

June 26, 2025

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Renewal. Last Fall, when we chose *renewal* as our theme for this year, no one clearly anticipated that we would be given the task to renew Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island. Yet since mid-April of this year we have been partnering with our friends at Cong. Ahavath Israel in Newport to stabilize, revive, and renew that gem of a building and the community taking loving and responsible care of it. Welcome to another of our occasional sections:

Touro Treasures. Minyan this past Shabbat at Touro Synagogue was outstanding, with nearly 20 guests and regulars. Weekday tours of the Synagogue are attracting record crowds, including some bus tours; CAI's docent extraordinaire Aaron Ginsburg is tireless. This past week, in a first, CAI hosted a wedding in the Synagogue with a brand new chuppah ably installed by CAI's President and Secretary/Treasurer, respectively, Paul Tobak and Jim Herstoff, and Aaron. Here is a pic:



What CAI is doing at Touro Synagogue is remarkable. We should all know about it, applaud it, and do what we can to help. And do what we can to help.

Short and Sweets. We have one new entry this week. Bob Starkand likes the verse from Psalm 133 that many Jews say every morning,

הִנֵּה מֵה־טוֹב וּמֵה־נְעִים שְׂכֵת אֲחִים גַּם־יַחַד

How good and how pleasant it is for friends to be together

I'm so pleased that on the whole our list of these aphorisms has not included the tired, hackneyed tropes that people often peddle for these things – except for the couple I suggested. So send in more, so that others can enjoy.

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

Andrew Druck is back! This time his copious number of suggestions don't have his signature explanations. Yet the entries seem clear enough:

For **Parashat Shlach**, Andrew suggests “songs for the spies”, or *meraglim*:

- [James Bond theme](#), by John Barry
- Another James Bond theme song, [Live and Let Die](#), as sung by Paul McCartney/Wings
- [I Get Around](#), as sung by the Beach Boys (and noting the passing last week of Beach Boy great Brian Wilson)
- [God Only Knows](#), as sung by the Beach Boys
- [In the Still of the Night](#), as sung by the Five Satins
- [Undercover of the Night](#), as sung by the Rolling Stones
- [Strangers in the Night](#), as sung by Frank Sinatra
- [What's Your Name](#), as sung by Don and Juan
- [Slip Sliding Away](#), as sung by Paul Simon
- [This Land is your Land](#), as sung by Woody Guthrie
- [Break on Through \(to the Other Side\)](#), as sung by the Doors

Also for **Parashat Shlach**, Claude Nadaf offers a neat one:

- The theme music from [Anthem](#)

For **Parashat Korach**, we are back to Andrew, who suggests:

- [Shake, Rattle and Roll](#), as sung by Bill Haley and His Comets
- [Helter Skelter](#), as sung by the Beatles
- [Revolution](#), as sung by the Beatles

Also for **Parashat Korach**, Michael Schulder suggests what he describes as the obvious, but still excellent,

- [*I Feel The Earth Move*](#), here by Carole King, with the hope that a certain leader of a certain nation bent on Israel's destruction would be "singing backup."

Warren Stern too has a clever suggestion for **Parashat Korach**,

- [*Foot of Pride*](#), here by Bob Dylan, usually together with Mark Knopfler, especially the verses:

*It's like the earth just opened and swallowed him up/
He reached too high, was thrown back to the ground*

Warren bemoans the fact that we can't all be Faith Fogelman. That's true, but Warren's suggestion is still excellent. Cool actually.

And now, great tunists, we open the collection for the back half of Sefer Bemidbar, consisting of **Parshiot Chukat, Balak, Pinchas, Matot, and Masei**, which will complete this Fourth Book of the Torah!

The Peckings of Chickens. The global Daf Yomi learning cycle is this week studying pages 4-10 of Tractate Avodah Zarah. We continue to meet marvelous stories with morals and lessons. These are timeless truths masquerading as diverting anecdotes and wordplays.

Let's look at one, on page 4a. The gemarra here states:

דָּבָר אַחֵר: אֶפִּילוּ אִין יִשְׂרָאֵל עוֹשִׂין מִצְוָה לִפְנֵי כִּי אִם מַעַט, כְּפִיד שֶׁל תְּרִנְגוּלִין שֶׁמְנַקְרִין בְּאֶשְׁפָּה, אֲנִי מַצְרֶפֶן לְחֶשְׁבוֹן גָּדוֹל, [שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "אִם בְּפִידוֹ] לֵהֵן שׁוּעַ",.

Alternatively, even if the Jewish people perform but a few mitzvot before Me, like the pecking of hens that peck in a dunghill, I will combine them to a large reckoning, as it is stated: "Though they peck [befido]," i.e., perform mitzvot a little at a time, "they will be saved [lahen shua]" (Job 30:24).

This little vignette is lovely. What the Holy One promises is that small acts, like the pecking of a hen, will add up with other small acts and, behold, lead to big and mighty results. All we are asked to do is the small stuff. SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF!

Repentance, for everyone, and for always. We can't overlook the brief but profound point made right at the top of page 7b of Tractate Avodah Zarah, right before the second Mishna in the Tractate. Our Sages thought hard about whether anyone was beyond redemption. And I acknowledge other discussions elsewhere in our corpus. Here, however, relying on Jeremiah 3:22, the Talmud is unequivocal that repentance is available for anyone, everyone, however the sin was committed, whether privately or publicly. Period. Full stop. Just sincerely apologize, make it right, and move on.

Books. Having congratulated Claude Nadaf a few weeks ago for finding a second example of a book written by two Nobel Laureates – the 2016 publication by Desmond Tutu and The Dalai Lama of [*The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World*](#) – I ventured to read said book. (Anglican) Catholic Archbishop Tutu died in 2021. His Holiness The Dalai Lama is now 89 years old and heads the Tibetan branch of Buddhism. The book quotes or summarizes question-and-answer sessions with these spiritual leaders, who spent a week together and traded stories, anecdotes, homilies, and lectures on how to achieve joy.

Buddhism and (Anglican) Christianity appear to take similar paths to achieving joy in this life. The book lays out eight “pillars” to achieving joy. The authors list four “pillars of the heart” – perspective, humility, humor, and acceptance; and four “pillars of the mind” – forgiveness, gratitude, compassion, and generosity.

I am pleased to say that I saw little new in the book – little new about Judaism, anyway. One might predict that all religions might offer similar paths to achieving a joyous life, and Judaism is no exception. The book reads like so many Jewish texts, ancient, modern, and in between. I think I spotted perhaps three things that Judaism entails that these authors do not focus on when it comes to their respective religions: the fundamental communitarian aspect of Judaism, the role of song, and the beauty of Shabbat. All of these lead to joy but don’t fit neatly into the eight pillars. True, I am not a student (certainly not an A student) of our own much less other religions. Still, it seems to me that ultimately the eight pillars discussed in the book seem to appear in many different religious settings including ours.

In the book, it is clear from the choice of questions posed to the authors that the similarities in their approach to joy is greater than the differences in their faiths. That’s not to say there aren’t deep differences. The Buddhist declares that his religion has no deity, and he is keenly interested in modern scientific theories about brain function and happiness, which to me is a perilous business when scientific theories change, as they invariably do. The Catholic declares more deities than we do.

I think the book is worth a skim. The message, however, is one we should be vigilant about observing: the eight pillars (and maybe a few more) paths to joy.

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

Louis Solomon, Parnas