

May 14, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

***Our Year of Allegiance.*** We are a week away from Shavuot. Rabbi Soloveichik's Shavuot night talk bears his signature short and pithy title, *The Jewish Calendar, The Revolution, and the Constitution: A Tale of Torah, Time, and America's 250th*. I'm sure the talk will be fun, and great.

***Shavuot Shearith Israel – 2026.*** I mentioned last week that between our gorgeous synagogue (thank you to Arnold Brunner and Louis Comfort Tiffany) and the gorgeous floral arrangements installed for the holiday (thank you to our Sisterhood); between our gorgeous liturgy and melodies and the blessed chanting of Megillat Rut by our young girls and women, Shavuot Shearith Israel is a gorgeous and blessed experience. If you are in town, please join us.

***Shavuot Touro Synagogue – 1773.*** One of the most accurate ways to determine how Shearith Israel observed Shavuot 250+ years ago is to see how our Touro Synagogue observed it (this is much the same as we do concerning our observance of Tisha B'Av before our Republic was born, [see my email of 7/15/21](#)). Many thanks to Albert Rosenblatt for sending along a reprint of the Rev. Ezra Stiles's description of the Shavuot service at what was then called the Newport Synagogue in 1773 (it became known as the Touro Synagogue during the Nineteenth Century) ([see here](#)). Albert believes that, because the guest Rabbi ("Karigal", about whom we know a good bit) gave the sermon in Spanish, the inference exists that the Congregation knew Portuguese. I'm not sure; even the Stiles excerpt records that the Reverend himself wasn't conversant even in Spanish, much less in Portuguese. Still, it's a marvelous description, and it's uncanny to see mention that "the Synagogue was decorated with Flowers &c" – exactly as our Sisterhood adorns our Sanctuary to this day.

***Jewish American Heritage Month.*** You'd think it was a Hallmark holiday, but it's legit, straight from the mouth of our President. Thank you to Trustee Avery Neumark for this link to a Presidential Proclamation proclaiming May 2026 *Jewish American Heritage Month* ([here](#)). The proclamation also identifies this coming Shabbat, **Parashat Bemidbar**, as one where American Jews should *come together in gratitude for our great Nation. This day will recognize the sacred Jewish tradition of setting aside time for rest, reflection, and gratitude to the Almighty.*

The proclamation reads like one of Shearith Israel's potted histories — *of us!* What a grand way to celebrate the first parasha in the new Sefer this Shabbat.

Office Manager Sarah Gross sends in an even clearer expression of who we are as a Congregation. [Here](#) is a graphic novel, written by Julian Voloj and Asser Levy — about us! As Sarah says, publication of the book is a "fun reason to be in the news."

**Yom Yerushalayim.** We observe this day, commemorating the reunification of Jerusalem in 1968, tonight/tomorrow. I wonder if this day might be less complicated than other recent Israel-inspired holidays. After all, however you come out on current issues challenging Israel, isn't the reunification of our holy city, and preventing further destruction and indeed desecration of holy sites (not just Jewish), something all sides of all spectra might agree on? We'd love to hear from you on this.

**Our Spring Gala.** Rabbi Soloveichik does come up with the most ingenious ways to celebrate our annual gala. This year, the gala will occur in the evening of June 16 (if you don't immediately email me with what else is celebrated every year on June 16, we will count you as – well, you just better know). The gala will start with an exclusive program at The New York Historical (what happened to "Society" only modern marketers would surmise) and then continue with a festive reception on our own Paved Paradise.

The gala is festive and fun. But the gala also serves as the focal point of one of our two formal fundraising events of our entire year. We need to raise several hundred thousand dollars this Spring. I would be delighted to meet or talk with you in detail about what those funds cover. We need your help. Please, give as generously as your means permit — [click here](#).

**Faith for Food.** Again this week, with the help of Masbia and DoorDash, we were able to feed approximately 300 Manhattanites in need. We are hitting the maximum number we can serve in a week without more physical infrastructure (more sheds on Paved Paradise) and more capital. Our thinking, as I mentioned, is to canvass other faith communities in Manhattan for help. But there is little doubt that they are as financially challenged as we are. We need to do what we can, and I solicit your ideas.

**Name that Haftarah Tune.** We are now collecting tunes for the haftarah for the parshiot comprising the first half of **Sefer Bemidbar: Parshiot Bemidbar** (this week's), a pause for **Shavuot, Naso, Behaalotcha, Shelach, and Korach**.

Were this Shabbat not the day before Rosh Hodesh, the **Haftarah for Parashat Bemidbar** would be Hosea 2:1-22. The last verses of the haftarah, which Ashkenazim recite at every donning of tefillin, describe the eternal marriage of the Almighty and the Jewish people, even, as Andrew Druck, MS, says, "after periods of estrangement." Andrew's song suggestions are:

- [Always](#), as sung by Ella Fitzgerald
- [I've Been Loving You Too Long](#), as sung by Otis Redding
- [Chains](#), as sung by the Beatles
- [Love Me Do](#), as sung by the Beatles
- [I Will Always Love You](#), as sung by Dolly Parton
- [Close to You](#), as sung by Frank Sinatra

The haftarah that we will read this Shabbat, however, is the special reading for a Shabbat immediately preceding Rosh Hodesh, which occurs this coming Sunday (Rosh Hodesh Sivan). It is taken from I Samuel 20:18-42. It is among the most beautiful haftarot that Samuel can offer: the well-known story of Jonathan warning David about Saul's anger and the deep friendship between Jonathan and David. The haftarah ends with the timeless statement:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹנָתָן לְדָוִד לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְנוּ שְׁנֵינוּ אִנְחָנוּ בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה לֵאמֹר יְהוָה יְהִי אֲנִי וּבִינְךָ וּבֵין זַרְעֵי וּבֵין זַרְעֵי עַד-עוֹלָם:

*Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace! For we two have sworn to each other in the name of the Almighty: 'May the Almighty be [witness] between you and me, and between your offspring and mine, forever!'"*

"Brother" songs abound, including the following suggestions by me:

- [He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother](#), here by The Hollies
- [Brother Love's Travelling Salvation Show](#), the great song by Neil Diamond
- [The Opening Theme](#) from *The Brother from Another Planet*, an offbeat movie from 1984
- [Brother Brother](#), here by the Isley Brothers

**Shut Up, The Tanna Explained.** This week, the global Daf Yomi learning cycle is studying pages 10-16 of Tractate Chulin. We are in Chapter 1 of the Tractate the entire week, and we are working through multiple permutations of the laws of ritual slaughter, which, as I mentioned, feels relevant since the same rules are applied to preparing kosher food today.

Page 15a contains a story worthy of focus. The gemarra is in the middle of debating whether inadvertent violation of the Sabbath in the slaughtering process renders food unfit for eating. The following then occurs:

תַּנְי תַּנָּא קַמֵּיה דְרַב: הַמְבַשֵּׁל בַּשַּׁבָּת, בְּשׁוּגָג – יֹאכֵל, בְּמַזִּיד – לֹא יֹאכֵל, וּמַשְׁתִּיק לִיה רַב.

*The Tanna taught a baraita before Rav: One who cooks on Shabbat unwittingly may eat the food that he cooked; if he did so intentionally, he may not eat the food that he cooked, and Rav silenced him.*

Silenced him? As in, uhm, like told him not to speak? As in, uhm, like canceling his views? In our years together, we have reviewed literally dozens (well, a lot, anyway) of examples of a freedom of intellectual debate – even in matters of grave importance – that is manifested in the Talmud and that I believe should be the envy of the modern world. So what's the silencing business?

The answer may be that our Sages were human, and perhaps sometimes they expressed themselves in ways peremptory. What matters more than what a Sage said is the way the gemarra reacts to what the Sage said. Here the reaction is bold and courageous and is recorded for posterity precisely so that we can learn from it:

מאי טעמא משתיק ליה? אילימא משום דסבירא ליה כרב' יהודה, ותנא תנ' כרב' מאיר, משום דסבירא ליה כרב' יהודה, מאן דתנ' כרב' מאיר משתיק ליה!?

*The Gemara asks: What is the reason that Rav silenced him? If we say it is because Rav holds in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda and the Tanna taught the baraita in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Meir, can it be that merely because he holds in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda he silences one who teaches a baraita in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Meir?*

So now it's clear. The gemarra calls Rav out on his "silencing". Opposing views are not merely tolerated; they are welcome as the best way to get at the truth. No silencing! No canceling! No never.

**Scheduling Note.** We hope to get next week's email out on Wednesday, May 20, since Shavuot is Thursday night, May 21.

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