

# From the President

Noam Pianko



Today, well into the COVID pandemic, is a fitting moment to introduce an issue of *Perspectives* called the “Unfinished Issue.” With our professional and personal lives radically disrupted, we all probably have an inordinately long list of unfinished tasks and responsibilities. I am grateful to the *Perspectives* editors for choosing a theme that touches on a defining aspect of our lives today.

Fortunately, most people have been very sensitive to the new reality of “unfinished” business. Still, this is not an easy state for a goal-oriented person like myself. I find it hard to avoid the unease that comes as new responsibilities pile up with limited options for completing existing ones. Reminders of unfinished assignments, projects, or obligations trigger panic, guilt, and worry. I miss the sense of relief that comes with finishing a task and crossing it off the list.

One Hebrew expression has helped allay my own discomfort with the connotations of “unfinished.” Many years ago, an Israeli mentor ended a particularly contentious class debate with the words תם ולא נשלם (*tam ve-lo nishlam*). Unfamiliar with the expression (which colloquially means “to be continued”), I translated the words literally in my head—“finished (or perfect), but not completed.” The literal English translation puzzled me. In English, *finish* and *complete* are synonyms. The Hebrew, however, contrasts a temporary state of accomplishment with a distant and ideal goal of reaching “wholeness.”

תם ולא נשלם offers a much more nuanced way to recognize the incremental efforts to reach milestones. How differently might we approach unfinished things in our lives if we looked at them as perfect but not complete? Instead of rushing to check off tasks, we might focus more on appreciating the small accomplishments. Any completed task would come with the humble realization that we have not reached a final sense of wholeness.

This issue provides an opportunity for us all to grapple with everything interrupted in our lives and scholarship. I hope this exploration leaves us not with the sense of failure so often connected to “unfinished” business, but an appreciation that we can celebrate what we have finished even if some things remain to be completed.

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The Arizona Center for Judaic Studies at The University of Arizona invites applications for the Jeffrey B. Plevan Chair in Israel Studies, tenure eligible, open rank, to begin August 2021 in Tucson, Arizona. The successful candidate will have a Ph.D., a record of scholarly excellence in research, teaching, and service/outreach, will possess a commitment to undergraduate and graduate education, and will have a desire to raise the visibility of Judaic Studies on campus and beyond. The position carries a 2-2 teaching load.

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