

June 19, 2025

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Renewal. It's hard quickly to think of a clearer case of *renewal* than Touro Synagogue. Over the past several weeks, we have been sharing updates on the progress we are making with our partner, Cong. Ahavath Israel (CAI), to revive Touro Synagogue. There is a lot to do, and this labor of love and commitment will take years to see its full fruition.

But every little step forward helps. This week, we are delighted to announce that, not only does Shearith Israel have a dedicated space on our website for Touro Synagogue ([here](#)); the new dedicated Touro website, thetourosynagogue.org, is up and running as well. It's a beautiful website – simple, elegant. Visit it often (btw, the donation button works well – just sayin').

Hayyim Obadyah comments on the importance of having someone to read Torah at Touro Synagogue every Shabbat, which we succeeded in organizing through at least Kippur of this year. And he is right. The reading works *way* better with a minyan, of course, and we are still looking for some self-sacrificing folks who want to go to gorgeous Newport to be at the gorgeous Touro Synagogue for a wonderful Shabbat. Please email Barbara Reiss to schedule something. Maybe we can help with accommodations or meals.

My email last week pictured one of our old scrolls at Touro Synagogue, which we have retrieved and is now in safe hands. Rabbi Marc Licht thinks that in my photograph you can see the Name of G-d in Hebrew. If that is so (I can't, but my eyes aren't great), and if that sort of double derivative is a problem, don't print the email, or if you do, dispose of it respectfully. Interesting, Rabbi Licht also noticed from the photo (it's of a Megillat Esther) that the scroll "looks almost like an Ashkenazi k'tav" (or script). That's possible, though the scroll is still quite old. Among the projects Reverend Edinger will be undertaking with CAI's Dr. Jim Herstoff is getting experts to look at these treasures that, alas, are in real need of attention and repair.

Short-and-Sweets. We are still collecting short and pithy aphorisms. We have opened the recommendations to those in English and Hebrew and now have:

- *According to the labor is the reward.*
- *Seize the Day.*
- *When opportunity knocks, grab it.* (Brian Eskenazi, whom we are delighted to hear from, prefers, "*When opportunity knocks, open the door.*" Even were Brian not an excellent editor, I think we could live with his improvement. I even like, *When opportunity knocks, answer it.*)
- *When you come to a fork in the road, take it!*
- *Watch Your Back*
- *Eudaimonia*
- *Amen*

- Leviticus 19:18 (**Parashat Kedoshim**) including *אַהֲבַת לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ*, or *love thy neighbor as thyself*.
- Deuteronomy 6:4 (**Parashat VaEtchanan**), which include the six words of the Shemah:
שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד
- Isaiah 6:3 (Haftarah Yitro) (“holy holy holy is the G-d of hosts, Whose presence fills all the earth”)
- Ezekiel 3:12:
וַתֵּשְׂאֵנִי רוּחַ וְנִשְׁמַע אַחֲרַי קוֹל רַעַשׁ גָּדוֹל בְּרוּךְ כְּבוֹד יְהוָה מִמְּקוֹמוֹ:

Then a spirit carried me away, and behind me I heard a great roaring sound: “Blessed is the Presence of GOD, in its place,”

- Exodus 15:18 (**Parashat B'shallach**). From the end of The Song at the Sea: *G-d will reign forever and ever*

For this week, Rabbi Marc Licht adds one from **Parashat Ekeb**:

- “Man does not live by bread alone”

And Laura Fleischmann likes:

- *Be here now*; and
- *Just do it!* (I’m not sure about using the Nike slogan. Anybody know a good lawyer?)

Finally, Claude Nadaf likes the last phrase of the Priestly Blessing, with emphasis on

- *Shalom*, which he says can only be imperfectly translated as “peace” - *May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and grant you peace.*

Summer Movies on Paved Paradise. We are at the LAST CALL for ranking movies to try to rent for summer watching on Paved Paradise. Bob Stark and nonetheless pushes his luck, and, having had a late-add accepted last week, wants to offer another late one this week: *I Do Not Care if We Go Down in History as Barbarians*. Laura Fleischmann also proposes some new ones: *A New Leaf* (“or ANY Elaine May movies”), *Harold & Maude* (“sort of a weird cult classic with the late great Ruth Gordon”), and *Dr. Strangelove*. I’m adding these, maybe though to be considered for next Summer.

On last week’s already over-stuffed list, remember that Joel Maxman ranked his faves:

- *Lawrence of Arabia*

- *Kazablan*
- *Chariots of Fire*

Last week, I also asked if others agreed with Michael Schuder, who favors great movies with Jewish themes, like *Exodus*. Michael's brother Billy does. Their collective suggestions now are:

- *Exodus*
- *Kazablan*
- *The Impossible Spy*

Rabbi Marc Licht, a/k/a Ravdoc, likes:

- *Kazablan*
- *Aventures de R Jacob*
- *The Out-of-Towners*

So I'm thinking we should consider the following semi-final list:

- *Lawrence of Arabia*
- *Kazablan*
- *Chariots of Fire*
- *Exodus*
- *The Impossible Spy*
- *Aventures de R Jacob*
- *The Out-of-Towners*

We can see if these are available. Any final suggestions, let's get them in now.

Name that Parasha Tune. We are collecting tunes for *Parshiot Bemidbar, Naso, Behaalotcha, Shlach (this week's parasha), and Korach*, which cover the first half of Sefer Bemidbar.

Before we get to this week's parasha, I want us to consider the verses in **Parashat Behaalotcha** discussing trumpets. I'm not sure why no one thought about these, but right there in Chapter 10 we learn what particular types of sounds are used for what occasions or events. Rabbi Soloveichik gave an interesting class on this last Shabbat afternoon. But of course he didn't discuss great horn tunes or trumpeters. Here are a few of my suggestions:

- [*Flight of the Bumblebee*](#) (from Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Tale of Tsar Saltan*), here played by the incomparable Rafael Mendez [the next time someone says, oh I don't like classical music, play this for them]
- [*Spanish Flea*](#), by Herb Alpert
- [*A Taste of Honey*](#), by the same great hornist
- [*Feels So Good*](#), by Chuck Mangione (who died at the end of 2023)

For **Parashat Shlach**, Asher Reimer likes

- [*Secret Agent Man*](#), here by Johnny Rivers

And for **Parashat Korach**, Billy Schulder suggests:

- [*Rebel Rebel*](#), here by David Bowie

These are all great. If the judges had given points, the bank would be ruptured already. Whew!

Torah Tunes by Faith Fogelman. Faith is back with some great suggestions. Faith does so much more than cite to songs that I want to share with you some of her capacious knowledge:

Parshat Shlach – Says Faith: “Caleb and Joshua brought strength, determination, inspiration, and vigor to B'nai Israel.” So Faith suggests

- [*Milk and Honey*](#), from Jerry Herman’s Broadway show of the same name.
- [*You Gotta Have Heart*](#) (Richard Adler & Jerry Ross), from the Broadway show *Damn Yankees*. However, continues Faith, “B’nai Israel was not inspired and sang back with”
- [*Is That All There Is?*](#), a song by Jerry Leiber & Mike Stoller, made famous by Peggy Lee.

Parashat Korach. Says Faith: “For one-upmanship, Korach sang to Moshe”

- [*Anything You Can Do \(I Can Do Better\)*](#) from Irving Berlin’s Broadway show *Annie Get Your Gun*. Soon after, B’nai Israel had in mind the song; and
- [*Poor Jud is Dead*](#), a song by Rodgers & Hammerstein for their Broadway show, *Oklahoma*.

Faith’s insights are so illuminating; the whole enterprise becomes educational and even more enjoyable on many levels. Faith, deep thanks. And for others, feel free to share your thinking. We will all benefit from it.

Biblical Oaths; Farewell for Now to Tractate Shevuot. This week we will be finishing Tractate Shevuot. Claude Nadaf is the only one to win two BIG, BEAUTIFUL points for knowing the three (and only three) Biblical oaths (the rest are Rabbinic):

- Oaths about deposits: *If someone denies the claim of having another person's property that was entrusted to them (deposit, loan, etc.), they can be required to take an oath in court to verify their claim.*

- Oaths administered by judges: *If a monetary claim is made and the defendant denies part or all of the claim, or if a single witness testifies against them, they can be required to take an oath in court to affirm their denial.*
- Oaths about testimony: *If witnesses are asked to testify in a case where their testimony alone would support a claim for movable property, and they falsely deny knowing anything, they can be obligated to swear that they do not know.*

Who can help unpack why the Torah would focus on these and only these three?

Say Hello to Idol Worship. No, but really, the global Daf Yomi learning cycle tomorrow begins **Tractate Avodah Zarah**, or much of what you wanted to know about idol worship and dealings between Jews and idol worshippers. This week we will learn pages 2-3 of the new Tractate.

Three brief introductory remarks about the Tractate will permit more substantive comments next week:

First, I would be happy to be corrected, but Tractate Avodah Zarah begins with a Mishna (about not assisting true idol worshippers in commerce right before one of their holidays) but quickly moves into stories with morals (aggadata). Are there other tractates that do that, as opposed to getting a dollop of law under our belts before venturing into aggadata? Our son Joseph says Tractate Berachot is like that. I think Tractate Avodah Zarah is unique. Who has a view?

Second, I understand the tendency to modernize the notion of idol worship. We all do that to make these laws of the Torah and Rabbis feel more relevant. Indeed, do you remember my short essay condemning “idle worship” ([see my email of 10/15/24](#)). A few people thought that was funny – it *was* funny, by the way, and I bitterly resent how many of you, after having chortled, did not email me telling me how funny it was. My point here is that, when you look at the kinds of idol worship at issue in this Tractate, it’s the REAL, old-fashioned kind. There are a great many Torah giants who have said that modern practices of other religions should not be confused with true avodah zarah.

Third, you should spend some time on pages 2a and 3a/b of this Tractate. The homiletics are quite intelligible. Even the Aramaic seems easier to get through. The first of the aggadata involves stories about other nations that, in the fullness of time, line up to prove how much they did for the Jewish people. The Almighty listens and cross-examines. That the Jewish people survived these other nations (Rome and Persia are first up) is not a testament to the generosity of those nations, says these moral tales.

Books. One of my favorite book mavens, Debby Sondheim, likes the book we were discussing two weeks ago, Francine Alfandary’s recommendation of *Melting Point*, by Rachel Cockerell (2025). Debby adds a recommendation of her own:

The style [of [Melting Point](#)] reminds me of George Saunders's book, [Lincoln in the Bardo](#). [Cockerell] herself mentions that book in her introduction. I loved his book. I listened to the audio version, and I would opine that it is far superior to reading it.

Debby, many thanks. I too listen to audio books. This is now on my list.

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

Louis Solomon, Parnas