

June 2, 2022

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Skip To the End! In the unforgettably funny scene in *The Princess Bride*, the clergyman begins with “mawage” goes on and on. Prince Humperdinck interrupts with the words, “skip to the end”, so that the marriage ceremony will conclude before Wesley can arrive to save Buttercup. I’m thinking of shortening the Covid-19 report, the original raison d’être of these emails, by skipping to the end and focusing on how the current state of community, state, federal, and international health may or may not be affecting what precautions we are taking to keep us all coming to our Synagogue and safe. We are at a point in our communal precautions where, it is felt by some, we no longer require long-winded explanations unless things change dramatically. Shortening this section will surely please some – and likely please others as well. The solace for me is that it will open a little space for a new section, introduced below, which I’m excited about.

So let’s try: This Shabbat is Erev Shabuot, and we will celebrate Shabuot on Sunday and Monday. Plans, which are always subject to vagaries and vicissitudes that we can’t predict, are to hold services inside throughout. We continue to offer seating options — masked optional and masked required — to ensure everyone’s comfort, praying indoors will allow us all to enjoy the Sisterhood’s glorious Shabuot floral arrangements, Sunday’s special musical tribute to our Choirmaster Emeritus Leon Hyman, and our Congregation’s girls chanting of the Book of Ruth on Monday. The Rabbi’s late night Shabuot talk on Saturday night talk will also be indoors (followed by premium cheesecake to be enjoyed outdoors). Kiddush each morning will be on Paved Paradise.

Whew was that b _ _ _ _ _ (I almost used the “b” word – it’s as bad a word as any scatological slang.) From now on I think I will call this section *The Dull Report*.

Season Fundraiser Finale. On Tuesday evening we were treated to the last of Rabbi Soloveichik’s lectures titled *Sanctuaries and Cities*. I think the whole series was a *tour de force* (pun intended). We are deeply grateful to our Rabbi.

Candidly, I’m a little disappointed that we have not yet gotten to 100% participation in our Spring fundraiser. But we can get there yet, and I’d be thrilled to receive my commemorative booklet and to find it bursting with sponsorship listings in addition to the Rabbi’s special content. The Talmud teaches (in Yevamot 79a among other places) that one of the defining characteristics of Jews as a people is that we show individual and collective gratitude, or *hakarat hatov*, for the blessings in our lives. Surely our Rabbi, our other Clergy, our Synagogue and its minhag are among our most precious blessings. Week in, week out we benefit from them. We need your help to support all that. I don’t care how large or small your contribution. That’s between you, the Almighty, and your tax advisor. But please give something. [Click here](#) to give what you can and submit your listing, and be done with my hounding – until the Fall.

Half-Full Report.

Doubling and Undoubling Parshiot. I called for help to explain why we didn't catch up with Israel sooner than doubling Mattot/Massei late in Bemidbar (Carla Schein is completely right in correcting my spelling of Bamidbar) ([email of May 26](#)). I got loads of help – but still no one with a great answer. Thanks to the Tinkers-to-Evers-to-Chance (two points for the team and the year) trio of Steve Spira, Miles Kuttler, and Professor Micha'el Katz, we get the point that the parshiot of Mattot-Massei are really just one long one, so it's the easiest one to combine and separate. It's something of an answer (eh). Avery Neumark helpfully forwarded [this](#), which at least cites the thinking the sixteenth-century decisor, the Maharit. It's worth a read, though Avery agrees that no answer is terribly convincing.

Optimistic Songs. David Vorchheimer asks what's wrong with operatic songs of optimism. The answer is that there is nothing wrong with it. From Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot*, David nominates the song [Nessun Dorma](#):

*Dilegua, oh notte
Tramontate, stelle
Tramontate, stelle
All'alba vincerò
Vincerò
Vincerò!*

Fade away, oh night
Set, stars
Set, stars
I'll win at dawn
I will win
I will win

David's entry is a contender. The words and music, what can I say, sing!

Andrew Lipton offers another great Sinatra song, [All My Tomorrows](#). I see it more as a love song than a more general life-affirmer, but it's so great that the Judges have permitted it to compete.

Sarah Meira Rosenberg, indefatigable help with all things Synagogian, offers an absolute smorgasbord of happy tunes, for our younger set especially, together with commentary:

- [Billy the Squid](#) - the number of sea-themed puns in this one is truly impressive
- [The Ghost of Bleak House](#) - manages to be creepy and heartwarming

- [The Ragtime Dance](#) - a dramatic bedtime story in a song, complete with interjections from children
- [R-E-C-Y-C-L-E](#) - the best intro to recycling and environmentalism that a kid could get
- [The Big Rock Candy Mountain](#) - as a kid, I wanted this place to be real SO badly

One more week to make final submissions.

Stupidity, What a Popular Topic! Who'd a thunk that our friend Paul Tobak's comment, that you can't fix stupid, would have called forth so many supportive echoes. Honorary and Essentially Permanent Part-Time Sexton and minyan mainstay Arthur Tenenholtz reminds us of Friedrich Schiller's great line,

"Against stupidity, the g-ds themselves contend in vain."

Ruth Lazar also sent in the Einstein quote:

"The difference between stupidity and genius is that genius has its limits."

Aura Bijou asks plaintively:

Until the Lord fixes stupid, how does one WORK with stupid?

But in all events, why this great interest in stupidity? [Is everybody talkin' at me?](#) If they are, I don't hear a word they're saying/Only the echoes of my mind.

Speaking of Stupidity. Apparently the Judges mixed up sisters Prof. Bella Hass Weinberg and Sarah Hass with brothers Billy Schulder and Michael Schulder. It was the sisters who got *My Sweet Lord*, plus Michael but not Billy. I would ignore my blunder were these not among our heavy hitters of R&R. Abject apologies. Points to Bella and Sarah.

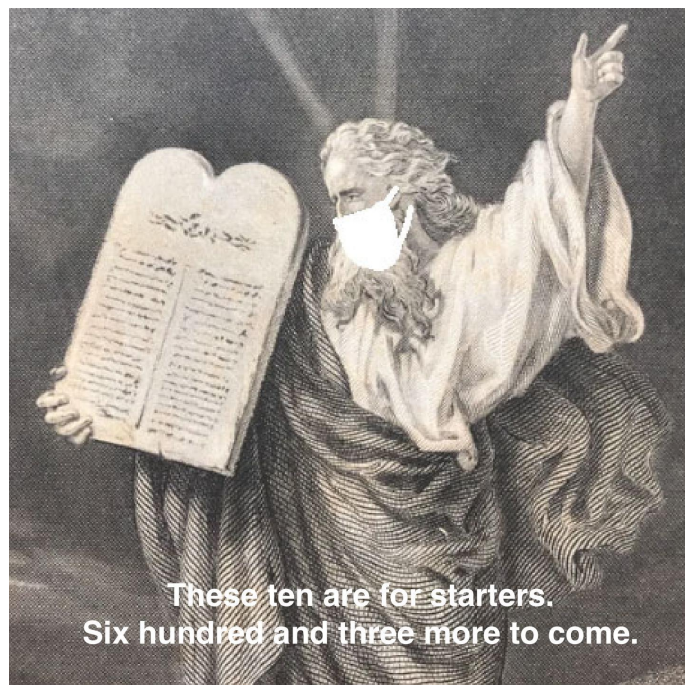
American Pie. First immediate winner spotting the riff on the Don McLean classic, *who wrote the Book of Job*, David Vorchheimer picks up an easy point, with our thanks.

Pre-N-Post. I want to initiate a new section of these emails. Covid-19 erected physical, mental, psychic, emotional, EVERYTHING walls on our personal and public lives, on our congregation and culture. For many of us, what was on one side of the wall, pre-Covid, is very different from what is on the other side, post-Covid -- or at least we think so. Am I the only one with the problem that it is getting hard to remember what was on the "pre" side and all too easy to "remember" what isn't perfect now?

That's where you all come in. I do not want a list of whines about how things are worse. I don't want to hear about wars, escalating inflation, supply chain issues, country defaults, dismal stock markets, crashing crypto, new variants, monkeypox (one word or two, hyphenated or not, I DON'T CARE). I want you to take something that existed pre-Covid and remind all of us how much better it is, or is getting, now. One concrete example is that pre-Covid Rabbi Soloveichik was weekly teaching tens and hundreds but since has been and weekly teaching hundreds and thousands. We are looking for something clever and fun. Help please. All points will be inflation adjusted and will NOT be paid in crypto-currency.

Also, I've provisionally named this new section *Pre-N-Post*. Now that you know what the challenge is, you can improve on the name. Remember Steve Smith (Mulligan Years for the period of Covid-19), Michael Lustig (Prayground for our outdoor space), Steve Tilly (doscant for a two-fer song)? Each achieved immortality with their namings. I'm sure they and others can improve on *Pre-N-Post*. Name the section, for posterity.

Shabuot 5782. Thank you Alan Zwiebel, who says it all in this pic:



Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom. Moadim L'simha.

Louis Solomon, Parnas