

Still Closed.

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Dear Friends,

You must now be aware of Governor Cuomo's recent permission to religious institutions to hold services limited to 10 people (albeit masked and distanced), of President Trump's declaration of religious institutions as essential, as well as of the handful of well-intentioned synagogues that are giving this a try.

Despite all of this, our synagogue will continue to remain closed. Here's why:

1. Our closing was an easy decision, but our re-opening is a much more difficult task; one that will require a patient and thoughtful deliberation involving risk mitigation policies that we are not yet able to offer and/or enforce. **It is simply too soon to re-open and we will not be reckless with your safety.**
2. We agree with the RCA and OU recommendations in exercising extreme caution, even more so than the demands of State. We share in Rav Herschel Schachter's insistence that our primary religious duty is to protect life and **we are proud to be a link in the chain of a tradition that is cautious, sensible, and mahmir (strict) regarding issues pertaining to pikuah nefesh (the protection of life).**
3. Even if we felt perfectly safe doing so, we would never open for only 10. We believe that a quorum of 10 men constitutes a halachic minyan, but we would never hold a service that definitionally excludes women, potential converts, or children from attending. We are similarly uncomfortable with formal policies that restrict those 65 and older. **We will not hold services limited to 10 Jewish men under 65 because we are reasonably modern, passionately welcoming, and confident that our diversity is one of our great strengths.**
4. We are mindful of the great Hillul Hashem that several of our co-religionists have created and we feel the responsibility to compensate for their disregard for public safety and relations. We would never want to be complicit - or even perceived as being complicit - in a second wave of illness, God forbid. **We will be more comfortable re-opening when the majority of other synagogues, as well as the church around the corner and the masjid down the street do so as well.** We are in communication with them.

The reality is that the major institutional synagogues of the Tri-State area - and beyond - remain completely closed. **We believe that our synagogue is extraordinary and that our leadership and community are pioneers in Modern-Orthodoxy, but this time we are going stay conventional.**

Thank you for your longing to return, your appreciation, your patience, and your understanding. We will continue to update you.

Gavriel Z. Bellino, Rabbi
Elie Yudewitz, President