

March 14, 2024

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Hope. Our ***Year of Hope Campaign*** was a success. We raised a bit more than our targeted goal of \$500k. And, as I have observed, more families and individuals stood together in this moment of unity than I can recall in any fundraising campaign that I can remember. Those of us who answered the call should be justly proud. Those whose financial circumstances didn't permit joining should also be proud to be part of our community. We are one.

Our next few stops are exciting. First, we will finalize the specifications for the carpet. Then we will order it, pull up the old carpet, figure out how bad the flooring is, get bids to get that fixed, and then, with any funds remaining, turn to repairing the pews. If all goes according to Hoyle (one point for telling us not just who Hoyle was but what his "game" was), the actual work inside the Sanctuary should commence in June and be completed before Rosh Hashana in October.

We are now working on commemorative signage reflecting those who made the Campaign a success. [HERE](#) is what we think is the final list. If you donated and are not on the list, please let us know ASAP.

Covid-19 Four Years On. Since so few of us want to be reminded of how dark and dismal things were at the onset of this modern pandemic, I will be briefer than brief. It's four years, nearly to the day, that we had to close our Synagogue for 108 days. Few things can be more telling about the travel of the disease – and the miracles of science and medicine – than that the CDC recently announced that it is now treating Covid-19 like the flu. Some challenges persist, perhaps the biggest one for medical science being how to help those suffering from Long Covid, which, as the capital first letters signify, is a real thing, harmful and debilitating to many people. Further affiant sayest naught.

Baba Metzia Explained. Last week, I asked for another way of summarizing our Sages' view condoning the use of self-help or force in exercising dominion over unclaimed objects. The best alternative to my explanation comes from Claude Nadaf, who explains one Talmudic view that falling on an object should not be seen as an act of aggression but only that the faller does not intend to use more peaceful means of showing dominion. Claude is right; that is a view taken by one opinion. It doesn't really answer the question, though, does it? Does the Talmud sanction the use of force to exercise dominion over an unclaimed object? It appears to, and my question is whether we have a view on that or not.

Baba Metzia Straight Up. This week, the worldwide Daf Yomi learning cycle studied pages 11 to 17 of Tractate Baba Metzia. We are at the heart of Chapter 1 of the Tractate. The episodes and dialogue show unvarnished the methodology of the Talmud: A major proposition of law is stated; constant respectful but muscular bombardment of challenges to the logic and bases for the major proposition follow; slight and not-so-slight digressions fill out our understanding of the life and times of the disputants; and infusions of stories reveal the deep and abiding humanity of the characters, their lives,

and the religion they were by turns explicating and fashioning. My summary doesn't begin to show the richness of the enterprise. In fact I can't.

What I can do is share a tidbit from one of the discussions, maybe to give us a glimpse of Talmudic methodology. The Mishna on page 12b discusses the law on finding documents, usually legal instruments. The Mishna knows that a found document in all likelihood belongs to one of the people mentioned in it, say, either the lender or borrower. However, returning the document to one or the other parties has significant legal consequences. Why? Because, unlike today, the legal instrument then was far more than just evidence of the transaction described in it. In most cases, unlike today, the legal instrument was often the *only* evidence of the transaction. Returning the instrument to the lender risks the lender's collecting multiple times on the same loan. Returning the instrument to the borrower risks permitting the borrower to evade obligations to repay. The Mishna and ensuing Gemara go through multiple permutations – cases where the legal instrument provided for a guarantee or guarantor of the obligation is one of the main points to be discussed. And juxtaposed to this discussion is one relating to when witnesses can be trusted to create or vary a written obligation. All this then turns back on itself to figure out what a court of Jewish law should do with a legal instrument that neither party holds.

The discussion gives an interesting glimpse into how an ordered system of justice arises and is molded based on the realities of the society it is trying to order. Multiple copies of legal instruments did not exist; hence super-importance needs to be given to the versions that do exist and how to treat the parties to the document. Lenders do not typically loan without collateral or a guarantee; hence if the court finds a legal instrument without collateral or a guarantee it is suspect. Responsible merchants do not usually enter into important transactions without being present; hence, the law will impose a higher burden of proof (on one opinion) in a case where the allegation is that an indebtedness was incurred without the lender being present. The examples, and our interest in them, are endless.

Sci-Fi – Books and Films. We received a boatload of reactions to our list of Sci-Fi books; even more to our list of Sci-Fi films. On books, Hayyim Obadyah wonders if we might start a “Shearith Israel Sci-Fi Book Club”? I *love* the idea and would be willing to commit to an evening-part a month. I asked a couple other likely enthusiasts. Both shot down the idea; everyone is SO busy. Still, if you are interested, we could zoom once a month and discuss great Sci-Fi reads. Anyone interested? Maybe we could get an actual Sci-Fi writer such as our nextgen editor SM Rosenberg to lead it?

When it comes to Sci-Fi on the screen, in the main the recommendations are old. Claude Nadaf loves *Lost In Space* and *Star Wars*. Billy Schulder loves *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *War of the Worlds*, and *Metropolis*. Billy disparages *Star Wars* and says it's not Sci-Fi but Cowboys and Indians. Claude then doubles down with *Battlestar Galactica*, *Space 1999* (was this a movie or only a TV show?), and *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Jay Harwitt's reaction of “OMG” might seem interesting for a Ritual Director to utter, but verily he says that Isaac Asimov “shaped my entire life after I read the *Foundation* trilogy in junior high school”. Jay actually sang Gilbert & Sullivan with Asimov, which is officially cool (and Barbara Reiss reports, having

learned from Mark Oppenheimer's wonderful podcast series, [Gatecrashers](#), that in 1935, at age 15, the brilliant Asimov was rejected from Columbia University, and instead, directed by the Admissions officials to Seth Low Junior College, a separate campus in Brooklyn, to earn what today we'd refer to as an Associate's Degree). And, with our deepest gratitude, Jay was also involved in one of the founders of *Magevet* (the magnificent a Capella group from Yale that was with us earlier this and last year) going to Yale.

Look how many old choices? All are worth renting (any takers for a Paved Paradise screening this Summer?). I'm still hoping for more recent but excellent Sci-Fi reads and films. Help if you can.

The Shearith Israel 2024 Year of HopePlus Song List. Here we are. True, Billy Schulder, we *can't* figure out exactly what the list is, but it works beautifully.

English songs:

- [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

- [Don't Stop Believin'](#), by Journey
- [Here Comes the Sun](#), by The Beatles
- [Wishing](#), by ELO
- [Promised Land](#), by Bruce Springsteen
- [Somewhere over the Rainbow](#) - Israel Kamakawiwo'ole version
- ["If It Be Your Will,"](#) by Leonard Cohen
- [Getting Better](#), by The Beatles

Hebrew/Yiddish songs:

- [טוב יהיה טוב Yihye 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
- [גוט מארגן Gut Morgen/Good Morning](#), by Mendy Twerski
- [השנה אינשלאה Hashanah Inshallah/This Year with God's Help](#), words by Bezalel Aloni, music by Ofra Haza
- [מחר Machar](#), by Naomi Shemer.

Hopefully by next week we will have these linked easily. Hopefully soon we can also beg Lia to Spotify us another list.

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

Louis Solomon, Parnas