



May 22, 2020

Dear YIOP member,

It is with a sense of relief that, Baruch Hashem, cases of COVID-19 infection have decreased locally and around the country. There is no doubt that this positive trend is a direct result of the sacrifices we've made in all areas of conduct, including -and especially- religious. Judaism thrives on proximity, and I'm proud that during this time we were nonetheless able to care for each other by remaining physically separated. Because of these efforts, we are overjoyed at the prospect of considering when, and how, to reopen our Shul.

As you may be aware, I, along with the Vaad HaRabbonim of Detroit, have announced that it is no longer strictly prohibited to open Shuls, and that it is up to the Rav in each community and kehilah to determine their individualized best practice. In keeping with the Orthodox Union, Rabbinical Council of America, poskim of the highest esteem, and leading medical professional opinions, it is clear to me that it is not yet time to reopen our Shul or host any minyanim. As those organizations have made clear, we, for whom our Torah exclaims "you shall exceedingly guard your life" (Devarim 4:15), for whom our Sages legislate "live by [the mitzvot]", and do not die by them" (Sanhedrin 74), should not volunteer to act as the subjects for the current reopening experiment. When it comes to possible pikuach nefesh, our responsibility is to first make sure that an activity is safe, and only then deem it appropriate to re-involve ourselves with it. Within the guidelines of medical advice, that means we should allow for at least a two week period to unfold once restrictions are relaxed, to make sure that the situation does not worsen, chas veshalom, according to the data in our area. The final decision -again- be made in consultation with our own medical professionals, as well as national medical and rabbinic guidance. Just as our extra precautions for the sanctity of life led to our closing YIOP 10 days before the government, we will again be more cautious than the government when it comes to reopening. As you can imagine, given the fluidity of these times, we unfortunately cannot provide any concrete dates for this timeline.

Is it possible that restarting minyanim and reopening society will not result in any increase of infection? I certainly hope so. But it is also possible, as is the virtually-unanimous concern among medical professionals, that this could also lead to more transmission of the disease. When we see, Gd-willing, that it doesn't, then we can safely, and halachically, open again. And as we've said before, that opening itself will involve a new set of procedures for our kehillah. It will be a gradual process, always adhering to the local, state, and federal guidelines.

I would like to stress the following sentiment, however: This experience has promoted a beautiful level of achdut, unity, among Jews everywhere, including here in Metro Detroit. We have come together as a Vaad to best guide our community, we have come together as baalei chessed to provide assistance in the community, and we have shared together through technology like we've never done before. Given the current, differing approaches within the community, let us make sure we do not hamper that unity. Chas Veshalom- No one should make either of the following suggestions: 1) that some Shuls/rabbanim do not care enough about life, or 2) that some shuls/rabbanim do not care enough about minyan. This challenging decision is a matter of assessment, a judgement of risk. It is NOT a litmus test of frumkeit, or a harbinger for who truly cares about the health of their constituents. Every Rav has been weighing these values heavily in conjunction with rabbinic and medical guidance, and has decided what he has, based on the utmost care and concern for each of these values.

With that being said, in our opinion, another crucial consideration for the sake of mitigation is the exclusive attendance of the same minayn. We are aware that many in our community attend multiple minyanim, and may be itching to get back to doing so. Nonetheless, we discourage anyone from going to another minyan earlier and to then come to YIOP when we reopen. We encourage you to stay strong as you have been thus far, in compliance with leading health officials and the religious organizations with which we align, to daven from the safety of your home. We look forward to seeing you again at YIOP when we believe it is safe and halachically prudent to do so. Again, this is not, chas veshalom, a judgement of one's sincere adherence to what other rabbanim have instructed, but it is simply how we have determined is the best practice of mitigation, to ensure the health of everyone involved.

Chazal, in a number of places, remark- "One who does more, or one who does less, (both are commendable) as long as one's heart is directed towards Heaven" (Menachot 110a). We are all doing our best, based on what we believe is the ratzon Hashem. Some may have the instinct to say "this one is doing more" or "this one is doing less". Regardless of that instinct, we are all being the best ovdei Hashem in the way we know how, based on expert guidance.

We hope that Hashem sees our yearning for His Torah at this time before Shavuot, no matter how, when and where we are, and allows us to return to a time of unrestricted avodat Hashem once again. On this Yom Yerushalayim, we hope that means to be back in our Beit HaMikdash, but at the very least, back to our Mikdash Me'at at the Young Israel. Veshavu Vanim Legevulam.

Moadim LeSimchah, Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Katz