



CONGREGATION
BETH ISRAEL

751 SAN JUAN BOULEVARD • BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON 98229

August 5, 2020
15th Av 5780

Dear Congregation Beth Israel,

Over the past several months, the Covid-19 Task Force, the Ritual Committee, and the clergy team have been meeting regularly to discuss the synagogue's re-opening probabilities, strategies, and, most significantly, the High Holy Days. As you are all aware, Washington State and Whatcom County, in particular, are still experiencing spikes in Covid-19 cases. Recently, Governor Inslee announced an update to the Safe Start plan for reopening the state. Some of the new measures aim to have social gatherings take place less often, with fewer people, and last for shorter amounts of time.

Given the current challenges and situation, we have all decided that this year, **our High Holy Day services will take place virtually**. This decision was not an easy one. It took great consideration, but in the end, we were all unanimous in the belief that it is the right choice to make at this time. While it pains us to not be together in person during our most sacred and holy time of the year, we strongly believe that the health and safety of all of our members and guests who join us is of the utmost importance. We are guided by the Jewish value of *pikuah nefesh*, saving a life. By gathering virtually, this ensures that we are taking every precaution to safeguard all who call Beth Israel their spiritual home.

We are hopeful that you will understand and support this decision to go virtual for the High Holy Days.

We should be grateful that we are currently living in a time where the technology we have at our disposal allows us to interact and see one another despite our social distancing. Nothing quite compares to singing and worshipping in a packed sanctuary and breaking fast together in the social hall, but we will still be together, albeit virtually. Please let us know if you have any technical challenges and we will do our best to address them.

At the same time, we are optimistic that some of our gatherings during the High Holy Day season can still be in person. For instance, we believe that Tashlich at Lake Padden and the Memorial Service at Beth Israel Cemetery can still happen, so long as we all take necessary precautions, such as wearing masks and keeping our distance from others. The former will allow us to hear the sound of the shofar in person and the latter will give us the opportunity to say Kaddish with others nearby. We are also contemplating some time during the ten Days of Awe when congregants can sign up for brief time slots to have a meaningful experience in front of the open ark, as individuals or as a family unit. It is unclear at this time whether there will be a sukkah this year.

During this time of great uncertainty, we respectfully ask for your steadfast support and involvement. We look forward to sending you updates about the High Holy Day season.

Wishing everyone good health as we approach the new year,

Rabbi Joshua Samuels
Andrea Shupack, Cantorial Soloist
Miriam Schwartz, President
Ritual Committee:

Steve Ban, Roby Blecker, Miriam Davids, Dan Ohms, Geraldine Reitz, Rena Ziegler