

April 27, 2023

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Covid-19 Update:

New entries have come in for our “business as usual” challenge. Laury Frieber wants to remember our Ashkenazi heritage. That is surely a part of the illustrious history of our Congregation. So Laury offers, in Yiddish,

געשעפט ווי געוויינטלעך

Carla Schein, for whom it is equally, and equally legitimately, important to remember our Dutch beginnings, offers:

normale gang van zaken

Carla wonders if Leah Albek, our newest Trustee and mainstay of our care and hospitality efforts, concurs with the Dutch.

Finally, Rebecca Frankel offers “business as usual” in Hebrew:

עסקים כרגיל

Along with our prior Portuguese, Spanish, and Russian, these are starting to make a respectable, *if still short*, list:

normale gang van zaken (Dutch)
עסקים כרגיל (Hebrew)
Negócios Como Sempre (Portuguese)
бизнес как нормально (Russian)
Negocios Como Siempre (Spanish)
געשעפט ווי געוויינטלעך (Yiddish)



At least two of our physicians report that their hospital systems are no longer requiring Covid-19 testing or masking unless patients are symptomatic. At the same time, there are still some congregants and visitors who are more comfortable staying masked in our Sanctuary. Please feel free to continue to join us, avec (or sans) masks. As we head toward the warmer season, we are holding Shabbat morning Kiddush outdoors on Paved Paradise. It was lovely there this past Shabbat. People lingered and talked. The kids ran around, wonderfully wild. Come and

join us. Experience the paradise of Shabbat and the paradise of our outdoor pavilion. Paradise Squared.

Yom Cubed. If paradise was squared last Shabbat, then time itself, or The Day, has been cubed this week.

- Monday night/Tuesday we all observed **Yom** Hazikaron, Israel's Memorial Day commemorating those who fell in the defense of the State of Israel. We at Shearith Israel, like so many other Congregations, said special prayers.
- Tuesday night/Wednesday we all observed **Yom** Haatzmaut, Israel Independence Day. I have only glimpsed the depths of the debate within Jewish circles over *what* we are celebrating on this day. But I hope that there is no dispute on *whether* to celebrate something truly momentous on this singularly joyous day.

Inspired by Rabbi Soloveichik's marvelous lecture last week, I just reread Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Don't succumb to the easy labels and broadsides leveled by others against the book; whatever the debate over it, the book is a serious effort to be a part of the corpus of research and writing on the Holocaust. It is essential reading.

In her chapter on The Final Solution, Arendt appears to be quoting Himmler that, in carrying out orderly and meticulously systematic murder of nearly six million Jews, "What stuck in the minds of these men who had become murderers was simply the notion of being unique". They thought of themselves as being part of

a great task that occurs once in two thousand years

Indeed. I don't think we could say it better – I certainly can't. In the State of Israel today, we as Jews must see ourselves as part of a great task that occurs once in two thousand years. I find that comparing the horrors of the Holocaust to any other tragedy is of limited value. But comparing the horrors of the Holocaust in the negative to the triumph of the modern State of Israel in the positive gives me at least a sense of scope and scale.

- In some ways, the third yom of our trifacta is as worthy of contemplation as the first two. My third yom is the **Bo BaYom**, as laid out in detail on two of the pages of Tractate Sotah that the worldwide Daf Yomi learning cycle is studying this week (pages 27 and 29).

What is the **Bo BaYom**, which can be translated as *[it happened] on that day?* I mentioned this in another context a couple of years ago (see my [email of 5/20/21](#)). Nonetheless, Tractate Sotah's extensive treatment, and our current climate (and I don't mean weather), make it a fitting topic to reprise.

The **Bo BaYom** refers to a large set of laws, debates, and Halachik discussions that occurred on the first day (or set of days?) after Rabban Gamliel was removed as Head of the Academy in Yavneh. He was removed over a clash of personalities with Rebbi Yehoshua. The clash can also

be described as different styles of governance over the nascent institution of rabbinic thought and teaching that arose just after the destruction of the Second Temple in ~70 C.E., at a pivotal time in the development of post-Temple Jewish law and study.

What sent things off the rails was a perception that Rabban Gamliel did not treat Rabbi Yehoshua respectfully, at one point requiring to him to stand to be interrogated on a matter of law. This went too far, and Rabban Gamliel was replaced (it turned out temporarily). In place of Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria was appointed Nasi or Head of the Academy.

It was on that day – *Bo BaYom* – that many new laws and halachik debates took place. The particulars don't matter as much as the sheer quantity as well as quality (though one observation I do have is that R' Akiva, himself sometimes described as approaching Moshe Rabenu in greatness of learning, loses many an argument, a lot of the time – we are such an interesting lot).

What is so compelling about the *Bo Bayom*, imho, is that the day/time/period is characterized by three phenomena: First, as Tractate *Berachot* 28a describes, legal debates that had never been resolved were *amicably* settled. Second, other laws were clarified, again through the building of unity and consensus. Third, clearly the super-normal event of the day was that the usual limitation of entry into the Beit Midrash was removed *on that day*. There was a feeling that Rabban Gamliel's entry requirements were overly strict and limited people from learning Torah. The Talmud teaches that *on that day* enough new students entered the Beit Midrash to occupy 400 benches (the alternative calculation given in the Talmud is 700 benches). All this occurred "*on that day*". And the Talmud is telling us that it all stemmed from the mutual respect and, dare I use the word, inclusion that occurred *on that day*.

Just last week, Barbara Reiss sent in a prominently displayed sign gaining traction in Israel:

לדבר מותר. לשנא אסור. כולנו אחים.

To speak is permitted. To hate is forbidden. We are all brothers & sisters.

That is the profound teaching of the *Bo BaYom* – and indeed of all of our Yoms in our Yom Cubed observances this week.

Built Back Better.

Quote/Unquote. Ok so now we have started to click – though I still think there are endless fun quotes still to challenge us.

- First, I asked who among Yogi Berra, Charles Darwin, Thomas Mann, and Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveichik said:

the universe is not the result of chance

A lot of us thought the right answer was Einstein. That Einstein wasn't one of the choices did not stop a lot of people from picking it anyway. Einstein is said to have said:

G-d does not play dice with the universe

My challenge, a bit different, was said by Darwin. As Asher Reimer said, that is an amazing quote given what modernity has turned Darwin into.

- Second, as to Faith Fogelman's question, which of Candice Bergen, Marilyn Monroe, Carl Rogers, or Benjamin Spock said:

It takes a long time to become a person. Longer than they tell you.

The right answer is Candice Bergen. Exactly no one got it right, though here again a number of people offered clever suggestions about other, similar quotes.

- Third, as to Faith's other great question, which of Aristotle, Niels Bohr, Carl Jung, or Jacqueline Kennedy said:

Life can only be understood backward, but it must be lived forward.

The right answer is Soren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaardian Kudos to Steve Smith for not letting me confuse you with four wrong choices!

- Several others sent in favorite quotes. Dr. Meyer Solny sent in the equivalent of a book of them. I can't give you anywhere near all of them, both because we don't have enough space (even in an email with no apparent space limit) and because I don't know the provenance of all of them myself (you don't think Meyer actually gave me the answers, do you?)

So here are two:

First, Meyer quotes:

A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on.

Choose among:

- a. Winston Churchill
- b. Francis Crick
- c. Freeman Dyson
- d. Martin Gilbert

Second, Meyer quotes:

Quantity has a quality all its own

I really don't know who said this, but it's a great quote. Come up with the right answer or at least a good guess for two points. We can then beg Meyer to tell us.

Counting Towards Lag La'Omer. In the beautiful ritual of Counting the Omer from Pesah to Shabuot, we and the rest of the Jewish world count each day starting with one and ending with 49. I have another, silent, internal counting going on: Counting *Down* to Lag La'Omer, when these emails will once again be enhanced or at least enlarged with song. Today is Day Minus 12 to Lag La'Omer.

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



Louis Solomon, Parnas