

March 2, 2023

Dear Shearith Israel family,

 **Covid-19 Update.** Gabriella Styler's attendance at Shabbat services won her not only a gold medal but our undying admiration as well. She comes with extraordinary regularity, she prays, and she doesn't talk. She, along with many others who write in, expressed appreciation for the Covid-19 updates as well as for the efforts we continue to make to keep people apprised of what we are doing to keep all of us safe. And if just one fellow congregant (especially a regular attendee) gains peace of mind from these updates, are they not worth it?

Gabriella also cleverly suggests what to me is the winning sign/icon to convey that we remain attentive to changes in positivity rates, adamant that we provide a safe and healthy space to congregants and guests, while at the same time mindful of our goal to maintain an active house of worship. Explaining the genesis of Gabriella's genius gesture:

What came to me . . . were those wonderful words in the Torah, i.e., "remember the Shabbat Day/Observe and keep the Shabbat Day."

The icon that came to Gabriella's mind is:



The only other submission coming close to this wit is from Laury Frieber, who suggests we simply translate "business as usual" into Portuguese, or:

negócios como sempre

I like it, and if we did that it would partially make up for not using Portuguese for basically anything else. Still the icon, well, seems iconic. You all decide. We can use both.

Speaking of Portuguese. A few weeks ago, when I enumerated Salomon Vaz Dias' preferred Portuguese greetings, I solicited help with the translations. Thank you to Salomon for supplying them. I would have left them to our collective imagination were it not for the last of them:

- We wish each other *Boas Entradas de Shabbath*, and the reply is *Digo Mesmo*. (We wish you a good entry of the Shabbat, and the reply is, "I say the same")
- On Yom Tob we say *Boas Festas* replied with *Melhoradas Festas*. (Joyous Holiday, reply: "an improved Holiday").

Salomon adds a last, best, and final translation, which says it all:

- On the eve of the 9th of Ab we say *Morir Havemos*. (We shall all die.)

Taam K'ikar. Our progress through Tractate Nazir, as part of the global community's Daf Yomi learning cycle, takes us into the high 30s (pages that is, though in New York, Fahrenheit too, melting the tiny snowfall of Tuesday). In these pages we meet one of the many important legal principles underpinning Jewish jurisprudence. It is discussed in many places in the Talmud. *Taam k'ikar*, or "the flavor is equivalent or tantamount to the substance", is the short-hand phrase used to describe a class of laws where an admixture of a small amount of one substance so infuses itself into the whole that the entire mixture becomes like the minority substance. The discussion begins with an analysis of whether a *nazir* can eat bread (permissible) soaked in wine (impermissible for the nazir). The answer is no; the small bit of impermissible fare takes over the whole. As another example, vegetables cooked along with non-kosher meat themselves become non-kosher.

Even in these two examples just recited there are nuances; wine is not impermissible to everyone, just the nazir, whereas the non-kosher meat is impermissible to every Jew. Yet the same principle is often applied to each. A related concept can also be seen at work: Even when *all* the ingredients are kosher or permitted, mixing them may give way to an impermissible assemblage. This one seems strange, yet it is prevalent in our laws. It is one of the great puzzles recognized by our Sages based on the Torah. Milk and meat are both permitted foods. Yet when you mix them together, the entire result is impermissible. So too when mixing types of food (*kilei hakerem*), or types of animals performing work, or types of fabrics (e.g., linen and wool, or *shaatnez*).

The Talmud's discussion is intrinsically interesting, at least to me. In addition, like other principles of Jewish jurisprudence, there is more than a small dollop of philosophy, morality, and positive psychology on display. What is being taught when a tiny amount of "bad" mixes with a large amount of "good" and has the effect of rendering the entire admixture unfit? In at least some cases, [one bad apple](#) does seem to spoil the whole bunch, girl. And what do we make of the rule that in some cases two permissible objects, when mixed, make a mess of the whole lot? Some time ago I quoted Sydney Morgenbesser's brilliant quip on this topic, where he definitively showed that two positives do sometimes make a negative ("yeah yeah") ([12/22/22](#)). But who has a *song* to capture the point? Two points.

Nazirite Postscript. Thank you to Steve Smith for sending me the pdf of page 33b of Tractate Nazir, which, as I said, literally has no Talmudic text on it.

Perek **V**
Daf **33** Amud **b**

This *amud* has no Gemara text, as in the classic Vilna layout it is entirely filled with the commentary of *Tosafot*.

No one has identified a shorter two-page "blat", so I'm thinking our speculation may be right that pages 33a/b are the shortest in the Talmud of *Talmudic* texts.

As a postscript to last week's musings on whether the Talmud's emphasis on words is akin to *imitateo Dei* (imitating the Almighty, who created the world with words), Dr. Jim Herstoff, one of our Touro Synagogue Affiliates, is worried about the analogy. Jim is "reminded of the episode in the original Star Trek series where two crew members developed the ability to absorb information quickly and read at superspeed (taking in all those words) and eventually became, or felt that they had become, god-like", causing trouble. Jim has a point; and his draw from the great TV series, simply sublime.

The Shearith Israel Winter Songbook. We are back in business! Last week's reminder generated some great suggestions. Our former list included:

- [*California Dreamin'*](#), of course, The Mamas and the Papas
- [*Wintertime Love*](#), by The Doors
- [*Here Comes the Sun*](#), by the Beatles
- [*Baby It's Cold Outside*](#), here sung by Dean Martin
- [*It Happened In Sun Valley*](#), Glenn Miller Orchestra, for the movie *Sun Valley Serenade*. Faith reports that one of the stars of the movie was Sonja Henie, the Norwegian ice skater
- [*I am a Rock*](#), by Simon and Garfunkel, with its overall mood and specific alliteration of "deep and dark December"
- [*Sunshine Makes Me Happy*](#), by John Denver
- [*Season Suite: Winter*](#) (Official Audio), by John Denver
- [*Hazy Shade of Winter*](#), by Simon & Garfunkel
- [*I've Got My Love To Keep Me Warm*](#), by Billie Holiday & Her Orchestra (Verve Records 1955)
- [*The Frozen House*](#) from "Dr Zhivago"

New arrivals include really great ones:

- Laury Frieber and Lynnette Gruenhut independently suggest [*Let It Go*](#), from *Frozen*;
- Nextgen Editor SM Rosenberg recommends [*Shoveling*](#), by Tom Chapin ("it's a fun little ditty about a father and son attempting to shovel their snow without getting distracted");
- Jim Nuzzo, whom we are delighted to hear from again, suggests *Winter Into Spring*, by George Winston. [Here](#) is the whole album;
- Faith Fogelman suggests [*Snow*](#), by Irving Berlin from *White Christmas*. Because of our fundamental faith in Faith, the judges have permitted the song, though it comes perilously close to being a holiday song;
- Dr. Zachary Gorden recommends one we already had but two other great ones; one, [*Winter Time*](#), by The Steve Miller Band; and
- [*Winterzeit I & II*](#), from *Album for the Young*, by Robert Schumann. Heady stuff, but beautiful.

One or two more weeks, and we will have our Winter list complete. More, please.

A New Poetry Challenge – If/Then. Parasha poetry seems to have befuddled virtually everyone but our two West Coast talents, Dr. Susan Vorhand and Cantor Jay Harwitt. We are therefore announcing a new challenge, one that our AI poetry programs may not yet be able to outdo us in producing. Take a famous or at least beautiful or powerful line of poetry. Use it as the “if.” Then, as the “then,” modernize the line in a way that’s, well, either funny or noteworthy in some fashion.

My entry for this week, to show you how it’s done, is from *Locksley Hall*, by the Nineteenth Century, Victorian-era giant, writer and poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson. Tennyson penned the glorious, 15-syllable line, which we have quoted before (about two years ago, [on 3/25/21](#))

In the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.

My offering for today, as an homage to my wife, is that

**If, in the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love;
Then, in the Spring a baseball junkie turns -- to pitchers and catchers.**

Give it a go. And in any case, even with snow in Manhattan, Spring training is here! Beth, dear, will I [see you in September](#), or lose you to a summer love?

Books Redux. I was sitting in court last Thursday checking messages at a break. I saw David Sable’s one-liner commenting on Alan Zwiebel’s suggestion that we read *Let There Be Light: The Real Story of Her Creation*, by Liana Finck, a graphic retelling of the Book of Genesis starring a female God. Said David:

Wait! Isn't God female?

I burst out laughing!

I just finished *The Hare with the Amber Eyes*, by Edmund de Waal. People are talking about it, even though the memoir was published in 2010, and the Jewish Museum’s exhibition concerning the book and the Japanese “netsuke” figurines (miniature wooden or ivory carved sculptures) that are at the center of the book was in 2021. It’s worth a read. It is not a typical Holocaust memoir (is there such a thing?) It is nicely if a bit preciously written. If you read it, I do not think you will again look at Vienna in quite the same way, so beware.

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

Louis Solomon, Parnas