

Dear Shearith Israel Family,

Wonderful news: Additional outdoor space for services. I hinted last week that we might have some good news soon about outdoor space in addition to the portico, where a larger number of our Congregants could attend services in relative safety. What I have to report is both welcome and wonderful. Manhattan Day School (MDS), a neighboring modern orthodox Jewish Day School of the first rank, is considering offering us two different outdoor spaces at their building on West 75th street near West End Avenue to use for our services. With social distancing, one of the spaces should accommodate approximately 100 Congregants; the other, 35. These numbers will be affected by City and State regulations that are frequently changing because of health and legal (even constitutional) requirements. But in any case, the number of Congregants who would be able to join in communal Torah reading and prayer is significantly greater than the 10-14 that fit on our portico. Outdoor prayer continues to be preferred by our Working Group even now. The availability of these spaces at MDS should allow our Congregants to pray together, perhaps in shifts, on Shabbat and, of enormous importance, during the High Holidays. We are hard at work finalizing details and figuring out what is optimal, and we hope to use an MDS outdoor space for the first time this Shabbat. Please sign up. We are deeply grateful to MDS.

Good deeds beget more good deeds. Our discussion with MDS about their outdoor space arose from discussions MDS was having with us about using parts of our Synagogue building during the coming school year for roughly 90 of their students, their seventh and eighth graders. How marvelous an opportunity for our Congregation to be able to assist a neighborhood day school--especially one that is or was attended by the children of several of our families-- in this way. Yes, there are as many details to be worked out. But there are few delights greater than the privilege of being able to assist a great educational institution continue to teach our young. It was just a few weeks ago that we learned in the daily Talmud study the opinion of one great Talmudic Sage that Jerusalem was

destroyed nearly 2,000 years ago because the study of children was interfered with. Or, on the same page of Talmud, we learned that the world is sustained by the pure breath of children learning (Tractate Shabbat 119b). Let us pray that, absent a true miracle that will make the whole dismal ordeal of COVID-19 vanish, we will have the merit to be able to hear and see school children in our Synagogue - socially distanced, of course. We will bring you more details when we have them.

Food, for our soul. Are you one of the few people left in America who have not rented *Hamilton* on The Disney Channel for \$6.99? If reading is more your preferred means of education or entertainment, do pick up any of Thomas Paine's works. They are comparatively short, and if you read one, you'll get the drift. For our times now, like those of Hamilton, Paine, and our other Revolutionary forbearers, are surely the times that try our souls. I've written so much about that that I've overlooked that we are also witnessing seriously trying times for our stomachs as well. No, I don't mean that we have to pick up our take-out dinners at curbside. On Rosh Hodesh Ab earlier this week, we began a nine-day lead-up to Tisha B'Ab by changing some of our daily habits. One is to give up meat during the week. Then, after going meatless for over a week (save for Shabbat), we will not eat for an entire day to observe the Fast of Ab. But there's more: During the four month period we are now in, we have four fast days - that's four times as many as we have the entire rest of the Jewish calendar. We have heard Rabbi Soloveichik's illuminating, humorous discussions about Jews and food. But what's the deal here and now? For this I rely on Rabbi Soloveichik's prior classes, a talk we heard years ago by Rabbi Saul Berman who was visiting with us as a Scholar in Residence, and the writings of Rabbi Yehiel Poupko, who frequently quotes the Talmudic passage that "now that we no longer have the Temple in Jerusalem and its altar to bring about atonement for sin, a person's family table gains reconciliation and forgiveness." There are an uncanny number of similarities between the service in Temple times and our rituals and customs around our dinner table; it was not coincidental. The Temple became the family table. Temple wine and water libations begot Kiddush and hand washing. The show bread begot challah. Except for Rabbi Soloveichik's hilarious Top 10 lecture on

the (mis)use of salt (oh how we long to be back in our synagogue listening side-by-side), the rest of us have and use salt, commemorating the salt used in the Temple. These are just a few of the analogies. We eat at our tables today to celebrate our past. And now it makes sense that we have so much different eating (no meat) and non-eating during this time of year. We fast to recall the loss of what we had in Temple times. What better way to show the absence of what we treasured than to forego the symbols that we use even today to remember the past glory. During COVID-19, our eating has become much more lonely, painfully so for some of our Congregants. We miss each other's company. When this is over and behind us, let's rededicate ourselves to making sure that no Congregant or visitor is ever without a place to eat. That will nourish not just our visitor's stomachs but our own souls as well.

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom.

Louis Solomon, Parnas