

Shalom Haveirim,

It seems ages since I last typed a greeting sentence of the sort 'Dear All' or 'Hi everybody'. Many times, in some interesting occasions, I put for myself a mental note to write to you about whatever I found worth writing; but, somehow, those mental notes were never materialized. Partially, it was because of my busy schedule; some of you may snort with contempt now ("Tamir? Busy? Ye, right..."), but, hey, what can I say - I was busiER than usual, OK? The other reason was my 'going-out-of-business-sale' feelings regarding LA: after all, I start preparing myself for the big move back home and Dvojak's symphony 'Of The New World' that was playing in my head while writing all those letters to you since my arrival here, is being gradually silenced by Smetana's 'My Country'. But, since some of my loyal readers expressed their concern about the hiatus in my communications - I hereby put an end to it!

Returning from Israel after an intense and most enjoyable stay, I decided to stop in London for a day. In the recent year I passed through London's airports many times but never stopped there. As I already know by heart the structure of Heathro's Terminals 1 and 4, I decided to check out what's new in the city that I loved so much in my previous visits years ago. It didn't change much. 'Starlight Express' and the eternal 'Mousetrap' are still playing in the same theaters where I saw them 12 years ago. Angry prophets and preachers are still raising their voices in Hyde Park Corner. The people are still so-perfectly-delightful and speak English with their awfully exquisite accent and wear the most hideous clothes that match so well their pallor. The only change which I noticed was in the Fish-n-Chips department: they stopped selling it wrapped in paper in the streets, it now costs 4 times more and what I remembered as a wonderful delicatessen, now tastes simply horrible. Was it the paper wrap that gave that dish its wonderful taste or was it tasty only because I was then poorer and younger and everything with chips that cost only 1 pound was good enough for me?

As my previous visits in England took place long before my first visit in the US, I never had a chance to compare "the two countries that are separated by an abyss of a common language", until now. When listening to a fervent and most articulate young black man in Hyde Park, I thought to myself that I already heard the very same things, in a different accent, in America. But as much as the two countries are similar in their language and their multiracial society, they are at the same time so much different: old/new, football/basketball, Pakistanis/Hispanics, bath tubs/showers, 'sparkling drinks'/'soda', conservation/change, slow/fast, English/English. . .

My first two weeks back in LA were very busy. Four days after my arrival I gave a talk in our weekly analysis seminar. As I was an applied mathematician speaking in a pure math seminar, the audience was composed of both applied math guys and pure analysts; I was afraid that the first group will find my work too theoretical while the second will consider it not theoretical and 'hard core' enough. Hence, I was very pleased when people from both groups really liked it, asked questions and complimented me on "an interesting talk. "

Exactly a week later, on a Friday afternoon, I delivered the same talk at Stanford and the responses were overwhelming. I was interrupted by questions, interrogations and remarks from the first minutes of the talk until way after it ended. Three major and famous mathematicians who were present, took a very active part in the talk that sometimes turned into a discussion. The warm and friendly atmosphere in the Stanford math department, which was apparent also in my previous visits there, enabled me to speak in the most relaxed manner that is not typical to me at all in such talks. When presenting an example, which was supposed to demonstrate the significance of my analysis - it prompted a controversy that was resolved only after a long discussion in which I was backedup, almost passionately, by Joe Keller - a world renowned mathematician and a precious soul whom I met for the

first time only then. After I made sure that the others understood my point, I told them that I added this example after my talk in the Technion last year during which I was dragged into a debate with one of the guys there, Titi Idris; suddenly, several people in the audience began to smile and said things like "Oh, Titi - it's so much like him", "Where is he now, anyway?", "Do you see him, how is he?". Talk about a small world.

After the talk I was so busy talking to so many people that when Tai Ping Liu, another major major guy, came to say some good words, I hardly had a minute to speak with him! And that is a man who's an editor in several important journals... We then went to the house of Gene Golub - the father, grandfather and great-grandfather of numerical algebra - where he held a party to end a one-day workshop that he organized. The man, who is known for his generous 'grandfather-ness', apologized to me profusely for stealing audience from my talk and for not being there. The next two hours were spent by chit-chatting with him and other people of his caliber. For me, who still lack self-confidence almost as much as I lack hair, this was a rare event. I never felt comfortable with such people (without any good reason, I know) and here I was swinging. This is why when my friends who hosted me - Ada, Eyal and Aya - came to pick me up from there, they found someone who looked as though he took a triple shot of some illegal stuff and was talking fast, way over the speed limit. At least I was perfectly aware of my situation and promised them that I'll be normal again later on.

That day was followed by a lovely weekend with the abovementioned Israeli guys and many others. With the very hot temperatures and the dominant Israeli presence in the Stanford area, this weekend in Escondido Village (the very Kibbutz looking village where the graduate students of Stanford live) felt as though I never left Israel. A few days before I was there, Judith Ravitz performed in Stanford (right after she did here in Westwood); as Ron Karidi told me, it looked like a reunion party of our military unit. Indeed, Stanford and the Silicon Valley are so full of them that you don't even bother to look surprised when you run into one of them.

When I returned to LA, the fun was over. You want to hear only about the good stuff, or also about the bad? So, few days after I returned from the bay area, I got a letter from a prestigious journal in NY, which rejected a paper that I submitted for publication 14 months earlier! That was the very same paper that got wonderful responses at Stanford, UCLA, Japan and Northwestern University. The letter was brief and conclusive. It was also arrogant, wrong and, I should say, a bit stupid. I learned from it, again, how much I don't understand in marketing. I had good results, and with my cautious language and minor style, combined with my desire to present everything in perfect clarity and simplicity, I turned them into something almost trivial. I used in my paper adjectives like 'quite interesting' or 'rather surprising' while some other people that I know would have written 'a striking phenomenon' or expressions of that sort; I presented the material to the reader like a mother who presents a peeled orange to her child - others would have made the reader sweat in order to understand and dig for the hidden meaning. I simply detest papers that are written in the latter pretentious style. However, I see that one must adopt that style, to some extent, in order to win the approval of some short-sighted people. But, there's no bad without good: after the rejection, I improved my paper - content and presentation, added more applications and intensified the style (I upgraded from 'quite interesting' to 'interesting'...). And now I shall submit it elsewhere with crossed fingers. I hope that this story will end like another rejected-paper-story of mine that ended happily only last month: That paper was rejected from another journal by another referee who was upset because in all of his studies of the equation with which I dealt, he overlooked what I revealed (to put it as shortly and accurately as possible). I tried to fight back the nasty, absurd and outrageous rejection, but found that it's useless. The editor, even after receiving a second referee's opinion that recommended publication, refused to change his first decision. Therefore, I submitted the paper to a different and even more distinguished journal, and the paper was accepted - as is - within

less than two months. Will the good forces defeat the evil forces again this time? Join me for another chapter of this mathematical saga, as it unfolds. . .

For those of you who are still with me, I apologize for, perhaps, boring you. In this letter I concentrated more about the bread; but I had also plenty of butter lately, on which I promise to write very soon. And now it's time to log off and go to watch the 6th (and most probably the last) Chicago Bulls vs. Seattle Supersonics game in the NBA finals. Yes, they got me too - now I am also hooked.

Later,
Tamir