

To: The Seward Park Community

From: The Rabbanim of Seward Park,

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that we, the Rabbanim of Seward Park, after much deliberation and consultation with medical authorities, have determined that we have no choice but to take the drastic action of canceling all minyanim in our Shuls starting Tuesday morning, March 17<sup>th</sup>. We are doing this with much trepidation and with heavy hearts. We know that each and every “*Amen*,” “*Kaddish*,” and repetition of the “*Amidah*” is precious. There is no more valued and treasured aspect of our shared communal life than the gathering together in our beloved shuls/synagogues. However, as you know, the halachic mandate of *pikuach nefesh* - preserving life, overrides almost every mitzvah of the Torah.

The canceling of our services is not a symbolic measure. It attests to the seriousness of the current pandemic and its potential exponential growth in Washington State and throughout the world. We are attempting with this measure to do our part to slow the spread of this virus, minimize the number of people who might become ill, and to avoid overwhelming our medical infrastructure. *Baruch Hashem*, current data reflects that healthy individuals are generally able to fully recover from this illness. It is our responsibility to protect those who are in high-risk categories by taking steps that can both limit the spread of coronavirus and also help ensure that our medical resources are adequate.

The goal of trying to minimize the spread of COVID-19 can only be done in partnership with each and every one of us in the community.

Therefore, we request that the members of the community take upon themselves the following additional measures:

- 1) Please refrain from creating any private home *minyanim*. We encourage each person to daven/pray at the regular set Tefilah times, joining together with all those who are similarly praying on their own.
- 2) Let us please dramatically curtail our children’s playdates. Our failure to comply with this will substantially defeat the purpose of social distancing and the rationale for our school and shul/synagogue closures.
- 3) We strongly discourage our usual warm communal hospitality practices of Shabbat guests - we must limit consistently our social interactions and maintain the new norm and mandate of social distancing.

We realize that these measures are extreme, but we feel compelled to act. We are experiencing an unprecedented situation, and it is likely that the rate of COVID-19 cases are much higher than reported. These are necessary steps that are within our human scope to stem the tide of this pandemic increasing, and Heaven forbid, becoming lethal for a significant number of the community.

Please consult with your rabbi if you have any questions about the above or would like to discuss this further.

We should use this time for introspection and to strengthen our tefillah. Our prayers will need to have a more intense level of concentration without the benefit of a minyan. We look forward to when Hashem will curb the spread of this pandemic and we will be able to take advantage of *tefillah Be'tzibur* - communal prayer.

As the situation is extremely fluid and changing rapidly, we will re-evaluate this situation in two weeks.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Moshe Kletenik - Av Beit Din of the Vaad HaRabanim of Greater Seattle

Rabbi Simon Benzaquen - Rav of Ezra Bessaroth

Rabbi Benjamin Hassan - Rav of Sephardic Bikur Holim

Rabbi Yaakov Tanenbaum - Rav of Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath

Rabbi Binyomin Weinrib - Rav of Ashreichem Yisrael