



Shir Notes

The Official Newsletter of Congregation Shir Ami Volume 23, Number 1, January 2025. Affiliated with United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

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Events of the Month

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

Saturday, January 4 10:30 am
Birthday Shabbat
Consecration of Officers
Saturday, January 25 10:30 am
Anniversary Shabbat
Linen Shabbat
See article on page 4 and flyer.

**Around the Rabbi's Tisch
Thursdays January 9, 23,
and 30, 7:30 pm via Zoom**
See flyer for more information

**Torah and Shabbat Study
Saturday, Jan. 18, 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 20
(see page 9)

Visit our website:
www.shirami.com

Rabbi's Column



In the modern digital landscape, few tools have proven as universally useful as the "cut and paste" feature. This simple yet ingenious function has revolutionized the way we work, learn, and communicate, allowing us to transfer text, images, and data with remarkable ease. By eliminating the need for manual rewriting or redrawing, "cut and paste" has saved countless hours and enabled a level of efficiency that was unimaginable in the pre-digital era.

The real beauty of "cut and paste" lies in its versatility. Whether you're moving a paragraph in a document, replicating a chart in a presentation, or transferring an image from one project to another, this tool ensures that ideas flow seamlessly from one context to the next. It allows us to focus more on refining our creations rather than reinventing the wheel. The simplicity of its function belies its power: with a few keystrokes or mouse clicks, the laborious process of duplication becomes a thing of the past.

However, as we stand at the threshold of 2025, it's worth reflecting on the limits of "cut and paste" when applied to life and progress. While duplicating and building on past successes has its place, the new year calls for fresh ideas and bold innovation. Just as copying the same text repeatedly can stifle creativity, relying too heavily on old habits and patterns can inhibit growth. This year, we have the opportunity to move beyond simply replicating the past and to embrace the challenge of creating something entirely original.

As we chart the course for this new chapter, let's view 2025 as a blank page—a canvas not for duplication, but for reinvention. The lessons and successes of the past year will undoubtedly guide us, but our focus should be on moving forward, not merely copying what has already been done. True innovation stems from breaking free of the constraints of the familiar, much like an artist stepping beyond their comfort zone to explore new styles and techniques.

So, while we continue to marvel at the convenience of "cut and paste" in our digital lives, let us metaphorically set it aside as we face the new year. Each action, decision, and project can be an opportunity to innovate, to build something original and meaningful. As we leave 2024 behind, let's commit to starting fresh—welcoming 2025 with the courage to create, not just replicate.

Rabbi David Vorspan

This photograph of **Abraham Joshua Heschel** walking arm in arm with **Martin Luther King, Jr.**, in the front row of marchers at Selma has become an icon of American Jewish life, and of Black-Jewish relations. Reprinted in Jewish textbooks, synagogue bulletins, and in studies of ecumenical relations, the picture has come to symbolize the great moment of symbiosis of the two communities, Black and Jewish, which today seems shattered.



President's Report

Happy New Year!



I want to thank all of you who attended our daylight annual members meeting and election of board members and officers, either in person or via Zoom. This was your opportunity to see how *really* organized "organized religion" is. 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 actually do have some new board members so we will be depending on our Shir Ami community for inputs on what you want for programs and other activities.

Following our consecration of officers and Board members, our Social Action Committee steps into the spotlight for our annual Linen Shabbat to provide towels, sheets, pillow and blankets to those in the shelters. Your donations of linens are very important not only to supply those in the shelters with needed items, but when they leave the shelters, they take the linens with them to set up their new households. So, the linens you provide will give them a fresh start.

Our Ritual Vice-President will continue to hold the monthly Shabbat/Torah Study Sessions, along with Stan's special programs on Zoom. Rabbi's Virtual Tisch will be starting up again.

As we begin 2025, we look forward to a great year so come along for the ride.

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

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.

Social Action Committee

We will be having our annual **Linen Shabbat** January 25, 2024 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. **Kitty Glass** will speak to us about the various services they offer to families who are dealing with these difficult challenges.



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



DONATIONS

Congregation Shir Ami wishes to acknowledge the following donations:

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	19h
Debra and Wayne Geffen.....	1/23	42nd

Birthday

Andrea Nachenberg (82)

Bonnie and Rabbi David Vorspan in honor of Eitan Sela (16), Elana Vorspan (45), and Rabbi David Vorspan (78)

Rae Wazana (81)

Anniversary

Barbara and Neil Hattem (50)

Martin Luther King Day Monday, January 20

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 transformed 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)

Our Condolences

We regret to inform the congregational family of the passing of:

Maxim Wazana, brother of **Armand Wazana**. May God comfort Armand and his family during this time of their bereavement.



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.



2025 Shir Ami Officers and Board

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



Board of Directors: Owen Delman, Judy Eisikowitz, Fran Feinman, Sheilah Hart

Other Board Members (former Presidents)

Helga Unkeless and Jerry Zatz

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.

A Jew in Paradise by Owen Delman
(originally published February 2011)

At first, it seemed as if the place couldn't be more, uh ... foreign. By that I mean kind of ... *alien*. Well, getting right to it, looking around, there just couldn't be a lot of Jews living here, could there? Tourists and renters maybe ... "a nice place to visit, but..."



Actually, though, it did sort of *feel* a lot like Israel (which certainly qualifies as a *very* Jewish place). I mean, the climate was Israeli -- lots of swaying palm trees, pleasant breezes and the scent of warm waters at the coast. But, this was half a world away from Israel. **This was Hawaii**. Specifically, the Big Island of Hawaii, not even the metropolis Honolulu had become. Jewish? I read the street signs and town markers -- who writes with so many vowels? It's like my Buby, whose first instinct in mastering English spelling was to use all five vowels and sometimes "Y" -- in every word!

But, I began to look past the obvious -- the heavy Polynesian and Japanese ethnic population -- and I ran across a local newspaper article about **Linda Lingle**, recently termed out after 8 years as the Governor of Hawaii. Ms. Lingle was the first female Governor of Hawaii and the first Jewish Governor! How did *that* happen here?



(Editor's note: I arranged for Linda Lingle to speak to our Congregation in May 2014. Stan Schroeder)

So I began to think. Jews, who only: a) comprise about a quarter of one percent of the world's population; b) a little better than two percent of the US population; c) and one half percent of Hawaii's, seem to be in evidence everywhere one looks. Why? And, is there any place or enterprise they're not involved in?

So there I was, sitting in a tropical paradise pondering this somewhat perplexing question about Jews. You have permission to call me crazy. Back to the question and a little "Google" research. Okay, we know they are deeply into the sciences, literature, medicine, philosophy, inventions, culinary arts, and...and. What about the more arduous, adventurous areas of life?

Explorers? Well, there's **Luis de Torres** who sailed with Columbus on the 1492 voyage and is considered the first Jew to step onto what became America (on board because he was going to be needed in Asia where his knowledge of Hebrew would be useful when the expedition met with one of the "lost tribes").

How about *professional soldiers* (other than Israeli)? Out of 150,000 Jews in the United States at the time of the Civil War, 8500 fought in the conflict -- on both

sides -- producing eight generals, twenty-one colonels and six Congressional Medals of Honor.

Boxing? **Max Baer** boxed in 84 professional fights from 1929 to 1941 ending up with a 71-13-0 record with 53 knockouts. The 1998 Holiday Issue of *Ring* ranked Baer #20 in "*The 50 Greatest Heavyweights of All Time*." Ouch!

Astronaut? **Judith Resnick**, who died on her second mission in the Challenger. **Jeff Hoffman** who flew five missions and had four EVA's. And there were others.

I realized, in almost any area one could name, Jews have left and are leaving their mark. How can such a small population be such a major participant in human affairs? What causes Jews to be so successful in seemingly most endeavors? Certainly not the first time anyone has asked that question, but that doesn't mean the issue's been settled.

A reason one often hears is the Jewish emphasis on education in child rearing and the reverence for knowledge in later years. After all, our rabbis are teachers, the sources of information for our population, not direct conduits to God. This education turns into success in adulthood (and another reason so many become teachers).

I'm sure this solution, and, probably many, many others are correct. However, it may be more basic than that! I think Jews are raised to be, for lack of a better word, *curious* about the world around them. We even question aspects of our own religion. It's how we understand the universe around us. By uncovering these mysteries of the universe -- through science and other disciplines -- and everything that universe contains, we feel we better understand and appreciate God. It's a never-ending search and sometimes gets us into trouble! That's okay, it's good to question. Just learn to duck when people throw things at you.

Jews haven't just survived for five thousand years, they have thrived! We have taken the gift of "Life" and used our other gift, "Free Will", to unlock Life's mysteries. This leads to a lot of participation in the world. It's how the promise to Abraham has been fulfilled: your people "...will be as numerous as the stars of the heaven and the sands of the seashore."

So, maybe I wasn't so crazy to spend some of my Hawaiian time thinking about these things, I was just being curious -- how Jewish of me!

Israel is Fighting a Proxy War for All Jews

by Lou Loomis



Yes, the war between Hamas and Israel drags on. It could be over if Hamas would release all the kidnapped hostages, but that would signify a defeat for the terrorists and worse, a loss of face. Dishonor. Worse than defeat. Meanwhile much of the world continues to blame Israel. For what you ask? Everything. Ho hum?

Well, yes and no. I keep waiting for the Israel Defense Forces to rescue the hostages, but as of this writing, it hasn't happened yet. I expect it to happen any day now...any moment...

One unexpected angle to this war, is how the IDF has disabled Syria and driven the Russians out of their Mediterranean Sea base. The Russians are leaving. Are they afraid of the IDF? Evidently tiny Israel has proven to be too much, too fierce an enemy. Iran too has also shown fear of the "Zionist entity" by their loss of control over Lebanon and much of Syria. Now Israel faces an avaricious Turkey that wants to reestablish their former Ottoman Empire in Syria. Did someone say that Israel is located in a very bad neighborhood? (I just did)

We American Jews are now reliving history after nearly eighty years after the holocaust, of peace here in the USA. I personally (as a boomer), had never experienced any real antisemitism, but since October 7 of 2023, it is everywhere. It's such a surprise to see people who I assumed were rational, intelligent Americans suddenly displaying Jew-hatred. I never expected it. And I don't understand it.

One that I never expected

One isolated but dreadfully uncommon example is when I picked up my car from the mechanic a couple of months ago. As he handed me my keys, he began to lambaste Israel and the "Jews of the world" for being greedy and trying to take land from the Palestinians in order to get "lithium mines" buried deep under Gaza. I was surprised he said anything like that, so he and I began a conversation. He had not ever heard any of the things I told him about Israel, its history, or even the holocaust. I know he changed his mind (or seemed to) about several of his misconceptions about Jews in general, but I believe he came from a place of total ignorance. At one point I expected him to ask me about my horns.

We may not realize how isolated some people, who should know better, are about Jews and Israel. Some of the most educated people are shockingly lacking in their exposure to Jews and Judaism;

including Israel. The most disappointing thing is when Jews repeat ignorant and self-hating ideas made by the haters. We can do better.

StandWithUs

To Jews everywhere:
Don't listen to the voices of people who want to destroy Israel.
 Those people will always exist—B'chol dor va dor—in every generation.
 Listen to the people who love Israel and the Jewish people. Those are the voices that matter right now.

StandWithUs CEO
Roz Rothstein

I know I'm not alone when I say that I have heard our fellow Jews refer to the "Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands." I have had conversations with people who are shocked when they learn that Palestinians speak Arabic, as do the Jordanians, Egyptians, Syrians and others in the middle east. Arabic is the true language of the occupation. There is no such language as "Palestinian," or "Egyptian," etc. Oh well, facts.

THE HISTORY OF THE CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

YEAR	NAME	WHO STARTED IT?	WHO WAS ATTACKED?	WHO WON?
1948	Arab-Israel War	[Flags of Arab states]	[Flag of Israel]	[Flag of Israel]
1948-1967	Fedayeen	[Flags of Arab states]	[Flag of Israel]	[Flag of Israel]
1967	Six Day War	[Flags of Arab states]	[Flag of Israel]	[Flag of Israel]
1967-1970	War of Attrition	[Flags of Arab states]	[Flag of Israel]	[Flag of Israel]
1973	Yom Kippur War	[Flags of Arab states]	[Flag of Israel]	[Flag of Israel]
1971-1982	Palestinian uprising in Lebanon	[Flags of Arab states]	[Flag of Israel]	[Flag of Israel]
1985-2000	Lebanon Conflict	[Flags of Arab states]	[Flag of Israel]	[Flag of Israel]
1987-1993	First Intifada	[Flags of Arab states]	[Flag of Israel]	[Flag of Israel]
2000-2005	Second Intifada	[Flags of Arab states]	[Flag of Israel]	[Flag of Israel]
2006	Lebanon War	[Flag of Lebanon]	[Flag of Israel]	[Flag of Israel]
2008	First Gaza War	[Flags of Arab states]	[Flag of Israel]	[Flag of Israel]
2012	Israeli-Gaza Operation	[Flags of Arab states]	[Flag of Israel]	[Flag of Israel]
2014	Second Gaza War	[Flags of Arab states]	[Flag of Israel]	[Flag of Israel]
2021	Israeli-Gaza Crisis	[Flags of Arab states]	[Flag of Israel]	[Flag of Israel]
2023	Israel-Hamas War	[Flags of Arab states]	[Flag of Israel]	Want to guess?...

(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 this on one **Irving Berlin**, because I am writing this just before Christmas day and the night after Christmas I will present a Zoom program on 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: Several other Jewish songwriters wrote Christmas songs . Another was Mel Torme who wrote the iconic Christmas Song in 1945. Following his death in Los Angeles in 1999, **Rabbi James Rubin** wrote this article in Commentary magazine.*
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.

Israel is Fighting a Proxy War for All Jews

(continued)

However, the more successful Israel is in fighting this war against Islamic extremists such as Hamas and Hezbollah, the more the newest antisemitism dissipates. Israel is earning respect for fighting a war nearly alone, without the help of American or European allies. Yes, to a large extent, the US has supplied Israel with weaponry, but it is the Israelis who are fighting and dying on the battlefield.



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Jewish Proverbs

A half-truth is a whole lie.

All things grow with time -- except grief.

Against stupidity; God Himself is helpless.

A pessimist, confronted with two bad choices, chooses both.

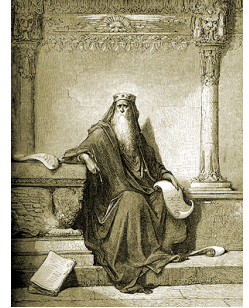
As you do, so will be done to you.

As you teach, you learn.

Ask about the neighbors, then buy the house.

Be sure to send a lazy man for the angel of death.

Be the day weary or be the day long, at last it rings to evensong.



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.



TREE OF LIFE

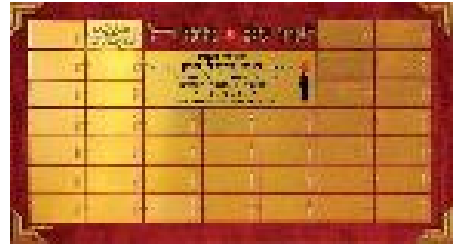


This beautiful Tree of Life, with leaves priced at \$100 and rocks at \$250 (one remaining), makes a perfect way to celebrate family occasions and support Congregation Shir Ami.

The Tree is on a rosewood background and consists of gold-colored leaves and rocks. It is displayed at all Congregation Shir Ami services and events.

For more information or to place an order, call Helga Unkeless at (818) 340-5751.

Congregation Shir Ami Memorial Board



If you would like to honor the memory of your loved ones by dedicating plaques on our new Memorial Board, please call Helga Unkeless at (818) 340-5751 so she may mail you an order form. The cost of each plaque is \$36.

Each plaque may contain up to three lines of engraving: English name, Hebrew name, and the years of birth and death. Both of our Memorial Boards are displayed at all our services.

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

Thursdays, January 9, 23, and 30 7:30 - 8:30 pm “Around the Rabbi’s Tisch” on Zoom

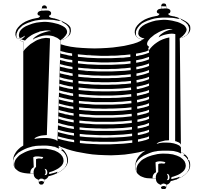


This popular Shir Ami educational series continues its 5785 season. Come join us for our weekly discussion of Rabbi Vorspan’s selected topics of Jewish interest. We discuss Jewish texts and current events as they relate to Jewish values and our lives as Jews. This is a unique opportunity to learn and 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=bG4venRKTW9lVzhhVWVSRGgraEFJdz09>

Meeting ID: 864 4008 2040 Password: 677588

Saturday January 18, 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 18. The Torah portion is *Shemot*, Exodus 1:1 - 6:1. It is the birth of Moses through his selection by God to lead the Israelites to redemption and out of Egypt. We will also discuss Martin Luther King Day and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.

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 2025
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 2025

Saturday, January 4 - Birthday, Consecration of Officers
Saturday, January 25 - Anniversary, Linen Shabbat

February 2025

Saturday, February 1 - Birthday
Saturday, February 15 - Anniversary

March 2025

Saturday, March 1 - Birthday
Saturday, March 15 - Anniversary

April 2025

Saturday, April 5 - Birthday
Saturday, April 26 - Anniversary

May 2025

Saturday, May 10 - Birthday
Saturday, May 24 - Anniversary

June 2025

Saturday, June 7 - Birthday
Saturday, June 21 - Anniversary



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 25 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

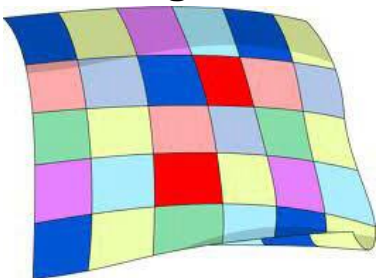
If you do bring linens to the service, our Committee will arrange for them to be delivered.

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.

