

March 26, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. Shabbat Hagadol is this Shabbat, and tomorrow night will be Rabbi Soloveichik's final *Friday Night Lights* for the season. The Rabbi's Shabbat HaGadol Derasha is titled: *The Writing on the Wall: Purim, Pesah, and the Pattern of Jewish History*. Please join us.

Tent's Up! Our Congregational equivalent of *surf's up!* When the weather warms, please join us for kiddush out on our Paved Paradise. It is a delightful, weekly repast when the weather cooperates. And let's start thinking about other ways we can enjoy our great outdoors, including with summer movies. If you have any suggestions, send them in. And if you are willing to help organize, that is the surest way to make it happen.



2026 Bradley Prize. Congratulations to Rabbi Soloveichik for being named as a recipient of this award conferred by The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation. The honor is given to “individuals whose extraordinary talents have influenced American scholarship and ideas.” We all knew that.

Faith for Food; Maot Hittim. We are continuing to staff and financially support our community project to provide food to our neighbors in Manhattan who are hungry or food insecure. This week, Masbia again distributed food for a week for about 250 people.

As timely, our project to raise \$18k so that Masbia can feed 80 families during Pesah with kosher-for-Passover food is over half-way there. Please, there is no minimum amount – but also no

time to lose. On Pesah, making sure that others have what to eat is as important as eating itself is. Please use the link [here](#).

Another Nir News Special Announcement: Twain Scholar at Shearith Israel. Right now, planning for *anything* after Pesah feels too ambitious. Still, I hope you will pencil into your calendars a terrific Squintennial event we are planning for Shabbat, April 25, 2026. Through Beth's good efforts, I have spoken with a true Mark Twain historian and expert. Her name is Dr. Susan Harris. She is a Distinguished Professor Emerita of English at The University of Kansas, lives in Brooklyn, and has taught and written about Twain for many years. Dr. Harris has agreed to join us for and after services on April 25. We will dialogue with her over a convivial Shabbat lunch.

We are thinking of encouraging special readings from Twain by our Siyyum HaTwain Reading Group members. Whether you've read any of the books or are just curious, come celebrate with us. Sign up — with Early Bird pricing—is underway — [click here](#).

Name that Haftarah Tune. We are now collecting tunes for the haftarot for **Parshiot Vayikra, Tzav (Shabbat HaGadol, this week), Shabbat Hol Hamoed Pesah, Shemini, Tazria, and Metzora.**

This week's haftarah, for Shabbat HaGadol, is taken from Malachi 3:4–24. The haftarah's message seems directed to those who have lost or are losing faith. Don't, says the prophet. In verse 6, he says

כִּי אֲנִי יי לֹא שִׁנִּיתִי וְאַתֶּם בְּנֵי־יַעֲקֹב לֹא כְלִיתֶם:

For I am the LORD—I have not changed; and you are the children of Jacob—you have not ceased to be.

Two verses later, the prophet powerfully says:

הֲיִקְבַּע אֲדָם אֱלֹקִים כִּי אֲתֶם קִבְעִים אֹתִי וְאַמְרַתֶּם בְּמֶה קִבְעֵנוּךְ הַמַּעֲשֵׂר וְהַתְּרוּמָה:

Ought man to defraud God? Yet you are defrauding Me. And you ask, 'How have we been defrauding You?' In tithe and contribution.

Andrew Druck has some excellent suggestions, as usual, based on Malachi's description of judgment day:

- [Days Are Coming](#), as sung by Shlomo Carlebach
- [I Shall be Released](#), as sung by Bob Dylan
- [Your Time is Gonna Come](#), as sung by Led Zeppelin
- [Our Day Will Come](#), as sung by Ruby and the Romantics

For me, these verses suggest the following songs:

- [Another Day in Paradise](#), here by Phil Collins
- [There But For Fortune](#), the timeless Phil Ochs song (that David Nathan likes as much as I do) here sung by Joan Baez

- [The Ghost of Tom Joad](#), here sung by Bruce Stringsteen

Sin Eating in the Talmud. The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying pages 70-76 in Tractate Menachot. Toward the bottom of page 72b we begin a new Chapter (7). This short chapter concerns how meal offerings should be performed (in one or another type of pan, unlike animal sacrifices), what form does the combination of meal take, how much of the offering is eaten by which relevant group (offeror, priest), etc.

One of the most interesting parts of the discussion, to me, is the role that the Temple priests play in the actual expiation of the sin that is object of a sacrifice. As we have been learning, only a fraction of the total sacrifices were for atonement. And indeed that is what prompts the question at hand.

You might have thought that the priests are the enabling forces only, but that the forgiveness process is between the offeror and the Almighty. That appears to be only partly true. The Talmud quotes the Torah (Shemot 29:33), which seems to suggest that atonement is achieved through actual eating, and priests are doing actual eating at that moment. The Talmud both here and in Tractate Pesachim 59b seem to say, as the Rashi manuscript version cited on this page of Menachot says, that the owner's atonement is achieved when the *Kohanim* eat the food of the offering (see Schottenstein page 73a, note 26). That led to the question as to whether a Kohen could eat only from those sacrifices that achieved atonement, which is why the discussion is here.

What is so interesting is the text's assumption that atonement arises from the consumption *by the priests* of the sacrificial offering. Now maybe you will say that's what it has always meant to you – after all, what role did I suppose the priests were playing?

In this space, we almost never engage in an exercise of comparative religion. Knowing the beliefs, practices, and texts of our religion is challenging enough. However, since many of us are reading Mark Twain as part of the Squintennial, I would like to point out that the Twain scholar who will be visiting with us on April 25 has a short piece in one of her books on this very topic. In 2020, Prof. Harris published [Mark Twain, the World, and Me](#). The book traces Twain's travels in India and Australia, among other places, which Twain wrote about in his marvelous book titled *Following the Equator*. On pages 48-49 of Prof. Harris's book, she discusses one aspect of the Varanasi cremation ceremony practiced even today in India: the process of haggling over payment with the Brahmin priest performing the cremation. For our purposes, what is interesting is Prof. Harris's explanation that the priests performing the ceremony (which includes eating) are believed to be integral to the actual expiation of the deceased's sins. This is a practice surely as old as that performed by the Kohanim. Maybe we will discuss this with Professor Harris when she is with us (ok, maybe not).

Siyum HaTwain (#10). 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 again have the delight to hear from Dr. Michael Schulder, discussing Twain's great **The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn** (1884-85) (#10). Says Michael:

Is Huck Finn a kids' book? I bet you all read it when you were young. But it's hardly just meant for kids, no more so than Megillat Esther. You will recall that it is a kind of picaresque novel, told in the (presumably authentic) backwoods Missouri voice of the young teenage protagonist. Huck is something

of a feral child who chafes at the strictures of polite society and takes off the first chance he gets. When Huck chances to meet a runaway slave named Jim, he joins the latter on his flight to freedom. Along the way the pair survive multiple close calls, including river accidents, various con men, and a family clan feud. The book ends with a coincidental reunion of Huck with his pal Tom Sawyer, in which Tom gets to indulge his obsessive need to act out adventure stories that he has read in some book or the other.

*While **Huckleberry Finn** would be a much better book without this overly long and silly conclusion, it is an easy and entertaining read. We can believe that Mark Twain is providing us with a true picture of the rough life of the mid-19th century along the Mississippi River (maybe his favorite topic, cf. the previous review of **Life On the Mississippi**). Countless scholarly works have been written on **Huck**. Don't believe me? Here's what Prof. AI has to say:*

While an exact, single number is difficult to pinpoint due to ongoing publication, **The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn** is one of the most studied works in American literature, with thousands of scholarly articles, essays, and book chapters dedicated to it.

Twain anticipated this somehow, writing a Notice at the start of the book, to wit:

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot. By Order of the Author, Per G.G. Chief of Ordnance.

*And yet...maybe, once the sederim are over, you might consider a re-read of **Huckleberry Finn**. The story of Jim is the core of the book, and is a seriously moving study of slavery and the pain suffered by its victims. Twain has been criticized, even cancelled, because of Jim's Steppin' Fetchit-type accent (though again, we can assume this is based on the author's having lived among and around enslaved black people). But what better to read on Pesach, and what better time to read this book which celebrates a slave gaining liberty, than on our own Festival of Freedom?*

Publication Notice. Because of Pesah, our next two weekly emails should be coming to you on Tuesdays, March 31 and April 7.

With all the relaxing yom tov time, I hope you will read the relevant haftarot and send in some good tunes. Or, if time permits, read one of the Twain books and join us on April 25.

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

A wonderful, sweet, and kasher Pesah to all. Mo'adim L'simcha.

Louis Solomon, Parnas