

April 23, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. Rabbi Soloveichik is away this Shabbat. He is in Israel, celebrating the bar mitzvah of Yosef Dov aka Berel. Congratulations to the Rabbi, Layaliza, Berel, and the entire family. It's a blessing they were able to make it.

Our Rabbinic intern, Baruch-Lev Kelman, will be giving a Twain-related talk after services on Shabbat. His title, which frankly doesn't sound all that Twain-related, is *Peeking Behind the Curtain: The Sorcerer who Snuck into the Holy of Holies*. After his talk, those who signed up will be able to enjoy a Twain luncheon with Twain scholar Prof. Susan Harris. BLK will also be giving the Shabbat afternoon class on Pirkey Avot.

We don't want to start another weekly counting (or do we?), but we were 19 again this past Sunday for morning for minyan, and 20 strong Monday evening. Give us just one day a week; we can remain strong throughout the year.

Faith for Food. Last week, Masbia estimated that our Food Annex served about 300 people. This week, Masbia estimates that, with the help of Doordash, we again helped feed an estimated 300 people. We are continuing to staff and financially support what is becoming an important community project to distribute food to our neighbors who are hungry or food insecure ([here](#)).

Name that Haftarah Tune. We are now collecting haftarah tunes for the remaining parshiot in Sefer Vayikrah: **Acharei Mot-Kedoshim** (a double parasha this week), **Emor, and Behar-Bechukotai** (also a double parasha this year).

Haftarah Kedoshim, which is what we read this week, is taken from Amos 9:7-15 for Ashkenazim and from Ezekiel 20:2-20 for Sephardim. To me, both provide answers to the profoundly important question, what does it mean to be the Chosen People. I have written with caution about that phrase before ([Dec. 10, 2020](#); [Aug. 5, 2021](#)).

What is remarkable is that whoever decided what haftarot would be read wanted both Ashkenazim and Sephardim to hear the *same* prophetic admonitions from two different prophets. (By the way, who did choose the haftarot? The judges are prepared to part with two points for an explanation with a good citation to a source.)

The simple message in both haftarot is that chosenness entails responsibility. In Amos, the prophet relays the point that the Almighty granted other lands to other peoples, just like land was granted to the Israelites. Whether we remain worthy to keep the land does not turn on grace but on merit: If we are sinful, we will lose it.

Ezekiel makes the same point. When the Almighty chose Israel, it was on the condition that we would “[c]ast away, every one of you, the detestable things that you are drawn to, and do not defile yourselves with the fetishes of Egypt.” Here too our conduct towards others will determine our right to remain in the land.

For these powerful themes, Songster In Residence Andrew Druck suggests:

- [Days Are Coming](#), as sung by Shlomo Carlebach
- [Faithless Love](#), as sung by Linda Ronstadt
- [Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow](#), as sung by Carole King
- [Devoted to You](#), as sung by the Everly Brothers

My song suggestion is:

- [Living for the City](#), sung by Stevie Wonder

Magisteria Revisited. Last week, I promised an additional perspective on the issue of how we can reconcile there being two magisteria in our religion, Shabbat and holiness. Exactly no one came up with it, so I will go it a give.

We are taught the laws of Shabbat, of what creative activity must and need not cease. And we are taught the laws of the sacrificial service in the Temple, of what can and can't be done. It turns out that there are some prohibitions that apply on Shabbat but not when those activities are performed in the Temple. Is that a double standard? Does that violate a rule of equality before the law, that people doing Temple service don't have to observe these laws of Shabbat?

Our answer last week suggested that the Talmud itself sees the tension and permits what would otherwise be a violation of Shabbat laws only to the limited extent necessary to carry out Temple service. And we saw that in a world of two magisteria these sovereign states needed to accommodate each other.

There is another way to look at this, though, and perhaps it's obvious. Both sets of rules come from a common source of authority: the Torah. Both magisteria therefore are subsumed into a larger and more coherent whole. When the Temple service is done, Shabbat rules do not apply (to the minimal extent necessary). That blending of rules *is* Torah law, not at variance with it.

Menachot 98-104. The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying pages 98-104 of Tractate Menachot. The entire week is spent in short Chapter 12, the penultimate Chapter in the Tractate.

Two interesting points this week include, first, the discussion beginning around page 97. Here we learn that, in the First Temple period, the Sanctuary had ten additional Sacrificial Tables and ten additional

Menorahs. We further learn that all of these were fit into the Sanctuary. Take the time to go through the math to see how they fit!

Second, on page 99b, we find the following:

*אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחאי: אפילו לא קרא אדם אלא קריית שמע שחרית וערבית – קיים "לא ימוש",
ודבר זה אסור לאומרו בפני עמי הארץ, וכבא אומר: מצוה לאומרו בפני עמי הארץ.*

Rabbi Yoḥanan says in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai: Even if a person recited only the recitation of Shema in the morning and in the evening, he has fulfilled the mitzva of: "This Torah scroll shall not depart from your mouth." And it is prohibited to state this matter in the presence of the unlearned [amei ha'aretz], as they are likely to get the impression that there is no need to study Torah beyond this. And Rava says: On the contrary, it is a mitzva to state this matter in the presence of the unlearned, [as they will realize that if merely reciting the Shema leads to such a great reward, all the more so how great is the reward of those who study Torah all day and night].

Isn't this a delightful debate? R' Yohanan wants everyone learning Torah as much as they can. So does Rava. R' Yohanan feels that, unfortunately, some people will do the minimum if they are told what it is. Rava feels, oh how wonderful, some people will do the minimum if they are told what it is. The Talmud is simultaneously so realistic, so human, yet at the same time so humane.

Siyyum HaTwain (#2). As mentioned, this Shabbat is our luncheon with Twain scholar Professor Susan Harris. Twain book club members are getting through their books. We are down to the last five. Here is the list of the Twain works that the Shearith Israel Twain Book Club is reading ([see email of Dec. 25, 2025](#)).

Leading the pack with among the most books read is Dr. Michael Schulder. Here is his tour de force on ***The Innocents Abroad*** (#2).

The Innocents Abroad made Mark Twain's career. Published in 1869, it was his best-selling book and started him on the path towards international celebrity status. It is a travelogue based on a series of newspaper articles describing the trip on a luxury steamship (a novel conveyance at the time!) that departed from New York harbor and traveled to Europe and the eastern Mediterranean. Passengers had various options for land-based travel excursions lasting days or weeks, and Twain describes his experiences in France, Italy, Greece, Crimea, and Palestine. **TIA** is notable for the trademark Twain cynical take on all kinds of humbuggery (e.g., the number of pieces of the True Cross displayed at various European churches). If you are at all inclined to wokeness this is most definitely not the book for you – the author's disdain for "backwards" cultures and prejudices is often hilarious but would get someone cancelled or imprisoned today.

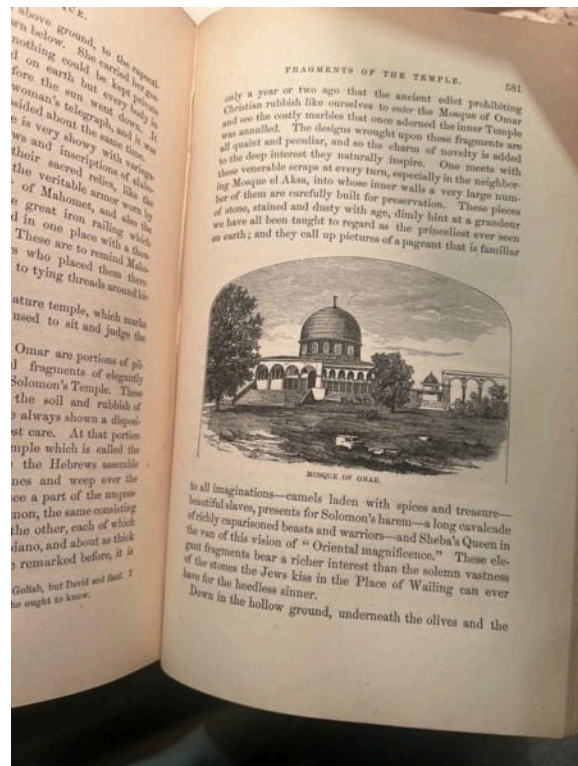
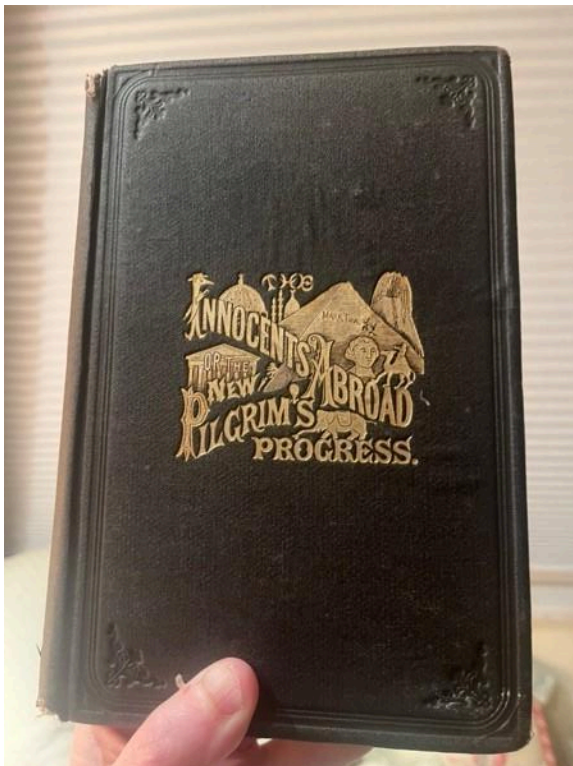
A couple of noteworthy quotes:

It used to be a good hotel, but that proves nothing—I used to be a good boy.

The gentle reader will never, never know what a consummate ass he can become until he goes abroad.

Now, regarding the famous passages about Palestine, including that it “is desolate and unlovely” ... I admit to not being a fan of how Twain’s words have been employed politically to show how the later arrival of Zionist Jews made the desert bloom and rescued the Holy Land from the squalor into which it had sunk. This just opens the whole “Orientalism” debate and goes nowhere. Having said that, the book is very entertaining, and those who have been to any of the venues described by Twain will find such passages especially interesting. **The Innocents Abroad** is well worth your time.

A note on the printed word: I had read **TIA** before on my iPhone and enjoyed doing so. In the interim I acquired a nice first edition of the book and have reread it as such. Besides the fact that there are many more illustrations in the hardcover than in the e-book, I got great pleasure in holding and flipping through the older version. Long live physical books!



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