

## MOVING OUR COMMUNITY OUT OF LOCKDOWN – PART 2

July 2020

Over the last few weeks, we have begun to see the gradual easing of lockdown restrictions.

At the end of June, the Government announced that places of worship were to be permitted to open from 4 July. Since then, every synagogue, church, mosque, and temple has faced difficult decisions about whether this is appropriate and how it might work for them.

At Sha'arei Tsedek we have been listening to many people across the community to understand what this easing of restrictions means for each of us, and to understand what different groups will want from life at Sha'arei Tsedek over the coming weeks and months.

During lockdown our programme has reinvented itself into a whole range of online offerings. The feedback is that these have been a hugely important way for people to pray, learn, laugh, live, and stay connected. And undoubtedly some of the things we now do online will be here to stay – we have learnt new ways of connecting that are a great innovation and addition to our way of life. We also know that for many of you, this online provision remains the critical way to engage in community life for the moment. Several of you have described it as a lifeline. And we are absolutely committed to maintaining this provision as long as it is needed.

Our Covid-19 Response Group, working closely with Council, has spent the last few weeks grappling with how to proceed, and how to ensure the safety, health and wellbeing of our rabbis, professional team, teachers, and members.

After much reflection, we have decided that the first phase of the reopening of the building will take place after the Days of Awe. Until that time, our service, learning and social programmes will remain online only.

This will allow us to prioritise risk assessment and comprehensive planning, preparation for our online Days of Awe, and staff wellbeing. We also need to work to ensure that the online experience, which will remain the reality for the vast majority of our community even after opening, is always of the highest quality.

We know that this news will be disappointing to some members who feel that we should be opening the building sooner. We are especially aware that it will impact on those who have lifecycle events coming up over the next two months. However, we believe that this is the right decision for our community and that it will enable us to navigate each stage of reopening our building with confidence.

A great deal of preparation and planning is needed in order for us to reopen well. We will take the time over the coming months to prepare how we are going to use the building whilst adhering to the restrictions of social distancing, limited gatherings, the use of protective screens and equipment and other guidelines including shorter services and the prohibition on congregational singing. When we open up the building, it will be to a limited number of people and the experience will be quite different to the Sha'arei Tsedek we know and love.

As Chair, my fellow trustees and I make decisions for the whole community. However complex, every decision is made with love and care for our members and our staff. We recognise that our decisions will be different to other synagogues who have different values to ours, or which serve the needs of smaller, less diverse communities. Other communities may also have been completely closed throughout this period. By contrast, our incredible rabbis, professional staff, and teachers have worked solidly for the last three months ensuring that Sha'arei Tsedek has remained open during the lockdown. Over the summer, we hope that the team will have the opportunity to rest and recuperate.

We are enormously grateful to Rabbi Ambalu, Rabbi Baaden, our exceptional Professional and Staff Teams who have made being a virtual community not only possible, but joyful.

Wishing everyone a good, safe, and restorative summer.

Richard Woolf

Chair