

October 13, 2022

Dear Shearith Israel family and Touro Synagogue Affiliates,

Holiday Cheer during Covid-19. If Kippur is the happiest and most life-affirming one-day holiday our Congregation observes – it is – then Succot is surely one of the happiest two-day holidays we experience as a community. Everything you see and touch shouts “WE ARE ONE.” Our Succahs – the one gorgeously adorned by our Sisterhood and the one beautifully decorated on Paved Paradise – are open and inviting to all. The Four Species of Lulab, Hadassim, Aravot, and Etrog that we hold together as one and wave together as a community is unmistakably a sign of communal unity. We literally walk around the sanctuary, in a circle, chanting songs of unity each day of the holiday during *Hoshanot*. Our special tunes are melodic and easy for all of us to follow, both native born and newcomer.

Services over the chag were beautiful. We had a nice attendance. For this Shabbat, the Rabbi is planning a special Shabbat afternoon class. We have kept in place many of the still-prudent Covid-19 protocols, like a mask-only section for those who wish, air cleaners, open windows. In the case of our sanctuary, there is little downside and little, if any, inconvenience to anyone. Some smart and sensible scientists are concerned about a resurgence of the disease this Fall – we are largely going maskless, we are going inside more, and the worry is that too many of us are not getting boosted. We will continue these protections so that we are all comfortable as well as safe.

More Circles of Renewal. It is not surprising that our religion would have so many opportunities to think about cycles and circles – of the seasons, of the year(s), of our Torah, of life, of the universe. This Shabbat Jews everywhere (well, almost everywhere) will read the Book of Kohelet, or Ecclesiastes, with the timeless image of “turn turn turn” ([here](#) are the Byrds singing the Pete Seeger classic).

This week’s Daf Yomi cycle in Tractate Ketubot includes an interesting use of the metaphor, one that has layers of important lessons for us in our time and space. In fact, since like so many Talmudic stories this one teaches through a narrative that includes humor, if I had more time (alas, these short work weeks ensure that I don’t), I would summarize the story in a limerick – any takers, for a whopping three inflation-adjusted points?

The scene opens on page 95a of the Tractate, with the Mishna describing a husband with two wives having sold a field. Remember, as we have learned before, wives may, in many more circumstances than our common law recognizes, collect against even prior sold property to satisfy Husband’s financial obligations to them in the Ketubah. The downward pressure that this rule puts on prices of transactions led parties to try to contract around that rule, made obviously to protect Wives.

In the case considered by the Mishna, in the transaction with Buyer for the field, Wife 1 relinquishes all claim to the field – and let’s suppose for this example that that relinquishment is

recognized as valid in law. So Wife 1 has no claim against Buyer to satisfy Wife 1's ketubah. Wife 1, however, does have priority over Wife 2, and Wife 1 did nothing to relinquish *that* priority. So, the Mishna says, Wife 2 still has a claim against Buyer (after all, it was only Wife 1 who forgave any claim against Buyer); Wife 1 still has a claim of priority against Wife 2; and Buyer still has a claim of priority against Wife 1 arising out of the transaction where Wife 1 relinquished her rights to Buyer. In language so perfect, the text then describes the going round and round in circles of this state of affairs and says finally:

וְחֹזְרוֹת חֲלִילָה, עַד שְׂיַעֲשׂוּ פְּשָׁרָה בֵּינֵיהֶם. נֶכֶן בַּעַל חוֹב, נֶכֶן אִשָּׁה בַּעֲלַת חוֹב

They continue to do so according to this circle [ḥalila, also with the meaning of Heaven forbid] until they agree on a compromise between them.

See where the Talmud ends up? The three of them – Buyer, Wife 1, and Wife 2 -- can go round and round forever. There is no solution in law. Or, they can come to a compromise, what the Talmud calls a “*pshara*”. We need to spend more time discussing the brilliance of Talmudic notions of “*pshara*”. For today, what is noteworthy is that:

- The Talmud knows that there are rights and entitlements that may lead parties to an impasse, and that does not reflect a defect in the legal system.
- To overcome the dizziness that sets in from pursuing vicious circles, the Talmud lays out a principled means of finding compromise. The benefits of learning the art of compromise are therefore huge and largely imposed (not entirely) outside the judicial system.
- There is a built-in limit to how unreasonable any one person can be in a three-party game like this, since if any one person is manifestly unreasonable vis-à-vis the other two, then the other two can team up and defeat the third. Do you see how that could happen with respect to each respective grouping? Send in your scenarios for one point each (it's pretty easy).

Circles – A New Challenge. The above story has to lead to a new challenge: One point each for great circle songs. *Lion King* is disqualified, and I will start the bidding by reminding everyone of two great “new start” songs that we enjoyed together last year, [on October 7, 2021](#):

- The beautiful song by Joni Mitchell, [Circle Game](#)
- A song that should be required listening every year this time of year, the masterpiece by Bobby Sherman, [Easy Come, Easy Go](#)

Built Back Better.

Hatikvah, the final word. David Lerner, who still joins us on Tisha B'Ab and is missed the rest of the year when he is not with us, adds this dispositively relevant observation to our discussion of the provenance of *Hatikvah*. Holding this key information while I floundered about for several weeks – though prior help from David Vorchheimer, Henry Watkin, and Barbara Reiss, among others, was invaluable – David Lerner points to an actual documentary, [Go in Peace, Rain](#). The published synopsis of the film states in part:

The Film Go in Peace, Rain is a journey following the metamorphosis of one Jewish melody, an ancient prayer of parting from the rain - "Who Brings The Dew"- and following its many incarnations which bring it to its final dramatic stance - to be the anthem of the State of Israel. From what is known, the melody began in Italy, and from there took a northerly turn to France, then West into Spain, Portugal and Gibraltar. During the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition, the melody was spread amongst the northern Portuguese communities - to cities such as Amsterdam, London, Hamburg, Paris and Prague; and to communities in the East: Greece, Bulgaria, Rumania and Turkey. From there, it would seem, the melody moved to Eastern Europe. It was also nurtured among the southern Portuguese communities, in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. The tune of the melody can be found in many variations. Among these: a Flemish National Song, a Polish air, a Turkish melody, a Slavic Shepherd Song, an ancient Italian song, a Czech children's tune, the "Hallel Blessings" (Sephardic Style), the scoring for the prayer "The Living God is Exalted " as per the customs of the Jews of Rome, a Swedish ditty called "Ack, V?rmland" [sic?], a Bohemian Folk Song, an original tune sung in the synagogue in the town of Yassi, a Valachian national song, a Basque national song, the opening of the symphonic poem "The Moldau," by Czech composer Bedrich Smetana, and others. The melody left Gibraltar, crossing the Atlantic Ocean and arriving in America: and on its journey across the globe, at the end of the 19th Century, the same tune returned to the Land of Israel.

Assuming we are all now completely exhausted by this fascinating history, I suggest two things: First, we should air this documentary on Paved Paradise next summer. And second, if asked the genesis of *Hatikvah*, we can just say, it's as timeless, and its message as universal, as the Jews themselves.

One Week Away from Opening Our Autumn Play List. As a community, over 50 of us made suggestions for the greatest Spotify playlist of summer songs. [Here](#) is the summer list, again. We are just a week away from opening the lines for our Autumn list. Please think, enjoy the vanishingly short Autumn, and chime in after next week's email.

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom. Here here! *Kaminando kon Buenos*. And moadim l'simha.

Louis Solomon, Parnas