

July 9, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. We are well over the fast of the Seventeenth of Tamuz. Rabbi Soloveichik has scheduled a welcome Three Weeks series of lectures ([here](#)). And, because we are in the saddest three weeks of our Jewish calendar, I'm mindful that many of us don't listen to certain types of music during this period. Other observances of sadness are increasingly evident up to Tisha B'Av on July 22-23.

That July 4 was on Shabbat rendered inapplicable all rites and customs of sadness. And we at Shearith Israel celebrated our Squintennial in great style. We were largely full downstairs, and the Rabbi's talk was excellent, as was the festive kiddush. It was a beautiful and fitting way to observe this happy day – fully in the American moment but proudly steadfast in our religious traditions. (Note: I have this report on good authority – I sat this one out. I'd only been looking forward to it for a year, after all. Man Plans/G-d Laughs.)

E Pluribus Unum. What I do have on good, first-hand, eye-witness authority is the spectacle of the spectacular fireworks down the East River as well as in Queens and the Bronx as Shabbat ended. (Oh, so he can't get to services, but he can get to the fireworks? Not exactly; there was a view from Weill-Cornell making it the best part of a bad day.) We were able to view the synchronicity of the colossal (biggest ever) fireworks East River display. And with a turn of the head, we could see dozens of pop-up fireworks displays in as many neighborhoods as there were cultures of the people watching them. One displayed timed, choreographed, homogenous unity and solidarity. One displayed chaotic and heterogenous unity and solidarity. **Out of many, one.** Happy 250th. (And to Beth, who endured the difficulties of the day with me with her unabatable good cheer, I borrow the great ode from Bill Withers, [Ain't No Sunshine](#): *And this house just ain't no home/Any time she goes away.*)

Faith for Food. We have not discussed the work of our Food Annex in a few weeks. But its work has gone on as undiminished as the needs of our hungry neighbors. Masbia continues to feed 300+ of our neighbors weekly from our storage and distribution sheds on Paved Paradise. In largest measure, Masbia accomplishes this act of *chesed* with funds that we and our faith partners have raised. Here ([link](#)) is a short video made by Masbia; it's worth a watch. It's also worth a donation, if you can spare it ([here](#)).

Walking Humbly. It is a testament to the power and importance of the quote from the Prophet Micha that for the third week someone has had something beautiful to say about it. This from Hayyim Obadyah on the verse: *Only to do justice, and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God:*

[Some people] think the directive is to walk with God and also to be humble. Rather, I think, the implication is that one should be humble with regard to one's walking with God. That is, when one walks with God one should be humble about it. We are told to walk with God without bragging that we walk with God, without insisting that our way is the only (or even the best) way to walk with God, without being certain that our understanding of how we should walk with God is the only correct understanding.

This is a directive that resonates strongly in these days when so many tell us how we should walk with God. May we always strive to maintain our humility.

Name that Haftarah Tune. We are now collecting tunes for the haftarot for the remaining parshiot in **Sefer Bemidbar: Parshiot Chukat-Balak** (another double parasha), **Pinchas**, and **Matot-Massei** (another double parasha, this week). And we have opened the lines for song suggestions for the haftarot in roughly the first half of Sefer Devarim: **Devarim, Va'etchanan, Eikev, Re'eh, and Shoftim.**

This week is the second of the *Telata De'puranuta*, or the three “haftarot of punishment” that precede Tisha B'Av. As they go, this second one isn't so bad (well, it's not what you'd call happy – though as with the other two the end uplifts). The reading is the **Haftarah for Parashat Massei**, normally the last haftarah in Sefer Bemidbar anyway (which is interesting in itself; the judges would part with two points for some evidence that the *Telata De'puranuta* were established by the time the haftarah choice for Massei was made). The haftarah is taken from Jeremiah 2:4-28, and a few different verses are then added by Sephardim/Ashkenazim.

Andrew Druck (whom I've given the moniker Master Song Suggester [MSS], but who in reality might just be called Awesome Andrew), notes that Jeremiah writes of how Israel has forsaken the Almighty, but if they do repentance, they will no longer wander, and nations will bless the Almighty's name. So, from the Almighty's perspective, Andrew suggests:

- [*You Cheated, You Lied*](#), as sung by The Shields
- [*Oh, Lonesome Me*](#), as sung by Neil Young
- [*High Noon*](#), as sung by Frankie Laine (“Do not forsake me, oh my darlin’”).
- [*Lonesome Day*](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [*Return Again*](#), as sung by Shlomo Carlebach
- [*Come Back Baby*](#), as sung by Aretha Franklin
- [*Stay, Stay, Stay*](#), as sung by Taylor Swift (“in honor of her wedding”)
- [*Stand by Me*](#), as sung by Ben E. King

For my song suggestions, I think of the contrasting metaphors of the Israelites trading the “source of living waters” for “broken cisterns” (of course we are thinking of rain this week – New Yorkers were not the only beneficiaries of the substantial rainfall earlier this week (2-3 times the average) – so were the reservoir system (at less than 90% vs 95% normal) and the trees in Central Park.

- [*Bridge Over Trouble Water*](#), here by Simon & Garfunkel
- [*Smoke on the Water*](#), here by Deep Purple

Ben Pekuah in Tractate Chulin. This week, the global Daf Yomi learning cycle is learning pages 66-72 of Tractate Chulin. We here complete the Third Chapter, dealing with types of kosher animals (the final pages of the Chapter focus on fish and grasshoppers).

Beginning on page 68a, we begin Chapter Four, named for its initial words *Behaimah Hamaksheh*, or an animal in difficult labor. These first pages, including those beyond ours of this week, deal with the fascinating case, with indirect antecedents in the Torah (give me a cite for one point), of how Jewish law treats the relationship between a birthing animal and its fetus. The Mishna on page 68a starts not with the general rule but with permutations of whether the fetus's various body parts had extended outside the mother before the mother was slaughtered. The discussion becomes graphic.

This entire discussion falls under the heading of *ben pekuah*, or the offspring of a severed or sundered animal. The interesting fact is that, setting aside complexities, if an animal is slaughtered in a kosher way, its fetus may be eaten on the basis of the mother's ritual slaughter. It's easy to explain the Rabbinic restriction on the practice (if the offspring gets up and walks around, it needs a kosher shechita), since the risk of confusion is great. But how do we explain the Biblical permissiveness? Calling the learned or thoughtful for some explanation.

I also want to note that, in these pages, the Talmud spends a lot of time on the laws of ritual purity and impurity. It comes up in so many places in the Talmudic corpus, ostensibly because there do not exist tractates specifically devoted to these issues. My question, again for the learned or thoughtful, is whether there are compilations of these issues elsewhere in the Talmudic-stage literature, and whether putting them all in one place might have made it easier both to understand those issues as well as the issues into which they are inserted.

UnTwaining. Thanks to Roger Mesznik, who likes [this](#) "nice coda" to our discussion of Twain.

What I like about the piece is its apolitical politicalness. Thank you Roger.

Our Next Book Club Project. I'm *still* hoping to wait till the Fall to get started on our next group list. I thought this would be an easy one. Who would choose Kafka over between-the-wars American greats with Jewish characters? Yet for every Laury Frieber, who not only weighed in favoring the former but has some books in mind, there seems to be a Billy Schulder – "KAFKA!" is all he felt he needed to say (which in ALL CAPS is pretty funny in itself).

I won't say the voting is neck-and-neck, but it's close enough to keep the polls open another week or two. And note, the first category need not be about Jewish *writers*. It's the portrayal of Jewish *characters* that, I think, that Madelene Towne has in mind. So which is it – and please, if you vote, consider participating.

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