

June 4, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

***Our Year of Allegiance.*** Over the years, this weekly email has tried not to act as a calendar of events; we have other and better media for that. But, as we head into the summer, there remain important community moments for us to enjoy together.

Last Sunday was the Israel Day Parade, which seemed to have the largest turnout of participants and a diminished turnout of spectators. Security concerns led to the entire west side of Fifth Avenue at Central Park being blocked off to parade viewers. Notwithstanding the security concerns (and a feckless Mayor), the parade was a success.

June brings our June 16 gala, which is going to be both educational and festive. Here is a [link](#). We have not yet reached our goal of raising \$300k, but we are getting there. One more sustained push could do it. Please, help in any way your financial circumstances permit — [click here](#).

We are celebrating our graduates on Shabbat, June 13, and Shabbat kiddush will be held on our Paved Paradise throughout the month (weather permitting). [Click here](#) to submit graduate information.

At Touro Synagogue, we are sponsoring the important Symposium on Religious Liberty (discussed below) on June 8, and some of us are planning on being in Newport for Shabbat on June 20-21. The Shabbatot after that when some of us may be up there are July 11-12 (Classical Music and Hall of Fame Tennis events); August 1-2 (Jazz Festival); September 5-6 (week before Rosh Hashana); October 17-18 (Shabbat Noah, or our Shabbat of Hope); and November 14-15, the Shabbat after Kristallnacht. We are getting a lively response to this effort. Please join us for a Shabbat, and join us in the community meals we are planning as well. Limited housing accommodations may also be available. Contact Barbara Reiss.

***Sensible Thinking about Antisemitism; Our Touro Symposium.*** A welcome lead in *The Economist* (May 9) shows a news organization that is generally arms-length when it comes to Israel being wholly supportive of active, aggressive intervention to halt “the rise in antisemitism in the West”. In its usual, penetrating, and data-supported plain speak, the article says:

*Everyone should be able to distinguish between an elderly man at a London bus stop and a Middle Eastern state.*

A Letter to the Editor a week later, from self-declared non-Jew Alexander McPherson of Toronto, says it perfectly:

*Antisemitism is a mirror, not a window.*

Part of the response to American antisemitism must be a bold willingness to dialogue as well as to educate. And for that the Symposium on religious freedom headed by Rabbi Soloveichik, with speakers both Jewish and non, taking place at Touro Synagogue next Monday is a highly positive addition to this effort.

I hope many of us will be able to attend. It is the first of what we are planning to schedule as an annual event. [Here](#) is the flyer.

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

The **Haftarah for Parashat Behaalotcha** is taken from Zechariah 2:14-4:7. I find it to be among our most beautiful. It includes the injunction to walk in the ways of the Almighty, and it (again) debunks the notion that Jews are warmongers (*"Not by military force and not by physical strength, but by My spirit" says the Lord of Hosts*). Its reference to the menorah makes it a fitting read on Shabbat Hanukah, when we also read it.

Many of our heavy hitters submitted great tune suggestions for this week:

Ritual Director Jay Harwitt suggests:

- [Every Valley](#) from *The Messiah* by Handel ("its lyrics from Isaiah 40:4, but in honor of the final verse here")
- [Not by Might](#) by Debbie Friedman (using the actual penultimate verse) [where Jay found this, who knows!]

Michael Schulder, from an airplane flying over the Pacific Ocean, suggests:

- [Lay Lady Lay](#), "by R. Zimmerman" a/k/a Bob Dylan

Andrew Druck, MSS, focuses on the light/fire aspect of the prophecy and suggests:

- [Light One Candle](#), as sung by Peter, Paul, and Mary
- [Candle in the Wind](#), as sung by Elton John
- [Light my Fire](#), as sung by the Doors [up there with *Layla*, imho]
- [Light of the Day](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen

Regarding the rebuilding of the Temple, Andrew suggests:

- [Our Day Will Come](#), as sung by Ruby & the Romantics
- [Jerusalem of Gold](#), as sung by Naomi Shemer
- [Independence Day](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen, which we suggest a lot

**Talmudic Intent Revisited.** The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week learning pages 31-37 of Tractate Chulin. The Mishna on page 31a and the gemarra that follows present an interesting logical extension of important thoughts we have shared many times before.

The Talmud teaches that a mindless doing of commandments is not what our religion calls for. Unthinking sacrifice is no sacrifice. Rote devotion is really second-best. Intent is King or Queen, as you prefer. We saw that repeatedly in the last many Tractates elucidating legal and jurisprudential principles, including Sanhedrin, Zevachim, and Menachot (e.g., our emails of [2/29/24](#); [10/1/24](#); [1/15/26](#));

Along this vein, the Mishna here teaches

*מתני' נפלה סכין ונשחטה, אף על פי ששחטה כדרךה – פסולה, שנאמר: "ונזבחת... ואכלת", מה שאתה זובח אתה אוכל.*

**MISHNA:** *If a knife fell and slaughtered an animal, although the knife slaughtered the animal in the standard manner, the slaughter is not valid, as it is stated: "And you shall slaughter...and you shall eat" (Deuteronomy 27:7), from which it is derived: That which you slaughter you may eat, and that which was slaughtered on its own, you may not eat.*

Based on what we have learned, this Mishna seems consistent with our prior understandings. If the knife just fell, there was no intention behind it and, therefore, no kosher act of ritual slaughter. But then comes the gemarra, and the water gets a little deeper. Ok, says the gemarra, a knife falling needed no human intervention or direction after the push, so it's easy to see how the absence of intent coupled with the absence of positive action leads to the conclusion of "not valid". But what if someone throws a knife as into a wall, intending not to slaughter but certainly intending an action, and what if in that action an animal is accurately and ritually cut. What is the rule then?

That is indeed the very question asked on this and the next page (31b). One opinion says that all that was needed was some purposeful conduct, so in the case posited the slaughter is kosher. That is the opinion of Rav Natan, and there is some evidence that that is or was the leading opinion. The Sages on the other hand say, no, the intentional activity needs to be of the slaughterer itself.

In a way, this discussion is harder than the discussion that follows in the ensuing pages to finish Chapter 2 of the Tractate. Subsequent pages ask, what if there is intent, but it's a bad intent, for example, an intent to slaughter for idol worship. The answer is that the slaughter is not kosher, but this seems easier than what is presented here.

In any case, how do we want *this* dispute to come out? Does it undermine our notion of intentional religious conduct to say that, in a case of ritual slaughter, any active intent will do? Would we prefer to remain purists – that just like in the case of Temple sacrifices, you really need to keep your mind on what you are doing?

What's your view?

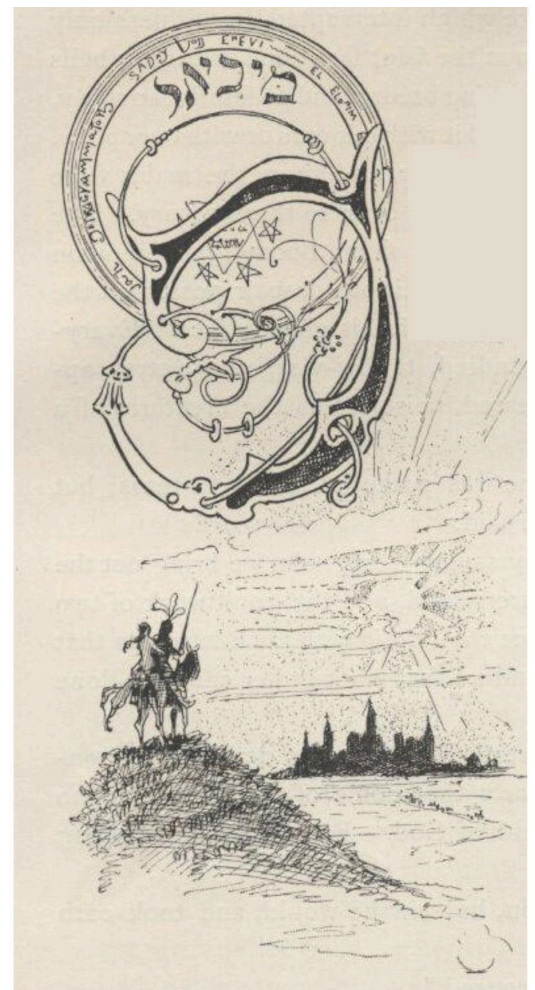
**Again They're Copying Us.** We've been talking about books since 2021 (even earlier actually, but see our email of [7/8/21](#)). We even had a contest to name the book-sharing section of this email (see, e.g., our emails of [11/17/22](#) and [12/22/22](#)). Having given the world this great idea, which no one had or would have thought of without us, only now has sharing book recommendations gone mainstream.

*Bloomberg Weekend* is starting an *On Books* link at the end of June. Other copycats include celebrity book clubs. We, however, don't sell ads or promotions. We are not influencers. *The Economist* (5/9/26) says: "Many celebrities now have book clubs. Most are irritating." Precisely. But not ours.

Calling all readers. There are over four *million* books published in America each year. The number is mind-numbing. We all need some help identifying really good and really bad reads. As we move into Summer, send in a summary, positive or negative, of a book you've recently read. Enlighten the rest of us.

***Siyum HaTwain (#21)***. Here is the list of the Twain works that the Shearith Israel Twain Book Club is reading (see email of [Dec. 25, 2025](#)).

Before we get to this week's summary, you will be gabberflasted by the pics that Michael Schulder sent in, from the original drawings of Merlin in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Faith Fogelman reviewed this book brilliantly on [May 7, 2026](#). Michael read it, too, on a trip to Aukland (that's in New Zealand – I checked), for business, alas. Michael, the photos are terrific:



**THE HOLY FOUNTAIN**

This week, Francine Alfandary shares the following harsh if warranted reactions to Twain's *Christian Science* (1907) (#21 on our list):

*Mark Twain was deeply skeptical of the organized religion of his day. He wrote, in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1889), "any Established Church is an established crime, an established slave-pen." Almost 20 years later, he turned his pen to Christian Science. In a series of essays collected and published in 1907, Twain railed against Christian Science and its founder, Mary Baker Eddy.*

*Mary Baker Eddy founded Christian Science in 1879. By 1905, there were nearly 900 Christian Science churches. Twain mocked Mrs. Eddy's claims that Christian Science could heal the body without a physician's aid. Twain accused her of using a ghostwriter. He claimed Eddy threatened to excommunicate any follower who did not sell copies of her book, "Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures." He claimed Mrs. Eddy's profit on the sale of the "little book" was 700%.*

*Twain was the country's most prominent detractor of the Christian Science movement. He devoted nearly 60,000 words to his criticism of the movement. He certainly raised some excellent points, and time has sided with Twain: the movement has shrunk from a high of about 270,000 adherents to fewer than 50,000 today. Nonetheless, I found his Christian Science essays to be repetitive, tedious and lacking in his characteristic wit.*

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