

August 6, 2020

Dear Shearith Israel family,

*Old News.* I assume you feel as I do: It comes as something of a relief that reporting on our “initial re-entry efforts” is starting to feel tired and unnecessary. We have been davening on the portico for over a month. This Shabbat will mark our third on the MDS rooftop. As a community we are supporting those saying Kaddish, or having a Nahala, and we are now communally reading Torah three times a week. We have found a way to permit our Congregation and the larger Jewish community to share in our most important communal days, as we did on Tisaha B’Ab. For all this we must thank not just our Clergy, Barbara Reiss, Bonnie Barest, and our Re-Entry Working Group; importantly, our gratitude extends to our maintenance staff, led by John Quinones as well as Miguel Santiago and Olivo Lopez, for their flawless regiment of cleaning and protecting those of us coming to pray. (We note with sorrow the passing of John’s father – John’s long and faithful dedication to Shearith Israel is the stuff of record-books.)

*New news.* Our progress is sure and certain compared to where we were. It is also adamantly not where we are going to remain. Assuming COVID-19 infection and spreading rates in New York City remain low and directionally safe, and assuming away the complexities that are now arising from those traveling here from other places, we intend to proceed on three paths over the coming weeks. *First*, Rabbi Soloveichik will continue teaching and lecturing, and Rabbi Rohde and Reverend Edinger will continue connecting with all of us who take advantage of their wonderful video and audio classes and ritual observances during the week, on late Friday afternoons, and after Shabbat. This “first” is a miracle, so let’s not skip over it glibly without pausing for a moment of Hakarat Hatov, or genuine thanksgiving. *Second*, we have taken a number of steps, including ordering many (expensive) air scrubbing units, to make indoor use of our sacred spaces available under conditions that will be as safe as we can reasonably make them. This option will be in addition to continuing our outdoor services. We acknowledge that we have been slower than our sister Congregations in moving indoors. We happily celebrate the progress they are making without feeling the need to keep pace. Each Congregation has its own unique challenges and opportunities. And for us, given our demographics, our physical plant, and our guiding Rabbinic priorities, we have done it our way – and we will continue to. *Third*, we are making progress in designing options for Rosh Hashana and Kippur (and we are going to have a fabulous succah). We hope to be able to announce our High Holidays plans next week. We will be having multiple services, and I believe we will be able to accommodate all of our members who will wish to join us. This will hopefully include a special service for our elders, and it will include shofar opportunities for our members who do not otherwise feel comfortable coming to a service.

*Shearith Israel, the Musical.* So what’s it gonna be? We are in the dog days of summer, at least weather-wise. We today commemorate Little Boy; Fat Man’s on Sunday. Do you want to go your own way, and call it another lonely day, as Fleetwood Mac would ask? Or shall we together, as a community, ask the existential question, what musical are we? No, that’s not a typo or an

ungrammatical sentence. I don't mean what musical instrument do we best collectively resemble. That's too easy; of course we resemble the most magisterial of them all, the grand piano. And I don't mean which musical play or movie do we like the best. That one's too hard; our diversity will create too many right answers. What I really mean is, which musical *are* we. Musicals tell stories, and the narrative or story line is typically advanced through the musical numbers. Musicals are not unadulteratedly happy. There are some very sad musicals and certainly sad parts of many musicals. In the end a musical is life-affirming because a great musical resembles life itself, with melodies, some unique, some recurring, punctuating spans of quiet, coasting, yang, whatever you want to call it. Whether it's a great life will depend in part on the ratio of song to the space in between, on the tunefulness of the songs and value of the space. This is all too abstract. "And now I'm asking" again (a line from a great though I find an unrelievedly sad musical), what musical is our Congregation? We've been here a long time. We've seen and experienced a lot. We've helped. Have we hurt? We've led, we've followed. Are there a few characteristics of us, over time and space, that most resemble a great musical? The answer is yes, and your challenge is to email me and tell me which musical, which characteristics, and why. Like Fermat in 1637, I know the answer; it's just hard to fit it in the remaining space in this email. So email me, and see your name and reasons emblazoned in next week's email.

Thank you all. Bless us all. Shabbat shalom.

Louis Solomon, Parnas