

November 22, 2023

Dear Shearith Israel family,

**Thanksgiving Shearith Israel: A Pride to be Proud of.** In post-modernity, *pride* is ubiquitous as a claimed virtue. Still, I'm not so sure that pride in all its incarnations is something either to aspire to or to flaunt. It's one of the Seven Deadly Sins, after all. And Jewish liturgy, law, and lore hardly seek to aggrandize the trait. Don't we almost reflexively use the prototypical Jewish wish to a parent or grandparent to enjoy "*naches/nachat*" or comfort from their offspring, rather than pride?

Time and space do not permit an exegesis of pride. I assume we would have to begin with, "well, there is pride and there is pride", never a great way to start an explanation of anything. For today, let's agree that Thanksgiving at Shearith Israel is a unique opportunity to express pride in Jewish participation in the American ethos.

Spending the morning of Thanksgiving at Shearith Israel is transporting. It is a not-to-be-missed. Consider just three aspects of our Thanksgiving morning *in addition to* prime viewing of the parade:

- First, since the first Thanksgiving in 1789, our Congregation has vocally expressed our thanksgiving for the blessings of America. The special hymns we sing are from Hallel. If it is pride that underpins not wanting to break our streak, then I'm sorry. I think it's more than that. Jews should be deeply grateful for the blessings of America, and we should show it, just as America should be grateful for the contributions Jews have made here.
- Second, for his entire time with us, Rabbi Soloveichik has been giving a talk after services but before the marching bands refuse to yield (source?). They are always uplifting (and the bands are cheerful too).
- Third, New York statistics still place the percentage of food insecure New Yorkers at a staggering 20%. For the past ten years, our Congregants have been spending Thanksgiving morning trying to help feed the hungry of New York. For the past nine of those years, we have coordinated a food pack-a-thon with other faith organizations: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, The Jewish Center, and West End Church (formerly West End Collegiate). This year, for the third time, we are partnering with Masbia, which procures all the food items. Remarkably, Masbia this year is turning to DoorDash, which is delivering the food gratis right to the front doors of the Masbia clients who comprise every faith and background.

This year in addition we want to acknowledge the substantial financial assistance from LDS. In particular, we want to thank Colin Cropper, Andrea Homer-Macdonald, and Marcia Nelson in New York and Chris George from the Church's Welfare Services Department for organizing that effort. LDS's generosity will help several *hundreds* more New Yorkers have food on and after Thanksgiving. We are rightly proud to partner with all these organizations.

Looking back on our *Thanksgiving Edition 2022* ([here](#)), I'm struck that the most obvious lacking this year is music. A year ago, we were coming out of Covid-19's dampening of our communal worship and our communal food-packing. We were on a welcome upswing in mood and charitable activity. The agony of Israel's torment right now has muted our appetite for any enjoyment, especially musical distractions.

But *Thanksgiving Shearith Israel* is one accompanied by music – from the songs of thanksgiving that we chant during services, to the marching bands in the parade, to the music on Paved Paradise (I hope Bonnie Barest will succeed in setting it up, as she did last year), to the music in our homes listening to *Alice's Restaurant*. After last year's email, I assume that you will tune in at noon to listen to that great American ballad. A few weeks ago, Beth and I actually made the pilgrimage to Stockbridge, Massachusetts to see where the restaurant once was:



Sleeping in on Thanksgiving morning provides nothing except a few more minutes of what Schopenhauer rightly called "little deaths". Get up, and bring everyone. Be forever in my debt. Services start at 7:45 am.

**Our Year of Hope.** Upheaval in Israel remains too painful and fraught to pursue our Congregation's *Year of Hope* fundraising goals and aspirations presently. Instead, consider these: Michael Gelman responds that the phrase suggested last week, "Yesterday was good/And tomorrow will be, too", are lyrics in the [popular \(and pretty\) Israeli song](#) by Shlomo Artzi. Nice. And Claude Nadaf notes that the number of Jews at the March last week in Washington, D.C. exceeded the total in-person turnout for each of the Obama and Trump inaugurations. Also nice.

Nicest of all is Trustee David Sable's deep thought to make a direct connection between on the one hand George Washington's famous requote of Moses Seixas's phrase, "*to bigotry no sanction, to*

*persecution no assistance*”, and on the other hand *E Pluribus Unum* (out of many, one). David wonders whether this is “the only path to true security”, perhaps for both here in America and in Israel. (Ambassador Deborah Lipstadt, U.S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism and native UWSer referenced Seixas’s powerful turn of phrase at the opening and close of her powerful speech at the rally. This past Shabbat, Rabbi Soloveichik similarly spoke both to this phrase and the even more powerful one in Washington’s earlier letter to the Savannah Congregation.)

For something completely different (fun movie by whom?), what we can now do is eavesdrop, as from a nearby table at Patis, on parts of a conversation with Peter Neustadter, our former Parnas, current Trustee, and dear Congregational friend. Peter and Naomi made aliya in 2010. They were in town sadly in mourning over the sudden loss of Naomi’s sister. *Mr. Mani*-like, only one side of the conversation could be heard – and even then only snippets that may *or may not* have been accurately heard, remembered, or recorded:

- Because Bibi needed to expand his coalition by the promise of “Ministries”, the government was left with Ministers who knew little about their portfolios. Israelis therefore needed to take the place of government in the aftermath of Oct. 7. Among other things:
  - Communities and individuals are gathering and dispensing clothing;
  - Top-rated non-kosher restaurants in Tel Aviv and elsewhere in Israel are koshering their kitchens to deliver food to the Army; and
  - Hotels in the South and elsewhere are housing tens of thousands.
- Young female soldiers were manning the front guard at the time of the Oct.7 attack. All but one was murdered. The one who lived insists that they had seen and reported buildup or other activity in the period leading up to Oct. 7.
- Like any other nation, Israel is entitled to demand safe borders, both in the South and in the North.
- In the morning of Oct 7, when no one knew anything, worshippers at Shemini Ha’Azeret/Simchat Torah services at the Turkish synagogue in Yemin Moshe took to drinking a shot of whiskey for every effective Iron Dome block that could be seen from Jerusalem. Services ended early.
- Come to Israel, everyone. Come. Come.

***Phavorite Parasha Pasuk, or Poem:*** Dr. Susan Vorhand is one of our primary West Coast correspondents. She composes long, elaborate, and insightful poems about the *parasha*, it seems, nearly every week. Here is a single stanza from her poem about *Parashat Toledoth*:

*Not as gregarious or outgoing as his Dad.  
Yitzchok never left the boundaries of his Homeland.  
Could it be that his inwardness resulted from the trauma  
Of his NDE at the Akeida?*

We should revive a poetry section in this email. I’d be happy to, as soon as we have additional contributors.

**Baba Kama: Law.** Gil Deutsch and Michael Gelman each correctly answered the question which Twentieth Century mystery writer spun a tale similar to the story in the Talmud about a coterie of otherwise unrelated persons jointly stabbing a person to death. It was Agatha Christie, in *Murder on the Orient Express*. Well done.

Turning to this week's pages being studied as part of the worldwide Daf Yomi learning cycle, Baba Kama pages 17-23 are noteworthy for at least three reasons:

First, pages of the Tractate in the high teens are overstuffed with specific legal adumbrations and rulings involving what constitutes:

***Regel (damage that an animal (or an associated thing) causes in the course of its normal activities, such as walking); and***

***Keren (damage that an animal (or an associated thing) causes with destructive or other intent not common for that species of animal). And, so that we have them handy, the other two of the four categories of damage most occupying this Tractate also include:***

***Shein – damage that an animal (or an associated thing) causes in the normal course of securing a benefit from act, such as scratching or relieving itself or eating.***

***Bor – damage caused by a risky or hazardous situation created mostly by human beings in the public square or thoroughfare.***

Claude Nadaf feels we need to add to our categorizations of considerations the issues of “emotional” and “AI-induced” damages. I’m sure the latter is a joke. In any case, my view is that these concepts are included within the larger and more general considerations. Again so that we have them handy, Claude would thus add the following (underscored) to the categorization we have been using to organize the basic learning of the Tractate:

- ***Who or what is doing the damage/committing the tort?***
- ***What is being damaged?***
- ***What is the level of intent of the damager?***
- ***What is the type and level of compensation available for the damage, including “emotional” (and “AI induced”) damages?***
- ***How should damages be allocated among tortfeasors including the injured party?***

Second, I have a theory as to why the Talmud uses so many different examples rather than, say, solely articulating general principles. Send in your views; I will share mine with you in the next week or so.

***And the Shaping of Virtue.*** Third, we have in these pages (especially on 20-21) the important discussion whether and under what circumstances the active or passive party needs to gain benefit

from the activity under review before the negligent party can be held liable. The Talmud uses the language of

**זָה לֹא נִהְנֶה וְזֶה לֹא חָסַר**

*This one gets no benefit from the conduct, and this one is not worse off because of the conduct.*

The meaning of the phrase and its variants is that one party can act and either benefit or be harmed or remain neutral from an activity. Similarly, the other party can benefit or be harmed or remain neutral from the same activity. The Talmud uses as an example someone using a rented house. Had there been a charge for the squatting, the renter would have gone elsewhere for free, and the homeowner was not going to rent the place anyway, let's suppose. In that case, should the interloper pay?

Given that we have (by convention) an active and a passive party, either getting benefit or not, the Talmud discusses in essence a simple 2x2 matrix. The discussion is smart and insightful. Interestingly, the Talmud addresses three of the four quadrants but not the fourth (anyone know what the fourth one is?). And with respect to the third quadrant – the actor benefits (say by squatting on land not being used for anything else), but the passive party (say the party owning the property) is unaffected, since the property was not going to be rented anyway – the Talmud is skeptical of making the squatter liable. We have discussed before the characteristic of being a Sodomite ([email of 9/24/20](#)), which for the Talmud means essentially being a dog in the manger – someone who insists on charging even when he derives no benefit or loss from the conduct, just to make sure the other person does not benefit.

**Covid-19 Update.**



Thank you all. Bless us all. Happy Thanksgiving. Shabbat shalom. *B'yachad* (united together). יהיה טוב *Yihiyeh tov* (things will be good).

Louis Solomon, Parnas