

May 8, 2025

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Renewal. Imagine our delight to see Rabbi Rohde at evening services last Thursday, as we said *l'hitraot* to Yom Haatzmaut!



To honor the occasion, we stuffed about 45 of us into the Small Synagogue. It is so good (miraculous?) to have him back so soon, and we all wish him a complete and speedy recovery.

After services, the entire congregation celebrated the *sheva brachot* of Aharon Soloveichik and Fayga Tziporah on Paved Paradise. It was beyond splendid that we as a community could celebrate a Soloveichik simcha. (The Soloveichik wedding was surely the happiest family/personal event for the Rabbi last week. Still, we were proud that the President of the United States [asked our Rabbi](#) to serve on a National Religious Liberty Commission.)

Joyous Congregational moments didn't end last Thursday (may they never end!). On Sunday, the Congregation and bunches of friends and family came together to celebrate the engagement of our Rabbinic Intern, Baruch-Lev Kelman, to Suzanne Behar. What a delightful time for all of us on a rainy Sunday. Mazal tov!

Finally, I hope you were able to hear Reverend Edinger's marvelous talks last Shabbat. His morning talk was about the likely-Eighteenth century floorboards on our Teba, which I promised he would speak on in my [email of March 20, 2025](#). Reverend Edinger is not only a fount of knowledge of most-things-Shearith Israel; he is deeply thoughtful about the role of continuity in the makeup of our personal and communal lives. It was an excellent talk, and we must have him speak again on these topics.

Our Spring Gala. *Handel With Care* is shaping up to be a one-of-a-kind event. Think of it as a gala gala. There is still time to [sign up](#). We will have the choral concert with commentaries program in the most glorious indoor space in New York City, and, weather permitting, our convivial repast in the most glorious outdoor space in New York City. Please join us.

Perek 2. How can we skip the simple, penetrating words that have animated our individual and communal aspirations for 2,000 years:

הוא הִיָּה אוֹמֵר, לֹא עָלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לְגַמֵּר, וְלֹא אַתָּה בֶּן חוֹרִין לִבְטֹל מִמֶּנָּה

[R' Tarfon] said: It is not on you to finish the work, but nor are you free to neglect doing any of it.

More Movies for Paved Paradise. We are collecting possible movies to show on Paved Paradise this Summer. As of last publishing, we had:

- *Exodus*
- *Lawrence of Arabia*
- *Deliverance*
- *The Red Violin*

Faith Fogelman more recently suggests:

- *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, which was a great and fun movie, but has it withstood the test of time? Comments please.

Robert Wiznia (Marc's father, who is always a happy visitor when we see him) has a great one:

- *The Jazz Singer*, starring Al Jolson.

Send in any others, please.

That Blessed Rain Continues to Fall. Sergio Wolkovisky sends in two more great rain songs:

- [Rain](#), here by Jose Feliciano [what a great song Sergio, to remember from the late '60s]
- [It's Raining Again](#), here by Supertramp

Team, we have a banner list of rain songs. Why not keep 'em coming?

Name that Parasha Tune. We are collecting tuneful suggestions for the remaining **Parshiot** half-way through Sefer Vayikra. And because of the upcoming double parshiot, we are soliciting for **Parshiot Acharei Mot/Kedoshim, Emor, and Behar/Bechukotai**, which will take us to the end of Sefer Vayikra.

Ritual Director Jay Harwitt is back with some mind- and music-expanding suggestions. Jay says that **Parashat Kedoshim** (Vayikra 19:23-25) creates the institution of *Tu B'Shvat* and therefore “allows us to enter tree songs”:

- [*Lemon Tree*](#), here by Peter, Paul, and Mary – says Jay: “the fruit is impossible to eat, at least for the first four years”
- [*In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree*](#), here by the Mills Brothers and Louis Armstrong
- [*Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree*](#), here by the glorious Andrews Sisters (no no no)

For **Parashat Emor**, Jay, “out on a limb”, suggests

- [*Jolly Holiday*](#), from the original soundtrack of *Mary Poppins*.

For **Parashat B'chukotai**, and “even further out on a limb,” Jay suggests:

- [*Sir Rupert Murgatroyd*](#), from Act I of *Ruddigore*, by Gilbert and Sullivan. It's a song, says Jay, “about a really nasty curse.” Tee hee!

Welcome to Tractate Shevuot. The global Daf Yomi learning cycle finished Tractate Makkot last week and began the first page (numbered page 2 remember) of Tractate Shevuot. This week we are learning pages 3-9 of that Tractate. I mentioned that the Tractate is about oaths and not the holiday of Shavuot, which you can remember by considering that Tractate Shevuot is in the Order of Talmudic corpus called *Nezikim*, or torts/damages, whereas the holiday of Shavuot does not have a dedicated tractate and is discussed in Tractates Menachot and Shabbat, among other places.

A major part of Tractate Shevuot is dedicated to oaths – among the most significant utterances of speech by human agents. Yet the Talmud is not slave to rigid categorizations. Indeed, the first two chapters of the Tractate don't dwell on the issue of oaths nearly at all.

Chapter 1 of the Tractate focuses on sacrifices that are variable to the wealth of the individual penitent, called *korban oleh v'yored*, or כְּעוֹלָה וְיֹרֵד. It moves to that topic because, for at least two of the types of oaths treated in the Tractate, the punishment for a false oath is such a *korban*. The learning here is interesting to the point of being challenging. It starts with a long Mishna, which occupies the entirety of page 2, and then discusses a number of disparate instances when “two equals/that is four.” The Mishna actually begins:

שְׁבוּעוֹת – שְׁתֵּים שָׁהן אַרְבַּע

For oaths in general, two types of oaths are actually four

The discussion goes through a series of taxonomic principles where the ordering or sequencing of laws matters. By *two being four* in this specific context, the Talmud is saying that, Biblically, there are two major and related types of statements that, when turned into an oath, can lead to the need to bring a variable sacrifice for a failure to carry it out:

- An affirmative statement about the future
- A negative statement about the future
- An affirmative statement about the past
- A negative statement about the past

There are a surprising number of other instances where the Talmud reasons that Torah rules should be grouped in ways like two being four, or vice-versa.

Interestingly, we also see here the rare case where the Talmud actually explains why one tractate follows another. The reason why Tractate Shevuot follows Tractate Makkot is precisely because, in Makkot, there was another of these types of rules where one act is given two punishments or where one act can be seen as two (in the case of Makkot, the example was *one* rounding of the head with a razor equaling *two* Biblical faults).

If We Only Had Skin Disorders! *Tzaraas* (*tzaraat* in Sephardic or modern spoken Hebrew), or skin disorders that you would incorrectly associate with leprosy, is another categorization structure where there are Biblically two main categories of the colors of the disorder, but each has a subcategory as the terms are used in Parashat Tazria, which we not-so-coincidentally read this past Shabbat. Here the numeration says that the first Biblical articulation of the disease's color is paired with the third color, and the second is paired with the fourth. These issues are discussed on pages 5-6 of this week's learning.

That may be why the Talmud discusses this issue here, but it need not be why we should. By the time we are done, I think the Rabbis counted about seven types of moral or ethical lapses that could lead to *tzaraat*. But please correct me if I'm wrong: The only place where the Torah itself discusses the *cause* of *tzaraat* is in Bemidbar 12:1-15 (with a look-back to the same event in Devarim 24:8-9). There we learn that Miriam spoke about Moses in a way the Torah felt deserved *tzaraat*. The diseased skin was cured after Moses prayed for his sister. My point now is that of the three places where *tzaraat* can theoretically be found – skin, clothing, and houses – the Torah seems to be giving an early warning signal that something is amiss. And that something might be *lashon harah* or talking about someone else.

Which of us wouldn't wish for an immediate and infallible early warning system for our speech? Would it be worth getting *tzaraat*? How about a mild case? It *is* treatable – at least it was when the kohanim were overseeing the process. Well, I for one,

Back to Books. While awaiting some more good suggestions for sci-fi, I finished Russell Shorto's newest book, [*Taking Manhattan*](#). Dear friend Henry Wollman sent me a *Wall Street Journal* review, and since I like Henry, and Henry likes the WSJ, and the WSJ liked the book, well why not. I have written here that one of Shorto's earlier books, [*The Island at the Center of the World*](#), was excellent ([see my email of 12/30/21](#)). The Shearith Israel League also had Shorto as a guest speaker some years ago, discussing his book [*Amsterdam*](#).

The new book isn't as good as *Island*. *Island* relied on then-new research showing the Dutch influence on what became New York. It showed the diversity of cultures that made the City work. It was interesting. The new book rehashes a lot of the earlier book and, as if pages were needed, strays into the history of the Dutch and English in the Seventeenth Century globally.

I also keenly felt the author's cultural biases, which I didn't feel in the earlier book: We aren't worthy because we stole land from indigenous peoples and had a minuscule but extant slave trade. It is interesting to hear about why there was no major war when the English displaced the Dutch in 1665, and our own Esme Berg gets a shoutout in the acknowledgements at the end, which is très cool. Like the earlier book, I found it interesting that trade and commerce – free agency among disparate peoples – went on, though here again I found it borderline irresponsible to hear speculation that, when a Native American or Black sold land, it *must have been* a coerced sale by avaricious whites (sometimes Dutch, sometimes English).

Imho, instead of a serious book of history, what we got is something akin to historical fiction without the disclaimer but with overabundant amounts of speculation about irrelevant details (what someone *might* have been wearing, what kind of tavern *might* they have been sitting in). This takes nothing away from the earlier *Island*, which remains in my mind a standout accomplishment.

Who else has read the new book? I would love to be disagreed with.

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

Louis Solomon, Parnas