

August 3, 2023

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Random Ramble. Tisha B'Ab 2023 is in our rear-view mirror. We hosted over 500 people for services last Thursday night. More than 200 stayed for Rabbi Soloveichik's talk after services. Our morning service, with our special *kinot* or lamentations, was as beautiful as ever. I'm tempted to hope that it will be the last most-sad-day-of-the-year we observe as a community, that we will genuinely learn the lesson of the day. Somehow, though, I think our people will be remembering our past forever. It is both who we are and who everyone else thinks we are. We are.

Time Again for Music! But we are not only post-Three Weeks, post-9 Ab, and post-our very own Sadie Hawkins Day. We are also happily in the middle of beautiful weather, summer vacations (for some of us), and music appreciation. This time last year we all contributed to the first of our seasonal Song Lists. Here is the link to our [Congregational Summer List 2022](#). For this Summer, unless there is a clamoring for another Congregational list, let's change things up a little; send in ideas for a fun song-driven challenge that we can all participate in. Or, if you are boring, and want slavishly to copy our Congregation's good ideas, then you can be like the New York Times, which on Tuesday published a list of "August Summer Songs" — [Listen on Spotify](#). Can you believe the shameful aping of our new and novel idea of a year ago?

In the short term, we note in passing the passing of the great Tony Bennett, just as we celebrate the Shangri-La youth and continued vitality of Bruce Springsteen. The Boss has been on a tear of a tour in Europe, the UK, and the US. Send in your single and most favorite song by this great artist. I have at least six, but surely one is [Born To Run](#).

Divorce with Dignity. The worldwide Daf Yomi learning cycle is finishing Chapter 8 of Tractate Gittin. After this there is only one more Chapter before completing this penultimate Tractate in the Order of *Nashim*.

A great many rules and laws have been discussed in the 70+ double-side pages that precede this week's pages. At this point in the Tractate, we should be down in the interstices, deep in the minutiae. And we are, in a variety of the discussions. But as down in the weeds as we can be, it is quite remarkable, I think, that the Talmud here pauses to address two rulings:

- First, on page 77b/78a, the Talmud insists that a husband cannot just toss a *get* at his wife for it to be effective. At a minimum, the wife needs to be in a place under her comfortable dominion to receive the *get*. Call it a place of one's own. Or call it a room of one's own (quick, author for two points). It can be small if it is given a name, a separate existence (answering the Bard's question of what's in a name, from which play? Quick, one point – it's easy). Call it a safe space.
- Second, on page 78b, the Talmud discusses the case where the husband gives a *get* with strings attached – literally – so that he can pull it back or yank the chain. (I wonder if

this is where we get the phrase, “strings attached”). The Talmud rules that such a transmission is not valid.

In both of these cases, why is the practice proscribed? The most obvious reason tying the two discussions together is that the practices under consideration are proscribed because they are undignified. The process of divorce is difficult enough. And anyone who practices in the matrimonial area knows – I don’t, but I have been involved in some divorce cases – the depth of behavioral degradation between two human beings is sometimes hard to fathom. The Talmud is teaching all of us to be considerate, dignified even in doing the unpleasant in life. It is not just the stuff of manners, as Barbara Reiss’s nice entry below explains; it is rather the stuff of majesty, which we can all achieve.

Built Back Better.

Not Too Cool for “Shool.” I have before cited one of our preeminent sources of Twentieth Century Shearith Israel customs, Reverend de Sola Pool, for how it was quite all right for us to refer to our and other Jewish places of worship as “shules” (see my email of [April 8, 2021](#)). Thank you to Avery Neumark and Reverend Edinger for sending me an excerpt from an equally authoritative source from a century earlier.

The Reverend Jacques Judah Lyons was our minister for 38 years commencing in 1839. His notes, diary, and other writings are indispensable sources of information about our Synagogue in the Nineteenth Century. In his 1846 notes on our service on Shabbat *Hazon*, which we observed on the Shabbat preceding Tisha B’Ab, he not only specifies which parts of the service are sung in our usual Shabbat melodies and which in the special melodies used during the Three Weeks; he also specifies that the service should start at 7:00 p.m., as ours did, and that “***shool*** out at 20 minutes to 8,” which Rabbi Rohde accomplished nearly to the minute this year as well.

“Shool” in the Nineteenth Century; “shule” in the Twentieth; and “shul” in the 21st. They are all fine. This is a perfect week for us to get yet another injection of the fact that, historically, we were open, tolerant, and even easy about variant approaches to describing, if not carrying out, services and our Sanctuary. Oh we are SO libertarian!

The Tragedy and Triumph of the Commons: A Postscript. Recall that a couple weeks ago we studied the Talmudic passages relating to *מְפִינֵי דְרַבְרַי שְׁלוֹם*, or finding ways of peaceful coexistence with others. Many of the examples given in the Talmud reflected an intelligent and sympathetic understanding of what game theory and economics call a “commons problem.”

Claude Nadaf pushed back. Says he:

The tragedy of commons forced the mostly capitalist Talmud rabbis into including some socialism/communism ideas in their “ways of peace” edicts.

There is much to disagree with in Claude’s observation. Efficient allocation of resources isn’t socialist or communist but, actually, capitalist in the extreme. Claude is wide of the mark, like by two standard deviations.

But I don't want to dwell on the negative. Instead, look at the beautiful thoughts Barbara Reiss had when thinking about **מִפְנֵי דְרָכֵי שְׁלוֹם**:

מִפְנֵי דְרָכֵי שְׁלוֹם is how I think of the rules of manners in contrast to etiquette. The rules of etiquette demonstrate that you belong to a certain class or subgroup (and others do not, e.g., setting your table properly, serving from the right and clearing from the left...). Whereas manners, in my view, are behaviors that show your consideration for others—their comfort and wellbeing—such as not sneezing in their direction, holding a door for someone, helping a visitor find their place in the siddur at services...

I really like the sentiment, and thank you to BR and CN for writing in.

Covid-19 Update. The uptick in Covid-19 cases reported in the local news is no longer reliable, since nobody seems to be keeping systematic records of infections or transmissions. We do know that a new vaccine is being rolled out. In the meantime, we will remain, you guessed it, “business as usual”:



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

Louis Solomon, Parnas