

October 26, 2023

Dear Shearith Israel family,

**Year of Hope Doings.** Last Shabbat not only commemorated our **Shabbat of Hope** but also inaugurated our **Year of Hope**. Rabbi Soloveichik's two talks, one to kick-off this year's **Friday Night Lights** series and one after services Shabbat morning, were marvelous. The talk on Shabbat morning focused on the first of the ten objects that will feature in his ten-lecture series. The second installment of that series will occur this Shabbat and is entitled: *The Jewish Calendar Made By a Catholic Priest: A World War II Tale for Our Time*.

Here is a photo of Shearith Israel's three pairs of glorious Myer Myers *rimonim*, which have been in use in our services recently and were on display in the Main Sanctuary for congregants to view up close last Shabbat:



We are waiting for things to improve in Israel before reaching out on the capital fundraising that we need to accomplish as an integral part of our **Year of Hope**. That need is real, but we will wait.

In the meantime, we are continuing to add prayers in every service for those in harm's way or missing in Israel or captive. We all sang Hatikvah with the Choir on Shabbat (the Choir and the rest of us sang in unison, without harmony – a fitting gesture of singular solidarity and muted joy). We are continuing to collect names and praying for the safety of Congregational children, grandchildren, and other relations and who are defending Israel now.

(Can't someone come up with a better heading for this section?)

**Daf Yomi: One of Our Greatest Stories Ever Told.** *The Greatest Story Ever Told* was first a radio broadcast (in the late 1940s), then a novel, and then, in 1965, an epic film about Jesus of Nazareth. That's not my reference. Mine is to the short but enduring life's work of Rabbi Meyer Shapiro, who conceived and began the Daf Yomi learning cycle 100 years ago. He died of typhus at the young age of 46 on 7 Marcheshvan, Gregorian Calendar year 1933 (7 Marcheshvan was this past Sunday). I was waiting for the anniversary of his passing, or *nachala*, to mention this. Our office manager Sarah Gross simply couldn't believe I was delaying this. She was right; I should have done it on Rosh Hashana, when R' Shapiro *began* the extraordinary venture.

These pages are not given to idol or even hero worship – at least I try to avoid it. What one person accomplishes, or is given the credit for accomplishing, can in most cases be argued or even proven as having been done by someone else, sooner or later. Further, everything worth doing takes a community to do it (as one of the great songs of our time goes, “alone we can lead [but only] together succeed”). Nonetheless, the world-wide learning that started with R' Shapiro's Daf Yomi directly touches hundreds of thousands of Jews daily and indirectly affects the lives of millions – and maybe even the whole world. In my mind, the accomplishment ranks with other miracles of the Twentieth Century (Israel, Hebrew as a reclaimed language, Chabad – you got others as profoundly impactful? Tell me, and prove it.)

**Maybe We Are Royalty, Maybe Scoundrels – But At Least We Are Together.** The pages of Tractate Kiddushin being learned this week (pp. 70-76) include a wonderful and even humorous discussion of J-Continuum unity. These pages discuss “*yichut*” or “*yichus*”, the supposed purity of lineage in certain Jewish families. To take an example, the Torah and the Rabbis prescribe a set of rules for who a *Kohen* can marry and still have his offspring be considered *Kohanim*. Or who can marry a *mamzer* and still be considered within the Jewish fold. At the same time, like any set of exclusionary rules, the rules can be misunderstood and misused to give a false sense of superiority to those on the “in” and a false sense of second-classness to those on the “out”. Recall our discussion of even the jaded lineage of Queen Elizabeth ([see my email of 7/28/22](#)).

Our Sages were keen on making sure that lineage was used properly and not improperly. A light touch is used to educate. Page 71b, for example, tells the following story:

זְעִירֵי הַנָּהָה קָא מִישְׁתַּמֵּיט מִינִיָּה דְרַבֵּי יוֹחָנָן דְּהוֹנָה אָמַר לֵיהּ: גְּסִיב בְּרַתִּי. יוֹמָא חַד הוּוּ קְאָזְלִי בְּאוֹרְחָא, מְטוּ לְעוֹרְקָמָא דְמִיא, אֲרַכְבִּיהּ לְרַבֵּי יוֹחָנָן אֲכַתְפִּיָּה וְקָא מַעְבֵּר לֵיהּ. אָמַר לֵיהּ: אוֹרְיִיתָן כְּשָׂרָה, בְּנִתִין לָא כְּשָׁרָן?

*The Gemara relates: The Sage Ze'eiri, a Babylonian, was avoiding Rabbi Yoḥanan, who was from Eretz Yisrael, since the latter kept saying to him: Marry my daughter. One day, when they were walking along the way, they arrived at a large puddle of water. Ze'eiri lifted Rabbi Yoḥanan upon his shoulders and carried him over the puddle out of respect. Rabbi Yoḥanan said to him: Our Torah is fit and worthy of honor in your eyes, and yet our daughters are not fit?*

R' Yohanan Ben Zaccai was one of the greatest Sages of his (or any other) generation. He can be thanked for saving Torah Judaism ([see my email of 9/14/23](#)). When *his* lineage is questioned, as it was by the hesitancy of marrying his daughter, then it is time to reexamine the entire enterprise.

A similar point is made right after that on page 71b. There it discusses the view that, for some reason, the lineage of those in Babylonia was more pure than that of those who had returned to Israel with Ezra and had raised generations of families and sustained Judaism there. Says the Talmud:

עולא איקלע לפומבדיתא לבי רב יהודה, חזייה לרב יצחק בריה דרב יהודה דגדל ולא נסיב. אמר ליה: מאי טעמא לא קא מנסיב ליה מר איתתא לבריה? אמר ליה: מי ידענא מהיכא אנסביה? אמר ליה: אטו אן מי ידעין מהיכא קאיתין?  
קאיתין?

*Ulla arrived in Pumbedita [in Babylonia] to the house of Rav Yehuda. He observed that Rav Yitzhak, son of Rav Yehuda, was grown up and was unmarried. Ulla said to Rav Yehuda: What is the reason that the Master does not marry a woman to his son? Rav Yehuda said to him: Do I know from where I can find a woman to marry him? I am concerned about flawed lineage. Ulla said to him: Is that to say that we know where we come from? Can we be sure that our lineage is unflawed?*

The Talmud goes on to describe various serious (indeed hair-raising) problems with the lineage of those in Babylonia. It's a wonderful way to instruct – and a mighty deep lesson to learn.

### **Built Back Better.**

**Books.** It's not that I'm tiring of reporting on my own reading. Actually, I'm happy to. But I would learn more from reading about books that *you all* have read and liked (or disliked), and others would benefit, too. Please, send in your book reactions or recommendations.

I just finished *Religion's Sudden Decline*, by Professor Ronald F. Inglehart. Inglehart was a Professor of Political Science at Michigan. He died in 2021. He developed something of a cottage industry taking and trying to interpret surveys (his most well-known one was the unpretentiously named World Values Survey) that asked questions, over decades and across much of the world, like, do you believe in G-d and how strongly, etc. His thesis has been that religion wanes in countries that find ways to increase wealth and health; so, for example, as infant mortality declines in a country fewer people answer his survey questions disclosing an abiding belief in an Almighty.

I didn't love the book, and not solely because it was repetitiously repetitious. I have five additional reasons:

- **First**, at some important level the assertions are pretty obvious. Read our Sages, or our prophets, or even our Bible if you want to learn about the risk of losing faith in the face of physical comfort.
- **Second**, Inglehart needs about ten separate hypotheses to account for all the variation among countries. Without that multiplicity, the data would otherwise undermine his thesis. The hypotheses seem to be created to fit the data, which is a perilous exercise if you want to appear to be doing science.
- **Third**, the hypotheses are only as strong as the data supporting them. [It was reported](#) (fortunately by the author and others) that there were highly significant errors in the data used for the United States. The author says his conclusions remain supported. I think the

credibility of one of the major points in the book, about the US, was demolished by disclosure of the error.

- **Fourth**, only toward the end (Chapter 8) does the book discuss happiness, fulfillment, or sense of purpose – and there the data destroy the neat statements made in the rest of the book (for example, many religious countries score highly on the “happiness” quotient).
- **Fifth**, there seems to be certain biases in the author’s approach that need discussion. I saw no data for his view, repetitiously repeated, that people in the United States were losing their religion because the Trump-inspired right turn off the young to religion. Nor are there data on his “tipping point” speculation – that at some point, apparently at a magic 50+%, previous personal tendencies shift 180 degrees and accelerate. Inglehart extols the virtues of the Nordic countries, which he says basically have turned their backs on religion but are still populated by nice and fair-minded and socially democratic people anyway. These countries have tiny populations – barely do any have large cities with *total* populations equal to the number of *migrants* that New York City is now alone sustaining – yet not once is that addressed as a factor in need of analysis. The author glosses over the fact that these countries turn their backs on foreigners, and he never addresses that these enlightened countries are in the forefront of those outlawing ritual circumcision and kosher (and halal) food.

Am I being harsh? Has anyone else read it?

**Final List of Word and Phrase of the Year Candidates.** We are all saddened by why we have delayed coming to final choices for **Word of the Year** and **Phrase of the Year**. We now have our final lists. Vote finally please in the next few days:

**Word of the Year.** The one new entry, from Laury Frieber, seems perfectly in tone with the moment:

- **Together/B'yachad**

Accordingly, the final list for voting is:

- **Awakenings**
- **Gratitude, or hakarat hatov**
- **Matter**
- **Together/B'yachad**

**Phrase of the Year.** New entries from two of our physicians:

Dr. Sandy Rose’s new, timely, and insightful suggestion:

- **Be the Light**

Dr. Meyer Solny offers, from Samuel I, 15:29:

- **וְגַם נִצַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִשְׁקֶר** (which Meyer renders as “*the eternity of Israel is not a falsehood*”, or as I would alter it, “*the glory of Israel will endure*”)

Accordingly, the final, marvelous list for voting is:

- **Be kind**
- **Be the Light**
- **Chazak Ve-Ematz! (be strong and courageous)**
- **Con alegria y permanencia; with joy and permanence**
- **Con el pie derecho; with the right foot, or right foot first.**
- **וְגַם נִצַּח יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִשְׁקֶר** (“*the eternity of Israel is not a falsehood, or “the glory of Israel will endure*”)
- **Mir zaynen du; We are here, or we survive**
- **Yehiyeh tov; T’ll be good**
- **Yeshua[t] HaShem Keheref Ayin (God’s help/salvation comes in the blink of an eye).**

**Covid-19 Update.**



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

Louis Solomon, Parnas