



Congregation Ahavath Sholom

The Creative Spirit Dwells Here

Friday 14 August 2026 ~ 1st of Elul, 5786

Rosh Hashana LaBehemot

Rosh Chodesh Elul

Parashat Shoftim

Shabbat Shalom,

This Shabbat, we mark Rosh Chodesh Elul, the beginning of the month that leads us toward the High Holy Days. We are now just one month away from Rosh HaShanah.

Elul invites us to begin turning inward—to notice where we have been, to consider who we are becoming, and to begin the work of teshuvah, of returning and renewal.

A New Year for the Animals

This Shabbat also marks Rosh HaShanah LaBehemot — the New Year for Domesticated Animals, one of the four “New Years” described in the Mishnah.

In the days of the Temple, this date marked the beginning of the year for determining the tithe of livestock. While this ancient practice may feel far removed from our lives, its presence on the Jewish calendar offers us an opportunity to think about our relationship with the animals who share our world and our responsibility toward all living creatures.

As we enter Elul and begin examining how we live, perhaps our cheshbon hanefesh—our accounting of the soul—can extend beyond ourselves. How do our choices affect other people? Our communities? The earth? T

Parashat Shoftim: Creating a Just Community

This week we also read Parashat Shoftim, which begins:

Shoftim v'shotrim titen l'cha —

“You shall appoint judges and officials for yourself.”

Shoftim explores leadership and justice: the responsibilities of judges, kings, priests and prophets, along with laws governing witnesses, warfare, cities of refuge and communal responsibility.

Through a Reconstructionist lens, these laws remind us that a just community does not simply happen—we create it together.

Judaism is an evolving religious civilization, and each generation inherits both the wisdom and the responsibility of shaping Jewish communal life. The question is not only Who are our leaders? but also What kind of community are we creating?

Are we listening to one another? Are we making space for different voices? Are we treating one another with dignity? Are our decisions guided by fairness, compassion and the well-being of the whole community?

These feel like particularly meaningful questions as we enter Elul. The work of teshuvah belongs not only to individuals. Communities, too, can reflect, repair, change and renew themselves.

Chazak v'ya'amez libecha — Strengthen your heart and be courageous.

In a beautiful [song](#), Rabbi Deborah Sacks Mintz reflects on the courage it takes to move through the world with chazak v'ya'amez libecha—with strength and courage in our hearts.

As Elul begins, may these words become part of our own spiritual practice.

May we find the courage to look honestly at ourselves.

May we find the strength to listen deeply to one another.

May we enter this season willing to repair what needs repairing, nurture what is precious, and imagine what might yet be possible.

And even amid the darkness and uncertainty of our days, may we strengthen one another as we make our way toward a new year.

Shabbat Shalom and Chodesh Tov,

Rabbi Jennifer Rudin

Please help us prepare for the High Holy Days - Don't Wait - Do these TWO things today!



1. Register for High Holy Day Services

Please use this [link](#) to register for Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur services. It is imperative that everyone who is attending registers.



2. Submit Poetry for the High Holy Days

Submissions due August 15

Please email your submission to Rabbi Jennifer Rudin at RabbiRudinAhavathSholom@gmail.com by August 15. To ensure a fair review process, all submissions will be blinded before being shared with the Poetry Committee.

Preparing for the New Year: Cheshbon HaNefesh

As we enter Elul, I take the practices of cheshbon hanefesh—an accounting of the soul—and teshuvah seriously. I ask myself: In what interactions over the past year was I not my best self, and who was impacted by those moments? When I recognize that I have caused hurt or fallen short of who I hope to be, I try to reach out to those who were affected and begin the work of teshuvah and repair.

This is not easy work. It can be humbling, uncomfortable, and even scary. But we do not have to do it alone.

If you would like support as you engage in your own cheshbon hanefesh and prepare for the new year, please reach out to me. I would be honored to walk this path with you.

— Rabbi Rudin