



A Message From the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah of America to Rabbonim, Shlita

13 Tishrei 5781

L'chvod HaRabbonim Hachashuvim, Shlita:

As we are all aware, the COVID-19 virus, which had been largely dormant for several months in many of our communities, has been *chozeir v'nei'or*, returning once again and spreading among many members of our communities. While it appears that in most cases the symptoms of the virus are relatively mild, there have also been some extremely serious cases as a result of this “new round” of COVID-19, *Rachmana litzlan*.

Needless to say, **it is incumbent upon all of us to exercise great care to minimize any risk of exposure to, or transmission of, the virus.** This is the mandate of the *Torah Hakedoshah's* commands of “*Vo'chai bohem,*” and “*V'nishmartem me'od l'nafshoseichem.*”

It is also important to recognize that keeping the infection rate down in our communities will, with Hashem's help, help ensure that our *yeshivos, botei medroshim* and neighborhood businesses will remain open. There is a real threat that our *mosdos* will need to be closed, *chas v'shalom*, if infection rates in our community remain high, and **we must do all in our power to avoid such disaster.**

As is well known, medical experts have identified a number of important steps people should take to protect themselves and those with whom they come into contact from COVID-19: **social distancing, face covering, hand washing, special precautions for the elderly and for those with pre-existing medical conditions, and staying at home when experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.** Rabbonim should institute appropriate practices and procedures to protect their *kehillos* from the spread of this terrible virus.

In particular, **as we approach the Yom Tov of Sukkos,** it is important that such practices and procedures be implemented. Upon consultation with medical experts, we respectfully offer the following suggestions for the consideration of Rabbonim:

1. **Large gatherings** – whether *Chol Hamoed* outings for children, or *Simchas Bais Hashoeivah* celebrations, or gatherings for leisure or entertainment – **should be avoided.**
2. Care should be taken regarding **visitors for Yom Tov who come from places where there are significant levels of infection.** If such visitors have not tested negative prior to their arrival for Yom Tov, consideration should be given to appropriate steps that would isolate them from others who may be vulnerable to



COVID-19. This policy is for local Rabbonim to establish, and should be respected by all such guests.

3. **The traditional format of *hakafos*, especially on Simchas Torah, requires adjustment this year.** Rabbonim should consider taking the following steps:
- a. making each *hakafah* of short duration;
 - b. limiting the number of people participating in each *hakafah*, possibly by breaking up the *minyan* into smaller groups in different locations or at different times;
 - c. alternatively, having only those people holding the *sifrei Torah* circle the bimah – even if there is only one such person – with the rest of the *kehillah* dancing in place at their seats; and
 - d. that the elderly and those with medical conditions should avoid dancing.

Rabbonim will no doubt use the occasion of Yom Tov to sensitize their *kehillas* to the current *matzav* and to the importance of exercising extreme caution to minimize risk of infection; as well as **to convey to their *kehillas* that we are living through an *eis tzara l'Yaakov***, which requires that we do teshuvah and rededicate ourselves to the three pillars on which the world stands: *Torah, avodah, and gemilas chasadim*.

May we all draw *chizuk* as we sit in *HaKodosh Boruch Hu's* protective *tzila d'meheimanusa*. This is the time of year when our *tefillah* of *ufros aleinu sukas rachamim v'chayim v'sholom* carries special power.

Secure in the knowledge that Hashem, our Protector, is watching over us in these difficult times, may we gain a special new dimension of appreciation for *zman simchaseinu*.

A gutin Yom Tov, and birkas Piska Tava to all.

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