

June 3, 2021

Dear Shearith Israel family,

*Steady As We Go.* I'm pleased to report that we have basically nothing to report this week. Disease spread numbers in our small corner of geography continue to decline. Our approach to safe communal gatherings announced last week - vaccinated and unvaccinated sections for outdoor services; status quo (everyone remains masked) for indoor services - began this week (Shabbat outdoor services were rained out last Shabbat) without incident. We will continue on this path and in addition are announcing the launch of some additional programs and activities for Paved Paradise (below).

Our bifurcated approach enables all congregants, including those still unvaccinated such as our children, to feel welcome at communal prayer. Right now, coming together in safe prayer has to be one of our highest communal priorities. After 367 years of practice, our services are gorgeous, inspiring, uplifting. Please, if you are comfortable in doing so, come and participate.

*What Price Righteousness?* Tractate *Yoma* 51b, which we study this week as part of the Daf Yomi cycle, contains one of many truly remarkable statements in the Talmud. The discussion analyzes what might seem like an obscure question: Whether the High Priest needed to own his own sacrificial offering, paid for by his own funds. The principle employed to decide the issue, however, is far from obscure. In fact it is profound if not radical.

In the back-and-forth discussion, the Talmud invokes the principle of exegesis that, for a sacrifice or other ritual involving holy objects ("*Kadshim*") to be *essential* (*m'akev*), the Torah needs to repeat the injunction concerning that ritual in the Torah itself. To unpack this a little, there are a great many detailed rituals involving sacrifices or holy objects. These include objects and rituals in the sacrificial services performed in the *mishkan* or Tabernacle that traveled with the Israelites during their 40-year sojourn in the desert as well as in the Temple itself. There are other objects and rituals that involve the separation of holy and mundane that are

also characterized as *Kadshim*. The rule of interpretation under discussion is that, for any law or ritual to be essential to the fulfillment of that *Kadshim* act or *mitzvah*, the Rabbis need to find not one but at least two specific articulations of the law or ritual in the Torah itself. This rule, what we might call a Rule of Repetition, means that in some cases a ritual remains valid even though a Biblical proscription or prescription is omitted from its performance. Even if the specifically mentioned ritual is omitted, the act is still valid if the Torah itself did not adumbrate the ritual at least twice. Put another way, to find the essential or *m'akev* aspects of all *Kadshim* mitzvot, we need to search for not just one clear Biblical support; the Rabbis need to search for and find a *second* articulation of the same rule as well. The Rule of Repetition is solidly ensconced in the Talmud and has been undisturbed by commentary or interpretation since.

Who knew? On the contrary, weren't we taught that the Torah is extraordinarily parsimonious with its words (so parsimonious, in fact, that you wouldn't find "parsimonious" being qualified by the adverb "extraordinarily", since "parsimonious" is already understood to be "extraordinary"). Weren't we taught that nary a stray letter or word exists in the Torah? How do we square those truths with this Rule of Repetition? Further, what is so important about "*kadshim*" that, to be essential, the rule needs to be repeated? If the principle is so important, then why isn't it applied to *all* laws and rituals in the Torah, not just those involving *kadshim*?

Thanks to our son Yosef for pointing out the brilliant Nineteenth Century's autodidact Rabbi Joseph Engel's discussion of this issue. He ends by saying the Rule of Repetition is as old as Torah itself, that it is *halakha l'Moshe m'sinai*. At least for me, the Rule of Repetition conveys a powerful message applicable to many aspects of what is too self-assuredly and a little bit foolishly monikered our "post-modern" existence (*post-modern*? How do we know we are post-modern? When did modernity stop and post-modernity begin? What comes after post-modernity? Oh never mind.) In our post-modern world, we jump to judge and condemn others for some lacking or another. We do so faster than A New

York Minute. Having done so, we feel justified in silencing the oh-so-rightly condemned. Canceled! A whole neology has developed to give this intolerant sanctimony a patina of seriousness and meaning. (When I first heard the word "woke" (not being used to describe me, alas), I was delighted that someone else remembered the We Five hit from the 1960s titled *You Were On My Mind*, but what the *velt* knows as "[When I Woke Up This Morning](#)".)

The Rule of Repetition is our Torah's way of guiding us away from this post-modern failing. The Rule teaches that, before we condemn another for missing something essential, we need to make sure we are so sure, so certain that the Almighty didn't just make the rule known once - it was said at least twice. To be holier than Thou needs not just super-clarity but super-duper-clarity. And if we don't have that clarity, and we very rarely do, our task is to tolerate, not to judge. Our task, as is shown to us on every page of the Talmud, is to listen, to respect difference, to try to understand and not shout-down. We do not cancel. We are taught what our ancestors lived: *Every good-faith and sincere opinion is part of the Words of the Living G-d (divrei elokim hayyim)*. Before we cut off respectful debate, before we, as congregational friend Fran Altman says it, offer "outsized opinions but really have nothing good to say", we need to make DOUBLY sure that sources of unquestionable and unquestioned truth confirm that we are right.

What price righteousness? It is a price so high that the Lord on High would rather tolerate error and omissions in the sacrifices offered than validate an unjustified level of certainty giving rise to intolerant silencing of sincere debate. Few have said it better than Paul Simon, in [Slip Slidin' Away](#) (back up performed by The Oak Ridge Boys):

God only knows  
God makes His plan  
The information's unavailable  
To the mortal man

*Half-Full Report.* So much to catch up on:

First, Steve Smith, who is credited with naming our decade The Mulligan Years (see [my email of palindromic 1/21/21](#)), tried to break a deadlock among last week's three choices for "name that [Rabbi Soloveichik Paved Paradise Shabbat afternoon] class" with one of the three finalists, Learning on the Lawn. It's terrific and would have won by a smidgen had Steve himself not pointed out that it abbreviates to LoL. The remaining entrants, Inside the Gates and Maven on the Green, are all tied with Learning on the Lawn. Final ballots please.

Second, get a load of this! Rabbi Soloveichik wants our first movie to be *The Ten Commandments* rather than *The Princess Bride*. So passionate is he that he is even willing to hold the *The Princess Bride* trivia contest even though we will be showing *The Ten Commandments*. Who agrees with him? Who thinks we should placate him even if we don't agree with him? And who is willing to challenge him in the trivia contest? I am, but am I the only one? Come on! Anyway, since I was going to be the judge rather than a contestant, and since it would have been an obvious conflict of interest to be both contestant and judge, I've reached out and asked a truly neutral, unbiased person to serve as judge instead of me: Beth Goldman (and if you are not yet acquainted with my wife, she's deceptively tough, exceedingly fair, and delightful -- and that too is a neutral and unbiased opinion). Last call for who will challenge Rabbi Soloveichik with me. I'm feeling we really have a shot at beating him, fair and square.

Third, Daniel Chazin, who has been a frequent and sound communicant throughout the past year, turns out to write over 90% of the posts in a hiking website, called [Trail Conference](#). It's a great website. Beth and I use it all the time. We have Daniel to thank - who has been hiking, he says, for 40 years.

Finally, next week, we will be starting our Lounge on the Lawn (abbreviation challenges be damned). Two afternoons and one evening a week, we will be welcomed to Paved Paradise to sit, to read, to snack (byof), to enjoy the convivial company of co-congregants. Wi-fi included. We will have vaccinated and separate unvaccinated/masked tables. There is plenty of room. Come, you will love it, and you will help others, too. Follow our upcoming emails for details.

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom.

Louis Solomon, Parnas