

May 7, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. We are 35 days into the Counting of the Omer, giving us just two weeks until Shavuot. We are already chanting verses from Megillat Rut after morning services. Shavuot is Friday/Shabbat, so coming to Shearith Israel will be easier – and will permit you to enjoy among the most beautiful services of the entire year that kicks off with what I hope will be a fun, late-night talk by Rabbi Soloveichik. That weekend is Memorial Day weekend, so many of us are likely to be away. Come if you are in town; it's so beautiful, the younger girls' reading of Megillah Rut is always inspiring, and by then we should be able to enjoy kiddush on Paved Paradise.

Also don't forget our Chatham Square Cemetery program during the morning of Memorial Day. It's a solemn yet uplifting program that we hold annually, but it will include a little "extra" this year in honor of the Squintennial. [Click here](#) for this year's program.

Faith for Food. We are continuing to staff and financially support our community project to distribute food to our neighbors in Manhattan who are hungry or food insecure. We are now approaching feeding approximately 300 people a week on a consistent basis. Our food storage sheds on Paved Paradise are stuffed to capacity to feed that many. To do more, and there is, unfortunately, more that needs to be done, will require another level of commitment, I hope, from our faith partners. In the meantime, please support this effort in any way you can [here](#).

Name that Haftarah Tune. We are now collecting tunes for haftarot to the parshiot comprising the back half of Sefer Vayikra: **Acharei Mot-Kedoshim, Emor, and Behar-Bechukotai** (this week's, also a double parasha this year).

And we are opening the lines for song suggestions for the haftarot to the parshiot comprising the first half of **Sefer Bemidbar** (spelling and pronunciation in loving memory of Carla Schein [[see my email of 6.2.22](#)]): **Parshiot Bemidbar, a pause for Shavuot, Naso, Behaalotcha, Shelach, and Korach.**

Before we get to this week's haftarah, I asked two questions about the haftarot read over the past couple weeks, and we have received some illuminating answers:

First, in our discussion of last week's haftarah, from Yehezkel, I asked why the haftarah read more like the dictates of the Torah itself, rather than a prophetic narrative. I seem to have been right. Claude Nadaf provides the following interesting background and answer:

The Torah prohibits regular priests from marrying divorcees, but allows them to marry widows. However, Yehezkel states that they may not marry widows either! The Sages considered banning the book of Yehezkel as a result of this discrepancy amongst others.

The book of Yehezkel appears to be linking Yehezkel to Moshe. Rabbi Eliezer of Beaugency (twelfth-century France) observed this as well:

You will not find a prophet exhorting his generation about Torah and the commandments except for Yehezkel. Most of Yehezkel's words echo the style of the Torah, and he repeated nearly the entire Torah to them... as though he were giving the Torah to them anew (Introduction to Yehezkel).

Second, as a community we know a lot about why and when we have double parshiot in a given calendrical cycle. See my [email of 4/29/21](#). We have talked less about *which* haftarah is read when we read a double parasha. I think our custom is pretty uniformly to chant the second of the two possible readings. Rabbi Mark Licht, a/k/a/ RavDoc, interestingly brings us a variant custom, by no lesser a source than Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik. RavDoc says the Rav indicated that that at least sometimes the first of the two possible haftarot should be read. RavDoc points out that following that tradition results in an anomaly where the same haftarah winds up being read two weeks in a row. Does anyone (else) have an example of that?

For this week's **Haftarah for Parashiot Behar-Behukotai**, despite RavDoc's illumination, we read the haftarah for the *second* of the parshiot, Parashat Behukotai. It is taken from Jeremiah 16:19–17:14. The haftarah is a classically jeremiad (which is where the word comes from) Jeremiah. It is also beautiful. Like the parasha to which it is appended, we are warned that there are consequences to our actions, as individuals and as a community. That's scary, of course, when we fail or lapse, but just as clearly the Prophet deeply believes that there are positive consequences to the entire community from good deeds as well.

Andrew Druck, MS (for Master Songster), suggests:

- [God Only Knows](#), as sung by the Beachboys
- [If You Go Away](#), as sung by Frank Sinatra [a personal favorite]
- [Stand by Me](#), as sung by Ben E. King
- [You'll Never Walk Alone](#), as sung by Gerry and the Pacemakers

My song suggestions:

- [Better than Revenge](#), here by Taylor Swift
- [The More Your Pay \(The More It's Worth\)](#), the great irony by Don McLean

Tractate Chulin. This week's global Daf Yomi learning cycle is studying a new Tractate, Chulin (pages 3-9). It is a long Tractate, running 141 double-sided pages. But already it is interesting – and quite different from the prior two Tractates of Zevachim and Menachot. It is different because, although several of the parts of the discussion relate to the sacrificial service in the Temple and thus only for priests, the bulk (so far at least) is about ritual slaughter, which, first, can be done by non-priests, and, second, has a resonance to us today, since so many of the laws of ritual slaughter are still practiced by those preparing kosher foods.

Right from the first Mishna we see a democratic tendency; the Mishna defines non-priests broadly, even for those acts that require a priest. The gemarra that follows tests the broad proposition and appears to cut back the initial breadth somewhat (this too seems different from other Mishnaot, where the broadening is done in the gemarra and not vice-versa). So, for example, towards the bottom of page 5a we meet the challenging effort of the Talmud to enable the greatest number of people to do the ritual slaughter. Even a sinner (other than idol worshippers and recidivist breakers of Shabbat) can ritually slaughter.

The Shock of the New. Yes, that's the title of a great book on modern art criticism by Robert Hughes, but that's not what I'm talking about – so stop distracting me, and pay attention! Toward the bottom of page 6b/top of page 7a of Tractate Chulin is a statement of extraordinary profundity. There the Talmud asks about proper reactions to new ideas about Jewish law. Says the Talmud:

מְכַאן לְתַלְמִיד חָכָם שֶׁאָמַר דְּבַר הַלְכָהּ, שֶׁאֵין מְזַיְחִין אוֹתוֹ, נֹאמְרֵי לֵהּ: אֵין מְזַיְחִין אוֹתוֹ, נֹאמְרֵי לֵהּ: אֵין מְזַיְחִין אוֹתוֹ

From here one learns with regard to a Torah scholar who states a new matter of halakha that one does not remove [meziḥin] him from his position; and some say: One does not disregard [mazniḥin] him; and some say: One does not attribute his innovative statement to his conceit [mazḥiḥin].

This isn't some unlearned person with an ulterior motive spouting gibberish. This is our Talmud, containing **The Things That Matter**. An eternal religion needs one foot in the past, one in the present, and one looking toward the future (correct, three legs, which like a three-legged stool will never wobble). What should our approach be to genuine, sincere attempts by the learned and religious to apply new rules or approaches today? Do not cancel the modern sage making a new point. Do not ignore him (or her?) either. And do not disregard the effort as illegitimate. Consider it on the merits. That's what we do. That's why we are still here – and why we will be here until the last syllable of recorded time.

Like we have all memorized that line from the end of Macbeth, we should all memorize this gemarra -- and rejoice at the wisdom of our Sages in articulating it.

Siyyum HaTwain (#11). 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 Book Club member Faith Fogelman, whose oral interpretation at our Twain luncheon of a page of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) (#11 on our list), the book she is reviewing below, was a highlight of that event. Says Faith (a bit long, but really good):

This novel, the genre of which is time travel fiction, centers on the experiences and adventures of Hank Morgan, a late-nineteenth century Hartford mechanic who discovers that he is in King Arthur's court. When a worker gives him a blow on the head during an argument, Morgan awakens in sixth-century England, where he brings his life experiences, judgments, and modern 1889 knowledge.

Morgan rises quickly from prisoner to Boss, second in command to the King, due to his knowledge of solar eclipses and the ability to deceive. He tells the scared King that although he (Morgan) blotted out the sun, he can bring it forth, but only if the king appoints him as the perpetual minister. Morgan reassures, thereby gaining the King's trust as a magician greater than Merlin. He shows deference to the king, while playing him for a fool. Unlike the Joseph story when it was Pharaoh who appointed Joseph as second only to him, Morgan self-promoted.

Written in first person, Morgan mixes 6th century English with American slang, standard 1889 English, and uses cultural references of both centuries as he tells his story. He embarks on escapades and missions for the King, develops a sustained friendship with a slim, self-identified page (Page? You ain't more than a paragraph), and tries to fit in and simultaneously stand out. Morgan knows that he is the most intelligent person in that society, but encounters issues that others do not, such as extreme discomfort wearing Armour: I rattled like a crate of dishes, and that annoyed me; ... I couldn't seem to stand that shield slatting and banging... and if I dropped into a walk my joints creaked...in that wearisome way that a wheelbarrow does.

During his time in the sixth century, Morgan falls in love and becomes a father. He saves a holy well using his advanced 19th century technical knowledge, thereby reinforcing his edge over Merlin. This victory pales in comparison to Merlin's ultimate victory [who at the end of the novel casts a spell on Morgan, saying]: "He sleepeth, now - and shall sleep thirteen centuries.' I am Merlin!"

This novel is written on many levels. It is a satire on societal hierarchies, inequity, injustice, and other social systems. One wonders how Twain would have shaped this novel if written in 2026 with our current social systems as the backdrop.

More WIHOR. We have another published congregant, a Writer in Her Own Right. Lucienne Carasso just published [*The Indigenous People of Israel/Palestine: The Return of the Jews to Their Ancestral Homeland*](#). It's available on Amazon, and unless someone is going to gift it to me, I am going to buy and read it. Congratulations, Lucienne.

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