

March 21, 2024

Dear Shearith Israel family,

Our Year of Hope. The fundraising constituting our **Year of Hope Carpet Restoration Campaign** was conceived of as a two-month fundraising effort. Thanks to the swift outpouring of generosity, it is not premature to declare it a success. Look at the Wall of Fame [HERE](#) to ensure that your name is on it. Now we need to get moving ordering the carpet and getting flooring people to fix our weakening floorboards. It's an exciting time – one that all of us should be proud of.

With the fundraising part of the Campaign more or less under control, is it time to refocus on the other parts of our **Year of Hope**? Recall that our **Year of Hope** started well before October 7. We dedicated our year to thinking about ways we could bring ourselves together and celebrate a hopeful future as a community – the micro-community of our Congregation and the larger, macro-community of American and World Jewry. Alas, that refocusing may still be premature; we continue to be distracted by the serious risks our fellow Jews are facing in Israel and the unfortunate disturbances many of our fellow American Jews are facing here.

What we can do is share items and tidings that might help us along a bit. I have two this week:

First, I want to thank Anita Tamari, from Kfar Saba in Israel, for sending in an update to one of our recent Hebrew songs, תפילה לשלום החיילים. Anita and another supplemented the song [HERE](#). Whatever use is made of the “lyrics” as a prayer, I'm sure we can all agree that we should sing for the safety of both our young women as well as our young men who are in harm's way in defense of Israel. Our weekly prayers include *all* members of the IDF, including expressly those related to our congregants. Thank you, Anita, for sharing this.

Second, although it doesn't belong here, I can't resist sharing with you our humorist-in-residence Alan Zwiebel's “possibly apocryphal” tell:

Many years ago, Mr. and Mrs. Rashi were getting ready for a very special evening out.

Mrs. Rashi came down dressed in a stunning red gown. Mr. Rashi said: “Why don't you wear the blue one?” Mrs. Rashi replied: “Must you comment on EVERYTHING?”

According to Hoyle. I always thought that Hoyle, an 18th Century Brit, brought us rules for the then-popular game of whist. Saying that something is or must be done “according to Hoyle”, the origin of which I asked for last week, meant that it needed to be done with strict attention to rules.

Robert Starkand insists that the Hoyle rules were not for whist but for poker. Since I don't really know what whist is outside some vague notion that Jane Austen characters would play it, the Judges are reluctantly persuaded to award Robert the promised single point. Claude Nadaf informs us that Hoyle “(1672 – 29 August 1769) was an English writer best known for his works on the rules and play of card

games”. Claude further advises: “Movie: *According to Hoyle* (1922). Play (1995)”. The things we carry in our brains! One point to Claude, too.

Stop Senseless Sanctimony. I innocently asked last week:

Would 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.

Claude Nadaf ain't having any of my namby pamby. Says he:

Baba Metzia is not a tractate on politeness. For that, I refer u to Ethics of the Fathers tractate.

Never Give Up, Reinforced. In my email of just a few weeks ago, on [2/29/24](#), discussing the end of Tractate Baba Kama, we again considered the actual, negative legal implications of giving up, abandoning hope, or expressing or exhibiting *yeush*. An even more powerful treatment of that same principle appears in this week's Daf Yomi learning cycle, which began the popular Chapter 2 of Tractate Baba Metzia (this week, pages 18-24).

In general, Chapter 2 of Tractate Baba Metzia discusses the return of lost objects. The Torah contains several discussions about the subject, principally in Devarim 22:1-3 (Sefaria translation):

לֹא-תִרְאֶה אֶת-שׁוֹר אַחִיךָ אוֹ אֶת-שֵׂיִן נִדְחִים וְהִתְעַלַּמְתָּ מֵהֶם הֲשִׁבַּם תְּשִׁיבֵם לְאָחִיךָ:

If you see your fellow Israelite's ox or sheep gone astray, do not ignore it; you must take it back to your peer.

וְאִם-לֹא קָרֹב אַחִיךָ אֵלֶיךָ וְלֹא יָדַעְתָּ וְאִסְפַּתְתָּו אֶל-תּוֹךְ בֵּיתְךָ וְהָיָה עִמָּךְ עַד דִּרְשׁ אַחִיךָ אֹתוֹ וְהִשְׁבִּתָּו לוֹ:

If your fellow Israelite does not live near you or you do not know who [the owner] is, you shall bring it home and it shall remain with you until your peer claims it; then you shall give it back.

וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְחִמְרוֹ וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְשִׁמְלָתוֹ וְכֵן תַּעֲשֶׂה לְכָל-אֲבִדַת אַחִיךָ אֲשֶׁר-תִּאֲבֹד מִמֶּנּוּ וּמִצִּאתָהּ לֹא תִוְּגַל לְהִתְעַלֵּם:

You shall do the same with that person's ass; you shall do the same with that person's garment; and so too shall you do with anything that your fellow Israelite loses and you find: you must not remain indifferent.

I find the Biblical discussion extraordinary because of the affirmative duty imposed on people to return lost objects. Imagine a society built on that kind of concern for our fellow human beings – “you must not remain indifferent.”

But back to this week's Talmud learning. On pages 21a and 21b of the Tractate, the Mishna and ensuing gemarra discuss a case where someone loses an object, does not know it is missing, someone else finds it, and *thereafter* the loser learns that it is gone and loses hope of ever finding it again. Let us suppose it is not an object with identifiable markings. Is that *yeush*?

The scenario creates a Talmudic debate between Abaye and Rava, two of our greatest [Titans of Talmud](#). Rava says that giving up is giving up; the fact that someone *else* found the object before the loser gives up doesn't require the finder to carry out the Biblical command of finding the person who lost the object and return it. Abaye on the other hand says that, because the Biblical obligation to return kicked in before the person knew the object was lost, that obligation (on the finder) prevents *yeush* in the loser – the loser is still entitled to have others try to find him or her to return the object.

This is an important debate. In only six cases in the entire Talmudic corpus do our Sages decide the law like Abaye. This is one of those few, special cases. Abaye is giving us even an *additional* reason never to abandon all hope. The principle is fundamental to our religion and philosophy. Do not despair. Do not give up. Ever.

Just for your amusement, note that the Talmud takes several pages and a bunch of proofs finally to decide like Abaye and against Rava. To keep the examples straight, the Talmud gives the reader a mnemonic to remember:

פמג"ש ממקלט" כסע"ז

Easy, huh?

Celebrating Wartime Victories. Several congregants have respectfully raised this issue for some time. Today, as many of us are fasting to commemorate Esther's deprivation, faith, and ultimate cunning and strength in the Purim story, it might be time to consider the following:

We link to videos showing the IDF in or leaving Gaza singing upbeat, stirring, patriotic songs. We sing those songs ourselves. We feel uplifted by them. The thought is not a new one. Indeed, we are about to celebrate our holiday of Purim. Aren't the date(s) of our holiday – the 14th and 15th of Adar – keyed to the cessation of fighting, celebrating monumental victories over our vanquished enemies?

At same time, is that the only legitimate feeling one can have? We don't sing the full Hallel during the last six days of Pesah. Why? One reason is because, as the Almighty teaches us in that context, the Egyptians, also G-d's children, were drowned in the Red Sea.

War songs, fight songs, patriotic songs of every stripe have been sung since time immemorial. Putting soldiers in the frame of mind to carry out orders is not a simple or solely cerebral task. The raw, almost shofar-like emotional component of sending young people into battle is ignored at our collective peril.

To reconcile these two strands in our psyche, is there anything to be said for a genuine celebration of our troops and of their conquests but, perhaps, a somewhat muted one? As you think about that, let's thank Esther Ingber for recommending the Yiddish song sung in the Death Camps and in the DP camps, [Tell Me Where Shall I Go](#), here sung by an IDF choir.

We are a singing people and a singing religion. If we don't sing about victory and perseverance and tenacity and resilience, will we sing about something else?

Reactions welcome.

Books. Several of you are conspiring to move me off our current kick for Sci-Fi books and films. It won't work. Still, for a break from sci-fi, Aura Bijou comes with two interesting book recommendations, for which we thank her:

- [The Strong Horse: Power, Politics, and the Clash of Arab Civilizations](#), by Lee Smith. Says Aura, "I felt [it] gave me much insight into the Arab mentality and shed much light on the motivations behind what is going on now", even though the book was published over a decade ago.
- [The Orientalist: Solving the Mystery of a Strange and Dangerous Life](#), by Tom Reiss. Aura describes the book as a "very moving story" "written by the daughter, I believe, about an Egyptian Jewish man who was a real *macher* when he lived in Egypt and the journey/transformation he underwent in coming to the US." "Poignant is an understatement."

The Shearith Israel Year of Hope Songs Plus. Thank you to our nextgen editor, SM Rosenberg, for collecting our final list of songs, [here](#). [And thank you to Lia Solomon for Spotifying the list, [here](#).] Enjoy, enjoy, enjoy.

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

Louis Solomon, Parnas