

June 11, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. On Monday, we, along with our Touro Synagogue partner Congregation Ahavath Israel, sponsored **Faith, Freedom, and the First Amendment: A Symposium on Religious Liberty.** Touro Synagogue was full. The speakers were extraordinary, every one of them: Rabbi Dr. Stuart Halpern, Dr. Trevi Troy, Dr. Joseph Loconte, Dr. Shaina Trapedo, and Rabbi Soloveichik:



The Symposium was a part-day program that we intend to turn into a longer program next year. There is more than enough to discuss. Religious liberty is our Nation's *first* freedom for a reason; when you restrict freedom of thought or conscience, nothing else is safe. Kudos and deep gratitude to Rabbi Soloveichik for pulling together the symposium and acting as Emcee and principal speaker.

And next up our Gala! It is going to be a terrific event, both at the New York Historical [Society] and on Paved Paradise. The one but: We are close, but we haven't yet made our goal of raising \$300k. If you could bear to pledge even a little extra, we can make it. Please [click here](#).

We Want YOU.



We want you – for Shearith Israel, that is. And we not only have a genuinely novel, seen-for-the-first-time poster; we also have a song as our mascot, [*I Want You So Bad*](#), by Slowburn.

As we approach the Summer, let's share a few thoughts about this past year, and begin a conversation about next year.

This has been a busy year for our Congregation. Our Congregation actively participated in the Nation's celebration of our 250th year. Rabbi Soloveichik's 10-part lecture series was a high-point, attracting both congregants and guests. We initiated our Faith for Food program, which we as a Congregation financially support and now, every week, serves over 300 of our neighbors in need. With the help of our partner, Congregation Ahavath Israel in Newport, we are devoting ourselves to repairing Touro Synagogue. These are only a few of the many accomplishments we should be proud of – that is, in addition to maintaining and sustaining America's oldest congregation as well as its oldest cemeteries, priceless ritual objects, and huge archival repository reflecting 372 years of Jewish life in America.

This past year, we tried, through a Membership Survey, to learn more about ourselves and how to strengthen us going forward. The Board deeply appreciates the work of the Committee of volunteers who assisted in the design, implementation, and examination of the survey and its results. Your Board has considered the responses carefully and taken them into account in formulating initiatives for the next year.

For next year, we propose that we all should be focused on two critical tasks: 1) energizing our existing congregational membership, and 2) growing that membership for the future. Duh, you are going to say. My point is that we hope to further these goals through a variety of programs and initiatives. All of the programs and initiatives share one ingredient as indispensable to their success: YOU! *Membership involvement* must be the watchwords of the next year.

Please consider volunteering for one or more of the following:

- Synagogue security is among our highest priorities. Get trained by our CSS partners, and then help on Shabbat and holidays.
- Work with the League and Sisterhood and volunteer to be a greeter to welcome newcomers and visitors on Shabbat and holidays.
- Help us implement a new peer-to-peer outreach program for nahalot and birthdays.
- Spend a Shabbat or two at Touro Synagogue in Newport.

With Rabbi Soloveichik's full support and with your involvement, the Board also intends to focus on several other initiatives, including:

- Offering more learning with Rabbi Soloveichik after services.
- Increasing the number of Scholars in Residence throughout the year.
- Having the choir with us virtually every Shabbat from the Shabbat before Rosh HaShana through Shabuot.
- Increasing the number of Shabbat community meals, and experimenting with extending Friday Night Lights beyond Pesah.

We do not have a monopoly on good ideas. Actually, I've heard it said that I've barely a one, and that's only at random. Seriously, we would be happy to hear your suggestions. If you have to remember only one thing – indeed one word - for our theme, it is,

JUST COME

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, Nasso, Behaalotcha, Shelach** (this week's), and **Korach**.

This week's haftarah for Parashat Shelach is taken from the Book of Joshua 2:1-24. It tells the famous story of Joshua's spies sneaking into Jericho and being hidden by "innkeeper" Rahab. Her faith and fidelity were matched later with faith and fidelity of the Israelites.

On these themes, Ritual Director Jay Harwitt cleverly suggests various spy-related theme songs (these are such great tunes!):

- [Mission: Impossible](#)
- [The Man from U.N.C.L.E.](#)
- [The Avengers](#)
- [Secret Agent](#)
- [Get Smart](#)

Master Song Suggester Andrew Druck loves the "adventure story" quality of the haftarah. His suggestions are great:

- [Suspicious Minds](#), as sung by Elvis Presley
- [Help Me](#), as sung by Joni Mitchell
- [Run for Your Life](#), as sung by the Beatles
- [Gimme Shelter](#), as sung by the Rolling Stones
- [Hotel California](#), as sung by the Eagles
- [Cover Me](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree](#), as sung by Tony Orlando and Dawn

Talmudic Expansion. Responding to my observation of how much Tractate Chulin added to the relatively brief number of Torah statements about the complex subject of ritual slaughter, Claude Nadaf rightly observes a similar phenomenon about the intricate laws of Shabbat:

In Tractate Chagigah 10a, the Talmud describes them as 'mountains hanging by a hair' because there are countless intricate laws derived from just a sparse few verses in the Written Torah.

Tractate Chulin Chapter 3. This week, the global Daf Yomi learning cycle is studying pages 38-44 of Tractate Chulin. On page 41a we begin Chapter 3, which is named, and is about, *tereyfot*, or things about an animal, internally or because of what is done to it, that render it unkosher to eat even if slaughtered properly. Here is where we learn about what size hole in the trachea, for example, will disqualify the animal from kosher eating, or under what circumstances will a fall by the animal disqualify it.

The Chapter starts with two interesting ideas. First, the Mishna begins the Chapter with a set of rules. The Misha and ensuing gemarra on pages 41a and 41b are determined to fit all the rules of disqualification into 18 categories. Efforts to add first four and then seven are rejected, but not because the defects aren't real but because of the systematization of the defects and the need to keep

to 18. On the next daf, eight global categories seem to survive the discussion. It's not just that the Talmud needs 18 or eight so that it can remember them. There is something more going on. It seems that our Sages determined that all the law requires is that the 18 categories be observed. Defects indistinguishable from the 18 but not in the taxonomy are not considered legal defects.

Our legal decisors seem to be reluctant to add categories of defect to increase the types of ways to render animals and fowl unkosher. Can any of you Rabbis or mavens out there weigh in on this? I'm thinking this is a positive quality in our religion.

Second, there is an aphorism on page 44b that is too good to skip. The issue relates to whether a Rabbi-Shochet can check his own work. It is not a favored practice. The Talmud states:

אמר רב חסדא: איזהו תלמיד חכם? זה הרואה טרפה לעצמו. ואמר רב חסדא: איזהו "שונא מתנת יחיה"? זה הרואה טרפה לעצמו

Rav Hisda says: Who is a [true] Torah scholar? One who sees his own tereyfa. And Rav Hisda says: Who is referred to by the verse: "He that hates gifts shall live" (Proverbs 15:27)? This is one who sees his own tereyfa.

This is a powerful homiletic, right in the middle of detailed, graphic discussions of the minutiae of what renders an animal unkosher. What the Talmud means by "seeing his own tereyfa" is doing the legal review of one's own answers. And look at the humility being taught in invoking Proverbs.

Summer Books. Bruce Roberts is first in the pool, answering our call for good or bad summer reading recommendations. Bruce strongly recommends [Returning, by Nicholas Lemann](#). I do hope we all understand how helpful it is to get a book recommendation (up or down) from someone you trust.

It's on the list. Thank you, Bruce.

Siyum HaTwain (#7). Morty Landowne brings to our attention that Ron Chernow has just published a door-stopper [1,200-page biography of Mark Twain](#). If you are time constrained – and verily, who isn't – I recommend you read the Shearith Israel Twain Book Club's summary instead.

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 I want to remind us of *A Tramp Abroad* (#7 on our list). I discussed the book briefly on [10/30/25](#). And if my count is right, we are rounding on the last of our Twain readings, which I hope to summarize next week.

I liked *A Tramp Abroad*. It tries even less to be factual than Twain's other travelogues. Twain spends a lot of this travel in Germany. It is a funny book, it's a clever book, and it is full of irony. Twain makes a lot of fun of tourism and tourists, though of course he was one. I love the short line found in Chapter 34 (p. 232 of the Seawolf edition):

[E]ven the finest scenery loses incalculably when there is no one to enjoy it with.

If you want to read one Twain travel book, read *Innocents Abroad*. If you want to read a second, read *Following the Equator*. *Tramp* comes third. The Book Club has thus spoken!

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