included in our Contemporary service, and various subjects relevant to Conservative Judaism.



Our next session will be January 27. The Torah portion is *Beshalach*, Exodus 13:17 - 17:16. We read of parting of the Sea of Reeds allowing the Israelites to pass through and the ensuing events at the start of their journey. We will also discuss the Tu Bishvat holiday that occurred that week.

This session will be held at the Schroeder home, 8450 Winnetka Ave. #14. Call Stan at (818) 718-7466 or email stanpacbell@gmail.com for more information.

**Congregation Shir Ami Schedule of Shabbat Services 2024
at de Toledo High School, Zoom, and Livestream www.shirami.com**

If you want to be added to our email list, please send an email to stanpacbell@gmail.com and you will receive ongoing information.

Saturday 10:30 am unless otherwise noted

January 2024

Saturday, January 6 - Birthday and Consecration of Officers
Saturday, January 20 - Anniversary and Linen Shabbat

February 2024

Saturday, February 3 - Birthday
Saturday, February 17 - Anniversary

March 2024

Saturday, March 2 - Birthday
Saturday, March 16 - Anniversary

April 2024

Saturday, April 6 - Birthday
Saturday, April 20 - Anniversary

May 2024

Saturday, May 25 - Birthday and Anniversary

June 2024

Saturday, June 8 - Birthday
Saturday, June 22 - Anniversary
Saturday, June 29



David Vorspan
Rabbi



Jordan Pistol
President

For Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86440082040?pwd=bG4venRKTW9lVzhwVWVSRGgraEFJdz09>

Meeting ID: 864 4008 2040 Password: 677588

If you would like more information about our congregation please visit our website at www.shirami.com

Please join Congregation Shir Ami
on Saturday, January 20 at 10:30 am



at de Toledo and via Zoom
for a special Linen Shabbat.



Please buy **NEW** twin, full, or queen size blankets or quilts, **NEW** full or twin size sheet sets, **NEW** full or twin size waterproof mattress pads, **NEW** pillow cases, and **NEW** bath towels and washcloths.

They will be given to moms and their children in domestic violence shelters. JFS Coordinator **Kitty Glass** prefers that you send the linens you order, or bring them, to **JFS Hope Domestic Violence Office** at

12817 Victory Blvd., North Hollywood, CA, 91606.
Call (818) 789-1293

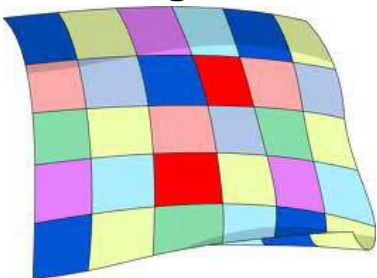
If you do bring linens to the service, our Committee will arrange for them to be delivered.

We look forward to seeing you at de Toledo or on Zoom at this special community *mitzvah* project Shabbat.

The link is

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86440082040?pwd=bG4venRKTW9IVzhwVWVS
RGgraEFJdz09](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86440082040?pwd=bG4venRKTW9IVzhwVWVSRGgraEFJdz09)

Meeting ID: 864 4008 2040 Password: 677588



For more information, please call
Becky Finlay at (747) 998-3804.

