

November 17, 2022

Dear Friends,

No Time for Covid-19. The 1960s Canadian R&R group Guess Who, not to be confused with the British powerhouse R&R group The Who, had a mid-'60s hit, [No Time](#). It seems that we have *no time* this week for an extended discussion of Covid-19. I know so many of you will be disappointed. Instead, this regular topic is, this week, being preempted for a happy report.

Last Friday, the Congregation was invited to the baby naming of one-year old Eliza Anne Klaber and the *berit milah* of her newborn brother, Caleb Julius Klaber, children of our next-gen members Andrew and Jackie Klaber. (I think that makes Eliza and Caleb next-next gen members, or maybe next gen-gen members.) The congregational moment was lovely – and Covid safe. We are blessed to have new children and happy life-cycle events to celebrate.

True Circles of Life. The Who, not to be confused with the Guess Who, sang, among other greats, [The Kids Are Alright](#). In it, they

“don’t mind other guys dancin’ with my girl.”

Similarly, I don’t mind others in the community of writers “borrowing” thoughts and phrases from these pages. Like so many other things belonging to our Congregation, we don’t mind sharing. Sure it would have been nice to receive an attribution or a small donation to the Synagogue. But even if not, it’s all for the good causes of enlightenment and entertainment.

It was with that equanimity that I read a recent piece in *The Economist* titled “*Circles of life*”. Now all of us will remember that, around Rosh Hashana time just last month, we not only spoke about circles and circles of life but had a fun contest to find – and we did find – great songs about circles (see at least three of our emails, of [Oct. 13](#), [Oct. 20](#), and [Oct. 27, 2022](#)). The article in *The Economist* that so baldly used our stuff is about “*Ikigai*”, a Japanese word that roughly means “reason for living”. According to the article, the word and concept have been “repurposed to lend an aura of ancient wisdom – and exoticism – to banal ideas.” “*Ikigai*” ostensibly offers a four-sphere approach to life. Writers in many countries – but not Japan – are extolling “*Ikigai*” to cash in on purporting to reveal the “Japanese Secret to Long and Happy Life”, as one book by two Spaniards is subtitled. As did the author of the article, I too asked several Japanese clients and friends what was up. None had heard of the monumental concept of *Ikigai*, though one had heard of the hype made of it by others whose interests, let us say, are certainly as mercantile as they are philosophical. Having said that, you can’t beat success. Books on this mere 10-year old upstart have been translated into 63 languages!

Ok, so I have an idea. We too have a Book, sometimes called Old, sometimes called Good, that is way older than 10 years, has been translated into way more than 63 languages, and not only spells out our reasons for living but actually gives specific means to achieve meaning in our lives. The Book is our Torah. It has guided us for 200 generations. Our Book separates the

world into three spheres: Actions between each of us and the Almighty; actions between each of us and others and the material world; and the creation, building, and sustaining of community. What the hype of *Ikigai* is I will never know. In my day people flocked to Buddhism. Now it's *Ikigai*. The flavor of next year – well, that's to be determined by the exploits of commerce. OMG! The path to fulfillment and meaning is staring us in the face. The true circle of life is our Torah and our community.

Oath Openings. I can't skip a week discussing the Daf Yomi discussions in Tractate Nedarim; the issues, and the Talmud's treatment of them, are too interesting to miss. So please accept this brief reference.

In the past week we have been learning Chapter 2 of Tractate Nedarim. Recall that Chapter 1 was about what utterances justified the strictures and responsibilities of oaths, in all its glorious Talmudic permutations. Following a beautifully logical progression, Chapter 2 discusses when utterances that sound like oaths are in fact not oaths at all. The discussion is extraordinary because it is so modern (not post-modern), sensible, intelligent. The language itself is modern – the phrase used to describe being let out of an oath is: looking for an “opening”. Take hyperbole – the Talmud is clear that such statements, even in the form of oaths, do not need to be undone by a Rabbi or Beit Din. They don't even rise to the level of an oath in the first place. Or, take negotiations (I swear I won't sell this for less than x – oh yeah, well I swear I won't buy it for more than $1/2x$). Again no formal process of relinquishment of a solemn oath is necessary. In a legal sense, the statement is simply not an oath.

Kristallnacht Remembered. Roberto Salama questioned why last week I didn't mention that on November 9 the world commemorated 84 years since Germany's *Kristallnacht*, when Nazis-led gangs engaged in indiscriminate “torching, vandalizing, and ransacking of Jewish shops, businesses, and synagogues across Germany.” Both of the books I recommended last week spent considerable time on the event, which was horrible in itself and which historians compellingly argue should be seen as the beginning of the Nazis' systematic and successful program to annihilate Europe's Jewish population. But Roberto is right, a point made all the more poignant by the fact that KFC in Germany sent a mass push to its customers promoting a fried chicken and cheese combo, as follows:

“Commemorate Kristallnacht – treat yourself to more soft cheese and crispy chicken. Now at KFCheese!”

KFC in Germany apologized for what might have been a computer glitch. We need never to forget Kristallnacht.

Built Back Better.

Our Community Pack-a-Thon. This Thanksgiving morning will mark eight consecutive years that Shearith Israel will host an interfaith pack-a-thon of food for the hungry. For eight years we have been partnering with **The Jewish Center, West End Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.** We are deeply fortunate to have such able and willing partners again this year. It is not the most arduous of work, but it's not glamorous either, so that's good. What it is, is blessed, from start, with Rabbi Soloveichik's talk, to finish – and the finish time is by 11-1130a, giving everyone time to get home to listen to [Alice's Restaurant](#) (two points for naming the radio station that airs it now – and that aired it during the last, oh, 20 years).

Our pack-a-thon will be better with you there. Please join us. We'll be packing 1,800 ample packages of food. And even if you've got other plans, support the cause; we're aiming to raise \$18,000. [Sign up here.](#) And if you come with the kids, they'll have a great perch for viewing the parade, will be treated to hot chocolate, and can partake in *hesed* as well. The pick-me-up goes deep and lasts longer than anything else you might do on Thanksgiving. Really.

Spelling and Misspellings. Daniel Chazin rightly corrected my spelling of לאכול in last week's discussion of why spelling was so important in early Hebrew/Aramaic but so much less so in English. It's more than a little ironic that my treatment of the variance in spellings had a variant spelling. Impressively, Daniel also guessed that the writing I pictured in the email was a land deed – and then he actually knew what and when it was from, when I sent him the whole document.

Cornubookia. For two solid, inflation-adjusted points, name the classic movie from which the following sentence (in words or substance) comes:

"Books, what are books, oh books, we have books"

Back to business. Last week we kicked off our sharing of great and awful books. Entries last week were excellent (well, my suggestions were at least good – it got at least Beth to read one of them). We still don't have an alternative to "cornubookia", a name that a couple of congregants actually liked. There is indeed no accounting for taste. Please, someone, come up with a better title.

Like last week, this week's suggestions are great:

- Barbara Reiss recommends *The Rise of David Levinsky* by Abraham Cahan. Barbara explains that this "semi-autobiographical account that mirrored Cahan's own experiences of immigration describes a Jewish immigrant's process of Americanization." She continues:

What amazed me was how this book, published in 1917 (and written in English by an immigrant who only arrived on these shores and began to learn English at the age of 22!) is so fresh, both in substance and in style.

- Henry Salzman, who has sent in interesting missives on writings before ([see email of 12/23/21](#)), offers another semi-autobiographical novel, which he wrote, titled *OY, OY, OY, The Teacher Is a Goy*. It's a "fictional treatment of classroom teaching of English at a Satmar yeshiva in Brooklyn in 1952-53". I'm game to read it (you can buy it on Amazon). The book was edited by editor Adam Bellow, son of Jewish American Nobel Laureate Saul Bellow. Henry wants to rename the "autobiographical novel" a "memel", "thus adding a word to our language that even Samuel Johnson was incapable of imagining!" I'm not sure the word is going to catch on. As to whether Henry is permitted to suggest his own writing, let us remember the very first line of the famous saying by Hillel in Pirke Avot 1:14:

הוא הִיה אומר, אם אין אני לי, מי לי. וכשאני לעצמי, מה אני. ואם לא עכשיו, אימתי

(14) He [Rabbi Hillel] used to say: If I am not for me, who will be for me? And when I am for myself alone, what am I? And if not now, when?

Autumn Song Book – Penultimate List. Our list is getting so wonderfully long that I won't repeat it this week but will next week. For new entries, Aron Korenblitt offers two beautiful Israeli songs:

- [צביקה פיק ערב סתיו יפה](#) (a "Beautiful Autumn Evening"), by Svika Pick
- [שיר סתיו - נעמי שמר](#) ("Autumn Song"), by Naomi Shemer

Robert Starkand suggests:

- Joe Williams' [September in the Rain](#)

These nicely supplement our really interesting list. One more week, and we will circulate our definitive Autumn List, in full, so that we can all listen to it on Thanksgiving. Final suggestions please.

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

Louis Solomon, Parnas