

Message from Rabbi Hirsch about the Coronavirus

3/6/20

Message to the Mekor Habracha Community,

I'm writing to let you know how our shul is addressing concerns about the coronavirus. The situation is rapidly evolving, but we must also keep in mind the unanimous expert advice that we should make every effort to avoid creating a climate of panic.

The DOH is advising people to be prepared for the spread of the virus. Numerous experts and governmental authorities have issued statements explaining that the steps for preventing the spread of COVID-19 are similar to those taken for the regular flu. For this reason, we urge you to follow the CDC's guidelines on hand-washing (<https://ccshul.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=f9fe87a16c42c24704c099073&id=3d4756f241&e=890f2f4800>) and coughing and sneezing practices (<https://ccshul.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=f9fe87a16c42c24704c099073&id=63b8dd9177&e=890f2f4800>) that prevent the spread of viruses.

The management office for our shul's building (1500 Walnut St) has issued the following statement about the steps they are taking:

"Germs are spread by direct contact or transfer. To try and combat the spread of viruses, we require that cleaners use a disinfectant cleaner in restrooms and on touch points. Common touch point/transmission areas that are being cleaned with diligence to try and prevent the spread of virus are:

- Door handles, hand plates, push or panic bars
- Elevator call buttons
- Flush-o-meters
- Dispensers that are not hands-free
- Cabinet handles or doors
- Refrigerator handles
- Stair rails"

Mekor also recognizes that our community members may have concerns about halachic requirements in this situation. The Orthodox Union has issued the following statement: "It is extremely important that if anyone has symptoms of illness, including fever, coughing, stomach bug or any other sickness, that they refrain from coming to shul or other communal gatherings, either during the week or on Shabbat. This is true even for a mourner saying Kaddish. Protecting and preserving communal health supersedes other considerations." This halacha would also apply to the mitzvah of listening to Parshat Zachor on Shabbat. If a person cannot attend, it is best for them to read the parsha at home. One may also fulfill this mitzvah when we read it at Mekor in the weekly torah cycle in Parshat Ki Teitzei on August 29, 2020.

In addition, Rabbi Herschel Schachter issued the following halachic ruling:

"In a situation in which it is impossible to have an in person mikra megillah (reading of

the megillah) due to pikuach nefesh (life threatening) considerations caused by coronavirus, it is permissible to hear mikra megillah (reading of the megillah) via a live phone call or video." If this is applicable to you, please email the shul for call-in information.

As of now, all Mekor functions will continue to operate as usual, and we will notify the community immediately if there is any change.

For more information and updates on COVID-19, visit the websites of the PA

Department of Health at <https://ccshul.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=f9fe87a16c42c24704c099073&id=44bb252a71&e=890f2f4800> or the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

at <https://ccshul.us2.list-manage.com/track/click?u=f9fe87a16c42c24704c099073&id=db3f4f056d&e=890f2f4800>.

I would also like you to know that our shul will be implementing OU's recommendation that we insert Tehillim on Friday night between Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat. For those not coming to shul, the OU suggests including chapter 130 of Tehillim in their candle lighting recitation.

May Hashem protect us from this and all other illnesses, and may those infected receive a speedy and full recovery.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch