

Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury River Valley
Virtual Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday March 12th, 2020 7:30pm

In attendance: Judy Goldberg, Rabbi Breindel, Shoni Aronovich, Scott Newman, Susan Tohn, Cynthia Myersburg, Jocylyn Bailin, Jim Billings, Mike Joachim, Marcos Szydlo, John Harper, Aaron Friedman, Debbie Glass, Steve Probst, Marla Lewitus, Justin Lewitus, Laurie Margolies, Judy Sletzing, Jesse Wertheimer, Lizza Sandoe, Michael Brown, Judy Goldberg,

Welcome: Judy Goldberg

Thanks for your patience with this new format for our Board meeting!

Rabbi D'var: Rabbi Breindel

We have agency! We cannot and must not rely on miracles or expect G-d to save us. We have the ability and the obligation to work together to think deeply, to make decisions, even – or perhaps especially – difficult ones. The decisions we make matter; life is precious and we must guard it carefully. Let us act for the good of our community, both here and everywhere.

Approval of Minutes: Jocylyn Bailin

- **Motion:** To approve minutes from 2/13/20 Board meeting. ***Motion passed unanimously.***

Covid-19 and Beth El: group discussion facilitated by Judy Goldberg

It is increasingly clear that the new Coronavirus, Covid-19, is becoming a greater threat to our health and jobs. The information is changing rapidly, sometimes from hour to hour. The last 48 hours the clergy, staff, and lay leadership have been consumed with decision-making on how best to respond. We met for two hours on Wednesday and another two hours today; the decisions we made on Wednesday were changed today. Tomorrow will most likely bring new changes and new decisions to be made. Here is where we stand now (some, but not all, of this information was emailed to the congregation this afternoon):

- MWFMP suspended indefinitely
- No food will be served at Beth El. If you bring food in, please do not share it.
- The building will be closed as of Sunday March 15th. All BEInSpirED programs and adult education programs will be conducted remotely via Zoom.
- Torah study will be conducted via Zoom.
- The March 20th Shabbat Rinah will be livestreamed to the congregation.
- Services Friday evening and Saturday morning will be broadcast on livestream, with Rabbi Josh and Lorel officiating. Each week our Friday evening and Shabbat morning services will be held with a minyan of ten people. They will be livestreamed, led by our clergy. If you wish to be part of the minyan for any service, please sign up. We will ensure a fair system of rotating attendance every week with a priority to Torah readers and those saying kaddish. The livestream can be accessed on our webpage. We encourage all congregants to pray, using your new copy of V'taher Libenu, via livestream on Shabbat.

- The adult b'nei mitzvah scheduled for this Shabbat (March 14) will be held with as small of a group as possible – RJB, Lorel, the b'nei mitzvah students and about 15 guests. Everyone will sit at a minimum of six feet apart and everyone will maintain distance as much as possible. It is important to the students to complete this lifecycle event.

Judy: This is the plan as it currently stands. As new information becomes available, we can change our plan. We felt it was important to get information out to the community today – we couldn't wait for the Board to make these initial decisions. You as the Board need to understand and support this or make different decisions.

RJB: A minyan of 10 is well below the threshold set by any leadership – federal, state, local – that we are seeing (current guidelines are 50). If anyone, anywhere decides that 10 is too many to be together we will shut down immediately. If you hear anything to this effect please, *please* contact me, Beth, and Judy immediately.

Shoni: we are fortunately in a very good position, from a technical standpoint, to shift everything online (livestream already in place, Ed programming already online, etc.).

Board/clergy/staff discussion:

Cynthia: I am in the health arena and am seeing discussions and hearing information that is downright frightening in scope. This virus is extremely contagious and potentially very deadly. We absolutely should not be encouraging people to gather in any numbers whatsoever. Proactive behavior is better than reactive behavior.

Many other comments about minyan, timelines, guidelines, etc.

Motion: to support the proposals and guidelines as outlined above. ***Motion failed***

Continued Board/Clergy/Staff discussion

- Minyan is not a religious obligation; in fact, it is irrelevant for any ritual purpose, especially if there is a danger to life. Concern is that people who are not comfortable coming together will do so because they feel they should.
- The goal of self-isolating is to reduce vectors. Any grouping of people who might otherwise not come together increases the vectors. If we bring people together from diverse communities then we are contributing to the spread.
- The reason to allow minyan is for those for whom it is important to be in community, whether for mourning, for mental health, for healing, etc. We need to remind ourselves that even in difficult times we continue.
- We can do most via technology, leave some flexibility for the sake of humanity
- We should not be taking chances with anyone's children, anyone's grandparents, anyone who is immunocompromised or has health issues. Any size gathering increases these chances.
- This is a temporary shutdown; it is not a forever decision. We do not want our sacred community to be a flash point for this pandemic.
- We are truly empathetic to the circumstances for our b'nei mitzvah group. This is an incredibly painful decision for all of us. Can it be held via Zoom? Can it be rescheduled?
- Any event that can be rescheduled should. Any event where technology can replace in-person can go ahead.
- Our obligation is to save lives. We need to set examples and create opportunities for our own and the wider community.

RJB question: This decision has larger implications beyond just our religious observances. Should even an in-person meeting between 3-4 people not be allowed? Should we close the building completely? Should we close the office?

More Continued Board/Clergy/Staff discussion

Nobody knows what level of risk is too much, what is safe/unsafe

The experience of not meeting up in person will not be the same. We understand this and we will survive this.

Motion: Beth El will be closed to all but clergy and staff and effective immediately. Staff will self-police. **Motion approved unanimously on a roll-call vote.**

Meeting adjourned 9:25pm

Respectfully submitted,

Jocelyn Bailin

Clerk, Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury River Valley