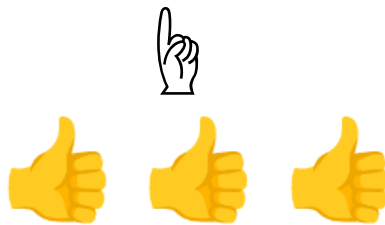


May 25, 2023

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Covid-19 Update. A friendly message to those who want to drop this part of the email: It is true that the health emergency has been declared over. Yet this illness remains with us. Indeed, two of our staff members tested positive last week. It is good that we still have the protocols in place for what to do when that happens.

All of us assess our own health risks and make decisions accordingly. We know that some of our Congregants have vulnerabilities that lead them to prefer avoiding crowds and wearing masks. We continue to try to make all Congregants feel as comfortable as possible, including by maintaining in our Sanctuary small but suitable masked-only sections and holding kiddushim outdoors when the weather is agreeable. In the end, we want everyone to return – or at least to feel comfortable that they can.



“Business as usual” finale. As final entries in our combined effort to phrase “business as usual” in other languages, our last two entries are fully worthy of the great list they join. First, Laura Fleishmann, asking whether dead languages are allowed, offers *solito negotium* in Latin. Second, Steve Smith suggests the corporate-speak of *BAU*. It’s SO obvious, but I have to say, in my world I don’t see that much.

Our final list is therefore as follows:

- **COVID? Fugedaboutit! (Brooklynese)**
- **BAU (Corporate-speak)**
- **normale gang van zaken (Dutch)**
- **Komerco Kiel Kutime (Esperanto)**
- **Des affaires comme d’habitude (French)**
- **normale Geschäfte (German)**
- **‘o ia mau nō (Hawaiian)**
- **חוזרים לשגרה or עסקים כרגיל (Hebrew)**
- **com’ siempre or komo siempre (Ladino)**
- **Solito Negotium (Latin)**
- **Negócios Como Sempre (Portuguese)**
- **бизнес как нормально (Russian)**
- **same auld hech-how (Old Scots)**
- **usiness-bay asay sual-uay (Pig)**

- ***Negocios Como Siempre (Spanish)***
- ***געשעפט ווי געוויינטלעך (Yiddish)***

Can anyone design a neat mural or pastiche or maybe even a screen-saver using these? Three points, though you should want to do it *l'shma!*

Gittin' married, Gittin' divorced. How happy we all are that Alan Zwiebel is back with us, churning out witty titles like this one! Last week, as we started Tractate Gittin in the worldwide Daf Yomi learning cycle, I offered the following Resolve:

The Jewish approach to divorce is about as enlightened and fair-minded a system as any operating within the constraints of dealing with fallible human beings could be.

I solicited, and continue to solicit, opinions pro and con. Alan decided to offer one of each, opining:

I can say that the Jewish divorce is very civilized, sensitive to both parties, and about as free from unnecessary bureaucratic bumpf as possible. A late friend of mine, Warren Adler, who wrote the movie "The War of the Roses" portrayed the polar opposite, and it was a big hit.

My initial take on the Resolve starts with the observation that the Tractate seems to begin, well, in the middle. The Tractate does not introduce us to laws of divorce in the organized, logical way you might expect: this is what the Torah says, or here are the major categories of issues it will address, or here are the major principles to be unpacked. Like James Joyce's last novel, *Finnegan's Wake*, the Tractate does feel like it starts (and ends) mid-sentence. (On Joyce's last masterpiece, ok, it is not *Ulysses*, but then few books before or since are. When I recently re-experienced *Finnegan's Wake*, I listened to all 30 hours of an unabridged reading in Audible Books by Barry McGovern and Marcella Riordan. It was truly breathtakingly brilliant, far more understandable, dramatic, and enjoyable than when I simply read it ages ago.)

I think the Tractate starts far down the organizational structure so that it can address perhaps one of the most significant laws that makes Jewish divorce so humanly sensible. The first Mishna and the many subsequent pages discuss the requirement that, to give a *get*, or the formal Jewish divorce certificate, the husband must act with *deliberate intentionality*. It is for that reason, for example, that witnesses to the giving of a *get*, at least when delivered outside the borders of Israel, must acknowledge that the *get* was both written and executed in the witness's presence. I at least can't think of any other significant reason why the Talmud would start with such an obscure rule.

Acting with deliberate intentionality is one of the protections that the law imposes to ensure that *gets* are not given frivolously. To impose no bar to ending a marriage could lead to marriages that lose their fundamental importance. To impose too high a bar to ending a marriage could lead to pain and suffering (for both husband and wife) that the Torah and the

Rabbis believed does not have to be endured. Requiring those who want to sever a marriage to pay the dowry and to think, and think hard, about what they are doing is a compromise that the Rabbis thought sensible. The balance struck has held us in good stead for many generations.

Let me share a wonderful side-note from Irving Ruderman, who uses a Twentieth Century story to answer a question that has interested us since the redaction of the Talmudic corpus roughly 1,500 years ago: Why do we learn Tractate Gittin, concerning divorce, before we learn Tractate Kiddushin, which is of and about marriage? His note is funny and thought-provoking at the same time, so I quote it at length:

Back in the days many years ago, when I was in high school at MTA growing up in the Bronx where Rabbi Israel Miller was our rabbi at the Kingsbridge Heights Jewish Center, I was sitting in the sukkah one yom tov afternoon. . . . A man walked in wearing a pilot's uniform and joined me. He was with one of the major airlines. He said he grew up Jewish but wasn't observant, lived in the neighborhood, and felt he'd like to visit a sukkah. He asked me what I was studying in school. I told him Gittin--about divorce in Jewish law. He asked if we had studied the laws of marriage. I told him that's called Kiddushin, but we had not learned it. He thought it odd to study the laws of divorce without having previously studied the laws of marriage. He thought a moment and then he said he guesses it's like flight school, which he went to, to learn how to be a pilot. They teach you how to land before they teach you how to take off to make sure you don't take off without first knowing how to land.

Eilu V'eilu Divrei Elokim Chaim. Forgive a second, brief reference to the Daf in Gittin this week. Our communal commitment to tolerance of thought by others is manifested by the principle that each of two conflicting opinions is *each* the words of the living G-d. Usually, the teaching of that principle has centered on the beautiful discussion in Tractate Eruvin 13b (**which I discussed at some length in [my email of 8/20/20](#)**). Gittin 6b, however, contains another (the only other?) reference to this profoundly important principle in the Talmudic corpus. On page 6b the observation arises when the *Almighty* is learning Torah and finds that each of the two conflicting opinions being expressed is sound. It doesn't get more obvious than that as a learning moment throughout the generations.

Built Back Better.

Potter's Fields. Answering a question from two weeks ago, Claude Nadaf alone picked up another two points for knowing that "potter's field", universally used to describe the place where the poor are buried, has a Biblical or certainly ancient origin. Says Claude:

Valley of Hinnom, which was a source of potters' clay. After the clay was removed, such a site would be left unusable for agriculture, being full of trenches and holes, thus becoming a graveyard for those who could not be buried in an orthodox cemetery.

Imagine walking around with that kind of knowledge in your head! Well done! (Claude also corrected a comment I made about the lineage of Pinchas. Since I thought I was summarizing the Talmud, I need to go back and look.)

A Final Farewell to Gordon Lightfoot. Dr. Michael Schulder has a late add to our musical send-off to Gordon Lightfoot. Says Michael:

Surely the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue should give a nod to Don Quixote, perhaps the best song by Gordon Lightfoot?

It's not his best song, but it's a good song, imho. I like Michael's sentiment, so [here it is](#).

Our Spring Songbook. We are off to a great start with the following:

- [Younger than Springtime](#) from *South Pacific* by Rodgers and Hammerstein
- [April in Paris](#) by Count Basie
- [April Showers](#) by Frank Sinatra
- [June is Bustin' Out All Over](#) by Rodgers & Hammerstein from *Carousel*
- [Spring is Here](#) by Ella Fitzgerald
- [Spring Can Really Hang You Up The Most](#) by Ella Fitzgerald
- [It Might As Well Be Spring](#) by Rodgers & Hammerstein from *State Fair*
- [Appalachian Spring](#) by NY Philharmonic, conducted by Leonard Bernstein
- [Can't Stop the Spring](#) by the Flaming Lips
- [Some Other Spring](#) by Billie Holiday
- [Waters of March](#) by Art Garfunkel
- [It's A Beautiful Day For A Ballgame](#)
- [Did You See Jackie Robinson Hit That Ball](#)
- [April Come She Will](#) by Simon & Garfunkel
- [Veronika It's Springtime](#), by André Rieu & The Berlin Comedian Harmonists

To these we add this week's suggestions, which also are great:

Laury Frieber insists that the "be-all and end-all" of Spring songs is

- [The Waters of March](#)

Laury hastens to add: "But it HAS to be the Susannah McCorkle version. Appropriately, it is in Portuguese, which she taught herself for the song."

Warren Stern offers

- [You Can Never Hold Back Spring](#), by Tom Waits. Even Warren admits that the song is “odd but appeals to me.”

Faith Fogelman offered a bundle of great suggestions last week and a bundle equally great ones this week:

- [Will You Remember \(Sweetheart\)](#), from the movie *Maytime* (1937), by Sigmund Romberg and Rida Johnson Young, with the song sung by Nelson Eddy & Jeanette MacDonald
- [Chapel of Love](#), by *The Dixie Cups* (Phil Spector again, though with Jeff Barry and Ellie Greenwich)
- [Green Grass](#), by Gary Lewis and the Playboys

Our dedicated Office Manager and Financial Associate Sarah Gross likes

- [The Ninth Man](#), by Abie Rotenberg, from the album *Journeys. It is certifiably weird.* Give it a listen. Sarah likes the sequel, too,
- [Ninth Man II](#), which is also weird.

Still need more, team!

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom. Moadim L'simcha. Here! *Kaminando kon Buenos.*

Louis Solomon, Parnas