

May 15, 2020

Dear Shearith Israel Family,

*This Week's Update, or Another Quiet Week in Synagogue Wobegone*

*Ten is the loneliest number (so far).* Ten is one of the great numbers in Judaism. The ten commandments. Ten plagues. Ten comprise a minyan. Ten would have averted the destruction of Sodom. These tens all manifest the active presence of the Almighty in our lives reacting to the positive role of community in shaping our destiny. But not now. Tomorrow will mark the tenth Shabbat that we will be out of our beloved synagogue and that our beloved synagogue will be bereft of us. This symbiosis of sadness is made worse by the deep personal loss that many of our Congregants have experienced along with the communal losses that we have all felt so keenly.

*And yet.* Or, as Rabbi Soloveichik says (George Eliot before him), "*and yet, and yet.*" Few if any of us have gone through the isolation, the limitation of our freedom of movement, the absence of social intercourse and camaraderie, the Groundhog Day monotonous repetition of monotony that the pandemic has imposed on us. Yet some of us are actually dealing with it very well. I speak to congregants, including those who have literally been alone for two months now. Those who make calls to others in our congregation or who deliver food to those who can't go out help others *and* help themselves. Those who call in to hear Rabbi Soloveichik's classes - singularly the most redoubtable display of scholarship, persistence in teaching, and strength of message that most of us have ever witnessed - Rabbi Rohde's stirring musical events, and Zachary Edinger's beautiful services and daily class, are no less isolated but feel very much less alone than the rest of us. Join in; be uplifted.

*Strength in community.* Each of us is facing many of the same but many unique hardships. Personal health, fear for ourselves and others, family dynamics (or their painful absence), financial challenges, work crises. These are so real. But they are "out there." In here, within our Congregation, our main goal remains to keep us strong as a community. Our spiritual leaders are giving us the sustenance to make it through. The risks and disorientation we are now facing together will be over in the near future. It will be replaced, for a long while it seems, by other challenges, including formidable rules and restrictions that we will have to live

with. Our Congregation is respectful and resilient. In Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's unforgettable phrase -- as recounted in our Rabbi's beautiful and fitting eulogy for Barbara Reiss's extraordinary mother earlier this week -- in our collective, communal actions we exhibit the "negation of despair". We will remain strong and gain even greater strength when we can start to be together again. The day is coming soon(ish). (Hope Springs Eternal: We hope to have something more concrete to say by Shabuot.)

*Our spring fundraiser.* We can't have our gala this year. We will miss what is always a beautiful and festive event. It is also one of our most important congregational fundraisers, of which we have very few. Instead of our gala, we will be fundraising virtually. As you will soon see, this will be part of a truly ambitious undertaking by Rabbi Soloveichik leading up to Shabuot. If even a fraction of those of us hooked on Rabbi Soloveichik's radio voice contribute even modestly, we will be able to meet the operational burdens we are continuing to bear even in our time of shutdown. Please be as generous as your circumstances permit.

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom.

Louis Solomon, Parnas