

August 24, 2023

Dear Shearith Israel family,

***This Intro Section Is Going to Get a New Name Yet!*** The deep, abiding irony cannot be lost on anyone: Our fellow congregants and friends are so annoyed at my incessant asking for a new title for this section of this email that many (many) sent in proposed names. Yet no one actually reacted to the substance of my new section last week. Oh well. Talk about the medium *being* the message (quick, who made that famous – one point; it’s easy).

Here is a new set of “naming” proposals, which in a couple of instances are uncannily similar:

- Faith Fogelman suggests, among other things, “Points to Ponder”; “Thinking Aloud”; “Streaming Aloud”; and “Reflections, Random Reflections”.
- Ruth Riemer has a beautiful set of “Zeh V’zeh”; or “זזה וזזה”; or “This and That”. These could work nicely.
- Cantor Jay Harwitt, who is defending an earlier co-win in naming this section, offers “בְּעִבּוֹר הַהַעֲשָׂרָה” from Bereshit 18:32, which is an inspired sentiment (the Almighty is telling Abraham that Sodom/Gomorrah would be spared even were there only ten people there who cared about others).
- With more than a dollop of fun-poking, our next-gen editor and PUBLISHED AUTHOR SM Rosenberg “asked GPT for some brainstorming assistance”. SM sought an alliteration with a “P” for “Parnas” (more fun-poking). I won’t share her results – they were perfectly preposterous!
- And then comes the 800-pound gorilla himself! Trustee David Sable too is tired of my whining about needing a new title, so, in a spurt of magnificent marketing mavenry, David rattled off: “New Amsterdam News”; “The Ruminating Parnas”; “R&P from the S&P (Reflexion & Pensamentos from the Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue)”; “The Parnas Rambles”; “The Parnas Piece”; “From The Corner of 70th St”; “CPW Soap Box”; “Parnas Press”; “Parnas Prose”; and “S&P Progress.”

These are all fantastic, with some more fantastic than others. In any case, I’m chastened. No more whining. I will start using some new title(s) next week.

***Kiddushin – Proposed Thesis.*** At the commencement of our communal learning of Tractate Gittin ([May 18, 2023](#)) as part of the global Daf Yomi Talmud cycle, I proposed a working thesis about Tractate Gittin to help us focus our energies:

*The Jewish approach to divorce is about as enlightened and fair-minded a system as any operating within the constraints of dealing with fallible human beings could be.*

Ruminating over the reactions of many of us in the nearly-three-month period of *Gittin* study, I can’t say the thesis was overwhelmingly proven. Still, I want to try a thesis, if you will, a “Resolve”, for *Kiddushin*, too. Given my failure with *Gittin*, you might be wondering why I don’t just wait until

after we are done learning Tractate Kiddushin before trying to describe it. I'll answer that next week if I don't get any help in the meantime with an explanation.

In searching for a thesis, one might start with the beautiful Biblical description of marriage, stated in the very first parasha of the Torah (Parashat Bereshit 2:24) -

*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

This thought, having the effect of re-making as one what the Almighty just separated, would be both beautiful and sublime even without the beautiful and sublime Peter Paul and Mary song, [There is Love](#), which quotes the verse.

Or, if you didn't want beautiful and sublime but just want hilarious, you could start, and end, with the "[mawwage](#)" scene from the Princess Bride. It not just funny but fully in keeping with the legal dictates of the tractate. In the scene in the movie, Buttercup does not affirm her agreement to be bound in holy matrimony. As we will see, since the ceremony lacked essential equality and mutuality, it's not a valid marriage, says our Talmud.

Let me offer the following Resolve, which I believe will be borne out in the Tractate or at least is a sentiment worthy of respectful dialogue:

*Marriage in Judaism, as seen through the Talmudic lens and its aftermath, presents a fully formed expression of relative equality, mutuality of fundamental even if different obligations, and joyous affirmation and transmission of Jewish values.*

I acknowledge that this Resolve may not be saying anything so controversial as what we tried to prove about divorce in Judaism. Still, I'm not saying nothing, am I? Each of four parts of the Resolve – (i) relative equality, (ii) mutuality of important even if different obligations, and (iii) joyous affirmation and (iv) transmission of Jewish values – is empirical in the sense that we can test the propositions against the teachings of the Tractate. Anyway, even if you don't need or like the Resolve, the Tractate's discussions and teachings are interesting in themselves. So please join in the study and join in the debate.

***Relative Equality in Jewish Marriage.*** I want to start with the first of the four criteria: relative equality. Would you agree that in a sense this criterion contrasts with the relative position of husband and wife in the divorce context taught in Tractate Gittin? There, we saw, the Rabbis tried mightily to rebalance relative positions of *inequality* through the interpretation or enactment of many rules and laws. In Kiddushin, on the other hand, a fundamental premise of equality animates the rules and laws themselves. Let's take some examples.

First, we saw last week that the very language used in the first Mishna of the Tractate indicates that a marriage is effectuated through the *acquisition* of a *status change* carrying with it a sound

sense of *righteousness* and *sanctity*. Many people reacted positively to this description, none more eloquently than Barbara Reiss, who shared her view that:

*[P]erhaps the term 'acquired' is used to reflect the Mishna's view that the relationship is transactional. Not in the derogatory way that word is often used to describe the commercialization of so many relationships. But with a recognition that 'romance' is not the lynchpin of a successful marriage and that an implicit and explicit agreement on terms, including: do we want children, how many, where do we want to live, how to we wish to live our Judaism, who will take out the trash, and on which days... are important if not essential aspects to the relationship. Even the non-religious TV version of the marriage ceremony includes "vows"- what we each agree to do for each other, i.e., the terms, if not conditions.*

Thanks to Barbara as well for sending a link to a piece by David Brooks, which contains interesting citations to look up on the subject of, "[To Be Happy, Marriage Matters More Than Career.](#)"

Second, this "acquisition" mentality does not detract from the fundamental equality of the arrangement; rather it confirms it. The pages of the Tractate learned this week (pages 6-13 [ooh, isn't that an auspicious numerology for studying Jewish holy matrimony]) affirm and reaffirm that, in going into a marriage, each party is of equal ability to consent or reject (minor exceptions excluded). The Rabbis protect that equality throughout. As shown by some examples:

- Page 7b at bottom of page 8a toward the top and again on page 8b: We learn that a woman must know the value of what she is being offered for her consent to marry. It is for that reason that cash is an acceptable and arguably preferred form of consideration. So is a plain, round wedding ring, since the value of that ring is knowable and can be ascertained to be in excess of the required worth of a "*pruta*", which was a known denomination of coin or value in Israel. It is for this reason that, as the Talmud explains, diamond rings are frowned upon as being unsuitable as wedding rings. Use it as an engagement ring if you want to give one. As a wedding ring, the wife needs to know what it's worth without any real debate.
- Pages 11a/b discuss the use of a silver coin as opposed to another metal alloy, the reason again being that silver has intrinsic value that is known and understood by the wife.
- Carrying through on this rule, page 12b teaches that, because the wife must know what she is getting, if a man stuffs money worth more than a *pruta* into a rug worth less than a *pruta*, and the wife-to-be does not know about the money but sees only the rug, she is not married. Her knowing consent cannot be said to have been freely given.
- And at the bottom of page 12b and the top of 13a, we learn that if a man loans a woman money and later wants to forgive the loan and use that value as the consideration for the marriage, it is not a valid transaction if the woman either rejects the proposal or is silent about whether or not she accepts it. The woman needs to know what is going on from the get-go, needs to be explicit about agreeing to it (like sticking her hand out and offering her pointed finger in order to accept the ring under the *Chuppah* or wedding canopy), and can't be put in a pressurized position to need to acquiesce in order to forgive the loan.

Whatever happens after a marriage, the fact that a Jewish marriage occurs only through the knowing consent of legally equal participants has enormous explanatory force. We shall see more of this, I think, as we proceed together.

### ***Built Back Better.***

***Summer Music Fun.*** Judging by the number of responses, in both numbers of people and numbers of songs, our community very much wants to share “hopeful” and “happy” songs, followed by songs on the theme of marriage. We have not begun to exhaust these categories. So please send in more suggestions:

***Songs of Hope.*** As of last week, we had:

- [\*Wishin' and Hopin'\*](#), by Dusty Springfield
- [\*Somewhere\*](#), from *West Side Story*
- [\*Do You Hear the People Sing\*](#), from *Les Mis*
- [\*Hatikvah\*](#)
- [\*I Can See Clearly Now\*](#), by Johnny Nash
- [\*Lean On Me\*](#), by Bill Withers

Adding to this list, we now include:

The indefatigable Faith Fogelman makes three fantastic suggestions:

- [\*The Morning After\*](#), from *Poseidon Adventure* (Maureen McGovern);
- [\*We Can Work It Out\*](#), by The Beatles; and
- [\*Blue Skies\*](#), by Irving Berlin (here sung by the Chairman of the Board), a true personal favorite earworm, which I've previously linked to in these pages.
  
- Michael Schuler, who with his wife Lu just became grandparents (mazel tov!), suggests [\*\[Good Morning\] Starshine\*](#), from the musical *Hair*. Michael says, “It was a big AM hit, and we deemed it loathsome 55 years ago. Sounds different as an adult!” It's a great song – another earworm over the decades and certainly as happy as it is hopeful.
- Cantor Jay Harwitt suggests [\*Something's Coming\*](#), and *Somewhere* (the latter is already on the list) from *West Side Story*.

***Happy Songs.*** As of last week, we had:

- [\*Happy\*](#), by Pharrell Williams
- [\*Happy Talk\*](#), from Roger and Hammerstein's *South Pacific*
- [\*I'm in Love with a Wonderful Guy\*](#) from *South Pacific*

- [If You Wanna to be Happy](#) by Jimmy Soul (a personal fave)
- [I'm Happy Just to Dance With You](#) by The Beatles (uhm, another personal fave)
- [Don't Worry Be Happy](#) by Bobby McFerrin (dig the whistling)
- [Happy Together](#) by The Turtles (happy happy happy); and
- [Girls Just Want to Have Fun](#) by Cindy Lauper

This week's addition:

- Cantor Jay Harwitt offers the title song, [The Hills are Alive](#), from *The Sound of Music*.

**Marriage Songs.** Last week I offered [Love and Marriage](#).

We add to that a Love Boat of marvelous marriage songs:

Jerry Raymond offers two great ones:

- [Chapel of Love](#), by The Dixie Cups; and
- [Wouldn't it be Nice](#), by The Beach Boys.
- Faith Fogelman suggests [Sunday Sweet Sunday](#), from *Flower Drum Song*. Faith was good enough to concede that the song isn't as well known as *Love and Marriage*, but it's still a great song, so thank you Faith;

Dr. Sandy Rose offers a great set, the greatest of them being:

- [Anniversary Song](#), by Al Jolson;
- [I'm Getting Married in the Morning](#), from *My Fair Lady*;
- [There's a Small Hotel](#), by Peggy Lee, which is a great song that is little heard;
- [When I Fall in Love](#), here by Nat King Cole; and
- For a sad one, [A Cottage for Sale](#), here sung by the great Sinatra.

Claude Nadaf offers his own (as usual) eclectic set:

- [Here Comes the Bride](#), which Claude claims includes a "favorite musical scale" from Ancient Greece (I always thought it was Wagner, as in the linked version – but Claude has shown himself to be right before);
- [How Deep is Your Love](#), by the Bee Gees; and
- [Od Yishama](#)
- [Hey, Paula](#), sung by Paul and Paula, which is my entry (is it really so vapid that I can't get anyone else to sponsor it?).

