

May 29, 2025

Dear Shearith Israel family,

***Our Year of Renewal.*** Last Shabbat at Shearith Israel was reportedly very nice if a bit thin in attendance (Memorial Day Weekend). The Yom Yerushalayim program on Sunday evening, led by our Rabbinic Intern Baruch-Lev Kelman, was clearly terrific, as these photos attest:



And our annual Memorial Day commemoration, led by Reverend Edinger at Chatham Square Cemetery, Shearith Israel's first cemetery and the oldest one in the United States, was also outstanding, as *these* photos attest:



Our next congregational stop is Shabuot, surely one of the most delightful of holidays at Shearith Israel. The Sanctuary usually looks glorious, thanks to the greenery installed by the Sisterhood. The reading of the Book of Ruth by our young girls is always uplifting. The Rabbi's 11 p.m. talk on the first night (this year on Sunday night) is usually entertaining and always enlightening. So is the communal reading of the Azharot in the afternoons of the first and second days before Mincha,

when we pack into a single sentence of text an explication of each one of the 613 commandments. Many people are usually away for Shabuot. But if you are around, please join us. You will enjoy the holiday so much more if you do. And with some meteorological luck, you'll be rewarded with blintzes, S&S cheesecake, and more at outdoor kiddushim on Paved Paradise.

**Touro Synagogue.** While we are concluding the Counting of the Omer (only three nights left) and readying ourselves for Shabuot, I wanted to report on the trip the Daars and the Solomons took to Newport, RI last Shabbat. We spent a splendid Shabbat with our partners at Touro Synagogue, Congregation Ahavath Israel (CAI). We had Friday night dinner together and a communal kiddush after morning services. Services Friday night, Shabbat morning, and Shabbat afternoon each had a minyan, which cannot be taken for granted.

Our friends at CAI are truly wonderful people. Led by Paul Tobak and Jim Herstoff, CAI is fully committed to reviving and sustaining Touro Synagogue as an active house of worship. But frankly they need our help. They may well need our financial help; Touro Synagogue needs some substantial even if not life-threatening maintenance and repair. But that's the easier part (I say with no real idea where the money is going to come from).

The harder challenge is creating an environment where Touro Synagogue will consistently feel like and actually be a thriving house of worship. That is where many of us can really help. If you have even one Shabbat free this summer, please get up to Newport and act as a goodwill ambassador to CAI and to Touro Synagogue. As you make plans for the next few seasons, commit to getting up there one Shabbat per season. It's not really a hardship. The people at CAI are terrific, and they will be thrilled to greet and enjoy Shabbat with you. There's also plenty to do in Newport almost every season. Nothing will succeed like success at having regular Shabbat minyanim. It's a goal we can help CAI achieve. So let's do it.

**Star Spotting.** This occasional item occurs when we spot a true star (usually a true New Yorker, but it doesn't have to be) on the streets of our fair city. This week, it is none other than our trustee and trusted friend, David Sable:





The pic speaks for itself.

**Perek 5 (last mishna).** Three words of Ben He He teach an eternal truth:

בֶּן־הֵהָאָדָם אֵמַר, לְפֹנִים צִעֲרָא אִגְרָא

*Ben He He said: According to the labor is the reward.*

*Carpe diem* is also three words in English translation: *Seize the Day*. Ben He He's advice is just as profound. I challenge you to come up with equally or better advice in the same or fewer words. The Judges are willing to part with one point for each great suggestion.

**Name that Parasha Tune.** We have begun the fourth Book of the Torah, Sefer Bemidbar (btw, we say "Bemidbar" and not "Bamidbar" in homage to and loving memory of our member, Carla Schein (see [my email of 6.2.22](#))). We are collecting tunes for **Parshiot Bemidbar, Naso, Be'halot'cha, Shlach, and Korach**.

Finalizing the list of "songs of fear" from last week's reading of **Parashat Be'halot'cha's** curses, Michael Lewy suggests a good one:

- [Bad Moon Rising](#), here sung by great late-60's group Creedence Clearwater Revival, known as CCR for the past 50+ years. Does anyone remember when I quoted the first verse of this epic, [on 4.22.21](#)? Great song, Michael, thank you.

For **Parashat Bemidbar**, Zachary Gorden suggests one I already had, America's *A Horse with No Name*, but two other great ones as well:

- [Hotel California](#), here sung by The Eagles; and
- [Lech Lamidbar](#), here performed by The Parvarim (Israel, 1967)

Ritual Director Jay Harwitt offers a nice one, not for the parasha but for Haftarah Bemidbar:

- [We've Only Just Begun](#), here by The Carpenters

For **Parashat Naso**, and the Priestly Blessing, Jay suggests:

- [Sabbath Prayer](#), from *Fiddler on the Roof*

For **Parashat Shlach** (with the spies and all that), Jay serves up some humor by suggesting some great theme songs:

- [Get Smart](#)
- [The Man from U.N.C.L.E.](#)
- [Mission: Impossible](#)
- [The Avengers](#)

To show his agility, Jay adds two more for the end of **Parashat Shlach**:

- [Try to Remember](#), from *The Fantasticks*; and
- [Memory](#), from *Cats*

And or **Parashat Korach**, Jay offers (tee hee)

- [I Feel the Earth Move Under My Feet](#), here by Carole King

**Flying Camels.** This week, the worldwide Daf Yomi learning cycle is studying pages 24-30 of Tractate Shevuot. We finish Chapter Three of the Tractate on page 29 and begin Chapter Four on the top of page 30. Chapter Three involves a study of oaths using speech and in particular, at the end, senseless oaths. Chapter Four, which we can focus on next week, involves oaths as part of testimony.

The second to last Mishna in Chapter Three, on page 29a, deserves brief discussion. Here the Talmud clarifies oaths that matter by focusing on oaths that don't. A vain oath is one that contradicts what everyone (well, at least three people) knows to be true or false. Saying that a stone column is made of gold is a vain oath. So too is swearing to something that is impossible, like a flying camel or a snake large enough to be a beam of an olive press (for reasons it explains these nonsense oaths are stated in the negative, but the point is the same). The Talmud understands exaggeration and does not punish for it. It's where impossibilities are palmed off as reality, or where, as the Bard said, equivocation lies like truth that Jewish law steps in. (BTW, do you want a point from the Judges? Where does Shakespeare actually say "lies like truth"?)

The litmus test, and an easy way to remember the rule, is whether the corn is *actually* as high as an Elephant's eye. If that's plausible, and you swear to it, then get in line for the sliding scale of punitive sacrifice giving. If it's absurd and known to be, then, just sing away, off the hook, as [here in Oklahoma](#).

**More Nobel Duos.** Recall that for weeks (starting on [1/2/25](#)) Sergio Wolkovisky was the only one who could identify a book written by two Nobel Laureates. The book is [Why Nations Fail](#), by Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson. A lot of really smart readers tried to come up with another – NADA!

Comes now Claude Nadaf and, well, brilliantly I think, reminds us that in 2016 Desmond Tutu and The Dalai Lama, two Nobel laureates (both for Peace), published [The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World](#). Ha! It's great! Two solid points granted. And the Judges are willing to part with two more points for another example.

**Books – another Congregant WIHOR.** While we are waiting (and waiting) for you to get off your duffs and send in summaries of some really good or really bad books, I have found another Writer-In-His-Own-Right, or as they are known in these pages, WIHOR. Congregant, minyan mainstay, and intellectual powerhouse Hayyim Obadyah has researched the Masoretic text of the Book of Ruth and has provided a highly readable and intelligible English translation and commentary [[here](#)]. Since we read the Book of Ruth on Shabuot, this is an especially propitious

time of year for this citation. Hayyim also translated and comments on the Haftarah for the Second Day of Shabuot, which is also excellent [[here](#)]. Hayyim, deep thanks for allowing me to link to these excellent works.

In this, our Year of Renewal, let us feel and express gratitude and pray *Hoshi'á nna, save us now*.  
***And moadim l'simcha and Happy Shabuot.***

Louis Solomon, Parnas