

August 18, 2022

Dear Shearith Israel family and Touro Synagogue Affiliates,

TbA, Fat Man, Little Boy – All In Our Rearview Mirror. For lots of reasons, Covid-19 numbers matter (they are starting to dip in our area, a smidgen). At the same time, we are about at a point when the numbers, so long as they stay within a band, do not matter all that much to us insularly at Shearith Israel. The reason is that we now have in place a set of protocols and practices that are sustainable at delivering safety as well as the feeling of safety. We will keep those protocols and practices in place for a while. They are not *discouraging* attendance – at least not of anyone who has emailed or spoken to any of us – and in fact are *encouraging* attendance for some. The rest of us, Covid-tweeners, just seem happy to be back. That is surely what last Shabbat felt like. For Shabbat *Nahamu*, about 70 of us enjoyed a cool morning, a beautiful reading of Parashat *V'Ethanan* by Rabbi Rohde, a beautiful reading of the haftarah by Yosef Solomon, and a Kiddush, well, that couldn't be beat (song source please)!

Fred Ehrman took time from writing his own informative *divrei* Torah to remind us of the story told in Tractate *Makot* (24b). The Talmud relates that Rabbi Akiva laughed when his colleagues cried upon seeing a fox rummaging around the Second Temple ruins, which we mourn on Tisha B'Ab. Rabbi Akiva laughed because of his abiding faith that, if a first prophecy of destruction was true (he was talking about the First Temple), then a second prophecy, of Zecharia, about the rebuilding after the destruction of the Second Temple, would also be true. The prophecy describes the streets of Jerusalem being filled with our elders. It's a beautiful story, way better than the apocryphal one of Napoleon and Tisha B'Ab (see [my email of last week](#)). The story, and optimism it bespeaks, is a fitting way to say goodbye for this year to Tisha B'Ab and other calamitous events that occurred this time of year. Now we move forward, concentrating on comfort, hope, optimism, community. It is to those subjects that I directly turn.

Tithing the Tithe - Tachlit! Last week we announced a new community initiative, which is still provisionally being called *Tithing the Tithe*, or T3. (Don't get your mind set on these, to paraphrase [George Harrison](#), since we need a better name – now!) Whatever its name, T3 involves taking just 1% of our waking hours, about an hour a week, and contributing the time – that wasting asset more precious than rubies – to a synagogue or other community end. Some of you have already stepped up marvelously. I discuss a couple of these below.

Here I want to show that a page of the Daf Yomi Talmud study this very week provides key support for the T3 project. Page 43b of Tractate *Ketubah* (finally) begins discussing the contents of the marriage contract, or *Ketubah*. The Talmud asks what happens if a husband gives his wife two *ketubot*, containing different amounts of promised yet voluntary post-marital payments (that is, in addition to the required base-line obligations). Can the wife choose the *Ketubah* with the larger of the amounts? The Talmud indeed gives her a choice, but in terms of which to choose, the wife's choice is fact-dependent and not obvious. Not obvious? Why not just pick the larger? The reason is that the wife may collect her payment from property owned by the husband at the time the *Ketubah* contract is made and given to her. (BTW, this is very different

from the common law as it relates to contracts generally; this is an interesting topic by itself, but not for now.) So if *Ketubah 1* gives the wife \$200 in addition to the baseline obligations and *Ketubah 2* gives the wife \$300 in addition to the baseline obligations, the wife should in theory opt for *Ketubah 2*. But she needs to consider how much property the husband sold between the times he made and delivered *Ketubot 1* and *2*, since even though the promised amounts are fixed, Husband may have dissipated his assets, and the funds simply won't be there when time for payment arrives. This is interesting – but still is not my main point.

My main point (finally) involves an obvious second question: The Talmud asks, well, can Wife aggregate the two and seek \$500 in addition to the baseline obligations. The Talmud says no, not usually. There is, however, a circumstance when Wife *can* aggregate the two *Ketubot*: If Husband used language of “in addition to” or some other sensible variant indicating that he intended to add *Ketubah 2* amounts to *Ketubah 1*, rather than substitute, and give Wife the benefit of both *Ketubot*.

What is really interesting is that, today, and for many centuries already, our *Ketubot* do in fact include the language “in addition to”. This is not required by Jewish law. But it seems like it is invariably included in *Ketubot* (anyone know of exceptions?). So what gives?

What gives, is giving. Jews want the marriage ceremony to begin with *giving beyond* what is required. When we give more than what is required, we feel better – *and* so does the recipient. That is a profound message here, and it fully supports *Tithing the Tithe*. I do not know how to say it more clearly: The Congregation needs your hour a week. And you will feel immeasurably good if you give it. You will – try it for a month or two. If it doesn't pay substantial dividends, why, I'll give you your money back!

Several of us have already stepped up with some truly wonderful T3 undertakings. In terms of *Tithing the Tithe tachlit*:

- Rabbi Soloveichik has agreed to preside over a Shabbat meal at the Synagogue after *Friday Night Lights* about once a month. This will allow us to plan special Friday night dinners at the synagogue for various cohorts of our congregants. Planning is underway.
- As I mentioned on Paved Paradise during Kiddush this past Shabbat, our newest Trustee, Leah Albek, has announced her T3 undertaking as overseeing our Welcoming and Hospitality initiative. Part of their function will be to be and enlist greeters at services. Ours is such a beautiful nusach, or set of prayers and melodies. But for many, it is unfamiliar. Be a greeter. Meet new people. Show a warm, welcoming face to our services, Sanctuary, and community.
- We are heading towards “desperate” to keep up weekday afternoon minyan. What a marvelous T3 undertaking, even just once or twice a week. Any takers – er, I mean givers?

- Send in your T3 ideas.

The Great Word Challenge. Move over Wordle and all you other word games, both new and old. Here's a word challenge that can simultaneously help our community and inspire. When Chileans finally got rid of long-time Dictator General Augusto Pinochet in 1988, it was because of the concerted electoral push of many different political factions. The successful opposition was significantly buoyed by a simple, one-word slogan:

NO!

That was it, just ***NO!*** Given the political climate in Chile at the time, the slogan was both powerful and successful. (There is a movie about this, which I haven't seen. See [here](#). I did read Jared Diamond's account of the episode in his long, ponderous, repetitious, long, ponderous, and repetitious book *Upheaval*. I should have watched the movie instead.)

Now for our newest challenge: What is our one-word slogan going to be for returning, reviving, and rejuvenating, for consensus, community, and congregation, all in one word? One word. "Yes!" is disqualified, and the word need not be a single syllable. Two inflation-adjusted points for the top five entries.

The Great Slogan Challenge. Also, since a one-word contest is hard, the polls are also opening for a related challenge – same goals but with no word or syllable limitation. The only limitations are that it needs to be clever, and it needs to inspire. It can be a reuse another famous phrase or line. Or, way better, it can be your own creation. Steve Smith, who brought us The Mulligan Years, where are you? Two inflation-adjusted points for the top five entries here, too.

Shearith Israel Summer Songs on Spotify. Kudos and great thanks to Lia Solomon for masterfully, artistically taking our collectively generated summer song list and Spotifying it. The Shearith Israel Summer Song List 2022 can be found [HERE](#). Enjoy!

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom.

Louis Solomon, Parnas