

May 22, 2020
כ"ח אייר תש"פ

As rabbis in the Greater Toronto Area Jewish community we feel that it is our responsibility to share the following points as they relate to *Tefilah B'tzibur* (communal prayer):

The Torah *Hakedosha* (Holy Torah) forbids us from putting our lives or the lives of others in jeopardy. There has never been a better time to actualize the maxim that one should be *machmir* (stringent) on (even a *safek*) *Pikuach Nefesh* (saving a life).

During this COVID-19 crisis, we believe there is no *chiyuv* (obligation) to *daven* with a *minyan*. It is 100% *l'chatchila* (completely acceptable) to *daven* privately at home for reasons of health and safety. Undoubtedly, *Hashem* hears our heartfelt prayers from our *Mikdash Me'at*.

Some people are *davening* together outdoors while upholding social distancing requirements and in full compliance with the law.¹ Currently, the Province of Ontario prohibits gatherings of more than five people on the same property. **We cannot emphasize enough that such gatherings must be conducted in full accordance with the law and cannot violate the regulations set forth by the provincial health authorities.**

People who choose to *daven* together outdoors while upholding social distancing requirements should appoint a rabbinic leader whose instructions must be adhered to. This is of course necessary for matters of *Halacha* but it also ensures that all necessary guidelines will be maintained. In the coming days we will circulate a document with further guidelines.²

We must emphasize that **socializing before, during and after these *minyanim* (i.e. a Kiddush) is completely unacceptable.** The above details apply to *davening* only.

Many doctors recommend the use of masks even when social distancing is being maintained.

The eyes of the world are upon us. Let us demonstrate to our non-Jewish neighbours that the Jewish community is a law abiding one. We have an opportunity to create a *Kiddush Hashem* and we should seize it.

Finally, the Province of Ontario has advised that the social distancing guidelines will be relaxed at some point in the future to allow for gatherings of ten people or more. When we reach this milestone, we will circulate a document in consultation with physicians in the community with instructions as to how to conduct *minyanim* in a safe way.

Unfortunately we do not know when that time will come, so in the meantime we implore everyone to remain steadfast in their observance of all of the social distancing requirements and to use the Jewish power of *tefilah* to beseech the Almighty to bring this current situation to a swift conclusion as we continue to anticipate the coming of *moshiach* and the ultimate *geulah shelemah*.

¹ There are rabbis who advise against participating in *minyanim* at this time. We encourage you to look to your own rabbi for specific guidance.

² The undersigned reserve the right to place even greater restrictions on *minyanim* for their own *shuls* than what the document currently allows for.

*Rabbi Messod Azoulay,
Magen David*

*Rabbi Avraham Bartfeld,
Bais Dov Yosef*

*Rabbi Yacov Felder,
Shomrai Shabbos*

*Rabbi Seth Grauer,
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*Rabbi Binyomin Greenbaum,
Tehillah L'Dovid*

*Rabbi Charles Grysman,
Zichron Yisroel*

*Rabbi David Kadoch,
Sephardic Kehila Centre*

*Rabbi Mendel Kaplan,
Chabad Flamingo*

*Rabbi Uri Kaufman,
Agudas Yisroel Anshei Kielce*

*Rabbi Daniel Korobkin,
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*Rabbi Baruch Lichtenstein,
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*Rabbi Moshe M. Lowy,
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*Rabbi Yossi Michalowicz,
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*Rabbi Yirmiya Milevsky,
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*Rabbi Yehuda Oppenheimer,
Marlee Shul*

*Rabbi Yoseph Oziel,
Petah Tikva*

*Rabbi Tsadok Pereira,
Ahavat Shalom Congregation*

*Rabbi Shalom Revah,
Bar Yochai*

*Rabbi Avram Rothman,
Thornhill Community Shul*

*Rabbi Mordechai Scheiner,
Kollel Ohr Yosef*

*Rabbi Dovid Schochet,
Chabad Lubavitch*

*Rabbi Chaim Strauchler,
Shaarei Shomayim*

*Rabbi Tzvi Sytner,
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*Rabbi Eliyahu Zrihen,
Keter Torah*

May 28, 2020

Guidelines for Minyanim in the Greater Toronto Area

Considerations

1. Observance of and respect for municipal, provincial and federal law and public health guidelines at all times are expected.
2. We encourage sensitivity to neighbours in selecting both a time and a location for convening a *minyan*. It is preferable to avoid conspicuous gatherings for religious purposes. Even when they are legal and the behaviour is justifiable, the *frum* community is constantly being scrutinized. We are extremely concerned by the potential הילול השם and risk of stoking anti-Semitic sentiment. *Minyanim* should not occur in the street or obstruct sidewalks.
3. Every *minyan* should designate a *Rav* for *halachic* guidance.
4. Every *minyan* should have a designated safety officer to liaise with their *Rav* and to ensure guidelines are kept, and so that in the event of an outbreak, the *minyan* can be immediately informed.
5. We ask that neighbours and community members alike remember that rabbinic guidance varies amongst the *kehilos* of our community and to respect one another's choice regarding participation in *minyanim* at this time.

Where

6. As of this writing, *minyanim* may only take place outdoors. This includes front porches, driveways or backyards. Spaces must be large enough to accommodate recommended physical distancing.

Participation

7. *Minyanim* should be kept small in number as larger gatherings may carry a commensurate increase in risk.
8. No one individual should participate in more than 2 *minyan* groups to minimize the risk of community spread. This has been identified as one of the most important measures in terms of reducing the risk of infectious spread. As tempting as it might be to attend a *minyan* for a specific event such as an *aliyah* for a bar mitzvah, *bris*, etc., we ask that no exceptions are made. We can't overstate the potential danger.

Safe Practices

9. Every participant should use their own siddur, *chumash* and *talis* that they bring from home.
10. If one location is used for multiple *minyanim* (which is not ideal), there must be a time gap of at least 15 minutes between the conclusion of one *minyan* and the start of another. During this time period, the area must remain fully cleared. This is to eliminate the inadvertent mixing of 2 *minyanim* and to allow for aerosolized particles to clear from the air, as well as cleaning of high touch surfaces.
11. There should be no participation in the *minyan* under any circumstances of individuals who has experienced any of the following symptoms in the last 48 hours: Fever, cough, muscle aches and tiredness, difficulty breathing, sore throat, diarrhea, or loss of smell and/or taste. These symptomatic individuals may be legally required to self-isolate.
12. Only children who are mature enough to follow social distancing rules and who are not disruptive should participate in *minyan*.

13. Individuals who are elderly or those who have a chronic medical condition, physical disability or a weakened immune system (due to medical or health condition) should consult their *Rav* and doctor prior to participating in a *minyan*, as the risk to themselves may be higher than most.
14. Doctors encourage participants to wear masks at all times.
15. At all times, we recommend a distance of 8 feet between all participants unless they are in the same family and at the very least, a distance of 6 feet between individuals must be kept.
16. Doctors recommend that *Chazzanim*, who will be projecting their voice forcefully, should wear a mask and must take care to be stationed so as to be able to face away from the other congregants throughout. For the same reason, doctors recommend that all participants curtail singing.

Kriyas HaTorah

Extreme caution must be exercised in the observance of *krias Hatorah* as it increases potential contact between people and results in an increased risk.

17. Ideally, a *Sefer Torah* should not be transferred between locations.
18. Ideally, the *oleh* (the one who is called for an *aliyah*) should act as the *baal koreh* for his *aliyah*. This can be performed by each *oleh* *leining* the minimum *halachic* requirement of *pesukim* (consult the *Rav* of the *minyan* for details) and the *baal koreh* can receive the final *aliyah* and *lein* the remainder of the *parsha*. If this is not feasible and the *oleh* is not the *baal koreh*, they must uphold social distancing requirements at all times. A *gabbai* must also maintain required social distancing standards. The *minyan's Rav* may be consulted to investigate other possible ways for *leining krias HaTorah*.
19. Since the *baalei kriyah* will be projecting their voices, *kriyah* presents an elevated risk of virus transmission. Doctors recommend that *baalei kriyah* should therefore wear a mask at all times. A *minyan* may wish to erect a barrier (i.e. plexi-glass) in order to provide a separation between the *baal koreh* and the *oleh*.
20. The custom of kissing the *Sefer Torah* (even with a *talis* or *gartel*) should not be observed.
21. Gloves should be available for anyone that touches the *Sefer Torah* including *baalei kriyah*, *hagbah* and *gelila*.
22. *Hagbah* and *gelilah* should preferably be performed by two members of the same family. If this is not possible, one individual should lift the *Sefer Torah*, show it to the *tzibbur*, return it to the *bimah* and perform *gelilah* himself.

Other Considerations

23. Neighbourly greetings before and after *davening* should be brief with social distancing strictly adhered to. Social interaction during *davening* is not permitted by *halacha* at any time and should especially not take place during this time of *sakana*. Such activity is not protected by the principle of *לא ידע דבר רע*. It goes without saying that physical contact (hand shaking, etc.) is absolutely forbidden.
24. Any post-*davening* gatherings are prohibited, particularly social gatherings involving food and/or drink of any kind.
25. If anyone requires a restroom, they must return to their own home to use the facilities.
26. If rain disrupts a *minyan*, and it is not practical to continue while maintaining required physical separation and remaining outdoors, there should be no alternative but to disperse and *daven* as individuals.
27. We recommend leaving access to a yard open to avoid multiple individuals touching the same door latch. We encourage each attendee to consistently use one chair, if applicable.
28. High-touch surfaces (latches, chair arm rests, etc.) must be wiped down after each *minyan* with approved COVID-19 appropriate disinfectant solutions or wipes.