

MINYAN MONTHLY

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Sivan 5751

LIBRARY MINYAN ELECTIONS

--Robert Braun

As previously announced, the final date for submission of nominations as liaison to the Temple Beth Am Executive Committee has been extended to May 31, 1991. I am sure that many of you are simply waiting until the final day to submit your names, and I will wait patiently and hopefully until that time.

It also struck me that some of you may feel you do not have the leadership tools to act as liaison. As a public service, and to help solicit nominations, I am providing the following: "Rafi's Rules of Non-Parliamentary Procedure--Specifically for the Orderly Conduct of Jewish Meetings." The rules are reproduced in full below.

So that all Jewish meetings may be conducted in an orderly manner, with due respect for propriety and dignity, the following rules are hereby established by universal consent (with the majority dissenting):

1. Point of Personal Outrage: At any

time during a meeting when a participant becomes extremely upset, he or she shall have the right to interrupt any other speaker, will not be required to wait for recognition from the Chair, and has the obligation to speak at a volume considerably higher than required for normal conversation.

2. Point of Irrelevant Interjection: Irrespective of the motion on the floor, the participant shall have the right to monopolize the meeting for not more than five minutes as he or she discourses on a point the relevance of which escapes all other participants.

3. Point of Personal Attack: In response to a point raised by another speaker, the participant shall have the right to reply by launching a personal attack. At no time shall the point itself be addressed.

4. Point of Associative Guilt: The participant shall have the right to impugn the Jewishness of any other Jew by alleging that he or she is, was, might be,
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OPINIONS

DEAR EDITOR,

It astounds me to learn of so many budding Siskel & Eberts among our beloved Library Minyan members. After one of our Minyan volunteers finishes leading a Shabbat or Yomtov service, I can almost visualize different congregants holding up placards with boldly painted two's and three's as they rate the davener by their own unique set of criteria.

What may be too slow for one congregant with restless kids may be beautiful to a single congregant who buys into the concept of Shabbat being "an island in time." What is audacious isn't that every Minyan member seems to have a different opinion--that is endemic to Judaism. What is audacious is the fact that some Minyanaires voice their opinions in cold, cruel, harsh criticism without any regard to the feelings of their fellow Minyanaire. In many cases these critics are the same people who show up late for services and never/seldom undertake leadership positions for conducting services. In addition, our critics seem to forget that our gabbais, daveners or darshans are not paid for their services--they are generous volunteers.

As a Gabbai for the Library Minyan for well over two years, let me tell you that getting people to volunteer to lead services (especially P'sukei d'Zimrah) is like pulling teeth

I invite all our budding Siskel & Eberts in our congregation to put their money where their mouths are. Rather than criticize volunteers who lead; show us how it's done "right". Not only will a lot of feelings be spared, but we will get some much-needed diversity among our daveners.

B'Shalom,
Michael Beals (call 657-5171 to
volunteer)

DEAR EDITOR,

Judging by the fact that I was asked by you to rewrite the d'rasha that I gave on the last day of Pesah in the form of an article for this magazine, you at least must feel that its contents are worthy of publication. In fact, I had a very positive response to my d'rasha from many Library Minyan members. Nobody would have been able to make such a judgement if I had yielded to the pressure of no fewer than four members who approached me during the service asking me not to deliver the d'rasha owing to the length of the service. "There is a concept", they said, "of tirhah latzibur", a burden on the congregation. Owing to my persistence, members were given the opportunity to make up their own minds as to whether listening to what I had to say for those ten minutes was indeed burdensome.

Yesterday, on the second day of Shavuot, similar remarks were made to those leading services, either during or after the event. Putting in the blessing for the State of Israel was, it was suggested, a tirhah latzibur; my wife Robin's p'sukei d'zimrah was too long--I, on the other hand, had difficulty keeping up with her! The gabbai was told afterwards that he, like those four honourable gentlemen of the last day of Pesah, should have acted as a "heavy".

Personally, a service lasting just under three hours on a morning that includes the full Hallel, the reading of the Book of Ruth and Yizkor in addition to two Torah readings is not unduly long. I find it particularly interesting that few of those who complain about the burdensome length of services are present at 9:30 - or even at 10:15! I feel that the extra time is well spent to hear the rendition of the

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--Elections - continued from page 1
has a third cousin who is, or may have great-grandchildren who will belong to any and all organizations designated by the participant as dedicated to the destruction of the Jewish people.

5. Point of Contempt: The participant shall have the right to grunt, throw papers down on the table, shake his or her head vigorously, or otherwise demonstrate contempt for the proceedings.

6. Point of Harassment: The participant shall have the right to introduce irrelevant motions for the sole purpose of delaying the meeting. It is only permissible to resort to a point of harassment when the outcome of an imminent vote is obvious.

7. Point of Redundant Information: This is not to be confused with the more familiar "point of information." Whereas a point of information is a request for information from the Chair, a point of redundant information entitles the participant to tell those in the meeting something they already know.

Opinion - continued from page 2
megillot, especially when the Chag does not end until 8:30 in the evening. If others disagree, then they either need to express that view to a meeting of the Minyan and obtain a majority vote for the megillah or something else to be cut out of the service, or else draw up a list of people who can be assured of completing the service before their desired deadline.

The present practice of hassling or complaining about members who put themselves forward to lead services, read from the megillot, or prepare a d'rasha in good faith is beneath those who complain, and downright insulting to those at whom the complaints are aimed.

Sincerely,
Stephen Sandler Boroda

8. Point of Redundancy: This is a motion that entitles the participant to make a point made by another participant no more than five speakers earlier.

9. Point of Pious Posturing: This motion entitles the participant to make reference to any teaching in the Bible or rabbinic literature that allegedly supports his or her view. A correct quotation, however, immediately disqualifies the point.

10. Point of Grudge: Entitles the participant to raise an issue debated by the organization not less than five years earlier, for which the participant has not yet forgiven those involved.

"Rules" By Richard Hirsh
courtesy of Sarah Braun

I hope that these rules will eliminate some of the mystery surrounding Minyan meetings, and encourage active participation in its affairs.

THE LIBRARY MINYAN
EXTENDS ITS HEARTFELT
CONDOLENCES TO
ALLA GAMARNIK
ON THE PASSING OF HER FATHER

MINYAN COMMITTEES/RESPONSIBILITIES

Chair, Steering Committee	
Robert Braun	838-4272
Minyan Treasurer	
Norm Green	938-8110
Reading Torah or Haftorah	
Lida Baker	934-3663
Gabai'im-Shabbat/Holiday Services	
Torah Honors	
Michael Beals	657-5172
Alan Broidy	933-8894
Sharon Kushner	
Dan Wolpe	
Drashot:	
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Norman Saiger	837-5927
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Mailing List	
Leon Rogson	202-1329
Minyan Guide	
Carl Sunshine	934-7889
Minyan Monthly	
Susan Grinel	395-2572
Ritual Committee	
Stan Goldstein	813-8100
Scheduling Events-Master Calendar	
Lida Baker	934-3663

**DON'T FORGET WE'RE STILL COLLECTING
 CANNED AND PACKAGED FOODS FOR
 SOVA
 BRING YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS SOON!**

TREASURER'S COLUMN**--Norman H. Green**

Thank you to all of the following people, whose contributions to the Minyan fund for sponsoring Lyudmilla Orlovskaya and Roman Zverev have not yet been acknowledged here:

Jonathan Swerdlow
 M. Rosen & Karen Fox
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As of May 15, this fund has received \$4,381, over 87% of our \$5,000 goal, and a generous donation of furniture from Judy and David Lederich-Mayer.

Thanks also to Chaim Kline for his generous Simchas Torah contribution not previously acknowledged due to space limitation.

**PLEASE SEND YOUR ARTICLES
 OR STORIES TO THE
 MINYAN MONTHLY**

Submission Deadline**June 20, 1991****Mail to: Susan Grinel****1127 11th St. #204****Santa Monica, Calif. 90403****Or Call: 445-4282 (W)****395-2572 (H)**

STEPHEN BORODA

D'RASHA FOR LIBRARY MINYAN - LAST DAY PESACH 5751
EDITED VERSION FOR MINYAN MONTHLY
"HAVE WE GIVEN UP TOO MUCH OF OUR FREEDOM?"

One of the reasons given for the counting of the omer is that some authorities considered Shavuot to be the Atzeret of Pesach. Just as Shemini Atzeret provides a closing festival for Succot, albeit the very next day after the conclusion of Succot, so Shavuot is the closing festival for Pesach. Why? Because without Torah, without law and guidance and standardized practices, there is no true freedom. The old debate about freedom and its limits dates back far into our tradition.

Very few people over the ages, with the exception of the anarchists whose theory has always remained as mere theory, have seriously advocated unbridled freedom unchecked by law. We have intuited and accepted the idea that a restriction on freedom is the best guarantor of freedom whilst almost forgetting the paradoxical nature of this statement. Almost as easily, we have allowed the centralization of authority and come to see its resultant bureaucracy as inevitable to society.

The issue of centralized decision-making has played an important role in the Jewish tradition and continues to shape Judaism to this day, as does the accompanying trend of being more and more careful that human error does not result in God's law being accidentally breached. Together they have led to an increase in caution and a resulting decrease in boldness and creativity.

In the wider society we have seen how our freedom and autonomy which we so cherish has been eaten away owing to too much law, too much centralization and too much bureaucracy. In areas where we still do have personal autonomy over our decision-making, we protect it very jealously. In the Western World we are able to choose our own religion and how we choose to practice it. Religion is an entirely voluntary sphere of our lives. When we decide to adhere to the laws and regulations laid down by the religion of our choice, that too is a choice. We have made a personal decision to voluntarily place ourselves under its sphere of influence, under the yoke of its commandments to use a Jewish phrase. In Rabbi Irving Greenberg's terms, we enter into a "voluntary covenant".

Having entered into that covenant or, using a more traditional formulation, having reaffirmed the covenant made at Sinai, what then? By so doing have we given up any further use of our personal autonomy? Do we now submit to the traditional decision-making processes of our tradition?

Conservative Judaism would certainly hope that we would. Whilst the Conservative Movement holds that Orthodoxy has become too cautious in making changes, it nevertheless holds that changes in any area of Jewish practice must be made centrally by the rabbis

composing the Commission on Law and Standards. If a decision is taken unanimously, then that is the position of the Movement. If a decision is passed by a majority but is not unanimous, then the rabbi of each congregation decides the issue for that congregation. As an example, just over a year ago, as Rabbi Rembaum informed the Library Minyan when he spoke to us during Pesach last year, that Commission passed a majority but not unanimous decision that the imahot could be included in the Amidah; they also approved the use of magen Avraham ufoked Sarah as an alternative hatimah for the first paragraph. Rabbi Rembaum noted that his decision to bring this issue to the Commission was due to the Library Minyan's discussion of the issue. But ironically the Library Minyan had finally allowed these changes two months earlier, leaving the decision as to whether or not to use the alternative version up to each Shaliah Tzibbur. For us, at least, the decision was made before it was sanctioned by the Commission: a victory for less centralized decision-making!

Clearly, though, we have a problem. If the Library Minyan, whose individual members are amongst the most observant within the Conservative movement, can make an albeit communal decision to change Jewish practice without the prior consent of the Commission on Law and Standards, what does that say for the decision-making process of the Conservative movement? This is what Rabbi Eugene Borowitz had to say on the subject in his book 'Choices in Modern Jewish Thought':-

"Evaluating their movement on the occasion of its ninetieth anniversary, the spokesmen of Conservative Judaism found many of their accomplishments praiseworthy. They were pleased with their group's Hebraism, its scholarship, its ethnic loyalty and its Jewish warmth. However, on the major point of their ideology, they sadly acknowledged that they had failed to win any significant number of Jews to accept and live by the discipline of Conservative Jewish law. Like other non-orthodox Jews, most Conservative Jews will listen to what their movement says they ought to do, but insist on determining for themselves what they will do. Against the position which their leaders say distinguishes them from other groups, they are determined to live on the basis of personal autonomy."

If so, then what really distinguishes Conservative Jewish practice from that outlined by traditionally-minded Reform Jews? Maybe some variation of Mordecai Kaplan's democratic Judaism is what we ought to be pursuing?

It seems to me that the Conservative dilemma is caused by an attempt to recapture personal freedom which is part of the mind-set of non-orthodox Jews. The very fact that non-orthodox Jews have chosen not to be orthodox Jews is that they wish to practice their religion within the context of their modern-day reality. On the one hand, they use the standards of Judaism to judge, very often negatively, the ways of modern-day society. On the other hand,

they want their Judaism to live up to the best standards of modernism. Included amongst these standards is the jealous guarding of personal autonomy. People wish to feel that in the final analysis they have the legitimate right to decide what they will do in the sphere of their personal lives.

Judging Judaism by the standards of modern society has its problems. After all, the laws of Judaism have a Divine basis and the mores of modern society may well not accord with the will of God? According to Rabbi David Hartman, such criticism of Jewish law from, as it were, the outside, is legitimate when we are not critiquing it from the standpoint of modernity alone but rather by our accumulated ethics which we have learnt from the Torah itself seen through modern eyes. If we recognize that the Talmud's categorization of women along with children and slaves was due to the fact that none of these were completely free to serve God, having first to be accountable to their husbands, parents or slavemasters respectively, then we can see that the exemption of women from certain mitzvot was an historically-bound decision (rather than a positive time-bound one) which now should have no relevance. If it really is a question of competing obligations, then as men now have an equal responsibility for child-rearing, either these exemptions should be available to men too or for none of either sex. As changing the lot of women in Judaism does not fit neatly into the halachic construct, change can only be brought about by extra-halachic means: by taking back some of the power for decision-making from the centralized, institutionalized processes.

This sort of decision could, of course, be made by a centralized body such as the Commission on Law and Standards. Maybe it should have been: I think it would have made a lot more sense than the attempt at an halachic "fiddle" put forward by Rabbi Joel Roth. Counting the heads of men but the tefillin of women does not seem to me a full step in the direction of pursuing justice. Perhaps that is why the Roth teshuvah has not been strictly followed in certain quarters of the Conservative movement. Maybe communities like the Library Minyan are more prone to take decision-making into their own hands because they are dissatisfied with the over-technical, often unrealistic nature of these responsa.

Could things be different? Borowitz claims that personal autonomy is so ingrained in the modern mind-set that people will always follow their own judgement in the last analysis. I think he could be right but I feel that he may be missing something. For despite his contention, we have given up much of our personal autonomy to secular society. Whilst we are critical when we think that the power that we have invested in others has been abused, we have been willing to accept others making decisions for us for the sake of the smooth-running of society. Perhaps in the religious sphere too, then, non-orthodox Jews would be willing to give up some more of their personal autonomy if they felt that their leaders were taking back some of that long-lost freedom and using it to make bolder judgements for them to follow.