A Loving Call from the New York Board of Rabbis for Stringency at Cemeteries

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No words can express the depth of pain felt by our grieving families during this unprecedented period. We as rabbis seek to bring them the spiritual strength and support they so deeply need. It hurts us to see mourners denied the comforts that ritual proximity affords.

But we must also recognize that the principle of *pikuach nefesh* requires us to make exceptions to our time-honored funeral practices in order to protect human life, health, and safety. Clergy and community must find alternative ways to show comfort and condolence in these times.

Out of a deep sense of love for our colleagues and our constituents' wellbeing, we call on one another to conduct funerals according to the most cautious standards possible while the COVID-19 pandemic persists.

1. Ideally, *clergy should not be physically present at burials*. They may conduct burial rites remotely (i.e., by virtual means). When clergy feel they must be present, they should practice extreme caution (social distancing, masks and gloves, etc.).
2. No more than four mourners should physically attend a burial. Ideally, none should attend. Cemetery staff and funeral directors should be entrusted with all procedures of burial.
3. Clergy are encouraged to conduct funeral services online using Zoom or a similar platform - attended virtually by all mourners and guests who wish to participate - followed by a simple burial at which no clergy or mourners are present (or are present only according to the strict guidelines outlined above).
4. Clergy should not feel pressured by mourners, directors, cemetery staff, or colleagues to exceed these guidelines. They are for everyone's benefit.

*These guidelines are aspirational, not regulatory.* Every member of the community will, ideally, take it upon him- or herself to do everything humanly possible to protect life, even and especially as we show respect for the deceased and their mourners.
May The One Who Heals and Makes Whole give us the courage and stamina to weather this storm together. May we in turn give our communities the support they need to remain hopeful and healthy.

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