Schedule Alerts
- Hanukkah begins on Sunday evening (candle-lighting: 4:32 pm).
- Our offices will be closed on December 25.
- PTTS is on hiatus next week for winter break. It will resume on Thursday, January 2.

Debar Torah
—AARON SCHWARTZ-MESSING, BET MIDRASH PROGRAM—
This week’s Parasha begins with a single verse about Yaakov’s return to Canaan, and immediately thereafter focuses on Yosef and his story. Rashi cites a midrash which sharpens the connection between these two seemingly unconnected topics: “When Yaakov desired to live in serenity, the trouble of Yosef sprung upon him. When the righteous desire to live in serenity, the Holy One Blessed be He says ‘Is the reward that awaits the righteous in The World to Come insufficient for them, such that they desire to live in serenity in this world?’”

At first glance, this midrash is puzzling. Is it not understandable that Yaakov, who appears to have had the hardest life of all of the Abot, would want a break from his hardships? Is needing a break indeed a punishable offense? Was Moshe not appropriate for pushing himself too hard: “But Moshe’s father-in-law said to him, The thing you are doing is not right; you will surely wear yourself out…” (Shemot 18:17-18).

The answer to this question lies in Hashem’s statement at the end of the midrash above: “the Holy One, Blessed be He, says ‘Is the reward that awaits the righteous in The World to Come insufficient for them, such that they desire to live in serenity in this world?’” It is natural - and indeed obligatory - for people to take breaks to replenish their strength. Human beings need pleasure and comfort. The trouble lies in how this comfort is viewed.

It is taught Pirkei Aboth (4:16): Rabbi Yaakov said: this world is like a vestibule before the world to come; prepare yourself in the vestibule, so that you may enter the banqueting-hall. Our goal in this world is not to have a good time, rather to prepare ourselves and those around us for the World to Come. When pleasure becomes the reward, an end in and of itself, that is where the trouble lies. When life becomes a pleasure-seeking endeavor, one is in danger of losing sight of the ultimate goal.

This is why God couldn’t let Yaakov live in serenity. He saw in Yaakov’s desire to live in serenity an element of pleasure-seeking, not merely as a means to replenish his energy and double-down in his Abodat Hashem, rather for its own sake. God, out of his love and dedication to Yaakov, saw that it would be spiritually damaging to allow the righteous Yaakov to begin down this dangerous path.

Although we may not be on the level of Yaakov Avinu, we can still learn a valuable lesson from his experience. Even though comfort and pleasure play an important role in our daily lives, we should always remember that they are not the reward, nor an end in and of themselves, but rather tools that we can use to elevate ourselves, and catalysts to bring holiness into our lives and the lives of those around us.
THIS SHABBAT MORNING
Kiddush In Honor of Liz Rios
Shabbat, December 21 | Following Morning Services
Generations of children who have passed through Shearith Israel have experienced the warmth, creativity, and enthusiasm of our tireless Tot Shabbat and Toddler Program leader, Liz Rios. Join us as we present Liz with a special thank-you gift as a token of our appreciation.
We love you, Liz!

Film Screening: Children of the Inquisition
with special guest speaker, Rabbi Marc Angel
Saturday Night, January 4 | 7:30 pm
At Lincoln Square Synagogue, 180 Amsterdam Ave
Shearith Israel and Lincoln Square are proud to present a screening of this remarkable film about the history and experiences of Sephardi Jews following the Spanish & Portuguese expulsions and the descendants of crypto-Jews all the way to our time. After the film, Rabbi Marc Angel will speak about the religious issues surrounding identity, conversion, and his own work with modern-day descendants of crypto-Jews.
$15 in advance, $20 at the door. To register, visit shearithisrael.org/children-inquisition.

Pre-Pay Your 2020-2021 Dues
Through December 31
As we approach the end of 2019, and back by popular demand, we are again offering you another way to help the synagogue while potentially improving your own 2019 tax position. Full, associate, and young members may pre-pay 2020-2021 dues at our current rates. If we receive your payment by December 31, 2019, you will be exempt from any dues increase that may be implemented in the upcoming year.
To pre-pay, go to shearithisrael.org/prepay2020.

ONLY A FEW SPOTS LEFT
Mark Twain In the Holy Land
Sunday, February 2 | 11:30 am & 12:30 pm
At The New-York Historical Society
Mark Twain’s memoir of his tour of the Holy Land launched his career; his experiences are particularly fascinating when considered from the perspective of Jewish history and religion. Join Rabbi Meir Soloveichik for a tour on the final day of the New-York Historical Society’s exhibit on Twain’s trip through the Mediterranean.
Registration is currently open to sponsors only ($180) at shearithisrael.org/nyhs-twain.

Parent-Child Learning & Pizza
Saturday Nights bi-weekly | One hour after Habdala
Next session will be Hanukkah-themed on December 28, and will be led by Rabbi Meir Soloveichik
For Elementary School Age Children & Their Parents or Grandparents
This educational initiative gives parents (or grandparents) the opportunity to study Torah with their children in a fun interactive setting led by Shearith Israel’s clergy and talented volunteers. Pizza and prizes help make this a fun-filled evening of inter-generational learning.
The program is free, but please register for each session you will be attending at shearithisrael.org/pclearning so that we can know how many to expect!

Public Tours
Our next public tour is Wednesday, January 8, at 11:00 AM
Parnas Office Hours
Louis Solomon would be delighted to meet with you. Please schedule a visit at parnas@shearithisrael.org.

JEWISH EDUCATION 5780
⇒ Friday Night Lights | Rabbi Soloveichik
Friday Nights | Following Evening Services
⇒ Shabbat Afternoon Class | Rabbi Soloveichik
Shabbat Afternoons | One hour before Minha (but never earlier than 3:30 pm)
⇒ The Guide to the Duties of the Heart | Rabbi Shimmon de Hollander
Sunday Mornings | 8:45 am | Following S800 am morning services
⇒ The Road to Kingship | Rabbi David Silber
Sunday Mornings | 10:00 am | Final session this Sunday
⇒ Tuesday Morning Women’s Class | Rabbi Soloveichik
Tuesdays | 9:00 am | Sign up for weekly reminders at shearithisrael.org/join-our-email-lists
⇒ Bet Midrash | led by Steven Gotlib
Monday-Thursday | One hour before evening services

RABBI SOLOVEICHIK’S UPCOMING MAJOR LECTURES
⇒ Mark Your Calendars and Watch Your Emails
Following Evening Services
⇒ Wednesday, January 8: “From Mitzvot to Manhattan: What the Metropolitan Museum Teaches Us About the Exodus”
⇒ Monday, February 10: Special History Lecture
⇒ Tuesday, March 3: Major Pre-Purim Shiur

YOUTH CORNER
⇒ Upcoming Parent-Child Learning & Pizza
- Saturday, December 28 | One hour after habdala | Led by Rabbi Soloveichik
- Saturday, January 11 | Led by Z. Edinger | Register for each session at shearithisrael.org/pclearning
⇒ Mitzvot Workshop with Z. Edinger
Sunday, January 5 | 10:00 am | For elementary school aged children | Register at shearithisrael.org/mitzvot-workshop
⇒ Brunch & Learn with Rabbi Soloveichik
Sunday, February 9 | 10:30 am | For elementary school aged children | Register at shearithisrael.org/brunch-learn