

March 3, 2022

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Pretty Darn Good. Last week we encouraged everyone to get back into de Poole, irreverently referring to returning to our special space, our Sanctuary, for Shabbat. Shabbat was wonderful – so wonderful that I devote the next section of this email to it. Some other parts of the world are still struggling with Covid-19. Here, disease spread numbers continue to decrease. One of my interlocutors, who wants to remain nameless, argues convincingly from the data that in our local area the “bottoming out”, as I called it last week, is not as low as it is in other places, and hence we still need to keep our guard up. I think he’s right, though the reasons for higher positivity rates in our area could have more to do with higher testing. We will keep our guard up. But we are approaching endemicity (see [my email of Oct. 28, 2021](#)). Simply stated, if you want to know, how’s de Poole? It’s pretty darn good.

A Day in OUR Life. [A Day in the Life](#) is among the Beatles greatest songs. (Actually, it’s a great two-fer and ranks along with other unforgettable two-in-one songs like [Layla](#), and [MacArthur’s Park](#) – say, for one point, what do you call these two-fer songs? And for two points name one as great as any of the three I mention.) *Day in the Life* follows some news stories of the day, with some internal voices playing off headlines. One of the main headlines is about someone who “blew his mind out in a car”, and the reference, sadly, is not to a psychedelic experience. But it’s a fantastic song and ultimately life-affirming, notwithstanding the downer references.

Paying homage to *A Day in the Life*, with a slight head-nod to Faulkner’s *italicized* inner voice, I present you with a day in *our* congregation’s life, Shabbat, Parashat Vayakel-Shekalim, February 25-26, 2022, our first indoor Shabbat most closely back to normal in close to two years.

Minha-Arbit. 40+ strong. Most seated in the mask-optional section, though about a third of those opt to mask. *Oh this is working well. No one is fussing (yet).* No one is crowding. Rev. Edinger reads *minha*. *And that’s his inside voice! It doesn’t just fill the building. It lifts the building off its foundations.* Rabbi Rohde reads *arbit*. *Snuck a peek at his debar torah on the back page of the handout. It’s great – and someone told him to stop using the unreadably tiny 8-point font, so it’s actually visible.* His voice is angelic, yet he controls the choir. The choir is

gorgeous. *Is that a new tenor for Mizmor L'David?* Pure sound. Rabbi Rohde goes slowly during the last kaddish to permit mourners to join. *I've been saying kaddish quietly for our congregants who died during Covid-19 when no one could say kaddish for them. Goal is five years – they deserve perpetual. Need to ask RMS if it's ok. Friday Night Lights* is wonderful. 30+ stayed. We all recognize each other without masks. Great source sheet. Theme of unity and the beauty of Shabbat. Naomi Shemer (of *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav* fame and other songs that literally shaped modern Israel) nearly did not go into singing/song writing because of internal strife at her kibbutz! *How can RMS think of so many ways to bring out the beauty of Shabbat? Why aren't there 100 more people coming to this? First week back. It will take time. We will get there.*

Shaharit/Torah Reading/Musaf. We even had a minyan for early kaddish. Someone who was learning in the library came in. *Gotta love Jews, arayvim ze ba ze.* It is really starting to feel full by Torah reading. Look who came? Oh how nice. Them too. *Must be 60-70 people.* A real Cohen for the first aliya! Choir resplendent. Sermon short and beautiful. Kiddush downstairs. People are chatting and smiling. And it was FUN!

Shabbat afternoon class, minha, arbit. Class – no masks. Another great source sheet. The Rav (Soloveitchik) on Purim. Duality of emotions – strength and fragility. Minha dreamy as usual. A real Cohen again for the first aliya! Arbit drives it home to bless a new week.

What my musing doesn't capture, but what was palpable in the day in *our* life, is the sense of community. People are happy to see each other. In acts large and small people are reaching out to each other. What Barbara Reiss says (inspired by her study of Tractate Yoma, p. 80) is true in this context:

And with the state of the world, it helps to be reminded that while not all of us can be major players on the world stage, each of us and all of us can and must do our part in our little corner of the world. And better together.

Indeed, and better together. (And congratulations to all of us for having the extraordinary good fortune to be celebrating Barbara's 10th anniversary as Executive Director of Shearith Israel.)

Never an End But With a Beginning. This week we ended the month of Adar I. Before it ended we announced the new month, which we celebrate today, Adar II. On Shabbat morning, we end Sefer Shemot with Parashat Pekudei. Shabbat afternoon we start Sefer Vayikra and Parashat Vayikra without even waiting a day. Early next week we finish Tractate Chagiga, and we immediately start a new Tractate and a new Order of the Mishna in Tractate Yevamot (it's really hard but really cool – more on that next week).

Our second of the Five Books of the Torah ends with a beautiful recitation of a homecoming, the Almighty into the traveling Tabernacle. And Tractate Chagiga ends with an equally beautiful discussion of the laws of ritual cleanliness, with an emphasis on rituals applicable to the home. To people who had a mikvah in their homes, and nearly everyone did, for whom ritual purity and cleanliness was in fact not next to Godliness but was Godliness itself, it is the perfect symmetrical ending of the Tractate. Pekudei and Chagiga. The Tabernacle is the house that the Israelites built to keep the Almighty close to us. And Jewish homes respecting the sacred and pure are the houses that the Almighty built so that we could remain close to the Almighty.

So we now know *why* the confluence of the end of these books. Still, it can't be common – in fact it's quite rare - to end an entire Sefer of the Torah and an entire Order of the Mishna at virtually the same time. It shouldn't be so hard to calculate how rare. Five Sefarim end annually; six Orders end every 7.5+ years – and leave a few days variance, since even this year they are ending a few days apart. The bigger variance is the relative size of the Orders. But really, people, do I have to do *all* the math for you? Do I really have to offer THREE points for coming up with when it previously happened that we finished a Torah Book and an Order of the Mishna, or when it will happen again, or what the periodicity is over a century? Ok, three points. *Ganifs*.

Actually, however, I wasn't going to stress how uncommon is the occurrence under consideration. In fact, I was going to observe the opposite. In our religion, we do this all the time. We end and immediately begin something else. Some Jewish mystics discuss recycling people, souls, epochs. But on the whole Jews see time as linear. Linear yes, but cyclically linear, or maybe linearly cyclical. The point is so simple – yet so profound. We are each part of the J Continuum. Alone we are finite, but together we are infinite. We do not end without beginning anew. To me, it's not just a nice or even a profound thought. It's the very basis of meaning in our lives. It is the sum and substance. [My email of May 27, 2021](#)

reminded us of the great Laura Nyro song, [And When I Die](#), sung to perfection by BS&T, with its refrain:

“And when I die, and when I'm gone
There'll be one child born
In this world to carry on, to carry on”

The song is not only another great entrant into the “carry on” contest – which, with one exception (below) I seem to be the only one interested in so far (!). The song’s lines perfectly reflect our cyclical linearity, or maybe linear cyclicity.

Half-Full Report.

Limericks. First, I want to link again to what surely is the greatest list of limericks ever created ([Feb. 17](#) and [Feb 24 emails](#)). More votes came in this week for the parnas-poke by Billy Schulder, which is declared the winner of the *non*-contest. FWIW, my personal favorite is Faith Fogelman’s limerick about returning to our Sanctuary:

There once was a really neat shul
where congregants were all very cool.
But Covid descended
and they were upended,
now alas they return to their jewel.

This one needs to be emblazoned in the entryway of 2 West 70th.

And, finally, in another category never before announced, that of the best neologism created by the limerick contest, Paula Van Gelder walks away with the grand prize, referring to our esteemed Rabbi’s method of instruction as “Brisk-o-theque”.

New Contest! Haikus for Jews. Limericks are unrelievedly fun – at least they should be. Haiku (5-7-5, don’t get fancy on me), on the other hand, are really hard to make fun. So let’s try. The topics are the same: Our Esteemed Rabbi, Returning to our Sacred Space Post-Covid, and The Mets (just in case there

actually is a reasonably complete baseball season this year). And they need to be fun. Go!

Carry Ons. So nobody got my triple entendre of “carry on.” Francine Alfandary – who with her family has been at services virtually throughout and who was beaming last Shabbat! – did come up with a fabulous “carry on” song, Queen’s [*Bohemian Rhapsody*](#), with its line “Carry on, carry on, as if nothing really matters.” Well done! But there *are* others, folks, and some of them are great songs.

Picture Perfect. It’s been a dry couple weeks without fun pics. Ruth Lazar to the rescue, again. It speaks for itself, and it is grand:



"We'd like you to pave Paradise and put up a parking lot."

Thank you all. Bless us all. Hodesh tov. Shabbat shalom.

Louis Solomon, Parnas