



June 2021/Sivan 5781

Dear Kerem Shalom,

Shalom. What a year it has been. We are clearly in such a different place than we were one year ago. Indeed, I have begun referring to this moment as the “vaccination” or “post-vaccination” phase of living with the COVID-19 virus.

Massachusetts is now in the process of fully “reopening.” What “reopening” actually means remains to be seen as many individual businesses and organizations may, in fact, choose to maintain some masking or social distancing policies for the time being. What “reopening” means for us at Kerem Shalom and what it will look like for us in our building and in our sanctuary also is not yet entirely clear. We are in the midst of the process of figuring this out. We hope to soon have some news to share with you.

That being said, the decisions that we will make going forward will be made with certain values and principles in mind. The first principle is that we are not thinking about how to “reopen” Kerem Shalom, rather just how to “reopen” our physical space. You have heard me say numerous times over the past year that Kerem Shalom never closed and it’s true. We never closed. As a strong Jewish community, we quickly “pivoted” and figured out how to not only “stay open” but also to offer quality educational, spiritual and social programming in an online format.

In creating our online experiences over the past year we were consistently manifesting two clear Jewish values: *kehillah* (community) and *shmirat haguf* (taking care of the individual physical self.) While on the surface these two values, the community and the individual, may appear to be in opposition to each other, the truth is that they are essential components of each other. In other words, we cannot have a community if we do not take care of each other and ourselves as individuals, and we take care of ourselves and each other as individuals not so we can live our lives in isolation, but rather so we can be full participants in our community.

Even as we embark in this moment on what may feel like a “new beginning” of sorts, we are going to move forward ensuring our allegiance to these same essential Jewish values. We will do everything we can to prioritize creating a community of intellectual honesty and spiritual depth while simultaneously taking care of each other and ourselves as individuals, which means attending to our physical health and safety as well as our mental, emotional, spiritual and psychological selves.

It is clear that we have learned a great deal over this past year and we want to make sure that we bring the valuable Torah we have learned into this moment. One of the things that we have learned (or have been reminded of) is just how valuable and essential each and every one of us is in the communal whole. Indeed, Kerem Shalom is who we are because of the specific individuals and families who are part of our community.

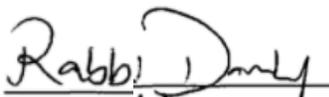
Each and every one of you, of us, matters. The saying may feel like a cliché, but it is true. In a moment where the future is still unclear, the willingness of each and every member of our community to rise up and be counted as a part of the community makes a huge difference, psychologically, emotionally and spiritually.

It is now the moment in the year when we ask everyone to rise up and be counted as a member of Kerem Shalom. It is a powerful statement of faith and of identity to affirm your connection to Kerem Shalom.

I deeply believe this, whether you are a sustainer, pay full dues, receive an abatement, or cannot pay anything at all. I deeply believe this, whether you attend Kerem Shalom at every Shabbat and Holiday gathering, or whether you come once or twice a year. I deeply believe this, whether you live nearby and can easily get to the building, or whether you live so far away that coming here takes time and energy. I deeply believe this, whether you take advantage of every educational opportunity at Kerem Shalom or whether you feel that you don't "use" the synagogue.

You matter and your formal statement of membership and connection to Kerem Shalom matters. Please join me and all of us in clicking the link that says you will rise and be counted for another year as part of Kerem Shalom. We are who we are, after all, because of you.

With Love & Gratitude, Kindness & Shalom,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rabbi Darby". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Rabbi Darby