

# Communal, Hashkafic and Halachic Guidelines Regarding Coronavirus Tishrei 5771

Written and edited by the Straus-Amiel staff

Dear Beren-Amiel and Straus-Amiel graduates worldwide,  
This is the third guide that we have produced during these daunting times of Coronavirus, following in the footsteps of the guides for Purim and Pesach. In addition to this, we have sent materials via emails and WhatsApp, held many a Zoom conference call on a variety of subjects and also produced a guide for those who are fortunate to be returning to the indoor sanctuaries of the synagogue. Now, as a second wave strikes in Israel and other places around the world, along with continued restrictions in communities globally, we have set our minds to the upcoming Days of Awe and the festival of Sukkot. We hope and pray that these days will be a time of redemption, forgiveness and celebration.

There is no doubt that the whole world and the Jewish people are going through complex times, due to Coronavirus. We receive 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 – Rabbi Dani Appel, Pnina Giat, Rabbi Yehoshua Grunstein, Rabbi Benjy Myers and Aviad Pituchei Chotam – for preparing the attached material.

With prayers for a Divine healing and best wishes to you and your families.  
“May this year and its curses end, and may the next year and its blessings begin.”

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**Note:** The videoconferencing platform that most communities appear to have used in the past few months is Zoom. As such, when suggesting ideas to be carried out online, we have written “Zoom” for ease of reference.

# Halacha

Below you can find some of the basic laws, customs and guidelines pertaining to this time of year. In this edition we have included just the final ruling without going into greater detail or providing footnotes. For further study of the sources please see the [Hebrew edition](#) of this publication.

## Introduction

The Days of Awe and Judgement, followed by the joyous days of Sukkot, Shmini Azteret and Simchat Torah, present a great challenge in the face of a global pandemic. Numbers in the synagogue, the length of the *tefillot*, enthusiastic singing and sounding the shofar, dancing, shaking hands and embraces – these and more are challenges with which the medical world, and by extension everyone else, must grapple at the moment.

The purpose of this document is to provide you with options and ideas that will enable the fulfillment of the religious, spiritual, and communal aspects of the festival period, while at the same time maintaining a strict adherence to the local medical and governmental guidelines. It's important to note that the rules and regulations are different from place to place and are also likely to change over the course of time, even between now and Rosh Hashana, whether for better or worse. Therefore, in any situation where the ideas presented here stand in contradiction to the local rules, the local rules take precedence because of "*sfeik pikuach nefesh*".

As the ideas suggested here are, God willing, for this year only and not permanent ones due to the Coronavirus situation, there is no need for an annulment of vows ("*hatarat nedarim*") in order to make the changes.

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## Behaviour and hygiene

- Hand shaking, embracing and other forms of physical greetings should only be done in keeping with local guidelines.
- Each community should make the necessary arrangements for cleaning and disinfecting public areas, as well as any items that may be used by the general public.
- Worshippers should be advised to bring their own *siddurim*, *machzorim* and *tallitot* from home. In a place where there is no eruv, this should be done before the onset of Shabbat or Yom Kippur.

- In accordance with local regulations, decisions should be made regarding the opening and closing of the Ark, removing and returning the Torah from and to the Ark and *hagbaha* & *gelila*. That is, should one person do it or can these honours be freely handed out to the worshippers. If the latter option is used, alcogel or gloves should be placed close by, for the benefit of those receiving these honours.
- Many communities have introduced a plexiglass separation on the *bimah* to enable the Torah reader and the person receiving the *aliya* to stand close to one another. Where this isn't possible, thought should be given to how to maintain proper social distancing at this time, or the possibility of the Torah reader receiving all of the *aliyot*.

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## Selichot

- Where necessary, the Selichot service should be reduced to allow for extra services to take place, or to limit the amount of time spent in an enclosed space.
- While the optimal time for saying Selichot is either before daybreak or after midnight, this year, when there is a need for extra services to take place in the same location, one can be lenient and say Selichot before Shacharit at any time in the morning (even if not at daybreak) or after the first part of the night (first part of three).

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## Rosh Hashana

### Blowing the shofar (also during the month of Elul)

- First and foremost, attention must be paid to the health and wellbeing of those present during the sounding of the shofar, with every care taken to prevent the possible spread of the virus. Therefore, at the very least, greater distance should be kept from the shofar than would normally be practiced with social distancing.
- This year the shofar is not sounded on the first day of Rosh Hashana, as it falls on Shabbat.
- It's important to ensure that as many people as possible can hear the shofar on the second day. This means having several times when the shofar is blown, whether in the synagogue, in parks or other public places and, as necessary, in private homes.

- As many people in the community as possible should be taught how to blow the shofar and the basic *halachot*. You can find a video guide to blowing the shofar [here](#).
- If one needs to limit the amount of time in the synagogue and therefore to sound fewer blasts of the shofar, the order of preference is as follows:
  - Sounding the shofar after each of the three middle blessings in the repetition of the *amida* (Malchuyot, Zichronot, Shofarot). In such a situation, neither blessing is recited (*lishmoa kol shofar & shehechyanu*).
  - If there is more time available, add the thirty blasts before Mussaf, including the blessings.
  - If there is yet more time available, add the forty blasts after the repetition of Mussaf.
- One can omit the *piyutim* surrounding the sounding of the shofar, and the verses that are recited before sounding the shofar prior to Mussaf.
- If the sounding of the shofar is happening outside of a prayer service, the two blessings are recited, and thirty blasts are sounded. A *ba'al tokeah* who has already recited the blessings may do so again, or one of the participants may do so.
- If the *ba'al tokeah* can blow all the sounds without the aid of a person calling each one by name and without getting confused, this too will save some time.

#### Prayer in public

- Where necessary, one should shorten the *tefilla* to allow for more services to take place in the same location or reduce the amount of time people are together in one place.
- Where a number of services take place, one should ideally finish Shacharit before the fourth (halachic) hour of the day, and in retrospect, before halachic midday.
- One person may read the Torah and/or sound the shofar several times throughout the day as needed. As for being the *chazzan*, this would only be permissible if there is no one else present who can lead the *tefilla*.
- The order of preference in a communal setting is to recite the parts that require a minyan (eg. *Kaddish*, *Barchu*, *Kedusha*, reading the Torah) and omit other parts of the service such as the liturgical poems (*piyutim*) and *pesukei d'zimra*.

### Prayer in private

- For the benefit of those praying on their own, who in normal circumstances would have attended the synagogue, it's a good idea to prepare a page outlining what is only said when there is a *minyan*, what can and should be said privately and what can be skipped.
- One should not begin Shacharit before sunrise (or at the most, before dawn), and the Shofar should not be sounded nor Mussaf said before the *halachic* third hour of the day. The page mentioned above should also include the relevant times of the day in local time.

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### Fast of Gedalia

- Pregnant and nursing women are exempt from this fast. So too is anyone who is so unwell that the illness prevents them from going to work, or anyone with Coronavirus symptoms. One who is exempt from fasting should not over-indulge, in order to maintain a bond with the rest of the Jewish people who are fasting.
- One who is not fasting, ideally, should not be called to the Torah at Mincha. This year, as the fast is on a Monday when the Torah is normally read in the morning, one who is not fasting may be called to the Torah at Shacharit.
- One may be lenient this year to read from the Torah and add the prayer of "Aneinu" in the *amida* even if there are only three people in the *minyan* who are fasting. Where truly necessary, one can consider reading from the Torah and adding "Aneinu" even if no one is fasting.

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### Yom Kippur

#### Exemption from fasting

- The only exemption from fasting on Yom Kippur is for someone in a life-threatening situation and in accordance with medical advice. Where possible, such a person should eat and drink in "*shiurim*".
- One who finds fasting difficult but is not in a life-threatening situation should be encouraged to stay home and not over-exert in coming to the synagogue. This will help the person complete the fast, which is biblically mandated.

## Hygiene

- In accordance with local medical advice, one may wash one's hands with cold water and soap or use alcohol gel or wet wipes.
- Alcohol gel or gloves should be placed close by for the benefit of those opening the Ark, removing and returning the Torah from the Ark, receiving an *aliya* or *hagbaha* and *gelila*.

## Prayer

- The outline written above for Rosh Hashana regarding the shortening of the service is relevant here as well.
- However, one should not underestimate the communal value of prayers such as Kol Nidrei and Yizkor. Where necessary, whether due to a lack of time or space, these two prayers can be recited before the onset of Yom Kippur through Zoom and the like.
- On Yom Kippur night, if time is a factor, one can say the blessing of *shehecheyanu*, pray the evening service (including the confessional prayer in the silent Amida) and finish with the full Kaddish.
- In Shacharit, if time is sorely lacking, one can say just one confessional prayer in the silent Amida and skip the list of "*al cheit*" entirely.
- In Mussaf, the Avoda section describing the service of the High Priest in the Bet HaMikdash, is mandated already in the Talmud and therefore should not be skipped. In the event that there is no repetition of the Mussaf Amida, this section can be said after the silent Mussaf as is customary in the Yemenite tradition.
- Ideally, one should begin Neila when the "sun is at the treetops". However, where necessary, it can be said from *plag hamincha*.

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## Sukkot

### Sitting in the sukkah

- The rule of "one who is discomforted (*mitztae'ir*) is exempt from the *sukka*" is also relevant this year. One who has the symptoms of Corona (but is not a confirmed carrier) should decide if sitting in one's private *sukka* will exacerbate the symptoms and cause discomfort.
- One who has Coronavirus should consult with the relevant authorities about being in the *sukka* which is adjacent to one's home. If it is not adjacent, one should not go out in public to get to a *sukka*.

- One can use the halachic principles of “*lavud*”<sup>1</sup> to build the *sukka*, thereby allowing for better airflow in the *sukka*.

### The public sukkah

- The use of the public *sukka* should be done with advanced registration to allow for maximum usage by members of the community, while preventing large gatherings.
- On Shabbat and Yom Tov, to limit the amount of time in the *sukka*, one should wash hands prior to entering the *sukka*, make kiddush, say the blessing of “*hamotzi*” and “*leishev basukka*” and then eat a bit of bread. After eating some bread, one should say *birkat hamazon*, and then the rest of the meal can be eaten outside of the *sukka*.
- If eating in the *sukka* is liable to cause the spread of the virus, one is permitted to recite the blessing of “*leishev basukka*” even for just sitting in the *sukka* for a period of time and not eating at all.

### The four species

- The four species should be ordered as much in advanced as possible, as shipping lines may be severely disrupted due to Coronavirus.
- One should prepare guidelines for keeping the species as fresh as possible. In retrospect, if the species have dried out one may still take them, but no blessing is recited. If only the lulav has dried out, the blessing is recited.
- In order to pass the four species among members of the community, each person should acquire them as “a gift conditional on returning it”. Make sure that the hygiene guidelines are strictly observed when handing the sets from one person to another.
- When taking the four species in order to fulfill the obligation, one may not have any barrier between the species and one’s hands such as gloves. Therefore, it’s highly recommended to have wipes or alcohol ready for use between each person.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/737767/rabbi-josh-flug/the-construction-of-a-sukkah/> and pp 52-56 <https://www.federation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Hamaor-Rosh-5779-2018-WEB.pdf> for further details.



## Shmini Atzeret & Simchat Torah

- As was the suggestion with Yom Kippur, in this situation as well, Yizkor can be streamed live before the onset of Yom Tov.
- Those praying at home should begin saying “*mashiv haruach*” from the approximate time that the congregation begins the silent Mussaf Amida on Shmini Atzeret.
- During the *hakafot* and dancing on Simchat Torah, it’s recommended that the *sifrei Torah* not be handed from person to person. Rather, they should be placed on a table and the dancing should take place around them.
- For health reasons, it is sufficient on Simchat Torah to read five *aliyot* and then the *maftir*, as is the case on every Yom Tov. In this situation the reading would be four *aliyot* from V’zot Habracha, and the fourth *aliya* is that of the *Chatan Torah*. The fifth *aliya* is from the beginning of Bereishit to which the *Chatan Bereishit* is called. The *maftir* is then called up as usual.

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## *Ideas for Communal Activities and Programming*

The High Holidays, closely followed by Sukkot, Shmini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, are highlights of the Jewish communal calendar. They are times of heightened communal gatherings, with people coming together to be spiritually elevated and communally connected. This year, such mass gatherings are unlikely to happen in many, if not most Jewish communities around the world, whether because of local government restrictions, because people are in quarantine or looking after those who are house and hospital-bound, or God forbid, because they are ill themselves and cannot leave home. Coronavirus has added these elements to other regular and well known circumstances such as the elderly or infirm, the lonely and those living on their own or those in hospital for whatever reason, people whom the rabbis, educators and *shlichim* attend to and support every year at this time and throughout the year in general.

First and foremost, one must adhere to the rules and regulations of the local authority. This may hinder our ability to get together, but the wonders of technology allow unprecedented interpersonal communication, which can certainly be of help in the current situation. As such, the main aim of this document is to suggest ideas for communal events and programming that will help keep in touch with the community members and create a feeling of togetherness and community, even if it is not possible to get together physically in one place.

Various materials for the holidays, including High Holiday tefilla guides ([in English](#)), as well as ideas for communal activities during normal times, can be found on our website, <https://www.otsamiel.org.il/en/home/>.

**Important note:** Since there are many and varied types of communities – synagogues, schools, college campuses, youth movements, clubs for the elderly etc., we have used the simple term "community". You are welcome to choose and adapt whichever idea is relevant and suitable for your individual community.

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### **General**

#### **Information booklet**

Prepare a booklet with the timetable for the coming month, greetings and blessings from community leaders, learning material suited to different levels, recommendations for suitable websites, etc.

Contact details should be added for the benefit of those who need physical or spiritual assistance during these times. The booklet can be printed and distributed, as well as attached to the community e-mail and uploaded to the website.

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## Preparing for Rosh Hashanah

### Shofar blowing workshop

As we wrote in the *halachic* section, it is important to prepare as many people as possible to be able to blow the shofar, especially if not many people are allowed to be in synagogue together and in order to help individuals and families who won't be able to come to synagogue, due to quarantine or for any other reason.

The workshop can be given by Zoom or a short film can be prepared, explaining the technique of shofar blowing, together with a page with the main laws. As mentioned above, we have [prepared such a clip](#) which you are welcome to share.

Following on from the workshop, create a short film showcasing the community's children, each of them blowing the shofar in turn and adding their personal blessing for the new year.

### Greetings cards

Prepare and send greetings cards in the community's name. In accordance with local regulations, we recommend doing it as a group activity to further strengthen the feeling of togetherness and actively show that it is a communal project.

The cards can be sent to all community members as an act of friendship and caring, with special emphasis on those quarantined, sick, elderly or other needy members.

### *Simanim* for Rosh Hashanah

Apple & honey and pomegranates are just two of the symbolic foods (*simanim*) traditionally eaten or placed on the table at Rosh Hashana. Prepare pages with the Rosh Hashanah *simanim* and the list of the "*yehi ratzon*" that are traditionally said on the first evening of the holiday. In addition to the page, you can also distribute apples & honey, challah, honey cake etc., particularly to those in need.

In addition to preparing a sheet for the evening of the holiday, you can also create a series of short videos, with each clip explaining one of the *simanim*. Here too community members, young or old, can take part instead of just the rabbi, educator or *shaliach* filming themselves. You can write the script for them, or ask them to write it and have you approve the text. This is good opportunity to work and study one-on-one with different community members in a way that might normally not happen.

Another idea is to ask families who would like to speak about a specific *siman*, one to which they feel a greater connection. They can video or write about why they chose

the specific *siman* (a family story, a special meaning, a connection to a specific period in life, or any other reason).

For younger children, a colouring page can be prepared with pictures of the *simanim* or other pictures of the holiday, which they can decorate and color. Examples for this and other Rosh Hashana themed pictures in this [link](#).

### **A song for the new year**

Choose a song that you would like to create as a community. The lyrics are divided into lines, and each person or family takes a photo together with the words they have chosen from the song written out in large. The photos are then arranged and edited into a music video. For the really brave communities out there, instead of using a pre-existing song or playback, compose your own song or sing the lyrics to an existing song.

### **Song and prayer**

What makes the High Holiday prayers so inspiring? The answer is not a simple or definitive one: it can be one of or a combination of many things, for example, the awe and fear of the verdict on the Day of Judgement; the family bonds and togetherness at the beginning of the year; the annual ceremony of crowning the Almighty as the King of Kings and more. Beyond this, obviously the prayers and tunes play their own special part in setting the mood during these days. Be it the moving tune before the evening "*barchu*" in the Ashkenazi communities, the liturgical hymn of "*Achot K'tana*" in the Sephardic communities, as well as many other prayers during these days, from "*Unetaneh Tokef*" to the confessional prayer of "*Ashamnu*" of Yom Kippur – they all lend themselves to generating a special atmosphere. There are also the unique elements, from the various additional honours handed out to members of the community to the rabbi's keynote sermons of the year. This year we must take into consideration the radical changes that will be felt in communities across the world:

#### **- Chazzanim**

It is important to guide the *chazzan*, who might not be the regular High Holiday *chazzan*, about the local traditions, tunes and what can be done so that the community is connected to the prayers and undergoes a religious, spiritual and communal experience. Take into consideration that in many places this year there will be much less singing together, therefore special care must be taken in choosing the right tunes and *piyutim* (liturgical poems and additions).

- **Sermon**

Considering the restrictions, will the rabbi be able to give a sermon in every *minyan* that takes place? Should we prefer a sermon in the local language over another *piyut* that might not be so easy to understand? Perhaps the sermon can be printed and handed out to those who come to the synagogue and sent, after Yom Tov, to those who couldn't make it? Maybe it should be e-mailed before Yom Tov and the spoken sermon itself be cancelled? All these questions must be considered far enough in advance to prepare suitably. Our recommendation is to video the sermon and send it before Yom Tov.

- **Gabbaim**

The job of the *gabbai* is a position that is usually noticed only when something goes wrong. During the High Holidays, the job is twice as important. From the many openings of the ark, the "*mi shebeirach*" which many say to the tune of the Torah reading and the importance of honouring certain people, the work of the *gabbai* on these days requires thought and advance planning. In a place where several *minyanim* take place, it is a good idea to partner a veteran *gabbai* with a new volunteer and arrange a meeting with the rabbi, the *gabbai* and the *chazzanim* prior to the High Holidays, to synchronize between everyone.

To save time where necessary, the *gabbai* can skip the full "*mi shebeirach*" during the Torah reading and say it without mentioning all the family members, or say a shorter "*mi shebeirach*" similar to Simchat Torah.<sup>2</sup>

- **Page announcements**

It is important to announce the page numbers so that the worshipers know where the congregation is holding. This year, especially if parts of the prayers are skipped, it is even more important. In the staff meeting mentioned above, a sheet with a list of the sections to be skipped should be prepared and given out upon entering the synagogue.

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## Rosh Hashana

### Shofar in the park

For the benefit of those who did not hear the shofar in the synagogue, gather together in a local park at a pre-arranged time and sound the shofar. In this situation, thirty

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<sup>2</sup> "מי שברך את האבות הוא יברך את הבנים ונאמר אמן" – "He who blessed the parents may He bless the children, and let us say *amen*".

blasts preceded by the blessings is sufficient. You can add other activities such as a short *dvar Torah*, a quiz for the children, hand out apple & honey and more.

Of course, this needs to be coordinated with the relevant local authorities and while adhering to rules of social distancing. It's very important not to disrupt other people and create, Heaven forbid, a *chilul Hashem*.

### Hearing the shofar

Create a list of all those who cannot come to either the synagogue or the park to hear the shofar, to ensure that they have an opportunity to fulfill the *mitzva*, either individually in their home or together with other people in the immediate area. This is also an opportunity to bring them, along with a shofar, some quality time and a warm smile, a greeting card, some honey cake or anything else to help sweeten the new year.

### Tefilla at different times

In the halachic section above (and in even greater detail in the [expanded Hebrew publication](#)) we detailed how to conduct a shorter service to allow for as many minyanim to take place and as many congregants as possible to attend. Another option is to conduct a service that, while not in strict accordance with the *halachot* of tefilla or the times of tefilla, still caters for the need to feel a connection and immerse in the atmosphere of the High Holidays. Such a service, akin to a beginner's service held in many communities worldwide, can take place later in the day. Such a service should definitely include 30 sounds of the shofar and the preceding blessings. It can also include deeper study and discussion of the prayers, the meaning of the day and the recitation or singing of some of the main elements.

This is an opportunity to bring, in particular, children, who due to spatial constraints could not attend earlier in the day.

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## Ten Days of Repentance

### Phone calls

Divide the community into phone trees and have each person or family call someone else on the list. The idea here is to create a sense of unity and community and of course to inquire as to each person or family's wellbeing. This can be easily explained as a manifestation of "*teshuvah, tefilla & tzedaka*", whereby caring for others, even if only by phoning them, is an act of *gemilut chasadim* and *tzedaka*.

### Daily Torah Digest

Send a daily video with a short thought that is relevant to the Ten Days of Repentance. It can be based on the laws of Teshuva, the daily *piyut* that is said in the *selichot*, a Chassidic story or anything else that is relevant.

### Zoom in on Selichot

Many communities worldwide livestreamed their daily weekday *tefilla*. This is an opportunity to also livestream *selichot* and expose people to these unique prayers that many people never experience. Beyond reciting the *selichot* themselves, one can also add short explanations on the content and deeper meaning of the *piyutim*.

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## Yom Kippur

### Yahrzeit candle

This year, many people who normally attend the synagogue for Neila to hear the *shofar* and *havdalla* will not do so. Seeing as the *havdalla* candle should be lit from a pre-existing flame, and also due to the custom many people have of lighting a yahrzeit candle to recall departed loved ones, this is an opportunity for the community to distribute the candles as a gift. Place a sticker with the community's logo or relevant message onto the candle, and one can also add other items to the pre-Yom Kippur package such as a list of relevant times for the day, a short thought for the day or even a snack with which to break the fast.

### Food

Make sure that people have food to eat before the fast and with which to break the fast, in particular those who are on their own or quarantined.

### Confessional prayers

E-mail ahead of time a translated and annotated document with the confessional prayers ("*Ashamnu*" and "*Al Cheit*"). This can also include explanations of each line, stories that set the atmosphere and questions for personal reflection.

### Yizkor

One of the main sections of the service on Yom Kippur is Yizkor. Due to the regulations and possible constraints, one can hold a Yizkor service on Zoom before Yom Tov, similar to what many communities did on Pesach and Shavuot.

### **Tefilla at different times**

Similar to Rosh Hashana, one can hold either concurrent services in a different room or different location, or alternatively during the breaks throughout the day. Again, the emphasis should be on atmosphere, study, discussion and a positive experience of the day. This is particularly true if the service takes place outside of the *halachic* hours of the service.

### **Q&A**

Hold a Q&A session during the break between Mussaf and Mincha (or at other times as relevant). This is an opportunity to ask the rabbi, other communal leaders, a panel of educators or any other combination any question that comes to mind.

### **Livestream the conclusion**

Delay the final parts of the day in the synagogue – *havdalla* and sounding the *shofar* – by a few minutes until after the end of the fast, so that a mobile phone or computer can be set up, and livestream the conclusion for the benefit of those not present. The slight delay will also give people at home the opportunity to set up their own phone or computer and connect to the livestream without the risk of desecrating the holy day.

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## **Sukkot**

### **Arts & crafts kit**

Put together arts & crafts kits for children to build their own model *sukka* or to make decorations for the family or communal *sukka*. The *sukka* model building can be done as a competition and can also be used as a platform for learning the laws of sukkot, either in person or via Zoom.

### **Public *sukka***

The use of the public *sukka* should be done with advanced registration to allow for maximum usage by members of the community while preventing large gatherings.

### **Musical *tefilla***

While livestreaming services has become almost standard practice, Chol HaMoed Sukkot affords an opportunity to add some live music to the occasion during Hallel, *hoshanot* and either before or after the *tefilla*.

Consideration should be given to the challenge of holding the four species while also playing a musical instrument.



### **Ushpizin/Special guests**

While hosting people during sukkot may be more of a challenge this year, it affords the chance to invite other virtual figures – past or present – to our *sukka*. Such figures could include family members, biblical or historical personalities and heroes of the Jewish people throughout the ages. Discuss why you'd like to host these people, what questions would you ask them, what is about them that is inspirational and more. One does not need to stay in the realm of people, but one can also 'invite' books, *mitzvot*, traditions, values, songs or anything else that captures the imagination. Each night can be designated for a different topic or a different type of guest.

### **Virtual meetings in the *sukka***

The wonders of modern technology, including Wi-Fi, allow us to leave home and go out to the *sukka*, while still staying connected. There are plenty of opportunities for family and communal activities in the communal or private *sukkot*. Below are some ideas for things to do.

If an online event is "Zoom-bombed," shut down the meeting immediately, and send out a new link to the participants<sup>3</sup>. Using a Zoom webinar rather than the usual Zoom meeting is another way to prevent Zoom-bombing.

- **Quiz:** using Kahoot! or Quizizz, prepare a quiz where everyone is in a different location and joins in through their own computer or mobile phone, while the host shares the main screen via Zoom and asks the questions.
- **Class:** Deliver a class or hold a panel discussion, inviting questions from the online audience. The main speakers can be from within the community or external guests. Make sure that the audience is muted when not asking questions or actively joining in the discussion.
- **Movie & discussion:** The movie itself can be uploaded to a cloud and a link sent to participants. This will enable everyone in their different locations to see the movie without the complications and often lesser quality of watching such things on Zoom. Set a time to meet up online for about five minutes after the end of the screening time (for example, if the event starts at 8PM and the movie is 20 minutes long, reconvene on Zoom at 8:25PM). Following the movie

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<sup>3</sup> "I would like to say thank you to Rabbi Green as the zoom host of the meeting, for shutting down the meeting once the hackers were observed. This is exactly what should happen when a zoom meeting is interrupted by hackers or unknown persons have entered a zoom meeting.

I would encourage anyone hosting a zoom meeting to make sure a meeting ID and password are required, a "waiting room" is enabled, and all participants are vetted by the host."

Bill Humphrey, Director of Community Security for the Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas, following a Zoom bombing of the community's Tisha B'Av programme.

<https://www.dojlife.com/tisha-bav-5780-the-kinnos-a-zoom-experience-with-the-rabbis-of-dallas-the-zoom-bombing-of-the-kinnos-the-greatly-successful-reboot-and-the-legal-follow-up/>.

conduct the discussion. Consider sending questions to ponder ahead of the movie so that the discussion flows more easily.

For those with a Zoom account, consider having part of the discussion in breakout rooms. This will allow more people to actively participate in the conversation. Ideally, each breakout room should have a moderator. For further details on Zoom breakout rooms, follow [this link](#).

- **Concert:** Invite a local or guest musician or musical ensemble to hold a concert just for your community. Again, make sure that everyone's microphone is turned off, otherwise the electronic feedback will interrupt everyone's enjoyment.
- **Virtual tour:** As a result of Coronavirus, many museums and public attractions have opened their doors to virtual tours. Here is a short list of suggestions to visit with the family or community. Other attractions are available, and the idea here is to present some different ideas:
  - Tour of Jerusalem in 360 [Jerusalem360](#)
  - The Virtual Jewish Library's [Virtual Jewish History tour](#)
  - Virtual tour of the [Israel Museum](#)
  - The Museum of the Jewish People at [Beit Hatfutsot](#) invites groups of all ages around the world to join innovative and groundbreaking online tours. Registration required.
  - ISRAEL21c's [Postcards from Israel](#).

### **Aliya laregel / pilgrimage**

Ask the local *shlichim* or an Israeli tour guide to use a tool like Google Earth to lead the community on a walking tour of Israel. This is an excellent opportunity for the *shlichim* to show where they came from, highlight favourite places in Israel and show off Israel's beauty.

For example, Nini & Matan Milner, Straus-Amiel graduates and *shlichim* in Manchester, UK, prepared an interactive walk through Israel in celebration of Israel's 72<sup>nd</sup> birthday. This included personal stories, quiz questions, photos and information about each place. One can see the interactive map [here](#) and the accompanying quiz [here](#).

### **Recipe book**

Make a communal recipe book with the twist that each entry must include at least one of the seven species with which the Promised Land is blessed.

### **Family project: Who am I?**

On Sukkot we leave our permanent homes and enter temporary abodes, but do we actually know where we came from? This is an opportunity, as a family, to work on a family project and discover more about the family's history. Make sure to interview members of the extended family and use websites such as [Beit Hatfutsot](#) and [MyHeritage](#). The completed projects can be left or as part of a wider community project, with the final product put on display in the community center, school or synagogue. Alternatively, host an evening on Zoom where families that want to share their story can do so, showcasing photos, movie clips and interesting documents from the past. If it is done as a communal project, consider preparing a template with guiding questions so that there is some uniformity in the responses.

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## **Shmini Atzeret & Simchat Torah**

### ***Yizkor***

Due to the regulations and possible constraints, one can hold a Yizkor service on Zoom before Yom Tov, similar to what many communities did on Pesach and Shavuot, and, as suggested above, around Yom Kippur as well.

### **Prayer for rain**

The standout prayer on Shmini Atzeret is the prayer for rain when we begin beseeching the Almighty to remember us and grant us a year of blessed rain. Due to the restrictions in place, many people may not be present to hear this annual prayer. To help set the mood, ask the community's *chazan* to record the *piyut* and send it out prior to Yom Tov. Make sure to state clearly that the change in the Amida to reciting "*mashiv haruach*" only takes place during Mussaf of Shmini Atzeret, even if people have played the recording before Yom Tov.

### ***Hakafot***

As written above, it's recommended that this year the *sifrei Torah* are not transferred from hand to hand, but rather placed on a table and the congregants dance around them. Nevertheless, one can still honour different members with leading each *hakafa* and reciting the verses prior to the *hakafot*, with the honourees leading the circle of dancers even if they are not holding the *sefer Torah*.

While different people are honoured each year with reciting the verses or holding the *sefer Torah*, consider highlighting this year those who have been at the forefront of the battle against Coronavirus and helping maintain a sense of normalcy such as medical personnel, lab technicians, teachers, social workers and so on. This can be

clearly mentioned before the *hakafa* and even in the PR materials sent out prior to Yom Tov.

### **Children**

If the services do not take place as normal, consider distributing a Simchat Torah flag and a bag of treats (both sweet and healthy treats, as per local practices) to families with children before Yom Tov. To further enhance the sense of joyful rejoicing with the Torah, include in this package a song list, age appropriate story for parents to read to their children, quiz questions and more.

### **Chatan Torah & Chatan Bereishit**

As mentioned above, here too is an opportunity to honour those people who have been active in combatting Coronavirus and tending to the needs of the community. In those places where women are also honoured as an *Eishet Chayil* or *Kallat Torah* and the like, the same principle applies.

### **Virtual *hakafot***

After Yom Tov, or on the eve of Yom Tov, arrange virtual *hakafot* via Zoom. Create a playlist of lively music, and between each *hakafa* share a short thought or better yet, ask members of the community to share a thought on the centrality and joy of living and learning Torah. At the conclusion of the *hakafot*, in lieu of a community kiddush, invite the adults to raise a glass. L'chaim!

\* \* \* \* \*

*And so, O God, grant honour to Your nation,  
praise those in awe of You,  
good hope to those who seek You  
and eloquent speech to those longing for You.  
Bring gladness to Your land and joy to your city,  
the flourishing of pride to David, Your servant,  
and a lamp laid out to the son of Yishai, Your anointed one,  
speedily in our days*