



(Click on the picture to play)

Dear Kol Ami Family,

I am here with a new update regarding how we will pray together during this time as we try to "Flatten the curve". When we made the decision last week to livestream all services with just one person in the room, it was a quick response to the pandemic based on conversations with other rabbis across world. Now that we've had more time to study some sources and think about the values that we hold when we pray, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards have updated their guidance on the issue of praying with a minyan.

In the case of livestreaming, the only way to know how many "people" are watching (or rather how many computers are logged on) is to log into a website. We see a number that identifies the computer and the city it is logged on from. Our classic Jewish sources require that a minyan be in one physical space. However, the Shulhan Arukh talks about the possibility of having an exception to this as long as one can see the faces of the other participants. He goes so far as to say that someone could be behind the synagogue with a window between them, as long as they show their face to the others, they can be counted. Several commentators have expanded on this, with even recent orthodox rabbis leaning on this

position to say that we should allow a minyan over the internet as long as one sees and hears each other in real time.

This is considered a lenient position and should only be used in what we call Sha'at haDehak, a crisis situation. Because of these circumstances, we moved to livestream, but I think we need more than just knowing that a certain number of computers are logged on to our website. For this reason, we are moving our minyan to a computer program called Zoom. Zoom is a video conferencing system where users can hear and see each other in real time. With Zoom, we will be able to see each person in the minyan, hear their responses to the barchu, and say amen to kaddish. We can chat with each other before and after and allow someone observing a yartzeit to share their memories directly.

Using Zoom is easy! You can use it on any device that has a camera and microphone - computer, tablet, ipad, or smartphone. There are individual links for each minyan, program, or meeting. Click the link for that event and the website will pop up. It may ask you to download the program (I always like to test the link in advance) or you can join from the web browser, it will help you test your audio and video and then once the "host" of the meeting has opened the call, you will be able to enter.

I understand this is a new concept halakhically, according to Jewish law, for all of us. This sha'at hadehak, crisis situation, where we are practicing social distancing and limits of numbers of people in a room requires new and creative thinking. I appreciate your patience and understanding as we navigate this new, but hopefully, very temporary experience.

With Hillsborough County's Safer-at-Home Order is in effect, we have made the decision to cancel all in-person services that take place from Congregation Kol Ami. In order to remain connected with our kehillah, our community, we will hold all Shabbat and daily minyan services online through Zoom. Shabbat services will be shortened with no formal Torah service, however, we will read the parsha from the Chumash and we will also say Kaddish.

Zoom's website will allow you to interact with other Kol Ami congregants. It is a one-click entry and easy to use. Click on "Join with Computer Audio" to hear the service. If you need help setting up or testing Zoom, please call the office at 813-962-6338 or email RabbiBlatt@kolami.org.

You can also still follow along with the livestream on www.kolami.org/streaming.html.

Services this Shabbat will take place at the following times:

ZOOM into Shabbat with Rabbi Blatt and Todah

For Young Families

Friday, at 5pm

<https://zoom.us/j/104325851>

Join by Phone: 646-876-9923
Meeting ID: 104 325 851

Kabbalat Shabbat Services

Friday, at 6:30pm

<https://zoom.us/j/795031104>

Join by Phone: 646-876-9923

Meeting ID: 795 031 104

Livestreamed here: www.kolami.org/streaming.html.

Shabbat Morning Services

Saturday, at 9:30am

<https://zoom.us/j/795031104>

Join by Phone: 646-876-9923

Meeting ID: 795 031 104

Livestreamed here: www.kolami.org/streaming.html.

Kol Ami Havdalah

Saturday, at 8:30pm

Bring your own Havdalah candle, spices, and wine or grape juice!

<https://zoom.us/j/558571447>

Join by Phone: 646-876-9923

Meeting ID: 558 571 447

We look forward to “seeing” you on Zoom!

Rabbi Rachel Blatt

Mitchell Weiss, Executive Director

David Pearlman, President