

February 29, 2024

Dear Shearith Israel family,

**Our Year of Hope.** We started soliciting help to fund our **Year of Hope Campaign** last month. Before then, we spent some months reminding ourselves how our **Year of Hope** might act as a counterweight to the resurgence of anti-Jewish behavior by a tiny fraction of the US population. Our perspective starts 369 years ago; follows American Jews' willingness and indeed polite but determined insistence on being an active and even muscular part of the American story; and reminds us that our Congregation's three pillars – Justice, Truth, and Charity – are as good as any you will come up with to define how Jews have helped America and can continue to do so. Just this past Shabbat, we were discussing how, when New York needed a hospital, Jews including Shearith Israel Jews stepped up to found, fund, and build Mount Sinai Hospital.

Earlier this week, the *NY Times* reported on [the extraordinary gift](#) that the Gottesman family gave to the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx. Dr. Ruth Gottesman, widow of billionaire David "Sandy" Gottesman, announced a donation of \$1 billion to the medical school, to be used to permit medical students to learn their noble art without incurring hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt. In the simple yet true words of our nextgen editor SM Rosenberg, this is a "tremendous kiddush hashem." It is a perfect example of a **Year of Hope** learning moment.

**Our Year of Hope Campaign.** At this point, only one thing is standing in the way of swiftly concluding our **Year of Hope** capital campaign: we need more of us to pledge. The campaign, to replace our Sanctuary's old, worn, and tattered carpet and to replace or repair weakening floorboards and supporting joists, can be successful with a final push that includes many more of us simply clicking [here](#) and helping us achieve not just our financial goal but, as important, 100% participation. On Shabbat, we are continuing to recite special *misheberachs* for all contributors.

We today observe a Gregorian calendar leap day in the middle of our Jewish calendar leap month. We therefore have an extra opportunity to make our goal of \$500k and 100% participation. Please help. If your circumstances permit, please donate \$1,800 or, if you can't, then \$1,000, or, if you can't, then \$180. But please donate. Join this [growing, auspicious group](#). Be a part of our entire community's beautification of our sacred space. We just got updated bids on the new carpeting and the carpentry work to be done. I'm sure you've guessed that the numbers have not decreased since the bids received last year. Still, with everyone's help, we will get there.

Rabbi Soloveichik will be continuing his special lecture series this Shabbat in honor of our **Year of Hope Campaign**. His topic this Shabbat: *The Marvelous Medieval Jewish Wedding Ring: Remembering a Lost Custom*.

Our Senior Rabbi's excellent lecture series is not the only teaching and learning going on. Nearly every Thursday, our Rabbinic intern, Baruch-Lev Kelman, discourses on some far-flung place of Jewish interest. He often has guest speakers, and they are often our congregants. Here are a few photos to enjoy:



**Transitioning Transitions.** In Aramaic, a “baba” is a gate. A gate is a transition between two areas or modes. Today, the worldwide Daf Yomi learning cycle finishes Tractate Baba Kama, literally the *first gate*. Tomorrow we begin Tractate Baba Metzia, literally the *middle gate*. We are transitioning transitions.

Some transitions are abrupt and seismic. Some are gradual and incremental. Where does the transition between the first two Babas lie? To me it seems that this transition more resembles the latter than the former. Perhaps that supports the view of our Sages that the Baba series – *Kama*, *Metzia*, and (the final gate in the triad, *Batra*) – was once one large tractate relating to *nezikim*, or damages.

From a micro perspective, meaning just reading the Talmudic dialogues at the end of *Baba Kama* and the beginning of *Baba Metzia*, I see additional evidence of gradual and incremental transition (does anyone know if the transition between *Metzia* and *Batra* is the same? We will hopefully see in about 119 days from tomorrow.)

Tractate *Baba Metzia* begins with the rightly famous Mishna, the first part of which teaches:

שְׁנַיִם אוֹתָיוֹן בְּטָלִית, זֶה אוֹמֵר: “אֲנִי מְצָאתֶיהָ”, וְזֶה אוֹמֵר: “אֲנִי מְצָאתֶיהָ”. זֶה אוֹמֵר: “כּוֹלָהּ שְׁלִי”  
וְזֶה אוֹמֵר: “כּוֹלָהּ שְׁלִי”. זֶה יִשָּׁבַע שְׂאִין לוֹ בְּהַ פְּחוֹת מִתְּצִיָּה, וְזֶה יִשָּׁבַע שְׂאִין לוֹ בְּהַ פְּחוֹת מִתְּצִיָּה – וַיִּחְלֹקוּ

*MISHNA: If two people came to court holding a garment, and this one, the first litigant, says: I found it, and that one, the second litigant, says: I found it; this one says: All of it is mine, and that one says: All of it is mine; how does the court adjudicate this case? This one takes an oath that he does not have ownership of less than half of it, and that one takes an oath that he does not have ownership of less than half of it, and they divide it.*

My thinking that the transition is gradual and incremental is supported by several examples – if you disagree, please write in; let’s dialogue:

- Unlike so many other Tractates that we have learned together, the end of Baba Kama does not contain a broad, general, story-based ending; it ends in a detailed discussion of how one treats the theft of green grain and dodder (I'm sure everyone else but me knew that "dodder" is a type of twining vine of the morning-glory family that is not only deficient in chlorophyll but is parasitic of other plants and has tiny scales instead of leaves). The ending is so prosaic and nitty-gritty that some medieval commentators express a bit of disappointment about the negative ending of the Tractate.
- As several commentators note (include the Tosafot right here on Baba Metzia 2a), the Tractate begins with *details* about found objects, rather than *general principles* of found objects (which are treated at the beginning of the second chapter of the Tractate). Is that because Chapter 1 of Baba Metzia continues the details appearing at the end of Tractate Baba Kama?
- Both the end of Baba Kama and the beginning of Baba Metzia focus on how legal entitlements change by reason of oath taking.
- Finally, on both sides of the transition, we focus on the issue of intent and its relation to the legal issues implicated by two people vying for the same object. At the end of the Baba Kama, we again focus on the issue of *yeush*, or despairing and giving up hope of finding a lost or stolen object (page 114a and the succeeding text). As we learned before (see my [email of 2/4/21](#)), despair is about the least constructive way that one can approach the world. In *The Power and the Glory*, Graham Greene called it the (only) unforgivable sin. As we saw in our discussion of page 66 of Baba Kama, despair, *yeush*, has legal implications in terms of getting back lost or stolen objects. Who can offer a more apt, single-word description of the Jewish People than that we do **not** despair, ever (come on, try to give me a better one!)? Perhaps it is time to remind us of what we quoted when the Omicron variant of Covid-19 was peaking around [1/13/22](#). Now that might have been a time to despair – yet we didn't. I quote again Churchill's unforgettable lines, spoken in 1941 when he visited his former school, Harrow:

*[S]urely from this period of ten months this is the lesson: never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never — in nothing, great or small, large or petty — never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense. Never yield to force; never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.*

This approach continues at the beginning of Baba Metzia. The concept of *yeush* is not explicit in the text. But it is essential to the operation of the laws being adumbrated here. The Mishna identifies ways that a claimant can maintain some control over an object. Here it is focusing on the benefits of taking an oath or swearing. In other parts of the Tractate, swearing is insufficient, and witnesses are needed. Of course this elegantly presages the common law. And none of it works absent an affirmative act *negating* despair.

**Sci-Fi Books and Movies.** With our thanks, Debby Sondheim, our book maven, sends along a Sci-Fi movie suggestion loved by her late husband: *Gattaca*. I saw it – it was great.

And wouldn't you know it but our nextgen editor, SM Rosenberg, is a maven in this genre. In terms of books, which is her main line (so to speak), let's start with the fact that she didn't like the book that

Michael Schulder and I loved, *Three-Body Problem* (“found it too heavy on technobabble and not enough on character development/interaction”). SMR herself contributed to the anthology [Jewish Futures](#), with a short story, *Moon Melody*. The volume is edited by Michael A. Burstein. More from her next week.

Anyone else with Sci-Fi books or movie suggestions?

***Songs of Hope-Plus; Final Call.*** Here is where we were holding as of last week:

- [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*. [Here](#) by Frank Sinatra, [here](#) by Elvis, and [here](#) by Andre Rieu.
- [Something's Coming](#), from *West Side Story*.
- [For What It's Worth](#), by Buffalo Springfield
- [One Day](#), by Matisyahu (which could also go in the Israeli/Hebrew collection below)
- [I Can See Clearly Now](#), by Johnny Nash
- [Wind Beneath My Wings](#), by Bette Midler; and
- [We Go Together](#), from GREASE

Our penultimate list, including adds from this week, contains some great suggestions, these made by Dr. Zachary Gorden:

- [Don't Stop Believin'](#), by Journey
- [Here Comes the Sun](#), by The Beatles (I think this song has been on more lists than any other; it fits here, too)
- [Wishing](#), by ELO
- [Promised Land](#), by Bruce Springsteen

- [Somewhere over the Rainbow](#) - Zachary especially likes the Israel Kamakawiwo'ole version – go figure.

**Israeli/Hebrew Songs.** And here is where we were, and remain, in Hebrew/Israeli genre:

- [Yihiye Tov](#) by David Broza.
- [Shema Yisrael](#) by David Broza & Abraham Tal
- [Am Yisrael Chai](#)
- [תפילה לשלום חיילי צה"ל](#)
- [Yerushalayim Shel Zahav](#), sung here by IDF soldiers.

**[Two Out of Three Ain't Bad.](#)** Does this photo remind anyone else of the Meat Loaf song?



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

Louis Solomon, Parnas