

January 22, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. This Shabbat, our choir will be back. We have missed them too many weeks in the past month. The choir will be with us on almost all Shabbatot between now and Shabuot. Next Shabbat, we will be enjoying both Magevet, Yale's wonderful *a cappella* group, and Rabbi Soloveichik's eighth lecture in his Squintennial series. Don't miss either.

Touro and the Two-Fiftieth. Some but not enough of us have responded about joining one of the following Touro Synagogue weekends this year. There are many great reasons to visit Newport, but doing it together, and supporting our friends at Congregation Ahavath Israel, is the cream on top:

- May 16-17
- June 20-21 (Flower Show)
- July 11-12 (Classical Music and Hall of Fame Tennis events)
- August 1-2 (Jazz Festival)
- September 5-6 (week before Rosh Hashana)
- October 17-18
- November 7-8, the Shabbat closest to Kristallnacht, when we hope Rabbi Soloveichik will be joining.

Faith for Food. We are in week #7 of our multi-year community project to distribute food to our neighbors in Manhattan who are hungry or food insecure. This week, in bitter cold, Masbia again distributed food for just under 70 families from our Food Annex.

Imagine needing to stand out in this week's weather to get food. [Here](#) is where you can show your financial support to this important project. And here is a photo of some of the fresh produce being distributed:



Name that Haftarah Tune. We are now collecting tunes for the first five **Haftarot for the Parshiot in Sefer Shemot: Shemot, Va'era, Bo** (this week's haftarah), **Beshalach, and Yitro**.

This week's **Haftarah for Parashat Bo** is taken from Jeremiah 46:13-28. Like last week's haftarah, this week's also prophesizes Egypt's downfall.

Michael Schulder likes the phrase from verse 18 of Jeremiah Chapter 46, referring to Egypt as an עגלה יפהפיה or a beautiful heifer. Michael thinks of

- [Dixie Chicken](#), sung by Little Feat, especially the lines:

*If you'll be my Dixie chicken/
I'll be your Tennessee lamb*

Andrew Druck has related song suggestions, all good and some inspired:

- [Days are Coming](#), as sung by Shlomo Carlebach
- [Eve of Destruction](#), as sung by Barry McGuire [disquieting video]
- [A Change is Gonna Come](#), as sung by Sam Cooke
- [The Times They Are A-Changin'](#), as sung by Bob Dylan
- [It's Too Late](#), as sung by Carole King
- [Gimme Shelter](#), as sung by the Rolling Stones
- [Goodbye Yellow Brick Road](#), as sung by Elton John
- [My City of Ruins](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen

My suggestion keys off the verses at the end of the haftarah. The Almighty tells Israel that, although the nations that vanquish Israel will meet their destiny in doom, Israel will not:

וְאֶתְּךָ לֹא־אֶעֱשֶׂה כָּלָה וְיִסְרְתִּיךָ לְמִשְׁפָּט וְנִקְרָה לֹא אֶנְקָרְךָ:

Hertz beautifully translates the verse as:

*But I will not make a full end of thee;
And I will correct thee in measure
But will not utterly destroy thee.*

There is something inspirational about the promise of correction *in measure*. My vote is

- [Dawn of Correction](#), here by The Spokesmen

Menachot, Monkeys, and Middle Fingers. The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying pages 7-13 of Tractate Menachot (Chapter 2 begins on page 13a). Last week's introduction to the Tractate promised applications to meal offerings of some of the same concepts explored in Tractate

Zevachim, which concerned animal and fowl sacrifices. We began by noting that the essential precondition of intent was the same for all sacrifices: to gain forgiveness, rote ritualization won't do.

As we consider this week's pages, additional analogies reveal themselves. Do you recall that, in Tractate Zevachim, the Talmud referred to a monkey's actions? We discussed that on [October 1, 2025](#), when we were summarizing page 14a of that Tractate. Then, I was going on about the Infinite Monkey Theorem, which posits the obvious mathematical truth that if you give monkeys an infinite amount of time they will type, for example, a Shakespearean sonnet. The thought experiment tells you more about numerical infinity than about monkeys. When the Talmud refers to monkeys, it is capturing the thought of an action that is purposeful but that one would not normally describe as being the product of intent, certainly not human intent.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Tractate Menachot also uses the analogy to a monkey's doing an act that might be purposeful but is not intentional, certainly not human-agent driven. On page 7a, the Talmud is discussing *kemitzah*, or the process of removing the flour mixture from its container to perform the sacrifice. An unthinking removal or return of any amount of the meal – in the case being discussed excess meal is shaken off the hand and falls of its own back into the hole created by removing the *kemitzah* – is treated as a nullity. The Talmud says that that is treated as though it had been put back by a monkey. (By the way, were there lots of monkeys in Babylonia in the times of the Talmud? Does anyone know?)

Another similarity between animal/fowl sacrifices and meal offerings is that in both there are four distinct parts of the sacrifice. We discussed the four related to animals/fowl ([see my email of Oct. 1, 2025](#)). For meal offerings, the four steps are:

- *Kemitzah*, or removing the *kometz* of flour;
- *Nesinah be'kli*, or placing the *kometz* in a service vessel;
- *Holacha*, or conveying the *kometz* to the Altar; and
- *Haktarah*, or burning the *kometz* on the Altar.

It is, by the way, beginning on page 11a that the Tractate begins to describe the interesting process of *kemitzah*. The process involves the three middle fingers, with the thumb and pinky serving in the office of clearing away excess flour. The Talmud itself calls *kemitzah* one of three most difficult tasks for the kohanim to do correctly. (Does anyone know the other two?)

Siyyum HaTwain (#23). Here is the list of the Twain works that the Shearith Israel Twain Book Club is reading (link to email of [Dec. 25, 2025](#)). This week, we are grateful for Diane Sandoval's summary of *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*, the last book Twain published during his lifetime (#23 on our list). Diane lucidly explains:

[The book is] a dark satirical tale of Captain Elias Stormfield's travels after death and visit to Heaven, or as the reader shall find out, many heavens. Captain Stormfield wanders the skies like a comet, lost for thirty years, before reaching a stream of people headed toward a gate into Heaven. Even then he is lost because he has entered through a gate into a processing center for the wrong section of Heaven. The sights and the people are completely unfamiliar, and only then does he begin to learn that there are

many Heavens. Once he is directed to his own part of Heaven, he is outfitted for the Christian popular culture vision of heaven of clouds on which dead people become angels with wings and strum lyres. But not all is good: Even the most ordinary among the dead are bored and can hardly wait to flee.

Having disposed of the popular mythical picture, Captain Stormfield tours the rest of Heaven guided by Sandy, a cranberry farmer from New Jersey, who has been in Heaven much longer and is much wiser. Stormfield finds that Heaven is very much like Earth, but with all the beings who have ever lived and mingling. Social status exists, but different than that on Earth. There are even "Rock Stars" in heaven with huge fan bases: Everyone wants to have proximity to the patriarchs and prophets, for example, and at large receptions they can be glimpsed.

But people who had high status on Earth (e.g., Napoleon) might be forgotten. The ordinary person has come to Heaven expecting to have all his earthly dreams fulfilled. In the case of a person who aspires to play music, the dream might be fulfilled. But for many, perhaps most, their dreams are not fulfilled because individualism reigns. Another person's Heaven might be contrary to his. He can change his own age and location in a quest for fulfillment and find it or not, but success or failure may be for all eternity.

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