

May 8, 2020

Dear Shearith Israel Family,

*Counting our isolation.* We are in the midst of counting the omer, the 49-day cycle between the second day of Pesah and Shabuot. Does everyone remember the marvelous and largely unique way we count at Shearith Israel? Rabbi Ira moves to the left side of the *teba*, facing our omer board that is hundreds of years old. Out comes the blessing and the count of the day, in Rabbi Ira's beautiful voice singing our timeless plain-chant melody. Then we all join in. Then we sing the beautiful Psalm, *Lamenatzeach Shir Mizmor*, with Rabbi Ira and Zachary Edinger's voices filling our sacred space and literally lifting all of us along with the melody. Like other houses of worship, we have our own, separate, sad counting going on now in tandem with counting the omer. Tomorrow will mark our ninth Shabbat away from our sanctuary. May it be over soon.

*Emerging.* We all read Governor Cuomo's guidelines laying out a taxonomy of metrics that will need to be met before any geographic area within New York can consider reopening. Several of us also listened to Dr. Fauci discuss possible timetables for opening houses of worship. There isn't enough specificity to these to give us concrete guidance yet. We again say that we will emerge in the same way we went on pause: We will abide and be guided by (i) dictates and directives of the government; (ii) the advice of our particular medical advisers; and (iii) particulars about our Congregation that we will take into account, bearing in mind what our sister congregations are doing in the area. We are heartened that many congregants have expressed interest in helping us think about re-entry. May we soon see our re-emergence; as our former Parnas and dear congregational friend Peter Neustadter put it earlier this week in describing Jerusalem: "Jerusalem is coming back to life/The sound of the barber is once again heard in the streets of Jerusalem".

*Two things to do now.* In the meantime, there are two things that everyone can do. Each will make you feel great, guaranteed.

*Call call call.* Keep calling in to the Rabbi's classes and lectures. They are phenomenal. Keep calling in to Zachary Edinger's pre- and post-Shabbat "services." They will lift your spirits. Keep calling each other, especially our elderly congregants, some of whom have been alone for nearly two months.

Singularly the best part of my day is when one of our congregants picks up their phone to talk to me. Keep calling until we can all be together again.

*Sign up to study a Parasha.* In anticipation of Shabuot, which is just three weeks away, Zachary and Barbara Reiss have circulated e-lists of parshiot available to “adopt” so that we can have a communal siyyum before Shabuot. There are a few parshiot still available. Take one and read it at your own time and pace. Rabbi Soloveichik is happy for you to read it in any language you are comfortable with. Our congregation boasts a greater diversity of languages than any other congregation anywhere. Let’s finish a congregational read of the Torah and celebrate a siyyum together.

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom.

Louis Solomon, Parnas

Addendum: We just learned of the passing of the mother of our Executive Director, Barbara Reiss. We are deeply saddened by this loss, along with so many others. Our deepest condolences to Barbara and her family.