



May 18, 2020
25 Iyar 5780

Dear Temple Israel Community,

We are writing with an update regarding our community's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to outline our response to the just announced Massachusetts policies for the reopening of places of worship. To be clear at the outset: Even as we are thankful for the technology that has allowed us to continue as a community to pray, study, and socialize, we deeply miss our in-person experiences. We eagerly await the point at which we can *safely* gather together. With this hope in mind, we want to let you know our thinking about and plans for the coming weeks and months.

While the new Massachusetts standards theoretically allow places of worship to open at 40% of their permitted occupancy, in practice, matters are much more complicated. Along with the requirement of placing seating 6 feet apart, we would need to control entrance and egress to preclude crowding. Once used by a person, a chair would have to be marked off so as not to be used by a different person. The use of shared books, Torah scrolls, and other religious objects would be precluded. All forms of child care and youth services are prohibited. Face masks would be required. Singing would be problematic. Disinfecting all heavy transit areas and high-touch surfaces, including chairs, would be required between each service.

These common sense requirements for safe gatherings have led us to conclude that, for the present, our community is best served by *not* returning to in-person worship or other programming. In this, we are following the advice for best practices of both our own medical professionals and of the Conservative Movement (and, it bears noting, of the Orthodox Union as well). Jewish values of saving a life, not endangering ourselves, of concern for the vulnerable among us, and for putting the good of the many before our own individual interests all suggest that, in phase 1 of Massachusetts' reopening, we are best served by continuing with our current approach.

Over the next weeks, we will closely watch the health impact of reopening Massachusetts. We will continue to evaluate the requirements for us to reopen and will assess the safety of doing so.

We are continuously evaluating the data as it comes in, communicating with health professionals and leaders of our Jewish organizations to ensure that our first steps safely to physically gather together are at the earliest possible time. We will be sure to update you as plans evolve and we learn from the experience of others.

A final word: During this period of closure, our staff and custodians, following all health requirements, have worked hard so that, upon our return, we will find our building in clean and beautiful shape. Carpets have been cleaned and the social hall floor refinished. Classrooms have been painted. We installed a dishwasher in our Early Learning Center, so that, when the ELC is able to reopen, the teachers will be able daily to sanitize manipulatives and other items used by the children. And we have continued to work on security enhancements that will allow us, when we reopen for Shabbat, to implement a new security protocol under which our front and courtyard doors will be locked and opened for members and guests who have been assessed through video surveillance.

The past nine weeks have brought a tremendous change to our lives as individuals and as a community. A long road lies ahead, but we feel confident in our ability to face it together as a congregation and to come out on the other side even stronger. The Temple Israel community has done and continues to do everything we can to meet our members' needs in meaningful ways. We appreciate your partnership in this undertaking and look forward in the coming weeks to providing formal opportunities for you to share your thoughts about what might come next for us and what is most meaningful to you as we contemplate both virtual and in-person programming.

B'Shalom,

Alan Avery-Peck
President

Rabbi Daniel Liben
Rabbi