

January 29, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. We are expecting a record turnout to hear **Magevet** this Friday night. They will be on hand to help us celebrate Shabbat Shira. Their concerts are enormously enjoyable. I hope you have signed up.

On Shabbat morning after services, Rabbi Soloveichik will also be delivering the next installment in his ten-part Squintennial lecture series.

This past Tuesday was **International Holocaust Remembrance Day**. Every year we struggle with whether to observe this day or Yom HaShoah. The answer is both. The reason for that is not, imho, because we are witnessing again the growth of the vile and viral antisemitism that led to the Holocaust. The reason is that this unspeakable tragedy deserves to be remembered and mourned, forever, whether or not anything remotely like it happens again. We are a forever people. We cannot fathom the loss of six million links in our J-Continuum. We cannot fathom it, so we have to remember it and mourn it. Having two days a year set aside to do that isn't too many.

And next Monday is **Tu B'Shvat**. Calling for poems about trees or about Tu B'Shvat itself. Consider [bringing them to our Tu B'shvat seder](#) led by Baruch-Lev Kelman on Sunday evening following Evening Services. No Joyce Kilmer or Robert Frost please.

Faith for Food. We are in week # 8 of our community project to distribute food to our neighbors in Manhattan who are hungry or food insecure. This week, again in bitter cold and foot-high snow drifts, Masbia distributed food for 50 families from our Food Annex.



Most of us writing or reading this email had the wherewithal to stock up on food and water prior to last Sunday's snowstorm. Imagine the families that had to hope and pray that we and others would come through for them.

Please, financially [**support this important project**](#).

Name that Haftarah Tune. We are now filling the collection box for tunes for the first five *Haftarot for the Parshiot in Sefer Shemot: Shemot, Va'era, Bo, Beshalach* (this week's parasha), and *Yitro*.

Both Ashkenazim and Sephardim take the **Haftarah for Parshat B'Shalach** from Shoftim, or Judges, 4:4-5:31. Both retell the glorious story of Devorah; the Ashkenazim read both the narrative and the song that follows, while the Sephardim read just the song. In both, Devorah needs to convince the apparently hesitant Barak to go to war against Sisera. In both, the Israelites are victorious. And in both, Yael kills Sisera (remember the milk/tent peg through skull?).

Andrew Druck has this week's haftarah covered in a multi-faceted feat (Andrew's song choices fit for both Ashkenaz and Sepharad portions):

- [Local Hero](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [I am Woman](#), as sung by Helen Reddy
- [Just like a Woman](#), as sung by Bob Dylan
- [Oh, Pretty Woman](#), as sung by Roy Orbison
- [She's Always a Woman to Me](#), as sung by Billy Joel
- [Long Live](#), as sung by Taylor Swift
- [Run for your Life](#), as sung by the Beatles
- [No Surrender](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [Simple Song of Freedom](#), as sung by Tim Hardin

And You Thought Being a Kohen Was Easy? Last week, I mentioned that the Talmud itself describes the three-finger *kemitzah* process as physically challenging, and the stakes for an error are, let us say, sky high! The Talmud speaks of two other difficult kohanic practices, and Claude Nadaf does his usual excellent job of explaining them:

- **Melikah (Bird Slaughtering):** Claude explains: *This involved the slaughter of a bird offering by pinching its neck with the thumbnail. It was considered difficult because it required extreme precision: the kohen had to sever both the windpipe and the esophagus at a specific location without cutting them through entirely or severing them incorrectly, often while holding the bird in a specific, cramped manner.*
- **Chafinah (Incense Gathering):** Again Claude is master: *Specifically performed by the High Priest (Kohen Gadol) on Yom Kippur, this task required him to scoop exactly two handfuls of finely ground incense into his palms. The difficulty lay in ensuring he took exactly what his hands could hold—no more and no less—and carrying it into the Holy of Holies without spilling any, all while managing a coal-filled pan.*

Piggul in Menachot. The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying pages 14-20 of Tractate Menachot. Page 17a finishes Chapter 2 and begins Chapter 3. Both deal with the topic of *piggul* (though we are not in Chapter 3 for very long before we begin discussing some other fascinating topics, like salt).

We discussed this same (challenging) topic of *piggul* on [Oct 1, 2025](#). There we were learning the end of the first Chapter of Tractate Zevachim – which gives us another example of the parallel streams of learning between animal/fowl sacrifices in Tractate Zevachim and meal offerings in Tractate Menachot. I think of *piggul* as doubling down on the importance of intent in making sacrifices and achieving atonement. *Piggul* imposes the requirement of intention on the *time* and *place* of the sacrifice and then moves further not just to require the proper intention but to require the actually proper time and place to be observed.

At the end of Chapter 2, there is a fun reference to

רַבִּים דְּפָמְדִיתָא

Or the sharp [Rabbis] of Pumpedita

And there is an inspiring statement on that same page (17a) that deserves mention. The Talmud there says:

אמר ר' חנןא: הא מילתא אбелע לי כב' חנינה, ותקילא לי ככלה תלמודאי – הקטיר קומץ לפקטור לבונה,
ולבונה לאכול שירבים למקיר – פגול.

Rav Hamnuna said: Rabbi Hanina helped me internalize this following matter, and to me it is equivalent to all the rest of my learning, as it contains a significant novelty: If one burned the handful with the intent to burn the frankincense the next day, and burned the frankincense with the intent to partake of the remainder the next day, the meal offering is piggul.

Rav Hamnuna is talking about whether the fact that there are two different deviations from proper intent makes things worse from a *piggul* perspective. It's a complex, abstruse topic with lots of complicated permutations. Yet, the Rabbi says, it's the best thing he's ever learned. Isn't it amazing that *this* is what he says brings him joy such that struggling through it is as important as *all the rest of his* (very considerable) learning? Are there things in our lives as to which we can say that?

Ministering for Our Future. We are taking a break from Twain – not for long – to discuss *The Ministry for the Future*, a novel by Kim Stanley Robinson. It was published in 2020 and is a science fiction account of the near future (we see dates in the 2030s and 2040s, but there are times in the book when it seems even more decades must have passed). Robinson is evidently quite knowledgeable of the ecological challenges we are facing as a species, and he spins a good yarn about what might happen if one or more mass environmental disasters leads first India and then more and more nations significantly to rethink their carbon footprint. The Ministry for the Future is an agency associated with the United Nations whose mission is to think about lives-not-in-being now but only in the future. Do

they have rights that have to be respected now? Should they be counted in the consideration of issues now? Should good or bad things that are going to happen to them be discounted to present value and have a role in current decision making? And in any case, what will the world look like if some fairly radical things get done to stop carbon over-emissions?

Parts of the book are great. Other parts, as where we learn of eco-terrorists murdering first hundreds of bad guys and then tens of thousands of innocents, not as good. The mention of these murders is *en passant*. And if that's not hard enough to swallow, compare that casual cruelty to the torment and pain we are supposed to feel when a single good guy (actually a good girl) is assassinated (someone who works for the Ministry). It doesn't work. At the same time, the book's disquisitions of socialist manifesto-leaning economics are better than they should be.

The writing style reminds me of both Thomas Paine and Douglas Hofstadter (some of the really short chapters, which include a dialogue, are excellent). The last part of the book fizzles out on the sci fi – but I'm still of the view that it's a good read worth the time. In major part that is because the author is successful in getting us to think, seriously, about a different paradigm of living, where different values are articulated and pursued in a meaningful, rigorous, and self-consistent way.

But now I want to ask. Who will actually minister *our* future? And by "our" I mean committed Jews over the next few generations. The largest and fastest growing segment of orthodox Jewry is the haredi. The part of that community that I know best is the yeshivish community living in places like Brooklyn, Monsey, Lakewood. These communities have largely upended settled notions of meaning, of success, of good fortune, of community involvement that American Jews have been pursuing in America for centuries. They have redefined the good life, and committed communal life, and moral and social values. Of course I'm being too general. But by becoming a generation of men who learn Torah every day, seriously, and who work (when they have to) in very different fields than those we thought merit-worthy or their highest-and-best use; by becoming a generation of super-women who have and raise children (on average way more than the carbon-friendly replacement rate), work, bread-win; and by becoming a generation of children who truly are less-gadget-obsessed, less social-media obsessed, and differently community driven – what are we witnessing is a radical change in who and what will minister *our* future. It's a serious, actually amazing transformation – certainly as profound as the one Robinson creates in his imagination.

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