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Edmonton Rabbis navigate COVID-19 with care & caution

By Maxine Fischbein

The arrival and trajectory of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every person and each institution in Edmonton and around the globe. As our primary hubs of assembly, prayer and study, Synagogues have been particularly impacted by the imperative to shut down and the uncertainties of what even prudent reopening means to their congregants and communities.

While *pikuach nefesh* – the preservation of life – is the bedrock value when it comes to their decision making, Edmonton's rabbis, together with their lay leaders, have devoted themselves to making their congregations and services as accessible as possible during this time of contagion so as to support congregants and community members through prayer, study and pastoral support while respecting the imperative for physical distancing.

Edmonton Rabbis are united in their shared commitment to keep congregants safe, going above and beyond government health directives. As the Province of Alberta continues to lift restrictions, local Synagogues are beginning to take cautious steps toward the resumption of in-person prayer services and/or other activities.

Each Synagogue has its own fingerprint whose arches, loops and whorls are formed by their various and distinctive beliefs, rituals, and denominational affiliations. The personalities and interests of the clergy make for additional and unique variations in the ways each congregation is responding to the current health crisis.

Alberta Jewish News checked in with local Rabbis who shared their synagogues' responses to COVID-19, offered some insights into what Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur 5781 might look like this September and October, and described some of the silver linings that have emerged from the pandemic and local responses to it. It is impossible to capture every detail of the incredibly diverse services, programs and pastoral work of Edmonton's Shuls. What follows is, therefore, representational rather than exhaustive.

Beth Israel: Rabbi Claman

Edmonton's Beth Israel Synagogue, a modern Orthodox congregation affiliated with the Orthodox Union (OU), responded rapidly to the pandemic, completely shutting down Synagogue operations the week after Purim, said Rabbi Zolly Claman.

At the beginning of June, Beth Israel started cautiously phasing in weekday prayer services on the advice of their COVID-19 Task force which includes two frontline physicians, one who is a specialist in infectious diseases and one who serves in an ICU. While Rabbi Claman stresses that *pikuach nefesh* remains the Synagogue's primary consideration, Beth Israel has cautiously reintroduced onsite daily prayer services.

"We are taking a very strict perspective," remarked Rabbi Claman who added that his Shul is meeting and exceeding the requirements of Alberta Health Services.

Like his colleagues, Rabbi Claman participates in virtual meetings for faith leaders hosted by the Alberta government. While some of the province's faith leaders have pushed for speedy reopenings and the ability to welcome large numbers of congregants for prayer services, Rabbi Claman favours a more prudent approach.

"We have not been trying to fit more people under our roof," noted Rabbi Claman, who expressed pride at the "equilibrium and patience" of Beth Israel and the Jewish community.

It is important to note that, unlike the city's more liberal congregations, Beth Israel is bound by a stricter

YEG Negev Gala: August 27



Edmonton JNF will honour Dr. Jacob and Odette Masliyah at a very special live stream Negev Gala on August 27 at 7 pm. Register at jfedmonton.ca. See story on page 5.

interpretation of Halacha (Jewish law) that does not permit virtual services for prayers that require a minyan (quorum of 10 Jewish men). They therefore could not move prayer services online as some other congregations were able to do.

During Phase I of Beth Israel's reopening, attendance at weekday prayer services was limited to 11 men (just over the minimum of 10 men required for a minyan). That number increased to 18 in their second phase of the reopening.

Entry to services is restricted to those who are free of COVID symptoms.

As of July 6, Beth Israel is contemplating the reintroduction of onsite Shabbat services, though a date for that important milestone has not yet been announced.

Rabbi Claman is confident that the gradual reintroduction of prayer services, beginning with the daily minyanim, is a great way to "test drive" the protocols that Beth Israel's COVID task force has put in place. It is a

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COVID planning at Calgary Shuls: July 6 update

By Maxine Fischbein

Last month, *Alberta Jewish News* provided extensive coverage regarding the operations of Calgary Synagogues during the Coronavirus pandemic. We checked back in with each of the five spiritual leaders to find out what has changed as the province has further lifted restrictions including those pertaining to houses of worship. Here is what they had to say, in alphabetical order by Clergy.

Rabbi Leonard Cohen: Kehilat Shalom (Unaffiliated)

Kehilat Shalom recently held its first in-person minyan (prayer service) since the COVID shutdown. Prayers were recited outdoors with worshipers required to maintain physical distance and to wear masks.

According to Rabbi Leonard Cohen, the gathering was a success, with attendees adhering to guidelines and gloved volunteers distributing siddurim (prayer books). Outdoor services will continue for the time being and

Synagogue leaders are in discussion with the Calgary JCC – where the congregation had regularly met prior to the pandemic – regarding re-opening policies.

Kehilat Shalom continues all its classes and programs, some online and others face-to-face. A Bar Mitzvah later this summer will be tented with strict protocols for distancing.

At a recent meeting of the Kehilat Shalom Board of Directors, the decision was taken to hold in-person High Holidays services. Rabbi Cohen said the implementation of this plan will involve "changes to the location, structure and very dynamic of the services."

Rabbi Cohen anticipates that Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services will be held at "some indoor location with adequate space and ventilation." Services will be abbreviated, if necessary, depending on the current circumstances.

"We will continue to insist on face masks and social distancing," said Rabbi Cohen, adding, "I'm a big, big, big advocate of masks. It's critical at this stage of the game."

Rabbi Mark Glickman: Temple B'nai Tikvah (Reform)

Although its office is open for business and some in-person classes are being held with safe physical distancing, Temple B'nai Tikvah does not yet plan to reopen for onsite prayer services, says Rabbi Mark Glickman. The decision to hold off on in-person services was based upon "not just the letter, but the spirit" of the province's health guidelines, Rabbi Glickman said.

Of particular concern are what the Rabbi refers to as "the three S's, seniors, siddurim and singing." The elevated risk for seniors and others with underlying conditions that are exposed to the coronavirus is a major concern as are the risks associated with the sharing of prayer books and with singing, which has been categorized by health authorities as a high risk activity.

"I would rather open a couple of weeks too late than a couple of weeks too early," Rabbi Glickman said.

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The Edmonton Talmud Torah teachers closed out the school year with a parade of goodbyes and good wishes for the students, their families and some special staff members who are leaving.

Edmonton Talmud Torah year end activities

By Moreh Ari Sniderman

Talmud Torah teachers lined 172nd Street on the last day of school while the Grade 6 graduates and their parents parked at the side. Parents paraded their children past them in back seats while they honked in congratulations for finishing up the school year in the most unusual way. Seeing the students in real time was the highlight of the pandemic, of course.

Talmud Torah is losing some longstanding staff

members this fall. Caroline Borgen taught at the school for 13 years, touching the lives of over 300 young Jewish community members ranging now in age from 5 to 28. The next generation will hear first-hand of her devotion to her students and the school. Elliot Burg spent two years in the preschool before joining the teaching staff in 2017. A Talmud Torah graduate himself, Elliot continuously strove to strengthen not just his students' academic standings, but the Jewish community. Finally, Arnold Tirao finishes his tenure as head caretaker after eight school

years. His calm and caring demeanour made the school a second home to us all and a safe, clean place to learn. On behalf of the TT community I wish them all the greatest success as they start new chapters of their promising careers.

On behalf of the TT staff, Thank you to the students who joined our e-classes with an open mind and a big smile every time. Thank you to the parents who showed us patience and support as we worked through the complex pedagogical and lifestyle stresses that the pandemic foisted upon us. We learned a lot about e-teaching and will continue to train to ensure an even more successful round if necessary. Enjoy summer break!

Anti-Semitism becomes political fodder at Alberta Legislature

By Jeremy Appel

The Jewish Federations of Edmonton and Calgary say they expressed concerns privately with the provincial government after an appointee to a judicial vetting committee was revealed to have promoted anti-Semitic conspiracy theories online.

Cold Lake, Alta., lawyer Leighton Grey abruptly resigned from the Provincial Court Nominating Committee on June 19 after *CBC Edmonton* uncovered social media and blog posts that compared a future COVID-19 vaccine to Auschwitz tattoos and called Black Lives Matter a "leftist lie" promulgated by Jewish billionaire George Soros. Another post accused Soros of financially manipulating the European Court of Human Rights.

The PCNC was established by the previous government with the goal of enhancing diversity in the selection of provincial court judges. Its role is to vet and select judges who have already been screened by the Judicial Committee.

Justice Minister Doug Schweitzer purged the committee of its NDP appointees on April 29, replacing them with more conservative-oriented appointees through an

informal, closed process.

In response to inquiries from the *Alberta Jewish News*, the Edmonton Jewish Federation said it sent a letter to the government expressing its concerns, but declined to make its contents public.

"We are dealing with this privately as we do with most advocacy issues where we have a partner who we trust and have a good relationship with," president Steven Shafir said, citing Premier Jason Kenney's "long-standing friendship with the Jewish community and Israel."

Bernie Farber, chair of the Canadian Anti-Hate Network and a past president of the defunct Canadian Jewish Congress, was less circumspect in his criticisms of the appointment.

He told the CBC Grey's remarks were troubling "on the basis of just pure humanity."

"Our expectation is that our government will go through a process to pick the people that are most fair, that are most equitable. The views posted in Mr. Grey's blog, in my view, are extreme," said Farber.

Comparing the pandemic response "to Adolf Hitler's legislation during the development of racial laws that led to the deaths of millions — never mind six million Jewish men, women and children — is simply an outrage," remarked Bernie Farber.

In a statement announcing his departure, Schweitzer called Grey a "successful Indigenous lawyer with an exemplary record of service."

"I also do not make judgments on Mr. Grey's ability to carry out his professional duties in practising law," the minister said.

He also clarified that the resignation was Grey's own

decision to avoid serving as a distraction from the committee's work.

"Work on the Committee is far from a full-time job, and members are not required to surrender their right to

personal views or commentary," wrote Schweitzer.

Grey was the only criminal defence lawyer appointed to the PCNC.

Before Grey's resignation, NDP MLA Irfan Sabir brought the House's attention to a post that suggested too many female judges were being appointed.

"Eight of the past 10 superior court justices appointed in Alberta were women. Today it was announced that 5 of 7 judges appointed to our Provincial Court are women. If Lady Justice is truly blind, then why does she see gender?" wrote Grey.

Schweitzer responded by calling Sabir's line of questioning "absolutely disgusting," before listing off previous PCNC appointees who were NDP donors.

After his resignation, NDP justice critic Kathleen Ganley asked the premier to explicitly condemn Grey's remarks in the legislature.

The justice minister rose in response to suggest Grey's resignation was sufficient.

"Mr. Speaker, this individual resigned over a post that they made online. I've accepted that person's resignation. I think that speaks for itself," said Schweitzer.

Leader of Opposition Rachel Notley issued a news release to highlight Kenney and Schweitzer's refusal to outright condemn Grey's remarks.

"It sends a dangerous signal to hateful extremists when the Premier of Alberta is silent when these opinions are being promoted by his own appointees," said Notley.

"It should be extremely concerning to any supporter of human rights in Alberta that neither the Premier nor the Justice Minister would apologize for this appointment, or commit to ensuring that this will not happen again. Jason Kenney must publicly condemn Leighton Grey's comments, and apologize for his Justice Minister's statement that prejudice has a place within a 'diversity of views.'"

The next day in the legislature, Kenney said the opposition "attacked an indigenous lawyer for his appointment."

"That person made offensive comments. He's no longer on the board."

Jeremy Appel is a Local Journalism Initiative reporter with *Alberta Jewish News*.

Congratulations Sandi!!



Sandi Kaiser's family is excited to congratulate her on her retirement after 41 years of teaching, 35 years of which was spent at the Calgary Jewish Academy.

At the CJA, Sandi has been a jack-of-all-trades and taught science, math, Jewish Social Studies, resource room, and homeroom classes. She has knelt down to eye-level for the little ones in first grade, and she has embarrassingly stayed on top of the latest slang to tease the ninth graders.

In equal measure, Sandi brings kindness, deliberation, and smarts to everything she does. She has always embodied that spirit of teaching that the best educators possess.

As Margaret Mead said, "Children must be taught how to think, not what to think." While there have always been upcoming provincial exams to consider, Sandi knew her job was to do both.

We are so unbelievably proud of Sandi and excited to enjoy more time with her!

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Rabbi Steven Schwarzman



Rabbi Zolly Claman



Rabbi Gila Caine



Rabbi Ari Drelich

Edmonton Rabbis

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point of pride for him that other Canadian Orthodox Synagogues have used the Beth Israel protocols as a template for their own guidelines in response to the pandemic.

Those in attendance must pre-register and are given a map that indicates where and how they must enter the building and where to sit. Entry and egress are coordinated so that as few people as possible are using the same doors.

“We have to be organized, we don’t want surprises,” says Rabbi Claman,

“It is BYOM, as we say,” adds Rabbi Claman. “If you don’t have a mask, you are sent home.”

Rabbi Claman’s Virtual Torah Centre is the means by which pre-Shabbat sermons and a wide variety of classes are being delivered and well-attended, not only by Beth Israel congregants but also by guests within and beyond Edmonton. WhatsApp updates help to inform participants about new listening and learning opportunities via Zoom.

High Holidays at Beth Israel

High Holidays plans are under discussion at Beth Israel, with Rabbi Claman and his lay leadership considering several potential scenarios. Current thinking includes a congregational survey to assess the interest and willingness of Beth Israel’s members to attend High Holiday services. Depending on that response, one approach may be to split the congregation into two carefully choreographed prayer sessions with professional cleaning and sanitizing to take place in between.

The one thing Rabbi Claman is willing to promise is “the most meaningful and impactful services as possible under the circumstances.”

Rabbi Claman’s COVID Silver Lining

Rabbi Claman sees reasons for optimism in his congregants’ response to the overall challenges posed by COVID-19.

“It has been a reality check as to how important the Shul is,” said the Rabbi, adding that “distance makes the heart grow fonder.”

But the most positive result of the disruption caused by COVID is the confirmation of Rabbi Claman’s fervent conviction that “the home is the epicenter of Judaism.”

“This was always true,” said Rabbi Claman who added that the pandemic has driven that important point home for some congregants. He believes they are experiencing personal growth due to the increased effort they have had to make to keep their yiddishkeit front and centre during the pandemic.

In a recent *Alberta Jewish News* article, Rabbi Claman urged community members to “try to leverage these difficult times towards a more meaningful life...look at the isolation as a calling and this time of crisis as an opportunity...to re-calibrate what it means to be a Jew.”

Beth Shalom: Rabbi Steven Schwarzman

Edmonton’s Conservative Synagogue, Beth Shalom – an affiliate of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) – chose to shut down before the province mandated closure of faith organizations.

“Pikuach nefesh required that we take all reasonable steps to ensure safety,” Rabbi Steven Schwarzman told *Alberta Jewish News*.

Within two weeks, Beth Shalom was running Zoom weekday morning prayer services. Some individuals who had previously been unable to join the congregation in-person enthusiastically embraced the technology including a 93-year-old congregant who learned to navigate cyberspace because it was so important to her to stay connected with her Shul.

Classes continue via Zoom including Rabbi Schwarzman’s *Introduction to Judaism* class. A recent offering exploring the *Psalms* in the Siddur was delivered with ease due to online tools like Sepharia (an online resource for Jewish texts) and video clips of musicians who include psalms in their lyrics, Rabbi Schwarzman said.

Initially, Shabbat services were not held because of halachic restrictions where the use of interactive online

technology like Zoom is concerned. Beth Shalom has not yet adopted livestreaming but is considering that possibility going forward.

The congregation has taken a different approach to re-opening than many other Synagogues. They plan to ease into onsite prayer beginning with Shabbat morning services in mid-July, once they have reassessed the number of local COVID cases and associated risks of transmission.

“We are starting with Shabbat services because they are held once a week,” said Rabbi Schwarzman.

A congregant who is an infectious diseases specialist has confirmed that the virus lasts only about three days on surfaces, a period that is well exceeded when the congregation meets weekly.

Rabbi Schwarzman says the Shabbat service will be a good test of protocols around the distribution and sanitizing of siddurim and the choreography of the service, including the distancing of Torah readers, Torah Gabbaim and those who are called for aliyot.

High Holidays at Beth Shalom

“[High Holidays] were the first thing on my radar once we shifted into pandemic mode,” recalled Rabbi Schwarzman, who told AJN that Beth Shalom is considering three options for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur: Onsite services, livestreaming services or a combination of the two.

“The Halachic issues are complex,” said Rabbi Schwarzman. For guidance, he turned to the Teshuva (responsa) by Rabbi Joshua Heller, *Streaming Services on Shabbat and Yom Tov*, which was adopted by the Conservative movement’s Committee on Jewish Law and Standards this past May. The teshuva, temporarily allows for the livestreaming of Shabbat and Yom Tov services due to the extreme challenge posed by the Coronavirus pandemic.

“I am reasonably comforted that [Rabbi Heller’s response] provides a well-reasoned halachic approach to the very unusual circumstances we are in,” Rabbi Schwarzman said.

At the moment, Rabbi Schwarzman is optimistic that congregants will be able to attend High Holidays services in-person. Nevertheless, the virus precludes the onsite attendance of congregants who are at high risk. It is also likely that the Synagogue will have to limit the numbers of congregants in attendance during peak times in order to ensure the required physical distancing. Beth Shalom therefore envisions the use of livestreaming whether or not some congregants are able to assemble onsite for prayers.

At a recent COVID-19 town hall meeting for faith leaders, Rabbi Schwarzman asked Dr. Deena Hinshaw

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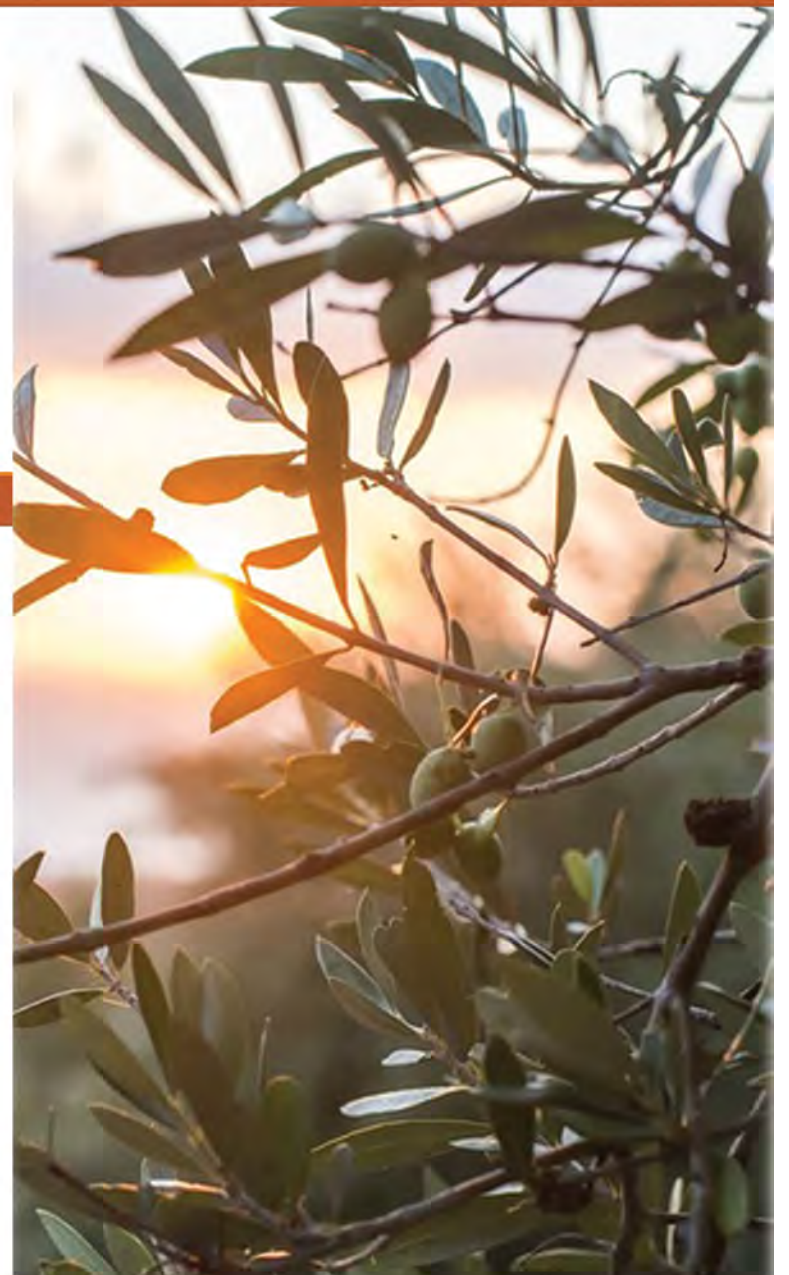
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Calgary COVID planning

Cont. from page 1

While there are no plans to reopen the Temple doors for worship in the immediate future, the congregation continues to engage in prayer via Zoom. Meanwhile, the lay leadership and Rabbi Glickman have been busy with the development of a COVID-19 Task Force that will be up and running during the first week of July.

While some lifecycle events have been postponed, others are currently being contemplated. Simchas have taken place with limitations based on health guidelines and Temple practices.

Rabbi Glickman and the Temple Music Director are planning for High Holidays services which they currently contemplate will be held via Zoom.

"Health and safety concerns are paramount," said Rabbi Mark Glickman. "I'd be the last to open, with pride."

Rabbi Binyomin Halpern: House of Jacob Mikveh Israel (Modern Orthodox)

House of Jacob Mikveh Israel began meeting for onsite morning and evening minyan last month, holding them outdoors for the first two weeks and indoors thereafter.

As *Alberta Jewish News* goes to press, the plan is for all Shabbat services to resume onsite at HOJMI beginning July 4.

Physical distancing and masks are an absolute requirement, said Rabbi Binyomin Halpern.

"We are asking people to bring their own siddurim, but if they don't have them, we are providing dedicated siddurim."

Bimah choreography looks quite different at HOJMI due to the need for physical distancing.

"We aren't calling people up to the Torah. Only the Baal Koreh [Torah reader] and their immediate family members are allowed on the Bimah," Rabbi Halpern said.

Given the current distancing requirement, the Baal Koreh reads the Parsha (Torah portion) in its entirety, unpunctuated by the honours given to congregants under ordinary circumstances.

HOJMI Classes and programs continue to be delivered virtually on a variety of platforms including Zoom, Vimeo, and WhatsApp.

High Holidays are still under discussion at House of Jacob.

"We haven't yet committed on the final plan, but we are planning proactively," Rabbi Halpern said.

Cantor Russell Jayne: Beth Tzedec Congregation (Conservative)

Beth Tzedec's Senior Management Team has planned what Cantor Russell Jayne calls "a cautious phased reopening."

The first phase, which will have been implemented by the time this issue of *Alberta Jewish News* reaches homes, features three onsite weekday prayer services, each taking place on a non-Torah reading day. The second phase will include in-person Shabbat morning services beginning on July 25. Expansion to twice-daily onsite weekday services is contemplated for August.

Those wishing to attend onsite services must register in advance, at least one day prior to the services they plan to attend. Those attending services in person are required to wear masks, to sanitize their hands and to provide their own head coverings and talitot. On arrival, they must check in with staff who will be asking COVID-related screening questions. Seats will be marked and bimah choreography will be altered to ensure required physical distancing.

Congregants who cannot attend services in person can continue to access all weekday services via Zoom and

Year end activities at Calgary Jewish Academy



As the world has been social distancing and adjusting to a "New Normal", this has certainly been a year like no other. On June 15, 2020 the CJA Grade 9 class made Calgary history by being the first school group to host a Drive Thru Graduation. The ceremony included special messages from the community, the CJA and students' families. Most importantly, students got a chance to ceremoniously walk the stage in front of their classmates and family. Mazel Tov to the 2020 CJA Grade 9

Graduating class on this milestone.

On June 23 & 24, students from all grades came to the school at scheduled times to have a physically distanced goodbye with their teachers. Giving each other in person well wishes for the summer was a special send off after months of online learning.

CJA wishes all their families a safe and enjoyable summer and can't wait to see them again in the fall!

Friday Night Kabbalat Shabbat and Saturday morning Shabbat services via livestreaming. This will help to ensure that those who are older or who have underlying conditions can continue to participate in services without putting themselves at risk.

Just before *Alberta Jewish News* went to press, Beth Tzedec sent out an announcement of a July 5th Member Appreciation BBQ, with organizers taking advantage of the Synagogue's large outdoor parking lot for a big tailgate party with appropriate physical distancing.

"This could all change at the drop of a hat," said Cantor Russell Jayne (begging the question: Is that a kippah or a cowboy hat?)

"We are prepared to walk it right back should there be a spike in COVID cases and AHS requires a return to more stringent measures," Cantor Jayne added.

For now, Beth Tzedec classes continue to be delivered online via Zoom

As previously reported, Beth Tzedec is planning for the High Holidays. Services will be livestreamed whether or not the doors can open for onsite services.

"Right now it seems most likely that we will assemble a Minyan so that all prayers can be recited including the Kaddish," said Cantor Jayne. "While I hope we can all be together, the virus itself will decide whether we can safely invite large numbers of congregants to celebrate Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur onsite."

Rabbi Menachem Matusof: Chabad Lubavitch Calgary

Chabad Lubavitch Calgary held minyanim in person and a special program via Zoom in memory of a beloved supporter on June 28 and 29.

"We are moving cautiously toward min-yans," said Rabbi Menachem Matusof, adding, "We are very careful."

While admitting to feeling some pressure to reopen for prayer services, Rabbi Matusof remains reluctant.

"Our organization is not just a Shul. We have other major programs to consider."

"Our main emphasis is on camp. This is a big challenge because parents don't want Zoom and online," Rabbi Matusof

said, adding that a solution to safely delivering Camp Gan Israel program-ming was important in ensuring shalom bayit – peace in the home – for families who have been cooped up together for months due to the COVID pandemic.

Toward that end, on June 29, Chabad Calgary announced that they will be running the camp with limited registration. They promise strict COVID-19 protocols and a dedicated staff for frequent cleaning and sanitizing.

Another main focus for Chabad has been their kosher catering initiative which has, according to Rabbi Matusof, provided some 2,500 kosher meals in Calgary and beyond since Pesach.

"Life is precious," says Rabbi Matusof, who is concerned about adding more people to the mix by opening up for services.

Nevertheless, Chabad is considering the reimplementation of Shabbat services, at least in part, with an emphasis on Torah reading and careful attention to health requirements.

"G-d forbid if something happens...we don't even want to go there."

Chabad has not yet made any decisions regarding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Calgary Chevra Kadisha

The Calgary Chevra Kadisha continues to enforce strict protocols where burials and unveilings are concerned and has enhanced safety measures to protect staff and volunteers who tend to the deceased. While provincial guidelines allow larger gatherings, the Chevra Kadisha continues to take a cautious approach, allowing no more than 20 mourners, friends and families to gather for graveside funerals and unveilings.

"We continue to monitor and discuss numbers and provincial guidelines, but the Chevra Kadisha will only implement the policies that we feel best protect our volunteers and community," Calgary Chevra Kadisha Executive Director Rick Pollick said.

Local Rabbis continue to participate in COVID-19 town hall meetings for faith leaders hosted by Alberta Premier Jason Kenney and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Deena Hinshaw as well as meetings for the leaders of major local Jewish organizations convened by Calgary Jewish Federation. The sharing of information and best practices continues to keep our Synagogues and community as safe as possible in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Maxine Fischbein is a Calgary-based Local Journalism Initiative reporter.

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The next deadline for Alberta Jewish News is August 6, 2020.

This is our Back to School and Pre-Rosh Hashanah edition.

For information contact Dan at albertajewishnews.com

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Edmonton Negev Gala goes livestream on August 27

The Jewish National Fund of Edmonton (JNF) is excited to announce that the 2020 Negev Gala honouring Odette and Professor Jacob Masliyah OC, AOE will take place on August 27, 2020 at 7 PM MDT. This year, the Negev will be live-streamed to allow all registrants to enjoy the event from the comfort of home!

Since 1954, the Edmonton Negev Gala has provided an opportunity for the Jewish community to gather to recognize deserving members within the community and to support the important work of the JNF. The tradition continues this year with a unique Negev Gala production designed to allow the community to gather socially yet remain physically distanced.

The 2020 Negev Gala promises to inform, entertain and inspire. This year's event will showcase the experiences of Jews who were compelled to leave Arab countries. To Canada's good fortune the Masliyahs, who spent their formative years in Iraq, brought their considerable talents to Edmonton.

Jacob Masliyah was born in Baghdad, Iraq, the youngest child of a family of eight. He left Iraq to pursue his undergraduate education at University College London. In 1964, he immigrated to Canada where he obtained his graduate degrees. In 1977, he joined the University of Alberta and, over his 40+ year career, was renowned for his work in bitumen extraction. Jacob is an Officer of the Order of Canada and a member of Alberta Order of Excellence. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, Fellow of the Canadian Academy of Engineering, and International Member of the US National Academy of Engineering. Jacob served on the board of the Talmud Torah including a term as president. He was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal.

Odette Masliyah née Ishayek was born in Baghdad, Iraq. She attended Shamash school learning Arabic, French, English and Hebrew. As hostilities towards Iraqi Jews heightened, she and her family were smuggled out of Iraq in 1969 via the Iraqi-Iranian mountain range, settled

in Israel, and eventually immigrated to Canada. After moving to Edmonton in 1977, Odette taught French and Hebrew part time. Subsequently, she joined the Edmonton Talmud Torah teaching Hebrew. Odette invigorated the Talmud Torah Junior Congregation and she is a frequent Torah reader during Shabbat services at Beth Shalom Synagogue. She served on the boards of the Beth Shalom Synagogue, Drop-In Centre, and the Edmonton Jewish Film Festival.

The Negev Gala supports the important work of the Jewish National Fund. Proceeds from this year's Negev will help to construct the Beit KKL JNF Canada House of Excellence in Sderot, Israel. This important project will provide educational enhancement opportunities for students living in the periphery of Israel. All donations will be matched dollar for dollar in Israel by Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael (KKL).

Registration for the 2020 Negev is now open and can be accessed online at JNFEDMONTON.CA

Scenes from Medicine Hat Jewish community

By Jeremy Appel

Barry Finkelman arrived in Medicine Hat as a young man in 1977.

Raised in Toronto, Finkelman moved to Alberta in 1975 looking for an opportunity to teach, initially settling into a job in Rimbey - a town 62 km northwest of Red Deer - before receiving an offer to work in the central office of the Hat's public School Division 76.

"It was a great lifestyle," he says of his decision to stick around the Hat. "It had everything that a small neighbourhood in Toronto would have without all the aggravation."

By the time he arrived, the small southeastern Alberta city's Jewish community was already on a "steady decline."

Finkelman got involved with the now-defunct Sons of Abraham synagogue about a year after moving to the Hat. The conservative congregation hosted High Holiday services and special community events for Hannukah and Passover. The community in the Hat wasn't the weekly Shabbat services type.

"It was already shrinking. A lot of the young people had left Medicine Hat and the elders were leaving to be with their families elsewhere," he said, specifically naming Calgary and Edmonton, as well as Vancouver and Winnipeg. "In general, people were looking for opportunity in the latter part of the last century, so people were moving to places where they could have a lifestyle that met their personal needs."

Finkelman served as Sons of Abraham's president from 1985 - 1997, which hadn't had a rabbi since before his time.

"We went through changes trying to keep the community focused (and) vibrant," he said. "We decided to move to the reform machzor, because it had more English. It met the needs of some of the younger people in the community at the time."

But by 1997 the board determined that maintaining a congregation wasn't viable. They sent their torah scrolls to the B'nai Tikvah temple in Calgary and a shul in Palm Springs that had a local connection. Finkelman joined B'nai Tikvah, where he's gone for holiday services since.

"After the synagogue closed, members of the Jewish community kept in touch with each other, but there were never any organized events," he said.

But in the past couple years, there's been an effort to rejuvenate the Hat's Jewish community among some younger members.

Sarah Tetrault, a 22-year-old who's lived in the Hat for 20 of them, is in the process of converting to Judaism.

They said they've always had a fascination with all things Jewish, particularly the concept of tikuun olam, or repairing the world.

"It just really resonated with me," says Tetrault. "None of the other religious paths that I explored had felt right. When I started researching it more, and looking into the practises and beliefs more, I realized that it just really lined up with what I believed. I liked the amount of ritual and everything about it."

"It felt like home."

They began the conversion process in the summer of 2019, taking online classes and getting in touch with a Calgary-based rabbi who prepared her for them.

"I didn't know there were any Jewish people in Medicine Hat at all," said Tetrault, who is also a member of the Hat's LGBTQ community, identifying as bisexual and non-binary. "In Medicine Hat, that's like being doubly ostracized."

They say their gender orientation made them feel alienated from organized religion writ large, but found reform Judaism very tolerant of LGBTQ people.

Tetrault found a double sense of community in the Hat that fall, attending a Hannukah party hosted by the Hat's reinvigorated Jewish community.

"My world's got a lot bigger," they observed.

Dina Jubrak was instrumental in bringing together the Hat's Jewish community, alongside Matthew Gourley, who has since converted to Christianity.

Jubrak, 31, hails from Kiryat Arba, a Jewish settlement just outside Hebron in the occupied West Bank. But she's not at all what you think of when you imagine a West Bank settler.

She was born in Russia's Jewish Autonomous Oblast to a Ukrainian Jewish father and Tartarian mother. Both are

Continued on page 6

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YEG Chevra Kadisha offers comfort & ritual

By Regan Treewater-Lipes, LJI reporter

The cycle of Jewish life is marked by gatherings that commemorate milestones including births, bar/bat mitzvot, weddings and deaths. Jewish tradition has been for communities to come together for celebrations and also to help one another in times of need. Specifically, the burial of the dead and the comforting of mourners are times when Jewish people, throughout the centuries, have organized themselves to reach out with aid and compassion. In Edmonton, the Chevra Kadisha, (Jewish Sacred Burial Society), has been providing the ritual of halachic burial preparation for members of the Jewish community for 114 years.

Edmonton's Jewish history dates back to 1893, when Abraham and Rebecca Cristall settled in what would one day become a modestly sized, but vibrant community. It was Abraham Cristall who established the Edmonton Hebrew Association in 1906, seeing to the needs of a handful of Edmonton's founding Jewish families. The Chevra Kadisha in its earliest form consisted of nine men affiliated with the Beth Israel Synagogue. The women's burial society was officially founded in 1919 but had been unofficially laying Jewish women to rest as early as 1914. The men's Chevra Kadisha, active since 1907, became incorporated in 1925, with its operational needs still seen to by selected men from the Edmonton Jewish Community.

In an article on the Chevra Kadisha's website, edmontonjewishcemetery.ca, archivist Debby Shoctor writes, "Early on, one of the founding members, Jacob Baltzan, formed an alliance with local funeral parlour owner John Connelly Sr., of Connelly-McKinley funeral directors to help with Jewish funerals by providing hearse and passenger cars, filing of forms, etc. This relationship has continued to the present day... In Edmonton's early days, it was a short distance from the heart of the Jewish community on 95 Street, down Rowland Road and back up the hill to the cemetery located at 7622-101 avenue. In the winter, horse-drawn hearses had to use wooden logs as brakes on the hills. Motorized hearses began being used in the 1930s."

Shoctor's words paint a nuanced picture of a much different time in local history. "The cemetery fence and gates were designed and made by Leib Agranov, who had previously worked as Blacksmith to the Czar," she writes. "He embellished the gates with beautiful fruits, birds, and flowers, which can still be seen today... Other embellishments at the cemetery later included the erection of a cenotaph after the Second World War in 1947 with the

names of the war dead inscribed onto it, and is used every Remembrance Day."

The inherent difficulties of operating and maintaining a Jewish burial society during the dawn of the twentieth century, can be easily overlooked in this modern era of convenience. Today, the Chevra Kadisha owns machinery for the purpose of digging. "It's certainly not like before when we would dig by hand: rain, shine, or snow," commented Bill Dolman, a twenty-year member of the group.

Today, the Edmonton Chevra Kadisha consists of 60 men, and women, from across Edmonton's diverse Jewish community. "We don't differentiate between someone who is Orthodox, Conservative, Reform or unaffiliated. We have always buried anyone who is Jewish. We have a system called 'next in line', so you can't reserve a spot. This means that you could be buried next to someone who is Ultra-Orthodox, or someone who is secular," the organization's Vice President Dave Marcus stated in a recent interview.

"The caveat to this is that if a spouse dies, G-d forbid, the other spouse can arrange for a double plot," added Dolman. The two even recall hearing about the death of a Jewish employee of a traveling carnival during its visit to Edmonton.

"He's buried in our cemetery," said Marcus, "Some phone calls were made and they found his family in the States to verify that he was Jewish... The biggest difference between our Chevra Kadisha and many others in North America is that we are all volunteers who run the society as a not-for-profit charity."

Marcus is careful to mention that service to one's fellow Jew at a time of such great vulnerability is a mitzvah, but that the work of the Chevra Kadisha is not suited for just anyone.

"It needs to be a calling," said Marcus. "Sometimes people come and eventually leave our group, and that is completely understandable. What we do is definitely not easy."

Marcus' own calling came gradually. "I was working on the southside, and sometimes, if they didn't have a minyan for a funeral service, one of the members would call me to step in," he explained. His contribution to Edmonton's Chevra Kadisha may have begun with the occasional minyan, but Marcus' dedication to preserving the dignity and ritual of Jewish traditions soon became an integral part of his life. Now, as Vice President, he works closely with Rhoda Friedman, the current Chevra Kadisha President, and the rest of the executive on the group's operations. The Chevra Kadisha goes to great lengths to



Edmonton Jewish Cemetery.

contact families of deceased Jews. "I've had occasion to track down rabbis and even a decedent's distant family member in Spain. Mind you, it was in the middle of the night here. But we always do whatever we can."

Many of the group's volunteers are older. Both Marcus and Dolman explain that this is because they believe that younger people should be spending time raising their families and focusing on life.

"The organization has been here for 114 years" said Marcus. "Well I intend on being here for at least 47 more years," interjected Dolman with a grin. "We haven't changed our minhag (customs)," continued Marcus. "Maybe some of our operations have been modernized - we now have a tractor - but our minhagim have not and will not change."

"And part of the Edmonton minhag is that everyone is treated equally, 100%, treated exactly the same. Once the spirit has left the body, Jewish values ensure that we treat it with the proper respect, that the levaya/funeral is conducted per halakha, and that you let the family go through its grieving process," added Dolman.

Edmonton's Chevra Kadisha is not affiliated with any one shul, any one community, or any one rabbi. They maintain relationships across the diverse spectrum of Edmonton's Jewish identities and work closely with all the rabbis in town. Both Marcus and Dolman have had occasion to facilitate at funeral ceremonies themselves in the past. Bill Dolman has even officiated at times.

The group serves a vital and necessary function within the Edmonton Jewish community, yet many know very little about them, what they do, or their history, until the unfortunate time that they should need to enlist their services. Both the Chevra Kadisha, and the current site of Edmonton's Jewish cemetery are steeped in history - a history of which all community members can, and should, be proud.

For more information visit edmontonjewishcemetery.ca.

Medicine Hat *Cont. from page 6*

staunchly secular communists, Jubrak says.

They moved in the early 1990s as part of a post-Communist wave of Russian immigration to Israel. Due to tax incentives that entice newcomers to move to the

settlements, the family ended up in Kiryat Arba. Jubrak converted to Judaism in her youth "to join the nation by choosing their religion."

She was travelling through North America after her military service and ran out of money in the Hat, so she got a job there. The plan was to stay for just a couple of months

in 2013, continue her journey down to Mexico and then return to Israel.

"It was just a stop in my adventure, a pause on my way that ended up being a long stop," Jubrak said.

She teaches Hebrew lessons in the Hat, with most of her students being Christians who want to read the Old Testament in its original language.

"I saw a gap initially within the Jewish community," Jubrak said. "I was astounded that with 63,000 people, there was no Jewish community, but then I learned there used to be one. So I figured, why the heck not try to find out where the people are and gather them? I wanted to celebrate the Jewish holidays away from home."

She's also heavily involved in the downtown Medicine Hat community, working as a volunteer co-ordinator for various not-for-profits in the neighbourhood, such as HIV Community Link and Pop Up Parks. Having served as a commander in the Israeli army, Jubrak says organizing people comes easy to her. "Wrangling people up and asking them to work on a common mission is something that I did in my previous life in a different aspect," she said.

Compared with Kiryat Arba (pop. 7,323), Medicine Hat is a pretty big city, but they share a mainstream fundamentalist religious culture. When she returns to visit Israel, she spends most of her time in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, where her family now resides.

The most major difference, Jubrak says, is not being in a perpetual state of warfare. For all its deep-seated conservatism, southern Alberta is a much more relaxed place to reside, which makes it easier to develop a counterculture and effect progressive change.

"The really big difference is the level of life stresser on average everyday here is lower, because there's no existential stress of, 'Will there be a war tonight?' It frees a lot of mental space to work on those awesome community projects, and to have the time and capacity to analyze and see how you can contribute," she said.

Jeremy Appel is a Local Journalism Initiative Reporter for Alberta Jewish News.

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A MESSAGE FROM YANNAI

Thank you to the Calgary Jewish community for the opportunity to serve as Federation president over the past three years. Writing this last message for the *Pomegranate* has given me a chance for some introspective thoughts about my time in this role.

I remember that upon accepting the position I thought long and hard about what I hoped to accomplish during my tenure. In my first speech, I announced to the community that my hope as Federation's president was to facilitate the goal of "more Jews doing more (Jewish) things together". Looking back at the amazing growth of both the quantity and quality of programs and services offered by the Federation and all of our community agencies and organizations over the past three years, I believe that we have met this goal.

I would like to add a sincere thank you to our Federation CEO, Adam Silver, and the entire Federation staff for making my job easy. As well, I wish to express appreciation to my fellow board members and all of our volunteers for their countless and selfless hours on behalf

of the community. I extend this thank you to all of the staff, leadership, and volunteers of all of our community organizations for being true partners in making our Calgary Jewish community so special. Of course I must also thank our generous UJA donors that make all we do possible.

When I took over the role of president, I also expressed another hope for my term (although this one was expressed mostly to my own self and a few close confidants) – that nothing would "blow up" on my watch, and that I would be able to return the community, with all of its institutions, in (at least) more or less the good health that they were in when initially handed over to me. Of course, I did not expect that with only a few months to go in my term, we would be facing a global pandemic that has proven to be so disruptive to our community.

Given that COVID-19 has certainly had a major impact on our community and institutions, there has been a specialness in the way we have come together to ensure the health and well-being of our community

members and institutions through an even greater spirit of innovation, hard work, and cooperation. As I write this message, it seems that we are just starting down the road towards the return to normalcy. I am confident that as a Jewish community, we will emerge even stronger and more united than we were before.

So once again, *Todah Rabah* for the opportunity to help build our wonderful and special community over the past few years. I wish you all a safe, healthy, and relaxing summer. I look forward to being able to gather together to reconnect in person soon.

B'Shalom,

Yannai Segal
 President
 Calgary Jewish Federation

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WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 12 • 7PM • VIA ZOOM

AGENDA

- President Remarks and CEO Remarks
- Approval of Minutes – AGM 2019
- Present and Approve Fiscal Year 2019 Audited Financial Statements
- Appointment of Auditors
- Election of Directors

Due to restrictions presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the AGM will be a business only meeting. A community event and awards night will be scheduled for a future date, likely as an online program.

To attend the AGM, please register at: jewishcalgary.org/agm, where you will also find the meeting documents. Inquiries should be directed by email to info@jewishcalgary.org.

AGM

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Edmonton Rabbis

Cont. from page 3

whether lengthier prayer services would pose an additional risk to worshippers. This is not a concern from Dr. Hinshaw's point of view as long as other requirements like physical distancing and hand sanitizing are in place, Rabbi Schwarzman said.

Rabbi Schwarzman's Silver Lining

Rabbi Schwarzman has increased his phone calls to congregants, beginning with the most vulnerable in the Beth Shalom congregation, including seniors.

"I've had some wonderful conversations," Rabbi Schwarzman told *AJN*. It's given me a chance, as the new Rabbi, to get to know people more deeply."

The Rabbi is also impressed by the actions of congregants who have volunteered to help others and are making their own efforts to keep in touch with one another.

"Beth Shalom congregants are feeling a strong urge to take care of one another," notes Rabbi Schwarzman. "It really is a great community."

Sadly, Rabbi Schwarzman lost his father in May. Because cross-border travel was not an option he was forced to grieve at a distance.

"I felt at a loss because I could not participate in the rituals Jews have done for thousands of years," he recalled.

Fortunately, Zoom shiva rooms provided some comfort, but the inability to honour his father in time-honoured ways proved difficult, said Rabbi Schwarzman.

Even amidst the grief, there was a silver lining for Beth Shalom's spiritual leader.

"It has helped me to understand more deeply the loss my congregants experience when they are at a distance."

Chabad Lubavitch Edmonton: Rabbi Ari Drelich

"We have been dragged into the 21st century kicking and screaming," said Rabbi Ari Drelich, Executive Director of Chabad Lubavitch of Edmonton, part of the worldwide Chasidic movement inspired by the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

Like other Edmonton Synagogues, Chabad very quickly organized a variety of Zoom classes with such offerings as Midrash, Chumash, Talmud and JLI classes six days a week.

"And it's the best coffee you can imagine, because you make it," Rabbi Drelich said.

He is proud of the fact that Chabad was able to distribute matzahs to Jewish residents in seniors' homes prior to Passover despite the pandemic, though visits to seniors' facilities, hospitals and prisons have been precluded by the pandemic.

Shabbos services on Friday nights and Saturday mornings have resumed at Chabad, though the "footprint" has changed. Participants are physically distanced, sitting at separate tables, and prayers are recited rather than sung, due to the increased likelihood of transmission of the virus while singing. Aliyahs to the Torah are done at a distance.

"We're doing everything by the book, excuse the pun," quips Rabbi Drelich. "It's business as unusual."

Under normal circumstances, Chabad conducts weekday morning minyans. In mid-June they resumed onsite weekday minyans on Torah reading days – Mondays and Thursdays. More recently they have expanded to onsite daily morning prayers.

A unique and timely offering for children is Camp Gan Israel's *CGI Out of the Box* summer camp. While the core camp experience is delivered virtually on Zoom, Chabad provides a box of materials that can be picked up in accordance with COVID protocols on each Friday prior to the new camp week. Counsellors guide campers with age-appropriate activities via Zoom. Senior campers occasionally require the assistance of an older sibling, parent or caregiver depending on the craft or activity.

Other out-of-the box features of this year's camp experience include a once weekly counselor drop by visits for young campers and twice weekly drop by visits for more senior campers. That way, campers can share their art and other projects while bonding with their counselors – from a safe physical distance and in accordance with health directives.

"We've found different ways to provide programming for the community," Rabbi Drelich said. "It is different busy, but it's busy."

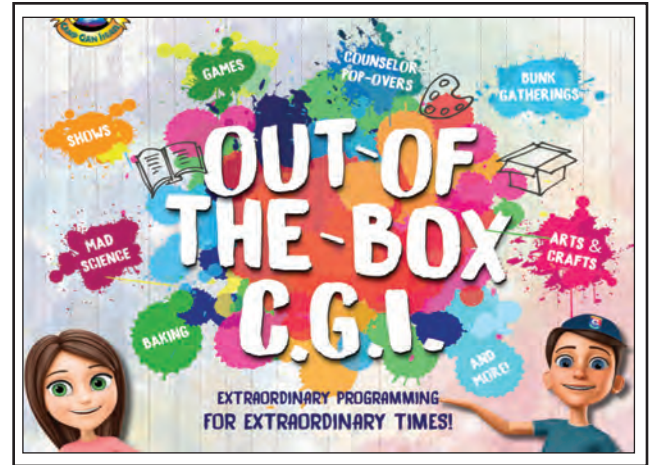
High Holidays at Chabad

The question "What will Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur look like at Chabad," elicited a chuckle from Rabbi Ari Drelich.

"We will be going to Yerushalayim because Moshiach will be here," he boldly proclaimed.

Ani ma'amin – I believe! But just in case this doesn't come to pass, Rabbi Drelich has thought out some practical potential solutions to holding onsite services.

"If we can't get everyone here, there is a parking lot and a park across the street," Rabbi Drelich said.



"Shofar is the key requirement," said Rabbi Drelich adding that no major decisions have yet been made about High Holidays at Chabad.

"We'll play it by ear...that's all we can do."

Rabbi Drelich's Silver Lining

"The silver lining in this cloud is that for the first time in decades the whole good-time industry has been shut down. People are focusing on what's important...those things we cherished, that families used to take for granted," said Rabbi Drelich, noting that people are eating healthier because they are together at home.

"Like Noah coming out of the ark, we are seeing a brand-new world...it was a reset for Noah and the world. We should reset and refocus."

Rabbi Drelich also sees hope in the way people are responding during those moments of joy that happen even in the midst of a pandemic. Although no weddings have been held at Chabad Lubavitch Edmonton since the beginning of the pandemic, Rabbi Drelich was moved by what took place following a wedding in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, where the worldwide Chabad movement is headquartered.

There, a couple recently married in the company of only a few people, an unusual situation in that community, but one necessitated by the pandemic.

One attendee sent a text to friends who, in turn, alerted others that the chupa had taken place and described the route that the couple was taking as they left their tiny simcha. The message went viral throughout the neighbourhood, prompting an enormous number of people to come out of their homes and, while distanced, to clap, dance, and make noise, some bearing hastily created signs with good wishes for the couple.

"It turned into a huge celebration," said Rabbi Drelich.

"Life doesn't stop."

Continued on page 11



The Jewish Federation of Edmonton is recruiting!

POSITION: Chief Executive Officer

ORGANIZATIONS: Jewish Federation of Edmonton, Alberta; Edmonton Jewish Community Charitable Foundation; and, the Jewish Community Centre of Edmonton

THE POSITION

The Chief Executive Officer provides the overall leadership to, and management of, the organization. This includes providing the overall strategic vision and related plans for the organization, developing and managing the fund development activities including annual campaigns and other related fund development initiatives, management of all human and financial resources including day to day operations, overseeing good governance practice and structures, and lay leadership development and management, and community relations and development.

Overall Responsibilities

The CEO is responsible for providing strategic direction to the Federation and its constituent organizations, including the Edmonton Jewish Community Charitable Foundation and Edmonton United Jewish Appeal.

Specific Responsibilities:

The CEO is responsible for the development of the financial resources of the organization, including the annual and long-term initiatives, to manage all aspects of the human (both professional and volunteers) and financial resources, and related allocations process, the marketing and communication strategy of the organization and to ensure excellent community and stakeholder relations. The CEO is also responsible to manage the day to day operations, programs and facilities.

The CEO will liaise with national Jewish organizations and Israeli organizations.

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JFSC fundraiser was a wow!

By Daniel Moser

New times call for new measures, and Jewish Family Services Calgary (JFSC) took the leap and made the appropriate changes to hold their Cowboys & Cocktails fundraiser to honour the memory of Sam Ousher Switzer z"l. In a normal year the fundraiser would have been a gala event, with members of the Jewish community gathering in cow-folk attire, sharing stories and schmoozing, and raising money for a great cause and worthy organization, but of course, this is no normal year. Faced with the option of having no event, or shifting online, JFSC Executive Director Roxanne Droppo made the decision to shift the event online, and it was the correct decision.

"June 11, 2020 is a day to add to the history books of JFSC," explains Droppo. "What changed was the concept of delivering an online fundraiser, which was a first for us."

With communal eating off the table, Droppo and her staff entered into an ingenious partnership with Gruman's Deli. Attendees were instructed to pick up their meals from Gruman's and enjoy them during the virtual events, just as they would in person. Enjoying the meal, the energetic emcee Larry Stanleigh, line dancing, and having a great time over video chat was a blast, and even though everyone was separated, the warm feelings of togetherness and unity were very strong.

Through a combination of Zoom and Facebook Live, friends and family were able to share stories and memories of Sam Switzer, whose philanthropy and kindness shone through the entire event. There was virtual line dancing, which was a hoot, as well as raffles and wild west challenges galore.

The evening's entertainment was provided by country music star George Canyon, who serenaded the attendees with his baritone voice and toe-tapping rhythms. It was a unique experience, a live show, in the comfort of your own home.

The night was a perfect remembrance of Sam, with attendees joining in virtual l'chaims with the signature cocktail of the evening, the Sam Spritzer Quarantini.

When something was impressive Sam would often "wow" with a sense of approval and the 2020 Cowboys & Cocktails fundraiser embodied everything that was implied by the event's catchphrase, "#ItsAWowJFSC."

Yes, some new ideas, and delivery methods had to be implemented, but as Droppo explains, the foundation remained the same. "What did not change, is the incredible support we receive from our donors and community which allows us to enrich the lives of vulnerable Calgarians and strengthen communities. Every day, I am grateful to be part of an organization and community that is committed to changing the world."

The evening was a fun and memorable event, and will surely be used as a template for other community organizations hoping to continue with their event calendar in some capacity. Though, hopefully next year, we will all be in the same room, to give a hearty l'chaim to the fantastic work that Jewish Family Services Calgary is responsible for.

Sam Switzer z"l was born on Feb 25, 1926 and lived everyday a life of building and giving until June 20, 2018. Sam was blessed with six children: Darlene (Bill), Lorne



JFSC Cowboys & Cocktails

(Nadine), Susan, Ronald (Helmi), John (Christine) and Mark (Martin.) He was predeceased by spouses Aneta Switzer and Betty Switzer. May his memory be a blessing.

For more information about JFSC visit jfsc.org or call 403-287-3510.

JFSC Virtual Fundraiser

Thank You!

Hats off to y'all! It Was A WOW!

Thank you to our generous supporters of Cowboys & Cocktails – a virtual event to honour the memory of Sam Ousher Switzer z"l.

The event was a success, raising over \$200,000 to support programs for vulnerable members of our community!

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from the Sources **S** Overstaying your welcome

by Eliezer Segal

The Talmud tells of a visit by Rav Huna bar Nathan to the home of Rav Nahman bar Isaac. During his visit, the guest did a number of things that dismayed his hosts. For instance, when offered an honourable seat at dinner, he accepted it immediately without the self-effacing refusals that were considered the appropriate etiquette for such offers.

When asked afterwards to explain his apparent violations of the norms of civility, Rav Huna was able to cite reasons or proof-texts to justify each one. As regards his immediate acceptance of his seat he cited a rabbinic tradition that "You should do whatever the master of the house tells you to do - except leave!"

As Rashi remarked, a version of that tradition is found in the rabbinic treatise *Derekh Eretz Rabbah*, an ancient guide to social etiquette. In that work, the advice about following the host's directives was attached to an anecdote about guests who dropped in on Simeon ben Antipatros. When Simeon insisted that they partake of food and drink, they excused themselves by taking a vow in the name of the Torah not to eat anything. Eventually, however, they relented - and the host punished them with lashes for violating their vow.

The report of Simeon's cruel treatment of the visitors provoked indignation among the sages who were unaware of the full circumstances of the affair. Rabbi Joshua volunteered to investigate. Arriving at the scene, he exchanged polite greetings with Simeon ben Antipatros, who offered him lodging. Rabbi Joshua discerned no sign of the cruelty that had been imputed to his host. As he was making his departure, upset that he had failed in his mission, he turned and asked Simeon directly why he had been treated with gracious hospitality whereas the previous visitors had been flogged. The host explained that they had desecrated a vow made in the name of the Torah, citing a tradition of the sages that this grave transgression is punishable by lashes. Rabbi Joshua assented vigorously that they deserved to be punished additionally for violating the rabbis' directives! (According to one manuscript, however, Rabbi Joshua imposed lashes on the host.)

Now this text is extremely puzzling. How does the story serve as an illustration of the need to obey the host's instructions? After all, the guests who accepted the invitation to eat and drink were ultimately whipped!

Several commentators struggled to resolve the difficulties. For example, Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Heller suggested plausibly that what had induced the guests to make the troublesome vow was their determination to resist Simeon's urgings; but they could have avoided their predicament altogether had they simply consented from the outset to partake of the offered food.

The attention of more recent commentators has focused principally on a different aspect of Rav Huna bar Nathan's statement, namely the clause about ignoring a host's command to leave. This stipulation seems irrelevant to the context, and its meaning is obscure. Rabbi Samuel Edels (Maharsha) attested that he had seen a carefully edited text of the Talmud in which the problematic words were deleted and noted that Rashi says nothing about them. He agreed that this makes sense. After all, "is it really reasonable to command a person to remain in a house in defiance of the master's objections?" Indeed, the phrase is missing from almost all the Talmud manuscripts and is not mentioned or discussed by any of the medieval commentators.

Maharsha proposed that the problematic words might be interpreted in the sense of "Do whatever the master of the house tells you, for as long as you are dwelling with him you are obliged to submit to his instructions. However, as soon as he tells you to leave, he is no longer considered your host and you are no longer required to listen to him."

Rabbi Joel Sirkes offered a cogent interpretation of Rav Huna's advice, as setting a limit to the obedience expected from a guest: As long as it is an activity that is performed in the house, then it is reasonable, but to send a guest to conduct one's business in the marketplace would be excessive and demeaning. Other authorities linked it to a passage elsewhere in the Talmud where it stipulates that a guest should remain in his lodging until the innkeeper actually resorts to violence or starts throwing out the

guest's clothing.

A remarkable insight by Rabbi Judah Leib Alter in his *Sefat Emet* connected the statement to the tragic legend of Kamsha and Bar Kamsha in which the ejection of an unwanted guest from a banquet set off a chain of events that degenerated into the destruction of the Second Temple. Originally the rabbis taught that guests should leave at the host's insistence, but this was emended in the wake of that catastrophe, and this gave rise to a revision of the Talmud text so as to advise against leaving a social gathering.

Some teachers, like Rabbis Jacob Reischer and Elijah de Vidas, interpreted the statement as a parable in which the "master of the house" symbolizes the Almighty. Accordingly, you ought to obey him - except where he seems to be rejecting you altogether. As de Vidas stresses, in spite of apparent declarations to the contrary, the Master really desires that even "irredeemable" sinners repent and strive to remain in the house of the Lord.

Rabbi Yom Tov Lipmann Heller explained the words "except leave" as a witticism intended to lighten the tone of the confrontation between Rav Huna and his questioners by playfully suggesting that, had Rav Huna not seated himself immediately, he would have been expelled. In modern Hebrew the expression has taken on the status of a witty rejoinder to requests from hosts, analogous to such English catchphrases as "You can call me anything, but don't call me late for dinner."

And now that I've said my piece, I think that I'll just make like a tree and - well, you can probably figure out the next step.

Eliezer Segal is a Local Journalism Initiative columnist for Alberta Jewish News.

'From the Sources' by Eliezer Segal is sponsored by the Zeisler Families of Edmonton, Calgary and New York City

How normal was the old normal?

By Rabbi Gila Caine

Before counting down the days to our return to "normal," we should ask: How normal was the normal?

From "Blade Runner" to "Upload", our culture is filled with dystopian storylines in which we go from maintaining an unhealthy status quo, to descending into apocalypse. Even much of our activist sci-fi and fantasy churn out unending gloom and doom fiction, and while some of it is quite wonderfully written, it only seems to send us down into a paralysis of frightened inaction. But, a few days ago I happened to listen to the "Radical Imagination" podcast and was lucky enough to hear the episode titled: *Visionary fiction*.

The conversation in the podcast suggested to us that when we try to change the social, cultural, economic,

religious, environmental structures and behaviours in our society, it is better if we advocate for that by creating believable worlds for people to imagine themselves in. We can only work towards that which we can imagine, and if we want to make our world a more just and kind world, we need to create for ourselves images and imaginations of what those alternative realities might look like.

This is one reason why we started a *Shemittah* study group at Temple Beth Ora. *Shemittah* is the ancient Jewish/Hebrew practice of letting the land rest and releasing debt once in seven years, and some of us are very curious about this practice in our community. Traditionally *Shemittah* was only practiced in Eretz Yisrael, but over the past decade many Jews around North America and other parts of the world have found it to be an inspiring religious and environmental tool. Some of its power lies exactly in that it can be framed as a form of "Visionary Fiction", or better still "Visionary Practice."

When we study the laws of *Shemittah* we begin creating in our minds eye, a society that works in cycles of seven years, constantly aware of the fact that land never actually belongs to private people, but always to Adonai, and to itself. It teaches us also that even if we are fortunate

enough to lend money to others, they themselves don't actually belong to us, we learn there is a point at which human dignity is more important than our current financial rules.

Shemittah is not nihilism, it is rather an experiment of imagining what would happen if we took the ideals of Shabbat and spread those over the whole world for a full year. It is a trial in envisioning a less greedy and more dignified form of human existence, and this thought experiment is at least 2,500 years old.

For much too long the "Normal" has not been so normal, and our forced time of slowing down now is an opportunity to explore what other visions of reality are out there. You are more than welcome to join our study group or create visionary groups in your own kehillot. We have been given a precious gift now, of being able to create a different human future and Earth future. Let's not waste that gift.

Rabbi Gila Caine is Rabbi at the Temple Beth Ora (TBO) - Edmonton's Reform Jewish congregation. TBO's "Shabbat of the Land" sessions are held, over Zoom, every Tue. at 8pm. Contact office@templebethora.org for more details.



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Temple Beth Ora: Rabbi Gila Caine

"We knew immediately that we needed to go online...mamash quickly," recalled Rabbi Gila Caine of the early days of the COVID-19 shutdown. Temple Beth Ora – Edmonton's only Reform Synagogue and an affiliate of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) – conducted its first post-shutdown Friday evening Kabbalat Shabbat service via Zoom and continues to offer online Kabbalat Shabbat and Shabbat morning services.

"We had to find a way to still be a kehilla," says Rabbi Caine. "We didn't want anyone to be alone."

While Rabbi Caine felt uneasy at reciting the Kaddish via Zoom, some congregants felt strongly that it must be done. A good conversation ensued which led to a solution that Rabbi Caine refers to as a *Kaddish Shinui* – a Kaddish with a difference. Sometimes an alternative prayer is recited; other times, she shifts the placement of the Kaddish prayer within the service.

Holiday services as well as Temple Beth Ora classes and programs were moved online with memorable offerings including a congregational Second Night Passover Seder and a Canada-wide Reform Tikkun Leil Shavuot study session.

Other online programs include the Temple's Conversion Class, Torah Study, a recent series on Shmita (sabbatical year) – with an emphasis on what that tradition means in the Diaspora – and a talk by a New York-based artist who created a Torah in which the genders of biblical characters are switched.

Additional Zoom highlights have included a Kabbalat Shabbat service held jointly with Calgary's Temple B'nai Tikvah and another prayer service held jointly with a congregation in Israel.

A unique lifecycle event was recently officiated by Rabbi Caine when blessings were recited for a Temple Beth Ora congregant who was about to give birth. A circle of local and international family and friends gathered via Zoom to bless the mother-to-be who later gave birth to a healthy baby girl.

The teachers at Temple Beth Ora's Hebrew school responded quickly to their students' educational needs by producing a couple of festive online magazines that featured games, activities and memories. The Pesach issue was sent to the entire congregation while the Yom Ha'atzmaut/Shavuot issue, sent to students and their families, featured a memory box of the year they had shared. The magazines included links to music, recipes and games.

At the time she was interviewed for this article, Rabbi Caine was in the midst of planning her congregation's first outdoor Shabbat playdate – a child and family friendly gathering by the river with physical distancing measures in place. Based on the success of that program, she said outdoor Kabbalat Shabbat and Shabbat morning services would be considered.

Temple Beth Ora continues Zoom services for the time being, which allows for a minyan despite COVID. Rabbi Caine enjoys seeing the faces of her congregants and maintaining a sense of community, an online experience that she characterizes as surprisingly intimate.

High Holidays at Temple Beth Ora

Temple Beth Ora is planning for three potential Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur scenarios: Onsite services, virtual services via livestreaming, or a combination of the two, with some individuals leading the service onsite while most congregants tune in to the livestream.

The final choice will depend on COVID-19. Rabbi Caine, who is Israeli, says that the uncertainty is a state that she knows well, given the frequent periods of uncertainty that are characteristic of Israeli life.

"It feels very familiar, not being able to plan in advance. Whatever happens, we will deal with it."

She has been in contact with other Reform congregations across Canada on the topic of planning for the High Holidays.

"We are learning from each other, even what questions to ask."

Rabbi Caine's Silver Lining

"We've been able to main-tain our youth group on Zoom. I'm happy with that," Rabbi Caine said, expressing pride in the way the younger generation has "risen up and taken more responsibility and leadership."

The comfort of the next generation with technology has been a catalyst to increased participation by some youth who are assisting other congregants who need help learning how to use the technology that is keeping the congregation together. Some young congregants are even stepping up for the first time to lead Zoom services.

Rabbi Caine is also pleased that a by-product of the pandemic has been the appetite for additional prayer services. While Temple Beth Ora typically offers services on Friday evenings and every other Shabbat morning, they have been adding additional Shabbat morning services. Though the congregation does not usually offer weekday prayer services, they have begun Tuesday and Thursday morning Shacharit Zoom services that include study of such topics as Tehilim (Psalms) and the Book of Job.

Each of Edmonton's Rabbis continues to perform lifecycle ceremonies for congregants and community members. Some simchas scheduled prior to the pandemic have been postponed until it is safer to come together in greater numbers while some weddings, b'nai mitzvah, baby namings and unveilings have been held with small numbers of family and friends in attendance. Some families are choosing to use Zoom or other online platforms so as to include family and friends from near and far.

Time bound lifecycle events including Brises have been conducted by Edmonton rabbis. In some cases, just the Mohel and immediate family have gathered while their Rabbi officiates via Zoom.

Sunday mornings at Or Shalom



Sara and India Cook celebrated Yom Haatzmaut at Or Shalom. A "COVID-friendly" version of Or Shalom Jewish Sunday school will begin this September. To register your child, please contact Francie Nobleman or the TBO office at: orshalomschool@gmail.com

The timing of lifecycle events, the circumstances under which they are conducted, and the number of people attending in person is currently decided on a case by case basis, with each Edmonton Rabbi balancing the needs and wishes of the families with their congregational practices and current health guidelines.

Edmonton Chevra Kadisha

In light of the Coronavirus, Edmonton's Chevra Kadisha (burial society) has instituted additional precautions and upgraded PPE in order to protect the health of volunteers who perform Tahara (ritual cleansing of the deceased) prior to burials.

Jewish funerals in Edmonton have been held privately at graveside during the course of the pandemic with additional safety measures to protect mourners, officiating Rabbis and Chevra Kadisha volunteers.

While the province currently allows up to 100 people at funerals, the Chevra Kadisha continues to proceed with caution, permitting no more than 15 individuals to attend. Physical distancing measures are strictly enforced."

The pandemic continues to morph and change, with some health experts warning of a second wave even before the first one has ebbed. Therefore, everything you have read here comes with a caveat. As we have so often heard the politicians and medical officers say, the situation is fluid. By the time you read these words, plans will most certainly have morphed and changed. For current, up-to-date information please check the various Synagogue websites and bulletins or give them a call. One thing is certain...they will be thrilled to hear from you!

Maxine Fischbein is a Local Journalism Initiative reporter.



A generous donation paid for upgrades to the Talmud Torah basketball court.

Generous Donors Enhance Talmud Torah School!

By Edmonton Talmud Torah Society Board

Edmonton Talmud Torah's Society Board is excited to announce two projects that have come to fruition, due to some very generous donors.

As you may have noticed, leading up to the front doors of the school there are new heavy-duty planters. Each spring we plan to fill them with beautiful plants that will enhance the school entrance. In addition, these planters provide an increased level of security at the front entrance. Our deepest gratitude to Debbie Anson and her family for financially supporting this initiative. Debbie's husband, Howard z"l, was a builder of the current school and, with this donation, the Anson family is enriching both the security of our students and the beauty of their environment – a fitting tribute to Howard's legacy.

In addition, thanks to the initiative and generosity of

Natalie and Ken Soroka, who teamed up with the Talmud Torah Parents' Auxiliary, our basketball court has been given a much-needed upgrade. Along with the new asphalt, court lines and backboards were painted, and hoops and nets will be replaced. New basketballs with our school logo have also been secured! Natalie and Ken are long time volunteers of the Society, Parents' Auxiliary and Early Learning Centre, and continue to be strong supporters of the school.

Lastly, a former Edmonton Talmud Torah family, the Goldsmans, donated a large art collection to our Early Learning Centre. Those beautiful pieces were sold at the ELC's annual Channukah auction. The funds raised went to enhance our programming and enriching the lives of our littlest Jewish community members. Thank you to Alvin and Debbie Goldsman for their very generous gift.

We wish to thank all of our donors and volunteers who continue to contribute their time and efforts to our school community. Your donation to Talmud Torah will help ensure our children and grandchildren have a home where Jewish values and Jewish identity thrive.

Your support is needed and appreciated during these challenging times, please go to www.talmudtorahsociety.com to donate today! Every little bit helps.

NOTICE

The Annual General Meeting of the Edmonton Talmud Torah Society shall be held through ZOOM on Wednesday, September 9, 2020, commencing at 7 pm MT.

The Agenda for the Meeting shall include the following:

1. President's Report
2. Principal's Report
3. Treasurer's Report
4. Bylaw Amendments
5. Election of Board Members
6. New Business

Any parent or guardian of a child who attends the school or any person 18 years of age or older and who has contributed or on whose behalf a contribution was made to the United Jewish Appeal or Edmonton Talmud Torah Society is eligible to vote at the meeting. A person is not eligible to be elected if they are engaged as an employee of the Edmonton Talmud Torah Society or if they have an outstanding debt or obligation to the Edmonton Talmud Torah Society, and has not put in place an approved payment proposal.

Any person who is eligible to run for the Board must cause the Nomination form to be properly completed and delivered to the Secretary not later than one week prior to the Annual General Meeting. Nomination forms may be obtained from the Society office by calling (780) 481-3377 or through email to Natalie Soroka at natalie.soroka@partner.epsb.ca You can also email nomination forms to this email address as well.

COVID-19 update from the Calgary Chevra Kadisha

To the Calgary Jewish Community,

As we continue to make our way through this pandemic with an end hopefully soon to come, we pray that everyone in the community is keeping safe and well.

Our governments and health authorities are slowly beginning to ease restrictions, and the Chevra Kadisha is also adjusting our practices. Our focus remains on following mourning practices as best as possible while keeping the health risk to a minimum.

Physical/social distancing remains a key to holding the virus in check. Thus, funeral and unveiling services will continue to be at graveside only and the Chapel will remain closed to the public. We ask that families restrict those in attendance at services to 20 people. Those attending a service will be required to wear a mask for their own protection, and if they wish to participate in the mitzvah of burial, are asked to wear gloves when using

shovels. As before, anyone feeling unwell should refrain from attending a service. Bereaved families are encouraged to consider the use of virtual platforms such as ZOOM to enable additional family and friends to participate in funerals.

Announcements of funerals and unveilings will continue to remind the community that, until further notice, to comply with restrictions on gatherings, all services will remain "private services". While we are aware that it is difficult to bury a loved one without the additional support of extended family and friends, our adherence to these protocols allows us to report that there have been no COVID-19 related cases arising from our gatherings.

We will still be meeting with bereaved families "virtually" whenever possible through video links or over the telephone. We continue to advise families that in

order to proceed with funerals promptly, they not wait for anyone who may be required to self-quarantine.

Even though COVID restrictions are slowly being relaxed, the arrival of warmer weather provides the opportunity for mourning families to consider outdoor physically-distanced shiva minyanim as a way to gather to say Kaddish and provide consolation.

We will continue to adjust our practices to stay in line with guidelines recommended by our governing authorities. However should circumstances change adversely, we are aware we may be required to revert to "lockdown" practices again.

We wish everyone good health, and may we soon see an end to this crisis. We salute all those who continue to serve the well-being of our community during these challenging times.

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