

January 1, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. Happy 2026! Last week, after I mentioned that we were using the music from [See, the Conqu'ring Hero Comes](#) from Handel's Judas Maccabaeus during Hanukkah, I received a great note from Professor Jerome Alain Chanes. Debunking my speculation that pressing the great tune into service was somehow the province of our Western Sephardic sister synagogue in London, Professor Chanes says he's been using the Handel's "*nigun*" for more than six-plus decades, for "*Adir Adireinu*" during a most Ashkenaz holiday *Musaf* service. And far from its being a Western Sephardic appropriation, he says that his father, Manuel Bar-Yaakov, a pure-bred Litvak, had been using it even earlier than that and may even have been the first to use it. Lesson learned!

The Tenth of Tebet With No Tenth. This past Tuesday was the Tenth of Tevet, a communal fast commemorating the commencement of the siege of Jerusalem leading to the destruction of the First Temple in ~586 B.C. It's the shortest of the fasts. We failed to get a minyan for shacharit morning services but did have a lovely minyan, with tefillin, in the afternoon. These are hard weeks to get minyan. If you can spare even one minyan a week, it would make all the difference.

Touro and the Two-Fiftieth. Updating two of the several ventures we are planning for Touro Synagogue with our partner Cong. Ahavath Israel for this year:

First, several of us have responded with good and bad weekends between May and November 2026, when some of us can plan to go to Newport together for a weekend. Send in clear good and bad choices so that we can try to accommodate as many as we can.

Second, our *Touro Conference on Religious Liberty* is coming into focus. We are inviting other faith partners for something like a day-long program, likely in May or June 2026. Stay tuned for details – and it wouldn't be a sin were you to volunteer to help plan.

Finally, thank you to Warren Stern for catching that last week I failed to attach [Albert Rosenblatt's poem](#) - a response to Longfellow's last line in his poem [The Jewish Cemetery at Newport](#). Apologies.

Faith for Food. Week # 4 saw Masbia distributing food to 56 families from our Food Annex. The numbers are increasing every week. We are growing from strength to strength.

Please also see [this link](#). Here we acknowledge the other faith organizations that have already signed on to help Masbia and Shearith Israel and we list our first responders – people in our community who have already sent in funds to get this program off the ground. Thank you all, deeply. We intend to add more names as people continue to donate. May we have thousands of names soon! BTW: It's January 1st – what a great way to start the new Gregorian calendar year: donating money to help feed our neighbors in need; [click here](#).

Name that Haftarah Tune. We are now opening the collection box for tunes for the first five **Haftarot for the Parshiot in Sefer Shemot: Shemot, Va'era, Bo, Beshalach, and Yitro.**

This coming Shabbat we complete **Sefer Bereshit** with the reading of **Parashat Vayechi**. The **Haftarah for Parashat Vayechi** is taken from Kings 2:1-12 (last week's **Haftarah for Parashat Vayigash** was taken from Ezekiel 37:15-38). This week's haftarah treats the succession from King David to King Solomon – as the parasha itself treats the succession from Jacob to his sons. The haftarah is full of admonition – that Solomon should follow in his father's path of righteousness.

Andrew Druck has a number of suggestions, meet for the task in his artistic even inspired sort of way:

- [Letter to You](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [License to Kill](#), as sung by Tom Petty (Dylan wrote it)
- [Murder Incorporated](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [Who's Gonna be the Last to Die](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [Forever Young](#), as sung by Bob Dylan

A Whole Other Way to See Things. Dr. Sandy Rose sees songs as epitomizing particular Biblical characters. This is not our approach this year, but who knows, maybe it's a teaser of challenges to come. And it's an inspired approach regardless. Here is Sandy's take; the songs are great (the litany of Popular Standard Absolute Greats is a huge pick-me-up – give a listen):

- For Abraham: [My One and Only Love](#), here by Coltrane and Hartman
- For our Prophets of Consolation: [The Best Is Yet To Come](#), here by the Great Sinatra
- For Hagar, [You Better Go Now](#), here by Billie Holiday
- For Sarah, [They All Laughed](#), here by Ella Fitzgerald
- For the Angels, [Angel Eyes](#), here by the Jeff Healey Band
- For Abraham and Sarah, [Come On-a My House](#), here by Rosemary Clooney
- For Isaac, [Let's Call the Whole Thing Off](#), here by Ella and Louis Armstrong
- For Hagar, [Mean To Me](#), here by Billie Holiday

The Debate Over Israel's Sanctity Is Ancient – and Unresolved. This week, the global Daf Yomi learning cycle is discussing pages 105-111 of Tractate Zevachim. Chapter 13 of that Tractate begins on 106 and runs to the bottom of page 112a. Like Chapter 12, this Chapter discusses where sacrifices may be brought and, more technically, how one deals with sacrifices where only a part of the necessary conduct was done where it was supposed to be done. Virtually all of the Biblical basis for the discussion in these current pages can be found in Vayikra, Ch. 17 v.1-9.

On page 107b, a debate ensues that is repeated elsewhere in the Talmudic corpus as well. It begins as a dispute between two famous Amoraim. R' Yochanan says that someone who makes an offering outside the Temple courtyard is liable, even though the Temple was long ago destroyed. Raish Lakish says that the destruction of the Temple ended that particular prohibition. The phrase they both use relates to whether the sanctity of the Temple area remains even after the Temple was destroyed. R' Yochanan holds that the Temple's sanctification was both for its time *and* forever into the future. Raish

Lakish holds that the Temple's sanctity was for its time but not forever given the Temple's destruction. The phrase in the gemarra is:

שְׁקִדּוּשָׁהּ רִאשׁוֹנָה קִידְשָׁהּ לְשַׁעֲתָהּ וְקִידְשָׁהּ לְעֵת לְבָא

The initial sanctity was for its (original) time and for the future

The Talmud then goes back in time, some hundreds of years, and shows that this very dispute is of Tannaitic origin. This is interesting in and of itself.

For us, rather than going back in time, let's move forward, and instead of 200 years let's jump 2,000. Debate occurs concerning whether all of Jerusalem is sacred or holy and therefore must remain in Jewish hands. A similar debate might concern whether there are parts of Greater Israel that may be relinquished for purposes of finding peaceful solutions to centuries of intractable problems. Is the initial holiness of a place determinative of the holiness we must imbue it with now? If not determinative, must it be considered? שְׁקִדּוּשָׁהּ רִאשׁוֹנָה קִידְשָׁהּ לְשַׁעֲתָהּ וְקִידְשָׁהּ לְעֵת לְבָא

Maybe the question of holiness is irrelevant to the geo-political discussion. Maybe, on the other hand, it *is* relevant. I of course have and express no view; we don't do politics. But it does seem interesting that this debate has been with us for thousands of years. Might one say that both sides capture legitimate positions? Let us be reminded of the phrase from Tractate Eruvin 13b:

אֵלֹהִים וְאֵלֹהֵי דְבָרֵי אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים

Each of the positions are words of the living G-d

Siyyum HaTwain (# 1). With all the works published in Twain's lifetime assigned to able congregants (see [email of Dec. 25, 2025](#)), we can start sharing results of our readings.

I read ***The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and other stories (1865)***, what appears to be one of Twain's earliest published work. It was great. There are about 15 short stories and other short pieces (btw, there is overlap with the collection of shorts that Francine Alfandary is reading, # 5 ***Sketches New and Old (1875)***). The stories involve mid-Nineteenth Century Twain as a writer, Twain as a publisher, and just plain vignettes, slices of life that the author makes funny, ironic, satirical. Twain's word choice is nearly-always inspired. His cadence and speech are captivating and entertaining. But above all his dry and sharp wit is funny, funny, funny. You cannot read a story without taking away the real point Twain wants you to ponder. Pick up the volume if you want the (early) humor in short spurts.

Who else has read the volume? Who has a view? We would love to create a dialogue.

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