

Dear Friends,

Since mid-March, Temple Beth Torah has been vigilant about upholding Judaism's highest priorities for life and health during COVID-19. Worship, education, and community have been accomplished via Zoom and online resources. You have warmly embraced them and encouraged us not to rush to open our Temple before we can all enter safely and responsibly.

For many weeks now, a COVID-19 Task Force has been meeting to discuss the many issues facing our congregation now and in the future. One of our chief concerns is the High Holy Days.

Erev Rosh Hashanah falls on Friday, 9/18, less than 3 months from now. In considering whether to hold services in person at Temple, we have been guided by the highest value Judaism has for **Pikuach Nefesh**, preserving and saving life. This is a bedrock principle of Jewish law and supersedes most other obligations or mitzvot.

We are also mindful of not endangering the well-being of anyone in our congregation. **Sakanat Nefashot** means that members, guests, staff, and clergy should not be in positions where they will be put at risk their own lives or the lives of their families due to pressure to restore activities.

In light of current Alameda County, California Department of Public Health, and CDC guidance as well as best practices according to healthcare specialists, the preparations and requirements for a large congregational gathering would be extensive and severely inhibit our normal practices (see below for **Challenges for In-Person Services**).

Jewish life has always made adjustments in times of emergency and crisis. We will need continued flexibility in Jewish practice informed by our commitment to authentic modes of interpretation of our tradition. In weighing the challenges and opportunities, we find a clear path.

Streaming our High Holy Day services to everyone will offer us the opportunity to better serve the most members of our community with the least possibility of endangerment. Making a decision now gives us the opportunity to best prepare and provide an intentionally designed, spiritual High Holy Day experiences.

We trust that you will join us in the fall when we delve deeply into the meaning of these sacred days. We will provide information and guides well in advance so that your sanctuary at home will be your sacred space for you, your family including young children and teens.

Thank you for your support and understanding.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Avi Schulman

Ronnie Petersohn, President

Task Force Members: Susan Amouroux, Rick Brodzinsky, Michelle Eisenbruck, Sean Raman, Laurie Ravenscroft, Jill Ziman

### **Challenges for In-Person Services:**

- We would have to limit the number of people attending services. How do we decide who is allowed to attend services?
- We would need a seating chart for contact tracing. People cannot come and go from services as they commonly do. If anyone tests positive within 2-3 weeks after attendance at a service, individuals seated within 25 feet would need to quarantine for two weeks and be tested.
- No one who could have been exposed recently, such as health care providers could attend in person.
- No one from vulnerable health populations could attend in person.
- We would need to block off half our parking spaces.
- People could only walk one direction through the building.
- Everyone's temperature needs to be taken and cleared before entering
- Liability and insurance concerns.
- Adhere to physical distancing.
- No handshakes, hugs, or physical greetings.
- Everyone must wear a mask over both nose and mouth at all times.
- Thorough sanitizing between every service.
- Thorough cleaning of all high traffic areas and items that are touched such as doorknobs.
- Thorough sanitizing of the bathrooms multiple times during the day.
- Limited bathroom access with six feet between people in line.
- No group singing or reading.
- No choir.
- No shofar blowing.
- No group recitation of prayers and passages.
- No communal prayer books, kippot or tallitot.
- Torah could only be handled by one person, no marching with or kissing the Torah.
- Separate microphone or mic cover for every participant
- No oneg.
- No communal Break Fast.

### **Opportunities for Streaming Services:**

- Everyone is welcome, and families can participate together.
- No age limits.
- You don't have to drive to Temple Beth Torah to attend.
- No parking problems.
- No limits for health issues.
- No limit on participation in the services.
- You may read along out loud.
- Sing as loud as you like.