



February 24, 2022

TO: Members of Congregation Jeshuat Israel and all worshippers at the Touro Synagogue  
FROM: The Board of Trustees of Congregation Shearith Israel and its Clergy

Dear friends: We were hopeful that by now the litigation would be behind us so that our two Congregations could get to the important project of moving forward together to keep Touro Synagogue thriving. Unfortunately, CJI leadership has filed papers continuing the litigation. It was sadly unnecessary. There was a path-forward fashioned by CJI's own selected intermediary and reflected in the terms we sent over. Your leadership chose not to take the reasonable and cooperative path.

We have been hearing from many of you who are as desirous of peace as we are. We are happy for that, and we urge each of you to stay strong and to keep communicating with us if we can help. But we are also hearing reports of really crazy distortions of Shearith Israel's position. Let's correct four of them here:

- Shearith Israel has never been interested in the Levi Gale House, the Rabbi's house, or any other property actually owned by CJI. The assertion is just too silly to be taken seriously. Shearith Israel has a deep, 200+-year connection to Touro Synagogue, its paraphernalia and appurtenances, including the cemetery. Those are the things we care about and will continue to protect. That is why we have been asking for the creation of an inventory, to confirm what property is owned by CJI and what property is owned by Shearith Israel. We've been asking CJI leadership for that inventory for three *years*. Let's get it done!
- Shearith Israel has no interest or design to take control of CJI. To avoid replacing CJI as lessee of the Touro Synagogue, we asked for two Board seats because CJI leadership wasn't being transparent with us, the lack of transparency happened repeatedly, and we believed that two seats would allow us "eyes in". But two of 25 seats doesn't confer control. Doesn't there come a point when common sense repels such nonsensical talk?
- Shearith Israel has repeatedly said that Rabbi Mandel is welcome to continue to serve those congregants praying at Touro Synagogue. This is our sincere hope. We never got Rabbi Mandel involved in this. Rabbi Mandel reached out to our Rabbi. We think it was shameful of CJI leadership to have asked him to do that, and we do not intend to discuss this further.
- Shearith Israel has been trying to achieve transparency and has never hidden anything from you. We want to come and speak directly to you. We have repeatedly offered to do so, hardly the mark of an organization trying to hide behind confidentiality. It was CJI leadership who refused to let us talk directly to you. We also offered to come and answer any questions you might have. CJI leadership refused to allow us to do that as well. Yet when CJI leadership asked to speak to us, we said great – let's get a dialogue going. We promptly sent the CJI letter to our Board, which is more than CJI did with our letters. Working together will require more communication between us, not less.

There is only one way to stop all the finger-pointing and misstatements. CJI's leadership should permit us to appear before the CJI membership and answer questions directly. We would welcome that opportunity.

### **Preparing For Our Partnership**

In the meantime, we would like to prevent the ongoing litigation from moving us further apart from you, worshippers at Touro Synagogue. We have several ideas about how to try to deal with that – in addition to encouraging you to reach out to us. We ask you to consider these:

- Shearith Israel renews our commitment that any congregant or worshipper who wishes to pray at Touro Synagogue will remain welcome to do so. This will not change, ever.
- Absent being invited to speak with you directly, we will continue to keep you informed of things through communications such as these letters. More communication between us will help move us closer together.
- We also invite you to join our Shearith Israel mailing lists. You can easily do that via a “Join our Email List” at the bottom of our homepage ([www.shearithisrael.org](http://www.shearithisrael.org)).
- You are welcome to participate in our on-line programming, and we would love it if you came to visit and indeed stayed with us should you be in New York for a Shabbat or Holiday.
- We also renew our invitation to CJI congregants to join Shearith Israel as members. This is not intended to impose any additional financial burden on congregants or worshippers.

Our main point in all this is that we need to ready ourselves to work together for the good of Touro Synagogue. The litigation may delay the day, but whether next week, next month, or next year, we will all be together at a unified Touro Synagogue. Let's prepare for our partnership now.

Shabbat shalom.