

Bava Metzia 58b with DS9 and related background (for SVARA MLBM-2, Tevet 5782, V. Spatz)
[Straight text version of Talmud-like page created as exploration of themes in class]

[central text (Aramaic) from B. Baba Metzia 58b; asterisked text matched with related phrases in English surrounding passages]

תני תנא קמיה דרב נחמן בר יצחק כל *המלבין פני* חבירו ברבים כאילו **שופך דמים** א"ל שפיר
קא אמרת דחזינא ליה דאזיל סומקא ואתי חוורא

[Translation:] A tanna recited in front of Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak: ****Causing a neighbor to publicly lose face is akin to murder.**** He responded: You spoke well – I have seen myself that a person will ****go out hearty and come back paled.****]

[Adjacent text layer:] "Far Beyond the Stars" S6:E13, Deep Space Nine (originally aired: 2/11/98)

In a vision from the Prophets, Benjamin Sisko, a Black human with the rank of Captain in the Federation of the Planets' Starfleet service, becomes science fiction writer Benny Russell, living in New York City in the 1950s. In real life, Capt. Sisko lives on and directs the diverse space station, Deep Space Nine (in the 24th Century, far from Earth); in the vision, Russell lives in Harlem, then mostly Black, and works in a predominantly white area.

In the vision, Russell's identity is first **casually erased** when the magazine requests a group photo of the writing staff and the editor tells him to sleep in, saying readers think "Benny Russell is as white as they are. Let's just keep it that way." (The only female writer is also told to stay home.)

Russell's writing is **casually dismissed** by several close to him, even as he enthuses about finally "writing for us." Colleagues applaud his story, "Deep Space Nine," but their editor, Pabst, rejects it, claiming "A Negro space station captain" is both unbelievable and ****dangerous**** ("could cause a riot"). Russell accepts fellow writers' suggestion to make the story into a dream, as more acceptable for white readers.

Shortly afterward, police fatally shoot Russell's friend, and he is badly beaten himself trying to reach the victim. Still bandaged and using a cane from the attack, Russell returns to the office to see the new *Incredible Tales* issue with his story. The staff learn together that the entire print run was pulped...and that Russell is fired.

Russell is **crushed** but still affirms the future he sees:

"You can deny me all you want but you can't deny Ben Sisko – He exists! That future, that space station, all those people – they exist in here! In my mind. I created it. And every one of you know it, you read it...I created it and **it's real!**"

Finally, Russell collapses. Sisko re-emerges and learns he is "the dreamer and the dream." (Later [S7:E2] we learn that Russell has been institutionalized, his writing and belief in a future **treated as insanity.**) //

[outer column 1] ...The halls of magazines and newspapers remain difficult to break into without (white, often male) contacts or mentors. Just from my experience alone, that's often meant policing my own behavior to appear more "white" and less threatening: straightening my hair, cutting my hair, or holding my tongue in meetings when I've heard something unquestionably offensive.

Sisko would never take crap like that, but Russell has no choice. All he can do is try to publish his story, even if it has to be on the terms his white editor. And that's the heart of this episode: what it means to have the agency to write your own story. In the end, Russell agrees to a compromise with his white editor so he can see his story in print. After the chilling police brutality and the segregation and erasure we see earlier in the episode, it's not perfect, but it's something, and Russell is excited for it, giddy even....

..."Far Beyond the Stars" helped me set a rubric for [previously undiagnosed panic attacks]...it would be Capt. Sisko's job to keep his cool and get his crew out of danger. It's my job to do the same for myself, to stay alive, to do the hard work of working on myself, especially ****when it feels like it'd be easier to die or disappear.**** – Eric Vilas-Boas [in 2018](#) – "Twenty years ago [1998], 'Far Beyond the Stars' introduced Star Trek's first black captain to America's ugly, racist past. This year, it helped me process my own mental health in America's present."

[outer column 2]

Even among these very bright and enlightened characters – a group that includes a woman writer who has to use a man's name to get her work published, and who is married to a brown man with a British accent in 1953 – it's perfectly reasonable to coexist with someone like [editor] Pabst. It's ****in the culture,**** it's the way people think. – Avery Brooks, “Deep Space Nine” actor and director of “Far Beyond the Stars” (see [Memory Alpha for this episode](#))

[outer column 3]

“The Caucasian race has produced super-high-geniuses by the dozen in the last five thousand years; the Oriental race has, also. *The Negro race has not...*” – John Campbell, Editor, 1937-71, *Analog (Astounding Science Fiction)*

Campbell rejected Samuel Delany's story in 1967, saying that readers would be unable “to relate to a black main character.” See, e.g., “Combatting Dreams Deferred...,” by Dr. Stephanie Toliver, in **Ethical ELA**

Although born in '42, Delany was considered a model for DS9's Benny Russell.

Samuel Delany, in Toliver (above): “... imagistic paraphernalia of science fiction functioned as *social signs* – signs people learned to read fairly quickly. They signaled Technology. And technology was like a placard on the door saying, ‘Boys Club! Girls, keep out. Blacks and Hispanics and the poor in general, *go away.*’”

PAGE 2 -- straight text for non-Hebrew/Aramaic material

Center text: *Ona'at devarim* degrades, pains, troubles the body

also *ona'at mamon* permits of restitution, but not *ona'at devarim* --Shita Mekubetzet (supplemental materials)

NOTE: Part of BM 58b skipped in class says that *ona'at devarim* affects the body, discusses matters given to the heart [ללב מסור הדבר], and warns against speaking like Job's friends did (Job 4:6-7)

[Column 1 outside]

"Hey! You gonna buy that or not?!" kiosk vendor demands of science fiction writer Benny Russell, who is holding a copy of *Galaxy* but not moving to buy it. “Personally, I don't see the attraction,” the vendor adds. ****“It's all make believe.”*** (Price is printed on the cover; Russell buys it.) – DS9 S6:E13

“Far Beyond the Stars” does not clarify whether this kiosk vendor knows Russell and/or is aware of his occupation. If the vendor doesn't know, is he liable for any harm as a result of his words? Is this a “matter given to the heart” (as in a portion of BM 58b we skipped in class)? If the vendor knows, does he – should he – consider his words harmless? Small-talk or acceptable teasing, maybe?

The story doesn't hint that the vendor knows Russell is “afflicted” (another skipped portion) in his career or that he is suggesting Russell somehow brought trouble on himself. With more background, would – should? – the vendor have modified his conversation?

****How far are each of us obligated to consider possible damage before speaking to anyone about anything???***

What might this brief scene suggest about making assumptions when speaking to relative strangers? [voice of the page, not a quotation]

[Column 2 outside] More DS9: "The Storyteller" S1:E14 (original air date: 5/2/93)

Tetrarch Varis Sul, leader of the Paqu people, participates in negotiations on Deep Space Nine meant to avert a war over river access on Bajor. Varis is 15 years old, orphaned, and without advisors. She is ***shamed,*** inadvertently and purposely, during the conference. Thereafter, she stops negotiating entirely, fearing any concession will be viewed as weakness and ****endanger her people**....**

Meanwhile, in a Bajoran village, a young man, who has been the spiritual leader's apprentice fails in an attempt to take over an essential ritual from the aging leader. The apprentice's failure-induced *shame* leaves him unable to lead, putting the **village at risk**....

Both stories focus on *results of *ona'at devarim**, including potential dangers to the community when someone has lost face, as well as on methods of repair – rather than on specific words that precipitated loss of face or individual reparations for any such words.

[Column 3 outside]

[BLOCK 1]

My daughter's name is Ori...

Her light is Black, because she is Black. She is Black light....

...For Ori, and for all the Black babies who light hanukkiyahs now—and will hopefully light them for decades to come—maybe this is the year we can celebrate that they, themselves, are fire: hard to contain, illuminating, bright, beautiful, and filled with light. – from “[My light, Ori](#)” by Rachel Faulkner, in Dec 2021 *Lilith*

[BLOCK 2]

There is a 30-year *life expectancy gap* between Black and white Chicagoans with similar gaps in DC and elsewhere. What part is *ona'at mamon*, and what part *ona'at devarim*? And how much of *ona'at mamon* is caused by one *ona'at devarim*?

[BLOCK 3]

Association of American Medical Colleges (Jan 2020, [Article here](#)):

“Black people's nerve endings are less sensitive than white people's.”

“Black people's skin is thicker than white people's.”

“Black people's blood coagulates more quickly than white people's.”

....40% of first- and second-year medical students endorsed the belief that “black people's skin is thicker than white people's.”

...In the 2016 study, for example, trainees who believed that black people are not as sensitive to pain as white people were less likely to treat black people's pain appropriately....