

December 25, 2025

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. On Sunday night/Monday, we said goodbye to Hanukkah:



But on Sunday morning we celebrated the Bar Mitzvah of Moshe Sasson, son of Sharon and Rafe Sasson, brother of Barbara, Elie, and Ronnie. Moshe did a marvelous Torah reading and musaf for Rosh Hodesh. The Sasson bar-mitzvah triumvirate carried our three Sifrei Torah this past Shabbat and are a formidable positive force in shoring up Hazanut and minyan attendance. Hazak u'barukh.

Who Says We Don't Innovate?! I chuckled. During morning shacharit services, including during Hallel, Rabbi Rohde and Reverend Edinger several times inserted the melody of [See, the Conqu'ring Hero Comes](#) from Handel's Judas Maccabaeus. Could it be a new addition to our canon? Not exactly; our London sister synagogue, Bevis Marks, has been using that melody for a very long time during Hanukkah, and the music dates from 1746 after all. Maybe that's innovation Shearith Israel-style.

Faith for Food. Week # 3 of this important communal effort served 60 households, 42 deliveries from our Annex and 18 pick-ups by appointment. Importantly, Masbia got some great coverage of the effort in Spanish ([here](#)).

I deeply know that, for many of us, discretionary spending on charity is quite difficult. Yet this is a program whose success will be directly proportional to the financial support and sweat equity we put into it. If your year-end seems to have turned up any excess, please consider donating it [right here right now](#).

Ner News for Our 250th: Touro Focus. The Rabbi's next installment in his lecture series is on January 17, 2026. In the meantime, we can use our time for wise planning:

First, we are planning on scheduling about one weekend per month between May and November 2026, when some of us can plan to go to Newport for the weekend and buoy up, and be buoyed up by, our friends and co-congregants at Congregation Ahavath Israel at Touro Synagogue. Rabbi Soloveichik will be there for some but not all, and if we all know the dates in advance, maybe we can make plans to be there at the same time as other Shearith Israelites. We did that last May and again in November 2025; it worked out wonderfully. So, in the next week or so, send in preferences for weekends from May to November.

Second, we are now starting to plan for a major program to be held at Touro Synagogue in 2026. Trustee Stan Towne has provisionally named it the *Touro Conference on Religious Liberty*. Think about what this should look like. Think about whether you might be willing to spend some hours helping to plan it. Among other important aspects of Touro Synagogue and the community that takes care of it is the fact that Touro Synagogue is a symbol of religious freedom for all faiths in America really like no other. Help us fashion and establish a major conference to further this noble and uniquely American innovation.

Finally, our poet Albert Rosenblatt composed [this](#) as a response to Longfellow's last line in his poem *The Jewish Cemetery at Newport*. Albert calculates that the consecration of the Newport Synagogue in 1763, which Shearith Israel helped pay for, occurred on Hanukkah.

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

Whenever I get an email from Alan Zwiebel, I start laughing even before I open it. That Pavlovian response is unfair; some of his missives are serious. But on the whole Alan doesn't disappoint in the laughter department. This week was no exception. Commenting on the **Haftarah for Parashat Miketz** describing King Solomon's threat to cut the baby in two so as to determine (from the vying women's reactions) who the real mother was, Alan says, simply:

The Miketz/Solomonic connection story would be well-served with a HALF-Torah.

Claude Nadaf reminds us that the **Haftarah for Parashat Vayigash** is also the haftarah sung on Hol Hamoed Pesach and includes the phrase אֲבָדָה תִּקְוַתֵּנוּ (*avdah tikvatenu*), or *our hope is lost*. Claude says beautifully:

This is a quote from the Book of Ezekiel in the Hebrew Bible (Ezekiel 37:11). In the vision of the dry bones, God tells Ezekiel that the bones are the whole House of Israel, who are saying, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost."

The phrase was later famously transformed into a statement of resilience in the Israeli national anthem, "Hatikvah" ("The Hope"), which declares: עוֹד לֹא אֶבְדָּה תִּקְוָתִנִּי (Od lo avdah tikvatenu) meaning, "Our hope is not lost."

Andrew Druck also weighs in cleverly on this week's **Haftarah for Parashat Vayigash**. This Haftarah relates the prophecy that siblings (really the two kingdoms of North and South) will eventually be reunited. So Andrew suggests:

- [*Come Together*](#), as sung by the Beatles
- [*Get Back*](#), also by the Beatles
- [*Long Walk Home*](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [*We Are the World*](#), as sung by everyone (and I mean everyone – just watch the video)

Owning Up To Error. We don't need an extensive set of proofs to demonstrate that Moshe Rabeinu came as close as any human being could to hearing the Truth directly from The Almighty and therefore getting it right. From the Talmud to the Rambam, Moshe is always seen as the person with the clearest and least tinted access to The Truth.

I think that is the reason I was struck by the discussion on pages 101a/b of Tractate Zevachim. This week's global Daf Yomi learning cycle is discussing pages 98-104 of that Tractate. These pages fall within Chapter 12 of the Tractate, titled *Tevul Yom*, which discusses laws and permutations on who may and may not eat sacrificial offerings and when.

On pages 101a/b, there is what you might think of as a digression - a story of Moshe correcting his older brother Aaron about whether a person in a state of *anus* (or the period after the death of a relative but before the burial) may or may not partake of sacrificial offerings. Moshe questioned his brother's conduct. Aaron's response was that he was right – and hence that Moshe was wrong. And it turns out that Aaron *was* right; Moshe was wrong.

Now the learning moment happened. What did Moshe do? He didn't dissemble. He didn't excuse. He didn't even say, oh, I never learned that (since after all Aaron was learning priestly details that Moshe was not privy to). Moshe did none of that. Moshe owned up. I was wrong, he said, and I forgot the law.

When we read about Moshe's unequalled greatness, I wonder whether this trait might be added to the others. It is such a rare occurrence in modernity – and shows as much greatness as many others.

Siyyum HaTwain. Aura Bijou captures what could be the true essence of this co-venture among so many of our congregants:

Not reading enough but laughing out loud funny—Twain is amazing.

Here is our list of published Twain works and the goodly volunteers who are going to read and report on them. It's not too late to join the club, by the way; there are posthumously published works that could use tackling, and it would be great if there were more than one reader per book. I'm happy to share any of mine. Game?

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) – Lou Solomon*
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) – Lou Solomon*
9. *Life on the Mississippi (1883) – Michael Schulder*
10. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884–85) – Michael Schulder*
11. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1889) – Faith Fogelman*

1890s

12. *The American Claimant (1892) – Naftali Friedman*
13. *Tom Sawyer Abroad (1894) – Laury Frieber*
14. *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894) – Warren Stern*
15. *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc (1896) – Baruch-Lev Kelman*
16. *Following the Equator (1897) – Billy Schulder*
17. *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg (1899) – Lou Solomon*

1900s

18. *A Double Barreled Detective Story (1902) – Family Sherizen*
19. *What Is Man? (1906) – Michael Schulder*
20. *The \$30,000 Bequest and Other Stories (1906) – Lou Solomon*
21. *Christian Science (1907) – Francine Alfandary*
22. *Is Shakespeare Dead? (1909) – Madelene Towne*
23. *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven (1909) – Diane Sandoval*

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