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I added a few items re **Coronavirus & social distancing**. Thanks. Chaim

<https://www.aish.com/ci/s/Coronavirus-and-Blaming-the-Victims.html>

Coronavirus and Blaming the Victims

Mar 10, 2020 | by **Rabbi Benjamin Blech**

As the coronavirus outbreak grows in scale and scope, victims sadly find themselves having to cope with the added stigma of blame for “the crime” of threatening the health of others.

At first it was inside China where people from Wuhan were treated like lepers. It wasn't long before we began to see numerous reports of verbal and physical abuse aimed at ethnic Chinese, and an aversion to Chinese restaurants and other places associated with the country.

Once the virus spread, discrimination was no longer restricted by geographical source. “Victim blaming” focused on anyone unfortunate enough to show signs of being affected – and as Madeline Hsu, a professor of history and Asian American studies at the University of Texas at Austin, perceptively put it, “Germs and viruses don't operate on the basis of race.” Last week a major Metropolitan New York newspaper featured a photo that identified “a Jewish lawyer” in Westchester with arrows of people “he infected” by way of contact in his synagogue at Sabbath services as well as at a funeral he attended.

The World Health Organization, sensitive to the possibility for blaming the victim, is urgently pushing the campaign against saying that people are “transmitting Covid-19”, “infecting others,” or “spreading the virus,” because that wording suggests a measure of blame or guilt. Instead WHO asks that we refer to people “acquiring” the virus.

Blaming the victim has a very long precedent. Robert Fullilove, a professor of sociomedical sciences at New York's Columbia University Medical Center, observed that history teaches us this unfortunate – and universal – lesson: “The more panic, the more temptation to blame the outsider – the other.”

The plagues of the past all verify this truth. And Jews have had a very personal and tragic familiarity with it.

When the bubonic plague, better known as the “Black Death”, turned a quarter of the population of Europe into a mass graveyard within a few short years in the mid-14th century, Christians found a ready explanation. Anti-Semitism was a simple theological rationale to assign blame on Jews who obviously masterminded the outbreak, poisoned the wells, or as a medieval conspiracy theorist claimed, “wished to extinguish all of Christendom, through their poisons of frogs and spiders mixed into oil and cheese.” As for the Jews who also perished, it was nothing less than well-deserved divine punishment for their sins and nonacceptance of Jesus.

Hundreds of Jewish communities met their deaths as targets of extermination campaigns for the crime of supposedly having created a disease which took no note of religious differences – other than treating Jews who faithfully observed the ritual of frequent handwashing as a mitzvah somewhat less harshly.

In the 15th century it was the spread of syphilis that again turned disease into an acceptable rationale for xenophobia and hatred. As historians put it, every national group in Europe defined syphilis as a disease of other nations. The Germans blamed the French, calling it “the French disease.” The French blamed the Italians, the Poles blamed the Russians, the Persians blamed the Turks, the Muslims blamed the Hindus, and the Japanese blamed the Portuguese. Somehow this was one of the rare occasions that Jews in the main were not considered the chief culprits.

But Jews weren't so lucky in the US when at the beginning of the 20th-century Jewish immigrants were accused of carrying “consumption”, better known as tuberculosis, to America. Nicknamed “the Jewish disease” and “the tailor's disease” – one of the most common Jewish occupations – tuberculosis and its Jewish connection helped to create the image of Jews as sickly and weak. Unfortunately, this would later be used as a “racial stereotype” to justify restrictions on Jewish immigration in the 20s as well as later in the 30s and 40s, even as the Holocaust decreed only death as alternative.

“Victim blaming” is not only irrational, it is cruel. It is directed to innocents already needlessly suffering. Sherry Hamby, a professor of psychology at the University of the South and founding editor of the APA's Psychology of Violence journal, sees its source in a very human attempt to ease our own fears for personal safety. “Holding victims responsible for their misfortune is partially a way to avoid admitting that something just as unthinkable could happen to you – even if you do everything ‘right’.”

With the spread of the coronavirus extending rapidly worldwide, every one of us might, God forbid, become the next target. For our own sakes, let us not be guilty of the crime which severely compounds the tragedy – the crime of blaming the victim.

<https://www.jta.org/2020/03/11/opinion/im-not-a-doctor-but-i-am-a-rabbi-heres-my-spiritual-prescription-for-the-coronavirus>

OPINION - I'm not a doctor, but I am a rabbi. Here's my spiritual prescription for the coronavirus.

RABBI SHMULY YANKLOWITZ

MARCH 11, 2020 1:56 PM

PHOENIX (JTA) — I am not a medical professional, an epidemiologist or an expert on pandemics. I leave the serious information in those important fields for the professionals who have the appropriate training to help us get through the coronavirus epidemic.

Even though I do not possess medical knowledge, as a rabbi and social activist, I believe I can try to humbly prescribe ethical vaccines that can remedy jilted nerves and worried minds. My words are not meant to heal physically but to inspire spiritually.

At this challenging time, it seems appropriate that those in the positions to (re)build confidence should do so. In that spirit, I am sharing thoughts on

how we might be able to spiritually cope with the uncertain reality that has rapidly spread throughout the world. The coronavirus is not only a disease of the body, but also presents an existential crisis that has put governments, businesses and, most important, communities and individuals on edge. I pray that we can get through it all. People are scared — and rightly so. We are truly living in an era of plague; we are largely unprepared. Communities throughout the world have been caught off-guard by the virus' potent potential for wanton havoc and daily disruption.

But hope can't be lost. At this moment, we want to protect ourselves and our families; this is human nature. From a Jewish perspective, from a social justice perspective, from a human perspective, we cannot descend into pointed tribalism at a time when we must come together as a collective of mind and soul. The coronavirus is a huge burden placed on humanity, but one that can be handled through shared action, compassion and a desire to see this disease contained before more lives are needlessly lost.

As I reflected inward about how the coronavirus is affecting the world, I thought about soul remedies that could help guide us — in the Jewish community and beyond — through this arduous ordeal and into a brighter tomorrow. Here's my six-part prescription for getting through this crisis with our souls intact.

1. There is no value in placing blame.

We are already seeing our worst impulses play out in this crisis. Because the present strain of coronavirus originated in China, some are blaming "the Chinese" or even all Asians for the outbreak, which is absurd and hateful. And then there are community leaders such as an ultra-Orthodox rabbi who bizarrely blamed the LGBTQ community for spreading the disease. These are the wrong reactions: Whatever we do, we cannot fall into the trap of blame. Blame harms more than it helps; it is myopic and never leads to practical solutions. Of course, we must hold reckless public officials accountable if they neglect public welfare, but this is different from directing baseless blame at large populations. Rather than join the blaming team, we should join the helping team.

There are times where we cannot help as much as we'd like, but we can still do as much as we can from a distance. We must simply adjust our mindset to think about how we can all effectively work together with the help of experts to deal with the task at hand.

2. Be afraid.

Yes, this must sound like unusual advice in a time of pandemic. But we must be skeptical of those in office who say "Everything is fine. Stop panicking and live your life!" It is a natural human emotion to be afraid of the unknown and the uncertain. We live in times where every day's events constitute a reminder that we cannot control the world as much as we might want. Politically, culturally and spiritually, the world is experiencing levels of disequilibrium that are difficult to endure. It would seem then that, rationally, we should live in fear of what tomorrow may bring. Rather than denying that human impulse to have fear in the face of serious risks, we can channel that fear productively.

Hold the fear. Hold your love ones close. But don't be held motionless — physically, emotionally or spiritually — by this disease. Feel it but own it, refine it, control it. Use it. We need to react boldly to situations such as the one that challenges us right now and with the clarity of mind that tells us that fear should inspire us to be courageous; troubling times calls for passionate and resolute leadership. Our fear can inspire us to hold one another even closer and with deeper resolve.

3. Wipe out evil.

In the Jewish tradition, the nation of Amalek is synonymous with the worst evil imaginable. The Amalekites saw the most vulnerable among the Israelites and instead of helping them, pursued and killed them, targeting in particular the weakest among the weak. The Torah records the deeds of the Amalekites and their actions, juxtaposing the meekness of the Jewish people with the pure cruelty of the nation of Amalek. We are commanded to vanquish Amalek and eliminate its memory from this world. The coronavirus

— the disease itself! — is Amalek-like since it appears to have the most serious consequences for some of the most vulnerable among us, the elderly and the immunocompromised. By protecting and supporting the most vulnerable people around the world, we have the ability to live up to the commandment to wipe out Amalek once more.

As tensions among communities may run high, we must learn again the lessons of interdependence: The coronavirus demonstrates the profound ignorance of the belief that we keep ourselves "safe" by building walls to separate us from our neighbors and by locking up immigrants at the border. In a world as interconnected as ours, we keep ourselves safe by respecting the truths revealed by science, by cooperating and working together within and among nations, by caring for the most vulnerable among us, and by creating a society that keeps as many of us as possible healthy and financially secure. In a world so focused on "us vs. them," the coronavirus reminds us that in a profound sense, there is only us.

The only sane path forward is more compassion, more justice, and more humility about the degree to which we need each other.

4. Embrace a sabbatical.

One of Judaism's great gifts to the world is the idea of the Sabbath, the sacred break from the labors of the week. But the Sabbath is more than lounging around with nothing to do. It's about renewal and the need to nourish the soul through extra time to study. One of the side effects of the coronavirus might be the ability for those who need to stay home to use that time away from the workplace or the outside world productively. Some folks need to show up at work, travel and go about business as usual. But to the extent that one can, it will be vital to care of yourself and those that you love. Through the gift of physical and spiritual rest, we may experience breakthroughs that will allow our society to manage this disease more effectively.

5. Be gentle.

Always be gentle with others. Everyone is doing the best they can. Human beings are fundamentally frail. To compensate for uncertainty and imperfection in this moment, some people will act out with pure hubris. But this hubris hides vulnerability and pain. We do not know what others go through on a daily basis.

The coronavirus may give us the ability to realize that humility in the face of great challenge can be a factor leading us toward communal healing. To be under quarantine, as whole countries are essentially imposing at this point, cannot be a pleasant feeling. It's isolating and humiliating. To be gentle also means to be empathetic to those who find themselves cut off from society.

This disease has upended routines all over the world. We can be understanding of how it has ruined the daily lives of people who only want to support themselves and their families. This universal reality brings us together rather than tearing us apart. Let us have the strength to be understanding and kind in this time of great tumult.

6. Love is contagious, too.

The coronavirus is highly contagious, but so are the actions we can take inspired by love and joy. We are reminded yet again of the total interconnectedness of all life on this planet. The amazing phenomenon of life and its parallel humbling frailty can inspire wonder and deeper empathy.

While, of course, we must heed medical experts to undertake precautionary measures to avoid the spread of the virus, we can also do our best to spread happiness and positivity, international cooperation and a positive attitude to help quell this virus.

To give up on the better angels of our nature is akin to defeat. At the least, to acknowledge people's good intentions and engage others out of love rather than fear are ways to help defeat the trials put before us by the coronavirus. Spread love, spread warmth, spread optimism. The times may seem bleak, but we can all do our part to ensure that a brighter tomorrow is around the corner.

Friends, this is a difficult time for all. No one has been spared from the effects of the coronavirus. Not all of us will be infected by the virus, but we

are already affected. There is no denying that the global attention to this ailment has radically shifted the world's power landscape indefinitely. But, for a moment, looking past these macro-effects can offer an opportunity to consider how each of us, at an individual level, can be spiritually renewed in our collective efforts to halt this disease and get through this moment.

RABBI SHMULY YANKLOWITZ

is the President & Dean of the Valley Beit Midrash (Jewish pluralistic adult learning & leadership), the Founder & President of Uri L'Tzedek (Orthodox Social Justice), the Founder and CEO of Shamayim (Jewish animal advocacy), the Founder and President of YATOM, (Jewish foster and adoption network), and the author of seventeen books on Jewish ethics. The opinions expressed here represent the author's and do not represent any organizations he is affiliated with.

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4668191/jewish/Six-Things-You-Can-Do-About-Coronavirus.htm

Six Things You Can Do About Coronavirus

By **Mendy Kaminker** March 4, 2020 2:32 PM

No matter where we live in this ever-shrinking world, it seems like everyone is thinking about the coronavirus, or COVID-19. At the Costco near my home, I was greeted by empty shelves, with most everyone cautiously stocking up on essentials. I am told that the local Shoprite and Target are experiencing similar shortages.

As the days go by, the number of people around the world impacted by this virus is increasing at an alarming rate with some entire cities under quarantine.

Is there something we can do about it?

The Jewish answer is: Yes, there is always something for us to do!

Let me share a few thoughts and practical suggestions as we weather this storm together.

1. Follow Health Guidelines

As much as it's common sense, guarding your health is a mitzvah we should take very seriously.

So follow the instructions of the CDC and your local health officials. Wash your hands with soap. If you suspect that you or a loved one has been affected, contact your doctor.

And if you do find yourself under quarantine, get yourself a good laptop and charger (and get ready to watch hours of Torah classes on Chabad.org video).

Read: Obey the Doctor

2. Know Someone in Quarantine? Reach Out!

With all of the talk about the problems with technology, perhaps this is its time to shine.

If you know of anyone who is under quarantine, reach out! Isolation for a long period of time is tough for anyone. Call, email, or send a loving text message.

So if it's a friend, a relative or a co-worker that needs to stay home, reach out to them. Tell them that you are thinking of them and praying for them.

3. Check Your Mezuzahs

The Torah guarantees that when a Jewish home bears a mezuzah on its door, the Guardian of Israel ensures that the home and all who live in it are protected. Whether at home or at the other end of the world, in the merit of that mezuzah, you've got the best safety net around you.

Rolled up inside a mezuzah case rests a parchment with the Shema Yisrael inscribed by an expert scribe. With time and weather, that parchment can fade or crack. That's why it's a Jewish custom to check the mezuzahs of your home every few years, and especially at a time when protection is needed.

If you don't have a mezuzah, your local Chabad rabbi can help you get one written by a qualified scribe now. If you have a mezuzah, but haven't had it checked recently, contact your local Chabad rabbi and have it checked right away.

How many mezuzahs does a home require? Basically, one for every entranceway. Your local Chabad rabbi can also help you determine which doorposts require a mezuzah and where that mezuzah should be placed.

Read: A Guide to Checking Your Mezuzahs

4. Have Faith, Not Fear

Yes, the concern is real. But the truth is, there is only One who decides what will happen to us, and that is the one Director of heaven and earth. Trust that He is good and think only good thoughts, and things will be good.

Spend some time pondering and verbalizing your faith in G-d. Pray. Ask Him to protect you and your loved ones. Ask Him to send healing to the entire world. Then have complete confidence that He listens to every prayer that comes from the heart, and yours will be answered as well.

A little trust in G-d can have some great side benefits too! Check this out, from the Mayo Clinic:

"Most studies have shown that religious involvement and spirituality are associated with better health outcomes, including greater longevity, coping skills, and health-related quality of life."

As in most situations, fear doesn't do anyone much good. Even a teaspoon of faith, on the other hand, has amazing healing power.

Read: What Is Bitachon?

5. Give Charity

Isaiah, the great prophet of peace, compared giving charity to donning a suit of armor. Each contribution you make, no matter how small, provides another shield of protection against any affliction. So too, the Book of Proverbs tells us that "charity saves from death."

The main thing is not how much you give, but how often. So get two charity boxes—one for your home and one for your place of work. In a pinch, you can simply designate any box as a charity box.

Put a coin in the box every weekday as well as before the Shabbat candle lighting on Friday afternoons. At your place of work, encourage others to contribute their spare change as well.

Don't carry cash? Today, most charities collect online. There are even apps for giving, including apps that direct funds to Jewish charities. You can make a habit of giving through an app on a daily basis.

Read: 16 Charity Facts Everyone Should Know

6. Be Infectious!

Finally, let's take a page from the playbook of this nasty virus. It's infectious, it's spreading, it's separating people and even causing us to be suspicious of each other.

So be an antivirus! Just by adding a little goodness and kindness to the world, you can be infectious in a positive way.

Use your social network to spread kind words, helpful actions and a little more love and caring to the planet. And may our collective good stop the spread of anything negative!

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4676982/jewish/10-Tips-for-Preparing-for-Shabbat-While-Social-Distancing.htm

10 Tips for Preparing for Shabbat While Social Distancing

By **Menachem Posner** March 12, 2020 5:11 PM

Does the coronavirus have you stuck at home for Shabbat, isolated from your synagogue and social group? Not sure how to celebrate alone? Here are 10 tips to make this Shabbat as pleasant and rejuvenating as possible:

1. Prepare Shabbat Feasts

"Anyone who puts in the effort to prepare on the eve of Shabbat will eat on Shabbat," say the sages of the Mishnah. Stuck at home on Friday? Assuming you have access to groceries, use the time to make your own challah, boil up a steaming pot of delicious chicken soup ("Jewish penicillin"), prepare fish, salad, chicken, kugel, and of course some hardy cholent to be enjoyed at Shabbat lunch.

We have all the best recipes waiting for you at those links.

If you are unable to prepare Shabbat food, please reach out for help. Your local Chabad emissaries can help, so please alert them to your need as soon as possible.

2. Have Liquid Soap and Cut Paper Towels on Hand

With a premium placed on regular and thorough hand washing, be sure to have a supply of liquid soap at home since bar soap can be problematic on Shabbat.

Since we don't tear paper towels to size on Shabbat, and using regular hand towels is out for the time being, prepare a stack of pre-cut paper towels near the bathroom and kitchen sinks for easy and sanitary washing.

Alcohol-based hand sanitizer is perfectly okay for Shabbat use.

3. Get Some Good Kiddush Wine

So you're stuck at home, but Shabbat is still a time of delight.

How about one of the fine kosher wines (or grape juice) that are available today, both for Kiddush and throughout the meal (with moderation, of course). This may be the week to spend an extra dollar or two on something special to honor Shabbat.

After making kiddush, there's no need to pass the wine cup around for everyone to take a sip, or to pour into other's cups. Instead, let everyone have their own glass of wine or grape juice in front of them while one person makes kiddush for all. In some ways, that's even better, because then people can drink as soon as kiddush is said, without delay.

As joyous as things may get, careful not to clink those glasses when making a l'chaim.

4. Print Up Some Good Reading Material

Looking for something uplifting and engaging to read while snuggled up at home? Before Shabbat, go to www.chabad.org/magazine and print the articles and stories we've published this week, especially some articles from our acclaimed Parshah section. There's something there for everyone, and probably more than a few somethings to help you through the long afternoon.

5. Make a Schedule in Advance

With so many hours in isolation, it's easy to feel like you are on a never-ending hamster wheel. It can be helpful to designate landmarks to demarcate the passing of time and give you something to look forward to.

So plan in advance. Decide what time you'll pray, when you'll have your meals, when you'll study Torah, take your Shabbat nap, etc. so that the day does not seem to stretch on forever.

6. Make Pre-Shabbat Phone Calls

Feeling like you need a good boost of social interaction before heading into 25 hours of isolation? Call friends and family before Shabbat to wish them a peaceful and healing Shabbat.

Tell them you'll be thinking of them, and ask them to think of you as well.

Fill your social tank to the fullest, and use that fuel to propel you through to Havdalah.

7. Pray a Little Extra When Lighting Your Candles

Shabbat candles must be lit in every Jewish household before Shabbat. This is the case even if there is no woman present. Are you isolated in a male-only home? Make sure you (or another one of the guys) lights candles.

Before lighting, make sure to give some charity. Today, that's a cinch to do online. Charity, according to our tradition, provides a shield of immunity around you at times such as these. And the time immediately before lighting candles is an especially propitious time for creating that shield.

After you've lit the candles and said the blessing, ask the One Above for all your needs. Use this time to pray for healing and happiness for the world.

8. Make Your Home a Mini-Synagogue

Even though you cannot attend synagogue, there is no reason not to pray alone.

With the exception of Kaddish, the Barechu call to prayer, the repetition of the Amidah, and the Torah reading, you can pray anywhere in the world, including your home.

So make sure you have a Siddur handy and a place set aside to serve as your ad hoc shul. If you are with others, pray together. Even though you don't make a minyan, you can say the words and sing the songs together.

Wondering when to hold services? Actually, the best time to do so is when your local congregation is doing so. That way, you're actually praying in tandem with them, even though you cannot see each other.

9. Exercise Your Positivity Muscles

Medical experts and Chassidic masters all agree that staying positive and full of faith can help you maintain your good health, keep up your immune system, and even recover more quickly from illness.

Upping our happiness is an art, one that we can learn and perfect with practice and patience.

Not sure where to start? Here are two simple steps:

Tell yourself: Everything is in G-d's hands; He loves me, and I am going to be OK.

Now smile.

Repeat as many times as necessary.

10. Belt Out Shabbat Songs

Going stir crazy from the silence? Fill it with Shabbat songs.

There's a longstanding tradition to sing zemirot (hymns) at the Shabbat table, and there's no reason to stop singing just because the crowd is a bit smaller than usual. On the contrary, fill the space with louder singing, joyful singing, and more happiness than ever. Best thing you can do for your immune system!

<http://www.5tjt.com/five-lessons-from-the-coronavirus/>

Five Lessons From the Coronavirus

March 11, 2020

By **Rabbi Pinchas Allouche**

To date, more than 100,000 people have been affected by the coronavirus globally, including 3,000 deaths. As we pray that this pandemic ends speedily, here are five pressing lessons that we may learn from this tragic disease:

LESSON ONE: One Sneeze Can Change the World

According to health experts, the coronavirus spreads viral particles through sneezing, which can infect many people.

The lesson is powerful: we each possess two forces within — a body and a soul. And if small particles from our body can produce such havoc, just imagine how much good our souls can create with its Divine particles. If one sneeze can affect our world so dramatically, one positive deed can certainly produce great change.

It is true: each of us holds the power to alter the state of our society. If we can allow our souls to produce some Divine particles through deeds of goodness, we too can engender a positive revolution that can, and will, better our world.

As Maimonides once put it: "Each person must view himself and the entire world as being half meritorious and half guilty. If he does one single good deed, he can tip the scale and bring deliverance to the entire world" (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Repentance 3:5).

LESSON TWO: A Little Bit of Fear Is Good

Franklin D. Roosevelt famously exclaimed that there is "nothing to fear but fear itself." Yet dare I ask, is it true that we should not be afraid of fear? Judaism would disagree. Sure, fear can be dangerous. It can paralyze the mind, stifle our growth, and lead to habits of destruction. But fear can also be constructive.

It is no secret that the coronavirus has spread fear among individuals and nations. People are increasingly afraid to congregate, travel, and attend public events.

But the more we fear for what will be in the future, the more we can also learn to appreciate all that we have, today, at the present.

Turbulent times like these can teach us that life is so vulnerable, that seeming certainties are so uncertain, and that material achievements are so fleeting. The fear that then naturally emerges from these realizations can rattle us profoundly. But it can, and it must, also awaken us to a renewed appreciation and commitment toward all that is firm and certain in our lives — from deepening our relationships with our loved ones to rededicating ourselves to living a life of purpose.

Perhaps this is why the wisest of men, King Solomon, taught that “happy is the man who is always fearful” (Proverbs 28:14). A little bit of fear is valuable, for it prevents us from falling into a state of stalemate, and opens our eyes to all the good that lies in and around us.

LESSON THREE: The Unbreakable Power of Unity

As I write these words, world governments and international experts are collaborating in unprecedented ways to find a vaccine for the coronavirus. It is in historic moments of unity such as these that we are privy to the power of collective responsibility. When we come together as one, even the most destructive of diseases becomes curable, and even the cruelest of challenges are, eventually, surmountable.

It is no secret that we live in tumultuous and divisive times. Yet, the coronavirus teaches us that the path to a healthy future relies on our ability to work together with respect for who we are: people of all kinds, who were created in the image of G-d.

And when we join hands together, an avenue of redemption is then paved. Like the colors of a rainbow or a symphony of instruments, true beauty and harmony will only emanate from our ability to unite together.

LESSON FOUR: “Keeping Good Hygiene”

With the rapid spread of the coronavirus, health officials are constantly warning us to “keep good hygiene.”

But I wonder: are we as careful about physical infections as we are about spiritual ones, such as negative words and actions?

It is no secret that we live in an age of impulsions. On social media, we often do not hesitate to voice our immediate reaction to every story under the sun. But not every post is worthy of our likes, pokes, and comments.

For in the race to speak back, we often forget to think. In the urge to reply, our swirl of emotions often eclipses our clarity of thought. And in the heat of disagreements, spiritual viruses can spread uncontrollably.

In the wise words of the Kotzker Rebbe (1787-1859): “All that is thought should not be said, all that is said should not be written, all that is written should not be published, and all that is published should not be read.”

LESSON FIVE: Man Plans, G-d Laughs

So says an old Yiddish adage. As we all know, our personal plans are not always fulfilled. Sometimes we get “stuck in traffic.” Other times, we receive a phone call that rocks our day.

The coronavirus has destabilized many of us. Personally, I was notified yesterday that a six-day mission of young Jewish leaders to Riga and Paris, in which I was to assume a role, was postponed.

Yet this disruption of plans teaches us a vital secret to happiness. Every day includes two plans: the plan that we design for ourselves, and the plan that God designs for us. Unfortunately, they are not always synchronized.

Sometimes we plan for A, but B happens. But the question then begs itself: how will we respond? Will we bury ourselves in frustration, or will we learn to accept the hidden blessings in God’s unannounced plans?

Viktor Frankl, the famed psychotherapist and Holocaust survivor, taught his students to “not ask what they want from life.” Instead, they should ask “what life wants from them, and then happiness will follow.”

Frankl was right. True happiness can only be achieved when we learn to accept what life wants from us, even when it interferes with our own plans. Some of history’s greatest heroes — from Queen Esther in the story of the upcoming festival of Purim to Sir Nicholas Winton who saved over 600 children during the Holocaust — rose to glory when they heeded the call of the unplanned.

And so must we. At times, we may not see the blessings in the unexpected events of life, but we must believe that they exist, and that, one day, we will find within them the laughter of G-d.

Rabbi Pinchas Allouche is the head rabbi at Congregation Beth Tefillah in Scottsdale, Arizona. Rabbi Allouche is richly-cultural, having lived in France, where he was born, South Africa and Israel. He is fluent in English, Hebrew, French and Italian. He received his rabbinic ordination in Milan, Italy in 1999. In March of 2013, Rabbi Allouche was listed in the Jewish Daily Forward as one of America’s 36 Most Inspiring Rabbis, who are “shaping 21st Century Judaism.” Rabbi Allouche can be reached at: Rabbi@BethTefillahAZ.org.

<https://www.jewishpress.com/news/us-news/breaking-news-bergen-county-rabbis-cancel-all-shul-forbid-minyanim-shabbat-gatherings-eating-out-and-more/2020/03/12/>

Rabbinical Council of Bergen County, New Jersey (RCBC)

March 12, 2020

ט"ז אדר תש"פ

Dear Friends,

We are writing with an important update regarding COVID-19 and the ongoing health situation in our community.

Last night, the rabbis of the Rabbinical Council of Bergen County (RCBC), the presidents of our shuls, and the heads of our local schools gathered to meet with representatives of local government, including the Teaneck Department of Health and expert physicians from our three local hospitals: Englewood Health, Hackensack University Medical Center, and Holy Name Medical Center.

The message from the healthcare providers was clear. They need our help to slow the spread of the disease before their resources are overwhelmed. The doctors expressed significant concern regarding the capacity of our local hospitals to meet the growing needs of their patients in the event of a (expected) large surge in cases of COVID-19. They reported that while the amount of cases is now low, it seems to be increasing rapidly. Even if patients of COVID-19 will be treatable, we may deplete our resources and other patients who suffer from ordinary, serious illnesses will not be able to get the necessary care, putting their lives in danger.

Slowing the spread of the disease will allow our hospitals to best manage this situation. The only way to do this is for us to socially distance ourselves from one another. Moreover, the doctors emphasized that the most significant community closure possible will make the greatest impact in potentially saving lives in our area.

We have therefore made the very difficult decision to adopt the following policies of social distancing in our community. We intend to re-evaluate our policies next week on the basis of the expert guidance provided by the medical leadership of the three local hospitals. This panel will guide us as we continually monitor the ongoing situation as it evolves. We collectively agree to abide by the decisions reached by our lay, educational and rabbinic leadership on the basis of expert medical advice, to uniformly adhere to these standards, and to communicate collectively.

We must all try our best to STAY HOME with only our immediate family for now and to avoid unnecessary contact with others, and particularly with substantial groups. We should only leave when it is truly necessary. Thus:

1. All community members are strongly encouraged to work from home, if possible, and to stay home whenever possible. It is critical for adults to set the right example.
2. As the schools are currently closed, there should not be playdates between children of different families. This would undermine the entire purpose of the school closing.
3. Shuls will be closed for all minyanim and shiurim effective Friday morning, March 13. There should be no house minyanim. All of the rabbis will be davening alone in their own homes.
4. There should be no public celebrations for smachot.

5. People should not have gatherings for Shabbat meals.
6. Shiva visits should be replaced by phone/video calls.
7. Levayot should be restricted to a small group of family members and a minyan.
8. Refrain from contact sports.
9. Restaurants should not seat customers. People should order for pick-up and delivery only.
10. The Mikvaot will remain open, at the guidance of CDC and local health authorities. Women under mandatory quarantine or who are experiencing symptoms of illness may not use the mikvah. Please consult your rav for further clarification or for specific questions.

As you can see, these represent significant changes to our lives and many detailed questions will certainly emerge. This brief outline cannot guide every particular situation. We will all have to address each circumstance as it comes up based on professional expertise and religious guidance.

It is with a very heavy heart that we are suspending so many of the most crucial routines of our daily lives and lifecycle moments. We do this only because of the compelling nature of our circumstance and the decisive medical testimonies that are consistent with CDC recommendations. These measures are adopted as a reflection of our overarching commitment to the sanctity of all human life, and we pray that these will be very temporary measures. Please take these days as a critical opportunity to intensify our tefilot to the Rofeh Ne'emán that all those ill will be healed and that our community will be shielded from any further harm.

Sincerely,
The Rabbinical Council of Bergen County

<https://www.thejewishstar.com/stories/im-a-rabbi-with-the-coronavirus-whose-congregation-is-quarantined-its-bringing-out-the-best,18933>

HEALTH AND HALACHA

I'm the rabbi with the coronavirus whose New Rochelle congregation is quarantined. It's bringing out the best in us.

Posted March 6, 2020

By Rabbi Reuven Fink

As so many of us are now contemplating going into a Shabbos of seclusion, I want to share a few thoughts with you.

We all woke up Tuesday morning prepared for our usual schedules of work or school or whatever we usually do. By late afternoon we learned that the state and the county health departments ordered a voluntary quarantine of those who were in a number of venues where the Coronavirus might have been. I said to myself, "but at all of those places we were performing mitzvot. To be davening in shul, attending a funeral, attending bar and bat mitzvah celebrations — all are good deeds, mitzvot!"

And yet, we were about to commence an unpleasant course of action:

Isolation and quarantine are words that evoke fear. I must confess I was frightened that we might have an epidemic, a pandemic in our community. Our lay leadership and I met with the health officials and tried to explain that quarantine of almost an entire congregation was an overarching edict. They quickly disavowed us of any such thinking and announced the shutdown of the Shul before we could even announce it to our own members.

We were locked in our homes. What would we do? This Shabbos is Parshat Zachor!

We all know it is incumbent upon Jews to hear Zachor being read from the Torah. Additionally, a young man's bar mitzvah was scheduled for Shabbos. He had studied his parsha so long and hard. What would be? And then, a young woman's bat mitzvah was on Sunday. She would be so disappointed! Our friend and member lost her dear father and is sitting shiva. We who are in quarantine are not able to visit her in her time of need.

People's lives are so disrupted. And certainly our minds never diverted from thinking about and praying for our good friend who lay in the hospital in

such serious condition. We thought of his wife and the kids and what they were going through in comparison to what our situation was. I told myself we would work things out. The people of New Rochelle are resourceful people.

And we prayed. Everyone was emailing for our friend's Hebrew name and wanted to know which Tehillim should be recited. People who were not in quarantine were calling to arrange to help people in need, particularly those who were elderly or sick. Neighboring communities volunteered to help. Our neighbors in Scarsdale and White Plains shopped and made deliveries to many. Seasons and Chickies tried to make ordering easy. UJA-Federation offered to send our members food from a canceled dinner. So many good people did so much good. And it continues.

Over the past day or two, other members of our congregation were tested and found to be positive for the Coronavirus. I as well found out an hour ago that I am infected with the virus. I can now reassure you that it is possible, Thank G-d, to get through this virus without a special vaccine. I have the virus and am doing reasonably well. But I must caution all of you who have had personal contact with me to seek counsel from your health practitioner as to how to proceed.

As a Shul we must worry about religion. We tried to address in writing what people could do for the observance of yahrzeit and recitation of kaddish. We worked out a plan to read Zachor on Purim. Daf Yomi was taught online via Zoom. We had two shiurim today given by me and by Rabbi Axelrod about Purim topics.

A crisis can bring out the best in people. It is bringing out the best in us. Admittedly, it is hard to comply with the burden the state has placed on us. But as we see, despite all these measures, the amount of people testing positive is increasing. We all have to be careful to comply.

There are some positive elements that can be found in looking at our predicament. It slows down the pace of our frenetic lives. That can be positive. It can give us more time with our families. Maybe that book that we never got around to reading can be read now. Maybe we always wanted to find time to learn Torah. We now have that opportunity. I can't remember the last time I davened without a minyan for Shacharis. But my davening this morning was much slower than usual.

This circumstance certainly gives us the opportunity to think. Our attention turns to mortality and our vulnerability. We sometimes find ourselves victims of life's fragility and tentativeness. This is one of those times. It can help us to reorient our ultimate goals in life. Contemplation is good for the soul.

I can't help but wonder if perhaps I discovered a fantastic insight into current events in this morning's Daf Yomi.

The Talmud is in the midst of discussing various seminal events in the life of King David. It tells of an error he made. He decided to conduct a census of his kingdom. He wanted to have an accurate count of Israel's population. According to the Torah, a census can only take place by counting tokens that represent a person but not by counting the people themselves. The Torah says: Count half-shekels so there "will not be a pestilence when you count them." King David ignored this rule and counted people. The Navi tells us that a plague commenced as a result. The strange occurrence that guided that plague was that exactly 100 people died per day. The prophets and sages of that era ascertained from heaven that if they would institute a new mitzvah, the plague would end. They legislated a rabbinic mitzvah to recite 100 brachot each day. This is among the seven rabbinic mitzvot, along with lighting candles before Shabbat and the recitation of Hallel. But somehow this particular mitzvah has been lost to us during our bitter history.

Could it be only a coincidence that we learn this portion in the Talmud specifically today during this crisis of a possible pandemic? Perhaps. But perhaps we can take a lesson from it. Maybe we can accept upon ourselves to be more mindful and meticulous in reciting brachot. A bracha, a blessing, is our way of acknowledging the profound awareness that we have of G-d in

our lives. A blessing can elevate the most mundane activity into something lofty and holy. It takes seconds but launches us into eternity. We still have a way to go in handling our communal situation. Together we can persevere and triumph over these challenges. With our ever-abiding faith in G-d who is the healer, we pray that we, as well as our fellow Americans and the peoples of the world will conquer this disease. Wishing all a Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Reuven Fink

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**Home Weekly Parsha KI TISA
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

One of the more mystical rituals in the mishkan was the ktoret – the offering of incense on the altar. The incense, when burned by fire, provided a fragrant cloud of smoke that permeated the tent of the mishkan. The Torah is very exact and detailed in describing the ingredients and formula that formed the ktoret in the mishkan and later in the Temple, which produced this powerful fragrance. The Talmud states that when the incense was being prepared in the Temple in Jerusalem the goats pasturing downwind in Jericho sneezed! There is no doubt that the incense did provide a very strong and pungent fragrance, though nowhere is it mentioned what this fragrance was comparable to. The Talmud adds that if the incense mixture would be combined with honey, then its smell would be so pleasant that it would prove to be irresistible. Why, then, was no honey added to the formula of the incense? The Torah itself forbade this addition to the incense mixture, by stating explicitly that honey was not to be introduced on the altar. There is a profound lesson to be learned here.

The Torah's instructions are not to be improved upon by human tastes, fads and currently popular ideas. The mystique of the incense offering is not to be enhanced by human preferences. Jewish history has shown us that all such "improvements" were eventually discarded. The Torah deals with eternity, and not with current moods that always change. The Torah itself is the sole arbiter of what the fragrance of the incense offering should be.

The incense offering was also deemed to be dangerous, if not lethal, to those priests performing the service. This was especially true on Yom Kippur when the High Priest himself performed the service upon entering the Holy of Holies with the incense pan and coals in his hands and arms. The Talmud records that during Second Temple times there were many priests who were unworthy of being the High Priest and obtained their position only by means of corruption and graft. Their corpses literally had to be dragged out of the Temple's precincts, since they died from the incense offering ritual. We do not find such lethal danger attached to any other duties of the High Priest in the Temple service.

But as in the physical world, so, too, is it in the mystical spiritual world – that which has the power to destroy also possesses the power to heal and bless. The incense offering was the source to ensure financial prosperity and abundance for the Jewish people. Even today, biblical verses regarding the incense offering are recited daily by many as a prayer for monetary success and physical welfare. It is the mystery of all this that so intrigues us. It remains one of the hidden treasures of the Torah that are not yet revealed to us. The ktoret retains its eternal fragrance of mystery. And we are not to add or detract from its Torah formulation.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

from: Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org>
subject: Covenant and Conversation
date: Mar 11, 2020, 3:17 PM

Moses Annuls a Vow (Ki Tissa 5780)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Kol Nidre, the prayer said at the beginning of Yom Kippur, is an enigma wrapped in a mystery, perhaps the strangest text ever to capture the religious imagination. First, it is not a prayer at all. It is not even a confession. It is a dry legal formula for the annulment of vows. It is written in Aramaic. It does not mention God. It is not part of the service. It does not require a synagogue. And it was disapproved of, or at least questioned, by generations of halachic authorities.

The first time we hear of Kol Nidre, in the eighth century, it is already being opposed by Rav Natronai Gaon, the first of many Sages throughout the centuries who found it problematic. In his view, one cannot annul the vows of an entire congregation this way. Even if one could, one should not, since it may lead people to treat vows lightly. Besides which, there has already been an annulment of vows ten days earlier, on the morning before Rosh Hashanah. This is mentioned explicitly in the Talmud (Nedarim 23b). There is no mention of an annulment on Yom Kippur.

Rabbeinu Tam, Rashi's grandson, was particularly insistent in arguing that the kind of annulment Kol Nidre represents cannot be retroactive. It cannot apply to vows already taken. It can only be a pre-emptive qualification of vows in the future. Accordingly he insisted on changing its wording, so that Kol Nidre refers not to vows from last year to this, but from this year to next. However, perhaps because of this, Kol Nidre created hostility on the part of non-Jews, who said it showed that Jews did not feel bound to honour their promises since they vitiated them on the holiest night of the year. In vain it was repeatedly emphasised that Kol Nidre applies only to vows between us and God, not those between us and our fellow humans. Throughout the Middle Ages, and in some places until the eighteenth century, in lawsuits with non-Jews, Jews were forced to take a special oath, More Judaica, because of this concern.

So there were communal and halachic reasons not to say Kol Nidre, yet it survived all the doubts and misgivings. It remains the quintessential expression of the awe and solemnity of the day. Its undiminished power defies all obvious explanations. Somehow it seems to point to something larger than itself, whether in Jewish history or the inner heartbeat of the Jewish soul.

Several historians have argued that it acquired its pathos from the phenomenon of forced conversions, whether to Christianity or Islam, that occurred in several places in the Middle Ages, most notably Spain and Portugal in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Jews would be offered the choice: convert or suffer persecution. Sometimes it was: convert or be expelled. At times it was even: convert or die. Some Jews did convert. They were known in Hebrew as anusim (people who acted under coercion). In Spanish they were known as conversos, or contemptuously as marranos (swine).

Many of them remained Jews in secret, and once a year on the night of Yom Kippur they would make their way in secret to the synagogue to seek release from the vows they had taken to adopt to another faith, on the compelling grounds that they had no other choice. For them, coming to the synagogue was like coming home, the root meaning of teshuvah.

There are obvious problems with this hypothesis. Firstly, Kol Nidre was in existence several centuries before the era of forced conversions. So historian Joseph S. Bloch suggested that Kol Nidre may have originated in the much earlier Christian persecution of Jews in Visigoth Spain, when in 613 Sisebur issued a decree that all Jews should either convert or be expelled, anticipating the Spanish expulsion of 1492. Even so, it is unlikely that conversos would have taken the risk of being discovered practising Judaism. Had they done so during the centuries in which the Inquisition was in force they would have risked torture, trial and death. Moreover, the text of Kol Nidre makes no reference, however oblique, to conversion, return, identity, or atonement. It is simply an annulment of vows.

So the theories as they stand do not satisfy.

However it may be that Kol Nidre has a different significance altogether, one that has its origin in a remarkable rabbinic interpretation of this week's parsha. The connection between it and Yom Kippur is this: less than six weeks after the great revelation at Mount Sinai, the Israelites committed what seemed to be the unforgivable sin of making a Golden Calf. Moses prayed repeatedly for forgiveness on their behalf and eventually secured it, descending from Mount Sinai on the Tenth of Tishrei with a new set of tablets to replace those he had smashed in anger at their sin. The tenth of Tishrei subsequently became Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, in memory of that moment when the Israelites saw Moses with the new tablets and knew they had been forgiven.

Moses' prayers, as recorded in the Torah, are daring. But the Midrash makes them more audacious still. The text introducing Moses' prayer begins with the Hebrew words, Vayechal Moshe (Ex. 32:11). Normally these are translated as "Moses besought, implored, entreated, pleaded, or attempted to pacify" God. However the same verb is used in the context of annulling or breaking a vow (Num. 30:3). On this basis the Sages advanced a truly remarkable interpretation:

[Vayechal Moshe means] "Moses absolved God of His vow." When the Israelites made the Golden Calf, Moses sought to persuade God to forgive them, but God said, "I have already taken an oath that Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the Lord must be punished (Ex. 22:19). I cannot retract what I have said." Moses replied, "Lord of the universe, You have given me the power to annul oaths, for You taught me that one who takes an oath cannot break their word but a scholar can absolve them. I hereby absolve You of Your vow" (abridged from Exodus Rabbah 43:4).

According to the Sages the original act of Divine forgiveness on which Yom Kippur is based came about through the annulment of a vow, when Moses annulled the vow of God. The Sages understood the verse, "Then the Lord relented from the evil He had spoken of doing to His people" (Ex. 32:14) to mean that God expressed regret for the vow He had taken – a precondition for a vow to be annulled.

Why would God regret His determination to punish the people for their sin? On this, another Midrash offers an equally radical answer. The opening word of Psalm 61 is la-menatzeach. When this word appears in Psalms it usually means, "To the conductor, or choirmaster." However the Sages interpreted it to mean, "To the Victor," meaning God, and added this stunning commentary:

To the Victor who sought to be defeated, as it is said (Isaiah 57:16), "I will not accuse them forever, nor will I always be angry, for then they would faint away because of Me—the very people I have created." Do not read it thus, but, "I will accuse in order to be defeated." How so? Thus said the Holy One, blessed be He, "When I win, I lose, and when I lose I gain. I defeated the generation of the Flood, but did I not lose thereby, for I destroyed My own creation, as it says (Gen. 7:23), "Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out." The same happened with the generation of the Tower of Babel and the people of Sodom. But in the days of Moshe who defeated Me (by persuading Me to forgive the Israelites whom I had sworn to destroy), I gained for I did not destroy Israel.[1]

God wants His forgiveness to override His justice, because strict justice hurts humanity, and humanity is God's creation and carries His image. That is why He regretted His vow and allowed Moses to annul it. That is why Kol Nidre has the power it has. For it recalls the Israelites' worst sin, the Golden Calf, and their forgiveness, completed when Moses descended the mountain with the new tablets on the 10th of Tishrei, the anniversary of which is Yom Kippur. The forgiveness was the result of Moses' daring prayer, understood by the Sages as an act of annulment of vows. Hence Kol Nidre, a formula for the annulment of vows.

The power of Kol Nidre has less to do with forced conversions than with a recollection of the moment, described in our parsha, when Moses stood in prayer before God and achieved forgiveness for the people: the first time the whole people was forgiven despite the gravity of their sin. During Musaf on

Yom Kippur we describe in detail the second Yom Kippur: the service of the High Priest, Aharon, as described in Vayikra 16. But on Kol Nidre we recall the first Yom Kippur when Moses annulled the Almighty's vow, letting His compassion override His justice, the basis of all Divine forgiveness.

I believe we must always strive to fulfil our promises. If we fail to keep our word, eventually we lose our freedom. But given the choice between justice and forgiveness, choose forgiveness. When we forgive and are worthy of being forgiven, we are liberated from a past we regret, to build a better future.

Shabbat Shalom

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Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Ki Tisa (Exodus 30:11 – 34:35)

Rabbi Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Two Tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord" (Exodus 34:29)

What is the significance of the dazzling radiance of Moses's face and why did it not attain this shining glow until he received the Second Tablets on Yom Kippur? And, perhaps the most difficult question of all, why did Moses break the first tablets? Yes, he was bitterly disappointed, perhaps even angry, at the Israelites' worship of the Golden Calf only 40 days after God's first Revelation on Shavuot; however, these tablets were "the work of God and they were the writing of God." How could the holiest human being take the holiest object on earth and smash it to smithereens? Was he not adding to Israel's sin, pouring salt on the wounds of the Almighty (as it were)? My revered teacher, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, taught that Moses emerges from our portion of Ki Tisa not only as the greatest prophet of the generations but also as the exalted rebbe of Klal Yisrael (All of Israel), as Moshe Rabeinu; Moses the teacher and master of all the generations. This unique transformation of his personality took place on Yom Kippur; it is the sobriquet of Rebbe which occasions the rays of splendor which shone forth from his countenance.

The midrash on the first verse of the Book of Leviticus, "And [God] called out to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting..." provides a remarkable insight.

The biblical word for "called out" in this text is vayiker, a word which suggests a mere chance encounter rather than an actual summoning or calling out of the Divine; indeed, our Masoretic text places a small letter 'alef' at the end of the word. The midrash explains that it was Moses's modesty which insisted upon an almost accidental meeting (veyikra) rather than a direct summons.

However, when God completed the writing down of the Five Books, there was a small amount of ink left over from that small 'alef'; the Almighty lovingly placed the surplus of sacred ink on Moses's forehead, which accounts for the glorious splendor which emanated from his face.

Allow me to add to this midrash on the basis of the teaching of Rabbi Soloveitchik. The essence of the Second Tablets included the Oral Law, the human input of the great Torah Sages throughout the generations which had been absent from the first tablets.

Hence Chapter 34 of our portion opens with God's command to Moses, "Hew for yourself two stone tablets" – you, Moses, and not Me, God; the first tablets were hewn by God and the commandments were engraved by God, whereas the second tablets were hewn by the human being Moses and the commands were engraved by him. The chapter concludes: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Write for yourself these words for on the basis of these words [the Oral Law, the hermeneutic principles and the interpretations of

the rabbis of each generation] have I established an [eternal] covenant with Israel.”

Rabbi Soloveitchik maintains that during the 40 days from the beginning of the month of Elul to Yom Kippur, Moses relearned the 613 commandments with the many possibilities of the Oral Law; Moses’s active intellect became the “receiver” for the active intellect of the Divine, having received all of the manifold potential possibilities of the future developments of Torah throughout the generations. This is the meaning of the Talmudic adage that “Every authentic scholar (‘ talmid vatik ’) who presents a novel teaching is merely recycling Torah from Sinai.”

In this manner, Moses’s personality became totally identified and intertwined with Torah, a sacred combination of the Divine words and the interpretations of Moses. Moses became a living ‘Sefer Torah’, a “ministering vessel” (kli sharet) which can never lose its sanctity.

The Beit Halevi (Rav Yosef Dov Baer Halevi Soloveitchik, the great-grandfather of my teacher) maintains that the special radiance which emanated from Moses’s countenance originated from the concentrated sanctity of Moses’s identity with the many aspects of the Oral Torah which his own generation was not yet ready to hear, but which Moses kept within himself, for later generations. Whenever the inner world of the individual is more than it appears to be on the surface, that inner radiance becomes increasingly pronounced and externally manifest. Moses’s radiant glow was Oral Torah dependent, not at all germane to the first tablets, which contained only the Written Law; the glow expressed the radiance and love which would suffuse the manifold interpretations which were beneath the surface, but would emerge throughout the future generations of oral interpretations to come!

Why did Moses break the first tablets? Moses understood that there was a desperate need for a second set of tablets, born of God’s consummate love and unconditional forgiveness, with an Oral Law which would empower the nation to be God’s partners in the developing Torah. But God had threatened to destroy the nation. Moses breaks the first tablets as a message to God: Just as the tablets are considered to be “ministering vessels” which never lose their sanctity even if broken, so are the Jewish People, Knesset Yisrael , teachers and students of Torah, “ministering vessels,” who will never lose their sanctity, even if God attempts to break them! The Jewish nation, repositories of the oral teachings, are the heirs to the eternal sanctity of Moses their Rebbe.
Shabbat Shalom!

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Ki Tisa

For the week ending 14 March 2020 / 18 Adar 5780

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parsha Insights

A Work of Craft

"See, I have proclaimed by name Betzalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Yehuda. I have filled him with a G-dly spirit, with wisdom, insight, and knowledge, and with every craft ... to perform every craft of design." (31:2-3)

In Hebrew, there is no word for Art.

There is a Hebrew word, "melacha," that means "craft," but no word meaning Art.

What’s the difference between Art and craft?

An artist can think he is G-d.

He starts off with a blank piece of paper and creates a universe. Being an artist is the closest a person can get to creation ex nihilo — creation from nothing. The universe of the artist is entirely at the whim of its creator. He

can draw and he can erase. He can form and he can fold. He can "create worlds" and he can "destroy them." The sky can be blue or gray. The next note could go up or down. And who says that all this has to be the way it is? Me, the artist.

For the past two and a half thousand years there has raged a global-historical conflict over the place of art in the world. The ancient Greeks, who invented Art with a capital "A", claimed that Art is a doorway to ultimate truth. This Weltanschauung says that through art and artifice you can reach the elemental truths of existence. Celebrating the surface, the way things look, claimed the ancient Greek, leads to the essence of things themselves. The Jew says that the artifice and illusion leads only to greater illusion, unless that skill subordinates itself to the service of truth.

Art that is not for Art’s sake is called craft. Craft knows it is the servant of another master.

The Talmud teaches that if you never saw the Second Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple), which Herod built, you never saw a beautiful building in your life. Its walls were constructed from blue/green marble and white Marmara marble. One layer was indented and the next protruded so that the plaster would adhere. Herod thought of covering the whole edifice with gold plate. The Rabbis told him to leave it as it was — without plaster or gilding — since it looked better in its natural state with the different levels of green/blue and white resembling the waves of the sea.

"See, I have proclaimed by name Betzalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Yehuda. I have filled him with a G-dly spirit, with wisdom, insight, and knowledge, and with every craft ... to perform every craft of design."

Every talent has a place in Judaism. Every talent is a gift of G-dly spirit: A beautiful voice, a brilliant mind, the skill of an artist. Every talent is a gift and a responsibility.

"By His breath the Heavens are spread (shifra)" (Iyov 26:13).

G-d spreads aside the curtain of cloud to reveal that which is beyond. He disperses the clouds that conceal so we can see past the obstruction, past the surface. The word "spread," "shifra," has the same root as "shapir" which means "to beautify."

In Jewish thought, beauty means seeing past the surface to the essence. That which is beautiful is that which takes us beneath the surface, beyond the clouds, to reveal the endless blue heavens, to reveal the truth.

Similarly, the word for "ugly" and "opaque" in Hebrew are the same "achur." Something that conceals essence is ugly, however "beautiful" it might seem.

"Art for Art's sake" can never be a Jewish concept. For, if the definition of beauty is that which reveals, something that reveals nothing but itself can never be beautiful.

The true beauty of the Tabernacle and the Temples was in being the place of the greatest revelation in this world. It revealed that existence is not bounded by the physical constraints of space and time. It demonstrated that this world is connected to that which is beyond this world.

It was a Work of Craft.

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message - Kee Tisah 5780-2020
“The Levites and the Golden Calf: Transcending One’s Own Nature”
(Updated and revised from Kee Tisah 5761-2001)

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week’s parasha, parashat Kee Tisah, we read of the tragic and calamitous rebellion of the Golden Calf.

According to tradition, the People of Israel miscalculated the time that Moses would be with G-d on Mt. Sinai. When Moses did not return at the

expected time after 40 days, the people demanded from Aaron that he make a new leader for them.

Aaron tried to delay the people until Moses returned by asking the people to bring their jewelry, expecting that they would not be very eager to give up their valuables. Uncharacteristically, the people quickly brought their valuables. Aaron received their donations and fashioned the gold with a tool into a molten calf. Aaron tried to delay again announcing that there would be a celebration tomorrow. But, the people were so eager, that they arose early in the morning and began to joyously worship the Calf. When Moses descended from the mountain, he found the people not only worshipping the Golden Calf, he saw them enthusiastically celebrating with song and dance. Moses reacted angrily to this sight and smashed the tablets that he had brought down from Sinai.

The Torah, in Exodus 32:25-29, states that when Moses saw that the people (worshipping the Golden Calf) had gone mad... he stood at the gate of the camp and cried out: *mi laHashem Eilai* "Whoever is to G-d, come to me!" All the Levites gathered around him. He told them, "Thus says the Lord, G-d of Israel, each of you prepare your sword on your thigh, pass back and forth through the camp and kill your own brother or your own friend or your relative."

The Levites did as Moses commanded, and on that day, there fell from the people about 3,000 men. Moses said to the Levites: "Dedicate yourselves to G-d today, for indeed each of you is dedicated through his son or his daughter and have brought on yourselves a blessing this day."

Rabbi M. Miller in his *Shabbath Shiurim*, cites a series of questions raised by the Netziv, with regard to the Golden Calf. Clearly, asks the Netziv, since only 3,000 people were killed, these 3,000 (an approximate ratio of one of 200) must have been the guilty ones among the 600,000 people, who were actually involved in the sin. Why then did only the Levites respond to Moses' call?

Furthermore, asks the Netziv, why was the call of Moses expressed in such a harsh manner? Moses did not say: Kill every person, even if he is your brother or your friend. Instead, he commands, "Kill your own brother, or your own friend." What was the reason for his extreme harshness?

Rabbi Miller explores and develops the comments of the Netziv, saying that the Levites' response to Moses was much more than an ethical, moral or religious response. Rather, claims the Netziv, the Levites' response emanated from an extraordinarily pure and unmitigated desire to perform G-d's command. Through their selfless actions, the Levites, in utter self-negation, became an instrument of G-d's justice, devoid of any human emotion. When Moses calls to the people, (Exodus 32:26), "Whoever is to G-d, come to me!"—he is really asking, who is holy and unreservedly for G-d? Who is capable of utter abnegation of the self in their zeal for G-d? He phrased the question in such a brazen manner specifically because he wanted only those to come who were up to that exalted level.

Only the Levites, among the People of Israel who did not worship the Golden Calf, reached that level of self-abnegation. Consequently, only the Levites were able to respond to Moses' call to kill even their brothers, if necessary.

Perhaps, now we understand why the Levites were singled out to be the servants of G-d for all time and to serve as the ministers in the Tabernacle and ultimately in the Temple. The Levites, who were prepared to kill even their own brothers, and subjecting themselves to the possibility of being killed by their own brothers, actually went against human nature.

While few of us could ever hope to achieve that exalted state of transcendent spirituality reached by the Levites, all Jews must certainly strive to raise their own spiritual sights as high as possible, so that we too may serve as the ministers of G-d in our own modest way.

This Shabbat is also known as "Shabbat Parashat Parah." It is the third of four special Shabbatot that surround the holiday of Purim. On this Shabbat, a thematic Torah portion concerning the Red Heifer is read from Numbers 19:1-22.

May you be blessed.

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Ki Tissa: The Knot of God's Tefillin

Moses' Vision

One of the more enigmatic passages in the Torah describes a mysterious encounter that took place following the Sin of the Golden Calf. After successfully pleading on behalf of the Jewish people, Moses took advantage of this special time of Divine favor. "Please let me have a vision of Your Glory!"

God replied that it is impossible for mortal man "to have a vision of Me and live." However, God agreed to protect Moses in a mountain crevice as He "passed by."

"You will then have a vision of My back. My face, however, will not be seen." (Ex. 33:17-23)

This account raises many questions. The most obvious problem concerns the story's anthropomorphic elements. God has no body; what do the allegorical terms 'back' and 'face' mean?

The Talmudic commentary for this puzzling incident only adds to our confusion. The Sages explained that God revealed His 'back' to Moses by showing him the knot of God's tefillah shel rosh. (The tefillah shel rosh, the phylactery worn on the head, is held in place by means of a leather strap tied to the back of the head with a special knot.)

What is the significance of God's tefillin knot? Why did God choose to reveal that particular part of His tefillin to Moses?

Knowing God

There are two levels of knowledge. The first is an accurate knowledge of an object's true nature. The second is a limited knowledge, restricted by our intellectual or physical limitations. Regarding tangible objects, there may not be a significant difference between the two levels of knowledge. But when dealing with abstract concepts, especially with regard to the nature of God, the difference will be great — perhaps infinitely so.

The Torah is based on the second type of knowledge. It presents us with a perception of God according to our limited grasp, since only this type of knowledge can provide ethical guidance. Knowledge of God's true nature, on the other hand, is not a form of comprehension at all. As God informed Moses: "Man cannot have a vision of Me and live."

Bound to the Human Intellect

Now we may begin to understand the metaphor of God's tefillin. Contained inside tefillin are scrolls with verses declaring God's unity and Divine nature. These verses signify a comprehension of God's true reality. This truth, however, is beyond human understanding. How can we relate to this infinite truth? What brings it down to the level of our intellectual capabilities, enabling this knowledge to enlighten us and provide moral direction?

The function of the knot is to bind the tefillah shel rosh to the head — and intellect. The knot symbolizes a level of comprehension that takes into account the abilities of those contemplating, so that they may grasp and utilize this knowledge.

The imagery of God's 'face' and 'back' corresponds to these two levels of knowledge. 'Face' in Hebrew is *panim*, similar to the word *p'nim*, meaning inner essence. True knowledge of God's infinite reality is God's 'face.' Knowledge of God's reality according to our limited understanding, on the other hand, is referred to as God's 'back.' Moses was granted this partial, indirect knowledge — a grasp of the Divine that we are able to appreciate and apply in our finite world.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. I, p.33)

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Dvar Torah: Ki Tisa

What does Hashem's back look like?

This must sound like an extraordinary question but in Parshat Ki Tisa we find Moshe having an encounter with the Almighty. Moshe asks to be given permission to see the presence of Hashem and Hashem replies 'V'raita et achorai, u'fanai lo yera'u' – you will see my back but my face will not be seen'. What did Hashem mean? Many of our commentators say that actually the message here is that if you want to see the presence of Hashem in this world you need to look backwards to our history because with hindsight, one can certainly understand Hashem's involvement and his place, directing everything that takes place in this world.

Rashi however, prefers a different approach. He references the words of Chazal, who explain that at that moment, Hashem showed Moshe his 'Keshet shel teffilin – the knot of the teffilin'. You see we put on our teffilin 'shel rosh' – the teffilin of the head and the teffilin 'shel yad' – the teffilin of the arm, every day. If you were to have a look at somebody who is wearing teffilin from behind, you will see the knot of the teffilin in the nape of his neck. That is what Hashem showed Moshe. You see in the Gemara (masechet Brachot) Chazal tell us that a Hashem puts on teffilin every day. Then they ask which verse is written in the teffilin of Hashem? The answer is the verse from Chronicles 'u'mi ke'amcha Yisrael goi echad ba'aretz' – 'who is like the people of Israel, a unique nation in this world'. I find this to be incredible. In our teffilin we have written 'Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad' – Listen o Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one'. Our teffilin are all about our praise for Hashem, but Hashem's teffilin are all about his praise for the people of Israel.

Now the Shut Tirosh v'Yitzhar explains beautifully, this particular encounter between Hashem and Moshe took place immediately after the sin of the golden calf. By showing Moshe his teffilin, Hashem was giving us reassurance. Despite the fact that so soon after receiving the Ten Commandments we rebelled against God and rejected his presence in this world, nonetheless, Hashem was continuing to sing the praises of our people. Despite our actions, Hashem was guaranteeing that the Jewish people would survive. So Moshe ended up not seeing Hashem's face, not even seeing his back – he saw his teffilin. Through the teffilin of Hashem, he was informed that regardless of circumstances in this world, Hashem will always remain true to His covenant with the founders of our faith and He will guarantee the survival of the Jewish people.

Shabbat Shalom

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Ki Tisa: Understanding a Son's Sin

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Every man is an omnibus in which his ancestors ride. -Oliver Wendell Holmes

This week's Torah reading contains the famous episode of the Golden Calf. Moses had gone up Mount Sinai to receive the Law from God. After forty days and nights, the people of Israel became anxious, and feeling leaderless, demanded of Aaron, Moses' brother, that he make an idol for them. Aaron grudgingly does so.

The next morning the people of Israel worship the Golden Calf. They do this at the foot of Mount Sinai, forty days after having heard the voice of God, three months after having been miraculously liberated from Egypt. God is understandably furious (whatever that means theologically). God is ready to destroy the nation of Israel. He informs Moses of his plan to wipe out all of Israel and start over again with Moses as the Patriarch of a new nation that would ostensibly remain loyal and steadfast in their devotion to God.

This is where Moses steps in. He prays to God. His prayer is so strong, so sharp, so convincing, that he somehow gets God to stay His wrath. (Parts of his prayer are used in our liturgies to this day).

The Meshech Chochma on Exodus 32:8 digs a little deeper and wonders as to what gave Moses the insight, the clarity and the wisdom to articulate such an effective prayer and thereby save the entire nation of Israel.

He answers based on the Talmud (Tractate Berachot 32a) which says that Moses prayed until he felt "fire in his bones." The Meshech Chochma details that the reference to "fire in his bones" is that Moses prayed to God for forgiveness for Israel about the Golden Calf until he felt in his bones that he also had the same fault. Only when Moses reached that point of understanding and identification with the sin of Israel, was he able to achieve forgiveness for Israel.

What aspect of the sin was in Moses' "bones?" The Talmud (Tractate Niddah 31a) states that a characteristic that a father bequeaths to his son is his bones. The Midrash based on the Book of Judges tells us that Moses' grandson Yehonatan was guilty of worshipping idols. That gave Moses the opening to say to God: "God, you want to make a new nation from me? In my family, I will also have this fault of idol worship."

So Moses' understanding and identification with his future grandson's idolatry somehow saved the nation of Israel from being punished for that same crime.

May we identify with our progeny, and they with us.

Dedication - To all those in quarantine.

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

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Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Ki Tisa

פרשת כי תשא תשפ

זה יתנו כל העובר על הפקודים

This shall they give – everyone who passes through the census. (30:13)

The *mitzvah* of giving *machatzis ha'shekel*, a half-*shekel*, each year applies equally to all Jews (men, twenty years old and up), regardless of their financial circumstances. All Jews are the same with regard to the donation that supports the daily *korbanos*, communal offerings, and other communal rituals in the *Bais HaMikdash*. As the *Sefer HaChinuch* explains the *shoresh*, root, of this *mitzvah*, Hashem wanted – for the good and merit of *Klal Yisrael* – that all Jews be equal with regard to the sacrifices (equal representation) that they brought regularly before Him. *Shavim b'mitzvah*, equal in the *mitzvah*, because all Jews are equal before Hashem. Every Jew has his unique, individual *tafkid*, purpose, in life, totally exclusive of his fellow. It is a purpose which only he can perform – no one else. After all, only one "you" exists.

This idea becomes more compelling after (or during) a crisis in one's life, when everything seems to come apart. One might think that the crisis counteracts his purpose in life. It is not true. He always has a purpose. He should be patient and watch how the situation plays out, and he will soon see how, even/especially in his present crisis, he is able to achieve what no one else can.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates the story of *Reb Asaf-Yosef Zeiger* - who grew up in a secular *kibbutz* in Southern *Eretz Yisrael* right next to *Sderot*. He became a *baal teshuvah*, penitent, and studied for eight years in *Bnei Brak*. He then returned to his *kibbutz* and married a like-minded young woman. Now came the pressing decision: Where should they live? No religious atmosphere to speak of existed in their present location. His mentors and other distinguished Torah leaders encouraged him to return to the *kibbutz*. No one was more suited to reach out to the members of his community than one of their own. He figured that this must be his personal *tafkid* in life. It did not take long before he had established a *shul* that served as a Torah center to which Jews of all stripes came to hear the word of G-d. Even after he became gravely ill, he continued his holy work, because only he could do it. Who knows, perhaps this is why he was blessed with a *refuah sheleimah*?

One of the premier *talmidim*, disciples, of the *Baal Shem Tov* visited his saintly *Rebbe*. He was shocked to hear the *Baal Shem Tov* declare, "You have no *emunah*, faith!" Obviously shocked by this accusation, the student replied, "I spend a good part of my *avodas ha'kodesh*, religious service, working on areas of *emunah*, elevating and deepening my faith." The *Baal Shem Tov* countered, "Yes, you have *emunah* in Hashem, but you have no faith in yourself!" This means that a person who does not "hold of himself," who lacks sufficient self-confidence, whose belief in himself and his abilities leaves something to be desired, is guilty of the concept of *katnus mochin*, restricted consciousness, which is the opposite of *gadlus mochin*, expanded consciousness. Negativity, resentment, aggravation, and obstinateness appear to be much more powerful than they really are to the individual who is going through a period of *katnus*, literally, smallness. He becomes overwhelmed, filled with a lack of self-confidence; he is no longer able to dream, to believe, to hope. He acts much like the *meraglim*, Jewish spies, whom Moshe *Rabbeinu* sent to reconnoiter *Eretz Yisrael*. They heard the residents of the land referring to them as *chagavim*, grasshoppers, which resulted in their own diminished opinion of themselves: *Va'nehi b'eineinu k'chagavim*, "We were in our own eyes as grasshoppers" (*Bamidbar* 13:33). Such a statement projects an utter state of uselessness and depression, which impedes a person's personal growth, thus interfering with his *emunah* in Hashem. The key to believing in oneself is to be true to oneself. Everyone has a unique good quality upon which he should focus. As a result, he should live his life consistent with his highest values and aspirations. Doing this will enable and empower him to believe in himself.

As a corollary to the *mitzvah of machtzis ha'shekel*, we learn the significance of attending to our personal *tafkid* in life. It is not about anyone else but us. Everyone has to worry about his personal turf, his unique *tafkid*. Do not worry about the other fellow. Worry about yourself!

The head of one of the premier *chesed* programs in *Eretz Yisrael*, a program which reaches out and helps many individuals who are in serious need of medical assistance, (and all of the antecedent issues that result from their condition) came to *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita*, during *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, seeking a *brachah*, blessing. Although an accomplished *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, he asked the *Rav* to bless him that he should have more time for learning and that his learning should be on a more profound level (as it used to be prior to his involvement with the *Klal*, community). The response was inspiring. "Had you approached me prior to undertaking this endeavor which assists thousands of our people and creates an enormous *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of Hashem's Name, in the world, I would have granted you a blessing to your heart's content (to grow in learning). Now that you are so involved in your project, and *Klal Yisrael* is in dire need of your services, however, it is a clear sign from Heaven that this is your *tafkid* in life. If this is the case, I have no reason to fill your request for a blessing (to grow in Torah learning)."

If we are succeeding at something, *Klal Yisrael* is benefitting and this results in an enormous *Kiddush Hashem* - it must be our *tafkid*. So, we should go for it!

ויאמר משה אל אהרן מה עשה לך העם הזה כי הבאת עליי חטאה גדולה
Moshe said to Aharon, "What did these people do to you that you brought a grievous sin upon it?" (32:21)

Rashi interprets Moshe *Rabbeinu's* question as, "How much trouble did they put you through before you felt compelled to make the Golden Calf for them?" *Ramban* disagrees, because such a sin is considered *avodah zarah*, idol worship, which is one of the three cardinal sins for which the law of *yehoreg v'al yaavor*, one should be killed rather than transgress, applies. In other words, regardless of the *yissurim*, painful troubles, to which Aharon might have been subjected, he still did not have license to make the Golden Calf. While it is beyond the scope of this *dvar Torah* to distinguish between *yissurim* and *missah*, death, with regard to the sin of *avodah zarah*, we can derive one powerful lesson from Moshe's question: When one judges the sinful behavior of his fellow (judging, as in preparation to rebuke), he must take into account everything and anything that could have catalyzed the sin.

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, observes that when we see our fellow acting inappropriately, regardless of the sin, we must first ask ourselves what his reason could be, what mitigating circumstances could have forced him to act in this manner. We must assume that he was not acting with malice; it was not the evil within him that was expressing itself. He must have an underlying reason for his actions. [This neither justifies nor vindicates his actions. A sin is a sin regardless of the underlying excuse, but it is good to know that the individual did not act maliciously.]

Chazal assert (*Pirkei Avos* 1:6), *Hevei dan es kol ha'adam l'kaf z'chus*; "Judge all men favorably." Most people justify acting the way they do. One does not simply sin because he wants to sin. He has a story. Every person has a pathology. If we were to go back to his past—family, community, education, upbringing, marriage, economics, etc., we will most often discover a compelling (and mitigating) reason for his actions.

Aharon replied to Moshe, "They had already murdered Chur. I was next. I could not allow them to kill us, for this would have created an unpardonable situation."

The *Sefas Emes* presents a fascinating exposition concerning this *Mishnah*. First and foremost, we are not instructed to ignore a person's actions. It is vital that we criticize constructively, with love and understanding, while being sensitive to the sinner's emotions and (perceived) reasons for acting in such a manner. We must try to understand what would make him act in such a negative manner. The *Sefas Emes* draws this conclusion from the unique vernacular of the *Mishnah*. The *Mishnah* exhorts us to judge "all men" *kol ha'adam*, which actually means, "all of the man." The whole of the person/all of the man, in this context means that you must give each person the benefit of the doubt. We do not judge one action in isolation, without taking into account the sinner's entire personality, his background and what he has gone through in life. This way we realize that had we been in his place, we might not have acted differently.

Horav Nachman Breslover, zl, offers a powerful thought concerning the obligation to judge others favorably. He teaches that the way we view others actually empowers us. We must search for a positive quality within the person whom we are judging. Within that positive quality, only good exists. If we can find that good and judge him in accordance with it, it is possible to elevate him to the point that the scales of judgment will swing in his favor. Thus, the individual whom we were about to disregard can be saved and brought back, if we take the time to expend the effort to look for that good and judge him based upon that good.

Furthermore, the way we view others can, in turn, become a self-fulfilling prophecy. *Rav Nachman's* teaching applies not only with regard to the way we view others, but, likewise (perhaps especially) the way we look at ourselves. Two types of people render two types of judgment. The first type is quick to vilify others, while simultaneously finding enormous merit in their own actions. Conversely, others are quick to heap praise on the actions of others, while deriding themselves mercilessly. For this reason, *Rav*

Nachman underscores the importance of also judging oneself favorably.

One who has difficulty in finding the positive qualities which he possesses will fall prey to depression and melancholy. “Do not listen to the negative voice from within which tries to depress you,” declares the *Rebbe*. Surely one has acted properly or performed good things with his life. That is sufficient reason to claim merit and establish a baseline upon which to focus. Once we have discovered the good, the rest is all about focusing on that good. This will ultimately bring us back to Hashem, Who is waiting for our return.

An elegant wedding was celebrated at one of the more exclusive halls in Yerushalayim. The assembled guests knew the *chassan's* family quite well, as fine, upstanding – but economically challenged – people. They were frequently borrowing or requesting assistance, simply to put food on the table. Therefore, the guests were quite surprised to witness the luxury and opulence of this wedding. It was not as if the *kallah's* side had any money either. As is common when people congregate and have nothing better to do, some of the guests began to gossip, wondering how a family of “*shnorrers*,” who usually requested charity, could have the temerity to incur such exorbitant expenses to marry off their son. When the *Rav* of the community heard the slander based upon rumors, he felt that he had an obligation to reveal the truth about the wedding.

Shortly before the wedding, the father had searched for a hall large enough for the wedding. He was about to make his first wedding and felt it prudent to invite the community. After all, without the constant support of the community, he would not be here now. He was in for a shock when he discovered that weddings are not given away for free. A caterer must earn a living. He went to the first hotel in which his son could get married and was prepared to sign a contract. As he was inquiring about prices, the woman who owned the hall burst into tears. She wept profusely after discovering the identity of the *chassan's* father.

A few moments elapsed and, after she gathered herself together, she explained to the puzzled father why she had reacted in the manner that she did: “Your father (the *chassan's* grandfather) helped my family escape Germany during the second world war. If not for him, we would not be here today. I insist that your son's wedding be celebrated in this hotel and that I assume all the expenses for the wedding.” This is how people who were otherwise destitute were able to have a lavish wedding. A story always has two sides.

After reading this story, one might say that it is best not to talk, because we never know how, why, where they had the money to make such a wedding. The flipside is, why would they be so thoughtless as to make such a wedding and feed the slander mongers their daily rumor? They should have known better. People – even good people – when they see a poor man living in luxury will question his sanity and integrity. Why give them the opportunity to speak negatively?

To judge favorably is an expression of deep love. We care about the person and want to see him happy and empowered. This is how it should be. We pray for the day when this is how it will be.

הראני נא את כבודך

Show me please Your glory. (Shemos 33:18)

The *cheit ha'eigel*, sin of the Golden Calf, was committed forty days after Hashem gave Moshe *Rabbeinu* the *Aseres HaDibros*, Ten Commandments, on *Har Sinai*. It was a sin for which Hashem wanted to destroy the Nation. While only a small group of people actually sinned, the rest of the nation stood by in apathy, either indifferent or unable to do anything to prevent the sin from occurring. As a result, Hashem held all of them in contempt, and He punished them. Hashem revoked His decree to destroy the nation due to Moshe *Rabbeinu's* supplication on their behalf.

Following Hashem's acquiescence to Moshe's prayer, Moshe asked Hashem, *Hareini na es kvodecha*; “Show me, please, Your Glory,” which means, “Teach me the way You conduct the world.” Hashem replied

that it is impossible to see Hashem's Glory directly and survive. To grant Moshe a glimpse, Hashem placed Moshe in a cave until His Glory passed by. As the vision of Hashem's Glory passed, Moshe could look out and gaze at Hashem's back. *Chazal* explain that Moshe was able to see His *Kesher Shel Tefillin*, the knot that secures the *Tefillin Shel Rosh*, *Tefillin* on the head, which is positioned on the back of the neck. Obviously, this is beyond us. What does the *Tefillin* knot, *kesher*, have to do with the Glory of Hashem?

The commentators interpret Moshe's request as an attempt to understand the spiritual quandary of, *Tzaddik v'ra lo, rasha v'tov lo*; “The righteous suffer while the wicked prosper.” This dilemma is magnified when we see a *tzaddik* who has lived a perfect life of commitment to Hashem suffer greatly, while the consummate *rasha*, whose life of abandon and rebellion against Hashem is utterly disgusting, seems to be walking on a cloud, enjoying the pleasures of this world to his greatest satisfaction. Our quintessential leader, whose faith in Hashem was without peer, could not fathom why there must exist such a spiritual impasse – one which has plagued and even turned off otherwise (externally) upright and devoted Jews. Furthermore, the eleventh *Ani Maamin*, Principle of Faith, declares that He is a righteous G-d Who rewards good and punishes evil. This is a principle of faith which, in the face of what seems to occur, requires that we make an enormous leap of faith to accept it.

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl (quoted in *My Rebbe, Rav Schwab*), explains that the *kesher* of the *Tefillin Shel Rosh* is tied in a special way. The manner in which we tie it provides us with an insight into Hashem's response to Moshe. A leather strap (*retzuah*) is inserted through a slot in the back of the *Tefillin* box and comes out on the right and left sides of the box. Those two ends are connected by a special knot, causing the *retzuos*, straps, to form a ring the size of the person's head. The knot sits at the back of the head, with the rest of the straps hanging down and worn by the person on the front of the body. Upon examination, we note that each strap enters the knot on one side and exits on the other. The right strap enters on the right and exits on the left and vice versa. Thus, the *kesher* serves as the medium for reversing the *retzuah*, with right becoming left and left becoming right.

This, explains *Rav Schwab*, alludes to the underlying connection between Moshe's question and the *kesher* of the *Tefillin*. What we perceive as pain and suffering is, in reality, in one's best interest. The righteous person who undergoes suffering simultaneously atones his sins in this world, so that his entrance into his rightful place in the World-to-Come is pure and without sin. The one who lives a life in violation of Hashem's *mitzvos* seems to value this temporal world above the external value of reward in *Olam Habba*, the World-to-Come. Thus, Hashem rewards him for whatever good he does in this world. The *kesher* teaches us that what goes in one end does not necessarily exit that way. Likewise, what we seem to think is “right” is actually “left” and vice versa.

ומשה לא ידע כי קרן עור פניו בדברו אתו

הרב דניאל בן הרב אברהם ארי' ליב שור ז"ל *our father, grandfather*

נל"ב ע"א אדר תשס"ו ת.ג.צ.ב.ה. *Horav Doniel Schur Z"l*

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When May I Ask a Non-Jew to Assist Me on Shabbos?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

While enslaved in Egypt, the Jews worked every day of the week, and one of the special days celebrated to commemorate our Exodus is Shabbos. Observing Shabbos includes not only keeping the *mitzvos* ourselves, but also knowing when I may ask a non-Jew to perform prohibited activity, and when I may benefit from work performed by a non-Jew on Shabbos.

Each of the following questions describes a situation that people have asked me:

Question #1: A non-Jew turned on the lights for me on Shabbos. May I use this light to read?

Question #2: It is chilly in our house. May I ask a non-Jewish neighbor to turn up the heat?

Question #3: There is a problem with our electricity -- the lights have gone out, and my son is terrified. May I ask a non-Jewish electrician to repair the power on Shabbos?

Question #4: We left the air conditioning off, and it became very hot on Shabbos. May I ask a non-Jew to turn the air conditioning on?

Question #5: I did not realize that I parked my car in a place where it will be towed away. May I ask a non-Jewish neighbor to move it?

In general, a Jew may not ask a non-Jew to perform activity that a Jew himself may not do. Chazal prohibited this because asking a non-Jew to work on Shabbos diminishes our sensitivity to doing melacha ourselves. Furthermore, the non-Jew functions as my agent, and it is therefore considered as if I did melacha work on Shabbos.

One may not benefit from melacha performed for a Jew by a non-Jew on Shabbos, even if the Jew did not ask him to do the work (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 276:1). Thus, if a non-Jew turned on a light for the Jew's benefit without being asked, a Jew may not use the light.

This article will discuss when I may benefit from what a non-Jew does a melacha and when may I ask him to do melacha.

BENEFITING FROM NON-JEWISH LABOR

In general, if a non-Jew does melacha work for me on Shabbos, I may not benefit from what he did until enough time has elapsed after Shabbos for the work to have been performed after Shabbos (Beitzah 24b; Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 325:6). Thus if a non-Jew baked an apple for me on Shabbos, I may not eat it after Shabbos until the time it takes to bake an apple. This way I receive no benefit from the work he performed on Shabbos and I am not tempted to ask him to do melacha for me at a different time (Rashi and Tosafos, Beitzah 24b).

However, if a non-Jew did work specifically for himself or for another non-Jew, I may benefit from his work even on that Shabbos itself (Mishnah Shabbos 122a). Therefore, if he turned on a light to see where he is going or to be able to read, I may use the light to read. There is an exception to this lenience that I will explain shortly.

The Gemara tells us the following story: The great Amora Shmuel was visiting a man named Avin in the town of Torin, when a non-Jew entered the room and kindled a light. Shmuel assumed that the non-Jew had ignited the light for Shmuel's benefit, which would make it forbidden to use the light. In order to point out the fact that he was not using the light, Shmuel turned his chair around, with his back to the light, so that it was obvious that he was not using it. Shortly thereafter, the non-Jew returned with a document that he proceeded to read. Shmuel now realized that the non-Jew had kindled the light for himself and that he (Shmuel) was permitted to read by the light (Shabbos 122b).

Sometimes I may not benefit from work performed by a non-Jew even though he performed the work to benefit a non-Jew. This is in a case where there is concern that my benefiting from the activity might encourage the non-Jew to do more work than he needs for himself in order to benefit me. For example, if a non-Jew who knows me heated up a kettle of water because he wants a cup of coffee, I may not use the hot water. The reason is that, at some time in the future, he might decide to add extra water to the kettle that he is heating so that I can benefit (Shabbos 122a).

REMOVING IMPEDIMENTS

If a non-Jew did work that results in removing an impediment that was disturbing a Jew, I need not be concerned about benefiting from the non-Jew's melacha activity. For example, if he turned off the light so that a Jewish person can sleep, one may go to sleep in that room. This is not considered as receiving benefit from a non-Jew's Shabbos activity, since extinguishing the light only removed an obstacle and created nothing positive.

PARTIAL BENEFIT

Another instance that is not considered as receiving benefit from melacha activity is when I could already benefit before the non-Jew performed the melacha, and his melacha only makes it easier to do what I wanted. For example, if there is enough light to read, and a non-Jew turns on additional light, I may continue to read even though it is now easier to read. This is not considered as benefiting from the non-Jew's melacha since I could have read even if he did not do the melacha (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 276:4). Similarly, one may eat a meal by the light that he provides, if one could eat even without the additional light. (Note that one may not ask the non-Jew to turn on the light in any of these instances.)

The poskim dispute whether in the above scenario I may continue reading after the original light burns out. Some contend that once the light has gone out, I may no longer read in the room since I am now benefiting from what the non-Jew kindled on Shabbos (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 276:4; Bach; Magen Avraham). Others contend that since I was permitted to read when the light was kindled, I may continue to read even after the original light extinguished (Taz, Orach Chayim 276:3). Mishnah Berurah concludes that one should follow the first opinion.

I once spent Shabbos in a kosher hotel for a family simcha. I arrived early for davening Shabbos morning, intending to learn beforehand, only to discover that the lights were still out in the shul. I assumed that the lights were set to go on by a Shabbos clock and sat down near a window to learn in the interim. Fifteen minutes before davening started, a non-Jewish employee of the hotel arrived and turned on all the shul lights. This involved two prohibitions: 1. Since the non-Jew was an employee of the Jewish-owned hotel, the hotel should not have arranged for him to do melacha on Shabbos. 2. One may not benefit from the work he did. Thus, it is forbidden to read in the shul if you need the light to read.

However, as long as enough light came in through the windows to read, I could continue to read using the artificial light, since I could in any case read near the window.

However, I could not read anywhere else in the shul. Furthermore, once it would get dark outdoors, and I could no longer read by the natural light, most authorities would prohibit reading by the kindled light.

MUST I LEAVE HOME?

According to what we have just explained, it would seem that if a non-Jew turns on the light in a house because he wants to benefit a Jew, one may not benefit from the light -- and would have to leave the house. However, Chazal ruled that one is not required to leave one's house if one did not want the non-Jew to turn on the light. Although one may not benefit from a non-Jew's melacha on Shabbos, one is not required to leave one's house in order to avoid benefiting from melacha done against one's will (Rama 276:1, quoting Yerushalmi). In all instances like this, one should tell the non-Jew that you do not want him to do the melacha.

WHEN MAY I ASK A NON-JEW TO WORK ON SHABBOS?

Under certain extenuating circumstances, Chazal permitted asking a non-Jew to do melacha that a Jew may not do himself. I will group these situations under the following categories:

I. Situations when I may ask a non-Jew to perform work that would be prohibited min haTorah for a Jew.

II. Situations when I may ask a non-Jew to perform work that is prohibited miderabbanan.

I. There are a few situations where I may ask a non-Jew to perform something that would be a Torah prohibition if I did it myself. I may ask a non-Jew to perform a melacha for someone who is "choleh kol gufo," literally, his entire body is sick. This means that although the person is in no danger, his illness is more than just a minor annoyance but it affects his entire body (Shabbos 129a; Shulchan Aruch 328:17). For example, I may ask a non-Jew to drive this person to a doctor, to pick up a prescription, or to turn a light on or off. This leniency applies to someone whose illness affects his entire body, or who is sick enough to be bedridden. Later in the article, I will discuss the halachos that apply to someone who is not well but who is feeling better than the person just described.

CHILDREN

Since children often get sick and are generally weaker than adults are, halacha considers a child as choleh kol gufo (Rama 276:1) when there is a great need (Mishnah Berurah ad loc.). Therefore, if it is cold indoors, one may ask a non-Jew to turn on the heat for the sake of a child, and then an adult may also benefit from the heat.

Until what age do I consider a child a choleh kol gufo? Many poskim contend that any child under the age of nine is in this category (Shu't Minchas Yitzchok 1:78), although other poskim are less lenient.

Halacha treats a child who is afraid of the dark as a choleh kol gufo (Ketzos Hashulchan 134:18). Therefore if the light went out and a child is afraid, one may ask a non-Jew to rectify the problem.

We can now answer Question #3 above: "There is a problem with our electricity -- the lights have gone out, and my son is terrified. May I ask a non-Jewish electrician to repair the power on Shabbos?" Under these circumstances, one may do so.

COLD ADULTS

When it is very cold, one may ask a non-Jew to turn on the heat even for adults, even if this involves doing a Torah prohibition. This is because everyone is considered sick when it comes to the cold. When it is chilly but not freezing, the poskim dispute whether I may ask a non-Jew to turn on the heat for the sake of adults when there are no children or ill people around (Shulchan Aruch 276:5 and commentaries).

Thus, we can now answer Question #2: "It is chilly in our house. May I ask a non-Jewish neighbor to turn up the heat?" The answer is that it depends on how cold it is and who is affected by the lack of heat.

WIDESPREAD TRANSGRESSION

Another situation where one may ask a non-Jew to do melacha that is prohibited min haTorah, is when it is necessary to prevent many people from transgressing the Torah. For example, if one discovered that the eruv is down, one may ask a non-Jew to repair it on Shabbos, even though he will have to perform activities that would be prohibited min

haTorah (Mishnah Berurah 276:25), such as driving his car, tying a knot, or carrying in a reshuv harabim min haTorah.

II. Situations when I may ask a non-Jew to perform work that is prohibited miderabbanan.

SHVUS DE'SHVUS

Under certain other circumstances, Chazal permitted asking a non-Jew to do something that would be prohibited miderabbanan for a Jew. The poskim usually refer to this lenience as shvus de'shvus. In general, this is permitted in any of the following situations:

(A) If a person is slightly ill.

(B) There is a major need.

(C) In order to enable a Jew to fulfill a mitzvah (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 307:5). I will now explain these three situations:

(A) Earlier, I noted that if someone is ill to the extent that the illness affects his entire body, or if he is sick enough to go to bed, one may ask a non-Jew to do something that would involve a Torah prohibition for a Jew. If the person is less ill, one may ask a non-Jew to do something that involves only a rabbinic prohibition, but not a Torah prohibition.

Included under this category is if the person is suffering from considerable pain (Gra, Orach Chayim 325:10; Aruch Hashulchan 307:18). Thus, someone who caught his finger in a door may ask a non-Jew to bring ice through an area without an eruv, if he has no ice in his house. Similarly if an insect bit him, he may ask a non-Jew to buy medicine to alleviate the pain.

Based on the above heter, may one ask a non-Jew to turn on the air conditioner if it gets very hot? Does this qualify as alleviating a great deal of suffering? And is operating the air conditioning considered a Torah violation or a rabbinic violation, for which we may be lenient because of shvus de'shvus?

This question was the subject of a dispute by the last generation's poskim. Minchas Yitzchok (3:23) permits asking a non-Jew to turn on the air conditioning, quoting Levush who explains that once people are unaccustomed to the cold, halacha considers them to be ill even if it is not that cold. Therefore, one may ask a non-Jew to kindle a fire for them. However, he then quotes sources that contend that being too hot is not the same as being too cold. He concludes that someone who is accustomed to moderate weather suffers when it is very hot and humid and may therefore ask a non-Jew to turn on the air conditioning because it is shvus de'shvus bimkom tzaar (to alleviate suffering). Similarly, his mechutan, the Chelkas Yaakov (3:139) permitted having a non-Jew turn on the air conditioning because of shvus di'shvus bimakom tzaar.

On the other hand, Rav Moshe prohibited asking a non-Jew to turn on the air conditioner because it is benefiting from work performed by a non-Jew on Shabbos (Shu't Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 3:47:2). Rav Moshe forbids benefiting even if one did not ask the non-Jew to turn on the air conditioning, but merely hinted, such as by telling him, "It is really hot here!" hoping that he catches the hint. Evidently, Rav Moshe did not consider this as a makom tzaar that permits benefiting from a non-Jew's activity on Shabbos.

Thus, in answer to Question #4 -- "We left the air conditioning off, and it became very hot on Shabbos. May I ask a non-Jew to turn the air conditioning on?" We see that the poskim dispute whether this is permitted or not.

(B) One may ask a non-Jew to perform an issur derabbanan in case of major need.

There are three opinions as to how much financial loss this must entail to be considered a major need.

(1) Some rule that one may ask the non-Jew even if there is no financial loss, as long as there is a great need (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 307:5; Gra 307:12). According to these poskim, if one's clothes became torn or dirty on Shabbos and he is embarrassed to wear them, he may ask a non-Jew to bring him clean clothes through an area not enclosed by an eruv.

(2) Other poskim rule more strictly, contending that one may be lenient only if a major financial loss will result (Magen Avraham 307:7). According to these poskim, if one discovered that the plug of one's well-stocked freezer is disconnected, one may ask a non-Jew to reconnect it on Shabbos.

(3) A third opinion contends that major financial loss is not sufficient reason to permit shvus de'shvus unless there is some physical discomfort as well (Elyah Rabbah 307:14). We usually follow the second opinion quoted and permit a shvus di'shvus in case of major financial loss. Furthermore, we allow shvus de'shvus even if it is uncertain that a major loss will result, but it is a good possibility (see She'eilas Yaavetz 2:139). As a result, one may ask a non-Jew to plug in the freezer even if one is uncertain whether the food will go bad.

Note that the opinions I quoted above permit asking a non-Jew only to perform a melacha derabbanan to avoid financial loss, but none of them permit asking him to violate a Torah law. Thus, this would answer Question #5 that I mentioned above: "I did not realize that I parked my car in a place where the city will tow it away. May I ask a

non-Jewish neighbor to move it?" The answer is that one is not allowed to ask him. However, one may hint to the non-Jew in an indirect way by saying, "My car is parked in a place where it might get towed," as I explained in a previous article on this subject. (C) I may ask a non-Jew to do something that is only an issur derabbanan in order to enable me to perform a mitzvah. For example, having a guest who is visiting from out of town, or a guest who otherwise would have nowhere to eat, fulfills the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim. (Inviting a neighborhood family over for a Shabbos meal may be a very big chesed for the wife of the guest family, but it does not qualify as the mitzvah of hachnasas orchim [Rama 333:1].) Therefore, if one realizes on Shabbos that one does not have enough chairs for all the guests to sit at the table, he may ask a non-Jew to bring chairs from a neighbor's house even when there is no eruv. Other poskim are more lenient, permitting asking a non-Jew to bring any food or beverage that enhances Shabbos (Aruch Hashulchan 307:18).

Some authorities permit asking a non-Jew to perform a Torah melacha in order to allow the observance of a mitzvah. This is a minority opinion and should not be followed. However, there was an old custom among European Jewry to permit asking a non-Jew under these circumstances. This custom has halachic sources in the following Rama: "Some permit telling a non-Jew to kindle lights for the sake of the Shabbos meal, because they contend that in order to fulfill a mitzvah (such as having a nice Shabbos meal) one may ask a non-Jew to perform even a real melacha that would be forbidden for a Jew to do min haTorah. Following this approach, many are accustomed to be lenient and command a non-Jew to kindle lights for the purpose of the Shabbos meal, particularly for wedding and bris meals, and no one rebukes them. However, one should be strict in this matter when there is no extenuating need, since most of the halachic authorities disagree" (Rama 276:2).

In conclusion, we have discovered that in certain extenuating instances, Chazal permitted melacha performed by a non-Jew, but that one should not extend these heterim to other situations. When using a non-Jew to do normally forbidden work, one should focus that one's intent is not, chas vesholom, to weaken the importance of Shabbos, but, rather, to enhance kavod Shabbos.