

Congregational Responses to COVID-19

March 20, 2020



Dear TBH Friends:

We hope that you and your loved ones are safe and healthy; adjusting to the new reality we find ourselves in.

Yesterday, the Executive Committee of the Board voted to keep **our synagogue closed until at least April 24**. This is aligned with the date of school closure in Washington State. We recognize, given the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, that we may need to extend this date to protect all our safety.

This closure also includes the administrative offices. TBH will continue to fully function and staff will continue to work, but **please do not come to the TBH building.**

While we cannot be physically together, we are finding ways to join together virtually. Zoom video conferencing is proving to be easy to use and replicates the feeling of being in the same room together. Last Friday night, the Rabbi livestreamed the service via Facebook Live and Zoom. It was a warm and wonderful experience. Multiple TBH meetings have occurred on Zoom and more are scheduled. Even the TBH choir is going to explore rehearsing in our "Zoom Room". The Rabbi is exploring additional programming possibilities, including an alternative to our Community Seder, which needless to say, is cancelled this year.

And while we are focused on providing for our community's spiritual needs, we are also working to help provide for the physical needs of our congregational community. In the coming days, you will be hearing from your Board contact. We want to find out if you have need groceries delivered or

other errands, check in phone calls and more. We also are recruiting couriers who are not in the most vulnerable demographic to help make this a reality. And, there's no need to wait to hear from your Board contact! If you are reading this and feel you would benefit from help, or you are willing to help, please contact Kayla at tbh@bethhatfiloh.org or call (360)754-8519.

Rabbi Seth is available for remote appointments, you can be in touch with him directly at rabbi@bethhatfiloh.org. In addition, our Immigrant and Refugee Task Force is working hard to ensure the safety and health of our sanctuary guest.

This Shabbat we read the portion Vayakhel-Pikudei, which concludes the Book of Exodus. The Torah describes the construction of the Tabernacle, which was constructed by Betzalel and assembled by Moses. But the raw material was supplied by everyone: "Moses said further to the whole community of Israelites: 'This is what God has commanded: Take from among you gifts to God; everyone whose heart so moves him shall bring them.'" (Exodus 35:4-5)

We are in this together, and together we will make it through these challenging times.

B'Shalom,

Tikva Glantz, Board President



March 6, 2020

Dear Fellow Bet Am'ers,

This is a long email, so thanks for your patience.

We are continuing to take a cautious approach to help ensure our community's health and safety. We have not received BAS-specific guidelines from the CDC. Even though we have been told by the state that we at Bet Am Shalom are at low risk, in keeping with state guidelines about avoiding large gatherings for the time being, we will not be having large-assembly events at Bet Am Shalom for now.

We have decided today to cancel all public gatherings in our building, including services, Purim celebrations, Torah La'am, meetings, classes, staff on premises, etc., at least until March 17, 2020. However, our community will continue to function and be together in alternate ways.

HOW WE WILL PROCEED UNTIL WE CAN REOPEN:

- **Services:** We will stream our services on Friday nights and Saturday mornings with the Rabbi and Cantor. For the moment, we are planning audio stream only. An invitation to tonight's and tomorrow's services is coming shortly via email to you. We hope you will join us!
- **Purim:** We hope to "Reconstruct Purim" by time-shifting all of our festivities to a date in the future when we are allowed to gather in a large group again. We will keep you informed. By Monday, we will get back to you with ideas on how to celebrate the holiday with your family at home.
- **Torah La'am:** Students in K-6 will hear from their teachers by March 11 with things to work on at home. Dor HaHemshech is closed this Monday evening for Purim anyway, but the following week, March 16, we will be missing class. Abby and your teachers will keep you posted on all things related to Torah La'am.
- **Office:** The office staff will continue to work remotely until March 17. Please feel free to call the office using the regular number. You also can email our staff members.
- **B'nai Mitzvah preparation:** If needed, families with a Bar/Bat Mitzvah coming up will be speaking with the Rabbi individually over the weeks to come about their B'nai Mitzvah.
- **Simchas and Rentals:** We are following general guidelines of the county and NY State. Our first priority, of course, is the health and wellbeing of our building staff who work the rentals, and the safety of everyone involved. However, if you yourself have a rental coming up in the future, we know you

may be concerned about your event and your family simcha. Please speak directly with executive director Vicky Farhi.

- **Funerals and Shiva Minyans:** Rabbi Bronstein will continue to do funerals while we are closed. With the sense that large gatherings should not be happening in our building, each funeral will have to be planned individually and probably kept fairly small. Regarding shivas, if we are unable to gather in person, we may, if the family wants to, consider creating Shiva minyans online via Zoom. We will work out details on an individual basis.
- **Bikur Cholim:** If you need visitors or support, please reach out to Gillian Friedlander or David Isaacs via phone or email. We cannot visit if you have coronavirus, but we hope to provide as much support as we can in other ways. For those already receiving support from Bikur Cholim, we will continue to do what we can to provide continuing support.
- **Key meetings:** Chevra leaders should find alternatives to in-person meetings. We will make Zoom and conference calling available as much as we are able.
- **Other matters and events:** We are talking about many other things that are coming up. Please stay posted, as we will continue to provide information on other matters as needed.

IMPORTANT BACKGROUND ON WTA EXPOSURE:

We learned today that the WTA kids with the virus were asymptomatic, which means they weren't coughing and had no fever – so the state estimates the likelihood of them spreading the virus to our congregants by direct contact is low. Since those three children's diagnosis, as of this morning, no other WTA students, faculty or staff have tested positive yet, which is not conclusive -- but at least it is a good sign so far.

WHY DID WE PICK THE DATE MARCH 17 TO REEVALUATE?

Coronavirus can be transmitted either via direct contact with infected people who sneeze or cough on you, or by contact with contaminated surfaces. PEOPLE: There is a 14-day period after exposure when infected people are potentially contagious before they may show symptoms. Our community was potentially exposed from Sunday February 23 through Monday March 2. Therefore our 14-day window ends the night of March 16. We may or may not decide to reopen on March 17 depending on epidemiologists' and governmental direction. SURFACES: We are

following cleaning protocols based on the recommendations from the Center for Disease Control, New York State Department of Health, and Westchester County, and our staff is masked and gloved for their safety. Viruses can only live a limited time on a surface and that timeframe will have long passed by the time we reopen, so surfaces are not our biggest concern at this moment.

We definitely hope to reopen on March 17, but given the speed that the coronavirus infection is spreading in our community, it is possible that we will not be able to reopen on that date. We will keep you up to date, and we know you understand.

SHOULD I BE TESTED?

At present, we are NOT considered high risk enough by the county for everyone in our Bet Am Shalom community to be tested. It is clear, however, that this virus is very much out there in our region and spreading quickly. If you have ANY symptoms at all: fever, sneezing, coughing, congestion, diarrhea, nausea, etc., please contact your primary care physician right away. Take up any other health concerns directly with your primary care physician as well. If the state decides to allow blanket testing for all of the Bet Am community, we will let you know.

SHOULD I SELF-QUARANTINE?

The county has not told us to self-quarantine *en masse*, even those in the building at the same time as the WTA kids, because we did not have prolonged contact with the affected children, and they were asymptomatic so their likelihood of shedding virus now is assessed at relatively low. Watchful waiting and caution is the general guidance. However, some individuals in our community have been advised by their own doctors or employers to self-quarantine as a precautionary measure due to potential exposure or due to their own more vulnerable health status. Please follow your doctor's guidance on self-quarantining.

WHAT IF A MEMBER OF MY FAMILY GETS SICK?

Eventually, if the virus continues to spread, people from our community will test positive for coronavirus (even if unrelated to the WTA). If anyone in a congregant family tests positive, we ask you please to contact either [Vicky Farhi](#) or [Barbara Aloni](#) right away. They will serve as the clearinghouse for any data on sick members of our community (and will inform the Rabbi if you permit it).

AND FINALLY...

As we all know, information on this outbreak changes from minute to minute, and while authorities instruct us to remain calm, I know how many of us feel anxiety about the coronavirus as it has struck close to home. This is our current reality. We at Bet Am Shalom are all part of an extraordinary community that is both resilient and creative. We will find ways of connecting and caring for one another during this time. Friends, we are facing this together, and together we will get through it.

Thank you all, and Shabbat Shalom,

Ilene Semiatin
President