

The West Wing Weekly
1.14: Take This Sabbath Day

[Intro music]

HRISHI: You're listening to The West Wing Weekly . I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And today we're talking about season 1 episode 14. It's called "*Take This Sabbath Day*".

JOSH: It first aired on February 9th, 2000. The teleplay is by Aaron Sorkin, the story is by Lawrence O'Donnell Jr. & Paul Redford and Aaron Sorkin. You know there's... there's ampersand and then there's the word "and." So it's Lawrence O'Donnell Jr. ampersand Paul Redford, meaning they were working as a team.

HRISHI: I'm pretty sure that all has to do with union rules.

JOSH: Now from the Writers Guild, the ampersand means that the two writers are a team and are treated as one person for WGA [Writers Guild of America] purposes. The other version, with the word "and" spelled out indicates that the writers worked at different times: in this case they're considered separate entities.

HRISHI: Hmm! Here's the NBC synopsis.

JOSH: Here we go!

HRISHI: "After the Supreme Court refuses to stay the execution of a federal prisoner convicted of killing two drug kingpins. President Bartlet must decide whether or not to commute his sentence in less than 48 hours, so he calls upon his sagacious childhood priest for guidance. Meanwhile, even Toby feels the heat over the controversial issue when he hears a sermon on capital punishment from his rabbi. Elsewhere, a hearing-challenged, combative campaign manager demands an audience with the president when her Democratic congressional candidate has been purposefully underfunded by his party before the upcoming election to unseat an incumbent."

JOSH: It's funny, I don't remember any of the plotlines mentioned. [laughter] The only thing that stuck with me was the ampersand, and the word "and." [laughter] So... general reaction?

HRISHI: This is, I think, maybe one of the greatest pieces of television ever made.

JOSH: Oooh! Oooh that's hard I can't even - I can't even follow that. That made me break out in a sweat. Both: [laughter]

HRISHI: What did you think?

JOSH: Yeah, I liked it. I liked it too.

HRISHI: [laughter]

JOSH: No, I think it's terrific. I do. I don't know if I'm willing to... I've got to go deep within... I think I need a year of review before I can sign off on that exact statement. But I think it's a pretty

great episode of the show. And it's a great stand-alone episode. Maybe we should start easy and then build to deeper conversation.

HRISHI: Let's try and take this one chronologically.

JOSH: Ha! That'll last!

HRISHI: [cross talk] Let's see how it goes, yeah.

JOSH: [cross talk] Let's give it a shot! Why not?

HRISHI: We start in the Supreme Court. There are eight justices sitting because Mendoza hasn't been confirmed. And we find out that there is a death row inmate who's applied for stay of execution, and they deny the stay of execution. And then we go to the three public defenders who are in charge of this case.

JOSH: Most notably, public defender Bobby Zane, played by one of my oldest and dearest friends, Noah Emmerich.

HRISHI: You guys lived together, right?

JOSH: That is true.

HRISHI: When did you guys live together?

JOSH: I'd rather not get into our romantic history. No, we lived together at Yale, as we lived off campus together. He is a year older than I, he was a year ahead of me. But we shared a house for a year. We both moved to New York City, then we both eventually moved to Los Angeles in 1992. We got a house together in LA and lived together for several years.

HRISHI: And he was also in "A Few Good Men," I think.

JOSH: He was in the national tour of "A Few Good Men."

HRISHI: Did he get that gig because of you?

JOSH: Well, I guess he got to know Aaron through me, and he got the gig because of Aaron. And so by the transitive law you are correct, he got the gig through me.

HRISHI: And so continuing the transitive property, he also probably got this episode through you.

JOSH: Sure. I would say his entire career he owes to me.

HRISHI: [laughter] Well thank you! As a big fan of Stan Beeman on The Americans , I say thank you!

JOSH: Let me just say [laughter] in a real sense, I think, I know that he went into acting, if you go way way way back, I think at my behest. We did a commencement show, a show just after graduation, after my sophomore year and his junior, we did a production of Anything Goes . I played Moonface Martin. It was musically directed by my cousin Stuart Malina who is now the conductor of the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra. And I urged Noah to audition. He had a little interest in acting, but I probably deprived the world of what would have been a first-rate constitutional scholar [laughter] because I veered him off his path and study of history and the

US Constitution by pushing him to play a small role in an amateur production of Anything Goes . Got him obsessed with acting. My memory, too, is he had about three lines and he blew one of them consistently. As the captain of the ship in Anything Goes , he had to say... there was some sort of problem, and he would say “The something is you, Purser!” And I remember him saying, at least one night in one performance, “The problem is you, Skipper!” And then there was a long pause as he pondered the fact that he was the skipper, and that what he was saying made no sense. And yet somewhere from that moment there is a line to be drawn to his now incredible work as Stan Beeman on The Americans , and his pretty impressive body of work that he has done in film, and TV, and theater since that moment.

HRISHI: He was going to be a great lawyer, but much more importantly now, he plays a lawyer.

JOSH: Yeah. He plays a not-great lawyer.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Although, he is a lawyer who cares. I actually really enjoyed Noah in this. It’s a small appearance but he’s very good when his, almost-a-throwaway line but that that informs the rest of it, where he says that he can get, he thinks, Sam Seaborn on the phone because he used to beat him up as a kid, or he used to bully him.

HRISHI: He “used to beat him up in high school.”

JOSH: “I used to beat him up in high school.” Exactly. And you can kind of see in Noah’s... first of all he look’s like somebody who might have beaten someone else up in high school and a bit of a bully. And then when he talks to Sam, he really does bully him.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

BILLY: You are going to go to the President and you’re going to tell him that he can’t run from this one. He’s got to consider my client. You’re going to tell him that.

SAM: I don’t talk to the President that way, Bobby, nobody talks to the President that way, and I’ve got to tell you not that many people talk to me that way anymore.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And he actually gets Sam to reveal what synagogue Toby goes to, much to Toby’s dismay. So, he’s not the worst public defender.

HRISHI: No!

JOSH: He cares!

HRISHI: And in a lot of ways it seems like they’ve set him up to be this jerk. He was a bully. He got fired from his fancy law firm job. And yet, his passion here to save this guy’s life spurs the entire episode.

JOSH: Yeah. That’s right. And I like, Aaron wrote the whole opening kind of beautifully because life and death hangs in the balance, and what happens is very human. This guy says “Yeah I used to beat him up, I think I can get him on the phone.” We eventually see that Sam Seaborn is out the door, literally out the door, to go on a sailing trip and get some much needed vacation hours away from the endless grind of working in the White House, and he leaves from outside the door back into his office because that phone is ringing, and that little red light is lighting up,

and he takes the call. And regardless of how everything ends up, Aaron's little balancing act of the macro, huge stakes, goes on and the tiny, little, sort of, quotidian moments of your day: are you going to leave for vacation or are you going to come back and answer the phone. And he weaves them together beautifully.

HRISHI: I promise I'm not trying to jump ahead too much but...

JOSH: You may if you'd like.

HRISHI: The other thing that's really nice about that moment that you were talking about, where Sam comes back into the office because his phone is ringing instead of going on vacation, is his willingness to take the call, literally and metaphorically, versus later on. We find out that this issue is such a tough one to grapple with that Leo considers that, if he could have, if he had known it was going to happen, he would have kept The President out of the country so that he wouldn't have to take the call.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

LEO: We were totally unprepared for this!

SAM: What the hell are you s—

LEO: We were caught in the headlights! This thing was supposed to go back to the Sixth Circuit. And I don't know how the hell—

SAM: What are you talking about "prepared"!? The court sat! What would you have done different?

LEO: I'd have—

SAM: What would you have done different? You kept the President out of the country another two days?

LEO: ...yes.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But in this instance Sam has every right to just walk out the door. He's on vacation. He's done it. But there's a sense of civic duty or loyalty to his job, that he's like "No, I'm going to come back in. I'm going to answer the phone." And that, of course, changes everything.

JOSH: Yeah. It's a further revelation of his commitment, though we've seen in his writing the birthday memo. He's willing to miss a date for that. He's certainly going to skip sailing to deal with this.

HRISHI: Right. So we have this setup of the death penalty, but then almost immediately after the introduction of that plotline, we get the second story, the B plot, with Josh. He has a bachelor party to go to.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: The death penalty stuff is handled with so much gravity, but the episode is also so funny.

JOSH: It is really funny. Yeah. And it doesn't feel like it's two episodes working against each other.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think in some ways you maybe laugh harder because there's some sense of relief that those scenes give you. It works in the episode's favor to have the two different modes that it's working between.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree with you. We get the piece of information about the bachelor party during this great multidirectional walk and talk. It's got a back and forth. I was watching that again and the camerawork on that walk and talk is amazing. The cameraperson, just really, has got to be super aware of his surroundings and framing every moment. It's incredible choreography. It changes direction multiple times. Now that Tommy has, sort of, established this style, it's easy to take for granted these difficult, technical pieces of acting and filming that are being done. I mean, the lighting, the camerawork, the actors, the performance, everything has to work in one go. It's just a particularly intricate and beautifully played walk and talk.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

DONNA: You have to be here at 10 tomorrow morning.

JOSH: We have to be here at 10 tomorrow morning.

DONNA: Why me?

JOSH: Because you work for me!

DONNA: I have things to do tomorrow, Josh. It was my Saturday too.

JOSH: What things?

DONNA: I have to go shopping.

JOSH: For what?

DONNA: Whatever! It's Saturday!

JOSH: Ten minutes. When it's over, I'll buy you some shoes.

DONNA: Really?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: What do you think about Josh planning on buying Donna some shoes?

JOSH: Yeah. Now, especially because we've discussed it, I guess I'm always looking for it. They're just... do it already! [laughing] It really is, actually. Do you guys not realize that you're dating? [Laughter]

HRISHI: The idea that a man would buy a woman shoes. It sort of reminds me of "Pulp Fiction," when they talk about giving a woman a foot massage. That's a level of intimacy that goes to another level.

JOSH: Yeah, that's the word I was about to say. That's an intimate thing.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: That's not normal for a boss to be saying.

HRISHI: Or any man to any woman who is not his significant other.

[JOSH laughing]

HRISHI: It once again shows that, not only do the senior staff have very little control over their own schedule, there's these waves of personnel repercussions that go along with it. Suddenly Josh has this assignment, and now Donna has to be in the office all day on a Saturday as well.

JOSH: Yes, that's right. There's a domino effect.

HRISHI: A Donna-no...

JOSH: Nice. [laughing]

HRISHI: Were you at all tuned into the death penalty debate in the nineties?

JOSH: I was tuned in, in the seventies when, at my yeshiva, I was assigned, we had a death penalty debate. And, I remember, I can't remember whether I was assigned or, I'm guessing, I volunteered for the anti-death penalty side. I remember very ardently arguing my case while my sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Alter, played Mattel Electronic Football. [laughter] She was literally, I'm not kidding, doing that [sings music] thing with the phys-ed teacher who was in the room. And then I remember she, I think, had some criticisms for my either debate technique or content. And I remember saying, "If you hadn't been playing Mattel Electronic Football while I spoke, I might take your criticism more seriously." Because I was that kind of sixth grader.

HRISHI: You're that kind of 50-year-old as well.

JOSH: Well yeah, exactly. I certainly haven't mellowed.

[BOTH laughing]

JOSH: Shall we get personal? Shall we get into our own takes on the death penalty before we dive into this entire episode?

HRISHI: Sure. You first.

JOSH: Well okay. To me, it is a thorny, complicated, and not black-and-white issue. Although I have a black-and-white stance on it. I am completely against capital punishment. For me, there's just one very little easy escape valve that makes the argument simple when in reality, it isn't. And that's just that people get exonerated.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: There's DNA evidence, there's new scientific techniques. I think I read somewhere, 140 people, or over 140 people since 1976 have been exonerated from death row.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: So, to me, if there's any chance that somebody is innocent, you can't have the ultimate penalty. Now this makes it easier for me to not have to argue what are areas of it that make me

feel more ambivalent. It's interesting, when Mandy and C. J. are basically saying, "I feel nothing."

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

MANDY: He killed two people. Probably more. I'm sorry, I don't get worked up over it.

C. J.: Me neither. That's what I'm saying. Me neither.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And I often do feel that way when I see on the news or read on the internet that an execution is happening. Often I see the details of what the person has been found guilty of, and sometimes I do feel... yeah, I feel nothing. So I have that overall objection to it, and it's absolute. But then, when it is enforced in a situation where it seems clear to me that the guy did, it's generally a guy, something horrific, I don't feel terrible, emotionally.

HRISHI: I actually credit this episode, besides being a great piece of entertainment, for fundamentally informing my views on the death penalty. I was ambivalent about it and I could see arguments for it. I certainly had sympathy for people, families of victims who would want to see a perpetrator be executed. But I think after watching this episode, when I first saw it, and certainly subsequent times after that, it's reinforced for me the idea that: no, it's wrong. And then reading more, learning about things like the Innocence Project and examples of times when people have been wrongfully imprisoned. The inherent racism that exists in the criminal justice system in the US. There's just so many-

JOSH: I agree, I didn't mention what a huge element, the fact that, for this ultimate penalty the fairly clear sense that it's not fairly enforced.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

JOSH: [cross talk] is yet another element. What's interesting too is this absolute of "Well what if somebody innocent is put to death," I don't think is ever mentioned in this episode. Which is not to fault the episode. In a sense, Aaron really focuses more on the morality of taking a human life, [cross talk] and I'm not sure...

HRISHI: [cross talk] And less about the flaws.

JOSH: I'm not sure that there's a mention of racial inequity and how capital punishment is handed down as a sentence either. [cross talk] It really...

HRISHI: [cross talk] There is one.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

BARTLET: I want you to know that I had a number of people on my staff search for a reason the public would find palatable to commute the sentence. Technicality. Any evidence of racism.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Ah, you're right. You're absolutely right.

HRISHI: But yeah, you're right, they really are talking about the merits of the death penalty with the assumption that the system works and without the caveat that there are fundamental

institutional problems with law enforcement and how prosecution and punishment works in this country.

JOSH: Right. So in a sense I feel like what Aaron does is to dig into the harder stuff. In other words, he focuses more on the—

HRISHI: The morals and not [cross talk] the process.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah, gooey part that is a little bit harder for most of us to really get to or to access, and is harder to discuss and frame. It's interesting to me, that's how he decides to frame this discussion. Through a multi-religious lens.

HRISHI: That's a great point, that the moral argument for the death penalty is much more complicated than one based on the facts of judicial process.

JOSH: But the real focus is on: "Is vengeance even something we as a society should be in the business of? And is taking a life something that's ever okay?"

HRISHI: Okay. We jumped way ahead.

JOSH: I knew we would. I wrote down here, "fjords and lederhosen."

HRISHI: Yes, yes.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

C. J.: If you'll look out the left side of the cabin you'll see the fjords. Then we got a history of the fjords. Then we got a quiz on the fjords. Do you have any idea how much I'd like to dress you up in lederhosen and drop-kick you into a fjord right now?

BARTLET: You don't know how to have fun while we're traveling...

CHARLIE: It was quite a trip.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: So here are my two questions. Are there fjords in Sweden? And don't they wear lederhosen in Germany? I don't know, I'm just confused.

HRISHI: There are fjords in Sweden.

JOSH: Okay.

HRISHI: I thought lederhosen was German, but.... Where's Heidi from? Switzerland!

JOSH: Switzerland, Germany, Austria, all lederhosen. Sweden, I think not so much.

HRISHI: No, that's true.

JOSH: I'm just taking a shot at C. J.

HRISHI: So much for Sam's claim to Bobby Zane that nobody talks to the President that way. There's a great moment when they come back to Josh after the bachelor party on Saturday morning. He's in his office, and he's looking at Donna when he's drunk, in their first exchange.

At one point when he's looking at her and he's baffled, there's a face that he makes where his lower lip is just....

JOSH: [laughing] He does a very good hungover. I love when he says, "I have a very delicate system."

HRISHI: [laughing] No, it's even better than that! She says—

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

DONNA: You have a very sensitive system.

JOSH L.: I wish you'd stop telling people that. It makes me sound like an idiot.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: But then he calls it back later?

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: That's funny.

HRISHI: When he finally gets confronted by Joey Lucas.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

JOEY: Are you drunk?

JOSH L.: I have a very delicate system.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's right. That made me laugh. That made me laugh and made me angry because my wife, the lovely Melissa, does like occasionally to say to me, "You're a delicate darling." [laughing] Which is not my favorite thing to be called.

HRISHI: I don't mind it. I am a delicate flower.

JOSH: Yeah, I guess I am too.

[BOTH laughing]

HRISHI: Here's another great funny moment. When we're in the temple, and the rabbi is speaking, and Toby gets up to go take the call. He exchanges a look with the rabbi of "Yeah, it's me getting up in the middle..." His phone goes off and... it's all bad.

JOSH: Yes!

HRISHI: But then the button on that scene is so good. Toby leans on the chairs and they all go clattering. But the thing that's amazing that I never noticed until this watch is that the rabbi says the word "quietly." He's in the middle of a sentence and he says the word "quietly," and then Toby knocks over all of the chairs.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

TOBY: All right, I'm on my way

RABBI GLASSMAN: ...quietly... [sound of chairs falling over]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's very funny. The rabbi, of course, played by David Proval. He was in "Mean Streets," a Scorsese movie way back when. And was Richie Aprile in "The Sopranos." I don't know if you know. Were you a Sopranos fan?

HRISHI: I never watched "The Sopranos."

JOSH: Ugh. Oh dear lord.

HRISHI: That's not to say I never watched it. I watched the first season. Here's what I am going to say about "The Sopranos." When it was on, I was sort of like, there have been so many great mobster stories told...

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: And this one... It felt like, the only new thing that it was introducing, the new element, was the psychiatrist part of it. And I found those conversations so annoying.

JOSH: They were not my favorite part in the "The Sopranos."

HRISHI: And the whole thing about dream sequences... I hate dream sequences so much. And then I think everybody was so in love with "The Sopranos" that it made my slight annoyance so much deeper that I was like, you know what? I'm out.

JOSH: Yeah. No, I completely understand that. But you should watch "The Sopranos" because it was really good. If only to see David Proval, who plays this wise, loving rabbi in this episode of "The West Wing."

HRISHI: I might even say he was a little bit sagacious.

JOSH: I would say that as well. He plays an incredibly ruthless character very very convincingly in "The Sopranos."

HRISHI: [laughing] Okay.

JOSH: Yeah, he's really really good. If you want to juxtapose two extremes for an actor, look at those two performances. I love that, again, the level of detail that Aaron puts into a script. So, Bobby Zane, as played by young Noah Emmerich, has convinced the sagacious rabbi, as played by David Proval, to fashion a sermon really to reach out to Toby Ziegler, one of his congregants and, apparently, a regular temple-goer. Toby gets this phone call and walks out, and as he's walking out the sermon kind of drifts off but I can hear where he was headed, and it is actually a great little piece. The theme of the rabbi's sermon being that vengeance isn't Jewish. It's springtime, Passover is coming soon, or Pesach for our Jewish listeners. The rabbi, as Toby is headed out of the synagogue, is about to talk about something that's done on the Seder nights, the two Seders for Passover....

HRISHI: This is about the Haggadah.

JOSH: This is about the Haggadah. Very good! And in the Haggadah, there is a portion where we read aloud the ten plagues that God supposedly smote the Egyptians with. And as each plague is read, there is a ritual, or a tradition, of dipping your finger into your wine glass and taking out a drop of wine for each plague as a way of acknowledging that even as Jews around the world are celebrating their freedom at a Seder, they are not rejoicing in the misery even of their tormentors.

HRISHI: Interesting.

JOSH: Yeah, we take one drop out of our glass so our glass is less full. Wine being associate with celebration. So that's where he was just starting to head, he was just a few words... But I love that Aaron, in the sermon within the episode, which is not largely heard, had a real direction.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

RABBI GLASSMAN: We are reminded by the Haggadah, the simple truth, that violence begets violence. Vengeance is not Jewish. We'll pour ten drops...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: The "vengeance is not Jewish," is such a beautiful, complex line.

JOSH: Absolutely, and I think you could have a... it's not something necessarily to be taken at face value, for a people whose holy book contains "eye for an eye." It is expanded on later when it's suggested that vengeance is God's province.

HRISHI: Right. Karl Malden says....

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

FATHER THOMAS CAVANAUGH: "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." You know what that means? God is the only one who get's to kill people.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: In a sense I feel like that's part of the argument of the "vengeance isn't Jewish," because I can imagine people saying "What do you mean? Eye for an eye! It's in the Torah!" And it's also made explicit elsewhere in the episode, by the rabbi, all the things in the Old Testament, or the Jewish Bible, that were punishable by death.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

RABBI GLASSMAN: It says that a rebellious child can be brought to the city gates and stoned to death. It says homosexuality is an abomination and punishable by death. It says men can be polygamists and slavery is acceptable.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: This is something that I wanted to get into with you a little bit, and maybe we are not qualified to discuss this, but...

JOSH: What are we, ultimately, really qualified to discuss, Hrishu?

HRISHU: [laughing] That's true.

JOSH: Let's not let our lack of depth of knowledge stop us from discussing anything.

HRISHU: We started talking about this a little while back with Ed and Larry, with Peter James Smith and William Duffy, when we were talking about interpretation of the text and backstory. We were talking about it in terms of the Constitution. We were talking about it, specifically, in terms of stories and screenplay. And you invoked the Talmud as something that doesn't have backstory. But then there's this other part to it, this new wrinkle that I think gets added in here, when the rabbi says....

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

RABBI GLASSMAN: For all I know, that thinking reflected the best wisdom of its time. But it's just plain wrong by any modern standard.

[end excerpt]

HRISHU: The idea of the latitude given to a rabbi to interpret the Torah in that way, to say, "Some parts of the Torah should be disregarded." Is that at odds with what you were saying?

JOSH: Well, this is clearly not an Orthodox synagogue, first of all.

HRISHU: [laughing] Well, right, okay.

JOSH: First of all you have a congregant who's not wearing a yarmulke and who's answering his phone. [laughing] These are hard questions.

HRISHU: Do you think it would be cool to try and get a rabbi to talk to us about some of this stuff?

JOSH: Yeah, it actually, it would be, that's a very interesting idea.

HRISHU: In our Pilot episode, there was a clip that we played of Hillary Clinton talking about how she gets scripture in the morning. She was responding to a question from a rabbi.

[external excerpt]

RABBI JON: How do you cultivate the ego, the ego that we all know you must have, a person must have, to be the leader of the free world, and also the humility to recognize that we know that you can't be expected to be wise about all of the things that the President has to be responsible for.

CLINTON: Another absolutely wonderful question. Thank you, rabbi.

[end excerpt]

HRISHU: And that rabbi commented on our Facebook page. Rabbi, will you introduce yourself?

RABBI JON: Hi, I'm Jon Spira-Savett. I'm a rabbi in Nashua, New Hampshire. I serve a community for the past eight years called Beth Abraham. I've, in the past, been a high school

educator in Jewish settings, working a lot with teenagers on issues of philanthropy and social justice.

HRISHI: That's great, because Josh and I are basically teenagers.

RABBI JON: [laughing]

JOSH: That will be the level of discourse, [cross talk] it's true.

RABBI JON: [cross talk] Excellent.

JOSH: Rabbi, approximate Jewish population of New Hampshire? Do you just want to call them out by name?

[ALL laughing]

RABBI JON: We're told that there are about 10,000 Jewish people in the whole state of New Hampshire.

JOSH: All right, 1,000 minions ain't bad!

HRISHI: Will you tell the story of how you connected with us?

RABBI JON: Yes! And it gives me a chance to give a little shout out to my sister, Ellen, who lives in Zurich and who heard the podcast from the beginning. She's been a West Wing fan even longer than I have. When she listened to the first one she sent me it and also mentioned that the, she pointed to the little audio bit that you played of Hillary Clinton. It was part of your reflection about the role of faith in politics.

HRISHI: And then you left a comment for us on our Facebook page, which is how we connected here.

RABBI JON: [laughing] Yes.

JOSH: For the sake of the righteous gentiles among our listeners and the less informed Jews, can you give us, first, some simple definitions of Torah, Talmud, and Midrash so that we can, from there, move on together?

RABBI JON: Sure. I would say that Torah means a couple of things. It means, literally, the five books of Moses, the first five books of the Bible. Sometimes we use the word "Torah" to be the Jewish word for Judaism generally, all the teachings of Judaism. The Talmud is a compendium of discussions about the Babylonian Laws that often goes in all kinds of different directions which collects teachings that are 2,000 to 1,500 years old, so certainly several hundred years after the Bible was written down. Midrash refers to all the interpretations and processes of interpretations that jump off from the Bible in all kinds of different directions.

JOSH: Fantastic.

HRISHI: Josh and I have, in the past on this podcast, talked about the idea of interpretation, and even specifically Talmudic interpretation. There's a line from the rabbi where he says that there are certain rules that are dictated but by any modern standard "they're just plain wrong." And I was struck by the amount of latitude that a rabbi could even articulate that.

RABBI JON: Yes, and in fact it wasn't even a modern sensibility, but that 2,000 years ago the rabbis in the Talmud looked at the many death sentences that are pronounced in the Torah for

maybe more than 30 different offenses and decided that it couldn't be done. For instance, the rabbi made reference to the "rebellious son," who, according to the Torah, in Deuteronomy, can be taken out to the city gates and everybody in town stones this child to death. And they start asking questions, like, "When it says son, how old would that be?" and obviously it can't be too young because they wouldn't know better, and if it's too old it's not a child but an adult, and eventually one rabbi says, "This character of the rebellious son doesn't even exist, it's just here for us to talk about." They wouldn't go and write verses out of the Torah, but they would understand that there's a bigger picture that God has been teaching us in the meantime that we've been understanding that would actually prevent us from carrying these things out ourselves.

JOSH: Somewhere in the Talmud there's a discussion that a Sanhedrin that put one person to death in seven years would be considered a hanging court. And then another rabbi says, "No, one in seventy," even that is a murderous Sanhedrin. They really did try to create a situation where really capital punishment was unenforceable.

RABBI JON: One part of the Talmud specifically about capital punishment. The teaching is that a person who saves a life it's as if they've saved the entire world, and if a person takes a life it's as if they've destroyed a whole world. And that's actually part of a warning which, in the Talmud, is given to a witness at a capital crime. And the criminal, who you suspect of murder, is the one whose life, you might think, is the most worthless and the one that's easiest to take, that's the place in the Talmud where Judaism teaches that human life is so valuable, and you should tremble at the thought that you would mistakenly or for the wrong purpose destroy human life.

HRISHI: For you, rabbi, when you're teaching, how do you reconcile passages you might find personally, morally wrong? How do you teach the text while also being true to your own moral compass?

RABBI JON: Well I think the idea is that because the Bible, particularly, is so old, and it may be the product of the best wisdom of its own time, but clearly it was the beginning of the discussion and not the end of it. And almost any discussion that we might have in Conservative Judaism it was about whether women should be equal to men in certain roles, and then more lately it's been about LGBT, and it could be about this too. We have this feeling that we have been studying the conversations that had happened before and they might have the seeds of a different vision and we have to use that to correct our modern vision, too, to make sure we're not just chasing a fad which might go away. So it's a process where we converse with our own history. And that sort of corrects us, hopefully, from being selfish and imposing our own views. But it obviously, clearly may hold us back sometimes from reaching a more inclusive vision as fast as someone who is not also wrestling with what's being carried along in an older text that also carries a more difficult moral message.

JOSH: So far we've discussed the Rabbinic take on capital punishment of the Talmudic era. What you've told us so far, does that explain the modern, Jewish take on capital punishment? Is there a single, or does it change by denomination?

RABBI JON: There is a pretty universal affirmation in modern Judaism of wanting to repeal capital punishment where it exists, and most of the modern Jewish movements have taken positions in favor of outright repeal or moratoriums on capital punishment. The other thing is that in the State of Israel, which is a kind of modern lab for Jewish values, there is basically no capital punishment. The most famous example of someone who was executed was Adolf Eichmann, who was a Nazi war criminal. So it's on the books for a couple of things, but certainly people who are terrorists who have committed terribly grisly murders, they go to prison. And while there is a concept of capital punishment in Israel it is, certainly in the judicial process, almost completely absent.

JOSH: In an earlier episode, we got into a discussion of acting approaches and the creation of backstory by an actor. William Duffy who played Larry said that he made up a whole backstory, that he went to law school, and where he went to school, and stuff like that. And I contended that I took a Jewish approach, which is very textual and, and hence, I have an aversion to the creation of backstory. You and a couple others, on our website, took issue. I think the way you articulated it was that Jews generally really aren't textualists, and that the great wealth of Midrashic stories are, in fact, backstory. Is that correct?

RABBI JON: Yes, and I was surprised, Josh, if I might go so far as to say, that you expressed the position that you did because I think it ties into what Hrishi asked me before about how we deal with things that are written in the Bible that seem sometimes out of sync with things we understand today. I think the trick is that we are textualists, in that we look so carefully at the texts that we think there might be hints of backstory in it. One classic story is the example of Abraham who, according to the Torah, out of nowhere God picks him and calls him to leave where he is and go to this new unknown promised land. The text itself says that he should leave not only his homeland but his father's house.

JOSH: Terah!

RABBI JON: Yes, very good! So the Midrash builds a kind of backstory that says that Abraham was, for a while, in the process of trying to figure out how to disengage with his father. And so the Midrash has a kind of backstory in which Abraham is a young man, or even a boy, and goes and sort of builds the figure of Abraham as somebody who has already a kind of searcher so that when God calls him he is already walking a little bit and this kind of caught him along the way. So sometimes modern people will create even more backstory, but usually we are very respectful, textually, to the textual backstories that have been written down some centuries ago.

JOSH: So, here's where I'll push back slightly and then admit I'm wrong. That's my plan. I, of course, am not ignorant of these stories; of Abraham, and Terah, and the many many more. Here's where I question whether they are indeed backstory. My understanding of these kind of tales of the rabbis, I thought they were spun, in part, to reach people, to make the text more accessible, but did the rabbis posit these stories for us to take them as literally having happened? That's my question I guess, ultimately.

RABBI JON: Right, and it's not that literally it should be a backstory, I think it's exactly to your point with Ed and Larry about exploring motivations. Each of these Midrashic backstories gives us another layer both as to why that figure - Abraham or Moses - was, or believed, or acted they way that he did. But really we, to some degree, might read in and relate to some of these backstories that are suggested to find where it touches us, where our point of experiencing the same conflict is and then we use that as motivation to live out the example, let's say, of Abraham and Noah and the like.

JOSH: I think, and maybe this is absolute linguistic hairsplitting, and what's more Jewish than that. But, my actor's job is, I think, absolutely diving in and trying to divine motivation and trying to figure out why the text says this at this point, and why this happens, and why my character reacts this way. But, it's the literal creation of backstory, it's William Duffy deciding Larry went to Loyola Marymount when the writer might still might write, we might find out two episodes later "No! He didn't!" In other words the specific, literal acceptance of backstory, or creation of such, to me, goes against the grain. I still think I have a Jewish approach. It's all about interpreting the actual text. I mean there are times even when, as a character like Will Bailey is sad, and I might think about a time where Josh is sad. That's not Will's backstory, that's motivation that enhances the character and the performance.

RABBI JON: And this is why Midrash is great is that it might often give you two or three backstories that don't necessarily mesh with each other, and they really are more like the vivid depiction of what a motivation would be like. And, yes, they're not meant to be literal, and if you can use them in the way that you describe, I would have to agree with you.

JOSH: I convinced the rabbi!

[ALL laughing]

RABBI JON: We found common ground. I've been fascinated to how Aaron Sorkin, who I understand is Jewish but is not religious and didn't have much of a religious upbringing, I think the whole thing is just amazing to me, how much credit he gives to the complexity of religion, how much depth he gives. And I'm kind of curious if you know, Josh, where he comes to this. Why did he even decide to make the President a Democrat who's a Catholic. Do you know anything about what went into that?

JOSH: I do believe that that was input from Martin Sheen, am I right, [cross talk] Hrishu?

HRISHU: [cross talk] That's right. Martin Sheen himself is a Catholic, and he requested that the character be a Catholic as well.

JOSH: I'm not against requesting backstory. That's fine. It's absolutely great stuff. Way to go Martin!

[HRISHU laughing]

JOSH: So I think that was important. I think Bartlet's faith was an element that Martin Sheen brought to Aaron, and Aaron chose to incorporate.

RABBI JON: And as you know, so often liberals are portrayed as non-religious or anti-religious. And it's not only a label I think that President Bartlet has, but in so many places it is shown with great sensitivity to what it means to be a religious, modern person. And I think that this is a really great demonstration of that, even though it didn't come out in any package at the end. I don't know if this counts as a flentl-

[BOTH laughing]

JOSH: You just made my day that you even said that word.

RABBI JON: But the prayer which we hear repeated, the Hebrew prayer during the fadeout at the very end has a line in it which I think is heard in the chant there which means "guide us with your good council." It was a nice way to pick up some of the message from maybe that scene and also from the episode.

JOSH: Beautifully put.

RABBI JON: Thank you. This is an unbelievable honor, and I'm so excited.

HRISHU: Great. Thanks so much, rabbi. Thanks for speaking to us.

[ad break]

JOSH: I was a little bit disappointed that, is it Father Thomas Cavanaugh?

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: That he wasn't played by Tom Cavanagh. Don't get me wrong, Karl Malden is great, but I just thought it would have been a nice little moment. He was good in "Ed" and he would have been fine as Father Cavanaugh.

HRISHI: I'm not sure I would buy him as sagacious, though.

JOSH: Ah! Yeah he may have been lacking in the sagacious...

HRISHI: Sagacity?

JOSH: Sagacity.

HRISHI: Oh. I don't want to forget to mention this. When the President asks Charlie about his feelings, if they ever caught the guy who killed his mom.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

BARTLET: What happened to the guy who shot your mother?

CHARLIE: They haven't found him yet, sir.

BARTLET: If they did, would you want to see him executed? Killing a police officer is a capital crime. I figured you must have thought about it.

CHARLIE: Yes, sir.

BARTLET: And?

CHARLIE: I wouldn't want to see him executed, Mr. President. I'd want to do it myself.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I thought it was a great little piece of acting from Dule. It was a very real moment. An elegant way, I assume you'll agree with me that the entirety of the episode falls heavily in the anti capital punishment side of things and the pro capital punishment side really isn't even argued by anyone except for this little elegant moment. Where, while not an argument, you at least understand the emotion behind it.

HRISHI: That is extremely well said. Even if you ultimately know which way they're going to fall on the argument, I love when they present both sides in a compelling way. I think the fact that we don't hear so much from the anti death penalty side is really resolved by the fact that in the end the President doesn't act, and Simon Cruz is executed. Even if they're essentially creating a polemic against the death penalty, the plot of the episode it's not like he races in at the last minute and says "Save this guy!" It has this incredibly tragic timbre to it because all these arguments are being made and they're all convincing and they're all well-articulated, and you can tell the President believes in them at some level. And yet in the end he still doesn't act.

JOSH: And then immediately after acting through inaction and allowing the execution to happen and getting the piece of information that in fact it has happened from C.J. he then gives his confession.

HRISHI: Yeah, [cross talk] immediately.

JOSH: [cross talk] He considers himself to have sinned through inaction.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: It's actually very heavy. It's a heavy moment. So let me ask you, what is your take? Why didn't he stay the execution?

HRISHI: I think he frames it in the conversation that he has with Joey Lucas.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

BARTLET: I've got a Harris poll that says 71% of the American people support capital punishment.

JOEY: That's a political problem.

BARTLET: I'm a politician.

JOEY: Yes, sir.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think this is now the most dire version of his political cowardice, his unwillingness to embrace his own ideals. Because of the politics of it, because his own sense of his popularity with the American public, his sense of re-electability. Any of those things informing him. All the stuff that Toby is there to push back on. But here it's not just Toby; he is surrounded by this chorus of voices telling him these are all the reasons why you should not do it, that you should follow your moral compass. And yet he still doesn't because of politics.

JOSH: Including Leo saying-

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

LEO: If that's the only thing stopping you then I'll say this for the first time in your presidency... let that be the next guy's problem.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Also interesting I find, after that conversation with Joey, even though he says to her as if she's just being naive, "I'm a politician. This is what we do." he sends Josh after her to suggest that she become a politician. In other words, he sees in her almost a kindred spirit in that she would be the type of politician that's going to wrestle with her conscience in doing the right thing. And even as, I guess, even in his own estimation, on a certain level does the wrong thing, something on the level of sin, he sees value in her as potentially entering the political arena.

HRISHI: He sees her as the opposite of what O'Dwyer is. O'Dwyer is a stuffed shirt, and she's the real deal. She's grappling with the issues, she has an opinion, she has a point of view. And she can articulate them passionately and put both reason and morals into her decisions, which is really what I feel like all you can ask for one person in office to do.

JOSH: This is even in, as you're pointing out, an episode in which he makes the ultimate move against his own inner voice.

HRISHI: Yeah, I would say this is a failure because even very smart people with great intentions make mistakes. And I love that it's acknowledged right away in that confession scene. Since we're talking about that confession can we talk about something we talked about recently, which is the formality of titles. Father Cavanaugh asks the President, "How should I address you?"

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

BARTLET: To be honest, I prefer Mr. President.

CAVANAUGH: That's fine.

BARTLET: You understand why, right?

CAVANAUGH: Do I need to know why?

BARTLET: It's not ego.

CAVANAUGH: I didn't think it was.

BARTLET: There are certain decisions I have to make while I'm in this room. Do I send troops into harm's way? Which fatal disease gets the most research money?

CAVANAUGH: Sure.

BARTLET: It's helpful, in those situations, not to think of yourself as the man but as the office.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I think that's all fine, but then it's interesting that he keeps calling him "Tom."

JOSH: I noticed the same thing. Not "Father."

HRISHI: It sets up this dynamic between the two of them. Even as we come to know later that they know each other because Father Cavanaugh says, "You're just this kid who was in my parish." And I think that there is this little subtle undercurrent of arrogance or something.

JOSH: I think there absolutely is ego there. There's a continuing thread in Bartlet's character. He's got a healthy ego. No question.

HRISHI: But then there's this beautiful reversal at the very end in the confession. Father Cavanaugh says.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

CAVANAUGH: Would you like me to hear your confession?

BARTLET: Yes, please. Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Oh, here's an interesting thing that I liked. It makes no sense, but I really like it.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

CAVANAUGH: He sent you a priest, a rabbi, and a Quaker, Mr. President. Not to mention his son, Jesus Christ. What do you want from him?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I was like, how does he know all that?

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: [laughing] He just showed up. How does he know that there was a rabbi and that Joey Lucas is a Quaker and that she was in the thing, like that's [laughing]

JOSH: Yeah, I had the same thought too, like, "Oh, so you've watched the episode up until this point."

HRISHI: [laughing] Exactly!

JOSH: You're right, that's one of those moments where you go, "Nah, it works, it works! Just let it go!" And also, Aaron and Tommy discussed this episode on the ATX panel in Austin. I'm guessing most of our listeners have listened to that podcast already. There's some great little trivia bits, for instance, apparently Karl Malden used the Bible that he had used as Father Barry in "On the Waterfront" for this scene, which is just a great piece of information. I certainly noticed it in the rewatching, but one that Aaron that pointed out was their decision or maybe Tommy's decision, that little reflection of...

HRISHI: Simon Cruz and his mother.

JOSH: Which was a great, I thought, subtle, very brief glimpse into the specifics of it. C.J., even as soon as she says that she feels nothing, doesn't care, she's then moved by the fact that his mother has a name and that she, C.J., knows the name. And of course when we see Cruz and we see his mother, now they have faces for us and it's a great little stylistic choice. It didn't hit you over the head. Did you like it?

HRISHI: I feel fine about it. I think that just because it's such a different stylistic move from the show... I'm not sure how to feel about it. But I don't...

JOSH: I think what you're saying is, "No, [cross talk] you did not like it," and that's okay!

HRISHI: [cross talk] No! I... I didn't dislike it though. I understood what was happening. I felt like that was the episode's version of the singer in the temple. You need a little bit of showmanship sometimes to drive the point home. And I'm okay with that.

JOSH: I would say, first of all, I think this is what it sounds like when Hrishu doesn't like something on *The West Wing* .

[HRISHI laughing]

JOSH: I'm also going to say it's funny that you point that out because the cantor at the synagogue who has been apparently set up by the rabbi to be singing this beautiful prayer called the Hashkiveinu, which is a prayer for peace, it's a little bit like that's the rabbi's plaintive oboe.

[HRISHI laughing]

JOSH: It's is! It's doing the little extra getting you there, which as I've mention many times, sometimes works for me and sometimes doesn't. So you felt the same way about the little shot of Cruz [cross talk] and his mother.

HRISHI: [cross talk] A little bit, yeah. But, specifically, the cantor I thought was incredible. And I loved that they bring her back for the end of the [cross talk] episode.

JOSH: [cross talk] For the closing flentl.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: To me it was almost too on the nose to have a flentl that is that Jewish. It was beautiful. I loved it.

HRISHI: There's one thing that I thought about. It's little, but I liked it. The fact that C.J. doesn't want to know the mother's name. The mother's name is Sophia, and Sophia means "wisdom."

JOSH: Ooh!

HRISHI: I like that. And I might be reading too much into it, but if you have to pick a name, and one of the characters wishes they didn't know the name, Sophia is a great choice.

JOSH: Good catch, Hrishi. Yeah, I don't think Aaron takes naming lightly.

HRISHI: I love that the punchline to the story - to the parable or the joke, whatever it is - that God says...

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

CAVANAUGH: I sent you a radio report, a helicopter, and a guy in a row boat. What the hell are you doing here?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That you have a priest telling a story from the voice of God. And God's line is, "What the hell are you doing here?"

JOSH: [laughing] That's funny. I didn't even pick up on that. That's good.

HRISHI: Can we talk about, for a second, a little bit more about the casting. Karl Malden and Marlee Matlin. Heavy hitters.

JOSH: Yeah. And they're both great. And it leaves me wanting more Joey Lucas as soon as possible. She has a great, abrasive romantic energy with Brad. There's clearly something there but they're also really butting heads in a way that I like. There's a good romantic friction between them.

HRISHI: Yeah, there's one part I love when she's leaving.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

JOSH L.: It was nice meeting you.

KENNY [Interpreter for JOEY]: Nice to meet you... That was me saying that.

JOSH L.: You didn't have a good time meeting me?

JOEY: (finger spells) b-i-t-e m-e

JOSH L.: You know what I actually know that sign. Don't know that one but... I can probably guess.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I was trying to figure out what it was. And my sign language... I only know fingerspelling. And she does it too fast for me and her back is to me. But I know it started with a "B." And I think it goes "B" then "I" and then it looked like it ended with either "M" or "E" or both. And so I'm pretty sure she signed "bite me."

JOSH: Oh nice! Nice! Can we get confirmation on that?

HRISHI: Yeah if someone can confirm that, that would be great. But I'm pretty sure she says "bite me," which would be very much in keeping with Aaron Sorkin's dialogue, even when it's not spoken. Somebody would say "bite me" for sure.

JOSH: Yeah that's very Aaron, you're right. I wonder how they came to cast her.

HRISHI: Yeah, I wonder if... I mean you have to write that character as deaf for all those jokes to work, right? Or did he write it for her specifically?

JOSH: I'm guessing he wrote it for her specifically. I think I will email him and then we can drop it in later.

[late-breaking news theme]

HRISHI: Late-breaking news here. Josh did email Aaron, and we got a response back.

JOSH: I posed the following to Aaron. I wrote, "Hey, quick question. We are recording our podcast about Take This Sabbath Day and we were wondering how you came to cast Marlee Matlin. Did you reach out to her and then write Joey Lucas as deaf because she came on board, or did you conceive the role to be played by a deaf actress. Can you give me a little on that, that I can then read on the podcast?" Very graciously, Aaron responded with lightning speed, and he wrote, "Actually, it was because of you. After the Dear Louise episode of Sports Night in which Jeremy is writing a letter to his sister, who is hearing impaired, Marlee asked if she could meet with me. She'd seen the show the night before and wanted to persuade me to write the sister into a future episode so she could play the part. Marlee swept me off my feet in the meeting. She's abundantly charming, brainy, and funny. And her signing is like watching a world-class ballerina. I was never able to come up with an idea for a Sports Night story for Jeremy's sister, but a year later I asked her if she wanted to play a campaign manager whose candidate is being treated badly by the DNC. The character's deafness would only be incidental to the story. Marlee hit it out of the park and so I always looked for opportunities to have her on the show."

HRISHI: So cool.

JOSH: Interesting.

HRISHI: That's an even better origin story than I could have ever hoped for.

JOSH: Another great little moment that I loved. The entire Josh Lyman is hungover, possibly still drunk, complete mess, smells bad, has to change into Sam's foul weather gear. I like the entire thing. Totally makes me laugh. And there is a fantastic moment when Donna brings him coffee, which apparently is cold, and he spit-takes it onto himself. A very well executed spit-take. Hat-tip to Brad Whitford.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

DONNA: Drink this.

JOSH L.: Coffee?

DONNA: It's strong, drink it all.

[JOSH L. SPIT-TAKE]

DONNA: It's from yesterday so it might not be hot anymore.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's a different kind of spit-take. It's not the projectile spit-take. It's the dribble spit-take.

JOSH: That's true! It's a sister spit-take to what I was asked to do on Sports Night . There is an episode where [cross talk] -

HRISHI: [cross talk] With the eggnog!

JOSH: Jeremy can not drink eggnog. And it's not a *pffft* in your face spit-take, it's a "this just has to get out of my mouth." I'm just gonna let it fall, let gravity do it's thing.

HRISHI: It's much funnier. It's so baffling when he first does it. He takes a sip, and then it just falls out of his mouth and you're like, is he missing some faculty?

JOSH: [laughing] [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: [cross talk] And then Donna reveals, "By the way, it's cold." On the complete opposite side of the spit-take... There have been a few lines, like "We could all be better teachers," and "We talk about enemies more than we used to," that haven't always landed for me with the kind of gravity that I think they're supposed to...

JOSH: I know where you're going!

HRISHI: But there is a line in this episode that I love, that I think it supposed to be doing the same thing. [cross talk] And for me...

JOSH: [cross talk] Sam Seaborn line, yes?

HRISHI: Yes.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

SAM: Leo there are times where we are absolutely nowhere.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think about that line in my own life a lot. That's a phrase that, unfortunately, rings in my head when I watch the news so often. I love that one.

JOSH: It's a great line, yeah, I agree. I like it a lot. I did think of the other two lines that we had specifically discussed when I heard it. This episode is a nice further teasing out of Sam's character. I feel like in a way he was developed more slowly maybe because I feel like the Laurie storyline... was whatever it was, but it wasn't the most revealing of his character as we would later come to know him.

HRISHI: Right, it's almost more of a leading man storyline, and that's not necessarily the best deployment, it turns out, of Sam Seaborn.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree. We're getting more of the character guy.

HRISHI: The guy who is.. I love that he... There are other indications, besides the thing about [Harry] Blackmun. When he's talking to Toby, and Toby's getting mad at him for having revealed this personal information about his temple.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

SAM: Toby, that never should have-

TOBY: How did the public defender know I was at that temple?

SAM: I'm saying this guy didn't have the world's greatest legal council.

TOBY: How did he know where I was going to be?

SAM: I told him!

TOBY: You told him?

SAM: Yeah.

TOBY: Sam, what are you doing giving out that kind of information?

SAM: I know. I don't know, right at that moment it seemed like what I should do.

TOBY: He's not going to commute the sentence, Sam.

SAM: We don't know what the President is going to do.

TOBY: It seemed like what you should do...

SAM: Yeah.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think Toby has been presented as this guy who is maybe a little dogmatic even about certain things, and it's nice to have Sam have his own version of that.

JOSH: Yeah. I liked, also, that his time off was going to be spent on a boat, as if he is indeed of the sea born.

HRISHI: [laughing] Ha - ha!

JOSH: Like, ah! What's his little hobby? He likes to sail.

HRISHI: Very nice. What's Josh's hobby? He likes to tell lies to men.

JOSH: There you go, man.

HRISHI: And that's it for our episode.

JOSH: Another one in the can.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for joining us. And we hope you'll join us next time.

JOSH: In the meantime, if you want to reach out to us on Twitter and follow us, which is really what you ought to do, I'm @JoshMalina , Hrishi is @HrishiHirway . Should we be spelling that?

HRISHI: I figure, if they've taken enough time to listen to this episode, they've taken enough time to figure out how to spell Hrishi Hirway.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: And I have to say, I get a certain kind of thrill from the fact that so many people on our Facebook page and in our comments on our website spell my name correctly. I don't think I've ever seen such a vast number of strangers getting my name right.

JOSH: Let me just piggyback on that and say, considering how long I've been acting, it's shocking to me how many people on our Facebook page spell my last name incorrectly.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: What else? Our show also has a Twitter feed. It's @WestWingWeekly .

HRISHI: You can also leave a comment for us or for other West Wing Weekly listeners on our website, theWestWingWeekly.com or on our Facebook page, facebook.com/theWestWingWeekly . We're working on some exciting things, but in order to get them lined up we have to take next week off. But we'll be back the week after that.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: What's next.

[outro music]