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March 12, 2020

ט"ז אדר תש"פ

Dear Friends,

We are writing with an important update regarding COVID-19 and the ongoing health situation in our community.

Last night, the rabbis of the Rabbinical Council of Bergen County (RCBC), the presidents of our shuls, and the heads of our local schools gathered to meet with representatives of local government, including the Teaneck Department of Health and expert physicians from our three local hospitals: Englewood Health, Hackensack University Medical Center, and Holy Name Medical Center.

The message from the healthcare providers was clear. They need our help to slow the spread of the disease before their resources are overwhelmed. The doctors expressed significant concern regarding the capacity of our local hospitals to meet the growing needs of their patients in the event of a (expected) large surge in cases of COVID-19. They reported that while the amount of cases is still low, it seems to be increasing rapidly. Even if patients of COVID-19 will be treatable, we may deplete our resources and other patients who suffer from ordinary, serious illnesses will not be able to get the necessary care, putting their lives in danger.

Slowing the spread of the disease will allow our hospitals to best manage this situation. The only way to do this is for us to socially distance ourselves from one another. Moreover, the doctors emphasized that the most significant community closure possible will make the greatest impact in potentially saving lives in our area.

We have therefore made the very difficult decision to adopt the following policies of social distancing in our community. We intend to re-evaluate our policies next week on the basis of the expert guidance provided by the medical leadership of the three local hospitals. This panel will guide us as we continually monitor the ongoing situation as it evolves. We collectively agree to abide by the decisions reached by our lay, educational and rabbinic leadership on the basis of expert medical advice, to uniformly adhere to these standards, and to communicate collectively.

We must all try our best to stay home with only our immediate family for now and to avoid unnecessary contact with others, and particularly with substantial groups. We should only leave when it is truly necessary. Thus:

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1. All community members are strongly encouraged to work from home, if possible, and to stay home whenever possible. It is critical for adults to set the right example.
2. As the schools are currently closed, there should not be playdates between children of different families. This would undermine the entire purpose of the school closing.
3. Shuls will be closed for all minyanim and shiurim effective Friday morning, March 13. There should be no house minyanim. All of the rabbis will be davening alone in their own homes. Please daven at home, individually.
4. There should be no public celebrations for smachot.
5. People should not have gatherings for Shabbat meals.
6. Shiva visits should be replaced by phone/video calls.
7. Levayot should be restricted to a small group of family members and a minyan.
8. Refrain from contact sports.
9. Restaurants should not seat customers. People should order for pick-up and delivery only.
10. The Mikvaot will remain open, at the guidance of CDC and local health authorities. Women under mandatory quarantine or who are experiencing symptoms of illness may not use the mikvah. Please consult your rav for further clarification or for specific questions.

As you can see, these represent significant changes to our lives and many detailed questions will certainly emerge. This brief outline cannot guide every particular situation. We will all have to address each circumstance as it comes up based on professional expertise and religious guidance.

It is with a very heavy heart that we are suspending so many of the most crucial routines of our daily lives and lifecycle moments. We do this only because of the compelling nature of our circumstance and the decisive medical testimonies that are consistent with CDC recommendations. These measures are adopted as a reflection of our overarching commitment to the sanctity of all human life, and we pray that these will be very temporary measures. Please take these days as a critical opportunity to intensify our *tefilot* to the *Rofeh Ne'eman* that all those ill will be healed and that our community will be shielded from any further harm.

Sincerely,
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