

June 20, 2024

Dear Shearith Israel family,

**Our Year of Hope.** Shavuot was wonderful at our Esnoga. Sights and sounds unique to this holiday are transporting.

Answering my question of last week, of course it would be Joel Maxman who knew that the T-shirt – with the great trio of words **Community for Life** – was being worn by Ben Motola. I should have limited point-giving to non-Minyan-mainstays. But fair is fair, so Joel gets his points -- *ganaf!* I love the double entendre.

This Shabbat, we will be toasting our recent graduates. It's a lovely annual event. Rabbi Soloveichik will be addressing the Congregation, and that will be followed by brief remarks by several of our students who will be sharing what they've experienced this year on their campuses (Barnard/Columbia, Chicago, and NYU) and how they've navigated the challenges. Come hear their first-hand accounts.

**More Talmudic Entitlements: Baba Metzia (pages 109–116).** The astonishingly modern views of our Sages are again on display in the pages learned this week as part of the worldwide Daf Yomi learning cycle. I had mentioned last week that the examples used by the Sages in their hypotheticals about how much a sharecropper would receive of the yield produced by his or her efforts varied between one-half and one-third. Those are staggeringly generous percentages compared to what the “enlightened” law of the Middle Ages and indeed the Enlightenment itself brought the world. I'm no scholar of the subject, but there is plenty of evidence that depressed prices paid to sharecroppers flowed in large measure from external rules – for example, who could or could not own land or borrow on land or bequeath land – rather than on the laws of supply and demand dictated by the invisible hand of the efficient market. That Talmudic law avoided those market depressing effects is remarkable.

Now you might have speculated that the one-half/one-third numbers were pulled out of thin air by the Sages. They were just using examples, you will say, and so that doesn't prove anything. That position doesn't make so much sense to me – the numbers do seem pretty specific. In any case, the debate on page 110a of the Tractate validates my assertion that these numbers truly were in use.

On that page, the Gemara analyzes a case where the landlord and sharecropper have lost the legal instruments used to memorialize their transaction, and the landlord says that the sharecropper is entitled to only a third, while the sharecropper says he was promised a half. The Talmud asks, who is to be believed?

It is, first, extraordinary that a sharecropper would have written legal instruments protecting his or her rights. More to our point, the Talmud says that the amount to which the sharecropper is entitled depends on which of the two percentages is “prevalent in the community”. If these numbers were prevalent in the community – well that means they were in use to such an extent that prevalence could be discerned. It is therefore pretty clear, isn't it, that in Talmudic times sharecroppers were treated vastly better than they were for the close to two millennia after then?

It gets better. On page 110b, the discussion in the Ninth Chapter of the Tractate moves from sharecroppers or lessees vs landlords to employees vs landlord/owners. The second part of the Mishna there records:

שְׂכִיר יוֹם – גּוֹבָה כָּל הַלַּיְלָה. שְׂכִיר לַיְלָה – גּוֹבָה כָּל הַיּוֹם. שְׂכִיר שָׁעוֹת – גּוֹבָה כָּל הַלַּיְלָה וְכָל הַיּוֹם. שְׂכִיר שָׁבֹת,  
שְׂכִיר חֹדֶשׁ, שְׂכִיר שָׁנָה, שְׂכִיר שְׁבוּעָה, יֵצֵא בַיּוֹם – גּוֹבָה כָּל הַיּוֹם, יֵצֵא בַּלַּיְלָה – גּוֹבָה כָּל הַלַּיְלָה וְכָל הַיּוֹם.

*A day laborer collects his wages from his employer all night following his work shift. A night laborer collects his wages all the following day, while an hourly laborer collects his wages all night and all day. With regard to a weekly laborer, a monthly laborer, a yearly laborer, or a laborer for a Sabbatical cycle of seven years, if he left upon the completion of his work in the day, he collects his wages all day; if he left at night, he collects his wages all night and all day.*

This recitation seems basic, bland, and you might even say banal – until you consider the wallop it actually packs. What! Here is a Mishna, as authoritative a piece of Jewish judicial legislation as we have, setting strict and tight rules on when workers need to be paid. And they need to be paid *promptly*, typically the same day. It's absolutely amazing. I hereby offer three points – the largest offered in these pages – for a comparable set of legal rules in force at any time before the Twentieth Century.

**Gem of a Book.** I just finished listening to Ross Perlin narrate his book published earlier this year, entitled *Language City: The Fight to Preserve Endangered Mother Tongues in New York*. Ok, the subtitle is a little clunky – but even our eloquent and nearly always pithy Rabbi gave a lecture on Shavuot night titled, *Benjamin Disraeli, Mount Sinai, and Anti-Semitism: A Talmudic and Historical Reflection on Our Current Moment*. (!!)

*Language City* is excellent. The author is a Professor in the Department of Slavic languages at Columbia University and heads an organization in NYC dedicated to studying and preserving endangered languages from around the world. The book is long on affecting prose, interesting facts, and thoughtful analysis and blessedly short on polemics. The book also contains stories of six speakers, New Yorkers all, of at-risk languages. The book's messages are far heftier than the book's length and include how New York has been the most diverse city on the planet – and why it is essential to the City's health and vitality that it remain so. You read the stories of these immigrants, and you will think of the Phil Ochs timeless song (a favorite of David Nathan's and yours truly) [There But For Fortune](#).

I loved the book so much, I will ask Professor Perlin to visit our Congregation and share his ideas with us. If he accepts my invitation, I hope you will attend. I promise to make it worth your while. And the overlaps with our Congregation are galore. In the meantime, get the book, read it, and share your views.

**Shearith Israel Summer Songbook 2024.** Our theme is *Time, Waiting, Journeying*. Where we were last week is:

- [Anticipation](#), by Carly Simon

- [\*One of these days\*](#), by Neil Young
- [\*Waiting for the Sun\*](#), by The Doors
- [\*Wishing and Hoping\*](#), by Dusty Springfield
- [\*Any Day Now\*](#), by Chuck Jackson (music by the great Burt Bacharach)
- [\*Day in - Day Out\*](#), by Frank Sinatra
- [\*The Best is Yet to Come\*](#), by Frank Sinatra
- [\*It Won't be Long\*](#), by The Beatles
- [\*Time on My Hands\*](#), by Kate and Anna McGarrigle
- [\*High Hopes\*](#), by Bruce Springsteen
- [\*Long Walk Home\*](#), by Bruce Springsteen
- [\*Time is on My Side\*](#), by The Rolling Stones
- [\*Time Waits for No One\*](#), by The Rolling Stones
- [\*The Midnight Hour\*](#), by Wilson Pickett
- [\*Hejira\*](#), by Joni Mitchell
- [\*America\*](#), by Simon and Garfunkel
- [\*All I Want\*](#), by Joni Mitchell
- [\*Talk to Me of Mendocino\*](#), by Kate and Anna McGarrigle
- [\*Long Time Gone\*](#), by Crosby Stills & Nash
- [\*By the Time I Get to Phoenix\*](#), by Glen Campbell
- [\*On the Atchison, Topeka, & the Santa Fe\*](#), by Johnny Mercer
- [\*Something's Coming\*](#), by Leonard Bernstein from *West Side Story*
- [\*My Time of Day\*](#), by Frank Loesser from *Guys and Dolls*
- [\*The Wells Fargo Wagon\*](#), by Meredith Wilson from *The Music Man*
- [\*Summertime\*](#), by The Jamies
- [\*Working My Way Back To You Girl\*](#), by The Four Seasons
- [\*Sunrise, Sunset\*](#), from *Fiddler On the Roof* (this is a Perry Como version – smooth)
- [\*Tie A Yellow Ribbon\*](#), by Tony Orlando and Dawn
- [\*When Johnny Comes Marching Home\*](#), Mitch Miller rendition

The short week last week did not deter many of our most passionate song mavens:

Warren Stern suggests Sinatra renditions of these popular standards (how Warren knows the Sinatra versions of these is impressive):

- [\*September of My Years\*](#), by Frank Sinatra
- [\*Once Upon a Time\*](#), by Frank Sinatra
- [\*As Time Goes By\*](#), by Frank Sinatra
- [\*Day In Day Out\*](#), by Frank Sinatra
- [\*Sentimental Journey\*](#), by Frank Sinatra
- [\*When the World was Young\*](#), by Frank Sinatra

Warren also suggests:

- [\*Funny How Time Slips Away\*](#), by Willie Nelson
- [\*Tomorrow is a Long Time\*](#), by Bob Dylan

Billy Schulder suggests:

- [Time has Come Today](#), by The Chambers Brothers (a candidate for LONG song GOAT, too).

Faith Fogelman has come through, yet again, with an excellent list of suggestions:

- [Dock of the Bay](#), by Otis Redding
- [Waitin' for the Train to Come In](#), by Peggy Lee
- [Tous les garçons and les filles](#), by Françoise Hardy (crazy good choice, Faith – how did you think of this?)
- [When the Saints Come Marching In](#), by many artists including Louis Armstrong
- [Leaving on a Jet Plane](#), by Peter, Paul, and Mary
- [Come Back to Me](#), this one by Peggy Lee
- [Tonight](#), this version from Spielberg's 2021 West Side Story

**Postscript.** Lester Gottesman sends in the following, which is a sound basis to support our song theme of *Time, Waiting, Journeying*. Lester reminds us that the excerpt is from “*Ulysses*, the Tennyson one”:

*I am a part of all that I have met;  
 Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'  
 Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades  
 For ever and forever when I move.  
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,  
 To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!  
 As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life  
 Were all too little, and of one to me  
 Little remains: but every hour is saved  
 From that eternal silence, something more,  
 A bringer of new things; and vile it were  
 For some three suns to store and hoard myself,  
 And this gray spirit yearning in desire  
 To follow knowledge like a sinking star,  
 Beyond the utmost bound of human thought*

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

Louis Solomon, Parnas