

THE LYRICS!

All words and music

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<https://larrylesser.com/sparks/>

At the above URL is a link to enhanced liner notes including information on the songs such as: keys, chords, musician credits, summary, and source/text references.

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Lyrics for the 24 songs
of Larry Lesser’s album *SPARKS*
didn’t fit on the CD panels (what a shock!)
so here they are for your personal enjoyment,
in order of appearance on the CD:

1. Two Jews, Three Opinions
2. Shabbos [Sabbath] Keeps the Jews
3. Lights Lead Home
4. Kind
5. Max [The Bark Mitzvah Song]
6. Seven Circles
7. Sparks
8. Two Pockets
9. Feathers
10. Temples
11. Spiritual Not Religious
12. Tearin’ the Sea
13. The Best
14. One-Way Train
15. Stack the Stones
16. Right Messiah
17. Nothing in Between
18. Deep and Wide
19. Rowboat
20. Bruria
21. Letters
22. Everyone
23. The Stone
24. Give Thanks

(1) TWO JEWS, THREE OPINIONS

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Two rabbis in ancient times—
Hillel and Shammai— often find
their schools were at odds,
but both spoke words of the livin' God!
Sages' debates drive us like rack-and-pinion:
2 Jews, 3 opinions.

Can we eat meat? Can we frack?
Do these questions take us back
to what Creation is really worth
and stewardship of the Earth?
What does it mean that God gave us dominion?
2 Jews, 3 opinions.

Who is a Jew? Does it mean
culture, faith, or a set of genes?
How does Israel add more love?
Is it just all-of-the-above?
And how does the Shoah sway your position?
2 Jews, 3 opinions.

Well, some towns are torn apart
on how to do service of the heart:
What tune is used, how much is read,
how long it lasts, what kind of spread.
Now all the shuls pray for minyans:
2 Jews, 3 opinions.

We can disagree for Heaven's sake,
but fights like Korach I just can't take!
Meet me in the middle for a better stance
'cause that's how my mezuzah slants!
Whether a sabra or Virginian:
2 Jews, 3 opinions. Only 3?!

(2) SHABBOS KEEPS THE JEWS

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When I lose my way,
workin' to the bone,
I seek a beacon
to come back home
to who we really are,
not what we earn or do.
More than Jews keep Shabbos,
Shabbos keeps the Jews.

Friday brings friends,
some from far away:
each brings to the table
somethin' real to say.
After dinner, some go out,
some stay and schmooze:
more than Jews keep Shabbos,
Shabbos keeps the Jews.

As the Friday sky grows dark,
how do we light a spark?

Oasis in time:
hold our busy lives
to take in sweetness
of song, bread, and wine.
Timeless walk and talk
bring bigger views:
more than Jews keep Shabbos,
Shabbos keeps the Jews.

You may carry nothin'
but some wordless tunes.
You may cook up somethin'
that simmers and renews.
You may put a light on
dif'rent rabbi views
on your drive for meaning
in the woods or in the pews.
More than Jews keep Shabbos,
Shabbos keeps the Jews,
Shabbos keeps this Jew!

(3) LIGHTS LEAD HOME

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Rosa Mendez wonders why
her *abuela* drew the blinds,
lit two candles and closed her eyes
on Friday nights.

*Lights lead home, lights lead home
over ocean of soul.*

Here in this New World land,
Rosa starts to understand
Traditions hidden, lost or banned,
since Ferdinand.

*Lights lead home, lights lead home
over ocean of soul.*

It's like she found an ancient key
that opened doors of memory:
fin'ly safe now to see
sparks redeem.

*Lights lead home, lights lead home
over ocean of soul.
Lights lead home, welcome home
over ocean of soul,
sobre el alma del mar.*

(4) KIND

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If I were a fish,
what kind would I be:
would scales guard my integrity,
would fins help me steer and flee,
or would I scavenge from the bottom of the sea?

If I were a beast,
what kind would I be:
would I have split hooves or claws for my feet?
Would I wolf down my food so rapidly
or ruminate thoughtfully?

If I were a bird,
what kind would I be:
a bird of prey like an eagle,
or a gentle bird like a dove
to rise above?

I am a human,
I've come to see:
what I take in becomes part of me.
And I think of blood, I think of milk,
I think of a mother and her ilk.

So I'll face
what's on my plate
and think of the source, think of the fate.
May the awareness help me find
a way to be mindful, a way to be kind.

(5) MAX (THE BARK MITZVAH SONG)

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I'm man's best friend, gotta healthy sheen:
in human years, I'll be 13.
I got good *yichus* in my pedigree:
my ancestors' silence in Egypt
helped Jews go free.
Look at my tag: it certifies
I have no problem with rabbis (I mean, rabies)!

*Now it's time for my Bark Mitzvah—
I bound onto the bima with joy!
I run to do a mitzvah,
fast as any girl or boy.*

For my mitzvah project, my pet crusade,
is helping ev'ry cat get neutered or spayed.
Too selfish? I'll try again:
For my mitzvah project, I'll give 18 bones
to good dogs not blessed to have good homes.
My trainer says, "It's not a show.
Torah *leash-ma* is the way to go!"
So no collar by Gucci for just doin' my job:
I'll be happy with whatever treat you lob.

*I celebrate my Bark Mitzvah,
I've learned to heed commands.
I beg to guard a mitzvah:
I'll do, then understand.*

*Today I am a Bark Mitzvah (muzzle tov!):
I've shed my puppy youth.
One day, I'll marry a Shih Tzu:
I'll see you at my aufruf!*

(6) SEVEN CIRCLES

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Joshua at Jericho
walked 7 times around,
blew the horns and shouted
and walls came down, tumblin' down.

7 circles, 7 circles take down walls

We renew the cycle
with honors for all:
we take out all the Torahs
and dance 'round the hall, 'round the hall.

7 circles, 7 circles take down walls

I stand beneath the canopy:
for years, I kept my guard.
When you walk around me,
you open my heart, my cracked open heart.

7 circles, 7 circles take down walls

7 times the Earth will turn
to bring a day of peace;
7 times around the sun
brings year of release

Head and heart so far apart
in a world with false charm,
I bind myself to God
like the strap 'round my arm, 'round my arm.

7 circles, 7 circles take down walls

(7) SPARKS

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What was formed
as spoken
some affirm
as broken.
Another way is to say:

*We're sparks divine,
more light can shine.
Sparks divine,
hearts shine, we shine!*

To make this world,
God made room.
Light unfurled,
broke right through:
some returned, some fell and burned.

*We're sparks divine,
more light can shine.
Sparks divine,
hearts shine, we shine!*

To heal this world,
we must desire
sparks' return
to their fire.
You and me can set them free:

*We're sparks divine,
more light can shine.
Sparks divine, right time
to shine, shine, shine your part divine.*

(8) TWO POCKETS

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*You need two pockets with a truth in each
that you can reach, depending on the need.*

When feeling lowly,
reach in the right pocket and read:
“For my sake, the world was made.”

*You need two pockets with a truth in each
that you can reach, depending on the need.*

When feeling mighty,
reach in the left pocket and read:
“I am dust and ashes.”

*You need two pockets with a truth in each
that you can reach, depending on the need,
depending on the need*

(9) FEATHERS

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I told tales about you as I went through town.
Later, feeling sorry, I track you down
and say, “Please forgive me.”
You say, “To begin,
take a pillow to the meadow,
and free its feathers to the wind.”

I find this strange, but I do as asked,
then go to report completion of the task.
You say, “Now, go find
where each feather blew:
damage done by words
is as hard to undo.

Find those feathers,
find where each blew—
damage done by words
is as hard to undo.”

(10) TEMPLES

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As we offered up our service,
raising up our hands,
Romans laid siege,
took our treasures to their land:
our golden lamp and vessels,
the table that held our bread.
Before they burned down
our Temple to the ground,
I said, with dread:

*Baseless hate, baseless hate,
baseless hate will devastate...*

All the years of exile
we went through
have not taught us how
to treat a fellow Jew.
They may not share our passions
or wear what we wear –
is that why we don't try
to share our prayer?

*Baseless hate, baseless hate,
baseless hate will devastate, desecrate...*

Now we've many temples,
great halls with donors' names,
where some slander
those who don't look the same.
And some want me shamed
for how I learn or pray:
they call me heretic or fanatic,
as they relay

*Baseless hate, baseless hate,
baseless hate will devastate—
beyond the stones, can we atone?*

(11) SPIRITUAL NOT RELIGIOUS

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With organized religion,
I did not identify.
Here's what I'd say
to a friend who asked me why:
"Ancient Jewish teachings
don't fit modern life,
but Ayurvedic wisdom
transcends time.
I follow my heart, I need no part
of a group that's superstitious:
I am spiritual, not religious."

"And I love to unplug
and spend weekends at the beach,
but I don't keep the Sabbath –
it seems out of reach.
The sun and moon are comfort,
they light a path that's clear;
that synagogue's confusing –
candle times change all year.
The food and art, I view apart
from the superstitious:
I am spiritual, not religious."

"I don't need rabbis
judgin' what I do.
'It's unhealthy,' says my shrink
and my yoga teacher, too.
Like, why let rules
guide what we eat?"
I asked as I biked to the co-op to buy
grass-fed pastured beef, wild-caught salmon,
GMO-free corn, free-range hormone-free
organic chicken, veggies sustainably locally
grown, and fair trade chocolate sweets.
I said, "I need no laws, I'm moral 'just because',
and I am not litigious –
I am spiritual, not religious."

*Answered my friend: you're part of a trend
I was in, no yang just yin, but in the end
it felt unstable 'til I was able to see ritual –
the actual word – as 2/3 of spiritual.
Don't laugh, do the math, it's a narrow path
with no vessel to let us wrestle
with regularity in community
that's there for me with unity of history –
more than my mystery –*

*now I see peace of mind
needs inner and outer worlds aligned
with feelings and creeds as well as deeds:
my thought needs language,
my love commitment,
my prayer acknowledgment, words and music
so I can use it for this song to right a wrong
in the tribe I belong where
I am spiritual and religious!*

(12) TEARIN' THE SEA

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Our sages say a voice through the haze
before we were conceived
had us each paired to our b'shert
if we'd merit that decree. They say

Our Maker makes all matches,
but it's not easy and free:
it's hard to pair as it was to tear the sea.

Now what can be hard for the Almighty God
whose power knows no bound?
Well maybe our Maker must take from another
or see God's handiwork drown.

*Well what's the chance you'd hang around
after leavin' the job that brought you to town,
and nearby that year revealed
an opening in my narrow field,
and I got the offer
before I gave others an answer?
And what's the chance
your local friend was a friend since childhood
of the mother of my friend since childhood
and that got us introduced and
we were ready despite all we'd been through?
But when 40 miles and 5 jobs between us
left no time to convene us,
what's the chance my dad discovered
that 10 doors down I had third cousins
whose home was empty
when they left each winter
'cause who until you would keep it kosher?
So that winter, there you stayed:
that's how we got engaged.
It's too small a chance all that was chance,
too small a chance that was all chance.*

Tearin' the sea...
joy of soul once again whole.
Tearin' the sea...
we dance and sing with tambourine.
Tearin' the sea...
we find faith in narrow straits.
Tearin' the sea...
walk on dry ground though waters surround.
Tear in the sea.....you and me.

(13) THE BEST

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Trav'lin' with his donkey,
rooster and candle,
walkin' all day
far as he could handle.
The town he reached gave nowhere to stay:
he'd have to walk to a field
and sleep on some hay, but he said

*All God does is for the best.
Though we rarely see under duress,
All God does is for the best.*

That traveler read his holy books
well into the night
'til wind blew out
his candle's light.
Then donkey and rooster
were taken by wild beasts—
a turn of events
he could hardly believe, but he said:

*All God does is for the best.
Though we rarely see under duress,
All God does is for the best.*

When the trav'ler woke and walked
a little way, he found
soldiers had come
and captured the town!
Had his candle's light been seen
or animals been heard,
or had he slept here, he'd have been
taken like his bird!

All God does is for the best...

I think of his tale
on the journey that is mine
as my drama
turns out fine:
a failed career,
a failed romance
led me to a life
of greater expanse!

*All God does is for the best.
Though we rarely see under duress,
all God does is for the best,
all God does is for the best.*

(14) ONE-WAY TRAIN

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Who could foresee how ev'ry decree
brought darkness near us all?
Glass was smashed and to ghettos were cast
those wearing the yellow star.
Rounded one dawn, all were soon gone—
80 in each cattle car.
Huddled through night, some asking God, "Why
are things going this far?"

Sorted by sex and then by strength
by the Angel of Death's baton,
stripped of clothes, teeth taken for gold,
numbered on the left arm,
living half-dead on thin soup and bread,
slaving 'neath chimneys high
that blackened the skies with families' lives
and rage to have to hide
on a one-way train

A new century, but still hard for me
to see how to say
what we need in country or creed
to keep that darkness at bay—
What gives me hope is to know
tens of thousands dared
put self at risk so others might live —
an answer to a prayer
*on a one-way train
on a one-way train*

(15) STACK THE STONES

Words and Music © 2010, 2017, 2019 Lawrence M. Lesser

One of Ljubljana's few Jews today
walked me to its graveyard,
showed me Section J.
Standing in that grass overgrown,
wond'ring: "Who will stack the stones?"

Visiting Treblinka, where it stood
with mass graves and burnings
hidden by the woods.
Now searching earth for pieces of bone,
crying: "Who will stack the stones?"

We must keep seeking to learn from our past:
transcend hatred,
transcend the ash.
With faith we're not alone,
we will stack the stones.
We will stack the stones,
stack the stones.

(17) NOTHING IN BETWEEN

Words and Music © 2010, 2019 Lawrence M. Lesser

When I pray,
I talk to God direct:
that's the way
my soul connects
with nothing in between,
no, nothing in between.

Our holy tongue
I wanna learn:
those letters
made the world,
so there's nothing in between,
no, nothing in between.

*Am echad im lev echad;
Atah echad v'shimcha echad!*

We are connected:
at Sinai we stood,
bearing witness
as one peoplehood
so there's nothing in between,
no, nothing in between,
nothing in between,
nothing in between.

(16) RIGHT MESSIAH

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At college, I got approached on the quad
by Christians selling their path to God:
they said my sin made me damned
unless I got saved by their plan. I said:

*I don't see the prophecy
of a world at peace,
much less the world proclaiming God
in unity,
with all Jews in Israel rebuilding the Temple,
so I pray for the arrival
of the right messiah, right messiah*

A friend of a friend befriended me:
her faith and morals were clear to see
in how she blessed and how she prayed.
I said: I can't join *in Jesus' name*.

*I don't see the prophecy
of a world at peace,
much less the world proclaiming God
in unity,
with all Jews in Israel rebuilding the Temple,
so I pray for the arrival
of the right messiah, right messiah*

Right messiah,
anointed king –
a man to lead,
not redeem,
a world extreme

*One day we'll see these prophecies
like a world at peace:
that day may come sooner
if our good deeds increase.
And if I'm planting a tree, gotta wait for me
before I go greet the messiah,
the right messiah, right messiah*

(18) DEEP AND WIDE

Words and Music © 2018, 2019 Lawrence M. Lesser

I have friends whose faith is wide:
not a yoke, more like a guide.
They say it's our job to choose
and heal the world's blues.
Their tent opens wide
to embrace what's outside with faith that's wide.

And I have friends whose faith is deep,
who daily learn laws they keep.
They are quick to bless
and modest in their dress,
and they open their homes
to trav'lers they don't know.

*Astride this divide, still growing,
I refuse to choose –
I need both for the growth of my soul,
deep and wide, deep and wide, deep and wide.*

Some wide-faith friends can't see
roles can differ equally
and how ritual performed
can transform.
Maybe not all change is good
for our peoplehood that so long stood.

And some deep-faith friends can't see
all that women have to teach,
and how prayer may fill more need
with less length or speed,
or when fences confound
what they surround.

*Astride this divide, still growing,
I refuse to choose –
I need both for the growth of my soul,
deep and wide, deep and wide, deep and wide.*

I seek faith that's wide
and deep at the same time,
'cause both taught me much
and I was touched.
At Sinai, all were there
so this rift is hard to bear – I despair.

*Astride this divide, still growing,
I refuse to choose –
I need both for the growth of my soul,
deep and wide, deep and wide, deep and wide:
both reside here inside.*

(19) ROWBOAT

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Imagine many men
out on a rowboat.
Suddenly, one pulls out a drill
and starts to bore a hole
under his own seat.
“What are you doing?!” others yell.

*Can a man
rightfully answer
“What's it to you
what I do in my space”?*

Now from this boat we row,
we gaze at the waters
where we once could fish and swim.
The heavens have a hole
and glaciers are melting,
raising up these waters we're in.

*Can a man
rightfully answer
“What's it to you
what I do in my space”?*

*Oh how will we go
out on our rowboat?*

(20) BRURIA

Words and Music © 2018, 2019 Lawrence M. Lesser

Though Romans wrapped her dad
in a scroll set aflame
for teaching people Torah,
she became a great sage.
She learned 300 laws
in a single day;
when she disagreed with sages,
the ruling went her way.

*A woman of valor, who can find?
Was Bruria one of a kind?*

Her husband was a rabbi
who was so distressed
by revelry of neighbors
that he prayed for their deaths.
She said: "Pray they repent,
don't pray for their demise."
He saw she was right:
oh, she was very wise.

*A woman of valor, who can find?
Was Bruria one of a kind?*

One day a plague fell
on her boys in bed:
how to break it to her husband
that their sons were dead?
When he came home,
she had him explain:
what if lent something precious,
and the owner came to claim?

*A woman of valor, who can find?
Was Bruria one of a kind?*

She denied the view
that women lack the mind
for learning Torah,
gave some men a hard time.
What would be a reason,
when all's said and done,
to not teach our daughters
all we teach our sons?

*A woman of valor, who can find?
Was Bruria one of a kind?*

(21) LETTERS

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On his own, far from home,
a man comes to a house of prayer,
knowing nothing but
letters of the language.

All around, heads bow,
so deeply lost in prayer—
again and again, all he can send are
letters of the language. He cries:

*"Master of the Universe, I beseech You
to make words from my letters
that will please You."*

His heart hit the mark
with a simple way of prayer.
His world was formed by
letters of the language.

*"Master of the Universe, I beseech You
to make words from my letters
that will please You."*

In his breath, an *aleph* –
like a *vav* joining *yuds*,
blending, ascending,
all found good.

(22) EVERYONE

Words and Music © 1999, 2019 Lawrence M. Lesser

It's hard to win the lottery,
hard to win the Nobel Prize,
or get to play in the NBA,
but I found a great surprise:

*You are rich if content with your portion,
you are wise if you learn from everyone,
you are strong if you harness your passion,
you'll be honored
if you honor the spark in everyone.*

The songs I play won't bring big pay –
not much room on the chart –
but with sacred discipline,
we can all live a work of art 'cause

*You are rich if content with your portion,
you are wise if you learn from everyone,
you are strong if you harness your passion,
you'll be honored
if you honor the spark in everyone.*

Who has the chance to carry a man
from a house that's burning?
But make your might by doing right,
ev'ry day learning:

*You are rich if content with your portion,
you are wise if you learn from everyone,
you are strong if you harness your passion,
you'll be honored
if you honor the spark in.....
everyone..... can be rich,
everyone..... can be wise,
everyone..... can be strong,
so let's honor the spark in everyone!
Holy spark in everyone,
I said, holy spark in everyone,
everyone unique like everyone!*

(23) THE STONE

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Simple shepherd came
by a well one day
where dripping water made
a hole so deep.
As more drops fell
on stone by the well,
inspiration swelled
and was received. He said:

*Like water wears away the stone,
timeless ancient words
can surely impress upon my heart.
Water, wear away the stone –
stone that holds my heart,
and may the shaping start.*

When he was 40,
he began the journey,
did the learning
that made him wise.
And he taught others
in great numbers:
the well he discovered
never went dry!

*Like water wears away the stone,
timeless ancient words
can surely impress upon my heart.
Water, wear away the stone –
stone that holds my heart,
and may the shaping start...*

*Wear away the stone,
wear away the stone,
there's a way
to wear away the stone.*

(24) GIVE THANKS

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We wake up
with open eyes
and give thanks
before we rise
before the One
who made whole
and brought back
our very soul:

*A way to be, a way to live,
we are a people who give thanks.*

Delivered
by the sea,
from oppression,
fin'ly free.
And we're grateful –
it's ingrained
in our people's
very name:

*A way to be, a way to live,
we are a people who give thanks.*

Thanks for the lightning,
thanks for the thunder,
thanks for the rainbow,
its promise and wonder.
Thanks for the first fruit of the spring:
every day, we try to say 100 blessings!

*It's how we live,
we are a people who give thanks.
Give thanks,
give thanks,
give thanks,
wake up –
wake up and give thanks!*

DESERT ISLAND (hidden/secret track on CD):

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A boat sank with two Jews--
On a desert island, they were marooned.
But they used vines to bind some logs
And built a trio of synagogues:
One for each and one neither will set foot in--
Two Jews, three opinions!