



Graveside-Only Funerals During Pandemic (From NYBOR)

Dear Chevre,

I hope you saw our pre-Shabbat email of last week and our communal response to COVID-19 (Thanks to Howie Goldsmith for crafting it), that you were able to share it in some ways with your community and that you are feeling supported by your local community and your WBOR.

Here is a recent email from the NYBOR that I am sharing. I encourage us all to implement the GRAVESIDE ONLY FUNERAL RULE for the time being.

"Dear Rabbinic and Cantorial Colleagues and Funeral Directors,

"The death of a loved one is difficult enough under normal circumstances, but how much the more so when a pandemic looms over us all. Our people desperately need the compassion that we can provide. During this chaotic time, our congregants and communities are turning to us for unprecedented support. This is especially so when a family member passes.

"The New York Board of Rabbis recognizes the emotional benefits of indoor chapel or sanctuary funeral services, especially in inclement weather. However, the principle of pikuach nefesh ("the saving of life") calls us to acknowledge the inherent danger in conducting indoor funerals at this time.

"Therefore, we strongly urge our colleagues - as well as our funeral director partners - to insist on graveside services instead of chapel funerals while emergency conditions remain in effect.

"We urge you to lovingly direct your constituents toward this protocol and away from insistence on an indoor service.

"The NYBR recognizes the fact that this practice could present a hardship for our rabbinic and cantorial colleagues who are kohanim, where their physical presence in a cemetery may not be possible. We ask those colleagues to work together to find halakhic ways to be present for mourners and still respect the necessary precautions that the health threat requires of us.

"May the One Who Heals and Makes Whole give us the courage and stamina to weather this storm. May we in turn give our communities the courage they need to remain hopeful and healthy."

L'Shalom u'Vracha,

With Peace and Blessings,

Rabbi Daniel Gropper, President