

March 12, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

***Our Year of Allegiance.*** As advertised – about 2,000 years ago – this Shabbat is Parashat HaHodesh. I described this last week ([here](#)), and more on this below.

***Touro's First Freedom Symposium.*** Last week, we opened the bidding on the preferred name for the June 8 conference on religious freedom to be held in Newport, at our Touro Synagogue. We had:

- *Conference on Religious Liberty*
- *Symposium on the First Freedom*

To these candidates Reverend Edinger would add the alliteration:

- *Faith, Freedom, and the First Amendment*

So let's vote. And in any case, if your weekday obligations permit it, try to make it to Newport on Monday, June 8; it's going to be really interesting.

***COVID-19, Six Years On.*** Our Congregation's story matches that of countless others. An intrepid minyan of us read Parashat Parah in March 2020. We then had to close our Synagogue, by then an institution that had, in one house of worship or another, publicly prayed in and for America for 366 years. Due to Covid we then missed 108 days of communal prayer but then were able to resume, first outdoors on the portico, then outdoors on Paved Paradise, and then back in our socially distant and air-purified main Sanctuary.

We mourned a painfully real number of our congregants who could not benefit from that singular miracle of science and medicine: the fastest formulation, manufacture, and broad distribution of an effective vaccine in the history of civilization. Eminent and data-based epidemiologists estimate that the vaccine saved millions of lives worldwide.

The speed of the miracles has only accelerated since then. In just the tiny part of humanity comprising Israel's roughly .001 of the world's population, we saw the deepest trough post-WWII turn into dazzling promise if not triumph: thousands of remotely detonated cell phones; a 12-day war reducing the nuclear threat to a region of the world inhabiting over half a billion people and with relatively minimal casualties; and now a second bite at that apple to finish the job, leading to a real, prayed-for prospect of a generation of peace for that entire region. Wait and see.

Closer to home, in 2020, 100,000 people attended the NY/NJ Siyyum HaShas, the celebration of the 7.5-year learning cycle of the entire 5,422 pages of the Talmud. This was a small fraction of the celebrants worldwide. We hope that our own Congregation will have a contingent attending the next Siyyum next year.

We didn't start the fire. Billy Joel (proudly Jewish at a time when it's considered brave for a celebrity to be so) [did](#), but as humble but proud links in the J-Continuum, we are doing what we can to keep the flame aglow.

**Faith for Food.** We are continuing to support our community project to distribute food to our Borough neighbors who are hungry or food insecure. Masbia reports that, this week, our Food Annex distributed a week's worth of food essentials to about 250 people in need. That is close to a 25% increase since the average of the past several weeks. All of these recipients demonstrate need. Masbia has begun distributing food that is kosher for Passover, including Matzoh, chicken, produce, and other raw ingredients.

I am not sorry to keep reminding us; this food doesn't just grow on trees (well, you get it). Please, if your circumstances permit, as we head toward Pesah, help this great and good cause ([here](#)). We will also be dedicating a significant portion of our Maot Hittim collections to support Faith for Food's Maot Hittim distribution so that all of our Jewish neighbors can celebrate Pesah properly.

**Name that Haftarah Tune.** We are now collecting tunes for the haftarah for the final parshiot of Sefer Shemot: **Parshiot Mishpatim (Shekalim), Terumah, Tetzaveh (Parashat Zachor), Ki-Tisa (Parashat Parah), Vayakel-Pekudai** (read together this year) (**Parashat HaHodesh**) (this week's).

And we are officially opening the lines for the haftarah of the first five parshiot in ten-parshiot Sefer Vayikra: **Parshiot Vayikra, Tzav, Shemini, Tazria, and Metzora**. Verily, making haftarah song suggestions is more difficult than last year's Torah parshiot suggestions. Still, we are about 40% done. And we are not quitters. So read the haftarah and get creative. True, we can't all be Andrew Druck. But we can try.

To finish Sefer Shemot, Alan Zwiebel has a typically funny suggestion for last week's **Parashat Parah** (*parah* referring to the red heifer): "I'm in the MOOOOod for love."

- [I'm in the Mood for Love](#), here sung by Frances Langford

In terms of this week's haftarah, we have three possible choices – really four. I count four because we read the double parshiot of Vayakel and Pekudai, each with a haftarah. So that's two possibilities. And Parashat HaHodesh has a special haftarah – and there are two different places to start and finish that haftarah (one set for Sephardim; one for Ashkenazim). So I count four, and I challenge you to name another week when we have so many options.

We will focus on the **Haftarah for Parashat HaHodesh**, which is the one we read and is taken from Ezekiel 45:16 to 46:18 for Ashkenazim and 45:18 to 46:15 for Sephardim. Andrew the Great is back this week. Andrew notes that Rosh Hodesh Nissan, the first month of the Jewish year, is discussed in the Haftarah. And then, he says, to learn if a month is new, Jews (before the set calendar – one quick point for when exactly did Jews start using a set calendar) looked for a new moon. Andrew therefore suggests these great songs:

- [Calendar Girl](#), as sung by Neil Sedaka, whom we said goodbye to last week (and see below)

- [There's a Moon Out Tonight](#), as crooned by the Capris
- [Blue Moon](#), as sung by the Marcells [not the best version – but a great early '60s song]
- [Moon River](#), as sung by Andy Williams [*two drifters, off to see the world* – matchless]
- [It's Only a Paper Moon](#), here sung by Ella Fitzgerald
- [Moonlight in Vermont](#), here sung by The Chairman of the Board himself

To these I would add:

- [Moondance](#), as sung by Van Morrison
- [Dancing in the Moonlight](#), here by King Harvest [a Solomon family favorite, with the timeless advice that “you can’t dance and stay uptight”]
- [Moon over Miami](#), here sung by Ray Charles

**Postscript on Matzoh Menachot.** Dr. Meyer Solny – how we miss seeing Meyer and Suchu at Shearith Israel – sent in [an interesting link](#), from a website that I think is called תורה שבכתב. Last week, I suggested some reasons of inclusiveness concerning why the Thanksgiving offering of meal included chametz and not just matzoh. Meyer links to several other explanations, one of which is timely as we prepare for Pesah:

*Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel in his commentary, as well as the Maharil in his book of Manners, write a wonderful idea: When the Israelites left Egypt, they were granted all four types of miracles [that equate to birchat hagomel that I discussed]: those who sailed to the sea – when they crossed the Red Sea; those who walked through the deserts – when they went out into the desert; those who were confined in prison – when they came out of the house of slaves; a sick person who was healed – because in Egypt they were plagued and afflicted. Therefore, on the night of the Seder, three matzos are eaten, corresponding to three types of matzos in the thanksgiving sacrifice . And to this the son asks, "In all nights" - in the thanksgiving sacrifice, "we eat chametz and matzos," but "this night - all matzos"!*

**Two Four-Squares of Menachot.** The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying pages 56-62 of Tractate Menachot. We are approaching the end of Chapter 5 of the Tractate. And here we see two Mishnaot (on pages 59a and 60a) that deserve brief mention.

The Mishna on page 59a recites that there are four different ways the meal offering is made:

*מתני' יש טעונות שמן ולבונה, שמן ולא לבונה, לבונה ולא שמן, לא לבונה ולא שמן.*

*MISHNA: There are four types of meal offerings: Those that require both oil and frankincense, those that require oil but not frankincense, those that require frankincense but not oil, and those that require neither frankincense nor oil.*

Another 4x4 matrix is articulated on page 60a, where the Mishna finds four categories among offerings that have to be brought near to the altar and those that require waving, those that require one but not the other, and those that require neither.

What I like about the 4x4 set up is that it is easy to remember (easier, say, than to remember the many specific sacrifices that go into each category). I also like that, for the last of the quadrants in the first 4x4 – meal offerings that require neither frankincense nor oil – the stark presentation of the Talmud is noteworthy. It turns out that there are only two types of meal offerings in this fourth quad: the sin offering and the offering that accompanies the *sota* ritual – that is, the ritual saving a marriage when the husband credibly believes (with prior warning and witnesses) that his wife had not been faithful.

In both cases, sacrifices come to repair the tear in the fabric of the relationship, whether the tear is of a sin or of a possible sin. In the case of a *sota*, our religion teaches that it is the only time when we rely on a miracle (if the wife is guilty, the Almighty makes bad things happen to the wife who drinks the *sota* potion, but if she is not, the Almighty sees to it that nothing bad happens from her drinking the *sota* potion -- a potion that has the ineffable Name erased and dissolved into it). The erasing of the name of the Almighty, and the ensuing miracle, is said to be worth it to save a marriage relationship. It's a beautiful symbol, deeply resonant as one explanation why the J-Continuum remains stable and strong.

**Brooklyn 1950s Jewish Singer/Songwriters.** Francine Alfandary does not agree with me that the coolest thing about Neil Sedaka, who died last week, was that he dated Carole King in High School, lived across the street from Neil Diamond, and knew Barbra Streisand and Barry Manilow from the 'hood. Rather, Francine says:

*the coolest thing about Nissim (Neil) Sedaka is that the Sedakas are Sephardic Jews from Turkey. A large contingent of Jews left his region, the Dardanelles or Gallipoli, and settled in the Bronx or Brooklyn.*

I'm more ok with Francine's coolest thing than she is with mine. And maybe we are *both* in for a surprise: how cool is it that Sedaka played serious classical music, like Chopin, [here](#).

**Another Congregant WIHOR.** Don't make me have to embarrass you, again, for not remembering that WIHOR is the acronym for **Writer in Her Own Right**. First, it's a great acronym, so mellifluously does it roll off the tongue. Second, there is the great dual meaning of "right", which could also be "write" (the acronym would then be WIHOW, but even though it is funnier and sounds better, you will no doubt prefer WIHOR because you are a stickler).

These pages have long celebrated WIHORs and WIHORs of our Congregation. And today we do so again: Congratulations to member Yael Cycowicz on the publication of an article on *Psychology Today's* blog titled *When Everything Becomes "Trauma."* [Click here](#) to read it.

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