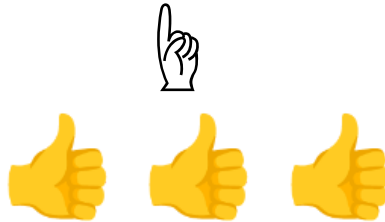


March 23, 2023


Dear Shearith Israel family,

Covid-19 Update:

Negócios Como Sempre (business as usual)



Shearith Israel Young Families Gather. Last Shabbat, thirteen families with young(ish) children luncheoned in the Elias Room after Kiddush. At fifty-seven strong (parents and kids), they are our future, and they are a blessing. What a treat for them. WHAT A TREAT FOR US!



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Welcome Young Families!

Shabbat Lunch, March 18, 2023

Positives, Negatives, Pogatives. We've had such fun with this. At least I have. It started with the brilliant retort from Henry Morgenbesser to philosophical giant JL Austin, refuting Austin's assertion that, in English, we don't have instances where two yesses make a no (Morgenbesser said, "yeah yeah"). Then, when I issued a challenge to suggest a song and lyrics that did the same thing, Robert Katz tried The Beatles [She Loves You](#) (yeah, yeah, yeah). The Judges gave only one point; it's unclear that even two or three "yeahs" are a no in that song. Comes this week Francine Alfandary with a winning answer: the lyrics from *Matchmaker, Matchmaker* from *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964):

"But he's a nice man, a good catch, true?

True." . . .

"But he's a nice man, a good catch, right?

Right."

So clever – two solid, inflation-adjusted points.

With this verbal inversion in view, we come upon page 58b of Tractate Nazir, which we learned this week as part of the worldwide Daf Yomi learning cycle. The discussion seems tailor-made to fit our challenge. There the Talmud first considers the case, learned in several other places in the corpus, of whether a positive commandment outweighs a negative one. One example is when a *berit milah* (a positive commandment) needs to be performed on Shabbat (with its negative command concerning cutting, among other things). There are instances in our law where the positive takes precedence, and there are cases where the negative takes precedence. These cases should not be confused with cases where the positive and negative are integral to the same single act – call it a *pogative*, if you want. Examples of pogatives, our son Joseph says, include the clothes worn by the Kohen, which *must be* made of shatnez -- admixtures of linen and wool that are forbidden to us at most other times.

To make the disquisition even more challenging, the Talmud then discusses cases where there is a positive command on one hand but a negative *and* a positive on the other. Well, well (or yeah, yeah). An example of this is the very jumping off point in the Talmudic discussion under consideration: What is the rule when a *nazir* needs to shave his head because he has become a *mezorah* (someone with leprous-like spots or moles)? Shaving to purify a *mezorah* is a positive command, yet a *nazir* may not shave his head (a negative command), and in the case where the *nazir* is a Kohen, there is an additional *positive* command not to shave the corners of the head. It turns out in this case that the Talmud actually weighs the seriousness and general applicability of the negative command to conclude that the solitary positive overrides even a positive *and* a negative. The result is different in other cases, as where the negative commandment is one of general applicability.

The Talmud wants us to think about hierarchies of commandments, which takes priority, and why. The logic is challenging; the philosophy sublime. And I'm confident that all of you who are not yet hooked on Daf Yomi will nod and simply say: Yeah yeah! If you are in that camp, wait a week. We will come to the end of Tractate Nazir and begin Tractate Sotah – oh are you going to love that one.

Built Back Better.

Samuel Johnson and Boswell. The challenge last week sought the quote that Boswell gave Dr. Johnson about being from Scotland. Dr. Meyer Solny instantly got the right answer, for two points. (These are not Meyer's only points, by the way – just the only ones he has allowed me to confer publicly – and just this once, he insisted.)

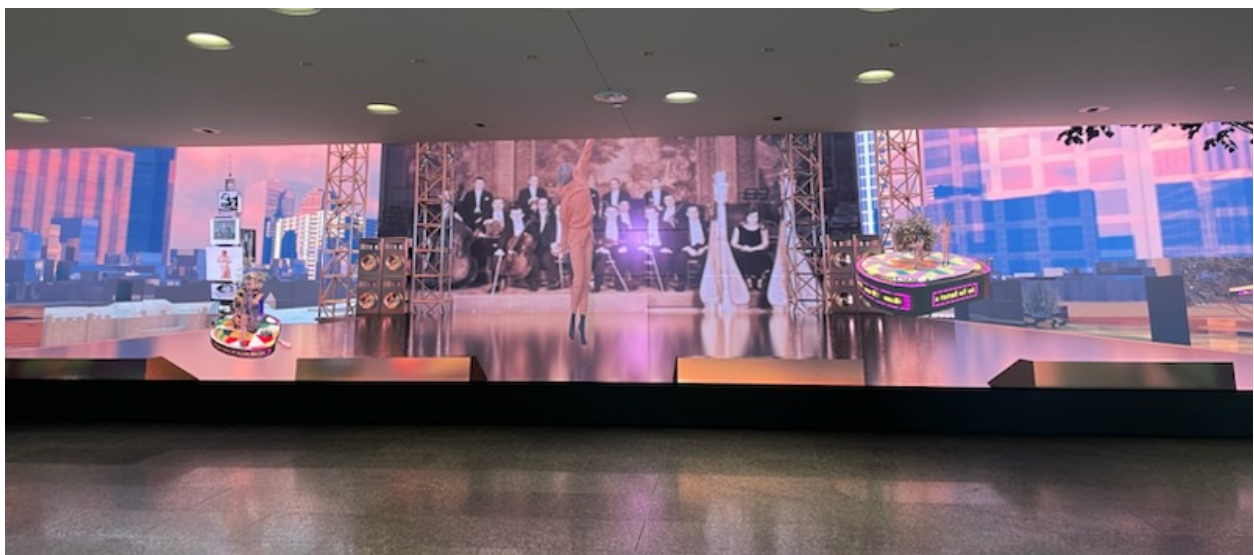
For most of us, we know that Samuel Johnson (everybody calls him Dr. Johnson) was the, or one of the, leading people of letters, ever, in the English language. He was born early in the Eighteenth Century. He is credited with the first English dictionary. His breadth of writing, and his influence, are astonishing, as were his wit and humor. James Boswell (everybody calls him

Boswell) became his biographer and wrote one of the most effective and affecting biographies of a great person with many flaws.

The quote that Meyer got right is part of a timeless story. When Boswell was first introduced to the great Dr. Johnson, Boswell said: “Mr. Johnson I do indeed come from Scotland, but I cannot help it.” One of the English language’s greatest practitioners then could not help himself and said, “That, Sir, I find, is what a very great many of your countrymen cannot help”, meaning that Johnson was complaining about the number of Scots who had moved to England. Boswell writes about the incident: “This stroke stunned me a good deal, and when we had sat down, I felt myself not a little embarrassed, and apprehensive of what might come next.” We know what came next – the greatest collaboration between genius and biographer in English.

Palindromic Paradise. What a lovely way to greet the advent of Spring: with the longest string of Palindromic dates we have seen or will see in a while. We’ve had a contest on this before ([emails of 12/2/21](#) and [1/6/22](#)). It turns out there is a string of 10 consecutive reversible dates (32023, 32123, 32223, 32323, 32423, 32523, 32623, 32723, 32823, and 32923). Two points for telling us when this will happen again? Three points for telling us when there will be 11 consecutive palindromic dates.

Signs and Wonders. It’s been a while since we had a sighting in NYC of a great sign, ad, or something akin to it. Here is one. When you have a minute, walk over the David Geffen Hall (formerly Avery Fisher Hall) at Lincoln Center. At astronomical expense, the Philharmonic has redone the concert hall. It has also redone the lobby as you enter. It is open to the public, and there are comfortable places to sit. During performances you can watch the concerts via video, for free. When there are no performances, the Hall shows various shorts and images on the wide video screen. The moving mural of which I captured a screen-shot below was great. Enjoy:



And One to Make You Smile. Aura Bijou mailed **this video** in. It's happy. No charge. Enjoy it.

The Shearith Israel Winter Song List. Perfect timing for the first week of Spring. Here is our communal Winter Song List. Thanks to all the many contributors, and thank you again to Lia Solomon for Spotifying the list: [click here](#) to listen! For those who don't Spotify, [click here](#) for the full list of songs with youtube links.

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

Louis Solomon, Parnas