

October 23, 2025

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance: Ner News for the 250th. Rabbi Soloveichik's first of ten lectures, delivered after services this past Shabbat morning, was excellent. I told you months ago that this year – a confluence of American history and the Jewish story in America featuring the important contributions of Shearith Israel – really has his name written all over it. The lecture was full of fun historical facts and deep thought about the role of Jews and Judaism in America. His next lecture in this series is entitled, "*The Touro Synagogue and America at 250: A Reflection on the Past and Future of American Judaism*" and will be held at Touro Synagogue on Sunday, November 9 (see next paragraph to learn about joining), and the one after that will be back at Shearith Israel on November 15, following Shabbat morning services.

We are just a week away from our visit to Newport, on Nov. 7-9. We would love to have a large NY contingent, so if you can spare the time, please consider joining us. So that we can know if you will be joining us, including for meals, please [sign up here](#).

Fewer than three weeks after our Newport weekend is Thanksgiving. We need your help (both financial and sweat equity) with our annual food pack-a-thon. And we are looking into a multi-year project to help feed New York's hungry. Some of us can't think of a better way for Shearith Israel to epitomize and therefore honor our Nation's **Squintennial**, our **two-and-a-half-cent**, our **Ten-score-fifty**, our **CCL**. This multi-year commitment will cost both money and our precious time. Stay tuned for more details, but even now, if the concept of the challenge moves you, please let us know.

Short Songs and Long Strings. In addition to our ongoing Haftarah song challenge below, our two other open song challenges are:

First, the reinstatement of our Short Song contest. Dan Rose, husband of glad-to-have-you-back Dr. Sandy Rose, is actually a MIHOR, or musician-in-his-own-right (see danrosemusic.com). He has extra street cred. For a short song, Dan suggests:

- [Toy Heart](#), by country singer Bill Monroe. On the internet, the song clocks in at 2:44. It's not the few seconds of the questionable "songs" suggested over the past few weeks, but it does satisfy an "under three minute" cut-off – and this is an actual (and great) song.

Second, recall that Esther Ingber was challenging us to name the first significant use of violins (not fiddles) in a R&R song. Ester suggests

- [There Goes My Baby](#), here sung by The Drifters

The song is said to be the first to make extensive use of strings. And the song dates from 1959, so it beats my Chad & Jeremy, [A Summer Song](#), from 1964.

Name that Haftarah Tune. We are now collecting tunes for the **haftarot** of the first five parshiot: **Bereshit, Noah, Lech Lecha** (this week's haftarah), **Vayeira**, and **Chaya Sarah**. I knew that if we gave this a little time, we would spark the interests of our musical mavens. Sure enough:

For **Haftarah Noah**, David Vorchheimer suggests:

- [Always](#), by Irving Berlin (here is the stirring instrumental)

For **Haftarah Lech Lecha**, Ritual Director/Cantor Jay Harwitt interestingly reports that Randall Thompson wrote a series of vocal pieces entitled

- [The Peaceable Kingdom](#), one of which begins with:

*Have ye not known? Have ye not heard?
Hath it not been told you from the beginning?*

Jay continues: "That's actually a direct quote from the Haftarah for *Va'etchanan* (Isaiah 40:21), but the first two questions also appear in verse 28 in ... **Haftarah Lech Lecha.**"

Also from that same **Haftarah**, verse 41:8 uses the phrase, *Abraham, my friend*, so Jay offers:

- [Friendship](#), here by Cole Porter; and I offer
- [You've Got a Friend](#), here by Carole King

Happily, Andrew Druck is back (and we were happy to see him at Rabbi Soloveichik's Shabbat lecture). Andrew observes that **Haftarah Lech Lecha** "focuses on G'd's love and support for those who believe in G-d. There's a sense of optimism in what is possible if the people trust in G-d". Andrew therefore suggests the following eclectic list of great R&R songs (among others):

- [Loves Me Like a Rock](#), as sung by Paul Simon;
- [My Love Will Not Let You Down](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen [live!];
- [I'm a Believer](#), as sung by the Monkees;
- [Georgia on My Mind](#), here by Ray Charles; and
- [I Can't Stop Loving You](#), also by Ray Charles

These are the makings of a terrific list. The Haftarah are accessible to everyone, so everyone should have a suggestion or two. Let's do it!

Pesah-Succot Goodbye. In saying goodbye to Succot and even to the Jewish month of Tishrei, Sarah Gross, our Office Manager and Financial Associate, offers a thoughtful and nicely stated insight. Sarah says:

The two holidays [of Pesah and Succot] also kind of act as foils for each other, particularly indicated by the ritual items that symbolize each holiday. Pesah is usually seen as the stricter holiday, with the

potential for something being considered hametz fairly easily. The succah, on the other hand, has many options for defining what makes a kosher succah.

Tractate Zevachim and the Truth of the Matter. The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week learning pages 42-48 of Tractate Zevachim. These pages complete Chapter 4 and, on page 47a, begin Chapter 5.

This part of Chapter 4 includes an insight that applies to many other parts of the Talmud and deserves our brief consideration. A little background. At the bottom of page 44b, the Talmud draws a parallel between a peace offering and a sin offering. The Talmud says that, just as a priest's error in a peace offering (Claude Nadaf feels that last week I didn't make clear that we were talking about a peace offering – apologies) does not render the sacrifice *piggul* unless the error related to the part of the service that took place on the external altar (rather than the internal one), so too that a priest's error in connection with a sin offering does not render the sacrifice *piggul* unless the error related to the part of the service that took place on the external altar (again, rather than the internal one). The gemarra then quotes several Sages who ultimately determine what the (final) halacha or law is.

At that point, at the top of page 45a, Rava questions why the Talmud would be finalizing the legal issue rather than just laying out and discussing the various options. Rava's question is based on the fact that the law in this area can be performed only in the Temple, which was not and is not in existence and will not be until the Messiah comes to rebuild it. Abaye is astonished at Rava's question:

הלכתא למשיחא!? אמר ליה אבאי: אלא מעתה, כל שחיטת קדשים לא לתני – הלכתא למשיחא הוא! אלא דרוש וקבל שזכר.

Does one issue a halakha for the messianic period, when the Temple will be rebuilt? Abaye said to him: If that is so, that such halakhot are not taught, let the tanna not teach all the halakhot of the slaughter of sacrificial animals, [i.e., then there really is no need to learn any of Tractate Zevachim], as it is entirely a halakha for the messianic period. Rather, one studies these halakhot due to the principle of: Study Torah and receive reward, i.e., one is rewarded for the study of Torah regardless of its practical applicability.

What these two Amoraim are discussing has occurred to all of us, I would bet, with increased frequency as we get more and more detailed in the legal discussion. Indeed, that very same question can be asked about much of the Talmud. Rava is surprised that the Talmud would go all the way to making a legal judgment on an issue that cannot have practical implications until the Temple is rebuilt. And Abaye says, well, if you are surprised at that, then why should we be learning Tractate Zevachim at all – *all* of it has no practical implications until the Temple is rebuilt. Abaye's answer is the one the Jewish people have used for two thousand years – and counting: We study Torah to relate to what we as a community have done for millennia, that is, we study for the “reward” of being part of the J-Continuum. That is reward enough, even though we cannot actually put the legal reasoning into practice at this time. (We will accept other rationales, too, if you have them.)

These are deep and beautiful truths even before considering the brain benefits of the study of the Talmud. For brain benefits, See Under South Korea's obsession with the Talmud. Tim Alper (JTA),

Talmud-inspired Learning Craze Sweeps South Korea, Times of Israel, Jan. 15, 2019. For soul (not Seoul) benefits, stay with us as we discuss our weekly Talmudic tidbits right here.

Squintennial Books. When I was trying to wax enthusiastic about Mark Twain's travel book, [The Innocents Abroad](#), Michael Schulder recommended Twain's [Roughing It](#). So I read it, since sharing books is one of the great things about our (any?) community. The book is "semi-autobiographic", which to me means that it doesn't matter if the diverting facts are true, just so long as the look, tone, and feel are. *Roughing It* is about Twain's time out West during the silver and gold rushes and, toward the end of the book, his travels to Hawaii+/- . The book is marvelous. Twain is as funny a writer as I've met (Peter DeVries funny, let's just say). But in beauty and depth and insight his writing knows few equals also. His ability to perceive and penetrate seems unparalleled.

The excerpt below from *Roughing It* isn't funny. Rather, as we here in the North-East are experiencing a change of seasons, the excerpt beautifully hits the mark (Chapter 56, p. 335):

No land with an unvarying climate can be very beautiful. The tropics are not, for all the sentiment wasted on them. They seem beautiful at first, but sameness impairs the charm by and by. Change is the handmaiden Nature requires to do her miracles with. The land that has four well-defined seasons, cannot lack beauty, or pall with monotony. Each season brings a world of enjoyment and interest in the watching of its unfolding, its gradual, harmonious development, its culminating graces – and just as one begins to tire of it, it passes away and a radical change comes, with new witcheries and new glories in its train. And I think that to one in sympathy with nature, each season, in its turn, seems the loveliest.

For another Twain travel book, I also just finished [A Tramp Abroad](#). It tries even less to be factual. But it is funny (deeply ironic in places) and clever and wonderfully written as well. It is hard to excerpt truly funny passages. But it's not hard to quote truly beautiful ones, such as this short line found in Chapter 34 (p. 232):

[E]ven the finest scenery loses incalculably when there is no one to enjoy it with.

Twain was a great writer. The editions I got of *Roughing It* and *A Tramp Abroad* were published by SeaWolf Press on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Twain's death in 1910. The editions contain hundreds of original drawings and sketches. They are terrific, and I would be happy to loan my copies. The book jackets for both seem right in citing Twain as being "America's greatest humorist and father of American literature."

For our Squintennial celebration, is anyone interested in a Twain Book Club, to try to get through his works in the coming year? I'm game.

In this, our **Year of Allegiance**, let us couple our collective **commitment** with a prayer to The Almighty, **Hatzlich'ana, help us succeed.**

Louis Solomon, Parnas