

*Congregation Ohav Yisroel of Blueberry Hill*

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**Alfred Cohen, Rabbi**

**Yaakov Grunstein, President  
Gedaliah Friedenberg, Vice President**

To our dear members and friends.

I can't begin to tell you what an honor it is to serve you as your president. Never in my wildest dreams have I thought of serving as a president, not to mention during such chaotic times. But, I am proud to be able to stand here before you and say openly that I thank Hakadosh Baruch Hu for helping me through the many tasks that we faced and the challenges ahead. First, was the decision to close the shul. You should only know the countless hours that our Rav pondered over this. And even more so, what will happen to each and every person that davened in our shul. What will happen to their yiddishkeit?

Then, skipping all the particulars and constant updates, when to open and which guidelines to follow. If you thought the decision to close was hard, when and how to open, was much harder; indoors, outdoors, how many people etc. Baruch Hashem with the opening of just 10 people on Shavuos, we now have over 100 participants signed up for Rosh Hashanah.

The above is just a snippet of what has been going on since before Purim. The bigger challenge (not to belittle the above) was the finances. With the shul having a \$20,000 deficit each of the past two years, and then COVID forcing the closure of the shul and literally no funds coming in (not even a penny in the pushka) and the non-foreseeable dinner (which would normally bring in approximately \$15,000), we were facing a \$50,000 deficit for this year alone. And then, if all this wasn't bad enough, boom! JEP, who has been here for around 35 years, decided to close their doors! And there you have it, another loss of revenue.

What would you do if you were in my shoes? As we are taught from childhood, never despair! Even if the sword is resting on your neck, NEVER loose faith. And then from nowhere HASHEM came to the rescue! The rededication of the shul was launched, a new tenant upstairs yielding us a larger income than before and thanks to the help from such people as yourself (the almost 50 families that gave to the rededication of the shul and the many other donations), I can now tell you that we have closed the gap considerably. That's not to say that we don't need to collect our annual \$100,000/year for general operating costs. Believe it or not, with over 100 people attending Rosh Hashanah services thus far, we have fewer paying members this year than last.

As the theme for the High Holidays is “repentance, prayer, and charity will rip up the evil decree” I ask you to do a little soul searching. Perhaps you can find a few extra dollars for the shul that is open to all. A true community shul – modern, chasidish, yeshivish and the average Jew are all welcome and treated equally. A shul that has been serving this community for almost 50 years. A shul that must survive for the sake of the large demographic that is here in this area. Where would our mispallilim go if we had to close? We are a shul that is home to all ages and stages. Last Shabbos, someone who just moved in, joined us for shachris. After shachris he shared with me, he visited the other shuls in the area, but “this is a shul”! Please help us survive and give generously this year, so that you may be zoche for Hashem to grant you a wonderful year to come with all of his bounty.

As the President, sometimes I have to make decisions that not everyone will like or appreciate. Therefore, as we enter the Yamim Noraim, I hope I did not offend you or anyone, and if I did, please take this as a personal request for forgiveness. Likewise, I harbor no ill will towards anyone and if you feel that you may have done something to me, you are forgiven. As the person who is scheduled to be the Baal Tokeah, it is important to know I’m just a representative. I’m just like you! And, I only wish you well and Hashem’s blessing upon each and every one of you, even those who will not be present at this time. May the Kol of the Shofar carry our tefilos to the Kisai Hakovod.

Lastly, it’s important to note, that the board has come together each and every time. No decisions were made on my own. The board meetings, sometimes on very short notice, were attended by most if not all of the board. And even our past President, Lenny Mann, has continued to join in on the meetings and he along with his wife have given generously to the tent and rededication of the shul. He may have left the area, but he didn’t leave the shul! May all his years of hard work for the shul be rewarded immediately.

Wishing you a k’siva V’chasima Tova

Your President, Yaakov Grunstein  
September 10, 2020