

What's Real about a Virtual Shabbat Service?



Recently, I did two things I never imagined I'd do.

First, I took the time to read through an article about why synagogues should be hosting “virtual gatherings” during the current COVID-19 crisis; at the same time, the article explained, we Jews should be sure to understand “what it means to come together physically.” Granting the long history of and traditions surrounding communal worship, I think we generally recognize and would not argue the value of being together – but these days, we hardly find ourselves in an ordinary situation.

The other thing I did was to participate in the experience of a Friday night service livestreamed by our congregational clergy, sans congregation; only our rabbis and our cantorial soloist were present. Like so many other congregations, we made the decision last month to close our building to the public, turning to virtual services in the meantime.

Frankly, I was skeptical – but it was the occasion of the *yahrzeit* (anniversary of death) for my wife’s brother, and this was our only option for respecting her