



Shir Notes

The Official Newsletter of Congregation Shir Ami Volume 24, Number 2, February 2026. 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, February 7 10:30 am
Birthday Shabbat

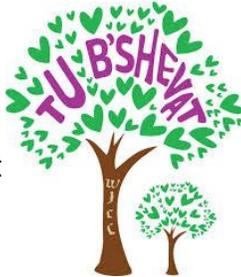
Saturday, February 21 10:30 am
Anniversary Shabbat

**Around the Rabbi's Tisch
Thursdays February 5, 12,
19. & 26. 7:30 pm via Zoom**
See flyer for more information

**Torah and Shabbat Study
Saturday, Feb. 28, 10:30 am
at the Schroeders'**

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

See article on page 4.



Tu B'Shevat
Monday
February 2



Presidents' Day
Monday, February 16
See articles on pages 2, 8,
and 10.

Visit our website:
www.shirami.com

Rabbi's Column



When our sages taught, "*Mishenichnas Adar marbim b'simcha*"—"When we usher in the Hebrew month of Adar, we usher in a great joy"—they weren't offering a casual observation. They were giving us a spiritual practice. Joy, in Judaism, is not only something we feel; it is something we can create, increase, and share. Beginning on February 17, as we welcome Adar and begin moving toward Purim, we are invited to actively expand the happiness in our homes, our synagogue community, and our daily interactions. Adar reminds us that even when life feels heavy, we still possess the power to tilt the world toward light, laughter, and hope.

One of the most beautiful ways to grow joy is by leaning into the gifts we already have—especially Shabbat. Shabbat is joy built into the calendar: a weekly oasis of peace, holiness, music, and gratitude. As Adar begins, let us recommit ourselves to celebrating Shabbat more intentionally—lighting candles with intention, singing a little louder, sharing a meal with family or friends, and showing up to pray together. Another powerful pathway to joy is generosity. Giving tzedakah, offering help, dropping off a meal, writing a note of encouragement, or simply checking in on someone who is lonely can transform another person's day—and our own hearts along with it. Even the small acts matter: smile at people, hold the door, offer a kind word, and watch how quickly joy spreads when we become its messengers.

And perhaps most importantly, Adar reminds us that joy grows best in community. Purim itself is built around togetherness—sharing food, giving gifts, and coming together to celebrate and support one another. This month, let's strengthen that spirit by joining one another for our Thursday evening study sessions, "Around the Rabbi's Virtual Tisch," where learning becomes a source of connection and inspiration, and by gathering for Shabbat services, where we lift our voices and souls as one. If you're looking for a simple Adar goal, try this: show up more, smile more, give more, and sing more. When we do, we fulfill the wisdom of our tradition—not merely by waiting for joy to arrive, but by increasing it, day by day, until it fills our community with the strength and sweetness of Adar.

Rabbi David Vorspan



President's Report

Shalom,

We are well on our way into the new year. Last month we had the first meeting of our new board of directors and while great minds may think alike, we will follow the Jewish tradition that when you have two people, there are at least three opinions.



I want to thank all of you who participated in our **Linen Shabbat** service. Our Social Action Committee led by **Becky Finlay** is carrying on the tradition established by **Fran Kobulnick** and we can be proud of the fact when there is a need, the Social Action Committee and Congregation Shir Ami are there.

You will all be heartened to know that the new Board is continuing with our **Shabbat services, the Rabbi's Tisch and the Shabbat/Torah Study sessions**, as if there were any doubt! We are blessed with excellent participation in our Shabbat services and I would wager (but not on Shabbat) that we have higher percentage of members who attend Shabbat services than the "big" congregations. Not only do we have prayers and teaching moments, but this is our way of saying to others, "Hello, I'm still here!" Our services are available on Zoom, but if you attend in person, our Oneg Shabbat is the best way to make sure you don't starve on the way home.

Since February is the short month, my message is short. We're here for you. You're here for us. And we're all here for each other..

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

Thank you,

Jordan Pistol, President

Some Jews in U.S. History on President's Day

by Stan Schroeder

In 1584, **Sir Walter Raleigh**, a favorite of **Queen Elizabeth I**, received a royal patent to explore the Virginia territory and found a permanent settlement. The queen hoped that the colonists would discover copper, silver, and gold, or at least find a passageway to the Orient. Sir Walter recruited **Joachim Gaunse**, a Bohemian (Czech) Jewish



metallurgist and mining engineer, to join the Virginia expedition. Gaunse thus became the first recorded Jew to set foot on English soil in North America.

Invited to England by the Royal Mining Company in 1581, Gaunse completely revamped English methods for smelting copper. In 1584, Britain was preparing for war with Spain and desperately needed copper, a critical element in the production of bronze from which the English manufactured the accurate cannons that gave their warships an advantage over the Spaniards' inferior cast iron cannons. The superior firepower provided by bronze cannonry proved crucial in the English navy's victory in 1588 over the much larger Spanish Armada.

Gaunse's contributions to English bronze manufacture were monumental. Before his innovations, English smelters required a minimum of 16 weeks to purify a batch of copper ore. Gaunse's process reduced that time to just 4 days. As an added bonus, Gaunse found a way to use the impurities removed from the ore in textile dyes. In an age when many still believed in alchemy (the "science" of turning base metals into gold), Gaunse pioneered modern scientific research methods.

"We hear much these days about our 'Judeo-Christian' heritage and its early and enduring influence on our culture," says the *Jewish Press*. But given that only about 2,500 Jews lived in the American colonies in 1776, it continues, "usually those of us who speak of that early dual influence are referring to the Christian Bible with its Jewish roots." Turns out, however, there was at least one influential Jew at the time of the first official Thanksgiving in 1789. **Gershom Mendes Seixas** was the cantor and spiritual leader of New York City's only synagogue, Congregation Shearith Israel, until it shut down operations during the Revolution, and he became the leader of a synagogue in Philadelphia, where he used his pulpit to speak out in support of **General George Washington**. When Washington was inaugurated as president, Seixas was one of the presiding clergy. "This was certainly an act of gratitude by Washington for the preacher's stalwart support during the war," says the *Press*. "It was also, though, an expression of Washington's thinking about the importance of religious freedom and diversity in the new nation."



And when Thanksgiving became an official holiday that year, Seixas, back at Shearith Israel, preached that Jews were "equal partakers of every benefit that results from this good government" and should try "to live as Jews ought to do in brotherhood and amity, to seek peace and pursue it."

(continued on page 9)



DONATIONS

Congregation Shir Ami wishes to acknowledge the following donations:

Yahrzeits

Janet and Richard Kirshbaum for Florence Kirshbaum
Carol and Irwin Koransky
Margaret Kovar for Sylvia and Claire
Paula and Lou Loomis for Roy Loomis
Marcie and Steve Spetner for Sarah Lurie
Fiona Taylor for Grace Konrad

Birthdays

Claire Silverman (94)

Birthdays & Anniversaries

Birthdays

Carol Koransky..... 2/2
Michael Easley..... 2/5
Lorraine Simansky..... 2/10
Karen Benson..... 2/10
Sima Schuster..... 2/13
Eric Dollins..... 2/17
Janet Kirshbaum..... 2/22

JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE LA

January 21, 2026

Dear Friends,

It was so wonderful seeing you all on Saturday. You are such a special group of folks, and on behalf of JFS Hope, I want to thank you all for the linens and money that we received. Everything is already on its way to the shelters providing warmth and comfort to our special residents.

I am overwhelmed by your commitment and support of our program over these many years. Fran Kobulnick is smiling above seeing that her vision for Hope is being realized even in her absence. This is a very special annual event for us, and we are deeply grateful and appreciative to you all.

As you know, we feel passionate that everyone deserves to live in violence-free homes, and we thank you for joining us in that mission.

The staff at JFS Hope join me in thanking you as well with warm wishes for a New Year filled with great health, happiness and cheer.

Warmly, *Kitty*
Kitty Glass
Community Outreach
Coordinator



A family of services.
A family that serves.

Our Condolences



We regret to inform the congregational family of the passing of our member **Ethel Granik**. May God comfort Ethel's daughters **Rhoda Granik** and **Marsha Granik** and their families during this time of their bereavement.

Congregational News

Get well wishes *rafuah schleimah* to:

Neil Hattem
Phyllis Schroeder
Jordan Pistol
Sima Schuster



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.

Tu B'Shevat (from My Jewish Learning)

The "birthday of the trees" is a time for seders, tree-planting and more.

The name of this festival is actually its date: "Tu" is a pronunciation of the Hebrew letters for the number 15, 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](#)). Only the fruit of older trees could be eaten. This law 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](#)).

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 [Lurianic 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](#) as well as 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.

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In 2026, Tu Bishvat begins at sundown on Sunday, February 1 and ends at sundown on Tuesday, February 2.

Tu Bishvat or the "birthday" of all fruit trees, is a minor festival. The name is Hebrew for the 15th of the Hebrew month of Shevat.

In ancient times, Tu Bishvat was merely a date on the calendar that helped Jewish farmers establish exactly when they should bring their fourth-year produce of fruit from recently planted trees to the Temple as first-fruit offerings.

(continued on page 7)

Defenders of Zion aka: Podcasters

by Lou Loomis

What is happening in today's Jewish world is boldly reported and defended by one of the most powerful weapons ever invented: the internet-based podcast. The news out of Israel during the October 7 war was not fully covered by the western media, and not reported fairly when news did break. This caused massive frustration in the pro-Israel world, as one would expect.



However, the determination by defenders of Israel to overcome the massive antisemitism that was birthed by this war gave rise to an underused resource that has begun to replace the "dinosaur media" in importance: The Podcast.

Podcasts, if anyone does not know, is a media source that is not reliant on the financial resources of the traditional media such as broadcast companies or news agencies. Prior to October 7, podcasts were mainly privately financed author interviews or book readings. Podcasts included cultural events that traditional media did not consider popular enough to attract a profit from a fickle audience. For example, my daughter would download onto her phone NPR book readings and listen to them while commuting to and from work.

During the Israel-Gaza War podcasts about the war or anti-Semitic demonstrations would be covered by a growing number of podcasters. Podcasters also discovered another Israel-friendly source to disseminate news, on X, formerly known as Twitter. As the popularity of X grew, so did the world of podcasts.

Today, dozens (maybe hundreds) of podcasts are available for phone or computer listening. Every subject is covered, and many podcasts are free (with ads, of course).

I don't want to bore you by naming all the podcasts I listen to, but I do want to recommend a few I personally believe are especially worthy of your time. And as a reader of the *Shir Notes*, I will only focus on the podcasts that are of interest to a Jewish audience.

- Being Jewish with **Jonah Platt**
- Unorthodox (put on by the team at Tablet Magazine)
- Meaningful People
- Mayim Bialik**
- Israel Story
- Two Nice Jewish Boys podcast
- Can We Talk? (Focus on issues of Jewish Women)
- Call Me Back (one of my personal favorites)
- Honestly with **Bari Weiss**
- For Heaven's Sake (Shalom Hartman Institute — another personal favorite)
- Rabbi Sacks**
- Hillul Fuld**



Recently I discovered a relatively new podcast featuring news analysis by **Hillel Fuld**. His coverage of the situation in Iran is deep, thorough, and in my opinion ought to be heard by anyone trying to make sense of why what happens in Iran is important to all Americans, both Jew and gentile. He will also occasionally direct one to his website with photos and videos

Lately he has been showing videos taken in Iran, discreetly filmed in Iran and risking the videographer's life.

He frequently summarizes his views on X. (See box, above) as he gives examples why the current government in Iran is dangerous.

While new to the podcast scene, he is also quoted by many prominent pro- Israel commentators, who verify his reports.

I (continued on page 9)

Biography of the Month: Rob Reiner

by Stan Schroeder

Robert Reiner was born in New York City March 6, 1947 to **Estelle and Carl Reiner**, who were themselves actors. Reiner began his career as an actor before transitioning to filmmaking. He rose to prominence with his portrayal of Michael "Meathead" Stivic in the 1970s US sitcom *All in the Family* (1971–1979), a role that earned him two Primetime Emmy Awards for Outstanding Supporting Actor.



Rob became a New York Yankee baseball fan at 4 ½ years old when Carl took him to a doubleheader at Yankee Stadium. The family eventually moved to Los Angeles where Reiner made his television acting debut at age 14 on the series *Manhunt*. He attended Beverly Hills High School and studied at the UCLA Film School.

In an interview with Jewish Telegraphic Agency in 2017, Reiner said he was raised with strong Jewish values that played a major role in his life and work. "My grandmother spoke Yiddish in the house, and my mother and father spoke a little Yiddish, too," said Reiner, who had a bar mitzvah. "They decided to bring a teacher in to teach me Yiddish, too. I learned a little, but he also taught the history of the Jews and it was like having a little shul at home. It was home shuling," he quipped.

Carl became an atheist after World War II and Rob had the same theology. He said he admired Buddhist values as well.

Reiner was married to **Penny Marshall**, the actress and filmmaker, for 10 years beginning in 1971. Like Reiner, Marshall experienced sitcom fame, with "*Laverne & Shirley*," but found a more lasting legacy behind the camera.

After their divorce, Reiner, at a lunch with **Nora Ephron**, suggested a comedy about dating. In writing what became "*When Harry Met Sally*," Ephron and Reiner charted a relationship between a man and a woman (played in the film by **Billy Crystal** and **Meg Ryan**) over the course of 12 years.

Along the way, the movie's ending changed, as did some of the film's indelible moments. The famous line, "I'll have what she's having," said after witnessing Ryan's fake orgasm at Katz's Delicatessen, was a suggestion by Crystal — delivered by none other than Reiner's mother, **Estelle**.

The movie's happy ending also had some real-life basis. Reiner met **Michele Singer**, a photographer, on the set of "*When Harry Met Sally*." In 1989, they were wed. They had three children together: **Nick, Jake and Romy**. Reiner said that his Jewish heritage and upbringing "is reflected in my work. It's my sensibility. I'm a Jew. I was raised a Jew. I value honesty and integrity and knowledge and education and all those values I was raised with."

Of course, Reiner was raised with another "Jewish value" as well: comedy. "Jews are funny," he said to JTA at the time. "And there's a reason we're funny. You have Cossacks. You have Hitler. You have a lot of things weighing down on you. You have to have a sense of humor or you can't survive."

In 2016, Reiner appeared in the documentary "The Last Laugh," about the taboos of Holocaust humor. "The Holocaust itself is not funny, there's nothing funny about it," he said on screen. "But survival and what it takes to survive — there can be humor in that."

Michele's family also has pronounced Jewish roots. She is the daughter of a Holocaust survivor and the sister of **Rabbi Suzanne Singer**, a prominent Reform rabbi who spent 15 years at Temple Beth El in Riverside, California, before retiring in 2023. A former documentary producer, Rabbi Singer has also held several leadership roles within the Union for Reform Judaism, and had worked with progressive Jewish groups like T'ruah. She is a part-time rabbi at Temple Sinai in Palm Springs.

On "*All in the Family*," Reiner served as a pivotal foil to **Carroll O'Connor's** bigoted, conservative Archie Bunker. Reiner was nominated five times for an Emmy for his performance on the show, winning in 1974 and 1978. In **Norman Lear**, Reiner also found a mentor. He called him "a second father."

"It wasn't just that he hired me for '*All in the Family*,'" Reiner told American Masters in 2005. "It was that I saw, in how he conducted his life, that there was room to be an activist as well. That you could use your celebrity, your good fortune, to help make some change."

Lear also helped launch Reiner as a filmmaker. He put \$7.5 million of his own money to help finance "*Stand By Me*". "There's a Yiddish word that describes Norman's genius: It's kochleffel," Reiner said. "For all you non-Jews out there, kochleffel is a ladle, a ladle that stirs the pot. And when Norman the kochleffel stirred that pot, he wound up changing American culture."

(continued on page 9)

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks Quotations

Tuesday evening, January 21, 2020, our member (and *Shir Notes* column author) **Lou Loomis** and I attended a lecture at the Sephardic Temple in Los Angeles by **Rabbi Lord**

Jonathan Sacks. Rabbi Sacks was world renown, not only in the Jewish world. It was a “once in a lifetime” experience. I regularly use his Torah commentaries at our monthly Shabbat Torah study sessions.



“The test of faith is whether I can make space for difference. Can I recognize God's image in someone who is not in my image, whose language, faith, ideal, are different from mine? If I cannot, then I have made God in my image instead of allowing him to remake me in his.”

“Why did God create mankind? Because God likes stories.”

“The journey is not yet over. Israel has not yet found peace. And after four thousand years Jews still find it hard to live their faith without fear. There is only one Jewish state, a country less than one quarter of one per cent of the land mass of the Arab world; the only place on earth where Jews form a majority, the only place where they are able to do what almost every other people takes for granted, to construct a society according to their values, and to be able to defend themselves. For every Jew alive today there are 100 Muslims, 183 Christians. Yet still we have to fight for the right to be.”

“[Genesis] is not myth. It is not history in the conventional sense, a mere recording of events. ... To put it at its simplest: philosophy is truth as system. Genesis is truth as story. It is a unique work, philosophy in the narrative mode.”

“Judaism is a religion of continuity. It depends for its very existence on the willingness of successive generations to hand on their faith and way of life to their children, and on the loyalty of children to the heritage of their past.”

“Broadcasting is being replaced by narrowcasting. The difference is that broadcasting speaks to a mixed public, exposing them to a range of views. Narrowcasting speaks to a targeted public and exposes them only to facts and opinions that support their prejudices. It fragments a public into a set of sects of the like-minded.”

Tu B'Shevat (from My Jewish Learning)

(continued)

The Tu Bishvat seder, modeled after the Passover seder, traditionally includes eating a variety of fruits and nuts and drinking four cups of wine of various colors. The seder has kabbalistic roots and was first mentioned in the book *Pri Etz Hadar*, written in the 18th century. There is room for much creativity when planning a Tu Bishvat seder, including the choice of foods, readings, and discussions. Popular topics include trees, the environment, appreciating the physical world, examining personal characteristics, and the important role of nature in Jewish texts, traditions, and rituals.



Wine or Grape Juice

Some have the custom of drinking four glasses of wine at the seder. Participants mix each glass to be a different shade from white to red, representing the four seasons, beginning with winter. The order of the wine is white, white with a splash of red, mostly red with a splash of white, and red. The blessing for wine is said before drinking each cup.



Fruits and Nuts

It is common to eat a variety of fruits and nuts at the seder. The fruits and nuts are grouped by their characteristics, such as having a hard shell or the type of seeds. The order of the fruits is as follows:

- Fruits and nuts with a hard shell and soft inside, such as walnuts and citrus fruits.
- Fruits without a protective shell but with a pit in the center, such as olives, cherries, and dates.
- Soft fruits which can be eaten entirely, such as figs, grapes, and star fruit.
- Fruit with a tough outer skin but is sweet inside, such as a sabra or banana.

The blessing for the particular food is said before eating.

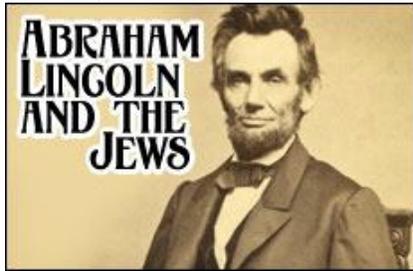
Explanations and poetic readings are often added to the seder. Readings about nature, the environment, the seasons, personal characteristics, Torah learning, and other inspirational topics are often chosen.

Editor's note: Tu B'Shevat may be considered a Zionist holiday since it is only in Israel that the tithes were required and Israel has become an agricultural wonder through planting trees.
Stan Schroeder

Abraham Lincoln and the Jews

By Marnie Winston-Macauley
(from aish.com)

Lincoln was the first President to make it possible for rabbis to serve as military chaplains by signing the 1862 Act of Congress, which changed the law that had barred all but Christian clergymen from the role. It all started on September 8, 1861, when a 30-year-old Philadelphia cantor, **Michael Mitchell Allen**, returned to his encampment with the 65th Regiment of the Fifth Pennsylvania Cavalry, known as Cameron's Dragoons. The regiment of 1,200 men, mostly Jews, elected him their chaplain. Complaints flew up the military ladder. Lincoln then signed the Act and Jewish chaplains have been serving in the American Armed Forces ever since.



He was also the first, and happily, the only President who was called upon to revoke an official act of anti-Semitism by the U.S. government. He canceled General **Ulysses S Grant's** "Order No. 11" expelling all Jews in Tennessee from the district controlled by his armies during the Civil War. (Grant denied personal responsibility for this act, attributing it to his subordinate.)

Shortly after delivering the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln met Canadian Christian Zionist, **Henry Wentworth Monk**, who expressed hope that Jews who were being oppressed in Russia and Turkey be emancipated "by restoring them to their national home in Palestine." Lincoln replied this was "a noble dream and one shared by many Americans."

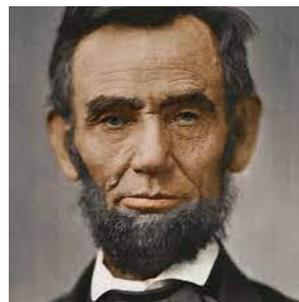
*Factoid: **Edward Rosewater**, a young Jewish member of the Telegraphers Corps of the Union Army, transmitted President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in 1863. President Lincoln was a frequent visitor to read the field dispatches. After the war, Rosewater founded the Omaha Daily Bee, and was elected and appointed to public offices.*

Lincoln and Jewish lawyer **Abraham Jonas** (1801-1864) were intimate confidantes. In one correspondence between them Lincoln wrote: "You are one of my most valued friends." The friendship began soon after Jonas settled in Quincy, Illinois in 1838. When Lincoln visited Quincy in 1854, he spent most of his time with Jonas, who came from Kentucky where he served in the State Legislature for four terms. From 1849 to 1851, he was postmaster and Lincoln re-appointed him in 1861. More, Jonas was one of the first to suggest Lincoln for the presidency when **Horace Greeley**, the editor of the New York Daily Tribune, went to Quincy in December 1858 to meet with leading Republicans to discuss the election of 1860.

Lincoln and Jewish doctor **Isachar Zacharie**, an English-born chiropodist, met in September 1862 professionally. The President gave him the following testimonial: "Dr. Zacharie has operated on my feet with great success, and considerable addition to my comfort." Zacharie became both friend and emissary for Lincoln. The New York World wrote that the chiropodist "enjoyed Mr. Lincoln's confidence perhaps more than any other private individual." Zacharie also actively solicited the Jewish vote for Lincoln.

Lincoln was exceptionally generous to prominent rabbi **Dr. Morris J. Raphall** of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun. The Rabbi had met Lincoln only once, but asked a favor of the president regarding his son. Raphall told his congregants, Lincoln had "granted it lovingly, because he knew the speaker to be a Jew- because he knew him to be a true servant of the Lord." Lincoln did more for Raphall's son-in-law, **Captain C. M. Levy**. Levy had been distributing special food and clothing to Jewish soldiers in Washington's hospitals. When he was dismissed from service, Lincoln came to his rescue.

Ironically, the Lincoln head penny was designed by Russian-Jewish immigrant **Victor David Brenner** in 1909 to celebrate Lincoln's 100th birthday. Happy birthday, Mr. President.



Defenders of Zion aka: Podcasters

(continued)

I want to point out that we Jews love to debate, on almost any topic. We are a noisy family that can argue, disagree, and debate, while still staying loving and protective. **We do not need to cancel** our relationship with those with whom we have disagreements. When we do keep up our conversations, we manage to find common ground (remember: “Two Jews, three opinions.”). Some of the podcasts I have highlighted are arguments and debates. There are many other Jewish-oriented podcasts that may be equally interesting, but you’ll have to explore those on your own. Just Google “Jewish Podcasts.” Prepare to be captivated and engaged.

Biography of the Month: Rob Reiner

(continued)

All the while, Reiner was one of the film industry’s most passionate Democratic party activists, regularly hosting fundraisers and campaigning for liberal issues. He was co-founder of the American Foundation for Equal Rights, which challenged in court California’s ban on same-sex marriage, Proposition 8. He also chaired the campaign for Proposition 10, a California initiative to fund early childhood development services with a tax on tobacco products.

On December 14, 2025, Reiner, 78, and his wife Michele, 70, were found in their Brentwood, Los Angeles, home, dead from sharp force injuries. The couple’s youngest child, Romy, had gone to the house with her roommate after the Reiners’ massage therapist informed her that the couple had missed their appointment; she discovered her father’s body, but was not aware that her mother was at home, and was later told of her mother’s death. The Los Angeles Fire Department responded to a medical aid call at the residence at 3:38 p.m. PST. Their son **Nick** who had been living with them has been charged with first degree murder.

The Reiners were cremated at Mount Sinai Memorial Park; their remains were given to their son Jake for private disposition.

Reiner (with Sally Struthers, Carroll O’Connor, and Jean Stapleton) as Michael Stivic on *All in the Family*, 1976

Some Jews in U.S. History on President’s Day

(continued)



The most fascinating – and influential – of Lincoln’s Jewish acquaintances was undoubtedly his Jewish chiropodist, **Isachar Zacharie**. A New York newspaper described him as having “a splendid Roman nose, fashionable whiskers, an eloquent tongue, a dazzling diamond breastpin,” and, most important of all for treating a patient with chronically aching feet, “great skill in his profession.”

In 1862, Lincoln heard that Zacharie could boast in his résumé of having had feet of Clay – *Henry Clay*, that is, Lincoln’s personal and political hero. So the President sent for him to see if the chiropodist could alleviate his aching corns. One news-paper joked, “It would seem that all of our past troubles originated not so much with the head [of the nation] but with the feet of the nation.”

Jokes aside, Zacharie worked wonders with Lincoln. Lincoln not only retained Zacharie as his physician, but he also found other ways for him to serve the Union as an unofficial envoy to Jewish communities in the South with an eye toward rebuilding their ties to the Union. Zacharie worked hard for Lincoln’s re-election in 1864, writing to assure the President during the campaign:

The Israelites, with but few exceptions, will vote for you. I understand them well.... I have secured good and trustworthy men to attend to them on Election day. My men have been all the week seeing that their masses are properly registered—so that all will be right.

Zacharie’s efforts predictably aroused a stir among – who else? – his fellow Jews, some of whom took issue with Zacharie’s claim that he could “deliver” the Jewish vote as a bloc. “There is no ‘Jewish vote,’” the editor of the *Jewish Messenger*, **Meyer Isaacs**, wrote angrily to Lincoln, “and if there were it could not be bought.” The fracas threatened to erupt into a political crisis until Lincoln ordered an aide to write a letter assuring Jewish leaders that no one had ever pledged the Jewish vote to the President, and he in turn had offered no inducements to secure it.



Haym Salomon, Jewish Financier, and George Washington

Haym Salomon's (1740 - 1785) life was brief and tumultuous, but his impact on America was great. A Polish-born Jewish businessman, he advanced from a penniless refugee to become one of the most important financiers of the American Revolution.

Risking his fortune, he helped fund General Washington's army, securing loans at rock-bottom prices. After the war was won, Salomon used his own money to help finance America's newly-formed but impoverished government.

Sadly, his generosity was not repaid. It seemed that Congress did not recognize their debt to Salomon, refusing to repay the money they'd borrowed. When Salomon died in poverty at the age of just 45, his family was left unable to reclaim his debt from the government.

In 1975 the U.S. Postal Service issued a stamp hailing Salomon as a "Financial Hero of the American Revolution."

There is a bronze statue in Heald Square in Chicago's Michigan-Wacker Historic District of **George Washington** and the two Revolution financiers **Robert Morris** and **Haym Salomon**.



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

“Around the Rabbi’s Tisch” on Zoom

Thursdays February 5, 12, 19, and 26 7:30 pm



This popular Shir Ami educational series has continued its 5786 season. Come join us for our weekly discussion of Rabbi Vorspan’s selected topics of Jewish interest.

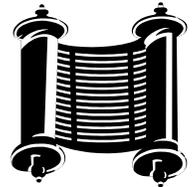
We discuss Jewish texts and current events as they relate to Jewish values and our lives as Jews. This is a unique opportunity to learn and share in an informal format. Rabbi usually starts the Zoom early for chatting.

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 February 28, 10:30 am Torah/Shabbat Study at Schroeder home and on Zoom (parameters above)



Stan Schroeder is continuing his twelfth year of 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 February 28. The Torah portion is *Tetzaveh*, Exodus 27:20 - 30:10. It includes crosssong of the Sea of Reeds. We will also discuss the upcoming holiday of Purim.

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 2026
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 2026

Saturday, January 3 - Birthday and Consecration of Officers
Saturday, January 17 - Anniversary and Linen Shabbat

February 2026

Saturday, February 7 - Birthday
Saturday, February 21 - Anniversary

March 2026

Saturday, March 7 - Birthday
Saturday, March 21 - Anniversary

April 2026

Saturday, April 11 - Birthday
Saturday, April 25 - Anniversary

May 2026

Saturday, May 16 - Birthday
Saturday, May 30 - Anniversary

June 2026

Saturday, June 13 - Birthday
Saturday, June 27 - 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