

April 16, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

***Our Year of Allegiance.*** With Pesah behind us, we enter upon a rapid series of significant days in our Jewish calendar. Yom HaShoah was Tuesday, tonight begins the two-days of Rosh Hodesh Iyar (Friday and Shabbat), and Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzmaut are next week. We are counting days of the Omer (last night was 14); the bridge between national freedom (Pesah) and true nationhood in becoming a Light Unto the Nations (Shavuot) is two-sevenths traversed.

These are the weeks, between Pesah and Shavuot, when we read a chapter a week of Pirkey Avot. You would think our annual study of these six short Chapters would have mined about all there was from the study. Yet this past Shabbat afternoon, Rabbi Soloveichik shared a marvelous set of new insights into the very first Mishna of the very first Chapter. The Rabbi plans to continue to teach Pirkey Avot during his Shabbat afternoon class.

These significant days and annual events can all be experienced from afar. They happen, we notice them in some vague way, and we move on. Or, we can participate as a member of our community and be immeasurably enriched. I hope you will join us, for our benefit and yours.

I really mean for everyone's benefit. This past Sunday, for example, at morning minyan (which begins at a respectable 8:05a and so is easy to wake up for), we had 19 people. For us that is a respectable attendance. What turned the respectable into the truly energizing is that nearly half of those praying in fellowship together were young people. It was marvelous. Everyone got a pick-me-up, and it lasted all day.

***Faith for Food.*** Two updates. First, our successful effort to support Masbia's feeding of 80 families during Pesah was supported by *dozens* of congregants and friends.

And second, this week, Masbia used our Paved Paradise to get food to nearly 300 people. Our hungry and food insecure neighbors' needs do not cease, so our work cannot cease either. If you have not supported this cause, please donate as generously as your circumstances permit ([click here](#)).

***Name that Haftarah Tune.*** We are now collecting tunes for the initial parshiot in ten-parshiot Sefer Vayikra (plus a special reading for the Shabbat of Pesah): **Parshiot Vayikra, Tzav (Shabbat HaGadol), Shabbat Hol Hamoed Pesah, Shemini, and Tazria-Metzora** (this week's is a double parasha, which is also Rosh Hodesh).

We are also opening the lines for suggestions for haftarot for the parshiot comprising the back half of Sefer Vayikra: **Acharei Mot-Kedoshim** (also a double parasha this year), **Emor, and Behar-Bechukotai** (also a double parasha this year).

Let's briefly discuss the Haftarah that we will *not* be reading this week: the **Haftarah for Parashat Tazria** and the **Haftarah for Parashat Metzora**. The former, taken from 2 Kings 4:42-5:19, is about the healing from leprosy of one Naaman, captain of the army of the King of Aram. Naaman was angry that the

Prophet Elisha gave him the simple task of washing seven times in the Jordan River to cure his leprosy. Naaman wanted a more difficult therapy – until he went and did what Elisha told him to do and indeed was healed. The latter Haftarah, also taken from 2 Kings, Chapter 7:3-20, tells the famous story of the four ostracized lepers who tell the Israelites that the Aramean army has fled, prompting a stampede and a trampling of the captain of the gate. I digress to reference these prophecies of hope and redemption from the scourge of leprosy, not merely because these are stirring haftarot but also because of the deeply moving descriptions of love and devotion between different groups of people, one of whom has leprosy, in Mark Twain's *Following the Equator* (pp. 28-30). Read it for our luncheon, discussed below.

Now onto the haftarah we *will* be reading this year. This Shabbat being Rosh Hodesh Iyar, we will read the **Haftarah for Rosh Hodesh**, Isaiah Chapter 66. Unlike the other two haftarot above, this one does not contain a narrative story as much as a set of injunctions uttered by the Prophet who ultimately promises salvation. It's a beautiful haftarah. About Jerusalem, the Prophet speaks of a time we must pray will arrive soon:

*Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the riches of the nations like an overflowing stream; then you will nurse, be carried on her hips, and dandled on her knees.*

Master Songster Andrew Druck also sees the beauty and power of the peace-as-river metaphor. Andrew's song suggestions are (be mindful if this your time during Sefirat HaOmer when you don't listen to music):

- [Peace Like a River](#), as sung by Paul Simon
- [Turn! Turn! Turn!](#), as sung by the Byrds
- [Land of Hope and Dreams](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [Our Day Will Come](#), as sung by Ruby and the Romantics
- [Jerusalem of Gold](#), as sung by Naomi Shemer

For me, apt songs suggested by this haftarah include:

- [Proof](#), by Paul Simon ("faith is an island in the setting sun")
- [Living on a Prayer](#), by Bon Jovi

**Two Magisteria in Menachot.** The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying pages 91-97 of Tractate Menachot. The pages straddle Chapters 10-11 of the Tractate and address intricacies of meal offerings and, in the latter pages, the set up of the Temple areas devoted to sacrifices. In the midst of all that, there is a discussion about placing pegs on the Sacrificial Table (to hold the Shewbread) and whether the pegs can be placed on Shabbat. Here we learn a fundamental principle adumbrated by R' Akiva:

דַּתְּנֶנּוּ, כְּלֵל אָמַר רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא: כֹּל מְלֵאכָה שֶׁאֵפְשָׁר לָהּ לַעֲשׂוֹתָהּ מֵעֶרֶב שַׁבָּת – אֵינָהּ דוֹחָה אֶת הַשַּׁבָּת. וְהִנֵּי נִמְי אֵפְשָׁר דְּלֵא דְחֵי שַׁבָּת עַל־יְהוּ.

*Rabbi Akiva stated a principle [in a Mishna]: Any labor that can be performed on Shabbat eve does not override Shabbat. And these actions, arranging and removing the rods, can also be performed in a manner that does not require overriding Shabbat for them, as the rods can be removed before Shabbat, and the rods can be arranged for the new loaves once Shabbat has ended.*

This is an interesting dialogue. But I raise it here because, some time ago, a valued member of our email community, someone who is gifted musically and for a long while was responding frequently, objected to my positive description of haredi Judaism, claiming that Temple priests lived by a double standard that permitted them to receive benefits and perquisites unavailable to other Jews.

Our friend is wrong, imho, and he particularly missed the mark in using as an example Temple practices that would not be permitted on Shabbat outside the Temple. That category exists, but the law quoted above makes it clear that Shabbat observance is overridden only to the extent necessary to have the Temple service function. Shabbat is elemental to our existence. So is the Temple service. Managing the two is crucial.

I think of this point, not as nonoverlapping magisteria of science and religion (the concept explicated by Stephen Jay Gould) but more closely akin to the symbiotic science/religion magisteria described by Nicholas Spencer in his excellent book, *Magisteria: The Entangled Histories of Science & Religion* ([see my email of June 15, 2023](#)). Shabbat and Temple service, two sovereign states of nature, simultaneously existed. They needed mutual accommodation. That is the stuff of positive compromise, not of objectionable taking advantage. (And there is another answer, but for that you'll just have to wait until next week.)

***Siyyum HaTwain Two-fer.*** We are just over a week from our April 25 Shabbat luncheon with Twain scholar Professor Susan Harris. Twain book club members are getting through their books; in fact I think we have only about six left. 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 we have the pleasure of hearing from two Book Club members, Rima Raynes and Dr. Michael Schulder.

Rima read ***The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*** (#6 on the list). Says Rima, in a touching description of likely one of Twain's greatest pieces of fiction:

*I first read The Adventures of Tom Sawyer when I was about 10 or 12 years old. At that time, I saw it as a fun story about a playful and mischievous boy. Now, reading it again many years later, I see much more in it.*

*Tom is still charming, clever, and full of imagination. I especially enjoyed again the famous fence-painting scene—it shows how well he understands people. But now I also see his immaturity and the world around him more clearly.*

*The book gives a picture of life in a small American town in the 19th century. Some parts feel warm and nostalgic, while others made me think more deeply.*

*What I appreciated most this time were the themes of childhood, friendship, and courage. Tom's friendship with Huck Finn and their adventures felt more meaningful to me now.*

*For me, rereading this book was like meeting an old friend in a new way. I would recommend it not only to children, but also to adults.*

Michael Schulder read **What Is Man?** (#19 on the list). Says Michael:

*Do humans really have free will? Great minds have wrestled with this question for thousands of years. The problem has been posed in terms religious (God sees and controls all and always, so how can we have free will?) and material (Man is a machine that runs by set rules, and therefore he does not have free will). We have a moral imperative to believe in free will, however, as without it we cannot define good and evil nor promote the former and combat the latter. This debate rages unto this very day, even if contemporary arguments are more likely to favor a secular, materialist position.*

*And yes, one person who attempted to cut this Gordian knot was none other than our populist, plainspoken, anti-hubbug, and very American Mark Twain. **What Is Man** was written in 1906 when Twain was 71. He had only 250 copies printed for private distribution, and that anonymously. It is a short book, or a long essay if you prefer, written as a series of dialogues between an Old Man (undoubtedly meant to represent the author) and a Young Man. The OM rejects completely the possibility of human free will, insisting that all behavior results from the pursuit of individual self-interest. The YM attempts to break down this idea with various examples of seemingly noble acts, but in the end he kinda sorta agrees with the OM after his protests are all rebutted with cold logic.*

*I had never read **What Is Man** before, and as you can tell it is a very different book from pretty much everything else written by Twain. It makes sense that he would write this somewhat cynical work in his old age (that was what 71 meant in 1906). It being Twain, the book has its share of amusing quotes, e.g.:*

*YM: Don't you believe that God could make an inherently honest man?*

*OM: Yes, I know he could. I also know that He never did make one.*

*YM: But you have no right to put Man on a level with a rat.*

*OM: I don't – morally. That would not be fair to the rat.*

***What Is Man** is a quick read so if you are on a mission to complete the Twain catalogue, then have at it. Where it fits in the old and large Library of Free Will is a question for another time.*

*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

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