

July 24, 2025

Dear Shearith Israel family,

***Our Year of Renewal.*** The old photos embedded in last week's email generated a bunch of right answers -- and costly points from the Judges. Here are the photos again:



Esme Berg, Steve Beispel, and Bonnie Barest each recognized Rabbi Dr. Pool (in both pictures) and Eleanor Roosevelt in the first picture. Steve and Bonnie both correctly got the year, 1942 (amazing, by the way).

Bonnie, with Reverend Edinger's help, also picked out Reverend Gerstein and Bram Cardozo at the annual Chatham Square Cemetery Memorial Day observance. Bonnie got the date right: "in the late '50s."

Steve Beispel cleaned up most of the remaining mystery in the cemetery photo, since he recognized everyone Bonnie and Reverend Edinger did (and also got the date approximately right) but also recognized (in the straw hat) Jonathan De Sola Mendes and possibly Judge Lou Okin.

Kudos to the winners. Kudos to all of us for having Clergy who officiated at these memorable events, congregants who captured the moments in photos, congregants who saved and then donated the photos to our archives, and congregants who have memories to help the rest of us in these many years later.

***Tonight's Movie Night.*** We are looking forward to seeing those who have signed up for *The Impossible Spy*. There's still time to [register here](#). And walk-ins are welcome.

If you can't make this film, join us on August 14<sup>th</sup> for *Chariots of Fire* ([register here](#)), suggested by Joel Maxman, and one of everyone's all-time favorites.

**Name That Parashat Tune.** We are collecting tunes for the back half of Sefer Bemidbar, consisting of **Parshiot Chukat, Balak, Pinchas, and Matot/Masei**, which completes this Fourth Book of the Torah. Maybe because this week is a double parasha to finish the Sefer, we have a marvelous set of insightful and diverse suggestions.

A few of us don't want to leave **Parashat Pinchas** without mentioning the daughters of Tzalofchad. Claude Nadaf is one them, and he suggests:

- [That Girl Is on Fire](#), sung by Alicia Keyes

Faith Fogelman also thinks about the daughters of Tzalofchad, but she places their story in **Parshiot Matot/Masei**. Aspects of the daughters' story appear in *both* **Parashat Pinchas** and **Parshiot Matot/Masei**, so everyone is right on this one. Faith's two suggestions are:

- [You'll Never Walk Alone](#), from *Carousel*, by Rodgers & Hammerstein (says Faith, "*at the end of the storm is a golden sky, and the sweet silver song of a lark*", as might have been sung by the children of Israel "for mutual support"); and
- [We Are Family](#), by Sister Sledge, especially "I got all my sisters with me" (Andrew Druck also suggested this – for more from Andrew see below).

Esther Ingber also has two great suggestions for **Parashat Pinchas** (well, from the haftarah, which merits *double* points):

- [Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho](#), sung by Ledisi as Mahalia Jackson; and
- [Jezebel](#), sung by Frankie Laine

I've been saving Jay Harwitt's suggestion for **Parashat Matot**, since it's a great New York story:

- *I offer - for the story of the Reubenites and Gadites - [the Marine Corps Hymn](#) ... The melody for that famous song comes from the 1867 revision of an 1859 opera entitled *Geneviève de Brabant* - by Jacques Offenbach. I learned this fifty years ago when I still lived home with my parents during graduate school at Columbia. My clock radio went off, the announcer on WQXR announced the overture to the opera, and I was drifting between sleep and wakefulness when the orchestra began to play that tune. I woke up! No way! Offenbach wrote that? That's great!*

Andrew Druck offers a cornucopia of great songs, replete with (lengthy) explanations. Because **Parashat Pinchas** includes the second census taken of the Jewish people in the desert, Andrew suggests:

- [\*Countin' on a Miracle\*](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen

Andrew also suggests, for the daughters of Zelophchad:

- [\*Sisters of Mercy\*](#), as sung by Leonard Cohen [I do wish I liked his songs more]

Next, on the transfer of leadership from Moshe to Joshua, Andrew suggests:

- [\*Congratulations\*](#), the great song by the Traveling Wilburys (“Sung with sarcasm and bitterness; conveys Moshe’s possible mixed unconscious feelings as he is told he won’t enter the promised land”); and
- [\*Forever Young\*](#), as sung by Bob Dylan (“the more sincere and conscious [blessing] from Moshe to Joshua”)

Andrew is (so far) the only person to comment on the discipline, power, dignity, and beauty of daily sacrifices, and for those he suggests:

- [\*Everyday\*](#), as sung by Buddy Holly
- [\*Day by Day\*](#), as sung by Frank Sinatra
- [\*Day In, Day Out\*](#), as sung by Frank Sinatra

Finally, and not to be outdone, for Israel’s journeys through the desert as relayed in **Parashat Masei**, Andrew suggests:

- [\*Travelin’ Man\*](#), as sung by Rick Nelson
- [\*Rockin’ All Over the World\*](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [\*Light of Day\*](#), as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [\*Does this Bus Stop at 82nd Street?\*](#) as sung by Bruce Springsteen
- [\*Walking Song\*](#), as sung by Kate and Anna McGarrigle; and
- [\*Come a Long Way\*](#), also as sung by Kate and Anna McGarrigle (I’ve told Andrew that the McGarrigle sisters don’t seem to have the following that I think he thinks – and he thinks I’m wrong. Does anyone listen to them?)

To finish off the last parasha and the Sedre, Dr. Zachary Gorden offers two great suggestions:

- [\*Green Grass and High Tides\*](#), sung by The Outlaws (for “what the 9-1/2 tribes saw on the other side of the [Jordan]”); and

For the cities of refuge, Zachary likes (and so do we all):

- [\*Refugee\*](#), sung by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers

**And Now, for the Final Act.** We begin our search for great songs for the first five of the eleven parshiot in Sefer Devarim: **Devarim, V'Etchanan, Ekev, Re'eh, and Shoftim.** The last book of the Torah is thought of as a repeat, a summary, of the rest of the Torah. So no repeats, but I think we will be able to think of a whole of great tune suggestions. Begin!

**Utilitarianism vs Rights-Based Morality.** Last week, we offered big, beautiful points for a thoughtful analysis of the moral dilemma animating R' Yochanan's promising not to disclose a recipe/formula for healing people of a malady and then turning around and publicly disclosing it. (Semantics likely obscures the issues rather than illuminates – but I needed a short title for this discussion, so forgive the semantics.) Our congregants and friends have this figured out sensibly, coherently, and even eloquently. Our Executive Director, Barbara Reiss, nicely summarizes the rights-based approach to the question:

*My thinking is not one of a moral philosopher. I'm probably closer to a lawyer (or perhaps an economist, or just someone with practical common sense) But it seems to me that even people with tremendous expertise that can help many people are entitled to proper (but not necessarily excessive) compensation for it. This is true for lawyers as well as doctors. Sure, pro bono work is great too. But that is for the expert to offer, not for a client (especially one entrusted with trade secrets) to impart. I think the thinking goes that if the expertise can just be given away, talented people will not be motivated to train and hone their skill for the betterment of anyone.*

Jay Harwitt, on the other hand, has much to say about the other way of looking at the dilemma, which we (and he) are calling utilitarianism:

*I'm the right age for the immediate answer to come from Leonard Nimoy z"l (a kohen, if you please!), when he told his friend, Captain Kirk, "The good of the many outweighs the good of the few." I typed that line into my search bar. AI immediately tied it to Spock but also mentioned the concept of utilitarianism.*

*I suggest that R. Yochanan - certainly a cultural hero of mine - was a utilitarian. He not only blabbed the formula for his cure but also put the kohanim [priests] out of business when he comforted Rabbi Joshua over the destruction of the Temple. What else could he do that wouldn't have sold the rest of us throughout history down the river?*

A final thought comes from Lester Gottesman (we could call his view Kantian – I think he would call it religious):

*The dilemma revolves around the following distinction – [does] one believes that the sacred is of prime importance such as making a vow to God that the consequences would be inconsequential. If the consequences are the most important i.e. letting people know the magic formula then there is no room for the sacred as making sure the conditions exist to achieve the results require flexibility which the sacred precludes.*

**Drinking the Kool-Aid.** This week, the global daf yomi learning cycle is studying pages 32-38 of Tractate Avodah Zarah. We are still in Chapter 2 (until page 40) and so still knee-deep in details about laws directly involving idol worship but also adjacent rules (such as under what circumstances must we be concerned about permitting a non-Jew to prepare wine for us, or cook for us, etc.). Given the heady discussion above, I wanted for a contrast to look at the fun story of Hadrian's soldiers. The wine they placed in earthenware was so strong that it seeped into the jugs. To have wine-flavored drinks as they traveled, they would break the jugs into shards and carry the lighter, wine-soaked shards with them on their travels. Then, when they wanted a wine-infused drink, they would put the shards into water. The Gemarra explains:

ומִיֵּצִי לֵהוּ לַחֲמֻצֵי־הוּ, וּמִתְבָּרֵר לֵהוּ בְּחֶסֶף וְדָרוּ בְּהִדְיָהּ, וְכָל הַיָּכָא דְמִטּוּ תָרוּ לֵהוּ נִשְׁתּוּ. אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן לֵוִי:  
וְרֹאשׁוֹן שְׁלֵנוּ כְּשִׁלִּישֵׁי שְׁלֵהֶן.

*And they placed this wine in white jugs, and the jugs absorbed the wine. And they would break the jugs into shards and carry the shards with them, and anywhere that they stopped, they soaked these shards in water and drank the water. The Gemara notes that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: And our first-rate wine is like the wine produced by the third usage of their Hadrianic earthenware.*

It's inventive, ingenious really, practical, and ancient. The original Kool-Aid!

**In Memoriam.** Thank you to Faith Fogelman for [this link](#) — Connie Francis (who died last week), singing *Hava Nagilla* (and other Jewish songs).

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

Louis Solomon, Parnas