

Congregation Ohav Yisroel

KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE BALL

Message from Rabbi Cohen:

I don't have to elaborate on the statement that we are living in difficult times. About a month ago, the leadership of the shul started trying to figure out how we are going to handle the Yomim Noraim, given that with our usual crowd of 150 or so *mispallelim*, there was no way we would be able to socially distance. We know that our Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur davening is especially important to our members, but how could it be done safely? Moreover, how could we hold the meaningful and uplifting davening we always have, in the midst of a crisis?

There were numerous solutions suggested and discussed:

[1] Some said, maybe we should leave out women and children, since they do not have the same level of obligation to daven with a minyan as do the adult men. We found that option totally unacceptable.

[2] Some said, let's leave out all the *piyyutim* [religious hymns] so we can have a short davening. We could maybe do shacharis, krias hatorh, mussaf, shofar all within an hour or so, and that way we could have several minyanim, one after the other during the day, and accommodate everyone. That, too, was rejected as unacceptable.

[3] It was suggested we try to rent the auditorium in the public school, but we were informed that they are not renting nowadays.

[4] We considered trying to have the street closed off and daven outside. We even met with the police department and the mayor; they were ready to let us do it. But then we worried—what if it rains? What if it's boiling hot?

[5] We pursued the suggestion that if we upgraded the cooling system, it might be possible to daven inside. The system was indeed improved, but nevertheless, it is not considered desirable for many people to be inside together, so that idea was not followed.

[5] Finally, it was decided that for Shacharis and Krias HaTorah, we would have one group davening inside and another davening outside. And then, for Tekias Shofar and Mussaf, all of us will daven together in a large open tent we are putting up at 19 Crestview. The advantage of the outside davening is that there is better airflow and less chance of spreading the virus. Our major concern is to keep everyone safe.

[6] Up until today, [5] above was our plan. However, due to the fact that fortunately—or unfortunately—so many people responded, there is simply not enough room in the tent to accommodate all the people who, *baruch Hashem*, want to daven with us. Therefore, we have had to resort to another solution: AS OF NOW THIS IS THE FINAL SOLUTION [we don't know if it will change, but we hope this is it!]: we will be having two minyanim for Shachris, for shofar, for Mussaf. One inside the shul, the other one in the tent.

For those people who are concerned about davening with a crowd, whether inside or outside, but want to hear shofar—you are welcome to stand outside the tent and listen to *tekias shofar*.

FURTHERMORE: Even with social distancing, it is not totally safe for many people to be davening together for a long time. Consequently, we have decided to omit some of the piyyutim in the davening. Although they are beautiful and help us express our tefillos, it is nevertheless important to minimize the time each person spends in the company of others. We hope that by making the davening shorter, and the exposure shorter, it will be safe for everyone.

We all understand this is not a perfect solution, but it is our hope that everyone will be able to focus on the davening rather than on the venue. Public safety is still very much an issue; we all have to come to grips with the reality that life has changed. Still, it is important that we continue to come together as a *kehilla*, to pray together, to hope together, to encourage one another that we are not alone.

Rosh Hashanah is the time for reflection and spiritual growth. Let us focus on the important issues in life. As we look back and contemplate what was written in the Books last Rosh Hashanah, it spurs us to daven even more fervently that the coming year should be a year of salvation, of health, of renewed strength. May we all be inscribed for a Shana Tova.

Rabbi A. Cohen
September 7, 2020