

February 15, 2024

Dear Shearith Israel family,

[Changes](#), that memorable 1971 song by David Bowie, includes the chorus:

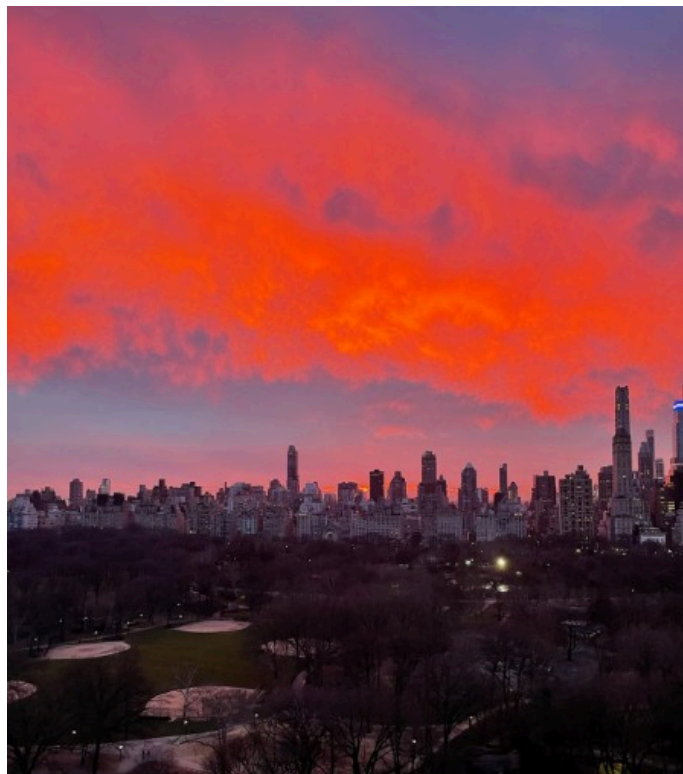
*Time may change me  
But I can't trace time*

Yet not all changes need be scary or depressing (though take it from me, many of them are). Let's together consider some good, evolutionary (rather than revolutionary) examples of change.

***Changes in Our Sanctuary's Beauty: Our Year of Hope Campaign.*** We have about a month left to our Campaign. We need to finish up so that we can order the carpeting, schedule the carpentry work to shore up our weakening floorboards, and finalize the few smaller but essential projects that our \$500k Campaign will fund. We need your help – every single one of you. Please, **use this link** to give whatever you can. We can find the remaining \$100k, but frankly only with your help.

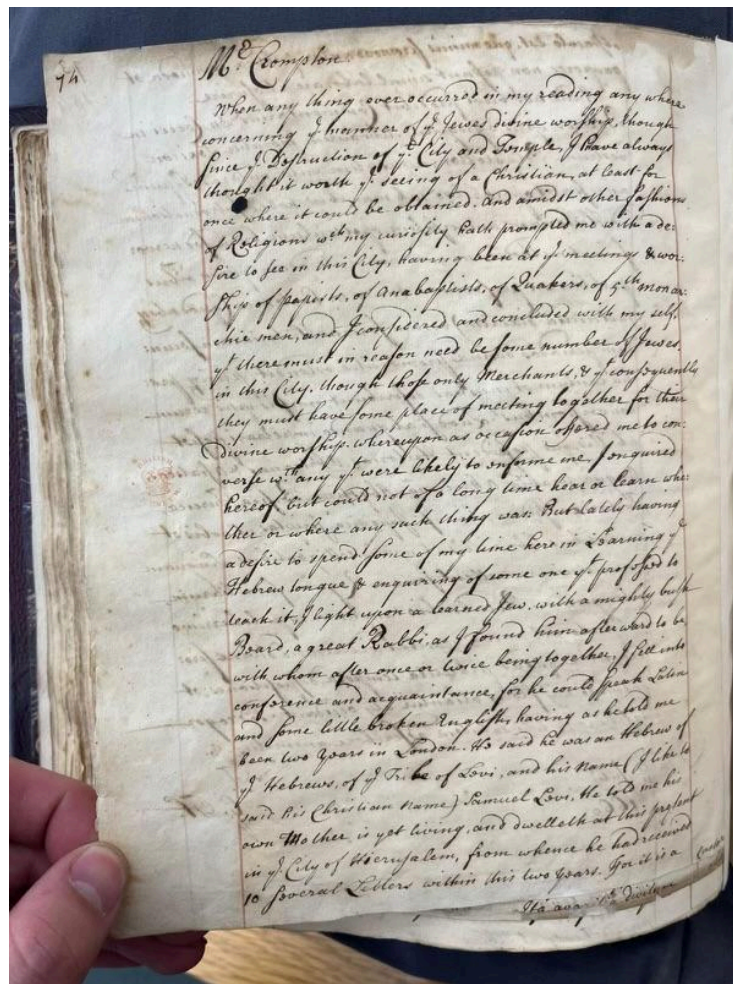
This Shabbat, Rabbi Soloveichik will be delivering the next installment in his lecture series celebrating our ***Year of Hope: Time Travel and Us: The Most Incredible Calendars in Jewish History***. Please join us. And, if you make your pledge today, come and hear a special *misheberach* made in *your* honor after Torah reading this Shabbat, as we've been doing weekly for every contributor since the start of this campaign.

***Changes in Our Morning Sky.*** Minyan mainstay Ben Motola thought that everyone would enjoy this photograph of the New York sky that I took early in the morning one day last week.



It was morning minyan time, and if you weren't on the street going to minyan, you would have missed it. Relatedly, at the large minyan we had on Super Bowl Sunday for arbit, trustee Stan Towne remarked how comforting and indeed supportive it is that, after a time, we come to know and like so many of our fellow daily minyan members. Familiarity breeds, not contempt, but fellowship. Please, commit to just a day a week – we will have daily minyan forever if you do.

**Changes in Our Brilliant Scholars: A New Guard.** This past Shabbat afternoon, Baruch-Lev Kelman, our Rabbinic Intern, gave an interesting talk about a letter dating from the 1660s describing what really sounds like a Congregation of Jews in London dating from that decade. The information is new and noteworthy. Earlier histories, including by such eminent historians as Cecil Roth, did not have congregational Jewish life return to England before, say, 1701. The letter is fascinating in that it describes the functioning of a Sephardic congregation in London – much like how Reverend Ezra Stiles described Touro Synagogue in Newport three-quarters of a century later (see my email of [7/15/21](#)). [Here](#) is a portion of the handwritten letter and a full transcription.



But there is something much more remarkable about the letter. It was unearthed by our very own native son Jonathan Nathan, back in the UK researching after receiving his Ph.D. Jonathan sent it to Baruch-Lev, who then got help in the transcription from Adams Kornblum-Carney, who is a recent and positive presence in our daily minyan, regularly leads our Shabbat youth groups, and sure plays a mean set of musical instruments that we hope to hear more of. The total ages of this trio – call them our

Tinkers to Evers to Chance (anyone want an easy point by explaining that reference?) – is likely less than mine alone. This is change, and it is wonderful.

**Changes in Attitude: An Eye for An Eye, a Postscript.** I thought the Talmudic discussion was persuasive a few weeks ago; we tried to demonstrate that the Talmud itself was adamant that, even in the Torah, E4E never meant anything but monetary compensation. Claude Nadaf actually did what I asked and garners another two points for correctly (at least I think so) enumerating that the Talmud brings four independent examples based on ten different proof texts to support its view.

Since we read in the parasha this past Shabbat about the very laws of EFE, I wanted to share the views of Howard Schranz, who has a different take. Says Howard, in part:

*I contend that E4E did mean, when it was written, E4E literally. We do not know whether it was ever actually carried out, but that is what it meant.*

*A great deal of history occurred in the ancient Near East in the 1000-1500 years between Scripture and Talmud. In fact, one can argue that society changed just as much from 1000 BCE until 500 CE as it did from 500 CE to 2000 CE (dates very approximate). As a medium of exchange, money was in its infancy.*

*Yes, barter and exchange of products and services happened daily in 1000 BCE, but money as the medium of that exchange was not yet in widespread use. Jacob worked for Laban for 7 years for his daughter's hand without a dime exchanging hands. Money and 'compensation' were very much in their infancy.*

*By 500 CE, coins were the preferred tender in most exchanges. In fact, the Talmud discusses when a customer buys gold with silver, which of the 2 is the merchandise and which is the tender.*

*2<sup>nd</sup> point, before monetary compensation became popular, E4E was even more just than compensation. Why? Because the perp who knocked out the eye was punished equally whether he was a poor or rich man. The perp was out an eye. However, when compensation became the interpretation, the rich dude could now buy his way out of losing his eye. The rich guy got off way better!*

Howard's points are really interesting and appear supportable. They deserve response – especially his last. Is an actual E4E really more just? More equitable? Who wants to take on these questions? And many thanks to Howard for weighing in.

**Changes in Jewish Legal Perspectives.** For the last few weeks, the worldwide Daf Yomi learning cycle has been studying Chapter 9 of Tractate Baba Kama. The Chapter focuses on how *changes* to physical objects affect *changes* in law. More generally, we have together considered how different legal jurisprudence in the Talmud is from modern common law contemplations. We mentioned two types of differences so far:

- In Jewish jurisprudence, the Almighty is an active part of the justice-dispensing enterprise; and
- Human agents are expected to act above and beyond the law – and it is remarkable that the law itself includes that expectation.

How are we faring on these observations? Pretty well, I think. My faithful and super-smart antagonist, Claude Nadaf, likes our first point but not the second. As to the first, Claude says:

*R S R Hirsch pointed to the Tenth commandment [though shalt not covet] as evidence of the divine origin of the Torah. No human court could enforce such a prohibition, whereas the all-knowing G-d can.*

As to the second, responding to my observation that the Talmud explicitly expects that human beings will act in *super-human* ways, Claude says:

*The examples you present hardly are superhuman behavior.*

I don't agree with Claude. Ordinarily, people can be expected to act in their own self-interest. It is only with extra special effort that they go above and beyond to act altruistically or charitably towards others. It is special enough that it should be praised. And it is remarkable that Judaism builds that behavior into its system of jurisprudence.

I want to add a third significant difference (call it a change?) between Jewish jurisprudence and common law expectations. The point is shown clearly by the Mishna on page 103b of Tractate Baba Kama, which is in Chapter 9 and which we learned this week. The Mishna teaches that one who swears falsely that he or she did not steal from another, and then recants the denial, has to pay "*homesh*" or a fifth of the amount of the stolen object (the fifth seems to be counted "down" from the final number, so one can see it as an adjustment of 25% to the value of the property stolen). It turns out that either the only or the most common examples of paying *homesh* is when the thief *admits* that he or she lied about the theft. So the question seems like a compelling one to ask, well, if the only or one of the main times you are surcharged an additional 25% is when you admit your theft and prior lie, why in the world would anyone do it? Why take on yourself the extra punishment of a fifth? The answer, for which I thank our son Yosef, is that under Jewish law the admission of prior prevarication and payment of penalty effects an atonement for the wrong. It's a blow-away thought that under any modern theory of justice one would include a law that incentivizes behavior because it effects a ritual atonement.

**Books.** Charlie Helinski reminds us that the Yeshiva University annual *seforim* or book sale is going on right now. It's a great event, and you should go. From his recent visit, Charlie recommends *The Weekly Mitzva*, by Binyamin Tabory. Explains Charlie:

*He takes one mitzvah from each parsha and in a few pages each, manages to be both scholarly and simple. It is helping me get a feel for the rationale of the mitzvot in the different vantages from Rashi to [Rav Moshe] Feinstein. I like books that are precise, less like essays, like this one.*

Thank you Charlie (who also recommends reading the poems of ee cummings, which I have never been able to understand or enjoy in anything but tiny bites).

**Songs.** In another week or so we will collect all the songs recently suggested. Here is the current list:

- [Stand by Me](#), by Ben E. King
- [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
- [Blue Skies](#), here sung by 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
- [G-d Bless America](#), here sung by Irving Berlin himself
- [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](#), by Randy Newman
- [Ain't No Mountain High Enough](#), by Marvin Gaye
- [For Good](#), from WICKED
- [Tomorrow](#), from *Annie*
- [I Hope You Dance](#), by Lee Ann Womack
- [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](#) by Andre Rieu. Billy Schuller and poet-in-(California)-residence Paula Van Gelder both corrected me in not mentioning that this song is from *Carousel*, which came out in 1945, the same year that The Great Frank recorded it.
- [Something's Coming](#), from *West Side Story*.
- [For What It's Worth](#), by Buffalo Springfield

Howard Schranz and Claude Nadaf echoed the top choice of the past two weeks, *You'll Never Walk Alone*. Howard wondered "how on earth" I could have forgotten that Jerry Lewis [did a skit](#) concerning the song, live, on the Champs Elysees.

Claude reminds us that *for decades* Jerry Lewis closed his magnificent Labor Day Muscular Dystrophy Telethon with the song. Here is [a clip](#) of Lewis explaining why.

**Israeli/Hebrew Songs.** Where we have had marvelous participation is on the Israeli or Hebrew songs. And this week's incredible rescue of two of our hostages by our wonderful IDF soldiers makes these songs even more resonant.

David Sable suggests the song inspiring our Phrase of the Year, [Yihiye Tov](#), by David Broza. Says David Sable:

*Could there ever be one more relevant?*

Michael Gelman suggests [another](#) by David Broza.

And true to her promise, Joanne Ben-Avi sent in a bunch of Israeli/Hebrew songs. Here are two of them:

- [Am Yisrael Chai](#)
- [תפילה לשלום חיילי צה"ל](#)

Got more? Even if they are not about change, send them in.

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

Louis Solomon, Parnas