

June 11, 2024

Dear Shearith Israel family,

**Our Year of Hope and Shabuot.** Tonight, we will celebrate as a community our third “shalosh regalim” in this, our **Year of Hope**. Our year, you will remember, was named and began before October 7. We have tried to repurpose the year to the new demands of the serious events in Israel and the less serious events here in America. We are a people who in 200 generations has witnessed innumerable moments when hope was essential – and forthcoming. We are a Congregation who in 19 generations has witnessed many moments when hope was essential – and forthcoming. We will meet the task before us now.

Come join us on Shabuot. Join our prayers of thanksgiving and hope that the greatest gift, the Torah, might be not only accessible to but accessed by more of our own people and more of the world. Join our class with Rabbi Soloveichik (tonight at 11:30 pm!) that also promises to convey hope. Join services over the next two days and relish in the botanically stunning beauty of our Sanctuary, which is sure to rekindle hope. Get a long, medium, and short shot of hope right here:

**Long.** Thank you to Albert Rosenblatt for [sending the poem](#) by the early Twentieth Century Yiddish poet Abraham Liessin titled **First Fruits** or בכורים (celebrated on Shabuot – English translation appears after the Yiddish).

**Medium.** In his debar torah this past Shabbat (which can be found in uncharacteristically legible typeface on the back page of our Shabbat handout), Rabbi Rohde captures our efforts and goal perfectly:

*“Voluntary group cohesion, even without a tyrant forcing them, and even without the pressure of having to respond to an enemy, is the true goal of the Torah.*”

**Short.** The back of a t-shirt (two points for guessing whose t-shirt) that says all that needs to be said in three words (including a double entendre):



**Commemorating Our Synagogue Buildings.** On four different sites in Manhattan, our Congregation has worshiped in five buildings belonging to us (I'm not counting our ownership of Touro Synagogue in Newport). The first Jewish House of Worship in America was consecrated in 1730. It housed our Congregation, which before then prayed in private quarters (though for a time we appear to have shared space with a house of worship of another faith). Our buildings are as follows:

- 1730 – First Mill Street
- 1818 – Second Mill Street
- 1834 – Crosby Street
- 1860 – 19<sup>th</sup> Street
- 1897 – 70<sup>th</sup> Street, our current location

Our website has a nice write-up on the buildings [here](#). What I didn't quickly find are the dates during the year when we celebrate our prior and current homes on special Shabbatot or holidays that include dedications to each of these places. Thank you to Reverend Edinger for reminding me of the dates. Since we observed commemorations of three of the five buildings in the past couple months, and will celebrate another one on Shabuot, I wanted to set them out here:

- First Mill Street 1730, 7th day of Passover
- Second Mill Street 1818, Shabbat Hagadol (the Shabbat preceding Passover)
- Crosby Street Synagogue 1834, Shabuot
- 19th Street Synagogue 1860, Parashat Nitsabim (the Shabbat preceding Rosh Hashana)
- 70th Street 1897, the Shabbat after Lag La'Omer

This is another reason to join us for services on these days in general and on Shabuot in particular. On those special occasions, we add beautiful prayers and songs to the service. The *hehal* is open during more of the service, and we dress our *Sifrei Torah* in even more beautiful Torah mantels, their festival pastels (don't you wear your even more special garments on the holidays?). For the Shabbat celebrating our current home, *rimonim* (or Torah finials) actually dedicated at the original, 1897 opening are used. The service is a few minutes longer, but the impact is profound. We should collectively recall how much toil, effort, resources, and determination were required to establish and maintain each of these places of worship. We should collectively rejoice in our continued ability to celebrate these special days together.

**Human Agency vs Free Will.** One of the reasons why I love our community – one of the reasons that everyone should love a community they can be a part of – is exemplified by an email I got from Lester Gottesman. Two weeks ago, I wondered aloud why post-modernity felt it necessary to use the phrase “human agency” rather than “freedom of will”, the latter of which seemed to be ok for the past millennia without complaint ([email of May 30](#)). Came Lester not only to explain a difference between the two concepts; Lester also sent in a link to a paper from a learned journal discussing the issue of human agency and how it differs from human freewill. The paper, [linked here](#), is by three professors, Richard Williams, Edwin Gantt, and Lane Fischer, psychologists at Brigham Young University, titled *Agency: What Does It Mean To Be a Human Being*. The paper is tough sledding, imho more properly might belong in a philosophy periodical, but is worth the time it will take you to read (and reread) it.

In the end, I'm not persuaded that the terms aren't *nearly* interchangeable, but the paper is a constructive and energetic defense of the value of taking an active role in one's conduct, thoughts, and approaches to life. A snippet won't capture the essence of the presentation, but one sound and beautiful passage reads:

*In the realm occupied by meaning-making beings such as we are, we thus make and remake ourselves all the time. The lived world for us (for agentic beings of the kind we are) exists primarily as possibility and meaning. The aspect of our rationality – our legacy from Enlightenment thinking – that is most important for us is not the cold, detached, logical aspect of our human consciousness, but rather the evaluative aspect by which we can discern and judge, by many lights, the meaning and value of that which we have taken up and that to which we have given ourselves over.*

If you gave me only three words to sum up the philosophy the paper espouses, see [last week's](#) entry under **Sage Sayings**:

בן־הא־הא־אוֹמֵר, לְפֹיִם צַעֲרָא אֶגְרָא:

Ben He He said: According to the labor is the reward.

Lester, I can't figure how you had this erudite piece of scholarship at your fingertips to send me so shortly after you got my email. Pretty impressive fingertips. Thank you.

**Sage Sayings Finale.** Last Shabbat, we finished the Sixth Chapter of *Pirkei Avot*. This Sixth Chapter actually isn't part of *Pirkei Avot* at all but is a bolt-on added by our Sages so that we would have six rather than five chapters of sage sayings to study one each week in the 6+ Shabbatot between Pesach and Shabuot. This Chapter too has many a quotable sayings. Study it over Shabuot and enjoy.

**Talmudic Gems at 75 M.P.H.** We are writing long this week, and with the impending holiday I am not sure who will have time to read much of anything. It's unfortunate; the pages in Chapter 9 of Tractate *Baba Metzia* (pp. 102-108) being studied this week as part of the worldwide *Daf Yomi* learning cycle are full of amazing thoughts. Each warrants an entire essay (in one case an entire book). Time and space don't permit more than this rushed drive-by:

- The Talmud, both the Mishna and Gemara, draw a distinction between sharecroppers and other land-leasers (p. 103b). That there are laws at all protecting sharecroppers is significant. Compare that to the near total absence of legal protections for sharecroppers in Europe, Asia, and America in the Medieval and even Enlightenment Centuries. [A little help here, and I'm willing to part with good points for the assistance.]
- And look at the way the Talmud treats sharecroppers (p. 104a/b, 105). It uses as examples profit splits between two-thirds and three-quarters to *the sharecropper*. That is between 10 and 100 *times* as much as what "enlightened" nations gave them.
- See how many times the Talmud describes *written contracts* spelling out the rights of sharecroppers. (id.)

- And we can't skip how the Talmud says, explicitly, that breakfast is the most important meal of the day (p. 107b). It discusses at length the need for healthy eating and living.

***Shearith Israel Summer Songbook.*** Not surprisingly, it turns out that we are not the only ones making summer playlists. Trustee, communications guru, and Rock N'Roll savant David Sable made an entire, 75-song Summer BBQ Playlist. It can be found at item 1216488604 on Spotify. It's amazing, and fun. Enjoy it.

For this Summer, *Time, Waiting, Journeying* is our "theme." No one has come up with a better one to Andrew Druck's suggestion, which I independently like a lot.

Where we were last week, thanks to Andrew, is:

- [\*Anticipation\*](#), by Carly Simon
- [\*One of these days\*](#), by Neil Young
- [\*Waiting for the Sun\*](#), by The Doors
- [\*Wishing and Hoping\*](#), by Dusty Springfield
- [\*Any Day Now\*](#), by Chuck Jackson (music by the great Burt Bacharach)
- [\*Day in - Day Out\*](#), by Frank Sinatra
- [\*The Best is Yet to Come\*](#), by Frank Sinatra
- [\*It Won't be Long\*](#), by The Beatles
- [\*Time on My Hands\*](#), by Kate and Anna McGarrigle
- [\*High Hopes\*](#), by Bruce Springsteen
- [\*Long Walk Home\*](#), by Bruce Springsteen
- [\*Time is on My Side\*](#), by The Rolling Stones
- [\*Time Waits for No One\*](#), by The Rolling Stones
- [\*The Midnight Hour\*](#), by Wilson Pickett
- [\*Hejira\*](#), by Joni Mitchell
- [\*America\*](#), by Simon and Garfunkel
- [\*All I Want\*](#), by Joni Mitchell
- [\*Talk to Me of Mendocino\*](#), by Kate and Anna McGarrigle

We have some great adds for this week (send in more next week, this week being a "short one"):

Bob Starkand suggests

- [\*Long Time Gone\*](#), by Crosby Stills & Nash

Cantor Jay Harwitt, like me, is obsessed with the travel part of our theme and offers these greats:

- [\*By the Time I Get to Phoenix\*](#), by Glen Campbell
- [\*On the Atchison, Topeka, & the Santa Fe\*](#), by Johnny Mercer
- [\*Something's Coming\*](#), by Leonard Bernstein from *West Side Story*
- [\*My Time of Day\*](#), by Frank Loesser from *Guys and Dolls*
- [\*The Wells Fargo Wagon\*](#), by Meredith Wilson from *The Music Man*

Jim Herstoff, from our Rhode Island sister congregation *Ahavat Israel*, likes a song we had on a playlist a couple of years ago but which I love and deserves to be repeated:

- [Summertime](#), by The Jamies

And closing out this week, Aura Bijou suggests one stupendous song (by The Four Seasons) and three other good ones (imho, with the last being, uhm, weird?)

- [Working My Way Back To You Girl](#), by The Four Seasons
- [Sunrise, Sunset](#), from *Fiddler On the Roof* (this is a Perry Como version – smooth)
- [Tie A Yellow Ribbon](#), by Tony Orlando and Dawn
- [When Johnny Comes Marching Home](#), Mitch Miller rendition

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom. *B'yachad* (united together). יהיה טוב *Yihiyeh tov* (things will be good). *Moadim L'simcha*.

Louis Solomon, Parnas