

Heights Jewish Center Synagogue

Beth Hamidrosch Hagodol - Ohave Emanu Anshe Grodno

Rosh Chodesh Elul, 5780

August 21, 2020

To all the members of our Heights Jewish Center family,
Chodesh Tov,

Rabbi Dr. Doniel Schur, z"l

Rabbi Raphael Davidovich

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In the midst of a global pandemic that has caused so much disruption, that has caused so many things to be delayed, postponed, or canceled, the Jewish year has not been revoked. Our celebrations and commemorations do not change because of external circumstances. Shabbos is every seven days. The Festivals are in their appointed times. And of course, the Jewish New Year will be here exactly as scheduled, in about a month.

Many of you have asked what our plans are for the coming Yomim Noraim, the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. A dedicated group of Shul members and leaders, in consultation with physicians in our community, has been working on the challenges of how best to provide a meaningful spiritual experience for as many of us as possible, while still protecting the health of our community.

Here is what we've determined to be the best course of action.

1. All the tefillos will be taking place on each day of Rosh Hashana. They will be conducted in the main Shul, with seats also set up in the lobby. (Note that the rear wall of the sanctuary will be removed to open up the lobby to the sanctuary)
2. All precautions regarding masking, social distancing, and sanitation will be strictly enforced. We must be very clear about this: Our usual routines within the shul must take a back seat to the health and safety of our congregation. More details about the guidelines are below.

We know this is hard. We know that davening with a mask is uncomfortable. We respect the fact there are differing opinions about all of this. But this is where we are holding and we can't afford to risk anyone.

And the choices are hard as well. Do not feel guilty about staying home if you are vulnerable to infection. Davening with a community does not take precedence over protecting your life. If you need to stay home, please stay home.

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3. Seating will be by reservation only, on a first-come-first-served basis.
 - a. We have 66 seats for men and 36 seats for women. When making reservations for women, please indicate preference for main floor or balcony seating. We will do our best to accommodate your request.
 - b. Members will be able to purchase seats right away as they are available; non-Members will automatically be wait-listed until **noon on Friday, September 4, 2020**. This would be a great time to talk to us about becoming a member!
 - c. Children are welcome only if they are able to stay with their parent during davening.
 - d. There are groups of 2 or 3 seats for families; please discuss your needs with the office.
 - e. **Unfortunately, we cannot guarantee your regular seat.** If you're the first one to reserve and your normal seat is available, we will be able to accommodate your request.
 - f. Call the office to reserve seats. Seats are not considered reserved unless you've either paid for them or made arrangements to pay for them.
4. Because the likelihood of spread increases with increased time together - even in the presence of precautions - we will be reducing the length of davening. The Rabbi, ba'alei tefilah, and gabbayim will be determining what piyyutim and songs can be removed while still being both halachically correct and spiritually uplifting. On Rosh Hashanah, Shacharis and Mussaf will last about three hours. Yom Kippur is more difficult to assess in that regard; we will be working to determine the timing for Yom Kippur over the coming weeks.
5. We will of course be blowing shofar in Shul on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. But because a number of you will not be able to attend the service indoors, we are planning to have a shofar service (with the halachically required number of blasts) right after Mussaf - roughly noon - in the Shul parking lot.
6. As always, if someone is housebound, our team of Shofar blowers will come to you and provide you with this mitzvah. Please contact the Shul office if that is a need.

We would like nothing more than to not have to go through any of this. We daven fervently that we can all be together and everyone would feel safe. But this is our reality. Know that we all miss each of you. We all look forward to a time soon that we can all be together.

We are grateful for all of your understanding and consideration. May G-d see our situation and grant us a sweet, happy, healthy (especially healthy) New Year.

Kesivah v'Chasimah Tovah.

The HJCS Yom Tov Planning Committee

These are the current guidelines regarding Shul attendance during the pandemic (these apply to every davening, not just Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur).

- *Masks that cover the nose and mouth must be worn while in the common space with others.***
- *Sit and stay only in designated spots, and always keep 6 feet away from others.***
- *Wash hands often with soap and water.***
- *Use hand sanitizer when entering the davening space, and before and after aliyos.***
- *No kiddushim or hanging-out in the building of any kind.***
- *There is no babysitting or child-care at this time, and the playroom and office will not be available***
- *If you are symptomatic, or have been in contact with someone positive for COVID-19 in the past 10 days, please stay at home.***
- *If you are immuno-compromised or have any of the well-known risk factors, please stay at home.***