

October 15, 2020

Dear Shearith Israel family,

*End of the Line.* Given the ever-recurring cycle of our year, how we end our holidays is a lens through which we see the upcoming year. It's worth a moment's reflection. On Hoshana Rabba, the seventh day of Succot, we first take a bunch of aravot, the fragrance-free, taste-free willow branches symbolizing the most estranged among us. We tether this bunch to the four-species set of lulab, etrog, hadassim, and aravot. We hold the newly combined set tightly together, as one. We physically symbolize our hoped-for integration of all Jews (some say all people). Then, at the conclusion of the service, we take the separate bunch of aravot, while keeping the rest of the four species intact, and beat the bunch on the ground. We thus symbolize our collective hope that we as a community will never again live without bringing aravot among us. When we come to the end of Succot a day later, we observe two other beautiful customs for ending the holiday. First, in our synagogue, we chant the *despedidas*, or farewell song to the holiday. Second, in our last visit to the succah during the afternoon of Shemini Atzeret, many of us recite a passage actually saying goodbye to the succah itself. We pray that, next year, we will be sitting in a succah made of the skin of the primordial Leviathan, obliquely referred to in this week's Parashat Bereshit. In the very next line, instead of eschatology, we say in essence, well, ok, if not Leviathan's skin, then "next year in Jerusalem". We are singularly the most optimistic people ever to inhabit the earth, and, in our own lifetimes, we have miraculously been rewarded for it. We recited that insanely unrealistic hope for nearly 2,000 years - and then "Jerusalem next year" became a reality.

We've come to the end of the line of our holiday season. We have to be proud that we managed to give a place for communal prayer, either indoors or out, to every congregant who wanted one. We are deeply thankful that no one got sick. We are thankful to our Clergy and a host of other people whom I've thanked before and will publicly thank again when we all zoom-gather to celebrate our Hatanim on November 1. And we've expressed our goodbyes through the various

beautiful customs described above. When the Traveling Wilbury's -- that staggeringly talented "super-group" of George Harrison, Bob Dylan, Jeff Lynne, Roy Orbison, and Tom Petty (imagine, the Nobel laureate Dylan was the least talented among them) -- wanted to end an album and, in turned out, say goodbye to Roy Orbison (who died tragically), the group composed and sang *End of the Line*. It includes the lines:

"Well, it's alright, remember to live and let live  
Well, it's alright, the best you can do is forgive"

How about that for a fitting farewell to 5780?

*"Now We Can Start All Over Again"*. Who doesn't remember that refrain from the 1970 hit sung by Bobby Sherman, *Easy Come Easy Go* (actually I'd be interested in knowing who *does* remember that song)? 5781. We are starting anew. For those of us blessed to be here and healthy, we have before us crimped but manifold opportunities to come together as a community and continue our Synagogue's mission. Embrace the 4-steps of *Our Congregation's Phase Next Manifesto*, laid out in last week's email: Stay in active learning from our Clergy (the gift that keeps giving); keep our rituals and *minhag* alive by showing up when health and safety precautions make that feasible; help others; and celebrate our blessings. I received a bunch of responses to my email of last week. Candidly, I think they were prompted by the fact that we are all Churchill-philes (many also liked "stay safe, sane, and solvent" as our COVID-19 alliteration of the week - you can all use it). But no one disagreed with the Manifesto, so I regard it as fully agreed, not just as contract but as compact between and among us. Let's pursue its worthy goals, each and every one of them. Together, as one.

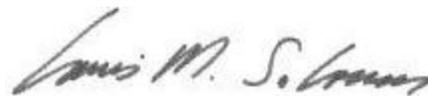
*Semper fi, not Semper fie*. "Semper fi" is short for "semper fidelis". It's Latin for "always faithful" or "always loyal". Semper fi has been the Marine Corp motto since 1883 (our Congregation's three-word motto, in English "Truth, Charity, Justice", was over a hundred years old by then). Recorded references to semper fidelis date back centuries earlier and were used, for example, by towns or cities

to inspire inhabitants to just and loyal behavior. What a difference an "e" makes. Just add an "e" to the end of "fi". You get "fie", a word expressing annoyance, disagreement, disapproval, even disgust. Shakespeare popularized it, but it was in use long before the Bard of Avon. "Semper fie" is my neo-neologism. "Always expressing disapproval", "always expressing annoyance" - in short "chronic complaining". Semper fi, good. Semper fie, not good.

Semper fi accurately describes many of our Congregants. They show up when they can (daily *minyans* goers are my personal heroes) and call-in or video-in with regularity. They help Caring Connection. They make calls, send cards, drop off food. They support the Congregation as their life's circumstances permit. On the other hand, semper fie doesn't describe any of our Congregants. But it could. It's so reasonable to "fie" what's is going on now. It's easy to see the risk of becoming a constant COVID complainer and, even more worryingly, a constant congregational COVID complainer. How do we collectively resist the 4Cs of fie-dom? My answer is that each of us should take on one or two projects that animate any of our Manifesto's truths. Pursue them with energy, even passion. There are an endless number of projects in need of owners and helpers to see them successfully through. With the holidays behind us, let's hunker *down* to keep our spirits *up*. Email or call Rabbi Soloveichik, Reverend Edinger, Barbara Reiss, Bonnie Barest, or me. We'll put you to work. And you will feel great.

*Semper fi!*

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Louis M. Solomon".

Louis Solomon, Parnas