

An Open Letter from Dr. Daniel Berman and Rabbi Dr. Aaron Glatt

The Corona Virus causes Covid-19, a very dangerous and contagious infection, far more dangerous and contagious than the flu (influenza). Not only individuals with pre-existing conditions are vulnerable. Anyone over age fifty, although robust and healthy, is vulnerable to potentially life-threatening complications. Additionally, as the Corona Virus continues *r”l* to (over)tax our healthcare system, we face the catastrophic prospect of not being able to provide life-saving treatment. This shortage would affect all patients with all serious conditions, not only those infected with the virus. The following sentence is difficult to fathom because no one alive today has ever experienced anything of this sort. Nonetheless, it is abundantly clear: We are currently confronted by communal *sakonas nefoshos* (danger to life) of the highest order.

Communal gatherings have contributed to the explosive, exponential spread of the Corona Virus. Accordingly, at the present time any communal activity or gathering in any venue is highly dangerous and literally, potentially life-threatening.

Dr. Daniel Berman

Rabbi Dr. Aaron Glatt

Psak Halachah from HoRav Hershel Schachter shlit”a

The *mitzvah* to safeguard and preserve life overrides all *mitzvos haTorah*. It is not a *midas chassidus* to ignore *sakonas nefoshos*. On the contrary, it is expressly and strictly forbidden. In the words of the *Ba’alei haTosfos* “*domov be-rosho*”; such an individual is culpable for any loss of life *r”l* that ensues.

In light of expert medical opinion regarding the current catastrophic danger, the following measures are halachically required and must be adhered to by all.

- Everyone should *daven* privately (*be-yechedus*). No *minyonim* should be formed in any venue.
- Weddings should be celebrated with a quorum of ten, no more (*minyan m’tzumtzom*).
- *Brisin* should be performed and celebrated without a quorum of ten (*minyan*).
- Funerals *r”l* must also be curtailed to a bare quorum of ten.
- *Bar and Bas Mitzvah* celebrations should be postponed.
- *Yeshivos* should be closed immediately

In the merit of the sacred *mitzvah* of attempting to preserve and protect life and our *teshuva* (repentance), both communal and individual, may *HKB”H* (the Holy One, blessed be He) send the *yeshuah* (salvation).

Rav Hershel Schachter