

January 27, 2022

Dear Shearith Israel family,

*Getting Back To Where We Once Belonged.* This great [Beatles song](#) (the melody, anyway) went through about as many lyrical iterations as we have gone through gradations of protections from Covid-19. In each of the song's iterations, however, the admonition is the same: Joe or Loretta is directed to

“Get back, get back, get back to where you once belonged”

What great advice! Exactly the same should apply here. We all belong in different places, but we also all belong in the same place. We all belong in our splendid Sanctuary with our resplendent choir and stirring prayer. We all belong there, listening to our Rabbi share Torah and trivia, wisdom and wit. Disease spread levels in NYC are indeed dropping, as we (along with nearly everyone else) predicted last week. Let's make it back to where we all belong.

We will have a full sanctuary this Shabbat—fuller than we've had in a long time—as we are celebrating the milestone of our member, Eliezer Nebot, becoming a bar mitzvah. But, psst, really there's room for you, too. I'm prognosticating – a fool's errand if ever there was when it comes to Covid-19 – that we will be very few more weeks at the level of Covid-19 Omicron-required protections we have been observing for the past few Shabbatot. It's our hope and expectation that thereafter we will be able to announce fewer restrictions. So get back to where you belong – with us!

*Killing me softly.* Look at the collaboration of this great song, [Killing Me Softly](#). In the 1970s, American songwriter Lori Lieberman hears a concert by one of my family's personal favorites, Don McLean. This inspires her along with the great lyricist Norman Gimbel to write the lyrics, and then Charles Fox writes the music. The song wasn't a hit until Roberta Flack made it timeless in 1973. The song got stuck in my head after we learned this week Daf 15b of Tractate Moed Katan, where we are now “holding” in the Daf Yomi cycle of daily learning. The discussion is actually fascinating. Chapter three of Moed Katan, where this page appears, involves discussion of the laws of mourning, often but not always in the context of Hol Hamoed. (The entire series of pages is interesting as one can see how old our customs of mourning are, and how thoughtful were our Rabbis in designing them.) In this particular discussion, the Talmud seeks to learn the similarities and differences between and among the mourner, the person afflicted by spiritual leprosy, and the person ostracized from the company of others for bad

behavior (the state of distancing is not full-blown excommunication, but in some respects worse than six-foot social distancing). The Talmud and later commentary asks about circumstances where conduct can lead even spouses to keep apart from each other. The Talmud, and again especially later commentators, ask whether there are circumstances when a person in that state must be kept away from his friends as well. Amazingly, there are a set of cases where the answer is no. And the reason is that spouses can be reconciled but that without friends, without a community, we could not sustain ourselves. The powerful proof text for this proposition is the Book of Job, where, as Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz taught (this according to Rabbi Shalom Rosner), Job was deprived of his health, his wealth, even his family. But he was *not* deprived of his three friends, since without that mini-community Job would not have made it. (The amazing Rabbi Shmuelevitz taught at the Mirrer Yeshiva for 40 years and was Rosh Yeshiva of the Mirrer when that largest yeshiva in the world was in Shanghai from 1941 to 1947.)

We are all trying very hard these days to maintain our own sanity as well as that of our family members we are close to. What we also must do is maintain our friendships. It's SO hard to stay in touch with others while we are still advised (and some of us have grown accustomed) to avoid close contact, especially indoors (and how much outdoor closeness can anyone endure during these frigid dog days of winter). So hard in fact that extra-human efforts need to be made to accomplish it. Reach out to another congregant. Meet five minutes before services on Paved Paradise. Or come to daily minyan, where you will see many a guide for how to accomplish this (without embarrassing him, let me suggest that you walk past Ben Motola any morning; you will be greeted on your way in and on your way out, always. It's a pick-me-up that lasts for hours). Or if you can't, zoom together, even if just briefly. The tiny act of kindness – like a simple greeting at and after services – is absolutely indispensable for us not only to remain a community, but for us to remain human. Stay in touch with each other. Literally, you will be sustaining life – your own included. Silence is *not* golden but deadly. Softness kills. Let's not be killed softly.

*Half-Full Report.*

*Brief Words, Deep Messages.* Swiftly, confidently, surely the big guns came out for the two-point reward for messages as brief and penetrating as the Ten Commandments, a contest announced in last week's email. Interestingly, no one offered Churchill, and no one offered Shakespeare. Can't we all think of lots of quotes from both of those giants that fit this bill? That's not to say the actual winners, who very much do merit two-points each, were in any sense shabby. In

fact they are both genius, but that's just my opinion (not an irrelevant opinion, since I give out the awards).

Almost immediately Trustee and Segan Michael Lustig shot me an email, capturing the Brief but Powerful category with:

Veni, vidi, vici

The saying, "I came, I saw, I conquered", is attributed to Julius Caesar – and frankly is such a good answer that the Judges considered adding a third point to the two fairly garnered. (For reasons that will become obvious, I can't pass up the opportunity to quote James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, singularly the most brilliant book on English word creation since Shakespeare – and you heard that here first – where the phrase becomes "ulvy came, envy saw, ivy conquered. Lou! Lou!")

But there was another winner. Lo and behold, one Beth Goldman, who as a first-time entrant joins a rarefied group of very few who win, and win big, on their first try. Beth captured the Majestic Category by reminding us what Lou Gehrig said when he learned he was afflicted with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), the cruel neurodegenerative disease that become known as Lou Gehrig disease and was retiring from baseball. To a full stadium, in roughly the same number of words as Lincoln used at Gettysburg, Gehrig said:

Fans, for the past two weeks you have been reading about the bad break I got. Yet today I consider myself the luckiest man on the face of this earth. I have been in ballparks for seventeen years and have never received anything but kindness and encouragement from you fans.

Look at these grand men. Which of you wouldn't consider it the highlight of his career just to associate with them for even one day? Sure, I'm lucky. Who wouldn't consider it an honor to have known Jacob Ruppert? Also, the builder of baseball's greatest empire, Ed Barrow? To have spent six years with that wonderful little fellow, Miller Huggins? Then to have spent the next nine years with that outstanding leader, that smart student of psychology, the best manager in baseball today, Joe McCarthy? Sure, I'm lucky.

When the New York Giants, a team you would give your right arm to beat, and vice versa, sends you a gift - that's something. When everybody down to the groundskeepers and those boys in white coats remember you with

trophies - that's something. When you have a wonderful mother-in-law who takes sides with you in squabbles with her own daughter - that's something. When you have a father and a mother who work all their lives so you can have an education and build your body - it's a blessing. When you have a wife who has been a tower of strength and shown more courage than you dreamed existed - that's the finest I know.

So I close in saying that I may have had a tough break, but I have an awful lot to live for.

It is pointless to try to interpret or spin – or improve – on these words. Just tear-up like the rest of us, and count your blessings.

*Great Signs and Wonders.* This week the pics speak for themselves. Thank you to Family Reiss, who went all the way to Europe to get a photo of a sign from FIFA, which featured in my essay last week ([email of January 20](#)):



And kudos galore to Alan Zwiebel, who is not only funny and smart but oh so talented at capturing Rabbi Soloveichik, calling this *The Leaning Tower of Brisk*:



Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom.

Louis Solomon, Parnas