

VA'AD HARABANIM RABBINICAL COUNCIL OF BERGEN COUNTY, INC

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March 6, 2020

Dear Friend,

We ask you to please read this message carefully. All of the contents below are in full compliance with guidelines set forth by the Center for Disease Controls (CDC) and the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH), with whom we have been in contact throughout the week.

It is extremely important to bear in mind, as you read this message, that each locality has distinct guidelines, based on the specific fact pattern that relates to that particular township. Correct and responsible halakhic policies can only be based on the specific information and underlying facts in the location in question. You will surely note that our guidelines differ from those in other places, be they near or far. This is precisely as it should be. Your own particular Rav will communicate the guidelines which are applicable in each township included in our Va'ad.

First and foremost, even as we are mindful and vigilant concerning the ongoing situation, it is critical that we all continue to function on the basis of established facts and medical guidance. While it is perfectly appropriate to be concerned regarding the developments, we must all strive to remain calm. Social media is often a source of unsubstantiated information and can lead to unnecessary alarm.

It is critical that individuals who do not feel well, or exhibit symptoms of cough, fever, or shortness of breath, refrain from attending any shul, in compliance with CDC guidelines and those of the NJDOH. There is no halakhic imperative more important than ensuring the welfare of the community. In addition, we ask parents to please keep children who exhibit any symptoms home as well.

We fully endorse the guidelines concerning frequent hand washing, use of Purell (including on Shabbat), and avoiding contact with one's face. Moreover, it is our collective recommendation that individuals with underlying respiratory conditions or who are otherwise immunocompromised please consult directly with their healthcare provider before coming to shul, for your own safety. It is equally our collective recommendation that people should avoid kissing Sifrei Torah or Mezuzot at present.

Any individual currently under quarantine **may under no circumstances break that quarantine for any purpose**, and should contact their Rav directly for halakhic guidance regarding any and all observances of the holiday, including the reading of Zachor tomorrow.

May He who is the *Rofeh Ne'eman V'Rachaman*, the true and merciful healer, bring a complete and speedy recovery to all those afflicted with COVID-19. May He continue to shield and protect our community, and help us maintain the appropriate balance between vigilance and calm necessary at present.