

February 19, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. Welcome to Adar, our communal month of joy! This Shabbat, Rabbi Soloveichik will be delivering the tenth and last installment in his Squintennial lecture series. These have been grand lectures, and I am pleased to learn that he will be creating a wonderful commemorative booklet for us to remember this special series honoring this milestone year. Also this week, the **West Point Jewish Chapel Choir** will be singing as part of the post-services program. Come and enjoy.

Très Trees Please. Claude Nadaf did in fact send in a citation to his significantly higher figure of 41 million trees cut down daily. Claude cites a 2018 Nature Conservancy press release that discloses no support and in turn cites nothing to support the number. In Claude We Trust; Nature Conservancy, on the other hand, should support its statements. In any case, as I read it, the reference doesn't seem to be about cow-related grazing land and so may be a case (or bushel) of Claude's apples to Roger Mesznik's oranges (Roger's number is an order of magnitude lower).

What is clear is that the numbers diverge considerably. It's also clear that pessimism is not the only reaction to have to the story. Michael Lewyn, for example, thinks of it as a "fun fact" that:

The U.S. (and apparently most other high income countries) have MORE forest land than they did in 1990- probably because of the increased productivity/mechanization of agriculture. (See the table at <https://ourworldindata.org/forest-area>)

Michael gets the point, as stated in his data, that we have taken fully one-third of our forests for agriculture, and that's where cattle grazing and production take a highly disproportionate toll.

Let's leave this topic for now, with a hope that at a minimum we can come closer to agreeing on the data. Forget reaching agreement on how much cow meat is too much cow meat.

Faith for Food. We are continuing to support with funds, space, and manpower our community project to distribute food to our neighbors in Manhattan who are hungry or food insecure. This week, perhaps because of the (slightly) better weather, Masbia/Doordash were able to support 70 families (eight new ones) and approximately 200 people from our Food Annex. Please don't forget this important commitment and, if you are able, donate [here](#).

Name that Haftarah Tune. We are now collecting tunes for the final seven parshiot of Sefer Shemot: **Parshiot Mishpatim (Shekalim), Terumah (this week's), Tetzaveh (Parashat Zachor), Ki-Tisa (Parashat Parah), Vayakel-Pekudai (read together this year) (Parashat HaHodesh).**

Hayyim Obadyah has a fair and right quip about last week's listings of songs about money (in honor of Parshat Shekalim and its Haftarah). "How could you forget the ultimate money song", he says, identifying:

- [*Money Makes the World Go Round*](#), here by Liza Minnelli, from *Cabaret* [I forgot it because I recoil at the movie – the song though is good]

For this week's **Haftarah for Parashat Terumah**, Andrew Druck notes that the haftarah is about levying taxes for the building of the Temple and about the Temple itself. So he suggests, for taxes:

- [*Taxman*](#), as sung by the Beatles
- [*Silver and Gold*](#), sung by Neil Young [great song, bad video]
- [*Silver Threads and Golden Needles*](#), sung by Linda Ronstadt
- [*Money \(that's What I Want\)*](#), sung by the Beatles [and another "money" song]
- [*Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes*](#), sung by Paul Simon [and one of the favorite of favorites in the Solomon household]
- [*With a Little Help from My Friends*](#), sung by the Beatles (Hiram helps Solomon)

And for building the Temple itself, Andrew suggests two great songs:

- [*Our House*](#), sung by Crosby, Stills, and Nash
- [*All About Soul*](#), sung by Billy Joel

How does Andrew remember these – meaning, I think I have a *decent* musical memory for songs of a particular era, but Andrew's knowledge and recall are encyclopedic, over vast genres and time-scales, and he "gets" the haftarots' purpose and themes. Andrew undoubtedly gets the "save" in this year's Haftarah tune challenge (it is noted that pitchers and catchers just reported).

Menachot, Humility, and Human Dignity. This week, the global Daf Yomi learning cycle is studying pages 35-41 of Tractate Menachot. We finish Chapter 3 at page 38 and there begin Chapter 4. This week's pages largely deal with discussions and laws of tefillin and tzitzit. I love the familiarity of so many of the legal discussions; it is comforting to know that the differences among Jews in how we perform these foundational rituals has been with us for close to two millennia.

Come pray with us some weekday morning (*please* come pray with us; help us make minyan). Some of us make a second blessing on the head tefillin; some of us don't. Some put on two sets of tefillin during prayer; some of us don't. Some wind the straps on the hand this way; some that. All of these customs are between 1-2,000 years old. All are valid, our Rabbis insist. All have been known and tolerated for centuries. It's quite a lesson.

But what I really would like to discuss are two topics that come at the end of Chapter 3. They are about a page apart and can't have been put so close together by happenstance. Individually they are

noteworthy; together they teach important life lessons that Jews proudly can say have been there for us to learn, again for millennia.

The first requires little explanation. Page 37a includes the following:

בְּעַא מִינֵיהּ פְּלִימוּ מַרְבִּי: מִי שֵׁישׁ לוֹ שְׁנַי רֵאשִׁים, בְּאִזָּה מֵהֶן מְנִיחַ תְּפִילִין? אָמַר לֵיהּ: אוֹ קוּם גְּלִי, אוֹ קַבֵּל עֲלֶךָ שְׁמַתָּא. אֲדַהְכִי אֶתָּא הֵהוּא גְבָרָא, אָמַר לֵיהּ: אֵיתִילִיד לִי יְנוּקָא דְאִית לֵיהּ תְּרֵי רֵישֵׁי, כַּמָּה בְּעֵינָא לְמִיתַב לְכַהֵן? אֶתָּא הֵהוּא סְבָא תְנָא לֵיהּ: חַיִּיב לֵיתֵן לוֹ עֶשְׂרָה סְלַעִים.

The Sage Peleimu raised a dilemma before Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi: In the case of one who has two heads, on which of them does he don phylacteries? Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi said to him: Either get up and exile yourself from here or accept upon yourself excommunication for asking such a ridiculous question. In the meantime, a certain man arrived and said to Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi: A firstborn child has been born to me who has two heads. How much money must I give to the priest for the redemption of the firstborn? A certain elder came and taught him: You are obligated to give him ten sela, the requisite five for each head.

Note that the story of the two-headed firstborn literally comes as the very next word in the text after R' Yehuda HaNasi's uncharitable reaction. As we mentioned a couple weeks ago, they don't really come greater than R' Yehuda HaNasi. Yet momentarily he appears to have lost his humility – and in that very instant he was taught a lesson that neither he, nor we, can easily forget.

The second story appears at the bottom of page 37b and the top of page 38a – indeed, these homilies end Chapter 3. The Talmud relates that on Shabbat a great Sage (Ravina) was walking behind another great Sage (Mar bar Rav Ashi) when the latter's garment tore creating a dilemma: The torn garment could not be worn on Shabbat (carrying in public space), but removing the garment would be immodest. In both of the related stories retold here (the difference between them being whether the wrong or sin of carrying was Biblical or Rabbinic in nature in the specific circumstances here) we learn the principle:

גְּדוֹל כְּבוֹד הַבְּרִיּוֹת שְׂדוּחָה אֶת לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה שְׁבִתוֹרָה

How great is human dignity; it overrides even a negative commandment of the Torah

Now I appreciate that one can't be his or her own decisor in determining when human dignity outweighs the adherence to either Biblical law (if at all) or Rabbinic law. But human dignity – *kavod habriot* – is a real, legitimate, powerful principle of human conduct and Jewish law.

Humility and human dignity are shining through these pages devoted to the intricacies and minutiae of Jewish law. Are we getting the point yet about what the Talmud is teaching and how it teaches it? It teaches ***The Things That Matter***.

Siyyum HaTwain (#15). Here is the list of the Twain works that the Shearith Israel Twain Book Club is reading (see [email of Dec. 25, 2025](#)). This week, our Rabbinic Intern Baruch-Lev Kelman shares his views about *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (#15 on our list of published works). His remarks are great, if a trifle long:

Where do The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc land within the hierarchy of Mark Twain's canon? If you asked the man himself, he'd be the first to tell you, "I like Joan of Arc best of all my books; and it is the best." Most Twain enthusiasts, however, vociferously disagree.

Joan of Arc was received well enough when it debuted in 1895, but subsequent critics have made a habit of eviscerating Twain's professed magnum opus—to the point that the novel has been effectively expunged from the American literary consciousness.

Mostly, it's the book's tone that critics find so objectionable. Whereas Twain is famous for his flippant, irreverent spirit, Joan of Arc is a serious drama that pits naive faith against overwhelming despair. Here, America's favorite cynic sheds his iconoclastic airs and, inserting himself into the story as Joan's confident Sieur Louis de Conte, kneels in prayer before the altar of Reims. Twain's "sardonic mocking spirit has been conquered by the fair Maid of Orleans" (Clara Clemens).

Now, admittedly, Twain is in fact a much better satirist than he is a tragedian. In fact, it is Twain's strongest satirical asset, namely, his unpretentious, vernacular prose, that trips up Joan's narrative. Key moments border on melodrama; tragic scenes can read as sappy. Perhaps Twain would have been better off "sticking to his lane" (as Rabbi Yehuda once suggested to Rabbi Akiva, Sanhedrin 67b).

But I for one find Twain's corny illustrations endearingly American, and never fail to cheer the first time the heralds cry "way, there, way for THE MAID OF ORLEANS!" at the siege of St. Loup. So, I say: darn the critics! On my Twain hierarchy, Joan of Arc takes the cake!

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