

December 11, 2025

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. Ner News Celebrating Our 250th. Here is [a link](#) to what's up. The Rabbi's next lecture is on December 20. Last Shabbat's talk was a *tour de force*.

The Gelman family is sponsoring the kiddush this Shabbat to celebrate the bat mitzvah of daughter Hella. Many thanks to Edie and Michael and congratulations as well to still-growing brother Ness. Michael was one of the studied, steady, sturdy physicians who as part of the Covid-19 Working Group kept us safe during the crisis (remember, this weekly missive started 5+ years ago as a way to keep the Congregation informed and cohesive during those disorienting times; now it's still about community and mostly fun!). We hope—aside from the occasional visit and this major lifecycle event-- the Gelmans return from their sojourn in South Florida soon.

Faith for Food. Our Food Annex, funded by us and other faith organizations and operated by Masbia (until more volunteers are needed), began operating this week.



The Food Annex is now serving 30 families in Manhattan who are in need. This is a blessing – a tremendous one for those families. But we are not nearly feeding all the needy, even in Manhattan. We can get there, with your help.

Hanukkah begins Sunday night. Wouldn't a donation to this cause be just the way to honor the holiday? Even just taking a small percentage of the amounts we spend on the gifts we exchange would make a real difference. To contribute, [click here](#).

Two Timing Treats. I'm sure you noticed both of them. First, last Thursday night, on December 4, we began saying during the *Amida* the (longer) *Barech Alenu* prayer for (local) weather and sustenance. We have two vintage plaques to remind us. Here is one:



We have discussed in the past the uniqueness of a Jewish prayer, in the sacred and ancient *Amida* no less, that keys off of the solar calendar. I'm sure you remember, but it is really interesting, and so if by chance you forgot, or didn't read my long exegesis two years ago, here is a link to my [email of Dec. 14, 2023](#).

Second, note the curio that the shortest day of the year – meaning the day with the fewest number of daylight hours and minutes – does not coincide with the earliest Shabbat or even with a day in the same week. This year, last Shabbat sunset was 4:28 pm; this Shabbat (Saturday night) it is 4:29 pm. That indicates that sunset is already getting later. And by the time of the Solstice, December 21 this year, sunset will be even later – indeed it will be 4:31 pm. So we've turned the corner and are heading into later sunsets weeks before the Solstice. It's obvious why this interesting phenomenon occurs, and so I don't need to take up space explaining it, though the judges will part with one point each for the first two people who get it right.

Name that Haftarah Tune. We are now collecting tunes for the final seven **haftarot** in Sefer Bereshit: **Parshiot Toldot, Vayetze, Vayishlach, Vayeshev** (this week's parasha), **Miketz, Vayigash, and Vayechi**.

Claude Nadaf starts with last week's **Haftarah to Parashat Vayishlach**. Claude feels that the discussion of Edom – which as we saw last week is a consistent theme three weeks in a row – should be likened to the enmity that Israel has for Amalek. I'm less sure. Claude also notes the haftarah's reference to the repopulation of the *south* of Israel gave Jews hope for thousands of years that, ultimately, as we have today, Jews are repopulating the Negev. Nice.

Claude offers the following suggestions for songs appropriate to Israel or to making aliya:

- [*J'ai Quitté Mon Pays, I Left My Country*](#), here by Enrico Macias (Claude's note: "A French-Jewish singer born in Algeria who has come to embody the nostalgia many North African Jews feel for their homelands"); and
- [*The Aliyah Song*](#), here by Benzion Klatzko ("A contemporary song that specifically addresses the theme of immigration to Israel")

For this week's **Haftarah to Parashat Vayeshev**, I am struck, again, by how different-yet-similar the haftarah is from its associated parasha. The parasha contains two powerful stories: about Joseph and his exploits (the Technicolor Dreamcoat, being left for mostly-dead, being sold, Potiphar and his wife), and, to a lesser extent, but no less powerful, the story of Judah and Tamar (Judah showing a moral majesty after Tamar shows him his moral failing). The haftarah, taken from the Prophet Amos 2:6–3:8, has no narrative or story but instead directly speaks of the moral corruption of the Jewish People at the time – and the consequences of that immorality. I wonder if the Sages who chose this haftarah for this parasha wanted to show that the stories of moral turpitude of Bereshit were being repeated a thousand years later – and so the redemptive quality of moral rectitude shown in the Torah (demonstrated by both Joseph and Judah) could and should repeat itself too.

If anyone is buying this so far, then why don't I have 20-30 suggestions for songs? Mine include:

- [*Handle Me With Care*](#), by the Traveling Wilburys
- The Opening Musical Sequence from [*Down Cemetery Road*](#), which may be by Laura Karpman

Zevachim 84-90: Two Chapters. In the worldwide Daf Yomi learning cycle, we are this week studying pages 84-90 of Tractate Zevachim. Page 83 begins the Ninth Chapter, and page 89a begins the Tenth, until page 92a. Therefore, here is a quick word on each of Chapters Nine and Ten:

The Ninth Chapter of Tractate Zevachim is as different from the Eighth as the Eighth was from the preceding chapters. Chapter Eight was about how admixtures influence or even determine sacrificial offerings. We discussed permutations over the past several weeks. The Ninth is about sacrifices being put on and taken off the Altar itself. In part, the Talmud is adumbrating the last part of the verse in the Torah (Shemot 29:37):

... וְקִדְשָׁתָּ אֹתוֹ וְהָיָה הַמִּזְבֵּחַ קֹדֶשׁ קִדְשֵׁי קִדְשִׁים כֹּל-הַנִּגָּע בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ יִקְדָּשׁ:

... and the altar shall become most holy; whatever touches the altar shall become consecrated.

To summarize unhelpfully, some sacrifices or parts of sacrifices need to stay on the Altar once there. Some *must* be put back on if they come off. Some *can't* be put back on again if they fall off. I tried to fashion a mnemonic for all the ups and downs. I failed. But you can think of it as something like the nursery rhyme, [*The Grand Old Duke of York*](#).

Short Chapter 10 is different yet again. It is titled **כָּל הַתְּדִיר**, or that which is more regularly frequent. The short chapter contains principles such as sacrifices that are more regularly frequent are done first; that sacrifices that are more pure or that include more demonstrable conduct are done prior to others; etc.

I looked with care at how the Chapter decides which comes first, a sacrifice that is more regularly frequent and one that is purer. The discussion on pages 91a/91b is challenging in this very respect; it asks that very question but never comes up with a comparison to force or decide the issue.

The Chapter does give a nice summary of the types of sacrifices that we have been discussing thus far in the Tractate. The only observation I would make is that, in answer to the fair question *why* is the more frequent done first, the Talmud brings support from more than one Biblical source. For those comfortable with Godel's Incompleteness Theorem ([see my email of Oct. 20, 2022](#)), you understand why the Talmud needs to go to an "outside" source to answer that question.

Siyyum HaTwain. Our Rabbinic Intern, Baruch-Lev Kelman, thinks of our communal undertaking to read Mark Twain's books (at least those published during his lifetime) as a *Siyyum HaTwain*, or an effort to finish an entire corpus of this gifted writer and humorist. BLK is riffing on *Siyyum Ha-Shas*, which is used to describe the celebration when we finish the entire corpus of the Talmud (the fabulous event held at MetLife Stadium about every 7.5 years). I like the title – not as much as I liked my own, *Where the Twain Shall Meet* – but let's go with BLK's unless someone has something even more catchy and funny. Suggestions?

We already have takers for about two-thirds of the books. There are only a few left. Sign-up now, fast, or be left bereft of a Twain of your own.

1860s

1. ***The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and other stories (1865) -- Lou Solomon***
2. ***The Innocents Abroad (1869) – Michael Schulder***

1870s

3. ***Roughing It (1872) – Aura Bijou***
4. ***The Gilded Age (1873) – Lou Solomon***
5. ***Sketches New and Old (1875) – Francine Alfandary***
6. ***The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876) – Rima Raynes***
7. ***A Tramp Abroad (1880) – Bob Starkand***

1880s

8. ***The Prince and the Pauper (1881) – Lou Solomon***
9. ***Life on the Mississippi (1883) – Michael Schulder***
10. ***Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884–85) – Michael Schulder***
11. ***A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1889) – Faith Fogelman***

1890s

12. ***The American Claimant (1892) –***
13. ***Tom Sawyer Abroad (1894) – Laury Frieber***
14. ***The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894) – Warren Stern***
15. ***Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc (1896) – Baruch-Lev Kelman***

16. *Following the Equator (1897) –*
17. *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg (1899) –*

1900s

18. *A Double Barrelled Detective Story (1902) –*
19. *What Is Man? (1906) –*
20. *The \$30,000 Bequest and Other Stories (1906) –*
21. *Christian Science (1907) –*
22. *Is Shakespeare Dead? (1909) –*
23. *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven (1909) –*

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