

April 3, 2020

Dear Shearith Israel Family,

Social distancing started in earnest approximately three weeks ago, around Purim time, and here we are approaching *Pesah*, with no clear notion of when this "new normal" will end. We will all miss our special pre-Pesah service and consecration Shabbat. We will all miss our stirring choir and our *hazanim*. We will all miss being together. The scourge will end, but until it does, we must all adapt as best we can.

We are proud of how our sacred *kehilla* have been adapting, including in the lead-up to what will surely be a very unusual *Pesah* celebration. And as we try to focus on silver linings, we cannot help but marvel at the extent to which Shearith Israel members and friends, far and wide, are using technology to participate in so many "learning moments". We have quickly grown accustomed to the fact that around 300 callers are joining in each week to hear Rabbi Soloveichik's *Pre-Shabbat Virtual Friday Night Lights* (as he more aptly calls it, "Friday Afternoon Lights"). We should all be equally proud of how many people are dialing in to the Rabbi's Tractate Taanit class (staying on for 1.5 hours multiple nights per week!). This was originally intended to be a service to the *bekhorim* (first-borns) in our community who will not be able to participate in a traditional *siyyum* this year on Ereb Pesah. But we are delighted that so many non-*bekhorim* have been drawn to the Rabbi's lightning-speed gemara lessons. And while yesterday was not Shabbat, let alone, Shabbat HaGadol, we were all deeply gratified that over 700 of us were able to learn from the Rabbi's piercing Shabbat HaGadol Derasha.

Under the dire circumstances we are collectively facing, our gratitude also goes out to Rabbi Rohde for overseeing the remote training and preparation of our post-bat mitzvah young women in the reading of *Shir HaShirim* for the entire community. It will not take place on the holiday itself, but it will take place, and for that we are thankful especially to the young women who are ensuring that our tradition and know-how are perpetuated.

We are awed by the capacity of our youth education professionals to deliver quality programs and activities for our youth. Our PTTS Hebrew School classes have been incredible, and Liz Rios has also jumped on the zoom bandwagon, offering puppet shows, story time, and other activities for our youngest congregants.

We anticipated that preparing meals, especially Seders ("Haggadot"), will be challenging for many members of our community. We were able to organize a kitniyot-free, ashkefardic friendly "Seder-in-a-Box" program, prepared by Sova Catering, that was reasonably priced and flexible enough to accommodate individuals, vegetarians, and others with special dietary needs.

We have been working to keep our *hesed* efforts on track and sustained as well. Zachary

Edinger deserves special recognition; in a real sense, he is keeping us all afloat (please tune in to his 8 a.m. class on the Prophets, and his pre- and post-Shabbat zoom experiences). We also want to share the developments of our partnership with *Chamah*. Last year we inaugurated a pre-Pesah Packathon with *Chamah* (with whom we've also been organizing successful Thanksgiving Packathons). Although we could not host a live Pre-Pesah Packathon this season, the needs of the community are greater than ever, and the delivery logistics are more challenging than ever. We are pleased to report that we, as a cohesive congregation dedicated to *hesed*, raised significant funds and *Chamah* has delivered 200,000 lbs. of fresh produce and 500 ample food packages to families in need. Separately, we have been raising funds to sponsor meals for members of our community who are having an especially difficult time.

Before signing off, we wish to remind you to check our [dedicated COVID-19 webpage](#), which aggregates all of our programming and resources in one organized place, including an archive of these weekly updates (and which is also featured prominently on our [homepage](#)).

We hope to be back in touch soon, but will use this moment to wish you *moadim l'simha* and *hag kasher ve'sameah*.

Shabbat Shalom.

Louis Solomon, Parnas Barbara Reiss,

Executive Director