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The New York Board of Rabbis, as a pluralistic rabbinic body, is proud to be an organization which supports diversity of thought and unity of spirit next to one another. We can look at our religious practices through different denominational lenses, but stand together on the issue of protection of human life, especially during the present pandemic.

The concept of *pikuach nefesh* is of paramount concern to all of us.

We cannot defend individuals in our Jewish community who demonstrate a blatant disregard for the COVID-19 health protocols and endanger their lives and those of other people. COVID-19 is a nondiscriminating disease that must be fought by all people following the rules without exception. We are also appalled by the shameful behavior of those who burn masks or beat people who protest their non-compliance.

We also do not tolerate the demonization of an entire community because some of its members do not respect the necessary protective measures. We believe in collective responsibility where we are accountable for our behavior and reject collective guilt where everyone is depicted without distinction. At a time when Anti-Semitism is on the rise, we categorically condemn the demonization of the Jewish people, but we will continue to advocate for safe individual behavior.

Therefore, it is the duty of citizens within those virus hotspots to take responsibility for their behaviors which are no doubt causing the drastic surge in cases. Their job is not to respond with defensive rhetoric, but rather do everything in their power to bring down the spread of COVID-19.

We at the NYBR will continue to work with government officials and community leaders, listening to grievances, in an effort to increase compliance so that all of us, regardless of background or belief, can walk safely together. The Torah states "You shall guard your souls." It is a prescription that applies to all of us as a people.

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