

March 31, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Allegiance. It is hard not to notice that as a community we have named this year our ***Year of Allegiance***. And in case you've not been paying attention, Pesah begins tomorrow evening. Is there a more fitting description of the fundamental teaching of this holiday than that of allegiance? You will say that the festival is one of freedom. And of course freedom is good, fine, great – and even stronger words would no doubt be expected and justified when used by those who don't have it. But for the rest of us, the point of freedom is being able to pledge allegiance as we deem fit. Without allegiance to something, freedom is chaotic, self-absorbed, nihilistic. We have the freedom to belong to the J-Continuum, which imbues both purpose and meaning into our lives.

Please join us for the holiday, if you are in town. It's very special (and we probably serve one of the better KP kiddushim in town).

Faith for Food; Maot Hittim. Our Faith for Food project is serving the hungry and food insecure this week as well. We don't have numbers for this week, since we are going to press a couple days earlier than usual.

Masbia is also serving the 80 families whom we have paid for kosher-for-Passover food to feed. As a community, we should be proud. There is still hunger and food insecurity in our own community, including for Jews who want to eat kosher food on Passover. We have done all we could this year. Next year, if we are not in Jerusalem, let's double or triple our success. Alas, that still won't eliminate the problem, but this is a real challenge we can actually make progress to ameliorate.

Faith, Freedom, and the First Amendment: A Symposium on Religious Liberty. Our June 8 program with Congregation Ahavath Israel in Newport is taking shape. Here is a [flyer](#). Since it usually feels like there are only about 3-4 days between Pesah and Shavuot, make plans right after Pesah for what promises to be a great event.

Twain Scholar at Shearith Israel. Here is another program that no one is going to have time to sign up for, since it's just two weeks after Pesah (April 25). Professor Harris is excited about having members of our Siyyum HaTwain Reading Group read excerpts from some of the books we are reading. This is going to be great fun for all. Please join us. Here is a link — [click here](#).

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

Jay Harwitt, Ritual Director of Temple Sinai in Los Angeles, whom we are delighted to hear from again, suggests for some prior haftarot:

- [What Have We Got to Lose?](#) here sung by Drew Holcomb & The Neighbors
- [Food, Glorious Food](#) from *Oliver!* (“once the siege is lifted”)

For **Shabbat Chol HaMoed Pesach**, we read the unforgettable prophecy of the dry bones, from Ezekiel 36:37-38, and then 37:1-17. The haftarah’s story of hope is redolent, as it is for the entire holiday of Pesah. Jay says “it’s almost too obvious to offer the spiritual”, *Dem Bones*, but it’s a great suggestion:

- [Dem Bones](#), here sung by the Delta Rhythm Boys

Jay also gets full credit for suggesting:

- [Hatkiva](#)

We have discussed at length the origin story of *Hatikvah*, noting the similarity between and among *Hatikvah*, *Smetana's Moldau*, *Tefilat Tal*, as well as *Mozart* and even *Twinkle Twinkle* (see my [email of 9/15/22](#)). Reverend Edinger feels the confusion is so evident that, in his words,

The whole matter becomes quite complex, and for the sake of accuracy it is probably best to say less and avoid any definitive attribution, simply noting the similarities. (But where is the fun in that?)

Here is Rabbi Rohde singing our version of *Lech L'Shalom Geshem*, which we sing on the first day of Pesah as part of [Tefilat Tal](#). The timing couldn’t be more propitious; come to services on Thursday, and be uplifted through Shavuot.

Talmudic Thanksgiving. The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying pages 77-83 of Tractate Menachot. These pages almost perfectly book-end Chapter 8 of the Tractate. The Tractate is titled **Thanksgiving**. And here too it’s hard not to see how perfect the match is between the Daf Yomi and the Jewish calendar. For if allegiance is the key goal of achieving freedom, showing thanksgiving is the key means of achieving that goal.

There are four interesting things I would like to share about these pages. I will keep it brief:

First, the first Mishna (which starts at the bottom of page 76b) discusses the *korban hatodah*, or the Thanksgiving Offering, as do subsequent *mishnayot* (new spelling approved by Bentsi Cohen) in this Chapter. Here for what I think is the first time in the Tractate, it is clear that the Thanksgiving Offering works only with a combination of grain (meal) and meat. To achieve real thanksgiving, think about *all* we are blessed to have. Understand the *entire* picture, not just the meal and not just the meat. How can anything but thanksgiving follow.

Second, by combining meal and meat offerings to constitute the Thanksgiving Offering, things become a bit more complicated than when offering either alone. So for example, we need to learn the sequencing of the different parts of the offering, what happens if things get switched, and indeed what happens if parts of the offering get substituted. This concept of substitution, of *temurah*, is known to us but is given an entire Tractate, which we will get to (the Almighty willing) at the end of Seder Kodshim or in about 260 days (Tractate Temurah is the fourth Tractate after Menachot). The point here is that the intent to get it right is what controls, a point our Kohen Bentsi Cohen made to me at kiddush this past Shabbat (anyone else interested in chatting about Daf Yomi at kiddush? It would be really fun.)

Third, at the beginning of this Chapter, we learn of changes in measurement conventions over the ages. The respective amounts of the ingredients in the offering didn't change, but "Wilderness" measurements, became "Jerusalem" measurements, and then became "Tzipporian" measurements after the destruction of the Second Temple. What is interesting is that, in comparing, say, Wilderness to Jerusalem measurements, the arithmetic convention was to take the second of the measures and calculate how different it was from the first as a percentage of the second and not, as is our convention today, from the first. As an example, when one is added to five, the Talmud describes the change as one-sixth of the final number, whereas we would say one-fifth of the initial number. Today, we would cry foul at anyone trying to manipulate the nomenclature by describing the change as a sixth. Yet it was standard in Talmudic times to reduce from the second number, not increase from the first.

Fourth, from the Department of Talmudic Humor, we often observe the merit of mnemonics used by the Talmud to serve as memory aids in what was largely an unwritten world. On page 80b of the Tractate, we meet a mnemonic to remember eight short and simple attempts to salvage a switched ingredient in one of the mixed Todah sacrifices. Here then is the simple mnemonic:

סימן: למודים, מידת, עלה, נשיש, נשכן, דדמה, דאי, חליש, מותר, תמורה, בחוץ, חוקנה, הפריש תטאת, לאחר יזמר

Siyyum HaTwain (#16). 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 pleasure to read the musings of Siyyum HaTwain Book Club member Billy Schulder on Twain's excellent book, *Following the Equator* (#16). Says Billy:

I have read two of Twain's books in my life: "Tom Sawyer" and "Huckleberry Finn" (the latter being an all-time great).

I would never have chosen a travelogue if I was picking my own book to read. I prefer either "pure" novels or "pure" non-fiction.

"Following the Equator" is kind of a hybrid. How so, you may ask?

In doing a bit of background reading about it, I found out that at least two of the stories he tells (one about Cecil Rhodes; the other about Ed Jackson and Cornelius Vanderbilt) are fictitious (albeit highly entertaining).

Of course, his writing is just so good that whatever he writes about (e.g. people, places, things, history, etc.) makes a marvelous read...

While reading the book, I highlighted 32 noteworthy comments. (Humorous, satirical or both.) Here are 5 of them (chosen at random):

- 1. Describing the Southern Cross [constellation in the Southern Hemisphere]: "It is ingeniously named, for it looks just as a cross would look if it looked like something else."*
- 2. On someone believing that MT had died: "My first thought was, why didn't he have the coffin opened? He would have seen that the corpse was an impostor, and he could have gone right ahead and dried up the most of those tears... and sold the remains and sent me the money."*
- 3. "The world was made for man-the white man." (Remember; this was written in 1895!)*
- 4. Related to the prior quote: "There are many humorous things in the world; among them the white man's notion that he is less savage than the other savages".*
- 5. On understanding vague descriptions of things: "Those things sound well, but they are shadowy and indefinite, like troy weight and avoirdupois; nobody knows what they mean. When you buy a pound of a drug and the man asks you which you want, troy or avoirdupois, it is best to say "Yes," and shift the subject. (WS: one of my favorites.)*

Query (Part One): If he was alive today, would Mark Twain win the "Mark Twain Prize for American Humor"? Of course he would!

Query (Part Two): Would he accept it? I think definitely not, and he would make fun of the entire enterprise.

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