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בס"ד

March 12, 2020

Dear Friend,

For so many of us, today was a day unlike any that we have experienced.

First and foremost, we think of all those currently afflicted with COVID-19, their loved ones, and we continue to storm the gates of Heaven on their behalf.

In a broader sense, we are confronted, as individuals and as a community, with profound and fundamental changes to our daily routines. This is extremely difficult, but, as I wrote earlier today, I have no doubt whatsoever that this is what we must do for the safety of our entire community, and for the protection of all human life.

We will evaluate these restrictions on a weekly basis with the most senior medical leadership of the local hospitals, to determine at which point we may resume our normal communal functions.

Until that time, we must adjust to a new reality. I will be available to all of you via email (rabbi@jcot.org) or phone at 201-747-5284, and Elanna will be working remotely and can be reached at office@jcot.org.

I apologize in advance for the length of this email. I ask you to please read it very carefully, as it deals with a range of critical issues.

Shalom Bayit

As our children will be home, and many will be working from home (I remind everyone that our guidelines encourage anyone who can possibly work from home to do so), we have a unique opportunity to renew our family bonds. At the same time, the close proximity is bound to cause friction and tension. Let us all endeavor to use this period as a special opportunity to focus on being loving and patient with all members of our family. **I am asking a special request of the women in the shul lighting candles tomorrow to daven on behalf of shalom bayit, as the Talmud associates the mitzvah of Shabbat candles with Shalom Bayit.**

Health

It is imperative that we guard our health during this time. In consultation with your personal health care provider, it is essential that people continue to exercise, get fresh air (not in social gatherings, of course), eat healthy, and get an appropriate amount of sleep. Our medical committee, led by Dr. Ben Cooper, Dr. Steve Myers, and Dr. Jonathan Resnick has advised me that these aspects of healthy living are absolutely crucial to our overall communal response.

For those looking for referrals to mental health resources at this time, please contact me directly at rabbi@jcot.org.

Chessed

Though we are required to be at a physical distance, we must redouble our efforts with respect to *chessed*. It was nothing short of inspiring for me today to see how many people volunteered to call our older and housebound members, who went shopping for them, and who expressed a desire to help. We have started a WhatsApp group called JCOT Chessed which you can join by clicking on this link,

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/HgONuwdqwuvAhxEn5Gke3i>.

I thank Debbie Cohen Mlotek for volunteering to help lead this initiative. We will be pairing volunteers with older and homebound members to call every single day, to check in on basic needs, and to ensure that the member is well. To that end, we have already arranged for food deliveries through our wonderful partnership with Glatt Express. We ask all those in a position to do so to please contribute to our Discretionary fund (click link [here](#)- scroll down for Type Rabbi David Feldman Memorial Fund/Discretionary Fund)) to help us cover expenses associated with these food deliveries.

Shabbat

Candles should be lit at 6:43.

This Shabbat we will not have the benefit of reading from the Torah, of coming to shul, of having all of those critical vehicles which remind us of the special *kedusha*, sanctity, of Shabbat. **I am asking that everyone please take care to dress in appropriate Shabbat attire, *Bigdei Shabbat* over the course of this Shabbat.** It will make an enormous impression on our children, and on ourselves, to show honor to Shabbat in this way.

I will be sending everyone a Shabbat drashah, as well as learning and questions in which to engage with children. Our Youth Director Batsheva Chait will be sharing a special Brachot based Shabbat activity with our children.

I encourage everyone to read the Torah Portion, Ki Tisa, and especially Parshat Parah (19:1-22), from a Chumash, in Hebrew or English.

Havdalah this week is at 7:52.

Tefillah

While it is deeply painful for us that we are not presently able to daven with a minyan, there are aspects of Tefillah B'Tzibbur, communal prayer, that maintain. The Talmud in the beginning of Brachot notes the significance of davening at the same time as others. As such, I am asking everyone, including those who are not accustomed to coming to daily minyan, to please join us in davening. It is imperative to point out that even those authorities, such as Ramban, who did not accept the proposition that prayer was a Torah level mitzvah on a daily basis, were open to that possibility during a time of crisis.

Sunrise tomorrow morning will be at 7:11, and so I will ask that everyone please make every effort to start davening at 6:50 or so, so as to arrive at the Shemoneh Esreh at the time of sunrise, which is the optimal time for davening.

Tomorrow evening, I will ask that we all daven mincha at 6:50 PM, and on Shabbat morning, at 9 AM, in accordance with our regular schedule. Shabbat Mincha should be davened at 6:45 PM, and Maariv should be davened at 7:45.

I will send daily updates regarding davening times in the morning through next week, and we should all daven mincha at 6:55 next week, and Ma'ariv at 7:15. As you will see below, we have arranged for our normal Zoom Learning between Mincha and Maariv.

Kaddish

It is uniquely painful for me to have to suspend minyan for those saying kaddish. For all those saying kaddish, please send me the Hebrew names of those for whom you are saying kaddish. I am working on an arrangement with someone very closely affiliated with the JCOT family in a part of the world where minyanim are permitted to keep these names in mind when he recites kaddish. As a further aliyah to the neshama, it is recommended to give additional tzedakah.

Torah Learning

Our Sages taught us that the world literally rests on the pillar of Torah study. We will continue to learn Torah together. We have started a WhatsApp group called JCOT Torah in which I will be uploading a 5-10 discussion of a chapter of Tehillim, accessible to all levels. Please click here to join this WhatsApp group <https://chat.whatsapp.com/GPxU0XVWzqEJTCA9WLA0iW>. The first recording will be posted this evening.

Our **Sunday morning Mishnah** class for 4th and 5th graders will meet via Zoom. Attached, please find the URL for the Zoom Mishnayot class. <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/4844160645>.

Our daily learning of Hilchot Pesach Between **Mincha and Maariv** will also continue via Zoom, at this link <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/4844160645> (note it is the same as above). This learning will also be shared via WhatsApp. The first installation will be posted tonight.

Our **Monday evening Haggadah series** from 8-8:30 will also continue via Zoom at the same link, on 3/16, and, as necessary, on subsequent Monday evenings as well.

Mikvah

As we released in our RCBC guidelines, the Mikveh will remain open. Social distancing measures **do not** include the mikvah. Women should be reassured that the chlorine and filtration mechanisms in the mikvah, and the extensive cleaning regimen undertaken there, at all times, and especially now, make it safe for use.

Once again, we reiterate that women under mandatory quarantine , or showing symptoms associated with COVID-19 (fever, coughing, shortness of breath) should not use the Mikvah. Please consult with me directly at rabbi@jcot.org, or with our outstanding Yoetzet Halakha, Tova Warburg Sinensky, at teanekyoetzet@gmail.com if you have questions regarding using the mikvah.

Community Mindedness

We are all acutely aware of the economic impact that these policies of social distancing are having on our community. All of the Rabbis of the RCBC are encouraging those who are able to do so to support those restaurants who cannot currently seat customers to order take out, in accordance with your means, and help us support those who are hurt so deeply by these painful but necessary restrictions.

Responsibility

There is no adequate way for me to express the importance of abiding by the restrictions of social distancing that we have adopted. These measures were adopted by community leaders on the basis of urgent and expert medical advice, but their efficacy depends chiefly on the compliance of our community.

I know that you will all rise to the occasion.

I look forward to sharing a Drasha with you tomorrow, and continuing to be in very close touch in the days ahead.

May the Guardian of Israel watch over our entire community.

With Deepest Affection for Each and Everyone of You,

Daniel Fridman, Rabbi
Uri Horowitz, President