



Shir Notes

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The Official Newsletter of Congregation Shir Ami Volume 19, Number 7,
July/August 2021. Affiliated with United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Events of the Month

Shabbat services via Zoom and Livestreaming

Saturday, July 31 - 10:30 am
Birthday /Anniversary Shabbat

BBQ and Barchu - Service Under the Stars Friday, August 20, 6:30 pm at home of Gladys Sturman

Our annual BBQ dinner will be
prepared by Ventura Kosher,
followed by White Shabbat
Service Under the Stars 7:30 pm

Shabbat Torah Study Saturday, July 17 10:30 am Saturday, August 14 10:30 am at home of Schroeders

See flyer for more information.



See poem
on page 9



Tisha B'Av Sunday, July 18

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Rabbi's Column



I write this on June 20, 2021. It's both **Father's Day**
and the **50th anniversary of my wedding to Bonnie**.

Family will be arriving soon to celebrate. It will be a
subdued affair. The original celebration was going to be
much more grand, but that will have to wait until next year. In the meantime,
Bonnie and I will continue our joy by going to Disneyland tomorrow, where
we honeymooned 50 years ago!

But this evening will still be a Golden Wedding Anniversary.

It will include a video I put together in an attempt to show my family what
happened a half century ago. We were married in my parents' back yard.
There was no video made of the wedding, and we were thankful that a
couple of friends kindly took pictures or there would have been nothing
much to prove we had a lovely event. We did have a tape recorder going
which provided us, 50 years later, with the only audio evidence of the
ceremony.

These I stitched together to form the movie we will show to our children and
grandchildren (and siblings who, residing in Oregon and New York, will
Zoom in).

My children never heard the original
wedding ceremony (something which
all future generations will be able to
watch of their family events as I can't
imagine any event occurring these
days which will not be recorded by
multiple cameras and phones!). My
kids did see some of the pictures over the years, but I'm really looking
forward to their hearing what my father, **Rabbi Max Vorspan z"l**, told
Bonnie and myself during the ceremony. We were married on Father's Day,
and it was also the anniversary of my parents wedding! My father wove the
events together into a wonderful service.



After watching the video, my son-in-law, **Rabbi Ahud Sela**, will officiate at
an informal ceremony in our living room, and we will stand under the original
huppa. It is the tallit which I purchased in Jerusalem a few years before our
wedding, and which I subsequently wore at my ordination.

I've officiated at many Golden Wedding Anniversaries over the years. I like
to think that those events were for old people, but here we are! But what
has kept me young (a youthfulness I feel until I look into a mirror, which I try
to do with less frequency) has been the world Bonnie has created for me: a
Gan Eden (Garden of Eden) within which I daily reside, embraced by her
love and the love of our children and grandchildren.

I will try to tell her this and how much she's meant to me during the renewal
of our vows this evening, but in the event I can't get through it without
choking up, these words, when she reads them, will have to do.

Rabbi David Vorspan

Events of the Month

Shabbat services

Friday, September 9, 7:30 pm
Birthday Shabbat
Service Under the Stars
at home of Gladys Sturman
See flyer for details

Saturday, September 17 10:30 am
Anniversary Shabbat
at de Toledo High School and Zoom

High Holy Day at de Toledo and Livestream

Sunday, September 25 - 7:30 pm
Erev Rosh Hashanah
Monday, September 26 - 9:30 am
1st Day Rosh Hashanah
Tuesday, September 27 - 10:00 am
2nd Day Rosh Hashanah
Wednesday, October 4 - 6:45 pm
Kol Nidre
Thursday, October 5
Yom Kippur morning - 10:00 am
Yizkor - approximately 12:00 pm
Blessing of Children - 7:15 pm

Shabbat Torah Study at the Schroeders'

Saturday September 24 - 10:30 am
Please see flyer for details

Jews and the Civil War via Zoom

Thursdays, Sept. 1, 8, 22, and 29

Stan Schroeder presents videos
from the Tikvah Fund series by
Rabbi Meir Soloveichik via Zoom.
See article on page 3. ""

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Rabbi's Column

At the risk of this coming off as a "What I Did on My Summer Vacation" essay, I did learn two important High Holy Day lessons from my summertime experience.

Bonnie and I celebrated our 50th Wedding Anniversary—given COVID restrictions last year. We brought out family to Cancun, Mexico for a week.

We arrived on a Sunday. By Wednesday afternoon I was feeling yucky and took a COVID home test. It came back positive. I alerted the good folks at Club Med who moved me into another room where I stayed, quarantined, until the following Sunday when we departed. I watched TV, read, paced the room, and ate decent food sent me by the chefs.

I also maintained contact with my family through Facetime on our computers and phones. I sat in on their meals, virtually. I went on their trips, virtually. And even celebrated Shabbat Dinner with them, also virtually. I felt a part of the group as they brought several tables together and symbolically lit candles, did the *kiddush* and *hamotzee*, and dug into their kosher dinner. They propped a phone at the end of the table where I was able to gaze out at them and watch the celebration. Even contributing a sentence of two when they could hear me.

And on Friday night, before they went for their Shabbat dinner, they all gathered on the lawn below my balcony and we sang Shabbat songs and did an abbreviated service (as you can see from the picture).

Here's the High Holy Day lesson: I had every right to be depressed by my circumstances. But I decided to make the best of it.

And I worked hard at being grateful for the partial.

I was able to pack a great deal of activity in those first few days before I was diagnosed (another lesson—don't put off for tomorrow what you can do today, because you don't know if you will still be able to do it tomorrow!). And by Wednesday, I did almost everything I wanted to do. The rest of the week was only going to be doing some of the activities again.

But those solitary days of quarantine were less depressing because of technology and the inventiveness of my family, especially Bonnie!

Rabbi David Vorspan



Rosh Hashanah
Monday, September 26





Shir Notes

The Official Newsletter of Congregation Shir Ami Volume 17, Number 7,
July/August 2019. Affiliated with United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Events of the Month

Shabbat services at de Toledo High School

Saturday, August 3
Birthday & Anniversary Shabbat

Torah and Shabbat Study Saturday, July 20, 10:30 am Saturday, August 24, 10:30 am Northridge Mobile Home Park

Stan Schroeder leads our monthly study and discussion session. We are having these sessions for the second time during the summer as a way of continuing Torah and comraderie. See article on page 8 and flyer. Call Stan at (818) 718-7466.



Tisha B'Av Sunday, August 11
See article on page 9

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Rabbi's Column



I was sitting in the stands watching my grandsons playing baseball (they're on the same team in a Jewish league) when, suddenly, a hardball from a neighboring diamond went sailing into our seating area from behind.

About a dozen of us, mostly my family, who just missed being hit. The ball came in fast and my first thought, as it bounced harmlessly, was that someone could have been killed!

It wasn't like watching a ball head in our direction from the field we were watching. Watching my grandchildren play, I was comforted by the fact that there was a protective fencing that shielded us.

But this wasn't true of the ball that came from behind us. I looked over at the other diamond and realized that the odds of a ball being hit from home plate at that field entering our space were extreme. And yet, here was the ball, finding its way in between spectators, missing us all. A miracle.

I'm still a bit shaken. I'm convinced that the ball was flying so fast, it could have done serious damage if it hit anyone on the back of the head. Probably could have been painful even hitting someone's back.

And I got to thinking. How much of life's tragedies do we just miss? How many of us could end up in the right place at the wrong time? I read recently of a college student hit by a falling crane; of a woman at Dodger stadium killed by a foul ball; of a man on the freeway impaled by an object dropped indiscriminately from an overpass. What are the odds?

When we get home in the evening, are we thankful for the many times we escaped danger? Probably not because we never know of these moments. We don't appreciate what could have been. We don't realize that getting stuck behind that one red light could have spared us a tragedy as our timetable is adjusted just those few seconds; that leaving the house 5 minutes later because of a prolonged phone call prevented a disaster; that a terrible accident occurred a mile past where we just drove. We just miss these disasters. And don't know it.

Read any edition of a daily paper to find examples of how haphazard life can be: a man picked a couple at random to murder; a kid decided to impress his date by running red lights, and slamming into another's car, killing the driver; a piece of glass ends up in the salad of the unsuspecting customer.

Perhaps we need to be more grateful for getting through each day unscathed! We need to realize that near misses could happen of which we are totally oblivious.

A good prayer to offer, acknowledging the goodness that is part of our lives, is this from the *Amida* (a series of prayers in the service) "we thank You, morning, noon and night for Your miracles which daily attend us..."

Rabbi David Vorspan

Editor's Note: Sunday, June 23 (after Rabbi Vorspan wrote his article) a young woman was hit in the head by a foul ball at Dodger Stadium. She was taken to the hospital as a precaution, and is apparently OK.



Shir Notes

The Official Newsletter of Congregation Shir Ami Volume 16, Number 5,
May 2018. Affiliated with United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Events of the Month

Shabbat services at de Toledo High School

Saturday, May 12 - 10:30 am
Birthday Shabbat

Saturday, May 26 - 10:30 am
Anniversary Shabbat

JWW Walk to End Genocide Sunday, May 6, 11:30 am 1000 Oaks Civic Arts Plaza

Our Team is participating in this annual Canejo Valley event. See article on page 2 or call Rae Wazana at (818) 881-5549.

Around the Rabbi's Tisch Thursday, May 10 and 17 7:30 pm at the Vorspans'

Our 5778 season of Rabbi's weekly discussion concludes its second half. Call Rabbi at (818) 888-9817 or see flyer.

Mother's/Father's Day Social Action Committee Celebration Friday, May 18, 1:00 pm

Join the Committee at the West Valley Healthcare Center, 7057 Shoup Ave. in West Hills to celebrate Shabbat and Mother's/Father's Day with the residents. See article on page 4 or Call Claire Silverman at (747) 237-7130.

Torah and Shabbat Study
Saturday, May 19, 10:30 am
Northridge Mobile Home Park
Stan Schroeder leads our monthly study and discussion session. Call Stan at (818) 718-7466 or see flyer.

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Rabbi's Column



The month of May is when I think most about Mike.

Mike was my childhood best friend, and his birthday was the first week of May. We never forgot each other's birthdays, throughout the years, no matter where we were living.

When we did get together, we continued the activities we loved to do as teens—giggle, mess around, toss a ball.

I remember one day, when we were in our mid 30s, calling him up and asking if he would like to play catch. He sounded very hesitant, and ultimately politely declined. And this happened repeatedly over the next few weeks.

Pressed, he finally explained why he could no longer play catch. He had been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. His mobility was becoming seriously compromised.

As the years passed, I could see the decline. Mike began to limp noticeably. Then he had to use a cane. It was becoming difficult for him to swallow, limiting our luncheon dates. Eventually he ended up in a wheelchair, and his wife and hired attendants had to care for his every need.

He tried to continue his teaching, but it was becoming arduous to just get up in the morning and dress. He told me it sometimes took him 3 hours to get hoisted out of his bed and onto his wheelchair, and for him to bathe and dress.

And so, when I think of Mike, especially in the month of May, I think of how difficult it was for him to do the simplest of tasks. And how much I take for granted doing these same tasks.

When I dress each morning, I try to think of Mike, and be more appreciative of my ability to get prepared to go to work in minutes, where it took him hours.

Mike died a few years ago. I miss him, especially around his birthday. But the lessons I learned from his life, from the challenges he faced with courage and patience

Rabbi David Vorspan



Mother's Day
May 13



Yom Yerushalayim
May 13



Shavuot
May 20

Memorial Day
May 28





Shir Notes

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The Official Newsletter of Congregation Shir Ami Volume 22, Number 9,
October 2024. Affiliated with United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Events of the Month

Shabbat services at de Toledo High School, via Zoom and Livestream

Saturday, October 5 10:30 am
Birthday Shabbat
Saturday, October 26 10:30 am
Anniversary Shabbat

Sukkot Party at the Vorspans' Monday, October 21 at 3:00 pm 22320 Philiprimm Woodland Hills

Rabbi and Bonnie Vorspan issue
this annual invitation to all our
members to shake the lulav and
enjoy Bonnie's desserts and the
Vorspans' hospitality. See flyer.

Shabbat Torah Study Saturday, Oct. 19, 10:30 am at the Schroeders'

See flyer for details.

High Holy Day at de Toledo and Livestream

Wednesday, October 2 - 7:30 pm
Erev Rosh Hashanah
Thursday, October 3 - 9:30 am
1st Day Rosh Hashanah
Friday, October 4 - 10:00 am
2nd Day Rosh Hashanah
Friday, October 11 - 6:45 pm
Kol Nidre
Saturday, October 12
Yom Kippur morning - 10:00 am
Yizkor - approximately 12:00 pm
Contemporary Mincha/discussion
5:00 pm
Blessing of Children - approx. 7 pm



Columbus Day
Monday, October 14
See article on page 6



Rabbi's Column

October is bursting with Jewish Holidays: not only Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but Sukkot, Hoshana Rabba, Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah.

The following month, November, has none. Except, of course, for Shabbatot.

But one could wonder about who did the scheduling, here. Why overload one month and neglect the next? But was there a wisdom to how the Jewish calendar set up? (And I understand the blasphemous nature of the question.)

When we think of American holidays, I don't think there was a master plan by our founders as our holiday calendar was set. Most of our holidays relate to events that occurred that are subsequently memorialized or celebrated—4th of July, Memorial Day, Pearl Harbor Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, etc. They were incorporated into our calendar over many years.

But the Biblical holidays (Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Pesach and Shavuot) were all set in advance. So, it is fair to ask the question—is there a rhyme or reason for the location of the holidays?

As we formulate an answer, we first must realize that the holidays aren't really scattered so haphazardly. Three of the holidays are related to the cycles of nature and the harvest seasons.

And Rosh Hashanah (actually one of at least 4 New Years mentioned in the Talmud) itself begins the year for counting years (and not months—it is, in fact, the 7th month of the calendar) and occurs at the emotional beginning of the year (when summer ends and fall begins). And Yom Kippur, ten days after Rosh Hashanah, is related to the date when Moses descended from Mt. Sinai with the second set of 10 Commandments.

And, it should be pointed out, while there is one Hebrew month without a holiday, the other 11 do have significant holidays, including those established since the creation of the State of Israel.

Our task, then, isn't to bemoan the compact nature of the High Holy Day/Sukkot Season holidays, but to celebrate the opportunity to bring so much joy and variation into our lives! We need to remember the significance of each holiday and invest out time and energy into embracing the sacred moments each provide us.

Happy Fall Season! Rabbi David and Bonnie Vorspan



Sukkot starts
Thursday, October 17
See poem on page 8



Shmini Atzeret
Thursday, October 24
See article on page 2



Simchat Torah
Friday, October 25
See poem on page 9



Shir Notes

The Official Newsletter of Congregation Shir Ami Volume 14, Number 3,
March 2016. Affiliated with United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Events of the Month

Shabbat services at de Toledo High School

Saturday, March 5 - 10:30 am

Birthday Shabbat

Saturday, March 19 - 10:30 am

Anniversary Shabbat

Around the Rabbi's Tisch Thurs, March 3, 10, 17, & 31 7:30 pm at the Vorspans'

Our 5776 season of Rabbi's weekly discussion continues. Call Rabbi at (818) 888-9817 or see flyer.

Torah and Shabbat Study Saturday, March 12, 10:30 am at Northridge Mobile Home Park

Stan Schroeder leads our monthly study and discussion session. Call Stan at (818) 718-7466 or see flyer.

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Rabbi's Column

Bonnie and I went to Disneyland on Presidents Day. Big mistake. It was packed. And hot. We got on a total of three rides. But something happened to make it all worth it.

The Electric Light Parade was going to start in 20 minutes, and we began looking for a spot to sit. Nothing looked available. People were on every curb and bench, spreading themselves out and protectively reserving spots with articles of clothing.

We were almost ready to give up and head for Pirates of the Caribbean, when we saw what appeared to be a small section of pavement unoccupied, but there were two women and three children spread out and covering what appeared to be a little too much room.

Bonnie kindly asked if there might be some room there for two senior citizens. (She didn't actually ask that, but we both sort of looked the part!)

They looked at each other, and then gathered their belongings so there would be sufficient room for us. Bonnie asked them how long they had been sitting here, waiting for the parade. "Since 6 o'clock," one of the mothers said. 21/2 hours earlier! And they were just fine letting us join them. They remarked that they felt good sharing the spot because we asked so nicely!

But that's not all that made the day worth it. It was the reaction to the Electric Light Parade by the kids. With the first float just around the corner, the kids were up and screaming with delight. I was actually moved by how appreciative and loud they were. They cheered everything and everyone. And the "cast" seemed moved as well. Those on the floats smiled and waved at them. Those walking in the parade came over to give high fives.

And I began to see the parade with their youthful eyes. No matter how many times I'd witnessed it in the past, I saw it anew. It was the feeling parents get when they introduce their young children to anything for the first time.

And the rabbi in me started to think: can Jewish ritual and customs that we do regularly be made new, as well? Can lighting Shabbat candles, or reciting the *Shema* before bedtime, or spinning a grogger, be given a freshness just by reorienting our thinking? After all, there is a prayer we recite daily that includes the line, "*hamichadesh b'tuvo b'chol yom maaseh breishit*: in God's goodness God renews creation daily."

So I've decided to challenge myself and renew aspects of my Jewish life. I would attempt to do ritual with the eyes and mind of someone doing it for the first time. Will the stale become refreshed? The ordinary made extraordinary? Time will tell. I'm looking forward to the experiment.

Will you join me?

Rabbi David Vorspan





Shir Notes

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January 2020. Affiliated with United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Visit our website:
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Events of the Month

Shabbat services at de Toledo High School

Saturday, January 4- 10:30 am

Birthday Shabbat

Saturday, January 18 - 10:30 am

Anniversary Shabbat

Social Action post-Hanukkah party Friday, Jan. 3, 1:00 pm at Valley Healthcare Center

We will celebrate Shabbat and a
late Hanukkah with latkes and
trimmings. See article on page 4.

Around the Rabbi's Tisch Thursday, January 9, 16, & 30 7:30 pm at the Vorspans'

Our 5780 season of Rabbi's weekly
discussion continues. Call Rabbi at
(818) 888-9817 or see flyer.

Torah and Shabbat Study

Saturday, Jan. 11, 10:30 am Northridge Mobile Home Park

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

Barbershop Quartet Concert Sunday, January 26, 2:00 pm at de Toledo High School

See article on page 2 and flyer for
more information.

Rabbi's Column



What helps us when life becomes challenging? When illness, death, suffering, disappointment or strife suddenly enters our lives?

How do we navigate tempestuous waters?

Of my rabbinate, I have met many people who have found a way to keep going—whether bowed by death, illness or emotional crisis.

Some have found solace in family and friends. Others in God. For some, an inner fortitude got them through it, a strength that surprised even them.

And some collapsed under the burden.

I have learned from those who have shared with me what helped and what hurt as they were going through difficult times. It was particularly important for me to learn how often people can disappoint. How those we count on the most just aren't there when we need them.

But it was also gratifying to find out how often help comes from those from whom we expect the least. How the heroes of our life, those that save us during the bleakest and darkest days, emerge in such unexpected ways.

My son-in-law, **Rabbi Ahud Sela**, refers to them as angels. In fact, he's written a book about them: "*Seeing Angels in the Shadow of Death.*"

In his young life, Rabbi Sela has had to endure a lot, and it has been illuminating to me to find what helped him through the tough times.

I've asked him to speak to our congregation, to share his story.

Rabbi Sela will join our "*Around the Rabbi's Tisch*" on Thursday evening, January 16, 2020, beginning at 7:30 PM. Whether you're a regular or not, I'd love for you to be a part of this unique presentation.

As we usher in a new year, let us continue to learn from each other, as we grow from strength to strength!

2020 Shir Ami Officers and Board members

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Mark Hyman

Rabbi David Vorspan





Shir Notes

The Official Newsletter of Congregation Shir Ami Volume 9, Number 6, June 2011
Affiliated with United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Events of the Month

Around the Rabbi's Tisch Thursday, June 2 at 7:30 pm

This will be the last of our weekly discussions for the 5771 season. Join us for the final evening at the Vorspans' home. We will resume after the High Holy Days in October. Call Rabbi Vorspan at (818) 888-9817.

Shabbat Services at Temple Ner Maarav

Saturday, June 4, **10:00 am**
Birthday Shabbat
Saturday, June 11, **10:00 am**
Saturday, June 18, **10:00 am**
Saturday, June 25, **10:00 am**
Anniversary Shabbat
Note new time of service.

Walk Around Lake Balboa Sunday, June 5 at 9:00 am

This year's Social Action Committee Walk will raise money for **Alzheimer's Disease research**. There will be a pizza picnic lunch in the pavillion following the Walk. See the flyer with this *Shir Notes* for more information.

BINGO at Temple Ner Maarav Sunday, June 26 Boutique at 2:00 pm Bingo at 3:00 pm

Our annual Ways & Means Committee Bingo game and raffle is always a fun-filled time with surprises, prizes, and refreshments. See article on page 2 and the flyer with this *Shir Notes* for more information or call Jerry Zatz at (818) 883-9924.

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Rabbi's Column

I can remember back a few years when my daughter, as part of a class assignment, asked me who wrote the Constitution of the United States. I could give a rough answer, close enough for the both of us. Similarly, if asked who wrote Israel's Declaration of Independence, the Magna Carta, or other similarly monumental documents, it wouldn't take much research to come up with some names.

But ask a Jew who wrote the Torah...some would tell you they know for sure (God!), but even then they will be short on specifics ("but other than the Ten Commandments, where did the rest of the Five Books of Moses come from?") Others suggest it was written by men (and women?) who were Divinely inspired. And yet others might opine that they were not inspired at all, and the results, regardless of the author, are open to interpretation and emendation anyway, so what difference does it make?

Important questions to ask during the month when we commemorate the giving of the Torah with the holiday of **Shavuot**. For how we respond will indicate how seriously we take it, and how "commanded" we consider ourselves by it.

Shavuot is a fairly neglected holiday because it lacks much of the ceremony and "hands on" involvement required by other major holidays such as Passover and Sukkot. And yet, Shavuot can be the most challenging of holidays, for it demands we deliberate on one of the most significant questions of our heritage: What is the authority of our law?

The rabbis themselves were aware of the controversy. They referred to Shavuot as "*zman matan torateynu*," the season of the giving of the torah, suggesting that it was given by one God, but received in many different ways by Jews. How have you received it, and what are you doing with it? Talk about it with your family and friends. Elevate your conversation with such "torah talk," and then go to a Shavuot services to celebrate the fact that, however it got there, the torah is the Constitution of the Jewish people.

Rabbi David Vorspan

This Month's Featured Articles:

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