

October 7, 2021

Dear Shearith Israel family,

New Beginnings – All Over Again. Well, we did it! The Tishrei season of non-stop holidays has rolled into Rabbi Soloveichik's favorite Jewish month – Heshvan, or as he (and others) call it, Marheshvan – the only Jewish month with *no* Jewish holidays (not much of any American holidays either). As a community we did so well in Tishrei. Minyanim were virtually back to normal (real normal *not* virtual normal). That we are sometimes outside and sometimes inside for tefilot is getting easier for everyone to accommodate with diminished fussing. Both have their virtues. Thank you to Professor Emeritus Roy Simon for nicely describing the outdoor service as having the beauty of our indoor service stripped to its essence. As I said at our Hatanim celebration, quoting our Working Group mainstay Dr. Michael Gelman, the true test of a safe and secure set of Covid-19 protocols is not whether anyone gets sick but rather whether there is spread by someone who is sick. We have had none, and we should all be proud.

The theme of new beginnings, of starting over, is captured in innumerable songs. I haven't cited the Joni Mitchell great, [*Circle Game*](#).

And the seasons they go round and round
And the painted ponies go up and down
We're captive on the carousel of time
We can't return we can only look
Behind from where we came
And go round and round and round
In the circle game.

My personal favorite remains the 1970 hit sung by Bobby Sherman, *Easy Come Easy Go*. Exactly none of you (including my R&R soulmates David Nathan and David Sable) wrote me last time I cited this great hit. Give it [another listen](#). It's eternal – especially the “start all over again” pounding music and phrasing.

Jeepers, Keepers. This past Shabbat, at our marvelous Hatanim Celebration, the burden of most of the remarks concerned how our 5782 Hatanim, Joel Marcus and Ariel Bengio, as well as Ariel's *Great* Uncle Norman Benzaquen, manifested the attributes of care and concern for others. The descriptions were apt and well deserved. The charitable *excesses* of these people are inspirations to the rest of us – they surely should be. The adage that every Jew is essentially a guarantor or

surety of the welfare of every other Jew is embodied in the saying, *כל ישראל ארבים זה לזה* (*kol yisrael arevim ze la ze*). The saying is a tenet. It is surely among the top, what, 2,3,4 most famous in our religion? We are *arevim* one to another – or, in the singular, an *arev*. This small word concisely suggests responsibility and interdependence. The principle ranks with Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself, or Do Unto Others as You Would Have Them Do Unto You, and, well, I think, very few others.

But here is the interesting question: Where in our most sacred texts do we learn that each Jew is essentially an *arev* for every other Jew? The other principles recited above have, more or less, explicit mention in the Torah (for the first, Vayikrah 19:18; for the second, Vayikrah 19:34 (ish)). I don't think *kol yisrael arevim ze la ze* does. The primary discussion of the principle is in the Talmud, Tractate Shavuot 39a, not in the Torah. Sure, you'll point to last week's parasha, Bereshit, where Cain rhetorically asks whether he is his brother's keeper (Bereshit, 4:9). But the Torah doesn't come right out and say, yes, Cain, you are! Or maybe you will point to Judah's willingness to lay his life down for Benjamin, when Judah was trying to persuade Jacob to permit the brothers to take Benjamin back to Egypt before Joseph's big reveal there (Bereshit, 43:9). That, our sages say, is exactly what acting as a surety means – but why doesn't the Torah come right out and say it? Or, lastly, you might refer to the Biblical interdiction:

But you shall not slaughter, from the herd or the flock, an animal with its young on the same day. (Leviticus 22:28).

Why, you will ask, would you cite that for the principle of *arevut*? One has to reason to the conclusion, as the Talmud does, I think, even in this week's Daf at the end of Tractate Beitzah. We reason to the principle of *arevut* by observing the interesting point that the Biblical interdiction of killing mother and offspring on the same day seems to apply even if the cow (as an example) and its offspring are owned by two different owners, living far apart. The only way for them to follow the Biblical precept is for them to have enough of a relationship one to the other that they know who is slaughtering which animal and to have enough respect for the precept to refrain from being the second one to kill the animal. This at least is not "just" a Biblical story but is an actual Biblical interdiction. But it is a negative one, not a positive command like affirmatively acting to protect and preserve another Jew, and in any event doesn't just simply make the point clearly.

So I ask again? Why is such a profound tenet not in the Torah? In fact, I offer the following challenge, this for an unrepresented THREE points: First, can you explain why such a fundamentally important principle is not explicitly in the Torah? Second, can you list other equally or even more fundamental principles in Judaism that are not in the Torah? And third, can you explain what can we learn about the process of being an *arev* for another Jew from the Torah's only-oblique references to the principle? One point for answering any one of the above. (For a wonderful treatment of the subject, by the way, but which won't answer my questions, see R.M. Rudman, *Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh Ba-Zeh* (Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought, Vol. 42, No. 2 (SUMMER 2009), pp. 35-49).)

Postscript on V'zot Ha'Bracha. I am confident that at least many of you can answer my three questions above, in part, because of the reactions by many of you to my challenge of last week: What is it about V'zot Ha'Bracha that makes it the only parasha that we don't read on Shabbat. Avery Neumark says, well, we do read it on Shabbat, in Israel, when Shemini Hag falls on Shabbat. I will leave to you whether Avery's answer is, well, a hyper-technical cheap shot, even if accurate. Claude Nadaf also challenged my assertion that the optimism of V'zot Ha'Bracha is incompatible with the gut-wrenching of the Gog and Magog haftarah, saying, "If Vezot Haberkha had been read on Shabbat Hol Hamoed Succot, a haftarah of a theme akin to the [parasha] would have been selected as usual". True, *maybe*, I say in response. Dislodging the Gog and Magog haftarah from Sukkot would not have been easy – even Rabbi Soloveichik spoke about it. So it's not so simple to say we would have Sukkot without Gog and Magog.

The best and a beautiful reaction came from Charlie Helinsky, who with our inestimable thanks offers a Chasidic interpretation that our Western Sephardic traditionalists might not have seen otherwise. Charlie cites the *Gutnik Edition Chumash*, which says:

The blessings mentioned here by Moshe in this Parasha are considerably greater than any of the blessings given earlier in the Torah, such as those given by Yitzchak and Ya'akov. And yet, in contrast to all the other Parshiyot of the Torah, this Parasha is not read amid the spiritually uplifting atmosphere of Shabbat, but on a *weekday (emphasis in original)*. (And while it is a festive day, it is nevertheless of a lower sanctity than Shabbat, as evidenced that many acts forbidden on Shabbat are permitted on a festival.) So with Parasha V'Zot Ha'Brachah we witness two extremes: It is the Parasha which contains the *most* blessings, and yet it is

read on a day which is of *lesser* holiness. This indicates that the blessings here are very powerful, for the ability to penetrate through to a lower sphere (a weekday, as opposed to Shabbos) indicates that the blessings come from a higher source. (I've used Sephardic spellings.)

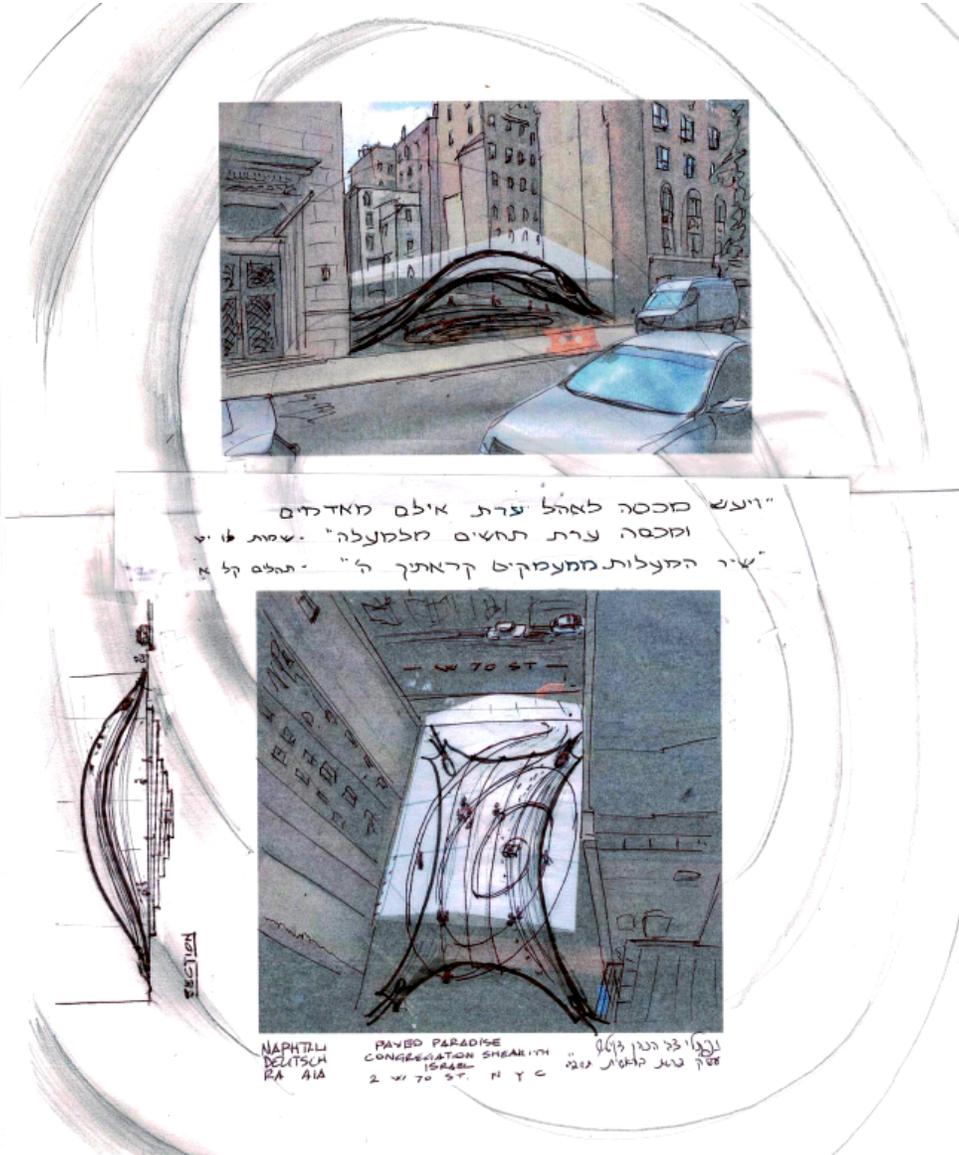
Half-Full Report.

Picturing Paved Paradise. Our fundraiser for **Preserving** Paved Paradise is nearly half-full in reaching its goal of \$150,000. We've done a great job of creating a beautiful and much needed outdoor pavilion. We can't squander it. Now we need to preserve and maintain Paved Paradise. The space has been a literal G-d-send. Please help us make the necessary investments so we can enjoy it for years to come, even when Covid is but an unpleasant memory. Donate generously – after all, we are all guarantors/sureties—*arevim*-- for one another. You can pledge just by replying to this email. The office will get it.

In the meantime, Ruth Lazar reimagines Paved Paradise in a novel way that we have never seen before:



And Naphtali Deutsch, brother of frequent contributor Gil Deutsch, who obviously has talent at drawing, gives us the following, which I think are fabulous:



Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom. Chodesh Tov.

Louis Solomon, Parnas