

November 10, 2022

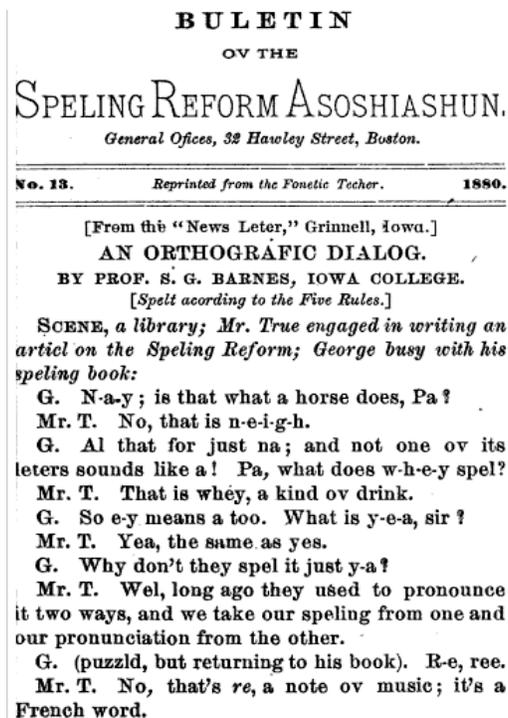
Dear Friends,

A Trifecta of Turbulent Trouble. The periodical *Science* just ran a piece on a surge in Covid-19 cases and a spike in respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV. The article came on the heels of multiple reports of the early onset of what is predicted to be a serious flu season.

Not to worry; this is not going to turn into a whack-of-the-week or malady-of-the-month email. I raise all three diseases together because reputable medical professionals are doing so. I also advert to the trifecta because, to my completely untutored eye, it seems that the precautions we have in place in our Sanctuary for Covid-19 should help – ok, at least not hurt – our response to these other seasonal respiratory viruses.

There are vaccines for Covid-19. So too for this year's flu strain. A vaccine for RSV is nearly ready for FDA review. We are all a lot more sensitive to how our coughing and sneezing may affect others, especially our immune compromised elders. So if you're sick, stay home. But if you're not, COME BACK and COME IN. COME ON!

Spelling Bea. I find it amusing that English tolerated so much variation in spelling until so recently. There is a lot written on the subject of orthography of the English language, even if we focus not on ancient or middle but just “modern” English. (For brief primers, see [here](#) and [here](#).) “Modern” spelling uniformity seems to start with the standardization in British English effected by Dr. Samuel Johnson in his famous dictionary (1755). For American English, modern spelling is also dated from a dictionary, in this case the standardization by Noah Webster (1828). Even after that, however, the language needed a lot of additional standardization. Look for example at the following, from 1880 (is it a joke?):



At Shearith Israel, you can witness first-hand the evolution over the past few centuries of American English spelling. Just study some of our old Board minutes and other notes, especially the non-printed, handwritten ones. Of course the subject matter or topics addressed in those memorializations are fascinating even in their banality. More to the point here, there is a real challenge to decipher the documents, in equal parts due to differences in penmanship and because of how words are spelled (Reverend Edinger is particularly astute at it). To take one example, can you read the excerpt below? Can you tell what it is, when it's from, how we would spell some of these same words today?

Moses Pacheco Jew and to their Nations
 Society or Friends a Piece of Land for a burial
 Place being in Dementsions as followeth, that
 is to say a Piece of Land thirty foot long,
 Butting South West upon the Highway that
 Leads Down from of Stone Mill towards Benj:
 Griffins Land and thirty foot upon of Line
 Butting Southeast upon John Eastons Land
 and thirty foot upon the Line Northwest
 Butting upon a Slip of Land Which of Said
 Nathaniel, Dinkins hath yet Remaining
 belivias this Piece of Land now sold and of
 Land Now belonging unto Benjamin Griffin
 and of Line Northeast Butting also upon of
 said Nathaniel Dinkins his Land to be in
 Length forty foot, which said Parcell of Land
 in Dementsions as aforesaid with the Fences
 thereto Pertaining. I have for my self my
 huss and Aprights sold unto of Said Jew their

The reason I find this exercise so amusing is that our religious tradition had spelling largely under control *thousands* of years earlier. Whatever the reason, a lot rode on getting the spelling right. The rules applicable to the correct spelling in a Torah scroll – 3,000+ years ago – is even more ancient than the 2,000+/- years we usually use for Talmudic redaction.

We can see the practical importance of standardized spellings in this week's Daf Yomi Talmud study, which includes pages 15b-16a of Tractate Nedarim. As we saw last week (have you recovered from that?), the Tractate Nedarim discusses oaths. There were serious implications to swearing back then, and so the Talmud placed a high premium on being thoughtful, and careful, about what we said and how we said it (oh how we all wish we were still so careful!). Equally important was how words comprising our utterances were spelled, even way back then. Pages 15b-16a, like several similar discussions on adjacent pages, find for example that an oath is made or not made depending on whether the utterance, and its attendant spelling, was the Hebrew equivalent of a "lo" vs a "la" (the case involves whether a wife went to her parents' home either before or after the next [major] holiday). In the next case treated on that page, the oath/no-oath distinction turns on whether a vowel "vav", pronounced "o", is or is not written in the word "to eat" [לאכל or לואכל].

Does anyone have a convincing explanation for what has to be considered profound cultural (intellectual?) differences leading to spelling standardization in such different epochs? My own guesses include the fact that so much of Hebrew/Aramaic language usage has legal implications, so you might expect to see greater care taken? Or, instead or in addition, the importance of correct spelling in Hebrew and I guess Aramaic may be that words in those languages have short root forms, typically three letters. As a result, slight differences in spelling of key or root letters will give you very different meanings? These don't seem to explain it all. Three points to be awarded for a convincing explanation.

Built Back Better.

Tayku. I commented last week that Tractate Nedarim is interesting in many ways, including that the acronym denoting an intellectual impasse, "tayku", isn't used in this Tractate. No one yet has explained why. Still, RavDoc, who always has something interesting to say, commented:

Tayku [or Tiku] is the modern Hebrew term for a tie. Incidentally there are those who question the etymology, claiming that it was around before its general acceptance as rashei tevot [an acronym]. It may have its origin in the Aramaic term Tikum, i.e., the question yet stands without a clear resolution.

Cornubookia? I wondered aloud last week if anyone else might be interested in sharing some book recommendations. Little did I know! To get the ball rolling, here are four:

- Gil Deutsch, a writer of great talent (I've read his stuff), mailed in the following:

As for the great books, Rabbi [Yidel] Rosenberg [who wrote a commentary on Tractate Nedarim and also popularized the Golem story] also happens to be the grandfather of the great Montreal writer Mordecai Richler. The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz is a classic book and pretty good film.

- Moishe Goldstein suggests, *To the End of the Land*, by David Grossman. He says of the book, "more Akeidah [referring to the story of the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham] than the original."
- Recently I read *To Hell and Back*, by Prof. Ian Kershaw. Last year I read Professor Kershaw's *Hitler, The Germans, and the Final Solution*, which was also excellent. *To Hell and Back* is not just a military history of the period of what Kershaw (among others) calls the Second Thirty Years War, 1914-45; the book offers lucid and compelling economic, cultural, political, scientific, and literary histories of the countries comprising Europe (both West and East) and Russia. Of necessity it's not as painstakingly detailed as any single volume would be on any of these topics alone. Yet you don't feel you are missing the detail. It's masterful.

I suppose we need a couple of agreed ground rules for our *Cornubookia*. First, it goes without saying – ok, I'll say it – that you have to have read any book you recommend. Second, any book

recommendation needs to come with *when* you read it (meaning recently or in the past) and, briefly, *why* you think it's either the greatest thing since sliced bread (assuming without proof that sliced bread is really great) or *why* you think the book should be avoided at nearly all costs.

This is a communal effort that will take shape with use. Think about a great book, and send it on in! While you're at it, surely we can do better than *Cornubookia*. Actually, I can't quickly think of anything much worse!

The Shearith Israel Autumn Song Book. Our current list, including last week's entries, is as follows:

- [*Do You Remember September*](#), by Earth Wind and Fire
- [*Autumn Leaves*](#), by Nat King Cole
- [*Wake Me Up When September Ends*](#), by Green Day
- [*Harvest Moon*](#), by Neil Young
- [*Leaves that Are Green*](#), by Simon and Garfunkel
- [*Try to Remember the Kind of September*](#), from *The Fantastiks*
- [*Autumn in New York*](#), this version sung by Frank Sinatra
- [*September Song*](#), also sung by Frank Sinatra
- [*Autumn Song*](#), by Van Morrison
- [*Will I See You in September*](#), by The Happenings; and
- [*We Fell In Love In October*](#), by Girl in Red
- [*If Ever I Would Leave You*](#), from *Camelot*
- [*You've Got a Friend*](#), by the incomparable Carole King (this version with James Taylor)
- [*Mother Earth's Routine*](#), by Tom Chapin
- [*Summer Song*](#), by Chad & Jeremy
- [*Autumn*](#), from Vivaldi's the *Four Seasons*
- [*Autumn*](#), by Tchaikovsky

- [Autumn](#), by Mendelssohn
- [Autumn](#), by Glazunov

This week brought more great entries:

Ruth Lazar, a great contributor to these emails, offers what I think is the theme music to the 1978 film,

- [Autumn Sonata](#). Beautiful.

Faith Fogelman suggests:

- [Pensée d'automne](#), or *Thoughts of Autumn*, by Jules Massenet. The piece is from 1887; all Faith would say was “before the R&R era.”

And what about one cool and one pretty entry,

- [Autumn Serenade](#), by John Coltrane, especially the cool sax solo!
- [Autumn Town Leaves](#), by Iron and Wine

Finally, does the following qualify – or is it just so great that it needs to go on our Autumn list irregardless (source of the word for one quick and easy point):

- [Maple Leaf Rag](#), by Scott Joplin

We are nearing the end of our collective effort for Autumn. Shouldn't we close the list by Thanksgiving, just two weeks away? I still feel there are more great “Autumn” songs. One more collective try?

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom. Here here! *Kaminando kon Buenos*.

Louis Solomon, Parnas