

February 1, 2024

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Hope. We officially kicked off our [Year of Hope Capital Campaign](#) last week, a day before the International Court of Justice gave us a new and highly implausible definition of the term 'plausible'. [The famous line](#) from *The Princess Bride* comes to mind:

You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means.

If you want to see a reasoned response explaining why the suggestion of genocide in Gaza is assuredly not plausible – not by the Israelis, anyway – see Justice Barak's separate opinion, [here](#).

The kickoff of our **Campaign** also occurred two days before International Holocaust Remembrance Day. I think I said what I thought a year ago on the subject of why it may be more appropriate to observe Yom HaShoah, rather than the day the Russians liberated a Nazi concentration camp (see my email of [1/26/23](#)).

But kick it off we did, and as I post below the early returns are strong. As promised, in celebration of our **Year of Hope**, this Shabbat morning, Rabbi Soloveichik will be delivering the third installment of his lecture series, *Judaica and Us: The Story of the Jewish People in Ten Objects*. His topic this week is *Truman's Torah, the Army's Talmud, and the American Jewish Future*. Don't miss it.

And don't miss our continued singing of Hatikvah and of our National Anthem at the end of services on Shabbat. Last Shabbat afternoon, during his class, Rabbi Soloveichik quoted from a [1944 New York Times article](#) reporting on a Passover Service held at the Italian Front. I noticed the last paragraph of the article:

After the meal and the service, the mess hall resounded with the strains of 'Hatikvah' and 'The Star Spangled Banner.' Then the men who had come down from the front for the service got started back.

Doesn't it seem that if it was right and proper for the Jews of the Fifth Army in the middle of the War to declare publicly their support for both America and (what became) the State of Israel, then we too can sing these anthems for a few more weeks -- until, we pray, events in Israel will make it appropriate for us to stop.

Such an accommodating group! LET'S KEEP IT UP!

- Last week, I bemoaned the dearth of book suggestions and reviews. Below you will find a new and interesting post on that as well.
- Then I hung out a **Help Wanted** sign, wondering if we could get back to some song suggestions, in the right humor under the circumstances. Congregants came through with an outpouring of fabulous responses, again discussed below.
- And, as mentioned, we kicked off our renewed **Year of Hope Campaign**. Here as well, the response has been heartening. In the week since official commencement, we have raised over \$225k of the \$500k needed to repair our flooring, replace our carpet, and pay for a few other smaller but crucial repairs. We can achieve our goal with 100% participation, with

each of us digging as deep as our financial circumstances will permit. Not only will substantial contributors be listed on our website and on special signage; as we did last Shabbat, the Rabbi will be saying a special *misheberach* for everyone who can find the means to help. Please, respond to our calls and to our email solicitations. Or, just [click here](#) – come on, **make my day** (one point for the first three people to get right the movie name, leading star, and year [yes, this easy one is a speed test that rewards readers who read and respond to my missives fastest]).

Baba Kama Potpourri. This week's Daf Yomi learning, as part of the worldwide Daf Yomi study cycle, covers pages 87-93 in Tractate Baba Kama. We finish the Eighth Chapter and move to the Tractate's penultimate one. These pages are as full of interest as they are deep in wisdom:

Of interest is the fact that, on pages 91b and 92, we get about 17 different sayings/questions/adages/proverbs shared between Rava and Rabba Bar Mari. (Is 17 the right number?) The sayings are extraordinarily varied. Take a few examples:

- *Poverty follows the poor.*
- *If your friend calls you a donkey, prepare a saddle for your back* [it's so brilliant – don't take bait. Don't be offended, either in reality or in appearance. Let insults slide. In most cases, you will diffuse the situation just by your (non)response.]
- *A dog in its hunger will swallow its own dung* [you don't suppose that the ubiquitous phrase in use today, which we will not repeat here, comes from this adage?]

Of deep wisdom one can't overlook the two Mishnaic statements attributed to R' Akiva. In the Mishna on page 90b, the Sages are offering differing opinions on how much should be paid to remedy "embarrassment", the fifth of the five categories of compensation we discussed last week. The first opinion is that everything depends on the victim's status in life; that will determine how much honor he or she is due; and in turn that will determine how much should be paid to remedy embarrassment. R' Akiva disagrees: He says:

Even the poorest of Israel are regarded as aristocrats who have lost their wealth, since we are all children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Further down in the same Mishna, R' Akiva again appears. This time he fines a man 400 zuz for uncovering a woman's hair in public. The man then shows that, to collect oil (that is, to profit herself), the woman is willing to uncover her own hair in public. R' Akiva doesn't care. Embarrassing another is unacceptable.

Of both interest and of deep wisdom, I don't think we can top the Talmud's extensive discussion in these pages of the Jewish love affair with our environment, especially trees. The indiscriminate cutting of trees was treated as among the worst offenses that a human being could commit, and both the Torah and Talmud suggest that the offense rises to the level of a sin against both the Almighty and among human beings. We learn on page 91b, for example:

אָמַר רַבִּי חֲנִינְא: לֹא שָׂכִיב שִׁיבְחַת בְּרִי, אֲלֵא דְקָץ תְּאִינְתָּא בְּלֹא זְמַנָּה. אָמַר רַבִּינָא: נְאֻם ה' הִיא מְעוּלָה בְּדַמִּים, מוֹתֵר.

Rabbi Hanina said: My son Shivhat did not die for any reason other than that he cut down a fig tree before its time. Ravina says: But if the lumber was greater in monetary value than its fruits, it is permitted to chop it down, and this does not violate the prohibition against destroying a tree.

Ravina's response permits us to infer that, since R' Hanina's son also knew the law, he was cutting the tree down for a permissible purpose. Still, see what happened – or at least what R' Hanina thought happened.

I hope to see you at tomorrow night's sold-out community dinner, which will include a conversation between Rabbi Soloveichik and Liel Leibovitz, who recently published a book on the joys and wisdom of Talmud study.

Songs of More Than Faith and Hope. My request last week was for help with how we could continue to share songs with each other while the distressing events in Israel continue to preoccupy us. As a community, we had already put together lists of songs of hope including songs of abiding faith. That wasn't what I was seeking. But frankly I wasn't sure what I was asking for. I didn't want to name the category, since I thought doing so would itself limit your ability to help.

What so many of you have intuited has been remarkable and more than a little inspiring. Here are some great examples of people are trying to help our community:

Warren Stern sent in one suggestion, and it is perfect to capture what I was so inarticulate in asking for:

- [Stand by Me](#), by Ben E. King

Faith Fogelman too took up the challenge. She suggested and then rightly rejected "help" songs like *Help Me Rhonda* and *Can't Help Falling in Love*. Her other suggestions seem perfect, even though they do not contain "help" in the title and even though we have listed some in other categories in the past:

- [You've Got a Friend](#), by Carole King
- [Wishing & Hoping](#), by Burt Bacharach & Dusty Springfield
- [The Morning After](#), written by Al Kasha & Joel Hirschhorn for the *The Poseidon Adventure*, and recorded by Maureen McGovern
- [I Believe](#), written by Ervin Drake, Irvin Graham, Jack Mendelsohn, and Al Stillman

Sandy Rose offers several great ones as well, including four by the great Irving Berlin:

- [Blue Skies](#), here sung by The Great Frank Sinatra,
- [Count Your Blessings](#), by Irving Berlin, sung by Bing Crosby
- [I've Got the Sun in the Morning and the Moon at Night](#), by Irving Berlin, sung by Ethel Merman
- And even [G-d Bless America](#), here sung by the genius himself

Lynnette Gruenhut also has captured the right mix (and agrees with Faith's love of Carole King's *You've Got a Friend*):

- [Lean On Me](#), by Bill Withers
- [I Think It's Going to Rain Today](#), by Randy Newman

- [That's What Friends Are For](#), here by Dionne Warwick
- [You've Got A Friend In Me](#), another great by Randy Newman
- [Ain't No Mountain High Enough](#), by Marvin Gaye
- [For Good](#), from WICKED
- [Tomorrow](#), from Annie

SM Rosenberg, our nextgen editor, author in her own right, and appreciative of what we are trying to accomplish here, offers

- [I Hope You Dance](#), by Lee Ann Womack

And David Sable totally nailed it (imho, as he always does):

- [A Change Is Gonna Come](#), by Sam Cooke
- [Eye of the Tiger](#), by Survivor
- [You'll Never Walk Alone](#). This classic, originally, is by Frank Sinatra (I think). [Here](#) is the Chairman of the Board's treatment. [Here](#) is Elvis's rendition. And [here](#) is a major tear jerk, with Andre Rieu with a complement of singers and a full orchestra.

These are marvelous, just what we need but with an appropriateness that seems right. Can you send in more? And more? And more?

A New Book Recommendation. Pearl Shifer has now begun her third calendar year of helping us build community with funny anecdotes and insights (it was her boss who was the Jewish Santa during the TG Day Parade moons ago). Pearl helps us with a comment on an "interesting" Sci-Fi book titled [Orbital](#), by Samantha Harvey, which I think just came out. Says Pearl:

It is categorized as SF/Fantasy, but it felt real. It is about 24 hours in a space station told from the point of view of the six astronauts (two actually are Russian cosmonauts) sharing their experiences in space and their continued connection to those left behind. I don't normally read SF at all. I thoroughly enjoyed this book, however.

I do like Sci-Fi – more in movies than in books, but I'm in. Pearl, thank you.

MORE BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS PLEASE!

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom. *B'yachad* (united together). *יהיה טוב Yihiyeh tov* (things will be good).

Louis Solomon, Parnas