

November 13, 2025

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. Ner News for the 250th. Our weekend at Touro Synagogue was fabulous. Forty of us prayed together Friday evening, enjoyed Rabbi Soloveichik's Friday Night Lights presentation, and close to 35 shared a communal Shabbat dinner. Kudos to R' Gershon Klapper for arranging excellent meals Friday night and Shabbat lunch and for a hundred other things he does for Touro Synagogue and the Newport Jewish community.

The rest of Shabbat and Sunday in Newport were just as special. Rabbi Soloveichik's talk on Sunday and Magevet's a capella performance were spectacular. We are going to plan more Shabbatot at Newport so that we can continue to assist the indefatigable people leading Congregation Ahavath Israel (Paul Tobak, Jim Herstoff, and a great many others) to revive and sustain Touro Synagogue. It is truly a gem of American and Jewish heritage and deserves all the collective attention we can give it.

Don't forget Rabbi Soloveichik's next lecture in our **CCL Series**, "Washington's Artillery on Shearith Israel's Land: The Battle for New York, 1776" – this coming Shabbat morning, after services.

Best Music/Lyrics Combos. The recent revival of our Short Song Challenge has been fun. Yet if we are thinking about reviving other past challenges, there is one in particular that I think never got as much attention as it deserved. Last year, when we were sharing **GOAT Songs**, both longest and shortest, I jammed in a contest for the most beautiful lines or lyrics coupled with great music. My suggestions then included:

- [MacArthur Park](#), written by the truly gifted Jimmy Webb and sung by Richard Harris (see my [email of 9/15/21](#) – Webb also wrote *Up Up and Away* and *Wichita Lineman*). As I've said, Webb wrote lyrics about love that Shakespeare would envy. *Lineman* for example contains:

*And I need you more than want you/
And I want you for all time*

And *MacArthur Park* contains beautiful poetry and then the *coup de gras*:

*And after all the loves of my life/
After all the loves of my life/
You'll still be the one.*

- [I'll Never Find Another You](#), by the Australian group, The Seekers. Here is just one of the stanzas:

*There is always someone
For each of us, they say
And you'll be my someone
Forever and a day
I could search the whole world over*

*Until my life is through
But I know I'll never find another you*

We need more of these. So we are officially (re)opening **Best Music/Lyrics Combos**. Let's hear from you – but they need to be as good as mine above, or feh, don't bother.

Name that Haftarah Tune. We are now collecting tunes for the **haftarot** of the first five parshiot: **Bereshit, Noah, Lech Lecha, Vayeira,** and **Chaye Sarah** (this week's haftarah). And today we are opening the lines for the next seven haftarot to complete Sefer Bereshit: **Parshiot Toldot, Vayetze, Vayishlach, Vayeshev, Miketz, Vayigash,** and **Vayechi.**

In **Parashat Chaye Sarah**, we read about the succession from Abraham and the loyalty of the next generation to Abrahamic principles. In the haftarah, we read about the succession from King David and the loyalty of the next generation to Davidic principles. In the haftarah, the prophet Nathan tells Batsheba of a plot by Adonija to seize the throne from David. Batsheba, naturally, wants her son Solomon to succeed David.

Jay Harwitt says *Haftarah Chaye Sarah* can rightly be titled, "The Palace Intrigue Haftarah." So Jay offers:

- [*I Stole the Prince*](#), from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers*

Michael Lewyn (a new star in our song suggestions) notes that the haftarah discusses the "(dis)honor of Adonija" and therefore suggests:

- [*I Just Can't Wait to be King*](#), from the *Lion King*

And since Zadok is mentioned in the haftarah, Michael suggests:

- [*Zadok the Priest*](#), by Handel, most recently from King Charles's coronation (see the video)

Andrew Druck, too, picks up on "the level of intrigue and drama in this haftarah". He therefore suggests:

- [*Suspicious Minds*](#), as sung by Elvis Presley
- [*Rebel Rebel*](#), as sung by David Bowie
- [*A New Argentina and Dice Are Rolling*](#), from *Evita* [among my personal favorites – great songs and about the greatest set of songs in a musical, imho]
- [*Rumour Has It*](#), as sung by Adele

Aren't these suggestions fantastic? They truly deepen our appreciation of the haftarah. Read the haftarah; join in.

Why Ritual Is Required. This week, the worldwide Daf Yomi learning cycle is studying pages 56-62 of Tractate Zevachim. These pages are in the Sixth Chapter of the Tractate. Much of the discussion involves the details of the places in the Temple where sacrifices were made.

Let's look at the discussion on pages 58b-59b. Those pages discuss the placement of various of the necessary items inside the Sanctuary and around the altar. Upon entering, we learn that the *kohen* always turned right (hence the custom to turn right/show right when we raise and revolve the Torah before/after Torah reading). The question arises, though, where was the wash basin kept for the *kohanim* to wash before they performed a sacrifice? The Talmud takes a lot of time trying to answer that question. It finally apparently adopts the view of Rabbi Yossi HaGlili as to the placement of the wash basin.

Rather than being bored or distracted by this discussion, I think we should be shocked – or at least stunned, or, ok, mildly interested by the discussion, since it prompts the following question. How is it that the Sages didn't know the answer to the empirical question of the placement of the objects in the Sanctuary? Indeed, Rabbi Yossi HaGlili was a second generation *tanah* and appears to have lived during or right after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in ~70 C.E. So why all the dialogue, debate, deliberation? Didn't they know? And to make an even sharper point of it, in one of the very next discussions, the Talmud asks a related question, and the great sage Rav – who lived a little later but who is also considered a *tana* in some respects – actually (on page 59a) says there is a Biblical verse that would clarify the matter but that he “forgot” what it was.

My hypothesis is that the basic set up of the tabernacle was forgotten, even in the short span of years or at most decades after it had stood and was known to all for 420 years (that is how long the Second Temple stood, right?). With the destruction of the Temple, there was no tangible even meta-ritual that set things up the way they were, and since that was not done it was quickly forgotten.

For centuries, the layout was common knowledge – certainly common knowledge among *kohanim* and *levyim*. I'm using the term *common knowledge* the way Steven Pinker uses it in his just-published book, [*When Everyone Knows That Everyone Knows*](#). It's a great book, Pinker at his brilliant, insightful, and fun best (has anyone else read it? – please weigh in). Based only on emanations from this and other of his books, I suspect that Pinker doesn't have enough interest in or belief in the importance of religion to analyze religious rituals. But they do fit the paradigm of “common knowledge” as he and apparently other social scientists use the term: conduct that is open and notorious (as lawyers use that word, “notorious” does not have any negative connotation), and seen by others as open and notorious, and the sight by others is in turn seen by those doing the conduct as open and notorious. The ad-infinity feedback leads to baseline beliefs that communities see and rely on as bedrock, or true, or meaningful, or worthy of emulation and repetition.

How often are we asked, why does Shearith Israel place such a premium on doing things essentially the same way we have done them, in some cases for 372 years? Why do we mention with such reverence and even pride that we have been doing this or that for hundreds of years? We find written descriptions of the way services were conducted hundreds of years ago. They are identical to the way we still conduct them. Think about when Ezra Stiles describes the Tisha B'Ab service practiced in our Newport Synagogue around the time of the Revolution (it would not be renamed Touro Synagogue

until about a century later). The description matches our current service nearly exactly (**see my email of [July 15, 2021](#)**), and we are proud of that.

When we at Shearith Israel continue practices centuries old, we openly attest to their still-current vitality and merit, and our attestation prompts others to understand that we are sincere in venerating the past practices. What we are engaged in is “common knowledge” as Pinker would characterize it.

Hence the tragedy of the Temple’s destruction (and why this week’s study of the Talmudic text discussing it is so important). With the destruction, the set up of the Tabernacle was no longer common knowledge. It therefore lost the power that public awareness of the set up gave it.

Twain for the 250th. I’m happy to announce that we have several intrepid souls willing to try to include *Reading Twain* as part of our 250th celebration: Aura Bijou, Laury Frieber, Michael Schulder. I’m in too. This exclusive club is not exclusive, by the way; we would love to have more participants. Next week I will assign our first couple of books, but as with most things, if anyone else wants that job, it’s yours!

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