

January 6, 2021

Dear Shearith Israel family,

*Learning To Stand Sitting.* Covid-19 numbers stink – in our community and just about everywhere else. In NYC, we remain in serious double digits in most disease spread and impact categories. The numbers are appreciably worse than even a week ago. And there is no evidence that we have peaked.

At the same time, just as Covid-19 itself required a new mindset about disease spread and prevention, so too its Omicron sequel is requiring a new mindset all over again. With numbers this bad the last time round, hospitals and morgues were overflowing. We were attending funerals of congregants where only one or two of us could be present. Even with our post-modern and therefore vanishingly short memories, we can still remember how grim it was, how painful for families and others who lost loved ones. The miracle of vaccinations, coupled with a more virulent but less deadly variant, leaves us at risk, yes, but of a qualitatively different sort. We are not shutting down communal prayer. We will be exercising maximum caution for our indoor services. And the Rabbi is going back online for most classes (briefly). But there is no way we are in repeat mode of 2020.

Is that enough? Well, imho, pretty well yes, at least for this week. We will duck our heads under the surf, and the wave will wash by without undue affect. But even if you disagree with me and want Covid-19 behind us entirely, or you want it to settle into bland endemicity sooner (see [my email of Oct. 28, 2021](#)), we are still light years better off than we were. Now we are about waiting and staying safe, not waiting and fearing death. Is the waiting fun? No. Faith Fogelman captures the point nicely, quoting Edward Albee's *The American Dream*, where a character finds waiting and not knowing "unbearable". Albee's line reminds me of a quip from yours truly, when trials or hearings take too long, and I have to do too much sitting around and waiting, and I'm heard to whine, "I can't stand sitting". No one should have to stand sitting. But if we stand sitting together, we will be ok.

*Answers to The "Question of '22".* For our first new contest of 2022, I asked why 2022 will not be as twisting and *tirlul* (Hebrew Word of the Year, as we discussed [last week](#)) as 2021. No sooner did I labor over my explanation of twisted, *tirlul*, etc. in my email than Trustee and stalwart of our Congregation Stan Towne sent [this](#). It's a must-see if you want a laugh, and it sums up 2021 cleverly, and brilliantly, in the under two minutes that it takes for a thoroughbred horserace to round a track.

2021 is yesterday's news. That was yesterday, and yesterday's gone, as [Chad & Jeremy](#) sang. Looking ahead to 2022, answers to how and why it will be less twisted, less crazy, less *tirlul* have come in slowly but with real clarity. If you're looking for ways to make the Greek alphabet a bunch of dead letters for our daily lives, well you've come to the right place:

*Sing.* Gabriella Styler takes a beautiful approach to The Question of '22. She finds a song, by [Quincy Jones, \*Everything Must Change\*](#), that for her "has always given comfort and guidance during unpleasant and worse times." I don't happen to love this song – but the concept of turning the year into a song is perfect. Thank you, Gabriella.

*Un-Palindrome.* Rabbi Charlie Savenor unwittingly took a clever approach to answering The Question of '22. He inferred, or maybe I said, that 2021 was so *tirlul* because there were so many palindromic dates in it. After all, dates having the same meaning whether read left to right or right to left simply has to be confusing, disorienting, *tirluling*. And Charlie is surely right when he observes that 2022 will

have only half the number of panildromic dates (two marks for the first person other than Charlie to email me all of them for 2022, making consistent use of “0” in month and day treatment). 2022 is a year that will know what direction it’s going in. That will be a big help all by itself. By the way, there was an open question from [Dec. 2, 2021](#), where I asked when we will have *ten* palindromic dates in a row. I overpaid three full marks for that – and there was only one winner: my law partner and dear friend Colin Underwood: 32023, 32123, 32223, 32323, 32423, 32523, 32623, 32723, 32823, 32923. Anyone want to try for eleven in a row? *Four* points await your correct answer (the degree of difficulty approaches that of a reverse 4½ somersault in the pike position, which rates a 4.8).

*Bundle.* A third answer to The Question of ‘22 is literally staring us in the face. As you walk south on CPW from the Synagogue, look at the sign on what used to be the CNN Building:



It’s a wonderful take-off on “what’s the worst that could happen”. It gives us the right mindset to embrace improvements that are surely coming. Now, if you’ve come this far, and not just geographically south, a sign on the outside of the Time Warner Shops at Columbus Circle gives one way of picking things up:



Personally, I would have finished the line, “Find Your Joy Inside” with “the Shearith Israel Community”. But surely there are other “insides” where each of us can find our joy. Shearith Israel is one of those places. Come in, or zoom in, or dial-in. There is too much going on each week for me to list in my emails. The main point is that if you give in time and effort as much as you want to receive in return, then you will receive many times *more* than you will give. That is the essence of community. It is certainly the bundle of humanity that is our community, which traverses time and space and is here for you now.

Page 25a of Tractate Megilla, right where we are learning in the Daf Yomi cycle this week, makes this point. The Talmud teaches that a person, even a righteous person, who believes enough to thank the Almighty for the good but not for the bad is not a person who should lead the community in prayer. This is such an elemental part of our religion. The point is intimately related to the fact that the Four Species we hold together on Sukkot must include the *aravot* (willow branches), which has neither a good smell nor a good taste. Elsewhere, in Tractate Kritot (6b, Sefaria ed.), the point is made pellucidly clear:

Rav Hana bar Bizna says that Rabbi Shimon Hasida says: Any fast that does not include the participation of some of the sinners of the Jewish people is not a fast, as the smell of galbanum is foul and yet the verse lists it with the ingredients of the incense [in the ketoret used in the Temple]. Abaye says that this is derived from here: “It is He Who builds His upper chambers in the heavens and has established His bundle on the earth” (Amos 9:6), i.e., when the people ***are united as a bundle***, including their sinners, they are established upon the earth.

It is the personality who understands that there is good, and bad, that we do what we can to better the good and good the bad, but that, at the end of the day, we need to believe that all of this is part of a coherent picture, part of a picture with a meaning, part of a picture that we are blessed to be a part of. We are all in this bundle together.

There is still room on the list for some great answers to The Question of '22. We are only a few days into this palindromically deficient year. Give it some thought, and email in. Help others, and help yourself.

*Half-Full Report.*

*Now let us praise famous R&R opening notes.* I pretty well understand the peculiarity of the contest that has now closed. We were not seeking the greatest R&R songs but the R&R songs with the most distinctive opening notes. Those need not be the same thing – though it can't be a coincidence that the finalists are surely among the great R&R songs (no Doors, but, well, you get the point). We had lots of entrants, the voting is in, and the judges have scrubbed the data and have certified the results:

- Top place – Beethoven's Fifth. Duh! Having been published in 1808, this great piece of music has had an over 150-year head start to become recognizable. It didn't hurt that it was used to signal the liberation of Europe in the Second World War ([see my email of Dec. 23](#)). So let's consider this in a class by itself and start the numbering over again, since Beethoven is not R&R in any case:

- First place – [Hard Day's Night](#), by the Beatles, suggested by several including Bill Schulder, especially since it is a fitting description of what some of us are going through these days. And it makes itself recognizable in the first chord.
- Second place – [Satisfaction](#) by the Rolling Stones, also suggested by Bill Schulder. Too bad, I say, since no one really likes the Stones! But it took second spot, fair and square.
- Third place – Bruce Springsteen's [Born to Run](#), suggested by Jim Nuzzo.
- Honorable Mention – Deep Purple's [Smoke on the Water](#), suggested by SM Rosenberg. Actually, the song has as recognizable a first phrase as some of the above. But so few people can actually name the song or the group that it has a deserving spot on this list of great greats, as a right honorable mention.

*After Singing, Dance?* With favorite first lines of songs pretty well explored, Faith Fogelman had another suggestion and that is to consider dancing in addition to singing. To start things off, Faith says: all the best things happen when you're dancing, as [this clip](#) confirms. My contribution to this contest is not to supply a dance clip yet, since we've just opened the contest, but to quote from the supernaturally great King Harvest song, [Dancing in the Moonlight](#), and it's supernaturally great line: "you can't dance and stay uptight"! Ok, send in your suggestions.

*Brief In-Memoriam.* My email last week quoted a story that Daniel Chazin told in the name of Rebbe Label Dulitz. Rabbi Dulitz recently passed away, and both as a Rebbe at MTA and, so interestingly, as a camp professional at Camp Raleigh, where our own Aura Bijou knew him, he is remembered with great warmth and fondness. *B'Sorot Tovot.*

*Great Signs and Wonders.* Surely the two signs above from Columbus Circle are candidates for this category of fun. Here is another funny one from Alan Zwiebel:



And, with characteristic aplomb, Barbara Reiss mailed in the following:

Just saw a tweet saying  
“Both the vaccinated and  
the unvaccinated can catch  
Covid.”

A doctor responded: “Both  
Serena Williams and I can  
play tennis.”

1:59 · 30 Dec 21 · [TweetDeck](#)

**17.3K** Retweets **748** Quote Tweets

Thank you all. Bless us all. Happy 2022. Shabbat shalom.

Louis Solomon, Parnas