

Cape Cod Limericks

For several years (2000-2002) there was a limerick contest at the National Havurah Committee December retreat, organized by R. D. Eno. Following are some limericks that I wrote for the contest.

First are seven limericks I read at the NHC retreat at Cape Cod on December 21, 2002.

The first is similar to one that won the contest the previous year -- I didn't have it with me, and the number of times I've been asked the question multiplied, so I decided to write a new version:

On her question I didn't even pause.
She asked "Are *you* Santa Claus?"
I've heard it many times
In various places and climes
So, of course, I told her I was.

The next three are reflections on this week's parsha -- Va'yechi:

Who gets the top blessing today?
Will it be Ephraim or Menashe?
Keep your eyes on the hands,
Watch where the right one lands.
As Jacob his shell game does play.

As Jacob approached his death,
he summoned his sons to be blessed.
But he cursed the first three --
Reuven, Shimon, and Levi --
Thank God he blessed the rest.

How **did** he survive all that strife?
And trouble from every child, each wife?
One day far from home
He encountered HaMakom
Who stayed with him throughout his life.

The next two were built around comments I heard at two workshops:

The Sadducees were a very strict sect.
Then insisted on following the text.
For a practice to be binding
It had to be in writing.
So they were forced to reject oral sex.

The following one is based on a comment about a b'raita in which Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai comments first that, considering the number of functions that the mouth performs, God should have created us with two mouths -- one dedicated to Torah speech. But then, in his usual misanthropic style, he concludes that it is just as well since we would have used both for lashon harah. The following limerick is not based on that b'raita but on the images it suggests:

Just imagine if mouths we had two
Your mother admonishing you
 You can talk while you eat
 That's not a great feat
But use different mouths to speak and to chew.

That one was the most popular of the limericks -- and drew the most laughs. I thought that the following one would be considered the best, so I read it last:

For this retreat my master plan
Was to achieve oneness with Hashem
 I came to Cape Cod
 To commune with God
But she said: "Get lost. You're a dirty old man!"

The next limerick was the one I wrote at the 2001 retreat and won first prize in R.D. Eno's second annual limerick contest. I didn't enter any of the above limerick's in the 2002 contest, choosing instead to read all of my limericks (I enjoyed that!) -- rather than giving them to R.D. to chant. (Cf. the first one above -- in which I have clearly become more accustomed to the question.)

On Virginia's question I didn't pause,
She asked me: "Are *you* Santa Claus?"
 This was very bold
 for a five year old.
Of course ... I told her I was.

The remaining four limericks were written for the 2000 contest (first annual) -- I guess they didn't win -- with notes that I wrote at the time -- the last one in the 2002 list clearly shared some ideas with the first one below.

Here are three limericks -- the first one got a good laugh.

I came because I wanted to pray
To meditate on Yud Hay Vav Hay
 To commune with God
 Right here on Cape Cod
But instead I slept the whole day.

The first two lines of the next limerick were given me (without the Italian) by Anne Mintz:

There were two men from Sodom
Who entertained an Italian at home
 He was too long for the bed
 So they chopped off his head
They did what you do in Sodom, not Rome.

(That didn't get much of a response -- I guess the reference to "as in Rome ... " was too oblique.)

Prayer's not my cup of tea
All that praising and blessing's baloney
 Kol Ha-ne-sha-mah
 Te-hal-lel Yah?
It just doesn't apply to me.

Oh ... here's another

In one of our favorite courses
We review all of the Jewish sources.
 Is there any sex
 In the ancient texts?
Ronnie's response: Of course there is.

At other retreats, where there was no limerick contest, I wrote limericks about the Parsha ... and occasionally wrote Parshah limericks at other times and places

Vayiggash (2004)

Va'yiggash is an extraordinary phrase
Judah stepped forward ... with no delays
 He did not cower
 Speaking truth to power
Serving as a model for us in our days.

Va'yechi (three limericks – 2002)

Who gets the top blessing today?
Will it be Ephraim or Menashe?
 Keep your eyes on the hands,
 Watch where the right one lands.
As Jacob his shell game does play.

As Jacob approached his death,
he summoned his sons to be blessed.

But he cursed the first three --
Reuven, Shimon, and Levi --
Thank God he blessed all the rest.

How ***did*** he survive all that strife?
And trouble from every child, each wife?
One day far from home
He encountered HaMakom
Who stayed with him throughout his life.

Va-yikra (3/16/05):

If by mistake a sin you commit
and your guilt builds up quite a bit
Place your hands on a ram
and say 'Baruch haShem'
That will surely get rid of it.

Metsora (4/13/13)

If your house is beginning to rot,
with green mold and red fungus, a lot.
You must scrub it in all possible ways
Then quarantine it for seven days.
If that fails, your house is declared shot.

The following limerick doesn't belong in this list, but I didn't know
where else to put it -- it was composed on New Year's Eve.

The ball will begin its dive
the time will soon arrive
to close the door
on 2004
and welcome 2005.

Following are three limericks composed in anticipation of the 2004 Cape
Cod retreat:

Give Highland Park a big cheer
It is well represented this year
you've got to be crazy
to drive all the way from Joisey
But a total of nine of us are here.

The following one was mailed to R.D. Eno who came to so many retreats
but for reasons unknown is no longer joining us.

Here is your invitation most hearty
to our annual Cape Cod party
 it's an event most dear
 but we missed you last year
we hope you'll rejoin us, Janet and R.D.

I composed the following after attending Ben Dreyfus' session on the
indicated topics; the group liked it.

A limerick is a classical verse
Its quantum version is much worse
 It might start out in rhyme
 but with probability point nine (.9)
The universe doesn't play dice with God.

This one they didn't get; perhaps there's nothing to be gotten:

A theologian named Mordechai
thought to change laws given at Sinai
 He had mixed success
 painting Judaism afresh
But he was the first Recon artist to try.

This one was for Shira Belfer, who makes long Mi Shebeirachs:

A prayer for those who are sick
Does not have to be said too quick
 But when you have dozens of people to mention
 Lots and lots of folks needing divine attention
The Mi Shebeirach becomes much too long to fit into a limerick.

At the 2003 retreat, I didn't complete the limericks that I had planned because of an important conversation in which I was involved. So there are only three. The first two are a pair, and were composed as a result of a session on writing short stories conducted by Joan Leegant:

If you want a short story to write
You must begin very late at night,
 You pick a first line
 and a bottle of wine
And you let your fancy, and your spirits, take flight.

That sounds like a pretty good trick
"I grabbed Rick's arm" was the line I did pick
 My writing it surged
 but no short story emerged
All I got was ... a limb of Rick.

The third limerick, not so funny, is linked to Anne Mintz' morning d'var Torah about the messages of Chanukkah:

When we look at the candles aflame
and sing praises to Your great name
 We dare not decide
 that God's on our side
Because that's what all zealots do claim.