

March 19, 2020

Dear Shearith Israel Family,

In addition to the myriad ways the Coronavirus is severely, if temporarily, we pray, upending our lives, it is also wreaking havoc with our sense of time. The normal routines afforded by work, school, and perhaps most significantly Shabbat preparations and services have made it difficult to keep track of time in the comforting ways we are accustomed to. Still, we are resilient, we make adjustments, we rise to the occasion, we learn from each new experience (how many of us have become zoom experts?), and we remain optimistic and ready for when we can resume our precious routines.

We know you are receiving an abundance of emails from us as well as from others. The volume of communications may be overwhelming. So we will limit this update to some abbreviated key points and remind you to refer our Coronavirus webpage: shearithisrael.org/covid, where you can find all of our virtual programming details including times and login/dial-in details, youth activities, and critical hesed opportunities.

1) Synagogue building and services: Sadly, our synagogue building remains closed. All regular services and in-person programs remain suspended until further notice. Our facilities staff continues to come in daily to clean and disinfect, handle repairs and projects that are better accomplished while we are away, and prepare for Pesah.

2) Programming: We've quickly pivoted to a wide array of virtual programming. Much of these are virtual versions of our regular activities, our approach being to maintain as much continuity as possible, even if the modalities must change. These include classes and shiurim for adults and youth activities for tots through teens, including PTTS Hebrew School at its usual time. And while we would so prefer to be together in person, one silver lining is that we are actually connecting with even more people who otherwise could not make it into our doors as demonstrated by the literally hundreds of people who called in for our Virtual pre-shabbat Friday Night Lights (which will be offered again tomorrow) and pre-Pesah shiur on Tuesday (with lots more to come). We are grateful to those who have been sponsoring classes entirely in support our Coronavirus Relief Fund.

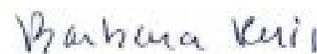
3) Hesed: There is no avoiding the sad reality that members of our community are going to be adversely impacted by this situation. Some will be (and already are) experiencing critical need. We have put a few things in place to help. We need everyone who can to assist. *Caring Connection* is arranging for food to be delivered and paid for when needed for those who can't. We have organized a volunteer effort that is reaching out to EVERY SINGLE MEMBER of our congregation to touch base, say hello, and see what might be needed. To support any of these efforts through your time and/or money, visit shearithisrael.org/covid-hesed.

4) Pesah: We are all anxious over how we will celebrate Pesah this year. Few of us will be spending the holiday with all the people we expected to or in the places we intended to. And some of us need to figure out how to set up our homes, arrange the meals, and plan for meaningful *haggadot* (seders). We will soon be sending out information on resources to support all of us including: a Passover Guide (shared with us by Rabbi Gabbai of Mikveh Israel), opportunities to purchase "Passover in a Box" *haggadah* (seder) and holiday meals, *shiurim*, sale of hametz, and much more. It will all be communicated to you soon and will also be conveniently collected on our website for easy reference.

In this vein, it is important to bear in mind that our Congregation has customs and traditions that are unique, and our resources need to all take those differences into account. In the past week, Congregations have begun jointly publishing guidelines, rules, and suggestions for dealing with specific issues of ritual and observance. This is invaluablely laudable. We fully subscribe to all attempts at unity, and we fully support any effort to control and contain the spread of the virus while caring for our members and the broader community. At the same time, given several unique aspects of our community, we think a more personalized approach should be used in addition to what other congregations are collectively doing. We intend to continue to communicate regularly and directly with our members based on the important medical advice we are receiving and in a way that is sensitive to the special and diverse character of our community. Additionally, if you have any specific ritual, lifecycle, or religious question, please do not hesitate to reach out to the office, to Rabbi Soloveichik, or to Zachary Edinger.

Let us end this longer than intended message by wishing you strength, perseverance, and good health. May we all enjoy the blessing of community, albeit a socially distant one, during these trying times. We will get through it together, and, with the help of the Almighty, will reunite in our beloved synagogue, stronger in our bonds.

Shabbat Shalom.



Meir Soloveichik, Rabbi Louis Solomon, Parnas
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