

May 28, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. Shavuot was wonderful. The rain held off until Shabbat, when the voices of our young women and girls filled a good part of our Sanctuary and treated us to a reading of Megillat Rut. Keen thanks to our readers: Hella Gelman, Rachel Vieyra, Lily Cohen, Maya Frisch, Hudson Lentnek, Dakota Lentnek, Ruth Sherizen, Navah Edinger, Neta Wiznia, Zahava Wiznia, Sofia Zigler, and Sarah Flaks, with group participation from Mina Kamil and Naomi Minevich. Kudos and gratitude for a beautiful reading.

Today being a week after the holiday began, we complete our post-holiday practice of not saying the tachanun prayers at Shacharit and Mincha. It is one of the things that makes Shavuot last about as long as Pesah and Succot. For one point, why did our Sages do that, and what else do we do in recognition of that?

Having overindulged on dairy for the holiday, there are few better reminders of what's to come than that provided by Ritual Director Jay Harwitt:

Cheesecake! Ice cream! Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we diet.

Remembering Our Fallen Veterans. Nearly a hundred of us attended the memorial service that Reverend Edinger led at our Chatham Square Synagogue on Memorial Day. What a stirring event: the color guard, the bugle *Star Spangled Banner* and *Taps*, the somber yet fitting speeches, our children planting flags on the graves of our communal ancestors who gave their lives for our freedom. Reverend Edinger has been leading this service for many years. It was heartening to see so many of us turning out for it.



Our Spring Gala and Fundraiser. I'm sure you saw Rabbi Soloveichik's description of the event we are planning and he is curating at the New York Historical [Society, for those of us who are reluctant to adopt their new, truncated appellation]. [Here it is](#), in case you didn't see it. It promises to be a great evening.

In any case, as I said last week, our financial needs right now are real. With this great program, there is every reason to hope that as a community we will generously support this fundraiser. We are about a third of the way to our goal of \$300k. Please be as generous as your circumstances permit ([click here](#)).

Where do the Haftaret Come From. I've been asking about this, and our resident maven-on-everything-Jewish, Claude Nadaf, tells us the following:

R Hai Gaon, Yishak Palache and Haim David Halevi offer the attractive "Sermon" hypotheses. Haftaret date back to the prophets as sermon on the weekly parasha applying to religious life.

In his Kesef Mishneh commentary on Rambam (Laws of Prayer 12:12), R Yosef Caro explains that, in the time of the Gemara, haftaret for regular Shabbatot were not standardized. An evolution from individual speaker to each community selecting prophetic passages relevant to the parasha eventually streamlined onto a universally shared Haftarah schedule but still with differences between Sephardim, Ashkenazim, Yemenites, and other communities.

A great variety of haftaret were chosen throughout the ages (a comprehensive list of which can be found at the end of volume ten of Encyclopedia Talmudit).

Claude, many thanks – and along with our thanks, two big beautiful inflation-adjusted points!

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

What a set of great and diverse suggestions this week:

Andrew Druck observes that, in the haftarah, an "angel promises a barren woman and her husband that they will have a son who will deliver Israel from the Philistines. However, the woman and her son must be Nazarites in order for their son, Shimshon, to keep his power."

On this basis Andrew suggests:

- [The Mighty Quinn](#), as sung by Bob Dylan
- [Angel from Montgomery](#), as sung by John Prine
- [Almost Cut My Hair](#), as sung by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young
- [No Woman, No Cry](#), as sung by Bob Marley
- [A Change Is Gonna Come](#), as sung by Sam Cooke

Dr. Zachary Gorden's suggestion, well, it could hardly be more spot on:

- [Samson](#), here by Regina Spector

Why Get the Neck of the Chicken. No, I don't have the lyrics wrong to the great 1930s Cab Calloway song, [I Get the Neck of the Chicken](#). I really mean *why* get the neck of the chicken — as opposed to some other part of a fowl's anatomy — in performing shechita, or in ritual slaughter. The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying pages 24-30 of Tractate Chulin. On page 27a, just as we begin Chapter 2, that very question is asked: from where do we learn that ritual slaughter involves cutting a majority of the key blood vessels or "pipes" *in the neck* of a chicken or animal. The discussion is interesting.

It starts with a short mnemonic, כמ"ש ט"ן, but before you get all excited that a three-letter mnemonic indicates that there are only three different opinions that need to be remembered and reconciled, I counted at least five.

Anyway, the Talmud logically goes through Biblical texts and animal physiology first to decide that the ritual slaughter needs to be where the fowl or animal bends; then decides that that can't be the tail, though it does bend but is, according to the Talmud, always bent; then decides that it can't be the ear, even though the ear bends, because lifeblood needs to be able to flow from the place of cutting, and an ear doesn't meet that criterion. Finally, after rejecting the nose and the heart itself, and after finding, based on another Biblical reference, that the place of slaughter must be where sound comes out of the fowl or animal, the Talmud concludes that the place needs to be the neck, a conclusion that is the product of both a law handed down by Moses and as one derived from Biblical nomenclature.

The gemarra next asks whether the rules being adumbrated apply to each kind of living or animate object, which the Talmud divides into three categories: animals, fowl, and fish. The discussion spends most of the time on fowl, which is itself interesting. As to fish, one question is whether fish do or don't need ritual slaughter, or, as the text seems to say, the gathering of fish out of water *is* the ritual slaughter? Again, though, there is little by way of Biblical textual support for the opinions being offered (there are, however, more mnemonics used than I can recall seeing on any other page of gemarra — does anyone know why?).

The entire discussion takes about 1-1/2 pages, out of the Talmud's 2,711. So, you might say, on the one hand, that's not much. On the other hand, don't these seem like rather important questions? Of course there are many important questions that don't have explicit Biblical sources (two points for each really surprising one), but I would add these to the list.

Siyum HaTwain (#12). Here is the list of the Twain works that the Shearith Israel Twain Book Club is reading ([see my email of Dec. 25, 2025](#)). This week, consider Naftali Friedman's excellent (if long and downright homiletic) treatment of *The American Claimant* (#12 on the list). Writes Naftali:

*In **The American Claimant**, Twain uses humor to peel away all the things people use to define themselves—money, titles, family name, class, fancy manners—and asks what is really underneath. The two main characters are the American Colonel Mulberry Sellers and the British Lord Berkeley. Sellers is*

an optimistic, impractical dreamer who tends to exaggerate his own prospects and gets treated by others as more significant than his real circumstances justify, largely because of his confidence and ambition. Lord Berkeley, by contrast, represents inherited aristocratic status, where people are inclined to assume importance based on title and lineage, even when that status does not necessarily reflect meaningful personal distinction. Twain uses this gap between how the characters are seen and who they actually are to expose how easily society misreads status as substance.

*That's also what makes it feel a little like Eddie Murphy movies such as **Coming to America** and **Trading Places**. The joke in all of them is not just that people switch places, but that society acts as if status tells you who someone really is. Twain keeps showing how silly that can be: a lord can be ridiculous, an ordinary person can be admirable, and a lot of what people call "importance" is just costume and show.*

A real Upper West Side example makes the same point: Arnold Rothstein, a bootlegger and Mafia financier who was linked to the 1919 Black Sox World Series scandal, became infamous and, sadly, died an "unnatural" death from a fellow high stakes gambler, while his father, Abraham Rothstein, was respected in Jewish life and honored with a memorial at The Jewish Center. Same family name—very different lives.

In Judaism, family history and tradition matter, but are not supposed to be the final measure of a person (see Vayikra 10:1–2, re: the sin and fate of Aharon HaCohen's sons Nadav and Avihu, also see Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 62b–63a on Rabbi Akiva's background as an uneducated shepherd). Judaism keeps coming back to a simple idea: what really counts is how you act—your character, your choices, and how you treat other people.

That's also the deeper message in Twain, (though the book is a bit long and sometimes tedious), and in those Eddie Murphy comedies: once you strip away money, pedigree, and social labels, the real question is simple—who are you really? The Rothstein story shows it clearly: a father can be honored with a memorial, a son can end up notorious, and in the end each person is judged by what he does, not by the name he inherited, or whether the person looks impressive or respectable, but they don't actually tell you who someone is or how they'll turn out. What matters in the end isn't the label people inherit or the status they're born into, but the choices they make and the kind of person they become once all the social decorations are stripped away.

In Memoriam. We note the passing of the great saxophonist Sonny Rollins, a/k/a Saxophone Colossus. Here is his matchless [St. Thomas](#). A cool wind blowing no ill.

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