

COVID-19 Update #5
Tuesday, March 17, 2020

Dear Friends,

I hope everyone is well (if you are not well or having issues, please let me know). It has been wonderful to see so many of you on the Pre-Shabbat call, Havdallah and virtual davening. I hope you can continue to take advantage of these offerings. We will have another Pre Shabbat story, Virtual Kabbalat Shabbat and Havdallah this week as well.

As we are in the midst of our first week away from shul, our thoughts remain with those in high risk categories. We also turn our attention to helping our kids with virtual schooling and entertaining them during non structured school time; especially on long Shabbat afternoons. To help with Shabbat activities, on Friday morning we will send Shabbat resources as we did last week.

The CDC and City of Houston issued important new restrictions and guidance regarding restricting the number of people in gathering to 10. We have been advised by infectious disease specialists, public health officials and halachic advisors that this is a critical part of the efforts to slow the spread of the disease; if social distancing is to be effective in "flattening the curve," **it is critical- as a matter of public health and therefore Jewish Law- to engage in social distancing.** The OU/RCA yesterday issued updated guidance that states that all shuls should remain closed and emphasizing the importance of social distancing.

Therefore, we strongly urge families to follow the following protocols:

- Avoid sharing Shabbat meals with non family members.
- The elderly, including family members living outside of your home, and other individuals in high risk categories, should not go to family and friends homes for meals. (Please contact the Chesed committee to arrange for meals for those in need.)
- Avoid in-person play-dates between our children and others (virtual ones are fine!).
- It is fine to take walks but please try to stay at least six feet away from other families.

Many have asked about Pesach seders. Unfortunately these same guidelines will apply. Hopefully the situation will change before then, but I recommend that you make plans to have smaller sedarim. We will continue to monitor the situation and report back to you.

In the event of the death of a loved one, God forbid, funerals will be limited to the bare minimum and there will be no in person shiva visits or shiva services. Virtual or Tela-Shiva visits of course, are encouraged. Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations should also be postponed.

Let us not undermine the efforts we take in certain areas by being lax in others. The time to act is now while we have an opportunity to prevent the catastrophic overload on the healthcare system

we are seeing in other countries. **As Jews, we have a responsibility to do our part in removing a public danger and these are the steps needed to do so.** While this is undoubtedly extreme, it is clearly the responsible, and therefore the halachically obligatory way to behave. This approach is being taken by most other Jewish communities around the country.

Of course, our practical efforts should be accompanied by increased spiritual power. Even if we cannot daven together in person, we can do so at the time time. Please join the daily virtual davening at 7am each weekday morning (8am on Sundays). **We have added Avinu Malkeinu to our daily davening and we spend time learning Mishna in memory of the loved one of our members who are saying Kaddish. We also have a Kaddish substitute that we have been reciting even in the absence of a minyan.** Please use this link to join any UOS virtual program. Now is also a good time to start Daf Yomi learning online.

(For those of you saying Kaddish for a Yartzheit please let me know in advance and I will try coordinate with a synagogue that is still holding daily minyan so that Kaddish can be said in honor of your loved one.)

I share with you the words from the Orthodox Union on this matter: **“We must emphasize that we are all dealing with limited data on a new virus and we are being as protective as possible in the absence of data. We are trying as hard as possible to protect people. The guidance provided such as closing shuls and minyanim is extremely painful but necessary, and is advice that none of us ever dreamt we would have to issue....Though we embrace and celebrate the Torah’s directive to take extraordinary steps to protect our health and those around us, we are simultaneously deeply pained by the absence of Torah and Tefillah from so many of our shuls. We encourage everyone to redouble their efforts in the spheres of Torah study and Tefillah, and to seize this challenge as an opportunity to create in our own homes a presence of meaningful Tefillah and shared Torah study.?”**

Again, please do not hesitate to reach out to me (RBG) or Ruthie if you are having challenges during this stressful time (or if you just want to say hello). Our Chesed Committee also is busy reaching out to members.

May all our efforts be blessed, and may our speedy action and redoubled spiritual efforts bring healing to the world.

Sincerely,
Rabbi Barry Gelman
Robert Levy

P.S. [Please see here for all the ways to virtually connect to UOS](#) and remember, [all UOS virtual events can be easily accessed using this link](#) (no downloads or membership required).

P.P.S. By order of the Mayor, sit down service at restaurants is prohibited. Delivery and take out is permitted. Local Kosher restaurants are suffering from lack of customers. [Please consider](#)

ordering (take out or delivery) from our Kosher restaurants to help them weather this storm.