

Dear Shearith Israel family,

*Kippursukkot 5782.* I write in the sliver of time these weeks that is not Shabbat or Yom Tov. The days, like the holidays, seem to run into each other; there isn't time even for a keyboard "space" between these very different but very special holy days. Kippur was a wonderful day at Shearith Israel. Our liturgy is simply awe-inspiring. We were close to 350 strong between the two minyanim. We were basically Covid-19 full to capacity. There were no reported incidents of Covid-19 disease infection or, more importantly, spread. We observed the same safety protocols on Sukkot, though we had one minyan, outdoors, given the smaller numbers of congregants attending. We also began again honoring different congregants and guests with aliyot, which we had restarted sometime in 5781 when Covid seemed to be on the wane, and then paused when the Delta variant came onto the scene with a vengeance, reversing some positive trends. Delta is with us still, but your Working Group feels that the care and precautions being taken allow for the restarting of aliyot, this little but deeply significant ritual. Our Sukkah, pictured below, is simply resplendent. Do come and sit in it.

*Friends.* In the past few weeks, we discussed the three-step journey that Judaism lays out for each of us, individually and collectively, during this season: Reset/Reboot on Rosh Hashana; Return on Kippur; and Repair on Sukkot and the subsequent holidays (see [my email of September 9, 2021](#)). For those fortunate enough to have been able to succeed in the arduous task of believing that resetting/rebooting is even possible, and for those who, having done that, were able to find a Return to our shared values and principles of meaningful existence, well you are among the most fortunate. For you, and I hope it is a great many of us, now comes the fun part – or, literally, the joyous part, for "Joy" is Succot's middle name (literally our prayers call Sukkot שְׂמֵחַתנוּ, the day of happiness or joy). The joy or happiness of Succot and the rest of this year arises from finding things in ourselves or in the world in need of repair and of devoting ourselves to accomplishing at least a tiny part of that repair. Few endeavors bring as much mental well-being and personal satisfaction. We all know that, as Pirkei Abot teaches, we are not duty bound to finish the task, but neither are

we free not to try (Ch. 2:21). Among my favorite aphorisms is: The only true failure is the failure to try. (Two points if you can identify the author.)

I title this section “Friends” because it is with friends that I think we might, as a community, usefully devote a little Repair time. Define “friends” as broadly as you want. The concept can include acquaintances and indeed complete strangers to whom we devote some of our energies to helping. It could include our entire community. And I start with “friends” as a category because other candidates of Repair activity might not give the same level of communal satisfaction because they are either too distant or not as universally available. For example, we could have started with “family”, which has a high degree of immediacy. But some of us don’t have other family members. (And yes we could have started with ourselves to repair, but without efforts directed outside ourselves the Repair would be a very self-absorbed enterprise.) And going more broadly than “friends”, while laudable, is a bit too distant to have immediate positive effect. It is in friendship that each of us can achieve his or her part in the Repair department. C.S. Lewis’s small masterwork, *The Four Loves*, counts friendship as among our most significant relationships, defining the friendship bond as the strong bond existing between people who share common values, interests, or activities.

Jewish literature is chock-full of great stories of friends. But I want to skip the beautiful story of not-yet-King David and son-of-Saul Jonathan as laid out in I Samuel 18:3, where we are told that David loved Jonathan as his own soul. I also want to skip one of my personally favorite paeans to friendship, Tom Paxton’s song/poem Ramblin’ Boy ([see the great Tom Stein and Theodore Bikel singing with Paxton in this rendition](#)). I want to go to one of the further-out perimeters of “friendship”, where we can observe acts of kindness that become acts of true heroism. These make for enduring narratives.

Let’s begin with the great scene from the movie *Spartacus*. In response to the Roman General’s offer to spare the lives of all the slaves if they give up Spartacus, one and then another and then [all the slaves stand up and announce, “I’m Spartacus”](#). This is friendship cum heroism. I’m remembering a similar scene in the unrivalled *The Great*

*Escape*, but I can't quickly find it (was it another wartime escape movie? A little help here!) And we all remember the real-life moment when, in 1995, roughly 10,000 non-Jewish families in Billings, Montana put Hanukah menorahs in their windows in solidarity with the Jewish family who had a brick thrown through the window of its home displaying one.

Acts like this make indelible impressions. They are also ancient. The Talmud has several stories in a similar vein – only they are more poignant, and they predate the 1960 and 1963 movies by some millennia. In one (Tractate Sanhedrin 11a), Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi was sitting and teaching when he smelled the odor of garlic. He said, “Whoever is eating garlic, leave!” R. Chiyya got up and left. But then all the other students in the room got up and left as well. In a story making a related point (same source), Rabban Gamliel ordered seven sages to appear in his attic study early the next morning. Arising to find eight sages in attendance, he declared, “Whoever came up without permission, go back down!” Shmuel ha-Katan immediately offered that he was the eighth and had come only to learn an intricate set of laws for calculating the new month and leap years (intercalation). At this, Rabban Gamliel's tone changed abruptly and, addressing Shmuel ha-Katan as “My son,” he asked him not to leave. The Gemara comments that Shmuel ha-Katan was not the uninvited sage; rather, he “outed” himself to prevent a colleague—a friend-- from being embarrassed.

*Small acts of greatness.* They ennoble us all, both those who did them and those who read or think about them even now. It is similar (true, not the same) to the small but great act of heroism in the Book of Jonah, read beautifully on Kippur by both Rabbi Soloveichik (outside) and Jack Daar (inside). As yours' truly summarized (see [my email of 6.18.20](#)), nameless friends of Jonah on the ship heard of the impossibility of saving Jonah yet went back to their oars to “row hard to return to shore”, in a gesture that remains a symbol of human nobility these thousands of years later.

We cannot live without friends. In Job, the Lord permits Satan to deprive the eponymous hero of his own family, including his precious children, his wealth, and even his health. But Satan could not deprive Job of his friends – that, a commentator

has said (who? two points if you can remind me exactly who and where), would have been too painful. We put four of the most disparate species together on Sukkot – the Lulab, Etrog, Hadassim, and Aravot – to make among the most powerful symbols of friendship or unity in our religion. Let us cherish our friendships and find small acts of greatness to help our friends. After all, THIS is what you see even in a NYC parking garage:



*Half-Full Report.*

*Open Challenges.* There is a growing list of unanswered challenges. What, is everyone as busy as I am? Actually I'm sympathetic; who has time to read much less answer some tricky and challenging questions these weeks. The list won't go away. I will get back to it soon.

*Slowing time.* Of the three suggestions I made last week to make the most out of the brief interval we are given to help Repair the World – slow time down, fill time up, and stretch time out – it is noteworthy that most of the comments were about slowing time down. I guess that's not really surprising, is it? The funniest entry comes from Aura Bijou: "I do believe that the best way to slow down time is to read the New York Times. It is so painful that you can't get through it quickly enough."

Other than that, I knit.” Aura promises to share some Knit Wit (ha!) with anyone who needs a pick-me-up.

*Picturing Paved Paradise.* Those congregants and friends who have been sharing photos of fabulous places and images can take a break this week. The reason? Because here is our real Paved Paradise made gorgeous by our real Sukkah and our real Sisterhood helpers taking a photo-op-break from their beautification efforts:



*Hatanim Celebration.* If you want to experience Joy while celebrating with and honoring friends, do sign up for our rapidly approaching *Hatanim* Celebration on Shabbat *Bereshit*. The service is gorgeous (if you have experienced our *Tenu Shebaha*, you know what I mean, and if you haven't, it's a not-to-be-missed, and the celebration will be festive and safe with options for everyone. And oh yeah, it's a critical fundraiser for Shearith Israel and this year proceeds will be directed toward the ongoing maintenance and beautification of Paved Paradise. The deadline to register is this Monday, so PLEASE sign up now (<https://shearithisrael.shulcloud.com/form/hatanim-2021>) and I'll see you there.

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom, and Moadim L'simha.

Louis Solomon, Parnas