

May 15, 2025

Dear Shearith Israel family,

**Our Year of Renewal.** Rabbi Robinson, leader of our sibling Congregation Lincoln Square Synagogue, like so many of the rest of us, marvels at the change since these essays began at the commencement of the Covid-19 lockdowns five years ago. Now, there are “so many beautiful simchas! a joy to see” in both Congregations.

No one is overlooking the bad or tragic or worse. Still, as Claude Nadaf nicely says, our mourning during the period of Sefirat Ha’Omer is only a “quasi mourning period [that] should be treated as such, as the [counting of the omer] is biblically a happy period counting up to Pentecost from Passover.”

**Our Gala Tonight, on Lag L’Omer.** Though our counting of the omer will continue after today, tonight many of us will celebrate the end of the period of no-music. And, following a music-free reception before *shekiah*, we will usher in Lag L’Omer with a marvelous program led Rabbi Soloveichik and our Choir, titled *Handel with Care*. We are looking forward to seeing all registered guests on Paved Paradise at 7p (or joining us for Evening Services at 6:30p). The musical program will start after sunset in the Sanctuary, at ~8p. I couldn’t be happier that we will be together for this.

**Perek 3.** Apropos of the discussion below concerning human agency, one can’t get a better expression of the Jewish view of the world than that attributed to R’ Akiva (3:15):

הכל צפוי, והרשות נתונה

***Everything is foreseen, yet freedom of choice is given.***

**Fewer Movies for Paved Paradise.** No one has made any new suggestions for summer movies on Paved Paradise. Several of us, however, have been open about criticizing the suggestions of others. The path is fair. Avoiding a bad movie is just about as valuable to all of us with limited time as finding a great one.

Taking account of opinions positive and negative, we have a shrinking list:

- *Exodus*
- *Lawrence of Arabia*
- *Deliverance*
- *The Red Violin*
- *Yankee Doodle Dandy*

Does anyone have any others?

**The Rain's Letting Up.** No new rain songs this week. So the torrent has become not even a trickle. One more week, and we will end this most interesting digression that threw off lots and lots of great songs.

**Name that Parasha Tune.** Speeding through the back-nine of Sefer Vayikra, we are collecting tuneful suggestions for **Emor** and **Behar/Bechukotai**, which will take us to the end of this Third Book of the Torah.

Andrew Druck wants to add a couple to **Parshiot Acharei Mot/Kedoshim**, the double parshiot that we read last Shabbat and that includes discussion of the laws of sexual morality: Says Andrew:

“What is permitted”:

- [Love and Marriage](#), as sung by Frank Sinatra
- [Cherish](#), sung by The Association
- [Respect](#), sung by Aretha Franklin
- [Words of Love](#), sung by the Beatles

And “what is NOT permitted”:

- [Anything Goes](#), as here by Cole Porter
- [I Heard it Through the Grapevine](#), here by Marvin Gaye

Andrew has some other good ones, but he was concerned about listing them in a “shul newsletter”. Is that what this is? Andrew’s list is great (as with any list, some of the songs *qua* songs are better than others, but they all have the right to be heard – or at least the right to be linked):

- [Kiss and Say Goodbye](#), as sung by Kate and Anna McGarrigle
- [Suffragette City](#), as sung by David Bowie
- [Little Queenie](#), as sung by Chuck Berry
- [Lola](#), as sung by the Kinks
- [When the Whip Comes Down](#), as sung by the Rolling Stones
- [Let's Spend the Night Together](#), as sung by the Rolling Stones
- [Wake Up Little Susie](#), as sung by the Everly Brothers
- [Brown Sugar](#), as sung by the Rolling Stones
- [The Boxer](#), as sung by Simon and Garfunkel
- [Janey Needs a Shooter](#), as sung by Brice Springsteen
- *Walk on the Wild Side*, as sung by David Bowie [actually for this one I can't find an appropriate video to link - ha!]

**Best Song/Worst Lyric Challenge.** Recently ([see my email of April 10, 2025](#)) I mentioned that the Beatles song [Rain](#) contained among the worst lyrics for a good song:

*If the rain comes they run and hide their heads.  
They might as well be dead.*

The thought has been brewing since then that the Beatles are not the only great singer/songwriters to botch lyrics in search of a rhyme. Many have suggested [I've Got You Under My Skin](#) for **Parashat Tazria/Metzorah**, most recently Beverly Druck. Even the great Cole Porter (in a rendition sung by the Chairman of the Board himself) succumbed in that popular standard to the following line:

*Use your mentality, wake up to reality*

Oh bother! Anyway, you get my point. The lines are open for some great songs with terrible lyrics, all in search of a rhyme.

**Human Agency in Tractate Shevuot.** This week, the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle is learning pages 10-16 of Tractate Shevuot. As I mentioned last week, the first two Chapters of Tractate Shevuot (which run from pages 2 to 19) are less about oaths and more about sanctity, purity, and related rules and laws about sacrifices, the Temple, Jerusalem, and “related” topics. Both chapters similarly include all the Mishnaic material at the beginning of the respective chapter.

I find it aspirational that the Talmud spends so much time on sanctity and purity – of body, of thought, of speech. You might quip that it must be that people in those centuries needed more reminders. Alas, I think the opposite is true. For many of us, well, for me at least, I can't even imagine what it's like to live in sanctity and purity, so the rules seem odd and hard to comprehend. That is our loss.

The last pages of this week's learning treat a distantly related topic that is worth a pause. We all know of the deep duality in our religion, playing itself out over and over in our rites, rituals, learning, lore: Is what happens to us the result of The Almighty's providence, or are we as human agents key players in the unfolding of history. Pesah celebrates matzoh – is matzoh the bread of freedom brought about exclusively by The Almighty, or is it the bread of affliction, poverty, and servitude that the Israelites needed to work through in order to achieve freedom? When the Israelites received the first set of Ten Commandments, which The Almighty made without human intervention, did they botch everything with the Golden Calf, or was it only when Moshe actually carved the Tablets himself, in partnership with The Almighty, that the fundamental moral creed of humanity had any hope of sticking? Both parts of this duality are true in our religion. We have faith in an Almighty that cares and controls, but active human agency is indispensable to our religious worldview, no matter in which language you say *tikun olam*.

Page 16a of Tractate Shevuot treats another instance of this duality. The question there presented is whether the initial sanctity of the First Temple remained the sanctity even of the Second Temple and will be the sanctity of the Third Temple, when it is built.

קְדוּשָׁה ראשונה קִידְשָׁה לְשַׁעֲתָה וְקִידְשָׁה לְעֵתִיד לְבָא

*The Sanctity at first was the sanctity thereafter and will be the same sanctity in the future*

Many sages say that the initial sanctity, imbued by The Almighty through the miracles, beginning with Joshua's conquest of the Land, will remain the same until the end of days. The alternative is that espoused by the other Sages, who feel that the initial sanctity of the First Temple will not be the same as that sanctity imbued by Ezra, who achieved the building of the Second Temple through human cooperation and without warfare, and it is that second sanctity that is greater and that will be everlasting. Different proof texts are used to support each of the opinions.

We are accustomed to answering "both" when asked a disjunctive question where we like both opposing answers. Judaism has clearly said "both" to the duality of G-d-driven vs G-d enabled universes.

**Books.** We are headed into summer. Is anyone reading anything good? Is anyone reading anything bad? Is anyone reading anything? Let us hear from you.

In this, our Year of Renewal, let us feel and express gratitude and pray *Hoshi'á nna, save us now.*

Louis Solomon, Parnas