

January 13, 2022

Dear Shearith Israel family,

*Relentless Neverlution.* The evolutionary biologist John Thompson published *Relentless Evolution* in 2013. It was only in late 2021 that Kyle Harper pressed into service the theme of relentless evolution to describe the arms' race between humanoid growth and development on the one hand and the incredible evolution of mutating microbes, parasites, bacteria, and viruses that feed off and in return sicken and kill humans on the other. Like his earlier book on the plagues that hobbled Roman civilization (which I cited in my [email of Oct. 29, 2020](#)), his most recent book, *Plagues Upon the Earth: Disease and the Course of Human History*, is, at least to this reader, another winner. Harper is a historian, yet his science writing is lucid and intelligible. And the sinking feeling one gets from his treatment of disease through the ages, frankly, made me feel a lot better about Covid-19.

I borrow "relentless" and couple it with the attitude we have adopted of never giving in to the doldrums of Delta, to the spirit-ossification of Omicron. We will never forget Churchill's 1941 admonition:

"never give in, never, never, never."

There is already some computer modeling (fwiw) suggesting that Omicron may be peaking in NYC. And if it isn't this or next week, then it will soon after that. We are praying together as a community. And this Shabbat, with or without a surprise sermon (see below), our beloved choir will be back to celebrate Shabbat Shira, we are going to warm it up inside (literally), but we will not increase risk to our congregants and thus will forego aliyot and kibudim for another little while. Relentless neverlution reigns!

*Celebrity Sighting!* So there we all were – well, ok, there about 50 of us were – inside our chilly sanctuary last Shabbat. We were speeding through tefillot trying to stay a step ahead of Omicron. And then, just after the Torah was returned to the ark, Rabbi Soloveichik, nearly spontaneously, ascended the pulpit for five-six minutes of stirring, energizing Torah! It was great. We were literally lifted out of our seats as our Covid-demoralized spirits soared. You will not be surprised that the sermon began with a gastronomic reference, though you might be surprised that the gastronomic reference had to do with eating locusts (yuck!). But it really got so much better from there, including an explanation of the Kamtza and Bar Kamtza story, of small acts of bad and good having outsized effects, and much more. You thought the reason to come to services on Shabbat was to participate in communal prayer and the communal reading of the Torah. True. But the chance to hear a bootlegged bit of brilliance now needs to be part of your calculus.

*The Rest of Sevens.* This week, the Daf Yomi cycle will be finishing Tractate Megillah and beginning Tractate Moed Katan. Moed Katan is only 29 (double sided) pages. It's a neat tractate that is fun to learn through. It discusses the laws and lore of Hol Hamoed (the intermediate days of Sukkot and Pesah) but, like the Talmud generally, a whole lot more. Interestingly, on page 3, there is one of the more extensive discussions in the Babylonian Talmud of the seventh year Sabbatical for the land, also known as *shevi'it* (for seventh). In the Mishna, Shevi'it is the fifth tractate in Seder Zeraim, or the Order of Seeds. Like most of the tractates in Seder Zeraim, there is no Babylonian Talmud for Shevi'it. There is a Jerusalem Talmud of Shevi'it. And interspersed throughout the Babylonian Talmud are various discussions of Shevi'it issues, such as whether letting the land rest every seven years is ordained Biblically or Rabbinically; what work can be done on the land during the seventh year; which produce may and may not be eaten that grows during that year; how far outside of Israel is the Sabbatical to be observed.

I like learning about the seventh year Sabbatical. Our son, Yosef, is in Israel now, and he is learning with me the mishnaot of Shevi'it, so of course it's special. It's also special because Israel is observing a Sabbatical *this* year. So it feels like there is a special connection with the Land of Israel itself. It's also special because the very concept of the Rest of Sevens is so pervasive in Judaism. We rest every seven days. The land rests every seven years. The Jubilee occurs every cycle of seven seven years. So, first, seven is not one of those numbers that occurs much in nature (or is it – two marks). It's an artificial number in that respect, but it guides our very existence. Second, I'm not very crunchy. The whole eco thing is one I observe with interest, but from a safe distance and with a small dollop of skepticism. Personally, I worry that the tradeoffs we are being asked to make in favor of eco risk sending us unscientifically backwards in terms of health and safety and innovation. Yet despite my (uneducated) view, there is no blinking that the Rest of Sevens has clear biblical roots, and our Sages were hip to a respectful, symbiotic relationship with our environment.

### *Half-Full Report*

*Great Songs.* As a farewell to this great and fun contest, Larry Kobrin made me laugh when, of all the many and varied entries, he says, "Well at least I knew Beethoven's Fifth". This week, on Shabbat, don't forget that we read one of the greatest songs of all – only one of two (?) in the Torah itself: Shabbat Shira.

*After Great Singing, Dance.* As we advertised last week, to shake off some of the Covid-19 Blues, we opened a great dancing clips contest. It was in about 1862 that Emily Dickinson wrote, "After great pain, a formal feeling comes". And it was in 2022 that we say yes, but if you sing, and dance, you can beat it. SM Rosenberg, finalist in the Great

R&R Song contest with Deep Purple's [Smoke on the Water](#), has basically monopolized the Great Dancing contest with three entries that, frankly, blow away the competition (and totally demolish what I was going to suggest):

- First, a clip of [90-year-old Dick Van Dyke](#). SMR says that the actor, now 96, remains "sharp as a tack."
- Second, because a new Gene Kelly movie was just announced, SMR offers [Anchors Aweigh](#) ("the mix of animation and live action is amazing, especially for its time").
- Third, another by Gene Kelly, from *It's Always Fair Weather*, [done entirely on roller skates](#) (true, lousy song, but Gene Kelly!)

With SM's inspirations, send in your picks.

*Perpetual Thanks.* My email of [Nov. 18, 2021](#) discussed the necessary repairs being undertaken to the Ner Tamid, or Perpetual Light, in our Sanctuary. Several of you came through with your financial support, Reverend Edinger dealt lovingly with the necessary repairs, and the Light is now back, in all its glory. Yet another reason to come to services on Shabbat:



*Remembering Rabbi Dulitz.* Last week, I mentioned several congregants whose lives were touched by this colorful Rabbi. Ben Suckewer, too, was moved to remember a story from his days with Rabbi Dulitz at MTA. So was David Sable, who knew the Rabbi from Camp Raleigh. It has to make all of us feel better to know of such a Rabbi, who positively touched so many people's lives. May his memory be a blessing.

*Great Signs and Wonders.* No one improved on my neighborhood sign from last week, "What's the Best that Could Happen". Ruth Lazar tried, and comes close with the following chuckler:



**The phrase  
"hindsight is  
2020" may forever  
have new  
meaning.**

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom. Happy Shabbat Shira.

Louis Solomon, Parnas