

Communal, Hashkafic and Halachic Guidelines Regarding Coronavirus

Written and edited by the Straus-Amiel staff

Dear Straus-Amiel graduates worldwide,

There is no doubt that the whole world and the Jewish people are going through complex times, due to the Coronavirus. We are receiving questions daily with halachic, personal and communal dilemmas, and have tried to assist as best we can. To further help the Institute's graduates and emissaries, as well as Jewish communities around the world, we have compiled many of the relevant topics and questions and are sending them to you for study and consideration.

You are welcome to send the material to other rabbis, educators and anyone else you wish.

A special thanks to our staff for preparing the attached material.

With prayers for a Divine healing and best wishes to you and your families,

Rabbi Eliahu Birnbaum

Director

Faith in Times of Crisis

When faced with a difficulty or crisis, the challenge is great. A crisis can strengthen or weaken, break or build. These days, with the world fearfully facing a health crisis, questions may arise while trying to understand the ways of G-d and his leadership in the world.

The public crisis can affect the community directly. The community's duty – especially during hard times – is to strengthen the individual and give security through the strength and fortitude of public unity. But in this case, the individual is required to stay away from the public and in certain cases there is a ban against assembling, causing synagogues and schools to close their doors. This reflects on the connection between the community members, the communal strength and, of course, actual difficulties in keeping up community-life and public Jewish life.

But the crisis is not only public. It touches the life of each individual and influences each member's spiritual and emotional condition and that of their surrounding social circles.

At this time especially, we have to strengthen ourselves and those surrounding us. It is the time to strengthen our faith and learning, our kindness and charity, caring for our neighbors and praying for world peace. This is a wonderful time to cultivate interpersonal relationships with loved ones and nurture the connection with the children.

We must remind ourselves that G-d is good and giving and leads His world with wisdom. We must pray to G-d to have mercy on us and spare us hardship. Even when we don't understand why there is suffering in our world, we must strengthen our belief that everything is for the best and act according to this good. May G-d merit us salvation and full health soon.

Halacha

Below you can find some of the basic laws pertaining to daily life, as well as laws relevant to this time of year. In this edition we have included just the final ruling. For further study of the sources please see the [Hebrew edition](#) of this publication.

Prayer in a Minyan

- A sick person or one who must be in quarantine may not come to synagogue to pray with the minyan, nor may he even enter the building when it is empty, so as not to infect others when they come.
- In places where congregating is banned, it is prohibited to get together for prayers as well.
- A person in quarantine should pray at the same time the prayers are held in synagogue.

Reading the Torah in Public

- Reading the Torah is a public, not personal, obligation. Therefore, one who is not allowed to enter the synagogue for prayer need not make up the reading on another occasion.
- If the whole congregation did not read the Torah, they should complete the reading the next Shabbat that they are permitted to congregate.

Parashat Zachor

- Where it is not possible to go to the synagogue due to personal quarantine or a restriction on congregating, one should instead have in mind the mitzva of remembering what Amalek did to the Israelites when reading the portion of Ki Teitzei later in the year.
- On Shabbat Zachor one should read the relevant passage from a Chumash.
- Someone who has a Torah scroll at home can read from it and fulfil his religious obligation on Shabbat Zachor, but should not say the blessings before or after the reading.

Megilla Reading

- The Megilla may be read on Purim by an individual as well (not just in a communal setting).
- If one has a kosher Megilla, one may read with the blessings before the reading, but without the blessing of "*Harav et Riveinu*" after the reading.
- Even though it is not the opinion of most poskim, there are those who allow hearing the Megilla over the phone, radio broadcast or via an internet stream (all live, not pre-recorded). The reader must have in mind those who are not physically present but hearing the live broadcast.
- In such a case, one should ideally follow the reading from a printed Chumash.
- While there is no obligation to recite Hallel on Purim (the reading of the Megilla takes its place), if one is unable to hear a proper reading, one is permitted to recite Hallel, but without the accompanying blessings.

Gifts for the needy and Reminder for the Half Shekel

- The mitzvah of gifts for the needy should be fulfilled with a bank transfer, credit card or online payment through a person or organization who will definitely distribute the money on Purim day.
- It is also possible to put the money aside on Purim and give it out after coming out of confinement.

Mishloach Manot

- A person in quarantine should arrange Mishloach Manot through a company which sends food packages. He must verify that the package arrives on Purim day and not at night. It should be clear to the receiver who sent the food gifts.
- If such a thing is not possible, some say a message (letter, email, SMS) which brings joy to the recipient is also permissible.
- One cannot send Mishloach Manot to others who are their dependents, for example husband and wife to one another, parents to children who still live at home etc.

Immersion in the Mikveh

- If there is a concern that going to the Mikveh may do harm to others (other visitors to the Mikveh or staff) or if there are clear rules against going to the Mikveh, immersion must be postponed until after the confinement.
- If there is no ban on going out to open places, one should try to go the sea etc.

Ideas for Communal Activities and Programming

The wonders of technology allow unprecedented connection between people. In the current situation this certainly can be of assistance. Firstly, we must adhere to the instructions given by the authorities. The main goal in these ideas here is to maintain contact between community members and create a feeling of togetherness and community, even if it is not possible to physically gather together in one place.

- Have **lessons** and chevrotas via the phone or through Skype/Zoom/Hangout etc., either one-on-one or in groups.
- **Congregational prayers** can also be held in the same way (except for the sections that require a minyan). The idea is to put up a camera in synagogue and a person in quarantine can join through an online connection from home.
- Create a '**phone tree**', so every community member receives at least one phone call a day. This way they feel that someone cares for them and thinks about them. Furthermore, it can be used to make the relevant authorities and emergency response teams aware of those who may be in need of assistance. This is especially important for the elderly and ill.
- **Zachor** (Remembrance!) – do you have a community Facebook page? Excellent! Post questions and ask community members to write memories of Purim from past years (on any other topic you choose). If someone finds it difficult, call them and ask them to dictate what they want to write and publish it in their name. Photos, of course, are always welcome.
- **Virtual Mishloach Manot** – a game of dwarfs and giants in which the 'dwarf' must call the 'giant' and wish a happy Purim. For extra fun add a riddle, song or anything else that comes to mind.
- **Short films** – prepare short films and distribute them through WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, e-mail etc. What to film? Anything you want! A message of support to the community, a dvar Torah, a daily thought, a recipe for Shabbat, a moving story, a short quiz etc.
- **Story Time** – set a time during the day and have a different community member tell his or her personal story every day.
- **WhatsApp** – if there is no community WhatsApp group - now is the time! In each group you can decide whether all the members can send messages or only the group administrator. The group can help pass on reliable information in real time without receiving tens or hundreds of messages in return. Of course, use the group to not only send information, but also the other things mentioned above (dvar Torah, strengthening messages, stories, films, etc.).
- **School: distance learning** – ask teachers to teach live lessons (through Zoom or other suitable programs) on topics they teach in school. Quizzes can also be prepared as homework or just for fun.



הכשרת שליחים, מחנכים ורבנים לתפוצות

- **School: Auxiliary lessons** – connect between younger and older children, so the older ones can assist the younger ones with their homework or general assistance in their studies.
- **School: Quarantine diary** – ask the students to create a diary while the school is closed. It can be done in writing, audio, video or PowerPoint presentation. The style of reporting can also be varied: news brief, interviews with other family members or video conversations with other people, newspaper, personal diary, serious, humorous and more.