

December 22, 2022

Dear friends,

Fuller Than Full. Positivity rates in NYC for Covid-19 infections continue to climb. But so, it seems, does our Shabbat attendance. Last Shabbat we celebrated the bat mitzvah of Ruth Sherizen, one of our Congregation's native children. Mazal tov to Ruth's parents, Congregational pillars Jodie and Ari Sherizen, as well as to Ruth's brother Abe. Ok, we expected a wonderful talk by Rabbi Soloveichik. It was Ruth's talk, however, that was spit-fire! Kiddush luncheon downstairs topped off a truly happy *simha* that our Congregation was privileged to be a part of.

In terms of our health-related protocols and precautions, they will remain the same. We are now being treated to about as many articles urging continuing vaccination/boosters as are cynically suggesting that we are vaxxing for the wrong disease; these articles say that the Covid-19 vaccinations still being used are not going to help very much with, how shall we call it, Covid-22 or Covid-23. The science seems to indicate that the cynicism is misplaced when it comes to preventing or reducing death and serious disease. Go [here](#) to stay up to date on what the health authorities consider "up to date" with the vaccines for your specific age or health circumstances.

Masking Sensibly Revisited. The science also appears to be persuasively solid that just about the best protection is being outdoors and, if indoors, masking. It seems to me that the role and promise of masking have been transformed in a fundamental way since the beginning of the pandemic. We are all smarter now and understand, based on the science, that wearing a mask best protects the wearer and not others. Wasn't this always commonsensically obvious even when the hype was to the contrary? Anyway, it is clearer now, and with that clarity the personal choice to mask and stay socially distant is easy to accommodate indoors, even when our capacious, air-purified, open-windowed Sanctuary is full.

Do those protections work when we are not just full but fuller than full, as we were this past Shabbat? They sure do, since the fuller than full was not of more people but more joy and community and unity – which I hope are contagious but in a different way.

A Nedarim Two-fer. I can't pass up sharing two of the gems in this week's Daf Yomi cycle, where we are holding in Tractate Nedarim. Both relate to how we used language 2,000 years ago and how people then and now modify their speech and behavior once they know how the law will treat one phraseology vs another.

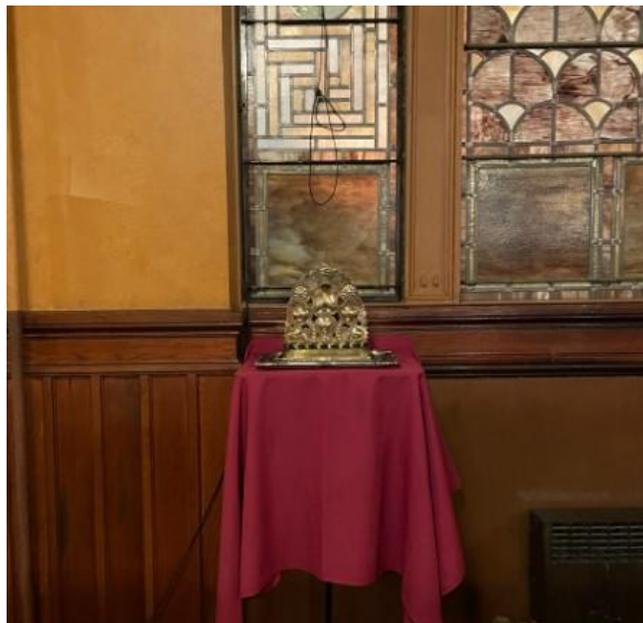
First, in Tractate Nedarim page 56a, there is a Mishna asking what meaning is conveyed when one vows not to enter a house. Does the reference to "house" include both the bottom floor, or the house proper, as well as the upper floor? The Talmudic discussion addresses all the logical permutations (it's a simple 2x2 matrix: lower portion/upper portion/yes/no). The fun part is to consider what happens if there is no upper floor, but, for example, just a staircase in the lower

portion going to the second floor, just for show? At last a reason to link to *Fiddler on the Roof* and its great song, [If I Were A Rich Man](#), singing of a staircase “leading nowhere just for show”. Who knew that the brilliant lyricist, Sheldon Harnick, was also a Talmudist (perhaps it was just Jewish osmosis).

Second, even more interesting word meanings are on display on Nedarim Tractate pages 60a/b. Here we begin Chapter 8 of the Tractate, and the Mishna and subsequent discussion ask what we mean when we vow, for example, not to drink wine “today” (daytime, all day, a 24-hour cycle?), “this week”, “this month”, or “this year”. Because of the way these phrases are commonly used, the starting and ending points differ virtually in each case (so “this week” would include the last day of the week, but “this month” would not include the last day of the month when that last day is Rosh Hodesh of the next month). I have long been bemused at how inefficient English is when using what are called deictic modifiers – meaning a word whose meaning derives in large measure from the context. How many (maddening) times do you have to ask for clarification when someone uses “next” as in “next week”. On a Saturday, does “next week” refer to (a) the days in the week beginning on the day after the Saturday or (b) the days in the week beginning on the day eight days after the Saturday. Don’t tell me you aren’t confused by that, basically all the time. [Here](#) is a short piece on the problem. The discussion in the Talmud is fascinating since it demonstrates that the problem is not limited to English. Discussions of time are often tricky, and it is evident that in 2,000 years we haven’t figured out a highly efficient way of making ourselves clear concerning that dimension.

Built Back Better.

Among the Most Wonderful Time(s) of the Year. The [Andy Williams classic](#) doesn’t qualify “most wonderful” with my “among”. But I’m a little more uncertain. But it is truly a special time. Just look at our nearly 300-year old hanukkiyah, now back along the southern wall of our Sanctuary, apparently in keeping with the general Sephardic and our own tradition:



Or walk over to the Plaza Hotel and see “The World’s Largest Menorah”:



Eighth Night Brilliance. Barbara Reiss makes a wonderful suggestion: On the eighth night of Hanukkah this year (“next” Sunday night), snap a photo of your or someone else’s hanukkiah with all candles burning and send it in. We can share them next week.

Parasha Poetry. We are doing well in sharing haiku on the weekly Torah parasha. People are amazingly clever. And the cleverness doesn’t stop. Cantor Jay Harwitt is now in for keeps. Here is one from him for this week, Parashat Miketz:

*Seven every time?
Wise men couldn’t solve the dream;
Joseph got it right.*

And here is another splendid one from Susan Vorhand on the same parasha:

*Fat cows, skinny cows
Foretell a famine to come
Plot builds. . . Wait for it*

Cornubookia. Last week I laid out a bunch of better names than “cornubookia”. But we don’t have a clear winner, so please vote or vote again. Maybe we should use all of them; they are all great. The choices are:

Good Odds from the Bookies

Book-A-Raba

BiblioFile

So Many Books. . .

Between the Pages

BookShelf

Coming of Page

Novel Novels & More

Hooked on Books

One for the Books

Another Book Choice. Without detracting from the importance of continuing to dither over a new name to replace the ugly “cornubookia”, I want to recommend a book I just finished, Amos Oz’s *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. A piece in *New Yorker*, quoted on the book jacket, says that it “circles around the rise of a state [Israel], the tragic destiny of a mother, a boy’s creation of a new self”. That seems 1% complete. In 2007 an Israeli organization named it one of the ten most important books since the creation of the State of Israel. I found it among the saddest, sobering, but funniest and thoughtful books, all in one. That’s no mean feat (there is some repetition; my guess is that he wrote the chapters at different times). And, apropos of nothing, the chapter on Menachem Begin quotes the fact that the slogan, “drain the swamp”, was old, tired, and hackneyed over 70 years ago. Just sayin’.

Arc of a Covenant Comes Around Again. A few weeks ago Sergio Wolkovisky brought to our attention the great book, *Arc of a Covenant*, by Professor Walter Russell Mead. Sarah Meira Rosenberg reports that Professor Mead is one of her brother's, the multi-talented, Yair Rosenberg’s mentors. Here is a [stimulating conversation](#) between brother and Professor.

Bless us all. Shabbat shalom. Here! *Kaminando kon Buenos*. Hanukkah alegre!

Louis Solomon, Parnas