

וְנִשְׁמַרְתֶּם מְאֹד לְנַפְשֵׁיכֶם - And you shall guard your lives very well*Deuteronomy 4:15*

These extraordinary times call upon us to take extraordinary measures.

For several weeks, we have been seeking responsible and creative ways to ensure that our Shuls, the cornerstones of our communities, could continue to function as the anchors of Jewish life. Yet, it is now clear from the Government's latest guidance, that congregational activity of any kind, including those of religious communities, poses a significant danger to the vulnerable and will serve to hasten the spread of the virus.

With this in mind, our Torah obligation to protect the sanctity of life transcends all other considerations. Therefore, with much pain and with the heaviest of hearts, in consultation with the Dayanim of the London Beit Din, I have concluded that we have a Halachic imperative to suspend all activity at all of our Synagogues until further notice. This includes on-site and off-site prayer services, educational, cultural and social meetings and activities for all ages. The Dayanim and I will now be praying all weekday, Shabbat and YomTov services by ourselves at home.

This inevitably raises many questions about how we sustain Jewish communal life, particularly with Pesach approaching. Further specific guidance will follow soon. For now, let us comfort the bereaved and pray for the recovery of the sick. Let us guarantee that the physical distance that this virus creates between us will be bridged through compassion and kindness. And let us all resolve to play our part in overcoming this pandemic by carefully following medical advice and public health guidelines.

May אב הרחמים, our Merciful Father in Heaven, shower His mercy upon all of human kind.

**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

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