

March 19, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

***Our Year of Allegiance.*** Happy Rosh Hodesh Nissan. The monumental process of cleaning and shopping for Pesah begins!

***The Colon Compromise.*** The June 8 symposium on religious liberty at our Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island is shaping up. Hayyim Obadyah made a compromise suggestion to Reverend Edinger's suggestion for the title of what will hopefully be an annual event. Dr. Jim Herstoff at Cong. Ahavath Israel in Newport as well as Kathy and Dan Vieyra (avid alliteration addicts) and Aura Bijou concur. So we have a title:

***Faith, Freedom, and the First Amendment:  
A Symposium on Religious Liberty***

And we have an [attractive Save-the-Date flyer](#). Because we are scheduling it for June 8, we are going to change to June 5-7 the June weekend when many of us are going to try to get to Newport. Do try to attend.

***Faith for Food.*** With Masbia's invaluable assistance, we are continuing to support our community project weekly to distribute food to our neighbors in Manhattan who are hungry or food insecure. This week, again, we helped feed approximately 250 people.

But I have a more urgent request of you now. We asked Masbia how Faith for Food could specifically help feed needy families on Pesah. Masbia put together an incredibly economical package where, for only \$216, it could supply Kosher for Passover provisions for the entire Pesah for a family of four, including delivering the food to the needy families. It's astonishing; the food includes much of what you would expect on Pesah. How Masbia works its magic is a story for another day. Today we need to take advantage of this amazing undertaking.

Masbia estimates that our Food Annex can serve about 80 families for Pesah. The math works out roughly to a bit under \$18k for all 80 families. So that is our goal. If you can send in even \$216, I know there are 80 of us who can do that. Obviously time is short before Pesah, so please, if you are at all able to help, send in \$216 or \$432 or any multiple of 216 including \$2,160. Use our Maot Hittim form and enter the note "FFF" (for *Faith for Food*) on the form, and we will make sure that 100% of the donation goes to this project. As a community, we have to succeed [here](#).

***Name that Haftarah Tune.*** We are now collecting tunes for the first five parshiot in ten-parshiot Sefer Vayikra (plus a special reading for the Shabbat of Pesah): **Parshiot Vayikra** (this week's), **Tzav (Shabbat HaGadol)**, **Shabbat Hol Hamoed Pesah**, **Shemini**, **Tazria**, and **Metzora**.

Hayyim Obadyah has another moon song, for last week's **Haftarah for Parashat HaHodesh**. He likes:

- [Fly Me To the Moon](#), here sung by Ol' Blue Eyes himself. It's a fantabulous song and a wonderful suggestion.

For this week's **Haftarah for Parasha Vayikra**, which is taken from Isaiah 43:21-44:23, Andrew Druck, our Haftarah Song Maven (or HSM), sees in verses 44:21-23 a focus on repentance and the Almighty's forgiveness (*I erased your transgressions like a thick cloud, and like a cloud have I erased your sins; return to Me for I have redeemed you*). For this theme Andrew suggests:

- [Return Again](#), as sung by Shlomo Carlebach
- [I Should Have Known Better](#), as sung by the Beatles
- [Where Are You](#), as sung by Frank Sinatra
- [We Can Work it Out](#), as sung by the Beatles [a timeless song]
- [The Nearness of You](#), as sung by Frank Sinatra
- [Bridge Over Troubled Water](#), as sung by Simon and Garfunkel

My addition would be the beautiful:

- [Both Sides Now](#), here sung by Joni Mitchell

**Menachot and Omer: A Pre-Pesah Parable.** The worldwide Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying pages 63-69 of Tractate Menachot. There are three points of interest I would like briefly to address:

First, page 63b begins Chapter 6 of the Tractate. The Mishnaot in this Chapter, however, are not found until Chapter 10, when only the Mishnaot are compiled. Yet when the Mishnaot are put together with their associated gemarra, as in the Tractate as a whole, they are moved and appear in Chapter 6. I'd be happy to consider any reason you have as to why. For me, the reason is obvious. The Mishnaot we are discussing include what I believe is the most sustained treatment of the *omer* in the entire Talmudic corpus. The *omer* is the ritual of cutting and offering of grain, which occurs daily from the second day of Pesah to Shavuot. It is a ritual we observe today by Counting the Omer. So now you see why the sequencing is altered; if we had waited to get to Chapter 10 to learn Mishnaot about the *omer*, we would have missed learning them before Pesah. You'll say that's just a coincidence and likely won't happen in the same way in other 7.5 year cycles of the Daf Yomi. And I'll say what I always do. Hah! Just as [One Man's Ceiling is Another Man's Floor](#), as Paul Simon taught us, so too is one person's "coincidence" another one's "all according to plan."

Second, these interesting pages begin with one of the most celebrated debates in the Talmud: the question of whether we should begin the cutting of the *omer* and the counting of the *omer* from the second day of Pesah or from the first Sunday after Pesah. The Torah commands that the *omer* sacrifice and cutting be done מִמִּתְחַלְתֵּי הַשַּׁבָּת, or from the day after the "Shabbat" or the day of rest (Vayikra 23:15). On this subject our Sages had a huge embroglio with the variously called Boethusians, who

were closely linked to the Sadducees. Our Sages interpreted *the day after the day of rest* as the day after Pesah, while the other view interpreted *the day after the day of rest* as the day after Shabbat – meaning we would wait until the Shabbat after Pesah to start the count. Nothing short of the destiny of the Jewish people hung in the balance. The Sages, or Pharisees, prevailed, ensured that the cutting of the *omer* was done on the second day of Pesah (starting at night, by the way) with great publicity and fanfare. And here we are today, starting the counting of the *omer* on a variable day each year, with Shavuot therefore being variable as well.

Third, there is a related aspect of this story, which is adverted to in the gemarra but which later commentaries are needed to explicate. Who were the Bitusim, or Boethusians, how did they get their name, and how did they split from normative Judaism so dramatically? The short version of the story is expertly summarized in the footnotes to the Schottenstein Edition of Tractate Menachot (page 63b) and derives initially from the work Avot de Rabbi Natan.

Pirkey Avot (the “Ethics of the Fathers” we read each year between Pesah and Shavuot) tells us that were the two direct disciples of Antigonus of Sokho, Zadok, and Boethus (Ch. 1:3). Antigonus taught the maxim, “Be not like the servants who serve their masters for the sake of the wages, but be rather like those who serve without thought of receiving wages.” The two pupils, Zadok and Boethus, repeated this maxim to their pupils. In the course of time, either the two teachers or their pupils began to misunderstand the maxim to deny elemental parts of Judaism, such as the Oral Law and specifically reward and punishment, the afterlife, and resurrection of the dead. These pupils or their disciples founded the sects of the Sadducees (from Zadok) and the Boethusians (from Boethus). That in turn led to a derailment in belief, which manifested itself in departures in interpretation and practice by these same groups.

This story is fascinating, I think, because it all started with a laudable maxim about the best intention to carry out the Will of the Almighty. The best intention, however, may be better suited to angels than human beings. This is a cautionary tale, even an arresting one, and certainly timely to be considering as we approach our Festival of Freedom and think about what lasting Freedom actually entails.

***Siyyum HaTwain (#9)***. Here is the list of the Twain works that the Shearith Israel Twain Book Club is reading ([see email of Dec. 25, 2025](#)). This week, we have the keen enjoyment of considering Dr. Michael Schulder’s analysis of one of Twain’s great works: *Life on the Mississippi* (#9). Michael’s analysis is long for our typical treatment, but it’s great, so here goes:

*It is hard living in an era of rapid technological change that lays waste to an entire industry, and forces untold numbers of people to find other work that may pay little and be less rewarding. The emerging world of AI, right? Try: steamboats on the Mississippi River of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. This is the world that forged young Samuel Clemens and where he took the pen name “Mark Twain” [see my [email of 1/15/26](#) for the explanation]. **Life On the Mississippi**, published in 1883 when Twain had already achieved much success and fame, is an entertaining, often fascinating, and frequently hilarious book that is in parts memoir, history of life along the river, social commentary, and flights of fantasy.*

*LOTM* is also to a large degree elegiac. Twain mourns the passing of the colorful culture of river steamboating that he grew up in but that could not continue as faster, cheaper, and more efficient railroads began to reach everywhere in the country (note the irony). As he writes:

*“Mississippi steamboating was born about 1812; at the end of thirty years, it had grown to mighty proportions; and in less than thirty more, it was dead! A strangely short life for so majestic a creature. Of course it is not absolutely dead, neither is a crippled octogenarian who could once jump twenty-two feet on level ground; but as contrasted with what it was in its prime vigor, Mississippi steamboating may be called dead.”*

*But the book is not gloomy in tone. Twain notes the above as an inevitability of progress, which brings great benefits along with good things being lost. As in so many of his works he is actually and not just supposedly funny. E.g., in describing an insufferable childhood classmate, a “Model Boy”: “At bottom he was a prig, and as for the contents of his skull, they could have changed place with the contents of a pie and nobody would have been the worse off for it but the pie.”*

*I was moved by the respect that Twain offers to the great pilots of the steamboating era, especially his mentor Horace Bixby, of whom he writes with genuine admiration and affection. Nor is he beyond poking fun at himself, far from it. Returning to the river after an absence of over twenty years he takes great pleasure in playing a long practical joke on an old colleague, Rob Styles, who has survived as a successful steamboat pilot. But it turns out the joke is on Twain, as he writes with some amount of glee.*

*LOTM* even contains a draft of a chapter from the yet-to-be-published **Huckleberry Finn**, of course another book set on the famous river (and the next on my semiquincentennial homework assignment). It is interesting to see so explicitly how a great author displays the influences that shape his work. You should read **Life On the Mississippi**. It is easy, fun, interesting, and you won't regret 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