

February 17, 2022

Dear Shearith Israel family,

*(Don't) Say that Again Please?* The CDC is politicized! Masks OFF! The CDC is politicized! Masks ON! Follow the science! Masks OFF! Follow the science! Masks ON! The exclamation mark extravaganza is as silly as it is disheartening. Such drama, such anger, so many decibels (!)

Here is what we are doing, and it's sensible – and sensitive to all our members, with their different needs and differing attitudes. We are opening up, again, but not abruptly. We are back to near-normalcy on Shabbat but are keeping masks on for services for at least another week. Classes Friday night and Shabbat afternoon – which are not happening this Shabbat, btw, as Rabbi Soloveichik is away for Shabbat – are mask optional. We have moved to mask optional for daily minyan. Vaxing/boostering are required for any who can.

An increasing number of congregants are rejoining us for communal services and Torah reading. Kiddush is both creative and delicious. Come, join us. Make your day, and ours.

*Now More Than Ever.* Decades ago, I was a second-year law student looking for a summer job in the Big Apple, at the time (still?) the only place south of the border, the Canadian border that is, you could get a good bagel. I interviewed at several New York law firms that were large at that time. Seeing my college alma mater (Yeshiva University) on my resume, my interviewer, a senior partner at a preeminent firm, inquired of the study of the Talmud. In earnestness, and I think in good faith, he asked me if there was anything the Talmud could teach us, lo' these thousands of years after it was written and codified. I took him seriously and answered that I thought a better question might be whether there was anything left to teach in the areas of interpersonal relations and the respectful exchange of opinions *since* the Talmud, since frankly I thought it was all taught then. The discussion was left at that.

The brilliance – but more than that the civilizing wisdom – of Talmudic discourse is on full display in this week in the Daf Yomi Talmud cycle. The topic of this week's move through Tractate Chagiga – in particular page 6a – concerns which sacrifices can be used for what. The topic is specific and time-bound; the modality of dialogue taught there is global and timeless.

Page 6a discusses how much a sacrifice should be worth in order to be a sacrifice. Now you need to suspend the disbelief here and assume that this question mattered, a lot, to the interlocutors. Certainly in their minds it was as important as the most important topics of our day are to some of us. In order to get an answer to the question, the Talmud needed to figure out what the best analogy was to the type of sacrifice under discussion. On that subject there were two major opinions, and then two minor opinions for each of the two major opinions. The discussion pitted Beit Hillel, R' Akiva, and R' Yose against Beit Shammai, R' Elazar, and R' Yishmael. The names are less important here than how the dialogue unfolded.

In breathtaking logic, the Talmud goes through this 3 by 3 matrix. Each side calmly states its position. The position is followed by a statement of proof, the basis for the opinion. The other side listens; interruptions are rare. Then the other side gives its own opinion and the proof, or basis, for its opinion. Then each side is required to explain both how the evidence supports its own position *and* why the evidence doesn't support the other side's. Then each needs to show how the evidence can or cannot explain the differing opinions. In the midst of all this is the voice of the Gemara itself, occasionally interjecting substance but often just making sure that the ping and the pong goes in an orderly way. The result is that all opinions are disclosed, all bases and proof area revealed. No one is shut down. No one is canceled. And no one referred to *Robert's Rules of Order*. In the end the reader can decide which is the most worthy of embracing. Many different lead-in or catch phrases are used to elicit these opinions and proofs. Learning the 4-5 of the most common is the easiest way to get through the Aramaic and always economical text.

I fear you are going to say, well, *Pshita*, as the Talmud says, or, as translated, isn't this blitheringly obvious or as the younger set says, duh? I have two answers. First, this is a modality of dialogue that is seen literally thousands of times in the Talmud. I know when the Talmud was redacted, and I know you are going to cite older Greek texts as precursors. I don't agree. This modality actually taught the world how to reason. Correct me with citations if you disagree. Talmudic discourse is the basis of modern logical and scientific thinking.

Second, and far more important, if it's so obvious, please explain why we seem to have lost the thread in the discussion of contemporary issues. Oh I know all about the modern penchant for the sound bites, since that is how information gets

disseminated, blahblahblah. And I see that many just want to holler and scream. But for the rest of us, who are interested in the right or at least most logical answer to vexing questions, why do we seem to have forgotten the basic skills literally taught to us on every page of the Talmud. We need that guidance now more than ever. It will renew your faith in humanity to do, and to teach your children and others to do, as the Talmud does.

*Half-Full Report.* I fully appreciate the concerted effort, let's call it a conspiracy, to keep my mid-section slimmer (hey!) by overwhelmingly responding to last week's contests. The yield was fabulous in each of the four topics:

*Beatles Longest No. 1.* No sooner did we hit the "send" button than it occurred to me that I was asking the equivalent of who remembers when human beings first walked on the moon (if you have to look it up, *fuhgeddaboudit*). And the judges offered two points each!? Big mistake. Of course *Hey Jude* is the longest running Beatles song at no. 1 – 19 weeks, as Billy Schulder emailed. Just the first page of winners include (in order of receipt):

- David Sable, our trustee and most valued compatriot in so many things for our Congregation that he should get hazardous duty pay just for that, who chided me with "that's not a contest!" and then added the deepest and funniest thought, "hot song to slow dance to [when] we still had dances";
- Billy Schulder, the master Beatler, yet whom David Sable beat out by four minutes! Ha!;
- David Vorchheimer, who I could imagine was in the middle of saving a life when texting the right answer;
- Nicola Garcia, from across the pond, who knows the actual 'hood where *Hey Jude* was originally recorded and is willing to be a docent for any of us who get to London. If you see her, tell her to enter more contests; her emails are terrific;
- Rabbi Charlie Savenor, the only Clerical winner and a terrific limerickian (below); and

- Michael Schulder, in just under the wire but a winner nonetheless.

Congratulations to all. This was an expensive contest. Say, does any of you want to double your points or lose them all? What is the *second* longest at No. 1?

*Limericks Galore!* Remember I gave three categories: our esteemed Rabbi; returning to our synagogue after Covid; and the Mets. I *knew* Limericks would be a favorite. But fun for so many? It was probably the THREE points the judges offered, which is going to send inflation higher than it's already threatening (inflation since we just print more points).

The judges have decided to have a run-off. You decide. Imho, what we received are all great (we needed to return a few that, while technically in AABBA format, with longer As and shorter Bs, strayed too far from the 8-9-10 syllables in A and 4-5 in B; so we acted by fiat, rejected them, and got back even funnier ones). Some are brilliant. All are total pick-me-ups, adding another few drops to our "half-full" report, which may soon reach its brim. Here are a few – enjoy them all:

First, there is Faith Fogelman, the rarest talent who competed in all three categories – curling *and* ski jumping *and* figure skating – winning gold in all three. This deserves mention up front:

Our esteemed Rabbi

With great intentionality  
he ensures intersectionality.  
From Torah to Rembrandt  
there is nothing he can't  
connect to spirituality.

Returning to our synagogue after Covid

There once was a really neat shul  
where congregants were all very cool.  
But Covid descended  
and they were upended,  
now alas they return to their jewel.

### Mets

Not a great team in the league  
watching them equals fatigue.  
Not many a home run  
in the rain or the sun,  
the Mets never can intrigue.

Second honorable mention needs to go to Alan Zwiebel, who tried a 3-in-1, and by golly it works:

### A triple-header

The members all sang “Hello, Solly”,  
Back in shul despite Covid’s folly,  
They could now pray for The Mets,  
While still losing their bets,  
And The Parnas could just say “Oh, golly!”

Now on to what mortals of great talent produced:

### **Our Esteemed Rabbi**

Alan Zwiebel:

Our Rabbi truly has “Rembrandt’s Eyes”,  
But for The Cubs he only has sighs,  
He can give an exegesis on “Kushi”,  
While savoring just freshly-made sushi,  
Still from “Brisk” he’s just one of the guys.

Nathan Lewin (yep, *that* Nathan Lewin! – edited slightly, and cleverly, by Barbara Reiss):

The Solovei(t)chik Dynasty is smart  
But none dared to dabble in art  
'Til Solly found in Rembrandt

What most art scholars just can't  
Torah in the great artist's heart

David Sable (yep, *that* David Sable):

There was a young Jew from Rhode Island  
Who came to New York with a smile and  
Said he to his mate  
Let us not tempt fate  
And pray with those Jews from the highland

[editor's note: at first I didn't get it – it's actually brilliant if you consider that highland refers to uptown NYC – hey, even Joyce needs a lexicographer]

David Vorchheimer [slightly edited]:

There once was a Rabbi, his lectures elan,  
Weave brilliant scholarship with jokes dead pan.  
Yet with erudition of Brisk  
Wisdom to fill a hard disc,  
Why is he still a Chicago Cubs fan?

Aura Bijou:

Reb Soloveichik's love of The Arts  
Has entertained us and endeared him to our hearts  
His humor he unleashes  
More Divine than mushroom quiches  
A Renaissance Man way off the charts!

### **Returning to Our Synagogue After Covid-19**

Alan Zwiebel:

We were saddened to leave our dear “shul”,  
Our Paved Paradise? Just an interim tool,  
Now the Pandemic is slowing,  
And our candles are glowing,  
So everyone, let's get back in the “Poole”!

Rabbi Charlie Savenor:  
There was shul stop due to a virus,  
Plague-like, when we wrote on papyrus;  
Vaccines won the day,  
Kahal a mainstay,  
Now the Rabbi's Torah can excite us.

### **The Mets**

Billy Schulder:

There once was a team from Queens,  
Who could do nothing right, it seems.  
But then managed by Hodges,  
We (almost) forgot the Dodgers  
And drowned out the O's futile screams.

In the final category, Billy Schulder limericked to make fun of me – I love it:

There once was a boy from the "hood",  
Who wasn't sure if things were bad or good.  
So every week he would write  
In language NOT trite,  
About any ol' topic he could.

These are marvelous, simply marvelous (movie and character for two points).  
Rank your preferences.

*Singing the Friendly Songs of United.* I bemoaned the fact that there weren't so many great songs with "united" in the lyrics. SM Rosenberg, whose actual name, Sarah Meira, is pretty but alas is shortened to initials, not by me in this instance, brings the [amazing number](#) from *How To Succeed In Business Without Really Trying*, where *landsman* Daniel Radcliffe is at the center. It's a song about unity, and that's close enough. Two points. I also had one to offer, if we are going to stray from "unity" to songs about unity, and that is [Do You Hear the People Sing](#) from Les Mis – WARNING, if you listen to this great song you will be singing it forever – or until another ear worm moves in.

*Great Signs and Wonders.* Taking me up on my request for owner-taken photos, Ruth Lazar went all the way to Jerusalem to capture the uncapturable: the Old City at sunrise. Ruth, thank you. Interested in photographing the Taj Mahal?



Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom.

Louis Solomon, Parnas