

November 26, 2025

Thanksgiving Edition

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. Three interesting items for your Thanksgiving edification:

First, I was delighted when, last week, I heard from Arnold de Vries of London. Arnold is the “4th [generation] Great Grandson of [Hana de Abraham Sarfaty née] Touro, Isaac Touro’s sister, who with the rest of the family remained in Amsterdam in the mid-18th cent.” Isaac Touro was the father of benefactors of the Newport Synagogue, Abraham and Judah Touro. The Touro family also counts as one of the significant benefactors of our Congregation during the Nineteenth Century. We still say memorial prayers thanking them for their generosity lo’ these hundreds of years later. Arnold follows our Congregation, and the deep continuity deserves mention and reflection on Thanksgiving.

Second, Arnold reacted to my mention of the fact that Shearith Israel as a community has been giving public thanks to the blessings of America since the first official Thanksgiving in 1789. Arnold sent an interesting article ([here](#)) containing evidence that Isaac Touro, in Newport, had given a public Thanksgiving prayer as early as 1765. It’s a beautiful prayer, and we should ask Rabbi Soloveichik to read it tomorrow. I note that Dr. de Sola Pool also mentions even earlier thanksgiving prayers, just not under the auspices of the national government, as they were commencing in 1789 (*New World* at 126-29).

Third, sometimes we are so busy enjoying our own Thanksgiving rituals that we neglect rituals enjoyed by others. We try not to miss listening to [Alice’s Restaurant](#) at noon. Bob Starkand offers a different “Broadway Thanksgiving tradition”: watching [Turkey Lurkey](#) time. Explains Bob:

The Tony Award version feature[es] Donna McKechnie. There are several versions, but this is the best. In part because it has McKechnie, and in part, because the tempo was too fast, yet the dancers pulled it off. There are several dancers here who later starred in "Chorus Line", created by Michael Bennett, who is the choreographer here. You also have to love the dresses designed by Donald Brooks.

Bob, thank you.

Here at Shearith Israel, certainly for the decade-plus that Rabbi Soloveichik has been with us, our Thanksgiving observance has paid homage to the old (we continue the long tradition of saying special hymns of thanksgiving) and has inaugurated and sustained the new (the Rabbi’s lecture after services and the food pack-a-thon). It remains one of the most special non-Chag/Shabbat days of our communal year. We hope you will join us.

A Little Culture Over Thanksgiving. Thanks to Alan Zwiebel for suggesting an “amazing exhibition” now on view at the Grolier Club, 47 East 60th Street. It’s titled *Jewish Worlds Illuminated: A Treasury of*

Hebrew Manuscripts from the JTS Library and contains “rarely seen gems from the Cairo Genizah among other sources”, including apparently the Rambam’s original Mishneh Torah manuscript. Sounds amazing, whether for this weekend or soon.

Name that Haftarah Tune. We are now collecting tunes for the final **haftarot** in Sefer Bereshit: **Parshiot Toldot, Vayetze** (this week’s parasha), **Vayishlach, Vayeshev, Miketz, Vayigash, and Vayechi.**

I have two general observations about this week’s haftarah. One is that Ashkenazim and Sephardim both read from the Prophet Hosea, but from different places (Ashkenazim from 12:13–14:10; Sephardim from 11:7–12:12). In this space we are happy to take songs animated by either reading, but it would be a little easier were there was as much standardization in the haftarot as there is in the parshiot themselves. Second, while both readings refer to Jacob's journey, as described in the Torah portion, both are really allegorical and frankly abstract. The parshiot in Sefer Bereshit are so concrete, the narrative so arresting, that it is a challenge to understand as much from the haftarot, which are so, well, prophetic-sounding. Does anyone else have this reaction?

Anyway, the Ashkenazic version includes a rebuke for idolatry, while the Sephardic version rails against corruption by the priests. For both, I think of some of the same songs as last week:

- [*Fix You*](#), here by Coldplay; and a new one:
- [*Bridge Over Troubled Water*](#), here by Simon and Garfunkel

And let me add two for last week’s **Haftarah for Parashat Toldot**, both excellent:

First, Claude Nadaf recognizes that Esav’s heart, too, is broken:

- [*What’s Love Got To Do With It*](#), here by Tina Turner

And Gabriella Styler picks two verses from Malachi:

- a. Hertz Edition-Haftarah Toldot Malachi - Chapter 1 - verse 5, pg. 102: “And your eyes shall see, and ye shall see the Lord is great beyond the border of Israel”; and
- b. The Stone Edition-Haftarah Toldot Malachi - Chapters 1:1-2:7 - verse 6, pg. 1138: “If I am a Father, where is my Honor, and if I am a Master where is my reverence says Hashem, Master of Legions”

For both she suggests

- [*I Can See Clearly Now*](#), here by Johnny Nash 1972

*I can see clearly now, the rain is gone
I can see all obstacles in my way
Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-shiny day
It's gonna be a bright (bright), bright (bright)
Sun-shiny day*

Mixing It Up. This week, the global Daf Yomi learning cycle is studying pages 70-76 of Tractate Zevachim. On page 70a, we begin the Eighth Chapter of the Tractate. With that we enter the very different world of admixtures or *taarovet*. The connection between this Chapter and prior ones is that the Mishna here treats cases where sacrifices become mixed up with other animals or items. It's from there that the general rules of admixtures are raised and debated.

Briefly, since I know we have Thanksgiving to prepare for, these pages are interesting in their expression of the same kinds of themes we have addressed earlier in the Tractate. On the one hand, there are stringencies: one bad apple (such as the wrong sacrifice or a sacrifice that is diseased or impure) does indeed usually spoil the whole bunch, [girl](#), contrary to what the Osmonds taught us – that is, advertent and even inadvertent mixing of bad with good does not sanitize the bad and in most cases taints the good.

Yet on the other hand, there is a limit: in the context of non-Biblical commands, for example, by page 74a, we learn that, in cases of double uncertainties, or *s'fek s'faykah*, the law can find ways to avoid huge wastage and expense that would otherwise arise from an unbending set of negative rules. A similar set of leniencies is applied to mixtures confounded within other mixtures.

The rules are not always intuitive, so you need to look at every one. At the same time, the rules are not (overtly) punitive.

Twain for the 250th. We have another new club member, Rima Raynes. And we have a fence sitter, Warren Stern, who seems to be ok doing some of the reading but isn't so keen on a periodic zoom or meeting to discuss the books. I can see his point. So this is what I now propose. Below are books and club members listed next to some of them. All we are asking is that each club member read the assigned book and send in a few sentences of explanation and opinion of merit and wit for the books assigned.

If we do it this way, I'm hoping that we will get more takers for the project; if you are interested, send me a note with the book(s) you want to be responsible for. Come on! Some of us are going to try to read them all, though that will take longer. They will get *extra* credit. So what think you all?

1860s

1. *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and other stories (1865)* – Lou Solomon
2. *The Innocents Abroad (1869)* – Michael Schulder

1870s

3. *Roughing It (1872)* – Aura Bijou
4. *The Gilded Age (1873)* – Laury Fieber
5. *Sketches New and Old (1875)* – Francine Alfandary
6. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876)* – Rima Raynes
7. *A Tramp Abroad (1880)* – Bob Starkand

1880s

8. *The Prince and the Pauper (1881)* –
9. *Life on the Mississippi (1883)* –
10. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884–85)* –
11. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1889)* –

1890s

12. *The American Claimant (1892)* –
13. *Tom Sawyer Abroad (1894)* –
14. *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894)* –
15. *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc (1896)* –
16. *Following the Equator (1897)* –
17. *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg (1899)* –

1900s

18. *A Double Barrelled Detective Story (1902)* –
19. *What Is Man? (1906)* –
20. *The \$30,000 Bequest and Other Stories (1906)* –
21. *Christian Science (1907)* –
22. *Is Shakespeare Dead? (1909)* –
23. *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven (1909)* –

Posthumous works (Significant)

24. *Mark Twain's Autobiography (first vol. 1924; full unredacted ed. 2010–2015)* –
25. *The Mysterious Stranger (posthumous 1916; several versions)* –
26. *Letters from the Earth (1962)* –
27. *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger (1982 edition)* –
28. *Queen Victoria's Jubilee (1975)* –
29. *Mark Twain's Notebook (1935)* –

- 30. *The Loves of Alonzo Fitz and Other Stories (posthumous collection) –*
- 31. *Fables of Man (2009, scholarly edition) –*

In this, our ***Year of Allegiance***, let us couple our collective ***commitment*** with a prayer to The Almighty, ***Hatzlich'ana, help us succeed.***