Weekly Email/Message the Rabbi, March 18, 2020

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  **Tuesday Minyan Update

Shabbat

Shabbat
Friday, March 20
Candle Lighting at 6:50 pm

Saturday March 21
Weekly Portion: Vayakhel - Pekudei

Message from the Rabbi

We closed our synagogue last week. There will be no more prayer services in our sanctuary until the coronavirus goes away. In hindsight it was an easy decision to make. But at the time it was anything but.

To close a synagogue feels like a betrayal of Jewish history. Jews have always taken pride in their resilience and determination in the face of crisis. Even in the worst of times Jews have surreptitiously gathered for prayer, quietly defying their persecutors and maintaining community. And now here we were canceling prayers and locking people out of the synagogue. What sort of Rabbi does that?

Retreating into one’s home is not something we would ordinarily consider heroic. As one internet comic put it: "Your grandparents were called to war. You are being called to sit on your couch. You can do this.". But today, there can be nothing holier than social distancing, because life comes first.

We have closed our synagogue to protect the health of our members. But more than that, we have closed our synagogue to do our part in slowing the spread of this disease. Social distancing is not just a good prophylactic, it is an ethical imperative to help others.
In Jewish law, preserving life is the most important commandment. Maimonides writes that it is the leaders of the community who must be the first to violate Shabbat to save lives, and in the face of a danger to life, we treat Shabbat as an ordinary weekday.

But the priority we give life in halakha is not simply a pragmatic concept; it is a profound Jewish value. We consider life to be sacred. Each morning we read a prayer that says:

"My God, the soul that you placed within me is pure. You created it, You formed it, You breathed it into me, and You preserve it within me."

A week ago we held to the illusion that with a few simple precautions we could continue to live our normal lives. Now we realize that quarantine is no longer the fate of the unfortunate few but be the reality for everyone. As we huddle in our homes, the worries begin to pour out: How bad will this plague be? Will it touch someone close to me? How long will it last for?

We are uncertain about almost everything. Vacillating predictions echo through our minds, and our hearts bounce between hope and worry. And it is this constant change of outlook that creates a sense of anxiety.

Anxiety is not fear, teaches Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz. Anxiety is the loss of our sense of control, because you don't know what the outcome will be. Uncertainty is more destabilizing than fear. There is an old rabbinic saying "there is no joy like the undoing of doubts" because anxiety only exists in the realm of doubt.

Anxiety is particularly difficult for us. One of the great illusions of modernity is that somehow we can overcome any obstacle that comes in our path. And we, as a society, have done an incredible job of taming the cosmos. We have found a way to overcome disease after disease, we have created technology after technology which enhances life, and we seem to have a solution for almost everything. But now we have the coronavirus, and, for the time being, are out of solutions.

This is a profound challenge for a generation that has not faced any existential threats. The previous generation faced a Holocaust, a World War, and the struggles of immigration; and our generation has been the lucky inheritors of their success. We have never before dealt with anything like the coronavirus, and we are anxious. And that anxiety actually undermines our own self-identity; we realize we are no longer in complete control of our destiny. Two weeks ago we all saw ourselves as far more powerful and in control; now we recognize our own fragility.

But this is not meant to be depressing or frightening. On the contrary, we will find that this crisis can inspire us. As Rav Soloveitchik reminds us, it is at this time of our own defeat that we find a new strength. We begin to recognize that even the vulnerable can make moral choices that are heroic. We can always love, we can always hope, and we can always dream. We may be facing a threat we don't fully understand, but one thing we do know for certain: the human soul is stronger than anything else.

Anxious times require more love. Anxious times require more prayer. Anxious times require more hope. And that is where we must turn now.

I am inspired by how many people have asked me how they can help. They want to know how they can help the vulnerable of our community. Nothing gives me greater strength in these anxious times than the spirit of Brotherhood.

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### Upcoming Events

Due to the corona virus our building is closed and all our events are suspended.

### Blood Donations

Due to the current health emergency, blood supplies are at dire levels. Please consider making an appointment at one of the standing Blood Centers or note that there are MOBILE DRIVES that are very convenient as well! Union Square, Grand Central, Port Authority - and many other locations.

Make an appointment at [www.nybc.org](http://www.nybc.org) and use the Brotherhood Chuck Ginsburg Memorial Blood Drive number of 14200 as well when you check in to donate.
You can donate every 56 days - save a life today.
Thank you to all who can help in this way.

Weekly Links

Weekly links will return next week.

Please send your links to: rkahn@brotherhoodsynagogue.org

Other Info

Tuesday Minyan

Every week 5:40 pm

Cantor Yager will be leading our weekly Tuesday Minyan at 5:40 PM every Tuesday until we are back in the building, via Facebook Live. So that you can follow along and participate in the weekly service, a link to our Mincha siddur can be found here. The Brotherhood Synagogue Facebook page can be found here. If you have not already "Liked" our page, please do so as we are also sharing important information there.

Submitting Names for Healing Prayer

When someone is ill, we traditionally say a Misheberach, a special prayer for healing during Shabbat morning services when Rabbi Alder will read the names of those who are ill. If you would like the name of someone mentioned during the Misheberach prayer, please let Rabbi Alder know by email. Ideally, we would use the person's Hebrew name and that of their mother; if this is not known, then we can use their English name. May God send healing to all those in need.

Brotherhood Monthly Bulletin

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