

May 20, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

**Our Year of Allegiance.** Holding at Day 48 in the Counting of the Omer, we will greet Shavuot tomorrow night. We will have late evening services (7:45p) so that we observe what the Torah describes as a *full* seven weeks from the day after Pesah; and then we will have a late class (11:15p) by Rabbi Soloveichik so that we as a community hint at the all-night learning that is customary in many synagogues. Shavuot Shearith Israel also includes a consecration commemoration of our Crosby Street Synagogue in 1834 (Day 1); our young girl/women's chanting of Megilat Rut (Day 2); and one of the most beautiful melodies for Hallel and other tefillot (both days) and the most beautiful floral decorations (courtesy of the Sisterhood) that we have during our year. I do hope you will join us.

**Not Even if the President Asks.** There has to be a joke here somewhere. The President of the United States encouraged us all to attend services last Shabbat as part of the Nation's Squintennial celebrations ([see my email of 5/14/26](#)). And *Yeshiva World News* covered in extraordinary detail [the story of a Shabbat-like dinner](#) at the White House. I agree that it's unprecedented and laudable.

But even our President couldn't get more of us to attend services last Shabbat. What those of us who slept in missed was a marvelous talk by Rabbi Soloveichik in the morning and our first kiddush of the season on Paved Paradise. It was beautiful, with congregants sitting and chatting convivially and enjoying both the food and the weather. Come join us as we continue to enjoy our precious outdoor space.

**Our Spring Gala and Fundraiser.** Francine Alfandary instantly knew that June 16 is Bloomsday, the day in 1904 when the Jew Leopold Bloom wanders around Dublin to give us surely one of the greatest narratives in English literature, the masterpiece *Ulysses*. Symphony Space @ Broadway and 95<sup>th</sup> Street doesn't seem to be offering the readings of *Ulysses* that it used to offer annually on June 16. It's a shame, because it was a great New York event. For us, though, there is now surely no reason why we should not attend Rabbi Soloveichik's June 16 art talk at the New York Historical or the lovely evening of food and fellowship promised for afterwards on our Paved Paradise.

In any case, we seriously need to have a successful Spring fundraising campaign. Please be as generous as your circumstances permit ([here](#)).

**Faith for Food.** Again this week, our Food Annex enabled over [300] people in need to be fed for the better part of a week. Good deeds don't come any greater. Indeed, there is no clearer reminder of this true generosity than Boaz's helping to feed Naomi and Rut. Rabbi Soloveichik calls Boaz about the most perfect person in the Rut narrative. His mitzvah, coupled with Rut's loyalty and love, led to the Davidic dynasty. Please continue to support this effort ([here](#)).

**Name that Haftarah Tune.** We are now collecting tunes for the haftaroth for the parshiot comprising the first half of **Sefer Bemidbar: Parshiot Bemidbar**, a pause for **Shavuot** (this week's), **Nasso**, **Behaalotcha**, **Shelach**, and **Korach**. There's a small boatload of great tune suggestions this week:

First, before we get to songs themselves, recall that some weeks ago I asked for a simple summary of who chose the haftarot we read and when were they chosen. Rabbi Mark Licht, a/k/a RavDoc, answers the question only partly (but at least he tried). He says that our Sages chose them over the centuries, and, he says, there are significant differences among even later commentaries. I remain unclear as to when and how and who chose them.

Second, Claude Nadaf points out other times when Jeremiah or others speak in jeremiad tones. Claude also says that I was wrong in suggesting that principally Ashkenazim recite daily the beautiful closing lines from the end of the **Haftarah for Parashat Bemidbar**, taken from Hosea 2:1-22 and describing the eternal marriage of the Almighty and the Jewish people. Ashkenazim recite the verse when donning tefillin, and Claude says that Sephardim say it as well. That may be true in some places, but I know one Synagogue following a Sephardic minhag where reciting the verse is certainly *not* the custom: Ours!

Third, Ritual Director Jay Harwitt, from whom we are delighted to hear, sends in the following. He begins with last week's haftarah for erev Rosh Hodesh and likes:

- [Friendship](#) from Cole Porter's *DuBarry Was a Lady*, originally sung by Ethel Merman and Bert Lahr

For Shavuot, meaning this week's, we read the amazing and to me in some respects still incomprehensible prophecy of the Four Faces (human, lion, ox, eagle) and Wheels within Wheels from Ezekiel 1:1-28; 3:12. Jay suggests:

- [Ezekiel Saw the Wheel](#)
- [Somewhere Over the Rainbow](#), from *The Wizard of Oz* [in connection with verse 28]
- [Water Music](#), by Georg Frideric Handel for verse 24 ["mighty waters" – Jay can't help himself, pointing out that water imagery might be "an untapped source"].

**Shut Up the Father Explained – Explained.** I thought my title last week was known to everyone. We were discussing using shushing as a substitute for thoughtful and respectful dialogue, and, well, the line seemed so fitting.

Thank you to Bob Starkand for reminding us that the line is actually from the early Twentieth Century writer, Ring Lardner. Bob quotes it as

*Shut up was the way he explained it.*

Same same from my perspective. Bob, though, goes further and adds his other favorite Lardner quote:

*The race may not always go to the swift, and the fight may not always go to the strong . . . but it's the way to bet.*

Bob, it's great, though the material before the punchline is straight out of Kohelet (9:11). But I guess Lardner must have known that, and that's why the punchline is funny. Bob, thank you.

**When Opposites Attract.** The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying pages 17-23 of Tractate Chulin. We are still in Chapter 1 (until page 26b).

The last many Mishnaot of Chapter 1 are in an interesting form. For example, the Mishna on page 22a (which is the second of its kind) says:

*מתני' קָשֶׁר בְּתוֹרֵין – פְּסוּל בְּבִנֵי יוֹנָה, קָשֶׁר בְּבִנֵי יוֹנָה – פְּסוּל בְּתוֹרֵין, תְּחִלַּת הַצִּיְהוּב בְּזָה וּבְזָה – פְּסוּל*

*The age that is **fit** for sacrifice **in doves**, mature birds, is **unfit** for sacrifice **in pigeons**, immature birds; the age that is **fit** for sacrifice **in pigeons** is **unfit** for sacrifice **in doves**. At the intermediate stage of **the beginning of the yellowing** of its plumage (see 22b), a bird is **unfit** both **as this**, a pigeon, **and as that**, a dove, since it is no longer a fledgling but is not yet a mature bird.*

A word of background. I think we've mentioned before that the Torah recognizes only two types of birds as fitting for sacrifices: pigeons and doves. One is migratory (doves), and one basically stays put (pigeons). Whether that is a reason why the Torah identifies these species – well, to paraphrase Paul Simon in [Slip Slidin' Away](#), that information's unavailable to this mortal man. The point of the Mishna is to contrast the ages when these birds may act as sacrifices. A dove must be mature to be fit for a sacrifice. A pigeon must be young to be so fit (young but not too young, the gemarra teaches). There is an undistributed middle period, when a dove is not quite mature and a pigeon is not quite too old. In that period of overlap neither can be used.

The interesting question is why did the Mishna approach the teaching in this way. Why the almost sing-song of opposing rules, processes that are at odds with each other as a means of contrasting them? It can't be that our Sages did not want to overly increase the number of Mishnaot by breaking them up; that can't be the reason because Tractate Chulin already has *a lot* of Mishnaot. The typical reason given is that the presentation of contrasting opposites made it easier to remember the rules before the Mishnaot were written down. That, it seems, is the default explanation given all the time. And maybe it's right in this case. Any ideas?

In this, our **Year of Allegiance**, let us couple our collective **commitment** with a prayer to The Almighty, **Hatzlich'ana, help us succeed.**

*Moadim L'simcha.*

Louis Solomon, Parnas