

December 18, 2025

Dear Shearith Israel family,

***Our Year of Allegiance.*** You don't need to hear from me about our broken hearts – another terror attack on Jews, this one at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Australia. But could we really share our weekly thoughts without mentioning it? Our Torah and Talmud give us a way to view this unspeakable tragedy – see below.

***Ner News for Our 250th.*** The Rabbi will continue his series of masterful talks. This Shabbat's title, *The Hessians & the Founding of Wall Street: An 'Only in America' Story.*

***Hanukkah.*** Too many words would spoil this solitary moment of beauty – our ancient (by American standards) Hanukkiah cradling the first night's wick, doubling as a memorial candle:



And if ours is the oldest, here is what passes for the largest, certainly in Manhattan, at the Grand Army Plaza at 59<sup>th</sup> Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue:



Remember that we take out three Torah scrolls on Shabbat. Other than on Simchat Torah, it happens maybe once or twice a year.

To cap off a special Shabbat morning with three Torah scrolls and the Rabbi's special lecture, we will also enjoy a special Hanukkah kiddush in honor of our Rabbinic Intern, Baruch-Lev Kelman. There's still time to join the growing list of sponsors/BLK fans — [click here](#).

***Faith for Food.*** We succeeded in our second week of this collaborative venture among various houses of worship and Masbia to fund, staff, and deploy a Food Annex on our Paved Paradise. Last week over 30 families got needed food; this week, 38 deliveries were made with an additional 20 families who were scheduled to come pick up the food bundles. Sadly, the very cold day deterred some pick-ups. And not only has Masbia created an informative video ([link here](#)), and not only did CNN cover the kick-off nicely ([link here](#)); the Yiddish press carried a great article that congregant Naftali Friedman

(with the help of his first cousin נפתלי Goldenberg in Kiryas Joel) so helpfully found and then translated for us:

*A Yiddish radio [website](#) interviewed Rabbi Alexander Rapaport, Executive Director of Masbia, the kosher soup kitchen and food pantry network, about its new partnership with Congregation Shearith Israel to open a new food pantry annex on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Rabbi Rapaport, described “a very unique kehilla with a beautiful beis medrash (Synagogue & Torah center) on the Upper West Side called “Shairis Yisroel” (Shearith Israel), a “Sephardische sheel” (Sephardic Synagogue) that has a lot of history and “ah goldene ahroyn koydesh” (a golden hechal). The kehilla was the first to celebrate Thanksgiving as they believe it’s a “Yiddeshe zachen” (Jewish thing) to say “yasher koyach” (chazak ubaruch) to the Aybishte (Hashem) for Jewish life in America. Rabbi Rapaport is very excited about the expansion of working together from the single day of Thanksgiving to the whole year. It’s a “shyneh zisse zach” (nice, sweet, thing) to help the community this way. “Tizku Lemitzvois” (may we merit to fulfill commandments).*

We are asking Hatan Torah Steve Beispel to translate the blurb into Ladino.

Here is a link to help support the project – [click here](#). Seven congregants and friends have already donated more than \$10k. Please help us sustain this unquestionably worthwhile—but costly—commitment, and may you merit in many mitzvot.

**[They Got Nothin’ on Us](#).** SM Rosenberg, our Communications Associate, Programs Coordinator, and WIHOR, gave us *squintennial* as a genius shortening of the cumbersome *semiquincentennial*. The Somerset Patriots, the Double A baseball club affiliated with the Yankees, should have asked us before trying to fit the ugly, seven-syllable, 19-letter monstrosity [on their jerseys](#).

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

For last week’s **Haftarah for Parashat Vayeshev**, Andrew Druck notes that both Joseph’s brothers and all of Israel will reap ill-rewards for ill-deeds. So he makes some great suggestions:

- [No Way Out](#), as sung by the Jefferson Starship (good song, weird video); and
- [Nowhere To Run](#), as sung by Martha Reeves and the Vandellas

Were it not Hanukkah this Shabbat, this week’s **Haftarah for Parashat Miketz** would recount the famous episode exhibiting King Solomon’s wisdom, from Melachim (Kings) I 3:15–4:1. Two women claim to have birthed the same baby, and King Solomon gives custody to the woman who would rather give up the child entirely rather than seeing him cut in two, which was King Solomon’s provisional solution to see who the real mother was. For this, Andrew Druck likes the following (he is really good at this):



- [\*Baby Love\*](#), as sung by the Supremes
- [\*Where Did Our Love Go\*](#), as sung by the Supremes (the song begins "Baby, baby, baby don't leave me Ooh, please don't leave me all by myself")
- [\*Who Do You Love\*](#), as sung by Bo Diddley
- [\*All or Nothing at All\*](#), as sung by Frank Sinatra
- [\*Court and Spark\*](#), as sung by Joni Mitchell

The **Haftarah for Shabbat Hanukkah I** is taken from Zechariah 2:14–4:7. Menorah metaphors greet us, but so does the real truth of this holiday:

לֹא בְחֵיל וְלֹא בְכֹחַ כִּי אִם בְּרוּחִי אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת

*Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord of Hosts.*

My suggestion for this Haftarah is therefore:

- [\*Hallelujah\*](#), here by Leonard Cohen
- [\*Bridge Over Troubled Water\*](#), by Simon & Garfunkel
- [\*The Dangling Conversation\*](#), also by Simon & Garfunkel

**Zevachim, Hanukkah, and Tragedy of Bondi Beach.** The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying pages 91-97 of Tractate Zevachim. Most of these pages are in Chapter 11, which begins on page 92a. Based on juxtaposed verses in Sefer Vayikrah (6:17-22), the main Mishnaot in this Chapter address seemingly unrelated topics: the need to clean off blood of a sin or forgiveness offering that spatters on a garment worn by the priest; and the need to shatter (if earthenware) or purge (if metal) any vessel in which a sacrificial offering is cooked. The topics seem unrelated because the blood spatter would appear to be inadvertent and unwanted, whereas the cooking is essential to the sacrificial process and therefore wanted. Spattered blood seems to be a necessary byproduct of repairing the world through the sin offering, but so is purifying the vessels that did nothing other than what they were intended to do.

Is that the same message of Hanukkah, which Rabbi Soloveichik explained during his marvelous class last Shabbat afternoon? He was discussing the passage in Tractate Avodah Zarah (8a). The Talmud there tells the story of Adam, who sees daylight shortening in the eight days preceding the Winter Solstice, then sees the daylight starting to lengthen in the eight days after the Winter Solstice. Adam concludes that *both* are part of the Divine plan and celebrates both the darkness and the light. Darkness is an indispensable part of the world that also includes light, not just its antithesis.

No feeling human being will reasonably try to suggest comprehension of unspeakable horror befalling innocent people going to a beach to celebrate Hanukkah. We all know that evil must be tolerated for there to be free will, which is at the very center of our humanity as ennobled by our religion. But that reality does little to stop the ache. We need to know as well what the Torah and Talmud teach: that an essential part of expiating sin is needing to clean spattered blood; needing to break and repair or purify

vessels that did nothing but what they were supposed to do; and that darkness is as much an affirmative creation of the Divine as is light.

We weep. Bondi Beach joins the innumerable number of other places that Jews will forever associate with the horror of senseless evil. We weep, but we try to [carry on](#), and [carry on](#), and [carry on](#).

**For Whom the Book Towles.** In our email of [June 8, 2023](#), we discussed how excellent was the Amor Towles's [A Gentleman in Moscow](#), originally a recommendation from book maven Debby Sondheim. Towles published a book of short stories last year, titled [Table for Two](#), and Beth and I read them to each other. I have to say, we didn't love them. They don't pack the punch of a short story but also don't have the development of a novel. Some are cloying and heavy-handed. The effort in the last (novella length) story to achieve a *film noir* effect failed.

While in the middle of the short stories, Beth and I separately read Towles's novel, [Rules of Civility](#). (NOTE: Read *Rules of Civility* before reading the last story in *Table for Two*; that last story is about one of the characters in *Rules of Civility*.) *Rules of Civility* is very good, and it's a great New York story. (Beth loved it; it's a New Yorker's treasure.) I also finished [Lincoln Highway](#), Towles' other popular read. Except for the disappointing even dislikable last part of the book including the ending, it too is a good book, but to me it is certainly a book for and about adolescents/young adults.

What do you make of this? I have a hypothesis that Towles writes better about young people than about adults. But Towles is a real talent, imho, and training some of that talent on New York was marvelous. Who else has read these? Comments most welcome?

**Siyyum HaTwain.** A full list of books and readers/reporters will be published next week.

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