

July 7, 2022

Dear Shearith Israel family, including our *Touro Synagogue Affiliates* (explained below):

*Covid's Continuity of Caution.* One of our congregants, a wise and cautious physician, communicates with me frequently about Covid-19. This congregant insists on anonymity when I report to you. This congregant has seen the data and scientific discussion on the B.5 subvariant's growing infiltration into environments close to home, its differences from earlier variant molecules, and its virulence. This congregant just told me that s/he, purely as a personal matter, will be remasking indoors and will re-start being cautious about mingling without a mask at indoor kiddushes at other synagogues. Similarly, one day last week, 80%+ of our attendees at afternoon minyan preferred the mask-only section of our Sanctuary. And for the rest of us, and others, who prefer a more "liberal" approach, we respect that as well and have plenty of room for you too.

I am still receiving emails supporting the cautious approach we have adopted toward Covid-19. We will continue to maintain that accommodating approach this Shabbat.

*Expectoration Redux.* A quick thank you to Rabbi Moshe Edelman, now living in Riverdale, for confirming that there is very little written on the spitting part of *halitzah*. I still would like a gentler explanation. Oh well, I'm getting used to disappointment.

*Completing Yevamot, Hanging On.* Thank you to those of you who have tolerated my brief and unstudied incursions into Tractate Yevamot. The Daf Yomi learning cycle finishes that Tractate today.

The homily on the last page of the Tractate, page 122b, is well known to us. The passage reads:

רַבִּי חֲנִינָא: תַּלְמִידֵי חֻכְמִים מְרַבִּים שְׁלוֹם בְּעוֹלָם, שְׁנֵאָמַר: "וְכָל בְּנֵי אֱמֶר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר אָמַר לְמוֹדֵי ה' וְרַב שְׁלוֹם בְּנֵיךְ"

*Rabbi Elazar said that Rabbi Hanina said: Torah scholars increase peace in the world, as it is stated: "And all your children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children" (Isaiah 54:13)*

We know this passage, not really because *four* Tractates of the Talmud end with it (one point for the other three); we know it because our Congregation reads it at 75-miles per hour in our daily morning service and more slowly and aloud on Shabbat, when it is often chanted by one of our younger congregants. It is a beautiful thought.

But even better, for us here and now, is the discussion just a page before. On page 121a we read of Rabban Gamliel seeing a companion ship on the open sea being shattered and sinking.

The Sage was bemoaning the death of the people on board, when Rabbi Akiva approached Rabban Gamliel, telling him that he, Rabbi Akiva, was on board and that he was saved. Astonished, Rabban Gamliel asked how? The Talmud continues:

אֲמַרְתִּי לוֹ: בְּנִי, מִי הָעֵלָךְ? אָמַר לִי: דָּף שֶׁל סְפִינָה נִזְדַּמְּן לִי, וְכָל גַּל וְגַל שָׁבָא עָלַי — נִעֲנַעְתִּי לוֹ רֹאשִׁי

*[Rabban Gamliel] said to [Rabbi Akiva]: My son, who brought you up from the water? He said to me: A plank from the boat came to me, and I bent my head before each and every wave that came toward me. The waves did not wash me off of the board, and I reached the shore.*

IMHO, this short episode ranks among the great metaphorical passages in the Talmud. One of the things so meaningful about the story, as conveyed by many, is that the word for plank in Aramaic is *daf*, or דָּף, the same word used for “page” of Talmudic text, as in *Daf Yomi*. The teaching here is that, when the going gets tough, the tough steadfastly put their heads down and cling to learning our collective past for strength and inspiration. What a way to end this challenging and brilliant Tractate. What a way to give us the strength and inspiration to hang on now! (Who can resist the Frankie Valli and the Four Seasons great hit, [Let's Hang On](#).) On to *Ketuvot*!

*Built Back Better.* This week's report is full of fun and inspiration:

*Continuity Cubed Twice.* This past Shabbat, as 60 of us were enjoying Paved Paradise for Shabbat morning services, Rabbi Rohde recited a *hashkaba* or memorial prayer on the occasion of the *nahala* of the mother of Anita Tamari. Anita was in town from Israel, where she has lived for many years, and was paying respectful tribute to the passing of her mother, Vida Simons, daughter of Vashti (!) and Yosef Corcos. Zachary Edinger announced that Yosef Corcos was Hazan of our Congregation at the time of the last pandemic to affect us significantly, the Spanish Flu of 1918. And Anita told me that she has a tradition of bringing her Israeli-born grandchildren to Shearith Israel, during trips celebrating their Bat/Bar Mitzvahs.

In this one vignette we have the congregational continuity of being here for someone who left many decades ago, still observing the *nahalot* of our former members. We have the continuity of actually remembering who our Hazan was at the time of the Twentieth Century's mis-named pandemic (Spain is about the only country in Europe that did *not* see an outbreak – it's called the “Spanish Flu” because people in Spain were healthy enough to report on it to the rest of the world.) And we have the continuity of a grandmother bringing her third generation back to observe her past and pay homage to their family lineage of another three generations upwards. Two trifecta. *Continuity Cubed Twice.*

*Rabbi Solly in Saudi.* [It is now public](#) that, a couple weeks ago, Rabbi Soloveichik was part of a 13-person delegation that visited Saudi Arabia. It appears that Rabbi Soloveichik was the only Orthodox Rabbi in the contingent. The purpose of the mission was to attempt to enhance

relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel so as to “expand the number of Arab nations that have normalized ties with Israel over the last two years as a result of the Abraham Accords.”

This is a significant and possibly historical moment. Even setting aside the political and social gains from improved relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia, in purely economic terms the effort is daring and potentially of extraordinary importance. Professor Jared Diamond’s long book *Collapse* is something of a sequel to his great *Guns, Germs and Steel*. He explains someplace in the latter tome that *Guns* addressed how civilizations lived long and prospered, whereas *Collapse* addresses the factors that lead to the failure and extinction of so many civilizations. Diamond argues that there are but five key influencers in the collapse of countries, states, particular peoples, and societies. One of them is whether and to what extent the group had positive trading relationships with its geographic neighbors. Of course that makes intuitive sense, too.

Our Rabbi is among a very few trying to open Israel to commerce (and other things, to be sure) with the fifth largest country in Asia by geography, a country with about 35 million people. The trip and its success could be a harbinger of other positive trading relationships. It’s amazing, and we are all proud of our Rabbi.

*Tel Aviv Tells.* Kudos to Rachel Herlands, who mailed this in, from the Tel Aviv market:



It’s terrific. Morton Landowne, off to the Holy Land for the summer, wonderfully tells that Tel Aviv actually reminds him of Paris, though “Paris isn’t swarming with as many scooters, motorcycles, and electric bikes, heading in random directions all at once!”

We need more from Tel Aviv. Send them in; make others smile.

*Alice's Restaurant*. Remember that David Sable was already in the lead with great summer songs. Of my reference to *Alice's Restaurant*, David amazingly tells:

*I actually had to do a draft physical. Was the only Jewish kid I know who did. Had low draft number and I refused to do the Yeshiva exemption route as I was Anti War.*

So this amazing tell needs a fuller explanation. We also need a Show and Tell, since David owns an

*“original, first edition of Alice's Cook Book complete with those flimsy records they used to make.”*

We will make David bring it in on Thanksgiving, the day around which the *Alice's Restaurant* story centers and the day we traditionally listen to the Arlo Guthrie anti-war classic, at noon, on the radio.

*And the Great Summer Songs Keep Coming*. The bounty of last two weeks is becoming the cornucopia I predicted. First, Francine Alfandary mails in the “fun fact” that *Summertime* holds the record as [the most recorded song](#). The 1935 Gershwin classic linked here last week has been recorded nearly 68,000 times. Laurent Alfandary and I are hot on the trail of finding a reliable source for number of plays of the best of these. It's tricky – I think he's right that we need to rely on *Billboard*. More on this.

Second, just when we thought we had listed the greatest of the great summer songs, from our Teaneck friend Laura Fleishmann comes Seals and Croft's [Summer Breeze](#). Of course! It's a great song. She also offers the band confusingly named, *It's A Beautiful Day*, who had the almost-hit, [Hot Summer Day](#). Laura suggests making a mix of all these when we are done.

Third, many continue to suggest [Chad & Jeremy's A Summer Song](#). I began with that wonderful song so don't need to repeat it. Others are still coming up with great suggestions. Ruth Lazar and Aura Bijou list The Beach Boys, [All Summer Long](#), though one could list, oh, a dozen other Beach Boys songs. In fact Andrew Lipton did. Andrew seems to have the mid-1960s cornered (how many others, like me, actually still love the classic instrumental by The Ventures, [Walk Don't Run](#)). In addition, Ruth adds summer songs like:

- Robin Ward, [Wonderful Summer](#)
- Eddie Cochran, [Summertime Blues](#)
- Jimmy Hendrix, [Long Hot Summer Night](#)
- Bob Dylan's out-of-character [Summer Days](#)

- Patti Smith's incoherent [Summer Cannibals](#)
- Richard Marx, [Endless Summer Nights](#)

Team, we are STILL missing some GREAT summer songs. Frankly I can't believe what you haven't sent in. THINK!, people, and help round out the list.

*Welcome to our Touro Synagogue Affiliates.* Some months ago, we offered worshippers at Touro Synagogue the opportunity to become Shearith Israel members. Many accepted, and we are delighted. We have been sending them separate Touro-specific communications but are including them here, in the hopes that they will join the fun along with our other congregants and friends.

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom.

Louis Solomon, Parnas