

April 7, 2026

Dear Shearith Israel family,

***Our Year of Allegiance.*** Moadim L'simcha, and happy Passover to all. The first days of the holiday were marvelous. Attendance was welcomely large the first day, respectable on the other two days of the three-day chag. The choir was glorious, and all of our Clergy was inspiring.

We are now enjoying Hol HaMoed, and tonight will find us observing the last two days of the holiday. Join us tomorrow (Wednesday) to chant the Song at the Sea. And Counting the Omer is one of the most satisfying things we do this time of year. Just keep counting; you will see.

***Faith for Food/Maot Hittim.*** We are continuing to staff and financially support our community project to distribute food to our neighbors in Manhattan who are hungry or food insecure. Last Tuesday, after we sent our email of last week, Masbia helped nearly 300 people receive food for the week.

I also wanted to share the results of our successful Maot Hittim project, which, with Masbia's extraordinary help, fed 80 families kosher-for-Passover food for the holiday week. We had over two dozen congregants and friends financially support the effort. Marvelously, every single one of the Congregation's Trustees participated in giving. Their names are listed on our website ([here](#)) and on each of the four Bulletins we publish yearly. Please thank them, and feel free to reach out to them.

***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, Shemini (this week's), Tazria, and Metzora.**

Further to our discussion of *Hatikvah*, since the theme of hope is so much a part of **Ezekiel's Dry Bones** prophecy read just last Shabbat, David Cohen reminds us that an entire documentary was made of this, called [Go in Peace Rain](#).

Master Songster Andrew Druck also had some great suggestions for last week's haftarah (Andrew had sent me these on time last week, but I had to get the email out earlier than usual):

- [God Only Knows](#), as sung by the Beachboys
- [Hello It's Me](#), as sung by Todd Rundgren
- [I Can't Tell You Why](#), as sung by the Eagles
- [Magical Mystery Tour](#), as sung by the Beatles
- [Leap of Faith](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [The Rising](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [Better Days](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [Counting on a Miracle](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen

This coming Shabbat, with Pesah behind us, we will read the **Haftarah for Parashat Shemini**. It's a "tragic" haftarah, says Andrew Druck, and describes what Andrew refers to as "two incidents":

*[1] It describes David's moving the ark to Jerusalem, interrupted by the tragic incident when the ark slips, Uza tries to steady it, and is punished for touching it. [2] The ark is finally brought to Jerusalem and David dances with abandon.*

Regarding the first incident, Andrew suggests:

- [Slip Sliding Away](#), as sung by Paul Simon
- [Break Away](#), as sung by the Beach Boys
- [Oops! I Did it Again](#), as sung by Britney Spears
- [Darkness at the Edge of Town](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [Sorry Seems to be the Hardest Word](#), as sung by Elton John [check out the subtitles]

Regarding the second, Andrew suggests:

- [Celebration](#), here sung by Kool and the Gang
- [Dance, Dance, Dance](#), as sung by the Beach Boys [clocking in 2:05, a candidate for a GOAT Short Song]
- [Twist and Shout](#), as sung by the Isley Brothers [not the Beatles' version]
- [Dancing in the Dark](#), as sung by Frank Sinatra [no, not Springsteen]
- [I Could Have Danced All Night](#), as sung by Frank Sinatra

**Hey, Didn't We Say That First?** This week, the global Daf Yomi learning cycle is studying pages 84-90 of Tractate Menachot. The week sees the entirety of Chapter 9 of the Tractate come and go (it's the shortest in this Tractate; only eight single-sided pages).

The Ninth Chapter is titled *Kol Korbanot Tzibbur*, or *All of the Communal Sacrifices*. It's a nice chapter to learn during Pesah. First, Pesah is a quintessentially communal holiday (though all of them are, really, no?) Second, there are Mishnayot in the chapter involving the Omer, which we are Counting (rather than bringing the omer as a sacrifice) every day now between Pesah and Shavuot. The themes of the Chapter include which of the meal sacrifices can be brought from grain within and without the Holy Land; which from old wheat and which from new; which from the best grain and which from more typical or ordinary grain; which from fertilized fields and which from irrigated ones; etc.

Just before the Mishna beginning towards the bottom of page 85a, we find the following discussion (the English is translated *and expanded* by Sefaria):

נְכוּלֵן אֵינָן בְּאוֹת אֶלָּא מִן הַמּוֹבְחָר כּו'. אָמְרֵי לִיָּהּ יוֹחֵגָא וּמְמַרָא לַמִּשְׁהָ: תְּבִין אַתָּה מְכַנְיֵס לַעֲפָרָיִים! אָמַר לְהוּ: אָמְרֵי אֵינָשִׁי "לְמַתָּא יִרְקָא – יִרְקָא שְׁקוּל."

*The mishna states: And all meal offerings come only from the optimal produce. One of the places the mishna mentions as having good-quality produce is Afarayim. The superior quality of its produce was so well known that Afarayim was used as an example in colloquial aphorisms. In Moses and Aaron's first meeting with Pharaoh, Aaron cast his staff to the ground, whereupon it turned into a serpent. Pharaoh's necromancers then duplicated the feat using their incantations, only to then be confounded when Aaron's staff swallowed up all of theirs (see Exodus 7:10–12). The Gemara relates the conversation that took place: Pharaoh's two leading necromancers, Yoḥana and Mamre, said to Moses: **Are you are bringing straw to Afarayim? Performing necromancy in Egypt, the world leader in sorcery, is like bringing straw to Afarayim, which is rich in the finest grains.** Moses said to them: It is as people say: To a city rich in herbs, take herbs. If you want to guarantee that people will appreciate your merchandise, bring it to a place where they are familiar with it.*

Let's look at the statement bolded above. It has the exact meaning of "like taking coals to Newcastle." In the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, Newcastle had an abundance of coal. Why take more there? The Internet records a first usage of this common British idiom in 1583.

But that's about 1,000 years *after* our Talmudic usage. Maybe we should popularize "like bringing straw to Afarayim," or "like bringing magic to Egypt."

Who has an earlier idiom to the same effect? The judges will part with two points for an earlier mention.

***Siyyum HaTwain.*** 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, I would like to react to the volume of short stories titled *The \$30,000 Bequest and Other Stories* (#20) as well as the separately listed short story, *A Double Barreled Detective* (#18).

There are close to 40 short stories and essays in the first volume. Twain apparently wrote them over a span of about 30 years. All are humorous (in one of the stories, Twain offers an unpersuasive but again lightly humorous disquisition on how "humorous" stories differ from other types of funny stories, such as British "comic" stories and French "witty" ones). Some of the Twain stories are humorous because they are satirical; some engage in irony; some are a bit zany. Some are dark, like *A Dog's Tale* and like the title Story, which follows a married couple (the Fosters) as they ruin their lives fantasizing about an inheritance that never appears. One of the great lines near the end of that story is by someone afflicted with self-imposed psychological torment who is ready to die:

*I am ready; let us go. The other hell is better than this one.*

My favorite essay is titled *Does the Race of Man Love a Lord?* I have long wondered about people's obsession of needing to distinguish themselves in relation to others of power or title or fame. Twain's point is that the phenomenon is universal.

On the whole, though, the volume isn't among the strongest Twains, imho. Remember I love Twain. I've mentioned this before; the short treatments seem to get more ponderous and repetitious than the longer ones, and it's in the nonfiction that I found Twain's writing style and topics of greatest interest, virtually all treated humorously.

Two other odds and ends on this first volume. First, I wonder if *A Humane Word from Satan* in some fashion inspired C.S. Lewis's incomparable *The Screwtape Letters*. Does anyone know?

Second, the related stories at the end of the volume, *Extracts from Adam's Diary* and *Eve's Diary*, are clever but do get a bit tiresome. At the same time, the latter story presages Molly Bloom's soliloquy at the end of Joyce's *Ulysses*, though Twain's treatment is beautiful while Joyce's is, well, modern and racy. The end of *Eve's Diary* includes these beautiful words by Adam, speaking of his wife:

*ADAM: Wheresoever she was, THERE was Eden.*

The second volume is titled *A Double Barreled Detective Story*. In lists of Twain publications, this is generally listed separately, even though it is the length of a long short story and is not joined with others. It's another satire, this time of Sherlock Holmes and mystery writing in general. Its beginning is dark, too dark – made even more so because that part of the story is never resolved. The story does have an extraordinarily modern feature of breaking the narrative with a self-referential disquisition by Twain smack in the middle. We really need Prof. Harris to unpack this one for us at our luncheon with her on April 25. I'm not going to spoil the story by telling you the ending.

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

Happy end of Pesah to all.

Louis Solomon, Parnas