



Chabad of Charlotte



Dear Charlotte Area Jewish Community,

Over the past several weeks, amidst an almost daily changing situation, we have been thinking about how we can fulfill our responsibility to honor the dead (*k'vod hamet*), comfort the mourners, (*nichum aveilim*), and protect the community (*pikuach nefesh*).

The scientific and medical communities have made it clear that we must make every effort to slow the spread of this virus. We do not know how any one individual will react after they have been exposed to virus. Some people display no symptoms, others are on ventilators for over a week at a time. The incubation period can be very long before an individual begins to display symptoms, meaning they can unknowingly spread the virus to others. Because there is currently no vaccine or known effective treatments for COVID-19, the best practice is to avoid physical contact with all people outside our immediate homes. It is our responsibility to do all we can to model life-saving behaviors while at the same time fulfilling the *mitzvot* of burying and honoring our dead.

The greater Charlotte area is trying to be a leader in preventing the type of medical crises that we are seeing in other regions. Our local hospitals do not have enough ventilators or ICU capacity to meet the needs of people who will likely need them. We need to be especially supportive by remaining physically distant, so we do not overwhelm the medical system. We must protect those who are saving lives.

In light of all this information, and after thoughtful consideration, we have chosen to make known the Hebrew Cemetery's updated policies, which were drafted in partnership with Rabbi Knight, Rabbi Groner, Rabbi Siegel and Rabbi Lipper.

- **Tahara:** *The decision to perform Tahara by a Chevra Kaddisha will be agreed upon on a case-by-case basis by the officiating clergy, funeral home, and trained volunteers. Decision factors include whether or not the deceased had COVID-19 or was presumptive positive; the availability of full-body Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for members of the Chevra Kadisha; and a determination of "acceptable risk" to each party given the evolving and ongoing nature of the health crisis. The various parties must be in*

consensus agreement. Modified Tahara may be performed. We will always lean towards protecting life.

- **Funerals and Burials:** *For the foreseeable future, all funerals – whether COVID-19 related or not - will take place graveside, with the casket already lowered and the grave filled. Only ten people **in total** can be in attendance by order of the health department. If state or local health officials order a change, we will strictly follow the orders. The total in attendance includes cemetery professionals, clergy, family or family designate, and funeral home employees. A family member or designate may film the burial. Everyone at the burial needs to follow strict physical distancing procedures – 6-20 ft. from one another. The services will be brief, to limit the possibility of exposure.*

The choice of the clergy member to attend the burial is up to each individual. We will ask, in advance, for either a member of the funeral home, cemetery staff, or individual family designee to be present for the burial and for filming. We will encourage mourners to consider holding a memorial gathering at a later date, when health concerns have subsided.

- **COVID-19 Related Funerals:** – *All COVID-19 related or presumed positive funerals will be virtual. No presumptive positive people or individuals who have been in contact with the deceased will be allowed to the burial.*
- **Virtual Services:** *For the safety of all and because physical distancing is so difficult in times of mourning, we will encourage virtual funerals using digital platforms, regardless of whether or not the funeral is COVID-19 related. This allows all mourners to participate remotely via the internet and ensures maximum physical distancing that helps to preserve the lives of the family members, clergy, funeral home and cemetery staff or volunteers. The cemetery will also do its best to provide means of virtual services via Facebook live or other such media. All shiva practices will also take place using digital platforms.*
- **Unveilings:** *All unveilings are postponed until further notice.*

We are pained to write this message, but we know it is for the health of our community and the mourners themselves. We are choosing life – the final gift our deceased loved ones can give to their families, friends, and community.

L'shalom,

Barry Blau, Hebrew Cemetery of Charlotte Board President
Sandra Goldman, Hebrew Cemetery of Charlotte Director
Rabbi Asher Knight, Temple Beth El
Rabbi Yoseph Groner, Congregation Ohr HaTorah
Rabbi Howard Siegel, Temple Israel
Rabbi David Lipper, Temple Kol Tikvah
Rabbi Chanoch Oppenheim, Charlotte Torah Center
Shelley Pawlyk, President & Sr. Chaplain, Temple Solel of SC