

March 5, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. I wonder if we would have fulfilled the command publicly to read the Megillah on Purim by taking out just about any newspaper and reading from page 1? Ok, just kidding, but for this holiday of joy that we all just celebrated, I would like to be the 400th person to observe the similarities between this year's observance of Purim and that of the Jews in Shushan 2,500 years ago. Persia *is* Iran – enough said! And more, a head of state, actual or effective, was killed by the wiliness of Jews for his Jew hatred. Jews fought for Jewish lives. Tragic sacrifices of lives were made. And the Hand of Providence was much in evidence, to believers at least, albeit in shadow. Purim at Shearith Israel was as joyous as circumstances permitted.

We will now observe Parashat Parah this Shabbat; then Parashat HaHodesh next week; then with only a week's skippage we will be at Shabbat Hagadol and then Pesah. The symbolism of these special Shabbatot is poignant. Parah invokes the spiritual cleanliness that comes from the humility of understanding that we don't understand everything (read the brief but powerful treatment of this in the Hertz Commentary, which I discuss in my [email of 7/9/20](#)). HaHodesh celebrates human beings taking control of their own destiny; and Hagadol, and Pesah after it, confirm that taking control of one's own destiny and nation-building will be lasting only so long as there is a goal beyond the selfish pursuit of individual destiny, only when the nation is truly a light unto other nations in meaningful respects. Weatherwise, March may come in like a lion and go out like a lamb. In the J-Continuum, we've got lions the whole month.

Touro's First Freedom Symposium. Recall that we are committed to a number of projects at Touro Synagogue this year. Many are tucked under our banner, ***Touro and the Two-Fiftieth*** (see my email of [1/1/26](#)).

An event now being planned, likely for June 8, is one that Trustee and Segan Stan Towne dubs a *Conference on Religious Liberty*. Others prefer *Symposium on the First Freedom*. Which title do you prefer? And if you have a catchier title, share it.

In any case, see if you can spare a weekday in June to participate with us in Newport. Rabbi Soloveichik will moderate, speak, and is inviting several other speakers worth hearing. We hope this will be the first of many such symposia.

While we are talking about visiting Touro Synagogue, and visiting as well our dear colleagues up there at Cong. Ahavath Israel, note the Shabbatot/weekends when we are hoping that some of us will be going to Touro Synagogue in small, informal groups:

- 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 (Shabbat Noah, or our Shabbat of Hope)
- November 7-8, the Shabbat closest to Kristallnacht

Make some even tentative plans now. This will be fun if several of us can go up for the same Shabbat and weekend.

Faith for Food. On Purim, Masbia stuffed the food sheds on our Paved Paradise with extra offerings like brisket, stuffed cabbage, and hamantashen, and delivered food to approximately 200 of our neighbors in Manhattan who will now have provisions for the coming week. Helping feed others is one of the most meaningful things we can do as a community. I assume your Purim gastronomies didn't break the bank. I'm sure your Pesah buying will. So now, after one and before the other, please help us help others — [click here](#).

And enjoy two fun photos, one of young volunteer, Sam Cohen and Alex Rapaport of Masbia, and the other of Sumo Sam with Jake Frankel, one half of our Dalya & Jake youth director duo:



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

The Haftarah for what we usually read as **Haftarah for Parashat Ki-Tisa**, I Kings 18:1-39, is the justly famous narrative of the Prophet Elijah's showdown with the 450 prophets of Baal. It's an amazing

haftarah, one that almost by itself would justify our project this year of paying particular attention to the haftarot. (Oh, is your idol busy, or sleeping? Shout louder so that he can hear you! Pour more water on my sacrifice – just to give you a fighting chance!)

Andrew Druck is hip to the nuances. He suggests for this haftarah:

- [I Say a Little Prayer](#), as sung by Aretha Franklin (it rivals Dionne Warwick's original, imho)
- [Light my Fire](#), as sung by The Doors [among the GOAT]
- [Fire](#), as sung by The Pointer Sisters
- [Purple Rain](#), as sung by Prince
- [Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head](#), as sung by B.J. Thomas [great song by Burt Bacharach and Hal David for a great movie, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*]

The actual haftarah we read this Shabbat, because it is **Haftarah for Parasha Parah**, is taken from Ezekiel 36:16–38. After some bad news, it discusses purification of the people and the lovingly tender watering that the Almighty will give a People who has Returned. The words are beautiful (verses 24-27):

For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land. And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep Mine ordinances, and do them.

For this I suggest the prettiest version of the prettiest watering song I know:

- [The Garden Song](#), here sung by the incomparable Pete Seger.

Matzoh and Menachot. This week's global Daf Yomi learning cycle is studying pages 49-55 of Tractate Menachot. During the week we finish Chapter 4 and begin, on page 52b, Chapter 5. Chapter 5 brings us back to studies in meal offerings.

The first Mishna in Chapter 5 seems a propitious one to be learning, as we are now less than a month before Pesah. The Mishna notes the interesting fact that, of all the many meal offerings made during the Temple service, only two are chametz; all the rest are matzoh. The two that include chametz are 1) 10 of the 40 loaves comprising the thanksgiving offering, and 2) the two loaves comprising the offering made on Shavuot. Mind you, as best I can tell, neither of these is offered *on* the Altar itself; the Altar is never chametz. It is always pure without leavening.

The second chametz offering listed in the Mishna, the two loaves on Shavuot, seems intuitive. Our communal and personal travel from Pesah to Shavuot is one that starts with a focused and unadulterated infusion of purity, without any of the leavening that our religion often associates not just

with activity and ingenuity but also with the inclination to veer off the proper path (the “evil inclination”). So it makes sense that, having focused for 50 days from Pesach to Shavuot on the pure and righteous path, we might be ready to add some leavening, with its positive and possibly negative aspects.

But why are 10 of the 40 thanksgiving loaves chametz? Could it be that we need to be thankful for everything in life, even the good mixed with leaven or evil? Could it be that in being thankful we try to elevate even the leaven or evil? Being part of the J-Continuum, is our goal not to absent ourselves from the grimy world but to sanctify it?

Or could it have something to do with who brings the thanksgiving offering? The thanksgiving offering is brought by the same four categories of people who, in modern times, recite *birchat hagomel*: one who safely crosses a sea, safely travels through a desert, has been seriously ill and has recovered, or who has been imprisoned and released. Sure, we can broaden these concepts to the general point of giving thanksgiving. But it does not seem that the Talmud is getting at anything so mushy. Does anyone have an insight? All approaches welcome.

Farewell Neil Sedaka. We observe the passing this week of Neil Sedaka. Perhaps the coolest part of this singer’s story, as reported in the media, is 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. “It must have been something in the egg cream”, he is quoted as saying about their intersecting lives in 1950s Jewish Brooklyn. We will not soon forget [*Breakin’ Up is Hard To Do*](#).

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