

May 4, 2023

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Covid-19 Update. Some great new entries have been suggested to continue our list of “business as usual” in languages spoken by our members and friends. Yakov Burstein suggests that a more colloquial “business as usual” phrasing in Hebrew might be:

חוזרים לשגרה

So on the list it goes. Jack Schenker helps with the German, which he says would be:

normale Geschäfte

Jim Rudolf says that the Ladino equivalent in household conversation for ‘business as usual’ is:

com’ siempre,

with *com* having a broad vowel and *siempre* pronounced “sempray.” Ladino is a great add. Can any of our other Ladino speakers confirm Jim’s entry (Jim says he is a little rusty with Ladino colloquialisms).

Finally for this week, and really my favorite, is Hayyim Obadiah’s Hawaiian:

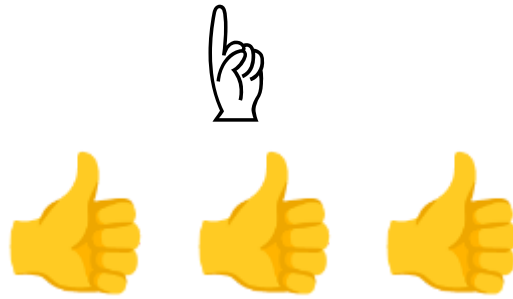
‘o ia mau nō

Says Hayyim, it means, “[a]pproximately, ‘it is the usual indeed.’” Then, in case we were going to check up on him, Hayyim added: “The symbol before the first o is “okina,” a Hawaiian letter corresponding to glottal stop, aleph. The final o has a “kahakō”, or macron. Both are required in modern Hawaiian.” Of course we knew that! What I’m not sure of is whether we have correspondents or friends from Hawaii. Anyone out there? Email in, please.

With these additions, our list is has grown to the following:

- ***normale gang van zaken (Dutch)***
- ***normale Geschäfte (German)***
- **‘o ia mau nō (Hawaiian)**
- **עסקים כרגיל or חוזרים לשגרה (Hebrew)**
- ***com’ siempre (Ladino)***
- ***Negócios Como Sempre (Portuguese)***
- ***бизнес как нормально (Russian)***
- ***Negocios Como Siempre (Spanish)***
- **געשעפט ווי געוויינטלעך (Yiddish)**

Still, we need many more. Come on, a little country or language pride is ok!



Stones for Unity. This week, our Daf Yomi study of Tractate Sotah is holding in the Seventh Chapter of the Tractate. Both in the Mishna on page 32a and in the Gemara's treatment on pages 36 and 37 there is extensive discussion of stones used by the Jewish People at different points in our history. The discussion is important (no puns, as in my analysis is rock solid).

The Tractate asks, what language do the Sotah statements need to be in? The Tractate then asks about the language used in other important utterances of the Jewish people. It addresses the language that was used by the Jewish People at the utterance of the blessings and curses, and the unified responses to them, as the Jews were standing atop and between two mountains (which two, for two points – no peeking) (Debarim 27:5). The Mishna then says:

Afterward they brought the stones, built the altar, coated it with plaster, and inscribed on it all the words of the Torah in seventy languages. (Tractate Sotah 32a)

The Tractate is here talking about the gathering of stones that the Jews used to build the altar after crossing the Jordan River and entering Israel as a unified people for the first time. The stones were removed from the bed of the Jordan when it (miraculously) split as the Jews passed through (as related in the Book of Joshua, Chapter 4). And the use of *seventy* languages is our Sages way of saying that the writing was universal. Indeed, here the Talmud quotes the Biblical verse:

You shall inscribe on the stones all the words of the Torah, well clarified.

“Well clarified,” say the Rabbis, means making the Torah's teachings available to everyone, in all languages. It's a beautiful thought – and a bit of an antidote to the “Chosen Jews” accusations we hear from others, and too often give succor to ourselves. The Torah and its authoritative interpretation by the Sages reject parochialism.

Rock Redux. As I was thinking about stones, rocks, and their universal aspects, wouldn't you know it but I saw an email from Linda Rawson. Linda lives out west but has been a genuine friend to the Congregation in helping us, mostly through our trustee Leah Albek, think about how to ameliorate our financial deficit. At the close of Linda's email, she includes the following quote from Hugh Latimer, the Sixteenth Century English (Protestant) martyr:

The drop of rain maketh a hole in the stone, not by violence, but by oft falling.

The saying is beautiful, and his story is tragic and worth a detour, but the saying is not his. Nor is it the Roman poet Ovid's, who is also oft quoted as saying:

Dripping water hollows out stone, not through force but through persistence.

Going back even further in time, the saying is not the Roman poet and philosopher Lucretius's either, though he too is often credited with the quote:

The steady drip of water causes stone to hollow and yield.

For two points, please find an earlier source than our own Job, whose birth and death dates are marvelously debated in the Talmud. One opinion places him as living at the time of Pharaoh in Egypt. He surely lived long before any of those others mentioned.

Job's profound observation is actually quoted in the moving story from *Avot of Rabbi Natan* concerning how one of our greatest Talmudic sages R' Akiva came to begin his study of Torah, at age 40:

*What were the beginnings of Rabbi Akiva? It is said: When he was forty years of age, he had not yet studied anything. One day he stood at the mouth of the well. "Who hollowed out this stone?" he wondered. They said to him: "The water that falls on it every day." They said to him: "Akiva, have you not read, **Stones, worn away by water (Job 14:19)**? Immediately, Rabbi Akiva drew an inference [kal v'chomer] with regard to himself: if what is soft carves out the hard, all the more shall the words of Torah, which are as hard as iron, hollow out my heart, which is flesh and blood. Immediately, he returned to study Torah.*

So whether it's Stones of Unity or Stones of Hope, what can I say: Rock Rules!

Israel, and Jews, At Our Best. Dr. Susan Lobel, as present at weekly Shabbat services as she is absent from Kiddush afterwards, sent in the following, which btw the Rabbi spoke about on Shabbat morning:

Only in Israel. Tonight in Jerusalem there's a huge demonstration in support of the judicial reform. So one guy turned to his WhatsApp group and asked if anyone had an Israeli flag to lend him. Another guy responded, saying, no problem, but you must return it to me by Saturday. I need it to protest AGAINST the reform. Of course I will, the first guy replies. Thank you!

Susan's comment on the Tweet is: "We are all brothers/sisters." True that.

Built Back Better.

But We Still Love Haikus. Cantor Jay Harwitt, whom you will remember was sending in marvelous haikus and funny limericks about the weekly parshiot of the Torah, bemoans the fact that we have moved away from poetry to quotes. As he put it, in a nice zinger that I loved: We

have “replaced creative expression with a quiz show.” Guilty as charged, but we will be back to poetry soon.

Quote/Unquote. First, if you want to chuckle, look at [this piece](#) from the *Christian Science Monitor*. It puts the lie, or at least the fib, to ten famous attributions of quotes.

Second, let’s answer one of last week’s challenges. As to who among Winston Churchill, Francis Crick, Freeman Dyson, and Martin Gilbert said:

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

the right answer, which no one but me got, is Winston Churchill.

On Meyer’s second quote:

Quantity has a quality all its own

I still don’t know. A little help here, please?

Finally, a baseball quote, also sent in by Meyer, with a special message for Beth and other baseball obsessives:

You see, you spend a good piece of your life gripping a baseball, and in the end it turns out that it was the other way around all the time.

Choose among:

- a. Jim Bouton
- b. Jacob deGrom
- c. Sandy Koufax
- d. Babe Ruth

Counting Down Towards Lag La’Omer. I mentioned last week that my own silent, internal counting going *down*, in tandem with Counting of the Omer going *up*, is really just counting until we can all share music and song, which many of us reinitiate in our lives on Lag La’Omer. Today is Day Minus 5 to Lag La’Omer. Please, send in favorite songs of any kind from any genre to adorn this email next week. Really, we’re almost there/livin’ on a prayer.

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

Louis Solomon, Parnas