

June 5, 2020

Dear Shearith Israel Family,

*"You cannot hide the soul"*. So spoke Ishmael, in describing Queequeg toward the beginning of *Moby Dick*. The book was published in 1851. What was our Congregation's soul in 1851? We could not hide it. In 1851 we were actively caring for the religious necessities of our Congregants. More, we were caring for the Touro Synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, ensuring that the cemetery there remained available for the burial of Jews and that the Synagogue itself was properly maintained even though it was empty, and Jews would not begin to return to Newport for more than 30 years. We were sending funds to Ireland during the Great Hunger of the Irish Potato Famine - an act of *hesed* or charitable lovingkindness that the President of Ireland came to New York to thank us for about eight years ago. We were about to establish Mount Sinai Hospital, to help all people in need. Our soul was manifest in the particulars of how we treated each other as well as others in widening circles of greater sweep.

*Our Congregation's Soul Circa COVID-19*. It would be unfair to compare us to the giants who bestrode the earth when Melville wrote his classic; we cannot meet the measure. But try we must. We have learned from them. Even in this dim time we have enormous amounts to be thankful for in the particulars of how we are treating each other and others. This Shabbat will mark our thirteenth out of our beloved Sanctuary. It is too many by any measure. Yet instead of communal despair we are showing a soul that would make our forbearers proud. Many of our elderly are isolated physically. Yet none need be alone; calls are continuing to be made; food packages for the needy are continuing to be delivered; pre-Shabuot notes were delivered by mail or in person by several of our magnificent young people. Rabbi Soloveichik, Rabbi Rohde, and Reverend Edinger - our world-class but deeply personal Clergy - have taught and inspired not just us but widening circles of greater sweep. Each of our Clergy will continue to be teaching and inspiring remotely throughout the Summer. We are assisting our sister congregations where we can. We are discussing with houses of worship of other faiths how together we might make a reality of the return to socially distant

in-person communal worship. The care that our COVID-19 Working Group is taking to maximize the health and safety of the return to our Sanctuary further reveals our collective soul. We acknowledge that other synagogues, even those in our expanded neighborhood, are already re-opening. We do not comment on their decisions and pray for their continued safety. For our Synagogue, we are following the specific, methodical approach we summarized in earlier updates. We are making progress. For starters, the Group is exploring safe ways to utilize the outdoor portico on the east side of our building. That is the place where, as of now, the Group feels we can safely hold services. We know that the portico will be able to accommodate only a few of our Congregants at a time. But, in a glimpse of our communal soul, we feel it is best, as an initial step toward re-entry, to be able to offer Congregants who have had to mourn the loss of loved ones in private a place to recite the communal Kaddish. The Group is exploring several other options. When those are ready for concrete presentation they will be presented.

*A Final Plea.* Remembering our glorious collective past takes us only so far (though it's not a bad place to start). Feeling good about what we are doing now confers even greater benefits. Please, continue to reach out to others. Continue to call in. Each Congregant and each friend can do one more thing. Our Spring fundraiser, done in lieu of our annual gala and in tribute to Rabbi Soloveichik's recent lecture series (among others), ends on June 15, in ten days. Our Clergy will not stop teaching and inspiring us in ten days. Our significant financial needs will not end in ten days either. But this fundraiser will - and we are asking everyone who has benefited from our Clergy's truly tireless efforts to contribute as much as circumstances permit. Let us show our soul generously.

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom.

Louis Solomon, Parnas