

October 5, 2023

Dear Shearith Israel family,

A Brief Goodbye to Kippur. In the past few weeks, I offered short thoughts on RH, Tzom Gedaliah, and Kippur. None remotely ranks with the pure joy of hearing that Abe Sherizen, who is eight and great, described the rain on Kippur as the Almighty washing away our sins. For Abe, we offer three *Candy Man* songs:

- The saccharine one that our and the younger generation know, by Sammy Davis, Jr., [The Candy Man](#),
- [A weird one](#), by a singer/song writer I usually love, Roy Orbison, and
- A most fabulous one, [Candy Man Blues](#), by Mississippi John Hurt.

The Stunning Simplicity of Succot's Symbols. Humankind has mastered the universe – just ask us. Indeed, we exercise such control over ourselves and our environment that some believe this certain certainty undermines the role of religion. We got this, G-d!

One tiny observation explodes that myth. Last Friday afternoon, when we were witnessing Diluvian-like deluges of rain, none of us could actually figure out if it was going to still rain on Friday night, as Succot was about to begin? The question did not concern some deep or complex phenomenon of nature. It was about the rain. And yet we couldn't answer it.

The three symbols of Succot are arrestingly simple – and deeply profound:

- We sit in a succah not simply as a sign of faith and of faithful dependence on the Almighty but to demonstrate how small changes or perturbations in our lives have outsized effects. This yearly re-education process began on Kippur. Don't eat or drink for a couple hours – look what it does to us. Remain standing for a couple hours – we feel achy and fatigued. On Succot, sit outside for any length of time, whether for a meal or some relaxation, when it is even slightly cool or rainy. Our plans are upended. We are flummoxed. We get used to controlling our environment even somewhat on Shabbat – or at least we think we do. In reality, we learn from dwelling in the Succah that our every comfort is Heaven-sent. (Imho, the lesson is deeper still. How can we not be mindful of those who actually don't have enough to eat, or clean water to drink, or a warm and safe place to live?)
- We put together the oddest and most awkward assortment of Four Species. One is long, one is short, one has flat leaves, one has rounded. They can't even fit into a neat box together. One hand can hold all of them only with difficulty. Our Sages long knew these antimonies: one has taste and smell; one has only taste; one has only smell; and one has neither. They are a jumble of contradictions. Yet only together do they make an item that the Almighty wishes us to use to celebrate this holiday of joy and happiness? They need to be mushed and held tightly together to be a "thing" on Succot.
- And if the symbolism of community is not obvious enough, our Torah portions during Succot involve the numeration of sacrifices that add up to seventy, a number that our Religion uses

as the metaphor for global unity. On each day of the holiday (other than Shabbat), we walk with the Four Species around our sanctuaries to close a loop and make the strongest metaphor for unity that we have – a J-Continuum in space.

Hoshaana Rabbah. Holding as we are between Succot and Simhat Torah, I want to invite you to a really long, really slow, but marvelous and indeed transporting service that we hold tomorrow, on Hoshana Rabbah. No one has time for a nearly three-hour service on Friday morning, and the lift will be too heavy if you have been up all night learning (a custom many of us no longer observe). Yet, if you can make it, your investment will pay manifold dividends. The gorgeous melodies (some reminiscent of Kippur), the beauty of the open Ark, the *hakafot* (seven circuits around the interior of the Sanctuary), the pomp of seeing our Torahs adorned with two sets of our Myer Myers finials and our even older Pineapple Set; it will give you a boost for much of the year to come.

Or, if you can't spare the time, look at this marvelous photo of a calligraphy workshop for our Congregation's children led by our Rabbinic Intern Baruch-Lev Kelman in our outdoor succah earlier this week:



The Piece de Resistance: Our Hatanim Celebration (Shabbat Bereshit, Oct. 14). Ben Suckewer (our Hatan Torah) and Guy Reiss (our Hatan Bereshit) sit on opposite sides of our Sanctuary. They are both steady even stalwart stewards of our Congregation. And they are more alike than you'd think, though

maybe not on the surface. Look at the beautiful way Barbara Reiss describes some of the unseen similarities:

[Ben and Guy] were born not too many miles apart, speaking very similar languages (which was not English, let alone Spanish or Portuguese). Indeed, the DP camp where Ben was born -- in Ulm, Germany -- was the same one that [Barbara's] parents and older sister lived in for several years after the war. Somehow, their lives took both Guy and Ben to the US where they each attended Columbia College and Columbia Law and eventually to Shearith Israel.

When we celebrate our Hatanim and their families, we are, just as clearly, celebrating our own good fortune for having such upstanding people in our community. At our Hatanim lunch, the joyous sense of conviviality and community is at its highest of the year. If you can support anything, support this – for your own good.

If you can't afford a ticket, email me, and we'll get you in; I know someone who knows someone. Let's show our Hatanim that we deserve them. Here is a link to sign up, and the deadline is today, so [CLICK NOW!](#)

High 40s/Low 50s. I'm not referring to what seems to happen to the temperature in New York with the onset of Succot. Rather, I'm referring to pages of Tractate Kiddushin, which are part of this week's worldwide Daf Yomi learning cycle (pages 49-55 are studied this week). Pages in high 40s/low 50s move from discussing the need for transparency and clarity concerning exactly what the wife is getting in exchange for her consent to marry – we saw that before – to an extended discussion of whether a loan can be used to effect a betrothal, even if the loan was taken by the wife-to-be (mostly not). The Talmud is clear that the wife needs to know what she is getting, *and* she needs to have it available for use right then and there.

The Talmudic dialogue then gets particularly interesting. It addresses the legal effect of either the husband or the wife making erroneous representations, such as claiming that you are rich when you are poor; a kohen when you are not; etc. . . . In these cases, overall, the betrothal is not valid. This too seems to follow logically from the prerequisites of transparency, and clear understanding on the part of the wife. (Even here, though, there is a marvelous exception (49b): If a man says he is righteous but in fact is wicked, counterintuitively the betrothal is valid. Why? Because everyone can repent, and perhaps the man was thinking of repenting when he made the comment! What an incredible statement of positive reinforcement of laudable conduct in this law/life treatise.)

The Talmudic text then moves to what happens when the prospective husband and wife might both reasonably believe different things. The example is that if a man says he is learned and reads Torah, how much Torah does he have to know? The Sages say that he at least needs to have read three verses from the Torah, with another Sage adding that he needs to provide a translation as well. Don't miss the timeless Talmudic comment in this regard:

וְהַתְּנִיחַ רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: הַמְּתַרְגֵּם פְּסוּקִים כְּצוּרָתוֹ – הֵרִי זֶה בְּדַאי. וְהַמּוֹסִיף עָלָיו – הֵרִי זֶה מְסַרְפֵּי וּמְגַדְּפֵי. אֲלֵא מַאי תְּרַגּוּם – תְּרַגּוּם דִּידֵן.

*But isn't it taught in a baraita (Tosefta, Megilla 3:21) that Rabbi Yehuda says: **One who translates a verse literally is a liar, since he distorts the meaning of the text, and conversely, one who adds his own translation is tantamount to one who curses and blasphemes God? Rather, to which translation is Rabbi Yehuda referring? He is referring to our accepted translation.***

This part of the discussion then lands on the legal effect of thinking thoughts without expressing them. Do those thoughts create conditions to the marriage? On the whole, the answer is no; if you don't say it, it don't matter. This is as it should be, no? Can you imagine a system of law that was required to credit internal, unspoken, mental thoughts?

Built Back Better.

Word of the Year: Finalists. Aura Bijou offers the word used by Rabbi Soloveichik in his stimulating talk over the Chag:

Awakenings

I would have thought we would have more options to choose from. Still, it's time to vote (though last-minute write-ins of additional suggestions are welcome):

Awakenings

Matter

Gratitude, or hakarat hatov

Phrase of the Year: Finalists. Dr. Sandy Rose likes all the prior suggestions and adds one:

Be kind

And Dr. Michael Gelman, of our Covid-19 Working Group, offers the wonderful phrase from *Bendigamos* (which we traditionally sing on Succot):

Con alegria y permanencia, or with joy and permanence

Time to vote (again, send in any last-minute write-ins, which will be considered):

Be kind

Con alegria y permanencia; with joy and permanence

Con el pie derecho; with the right foot, or right foot first

Mi Zenen Du; We are here!

Yehiyeh tov; T'will be good [not to put a thumb on the scale, but I did want to report that wonderful friends and congregants including Meryl Jaffe really like this one]

Covid-19 Update.



Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom. Here! *Kaminando kon Buenos*. And a final moadim l'simha for this season.

Louis Solomon, Parnas