

July 14, 2022

Dear Shearith Israel family, including our Touro Synagogue Affiliates,

BA.5, Chapter 2. That is the title of an interesting piece by Dr. Eric Topol, who (like others) thought we had finished with this particular Omicron subvariant some weeks ago. We haven't. It's a virus that can evade vaccination/booster regimes at alarming rates. Thankfully, for the great many of us who are vaccinated and boosted, the variant is nasty and conniving but on the whole not worse. One of our congregants emailed in, "Listen to the doc, having caught Covid at a [recent] wedding". A second urged caution, having recently witnessed a spreading event at a modern orthodox synagogue. A third, a physician, having asked his/her patient to mask while in the doctor's office, was told by the patient that it wasn't necessary since, "Oh we're from New Jersey."

Our protocols remain in place, maximizing safety, freedom of choice, and mutual respect. Our protocols are steady and predictable, like the background strings of an orchestra. They aren't as flashy as the (suspiciously Jewish-music sounding) [horn piece](#) announcing Edwin Diaz's entry into the stadium. But we can't have the beautiful music of community without our prosaic strings. And if we need to change the tune, we shall. Stay tuned.

Four Tractates Where Torah Scholars Build Peace. I know we are on to Tractate *Ketuvot*. That Tractate is nicknamed the small Talmud, since it treats so many different topics in Jewish law, lore, and learning. But we can't get there yet, since two more good-byes to Tractate *Yevamot* seem important.

First, Steve Smith, of *Mulligan Years* fame, correctly identified that, in addition to *Yevamot*, Rabbi Elazar in the name of Rabbi Chanina's adage appears identically at the end of *Berachot*, *Nazir*, and *Keritot*. In each, as we saw last week, he says that Torah scholars increase peace in the world. Avery Neumark also got it right (hardly breaking a sweat), and added a beautiful thought that referring to Sages as builders is a particularly apt way to complete *Yevamot*; the very verse in the Torah instructing the process of *yibum* says that the practice is done in order to "build" the dead husband's household. Steve Smith then added to the beauty of the Torah of Avery's thought with the comment that the Talmud does not say that Torah scholars *should* increase peace in the world. Rather, it says that, in order to be a true Torah scholar, a person *does* increase peace in the world. These are priceless lessons both. The Judges have awarded Steve and Avery one inflation resistant point each for getting the Tractates right. The reward for the Torah thoughts, well, is given by a Greater Authority. *Hazak U'Barukh*.

More On Spitting During Halitzah. Second, for such an unpleasant topic, many people keep trying to make sense of it. Of course that's to their credit. The Torah and our Sages established and developed a clever, caring institution to alleviate serious limits on a former wife's freedom, allowing her to remarry. Yet because an essential part of the ritual involves spitting, we've been trying to find something positive to say about it (see emails of [June 30](#) and [July 7](#)). Many with infinitely greater knowledge and proficiency in Jewish sources, like Rabbi Moshe Edelman, whom I cited last week, came up with very little. This week, Pearl Shifer cites the episode with

Miriam speaking out of turn against her brother Moshe, where the Almighty says (Bemidbar 12:13-15):

So Moses cried out to the LORD, "O God, please heal her!" But the LORD answered Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Let her be confined outside the camp for seven days; after that she may be brought back in." So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until she was brought in again.

Look at the strength of the Jewish people here, standing in solidarity with Miriam, waiting for her week of teshuva or repentance to end. Paula Van Gelder, recently named our official Los Angeles correspondent for her fantastic posts, cites the same Biblical verse, notes that, in *halitza*, the spitting is not in the face but on the ground, and beautifully says:

Perhaps if the spit landed on the ground, thereby watering it, it might have nurtured the growth of new vegetation -- yerek -- so perhaps there is indeed some deeper lesson to be found here about new possibilities arising out of tragic events.

Barbara Reiss – far flung to parts Europe these days making this section both intra-and inter-national – also had a thought on spitting in *halitzah*, that the party in subservience spits to show that her dignity will not be squashed by the act of refusal to marry being visited on her. It's a profound thought and like Pearl's and Paula's is trying to find dignity in what might in modern times be thought of as demeaning. Thank you all.

Built Back Better. What a litany of good stuff this week:

Quote of the week. A new item in BBB, I start with the observation of Dr. Richard M. Fuchs, a NYC cardiologist who was looking at absolutely miraculous, real-time video images created by a sonogram of a beating heart (it happened to be mine!):

We can surely marvel at how modern technology gives us a window to see Divine technology.

Try to beat that one (sorry for the pun).

Miracles and Wonders. Or maybe you want miracles at the other end of the length dimension. How about the first published picture from the Webb telescope into deep(ish) space, courtesy of Beth (and [NASA](#)):



Alice's Restaurant and the Draft. David Sable's stories of stepping up to the draft begot a lot of commentary. Jack Schenker's story was of an America that died in Vietnam but of an Israel that may still be alive there. Jack was initially deferred here in the U.S. because of hockey injuries (sustained, not given). But everyone wanted him to get help to be selected, since it was the honorable and courageous thing to do. Alan Zwiebel was also disgusted with efforts to beat the draft, so here he is, serving his country:



For comparison, here is David Sable:



And here is one of me:



Tel Aviv Tells. Thank you to Morton Landowne, who sent in this terrific pic from a Tel Aviv flea market:



Summer Songs.

- From the Department of Sweet, Suchu Solny offers The Happenings, [See You In September](#). Yes, it had been on the list before. But no one had associated it with scenes of Catskill summers with parents. Beautiful, and thank you.
- James Kahn, Professor to you all, but more importantly for us a Kohen, echoes several already mentioned (*Summer in the City* – also Henry Watkin's and Yakov Burstein's choices) and *Sealed With A Kiss*) but adds the fabulous [Heat Wave](#) (Martha and the Vandellas) and [Dancing in the Street](#) (same group). Interestingly, the Judges had initially disqualified both, since they aren't really summer songs. But James persevered and won on appeal.
- A similar fate befell Faith Fogelman, who had several other great additions, like The Danleers, [One Summer Night](#). But did she drift too far away from summer with The Drifter's [Under the Boardwalk](#)? Here again the Judges were ultimately persuaded. They are all on the list.
- And SM Rosenberg's favorite, [Every Summer](#), by Greg Raposo, also makes the list with a great tune.
- Yael Cycowicz offered three great Hebrew songs from Israeli summers back in the day:

חזה אלברשטיין - את כל פלאי הקיץ
צוות הווי תותחנים - בלילות הקיץ החמים
צביקה פיק - אהבה בסוף הקיץ

Team, I need help linking these to the actual songs. But I was so delighted to get some Hebrew songs on the list that they stay. We are even considering non-Hebrew non-English, but I – I mean the judges – need a link to the music and the lyrics.

- Steven Beispel's [Summertime](#) (not Gershwin's) from the movie *Summertime in Venice*, has enough English with the Italian that it's in, and it's great.

Now what about the sleepers? You thought it was over, didn't you? The great summer songs were already on the list, or so you thought.

- Then Lena Haber proposed the theme from [A Summer Place](#). It's an absolutely marvelous song and a spectacular summer song to boot. It should be at the top of the list. My personal favorite is the version sung by Andy Williams.
- Nearly as stunning – stunning in the fact that you all missed them for two weeks running – are two from Robert Katz, one the earworm, Eddie Cochran's [Summertime Blues](#) and the fantastic oldie by The Kinks, [Sunny Afternoon](#). (Robert has a story of our Congregation and The Grateful Dead that is hilarious. Ok, maybe I'll tell you.)

As the list grows in magnificence, two criticisms have been levelled against me. I'm here seeking the truth, so I will share them with you. First, I initially said "fun" summer songs, so why am I listing great or beautiful but not fun songs. Second, by having the contest go on for some weeks, but not re-listing prior weeks' entries, I'm leaving well-intentioned suggesters (or is it suggestants?) to resuggest the same songs.

I've given these criticisms a lot of thought. To correct for the second, we will soon list *all* the songs in all their glory, creating the greatest anthology of summer songs ever, or at the very least, the greatest Shearith Israel anthology of summer songs ever (we would list all of them now, but you are still missing super-great summer songs – I guess I will tell you next week, which is during the Three Weeks, so maybe I won't link to the songs that will be so embarrassing to you to have missed).

On the first point, my considered response is, "*feh*"! The criticism is sound and completely well-founded. I did say, and did want, *fun* summer songs. But are we going to let a little issue of conformity to rules get in the way of getting more of our congregants and friends to join in the Great Summer List, or GSL? Do we have to be reminded of Ralph Waldo Emerson's brilliant quip?

*A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds,
adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines.*

Thank you all. Bless us all. Happy Bastille Day. Shabbat shalom.

Louis Solomon, Parnas