



Rabbi Yaakov Hopfer  
President

26 Iyar 5780  
May 20, 2020

To Our Beloved Community,

We hope this letter finds you and your family safe, secure, and healthy. We appreciate your strength and fortitude during these difficult times. For the last 9 weeks we have shut down and sequestered all with the hope of flattening the curve and saving lives. B'H our community has been spared the sadness and loss that so many others have experienced. We thank the *Ribbono Shel Olam* for watching over us and we thank the members of this community for making the necessary sacrifices.

We feel that it is time to begin reopening the community. We have consulted with doctors, nurses, and health policy experts to come up with an appropriate and measured plan. **It is important to remember that we cannot reopen everything at once. We must do this gradually and with *chochma* (wisdom).**

The first stage in reopening will allow for outdoor block minyanim (details contained below) and increased interaction with in-town immediate family (guidelines to be shared shortly).

If we navigate this first stage successfully, we can IYH move on to the next (to be detailed in upcoming communication). In the next few weeks, we will, together with our medical panel reassess our communal situation and outline next steps.

While we outline the initial stages for reopening, we fully understand that some Rabbonim, Kehillos, and individuals may be uncomfortable with this first step and feel the need to wait longer before resuming minyanim. We respect the wishes of the individual Rabbonim and Kehillos to pursue such an approach.

#### **OUTDOOR MINYANIM:**

Below are the guidelines for the initial phase of reopening minyanim outside of shuls.

- We will begin with Mincha/Maariv on Wednesday evening, May 20<sup>th</sup> and followed by Shacharis on Thursday morning, May 21<sup>st</sup>. All minyanim will proceed on a daily basis.
- Areas with large backyards or open areas may hold backyard minyanim.
- Indoor minyanim are not permitted at any time, even in the event of inclement weather.



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- Porch minyanim, where mingling of different families is physically impossible, are preferred.
- In this phase, only a maximum of 12 to 13 people may attend a minyan. We express our profound appreciation and gratitude to Mayor Bernard C. “Jack” Young and to Dr. Letitia Dzirasa, Commissioner of Health of the City of Baltimore for their gracious understanding of our spiritual requirements.
- Each minyan should appoint a gabbai.
  - o Gabbai must register his minyan online. Please visit <https://icovid.com/minyan>. This site provides detailed instructions for how to create the minyan. If one doesn't have internet access please call (443) 839-0782 for help with setting up or finding a minyan.
  - o The gabbai should actively ensure that social distancing and safety is adhered to. This can mean excluding individuals who do not conform to these safety standards.
  - o For backyard minyanim, the gabbai must measure and place markers for an outdoor seating plan [or pre-position chairs] to ensure 6 feet of separation between all participants in all directions.
- Participants should bring their own siddur and chair. These should not be borrowed or shared. Baalei tefilah should use their own siddur.
- We recognize that these arrangements in most cases provide no accommodation for Krias Hatorah. We ask that you not pressure your Rav or shul administration to allow for removal of Sifrei Torah from the shuls.
- Daven with the same group of people for every tefilah in order to minimize possible exposures.
- You may not daven in different minyanim within a neighborhood.
- Minyanim should move efficiently in order to minimize exposure. Consider a "hoich'eh kedusha" at Mincha and attendees davening psukei d'zimra at home and joining the Shacharis minyan at Yishtabach.
- It is preferable to have at least one vacant (from a minyan) property between minyanim.
- Minyan participants should ideally walk to minyan location.
- On weeknights, Maariv should be davened immediately after sunset (or earlier). Late Maariv minyanim are not allowed.
- Anyone over 60 should not attend these minyanim without express permission from their personal physician.



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**Please note the following in all phases of reopening minyanim:**

- Social distancing of 6 feet must be safely maintained at all times.
- MASKS MUST BE WORN AT ALL TIMES.
  - o People must bring their own masks.
  - o Masks should be put on prior to joining the minyan.
  - o Masks must be kept on at all times while davening, and fully cover the nose and mouth.
  - o Masks may not be removed until after you have left the minyan and are not around other groups of people.
- Minyanim may not occur in the street or in any way that would interfere with pedestrian traffic.
- Attendees should be limited to those halachically required to daven. For example, children under bar mitzvah should not attend.
- ABSOLUTELY NO CONGREGATING BEFORE OR AFTER MINYAN.
- ABSOLUTELY NO KIDDUSHIM, FOOD OR DRINKS.

**Do NOT daven with a minyan if:**

- You feel ill (including chills, unusual muscle aches, headache, or fatigue) or have any other COVID-19 symptoms. This is endangering your fellow mispalelim.
- You had or think you may have had COVID-19, until at least 14 days after symptoms have resolved AND there has been no fever for at least 7 days.
- You may have had recent contact with an individual who has COVID-19, even if you currently show no symptoms.
- You are visiting from another community.
- You are at high risk of complications and death from COVID-19, including people age 60 years or older (please see above), who have cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, are obese, have kidney or liver disease, asthma, chronic lung disease, and who are immunosuppressed from illness or medications.

**Additional recommended precautions:**

- Use the restroom at home prior to attending a minyan so you do not have use someone else's restroom.
- No tzedakah receptacle should be passed around.
- Use hand sanitizer if any shared objects were touched inadvertently, and at minimum before returning home.



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We wish to thank Rabbi Ariel Sadwin, Executive Director of Agudath Israel of Maryland, for his tremendous assistance to the Vaad Harabanim throughout this process.

It is our hope, as we approach the Yom Tov of Shavuot, and as our kehila comes together *k'ish echad b'lev echad*, that our *tefila b'tzibur* will allow us to merit the end of this terrible illness and the coming of Moshiach speedily in our days.

Rabbi Yaakov Hopfer on behalf of the Vaad Harabanim of Baltimore