

July 28, 2022

Dear Shearith Israel family and Touro Synagogue Affiliates,

*"It's the Virus, Stupid."* Two weeks ago, I quoted Dr. Eric Topol's informative phrasing on Covid-19. I do so again now, since it sums it all up pretty nicely. The vaccines we signed up for, lined up for, and pull our sleeves up for – without doubt true miracles of modern medicine – “were designed against [a virus] altogether different from what it is today.” The lay press has now caught up with the scientific literature saying the same thing. So we can blithely state that the pandemic is over, yet we wring our hands, click our tongues, and tisk-tisk, not understanding why so many of us are still getting sick. The plain reality is that, for the vast majority of the healthy vaccinated, the risk of death and serious illness is now measurably small, but absent taking simple and tried precautions, many of us are going to get sick from a virus variant with an immune escape and transmissibility substantially greater than what we faced in 2020-21.

We paved paradise in 2020, believing that we would need outdoor space for a long time. Similarly, we instituted protections for indoor use of our sanctuary that retain their usefulness even as we face new and virulent viral variants. Last week, because of the heat, we held Shabbat morning services indoors. Slightly more of us were unmasked than masked, but many of us masked and sat in a large section of the Sanctuary with at least twice the recommended social distance between congregants. Everyone seemed very comfortable physically – while being moved spiritually by Zachary Edinger’s chanting of the special haftarah melody used during the Three Weeks followed by Rabbi Soloveichik’s *debar torah*. Outdoor Kiddush completed a beautiful Shabbat morning. The plan as of now is to go outdoors this Shabbat morning. The rest of the beauty, spirit, and conviviality will be the same. Please, come and join us.

*We Are [All] Royalty.* No, not the false, mutinous kind of royalty we read about in Parashat *Korach* a few weeks ago. And no, not the Sister Sledge song, [\*We Are Family\*](#). (The song has (barely) passable music and ok lyrics. Why do I find it so annoying?) No, I mean, the real kind. *We Are Roy-al-ty* (same cadence as *We Are Fam-i-ly*). Every one of us.

Your reaction, no doubt, is, “ok, we very clearly understand what you are saying but unless you’re being metaphorical, you’re wrong.” My response is that I’m right. Give me a minute to prove it.

When Beth and I were in London last month, evidence of Queen Elizabeth’s Jubilee year was ubiquitous. I snapped a few pics for you, here:



The Queen's royalty seems to derive from three considerations: First, she is in an unbroken lineage of royalty, part of a chain stretching far back hundreds of years. Second, she is the beneficiary of ceremonial authority conferred on her ancestors and now on her by different means, first by families, then by clans, and more recently by Parliament. Third, she acts her part with dignity, in service of something bigger than she is.

So now my job is simple. To prove that *We Are Royalty*, all I have to prove is that all of us share all those same three characteristics. I think I can do it, without a stretch and without metaphor (well, maybe with a little metaphor).

On the first point, each of us – yes, each and every one of us – is the result of an unbroken lineage stretching back hundreds of years. That's not a truism nor a gimmick. It's profound. True, some of us actually know the names of our far-in-the-past ancestors. Most of us don't. But is knowing names indispensable? I think not. Even when we know names, we do not, and cannot, know what it was like to live as our ancestors lived. On a fundamentally important point in our religion of having a lineage (applicable equally to those being born into the religion and those blessed by joining by choice), can we really judge how hard it was for our ancestors to uphold their place in the J-Continuum? Would it matter if we knew their names? Would we know if their conduct was indeed queenly or kingly? Isn't it sufficient that, given that we are here, we all have ancestors, and we all have ancestors stretching back even long before Queen Elizabeth's royal family stretches back? Queen Elizabeth herself isn't a straight longitudinally through the generations either, is she? Didn't she ascend to the throne after the death of her father, who became king only after abdication of his brother, King Edward VIII? A crooked lineage! Heck, we all have that, don't we?

On the second and third characteristics, that royalty has ceremonial authority and acts a dignified part for a larger purpose, doesn't each one of us have the right, and indeed, the duty, to act that way? We collectively follow *halacha* and our traditions. Our rules are a good bit stricter than QE II's. We are all part of the J-Continuum (as I've said, it's akin to the Q-Continuum in *Star Trek*, [see my email of 7.16.20](#)). Every one of us does or should live by rules of behavior and conduct going to the heart of who we are. For some, it's a burden to be part of this Great J-Chain of Being. For some it is a gift. It is magisterial in its own way. The J-Continuum has goals and aspirations that are good and right and upright. Every one of us is indispensable to the communal accomplishment of those goals and aspirations. I'm not talking silly little things. I'm talking about one of the most important aspect of our lives. True, we may define the goals slightly differently. For some it is to be part of a Holy Nation. For others it is to be strong links in a never-ending chain that is a Light unto the Nations. For still others it is to be a part of a religion that finds meaning in a way of life that has been shared by about 200 generations – compared to what, 10 for QE II?

*We Are Ro-yal-ty.* Every one of us. Fully proven. Q.E.D.

*Built Back Better.*

*Quote of the Week.* This week's prize goes to Morton Landowne, who not only sent in a great Tel Aviv photo but one with a deep thought to boot:



*Jim Morrison's Poetry.* David Sable more than made up for his missing The Door's [Summer's Almost Gone](#). He sent in two of Jim Morrison's piercing turns of poetic phrase. First, from his poem *Power*:

*I can make myself invisible or small  
I can become gigantic and reach the farthest things  
I can change the course of nature  
I can place myself anywhere in space or time.*

Second, from the great Doors song [Riders On the Storm](#):

*Riders on the storm  
Riders on the storm  
Into this world we're born  
Into this world we're thrown  
Like a dog without a bone  
An actor out on loan  
Riders on the storm.*

I appreciate that no one can rival David in knowing *The Doors*. But Morrison had other great poetry. Send in some more.

*Beatles Summer Songs.* Billy Schulder to the rescue, as usual, in offering [Good Day Sunshine](#), which is no less "summery" than some of the others we've admitted to the vaunted list of great summer songs. Two unsolicited points. Billy also says that the reason there are no summer songs from The Rolling Stones is that they tried for a "darker" image. I agree, and that is what makes them come in a very distant second to The Beatles, who, in their unforgettable songs, cover as full a range of human emotions as does Shakespeare. (Both The Beatles and Shakespeare are runner ups to the Talmud's endless insights into the human

condition.) So another two points to the Schulder-meisterB. (The Judges make this honorable mention to Esther Ingber's suggestion of [Octopus's Garden](#) (fun kid-friendly animation here).)

*More Great Summer Songs.* Brother Michael Schulder also offers several final entries. The one grabbing our attention is the stupendous Stevie Wonder's [I Was Made to Love Her](#). Schulder-meisterM also gets two points, not for the song, but for the novelty of his argument that we should list the song as a summer song because it came out in the *Summer of Love* (1967). Proust-like, as Michael describes it, he can

*"feel the sand between my toes, and smell the metal stairs at the beach burning in the sun"*

Even at the eleventh hour we had some other truly *excellent* additions. Robert Starkand suggests *Summer*, by War. For the Sephardim among us, listen to [this great version](#). He also offers Santana's *Smooth*, which is a neat, sassy, even great song, more about heat than summer, but ok. Andrew Lipton and Rabbi Moshe Edelman (who actually went to Queens College at the same time Paul Simon did) offer ones already on the list, including (by Andrew) *Here Comes the Sun*. Robert Katz doubles down on *Under the Boardwalk*. They are all winners.

*The Definitive Shearith Israel Summer Song List.* We really mean it this time. Final submissions, since we will publish the DSISL next week (we hope).

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom. (It's Rosh Hodesh Menachem Av tonight.)

Louis Solomon, Parnas