



April 7, 2022

Dear Friends,

This shabbat is called *Shabbat HaGadol* (*the Great Sabbath*), likely named for the words of the Prophet Micah in this week's *Haftarah*: "*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of **the great and awesome day of the Lord.***" Besides all its detailed laws and arduous preparations, Passover is a holiday about our national redemption. The *Haftarah* this week urges us to remember the Law of Moses, its statutes and ordinances, in preparation for the great day which will bring the coming of the Messiah and our ultimate redemption. Not coincidentally, pulpit rabbis traditionally will deliver speeches about the laws and meaning of Passover on this shabbat. I am certain that many such *derashot* have been given in Newport just as they have in New York.

Also falling this past week was the anniversary of the passing of Rabbi Abraham Pereira Mendes, who was the minister of the Touro Synagogue from 1883 until his death on April 4th, 1893. He had previously served as rabbi in Jamaica, Montego Bay, Birmingham, and London, and, had published widely on a variety of subjects. Two of his sons held important pulpits in New York, including Henry Pereira Mendes, the minister of Shearith Israel. When Shearith Israel invited him to serve the Touro Synagogue in 1883 he was a very well known, 58-year-old, highly experienced rabbi. The Jews of Newport could not have found a more accomplished minister.

Rabbi Mendes formally re-consecrated the Touro synagogue on May 25, 1883. For the next 10 he led services, read Torah, delivered lectures, taught a bible class, officiated weddings and funerals, and attended to all the religious needs of Newport's newly "reborn" Jewish community. He raised money for the Newport Hospital, provided for the needs of Jewish naval officers, and found time to document the fading inscriptions within the historic cemetery. During this period, he lived at three addresses: 124 Mill Street, 292 Broadway, and finally 21 Brinley Street. From all accounts, Rabbi Mendes was much loved by his congregants and respected by all. Some of you may know his great-grandson, Col. Jonathan de Sola Mendes, who at 101 years old is still an active member of Shearith Israel, as are his children and grandchildren.

A collection of A.P. Mendes' sermons was published in 1855. Contained within it is a masterful sermon for *Shabbat haGadol* delivered in the Bevis Marks synagogue, London. You can read it in its entirety [here](#). It concludes with the following prayer:

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ALMIGHTY God! Thy children are here before Thee, with hearts and minds directed to Thy approaching Passover—the glorious festival which gave a boon to Israel and the world, by teaching men the principles of liberty and truth. We thank Thee, Lord, for the care with which Thou hast preserved us alive, to witness the recurrence of this season;—we thank Thee for the gracious bounties of peace and spiritual repose to which Thou dost again invite us by Thy approaching feast-days; but more than all, we thank Thee that Thou hast implanted in our souls an appreciation of what is noble and good -- an admiration for the many moral truths involved in the Pesach, its lessons and its duties. Grant, Father, that we value forever the doctrines of that ennobling festival, and bring them into activity. And when its festive hours shall assemble us...to acknowledge the mercies of a past redemption, do Thou fill our hearts with all those sweet emotions that lead to good results — to purity and virtue, obedience and love. So, Father! advance Thy cheering feast of liberty, that it may bring joy to our hearts, happiness to our homes, and holy gratitude to our souls and the souls of all Thy people! Amen.

Reading these words today, we can perhaps get a glimpse of what worshippers might have heard in the Touro synagogue this shabbat more than 130 years ago.

Amidst all our preparations for Passover, we continue to look forward to our upcoming shabbaton together in May. I hope that you will be able to attend this wonderful event. If you are thinking of attending but haven't yet signed up please let us know as soon as possible. You can [sign-up here](#) or otherwise email me directly. I look forward to hearing from you (and seeing you) soon.

I also want to invite all of you to a special virtual presentation I will be giving just for our [Touro Synagogue Affiliates](#) and their friends on Wednesday April 20th (*Hol HaMoed*.) The topic will be *תבאמו ותטעמו בהר נחלתך*: *New York, Newport, and the Seventh Day of Passover*. A zoom link will be sent next week. I hope you will join me for this presentation, and I look forward to spending time together – albeit virtually.

I pray that holiday preparations go smoothly for us all and may this Passover “*bring joy to our hearts, happiness to our homes, and gratitude to our souls*.” Wishing you a happy and healthy holiday!

Shabbat Shalom,

Reverend Zachary Edinger
Sexton
Congregation Shearith Israel