

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Covid-19 Update:

Negócios Como Sempre
(business as usual)



If the above is not immediately understandable to you, click [here](#).

“What Will Become of the Torah?” Surely this question is an unfortunate overstatement by some post-modern fear monger worried about some trivial issue of our day. Wrong in every respect. The question was posed, rhetorically, nearly two millennia ago by the great Sage R’ Yose. It is recorded on page 50a of Tractate Nazir, which the global community of Daf Yomi learners is studying this week and which I had the privilege to learn with our son this past Shabbat. What could have gotten R’ Yose so exercised?

I will recount the story. You will then see its profound importance for us today. The Talmud is discussing a highly abstruse, nuanced issue: for what types of ritual impurity is a *nazir* required to break his or her *nezirut* and get a haircut. The great Sage R’ Yehudah announced that the students of R’ Meir (R’ Meir having just died), were not to be permitted in the Study Hall since, according to R’ Yehudah, they did not enter the Hall for the purpose of learning Torah but rather to vex R’ Yehudah. One such student, Sumchos, went anyway and gave an answer at odds with what R’ Yehudah had said. R’ Yehudah again tried to quiet the debate, actually getting angry or at least feigning anger. At that point R’ Yose asked the immortal question:

*“Shall they say, Meir died, Yehudah became angry, and Yose [i.e., himself] remained silent?
What will become of the Torah?”*

R’ Yose then entered the substantive debate, giving Sumchos’s opinion careful consideration.

We search all over for stories of inspiration – yet they are right here, in the Daf Yomi, staring us in the face. Permitting respectful debate and answering with substance not vitriol or silencing is not some new-fangled response to current efforts to shut down those who disagree with us. Silencing is wrong, even cowardly. It is the best recipe our Sages could think of to gut our own living Torah.

One can find even more ancient support for tolerant and respectful debate. In this week’s parasha, Vayakel-Pikude-HaHodesh, we read about how Moshe reacted to the Jewish People’s sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe brought the people together --and talked and taught. Our most senior Kohen – Bentsi Cohen – our Kohen Gadol, if you will, writes in a marvelous analysis of the parasha (which you should press him to share with you):

“Parashat Vayakhel stands as . . . convincing proof of the power of dialogue between two or three parties who disagree on an issue.”

Perfectly said. No argument.

Built Back Better.

When Two Yesses Make a No - Revisited. As I said in my email two weeks ago, even given Sydney Morgenbesser’s answer to Twentieth Century philosophical giant J.L. Austin -- that two yesses do in fact sometimes make a no (“yeah yeah”) -- I still thought it was hard to capture that thought in a song. Robert Katz (who with his wife and son attended our Magevet program and were troopers to walk so far in the cold) offers the Beatles, [*She Loves You*](#) (“yeah yeah”). I assume Robert thinks the “yeah yeah yeah” shows insincerity. I’m not sure. One point. For two points, name a song or lyrics where, clearly, two yesses or affirmative statements indicate a no or negative.

Book Shelf – Skippers and Grippers. I concede that the descriptors, “skippers” and “grippers” are good but not great to distinguish between books that it’s ok to skip and those that are just so good that you need to grip them tightly and read and maybe even re-read them. I recently read one of each:

Skipper. *The Entrepreneurs: The Relentless Quest for Value*, by Derek Lidow. I am surprised that *The Economist* recommended this 2022 effort. The author is a theoretical physicist writing on the history of economic and financial entrepreneurialism. Would we be running to read an economic historian’s treatment of topics in theoretical physics? I’m being unfair; Dr. Lidow teaches entrepreneurialism at Princeton. Still, I found that the history he discusses that pre-dates standard means of historical recordation, like writing, is pretty speculative and somewhat biased (meaning stated in a way to prove his point). And the history he discusses since the time we have had solid means of recording events seems rehashed. Later chapters seem to morph into the history of corporations, innovation, and marketing/sales - distinctly *not* what the author defines as entrepreneurial activity. The author admits that his definition of an entrepreneur embraces one *billion* working adults alive today. Isn’t that just about everyone other than lawyers? In the end, the book reduces to a well-written tour through the author’s favorite anecdotes (btw, some of the anecdotes are interesting). The I-strain quotient of the writing is also higher than it should be.

Gripper. I read again the 1989 novel *The Remains of the Day*, by Kazuo Ishiguro. The author won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2017. I remembered the book as even sadder the first time. The world seen through the eyes of a butler (Stevens) of a famous English estate (Darlington Hall) is deeply human. Duty and dignity are studied along with how emotions work on the psyche as well as the role and even the meaning of memory given our frail and forgetful brains. No sex, no lies (save for the self-deluding ones), no videotapes. No violence, and no drugs. It is simply, compellingly, and beautifully written.

Sableian Addenda. You know David Sable as a marketing/PR/crisis management guru. Or you know him as a passionate devotee of our Friday evening service (and the *Friday Night Lights* talk

that follows [don't miss this week's season finale!]). Or you know him as a trusted Trustee of this great institution. You should also know him as one of my most intelligent commenters. Since he had two marvelous addenda to my email of last week, I dedicate this section to him:

- Commenting on my reluctance to add holiday or Christmas songs to our Winter Songbook, David observed that “many of the good Christmas songs were written and sung by Jews. Neither help nor hurts, just an important expression of their desire to be American. The songs are really more ‘seasonal’ than religious. And I love singing them, too. Good cheer.” I can't improve on that sentiment. It is spot on, and we will keep the “seasonal” songs that have been suggested in our final Winter Songbook.
- On my reference to the song from the musical *Hair* about Manchester, England, David relates that his “late father-in-law was a Mancunian” (two points to David for knowing and using the word for someone from Manchester). David continues that Chaim Weitzman once asked his father-in-law, when he was a teenager at a Zionist Hachshara [where people get ready to make Aliya] in the UK “where are you from young man”; he replied “Manchester”. Weitzman said “Young man...never forget that Manchester is a place to come from not to go to”. David says: “the rest is history” as his father-in-law, Yehuda Avner, went on to become Israel's Ambassador to Britain. This is SUCH a great story – it reminds me too of the comment that Dr. Johnson said to Boswell. Two points for sending in the quote.

Our Winter Song List Finale. Our “last call” prompted several more great suggestions:

- Our nextgen editor, SM Rosenberg, “finally remembered” [Once Upon A December](#), from *Anastasia*. I remind us of the fact that SMR remembered the song because, well, it's ok to use the Internet to confirm but not to find. Silly rule, for sure – ignore it at will.
- Jim Nuzzo suggests Vivaldi's [Winter](#) from *The Four Seasons* (short and delightful excerpt). Odd that no one has suggested it before. Ah where are the David Vorchheimers of yesteryear.
- Bob Rifkind, my mentor in so many important ways, suggests Tom Lehrer's [Hanukah in Santa Monica](#). It's a great hoot of a song.
- I don't really get why Billy Joel's [Vienna](#) would make it on any list of Winter songs. But since I love the song, and since Rebecca Frankel, who is a mathematician and so must know, made the suggestion, on the list it goes.
- Awakened from his Winter slumber, Michael Schulder suggests the Phil Spector/Ronettes version of [Sleigh Ride](#). I said I thought it was odd that Michael had been silent (I now know he was away on vaca in stunning Jackson Hole, Wyoming - look at his stunning photo below). Now I think it's odd that Michael suggests a song by a convicted murderer. Odd, that's all. No mixing life and art, eh?

Final list next week!



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

Louis Solomon, Parnas