When I go to see certain works of art, the trip to the museum where they reside is a pilgrimage. I aim to look closely, delighting my eyes and expanding my world, but I also aim to pay homage—to touch base with something sacred, for my own sake and also, somehow, as an act of witnessing. This is the way I felt when approaching Michelangelo’s *David* the first time, and on subsequent visits. It’s how I felt lining up at the Uffizi to see Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus* and taking the tube to the Tate to see William Blake’s drawings. And it’s always how I feel when setting out to view the work of my favorite artist, Johannes Vermeer.

My favorite Vermeer used to be *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. Then I came to love *The Little Street*, after a smart docent explained the way in which every Vermeer contains at least one secret. But now my favorite is *De Keukenmeid*, variously translated as *The Milkmaid* and *The Kitchen Maid*. An inadequate but still wonderful lucite version hangs next to my washbowl. Not infrequently, I pause to study and restudy the way in which the milkmaid looks down with deference and concentration at the earthenware pot where milk is accumulating, the posture of her body while pouring, and the ethereal yet earthy stream of milk that connects pitcher to pot.

How can it matter the way in which a servant girl pours milk? Of course, it’s also the vibrant blue and yellow of the woman’s dress, as well as the milky white of her cap and the translucence of the window across from her, that matter. From the colors and forms of this picture, as of art in general, our sense of sight is reanimated and our appreciation for this gorgeous world is heightened. Still, with a representational painting like this, what is shown also conveys ideas and feelings, possible teachings and ideals. From this Vermeer painting I learn the beauty and value of focused concentration upon the ordinary acts of daily life, and also the generous plenitude that suffuses the universe if only we have the proper receptacle in which to gather it.

Shortly after having, as it were, fallen in love with *De Keukenmeid*, I came upon the following statement by the poet W. S. Merwin in a
publication brochure that included his new collection, *The Shadow of Sirius*: “When you listen to Mozart or when you listen to Shakespeare, you don’t know what part of yourself is responding to it, and you don’t know what part of them it’s coming from. Somewhere in between is this poetry. It’s that girl pouring milk from the pitcher.” After gasping in recognition, I read and reread the enigmatic statement, and then thankfully cut it out and pasted it to the back of my bathroom version.

“Somewhere in between is this poetry. It’s that girl pouring milk from the pitcher.” Notice the way in which the poet reaches across the centuries and miles, blurring the distinction between one art medium and another as he strives to capture in words the magical, mysterious, liminal space where artist meets audience.

Merwin’s meditation on how art affects us, with its invocation of Vermeer’s painting, came into my mind early in the process of planning this symposium issue of the *CCAR Journal*. It seems to me that the “somewhere in between” where viewer meets painting and where listener hears Mozart or Shakespeare is also the space where Jew encounters Torah and God. For different people and at different times, the stream of milk will be represented by a different passage, prayer, or *nigun*; or by one among the various names by which we call God, one aspect of the heightened reality we seek in God.

So much of our lives focuses on what Wordsworth calls “getting and spending” and Freud groups within “love and work” (*leiben und arbeiten*). The two great vehicles that carry us beyond these vital but limiting dimensions, beyond ourselves, are religion and art. Surely then the truth of art and that of religion must intersect. Surely then the world of Jewish practice and living needs to open itself up to the world of artistic fashioning.

The *Journal’s* editorial board, Director of the CCAR Press Hara Person, and I are most grateful to Eve Ben-Ora and Vicki Reikes Fox for having taken on themselves the major responsibility of guest editing (curating) this issue. Their ability to conceptualize and organize the issue will be apparent as soon as you turn to the Contents. You’ll notice their ability to attract and bring out the best in a wide range of authors as you progress through the articles. Congratulations to everyone associated with this issue, including its readers.

Susan Laemmle, Editor