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Shmini (Leviticus 9-11)
The Sins at the Beginning
by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

During the dedication of the Mishkan, the Jewish people were required to bring many korbanos, sacrifices $\frac{3}{4}$ a goat for a sin offering, a calf and lamb for a burnt offering and a bull and a ram for peace offerings.

Why so many? The Toras Kohanim explains that the Jewish people had an account with Hashem, with "sins at the beginning and sins at the end." The "sins at the beginning" refer to the sale of Yosef, when the brothers dipped his coat in goat's blood. The goat comes as atonement for that sin. The "sins at the end" refer to the Golden Calf, for which the calf is brought as atonement.

We can readily understand why the Jewish people had to make amends for the sin of the Golden Calf during the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan. The erection of the Golden Calf as an intermediary to Hashem was tantamount to avodah zarah, a direct affront to Him. Therefore, when the Mishkan was being dedicated and the Shechinah was about to dwell within it, amends were very much in order.

But what was the connection between the sale of Yosef and the dedication of the Mishkan? It was not a recent occurrence. Why then should it be brought up again in this context?

The Yalkut Yehudah points out that an underlying element of jealousy led to the sale of Yosef. The brothers could not bear that Yaakov singled Yosef out for a special role, that he gave him special treatment, that he provided him with special garments. If Yosef was so special, that meant they were less special. Unable to bear the thought, they plotted against him and eventually sold him into slavery.

What was happening when the Mishkan was being built? One family was being singled out to be the priestly caste, to perform the sacred service, to

wear special priestly garb, to be given the priestly gifts, to be treated as special in every way. The Kohanim were an easy target for jealousy, as indeed came to pass during Korach's rebellion, when they declared (Bamidbar 16:3), "The entire congregation is holy and God is among them; why should you lord it over the assembly of God?"

The dedication of the Mishkan was, therefore, a time to remember that in Judaism there are roles. There are roles for Kohanim; there are roles for Levites; there are roles for men; there are roles for women. Not everyone is alike. Not everyone has the same strengths. Not everyone is going to have the same duties and responsibilities. Not everyone is going to get the same benefits and privileges. Everyone must be content with the role Hashem has assigned to him.

This then was an exceedingly appropriate time to bring sacrifices to atone for the sin of selling Yosef. This would impress upon the people the extreme danger of giving in to jealousy. It had led to disaster in the past, and it could lead to disaster in the future, unless it was nipped in the bud.

Special Qualifications After Moshe gave Aharon all the detailed instructions regarding his duties in the dedication of the Mishkan, he said to him, "Draw near to the Altar." What happened? Why did he need special encouragement? Why did Moshe have to coax him forward?

The Toras Kohanim explains that Aharon suddenly saw the Altar in the shape of an ox, and he shrunk back. As the Ramban explains, the shape of the ox reminded Aharon of the sin of the Golden Calf, in which he had played an unwilling role.

In his great righteousness, Aharon did not consider himself worthy of approaching the Altar. "How can I come near to the Altar?" he said. "I, too, participated in the Sin of the Golden Calf."

"My brother, you're afraid of that?" Moshe told him. "You of all people don't have to fear what the ox represents."

That is why, the Toras Kohanim concludes, Moshe said to Aharon, "Draw near to the Altar."

The Toras Kohanim leaves us somewhat in the dark. Why indeed did Aharon have nothing to fear from the image of the ox? What was wrong with his reasoning? Even if he was not fully guilty, it was certainly a matter of concern. What did Moshe mean when he told him that "you of all people don't have to fear" the memory of the Golden Calf?

The Yalkut Yehudah offers an explanation based on the Midrash. Why indeed did Aharon participate in the construction of the Golden Calf? Even after he saw Chur murdered, why didn't he put his foot down and take a stand? Why didn't he say, "I will not allow this. Over my dead body will you make an idol?"

According to the Midrash, Aharon had the best interests of the Jewish people in mind. "If I let them build the Calf," Aharon reasoned, "the sin will be forever on their heads. Better that I should build it. Better that I should be blamed than the Jewish people. Better that I should bear the sin."

Hashem told Aharon, "Your love for the Jewish people was such that you were willing to sacrifice your righteousness to save them. Therefore, you will be anointed High Priest."

Because of his self-sacrifice, because he was willing to give up his Olam Haba for the Jewish people, because he placed the welfare of the people above his own, precisely for these reasons was he deemed worthy of being the Kohein Gadol.

"My brother, you are afraid of that?" Moshe told Aharon. "That's precisely why you were chosen. Draw near to the Altar!"

Perfect Faith ??And Aharon was silent. (10:3)

Aharon's two older sons, Nadav and Avihu, were men of extraordinary stature, righteous leaders who were worthy of someday stepping in the shoes of Moshe and Aharon. And then, during the joyous dedication of the Mishkan, they made a small error, and a fire reached out from the Holy of Holies and snuffed out their lives.

We cannot even begin to imagine the shock to Aharon, a father who witnessed his two glorious sons perish right before his eyes. What went

through his mind in that split second? His own loss, the loss suffered by the entire Jewish people, the loss suffered by the two deceased sons themselves. So much loss. Such a gaping void.

What was Aharon's reaction? The Torah tells us that "Aharon was silent." Silence. Complete acceptance. Unshakable faith. One of the most eloquent and powerful exhibitions of faith recorded in the Torah.

The Torah forbids excessive mourning over a deceased relative (Devarim 14:1). "Do not mutilate yourselves, and do not tear out your hair between your eyes over the dead." The Ramban writes that self-destructive mourning shows a lack of faith in Hashem. If we believe in the immortality of the soul and that all Hashem does is ultimately for the good, we do not mourn too much, even in the face of tragic youthful death.

A few years ago, the Baltimore community suffered a tragic loss on Erev Pesach. Mr. and Mrs. Israel Weinstein's son and his wife were killed in an automobile accident while coming from Lakewood to Baltimore for Pesach.

I was not there to witness it personally, but I heard from others that Mr. Weinstein's faith and acceptance were incredible. It is hard to conceive how a man who has just been told that his two beloved children had been torn away from him can walk into the Pesach Seder and make the Shehechianu blessing, thanking Hashem for sustaining life and bringing us to this joyous occasion. It is hard to conceive how such a man can walk into shul the next day and say "Gut Yom Tov" to everyone without a trace of his grief on his face so as not to disturb the festival spirit. It is hard to conceive how such a man, sitting in shul, can reach out and affectionately pat the cheek of a little child that happens to walk by. It could only be accomplished by a man whose heart is full of a rare and unshakable faith.

During the Shivah, the father of the boy whose cheek Mr. Weinstein had patted asked him, "How, in the moment of your most profound grief, could you still bend down to a child and pat him on the cheek?"

"At that exact moment," Mr. Weinstein responded, "when your little boy walked past me, with everything I was feeling in my heart, I realized how special each and every one of our children is. Sometimes we take our children for granted. Times like these clear our vision."

A person can only have such strength if he has a clear vision of the eternal light that shines at the end of every dark tunnel, if he has a strong and abiding faith in the Master of the Universe. Such a person, like Aharon before him, can be silent.

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from: **Rabbi Yitzchak Zweig** <rabbizweig@shabbatshalom.org> date: Apr 14, 2020, 4:21 PM subject: **Surviving the COVID-19 Virus** --- Shabbat Shalom Weekly BONUS EDITION!

As promised I have composed some thoughts on understanding the COVID-19 phenomenon. By every reasonable measure, this disease is a force to be reckoned with – and the human race is scrambling to cope. The COVID-19 virus is an implacable enemy that has the entire world under siege and many are on the front lines of this war. It may be hard to see this right now, but these difficult times will surely pass and future generations will undoubtedly look back at 2020 and judge every element of our battle.

As you have previously read in these pages, those of us who believe in a creator and a purposeful world know that the universe is constantly speaking to us. Unfortunately, most of us hardly notice and blithely continue on in our mundane lives. However, the universe is now literally SHOUTING at us, so

we are forced to confront the most basic issue – what is God trying to tell us and what are we to do about it?

First a caveat: We no longer live in the prophetic eras of our glorious past. God hasn't appointed a messenger whom He told to deliver a message to the world neatly tied in a bow. Yet, we know that God cares about us and only wants us to have the most extraordinary lives. Of course, God doesn't merely punish to cause pain and suffering. Much like a parent looks after the well being of a toddler, part of caring for us is trying to get our attention and guiding us back to the proper path for a meaningful life.

So we are compelled to divine what message God is trying to deliver, knowing full well that we will never really know for sure why things happen to us – after all, we have a very limited perspective. But we must make very effort and try to do our best to understand – which is all that God ever asks of us.

I want to begin with a story from the Talmud (Gittin 56b) that involves the Roman general Titus. In 70 AD, Titus besieged and captured Jerusalem, murdered her inhabitants, and destroyed the Second Temple. For this "achievement," Titus was awarded the Arch of Titus to commemorate his victory. The Talmud gives a full account of his atrocities upon entering the Holy Temple and it is a worthwhile read, though beyond the scope of this column.

However, I will give you a small excerpt from the story, which I find remarkably relevant to our times. After ripping down the huge tapestry that separated the area of the temple known as "Holy" from the area known as the "Holy of Holies," Titus made a rucksack out of this incredible tapestry and loaded it with the precious gold vessels found in the temple (the Menorah et al.). He then loaded it together with all the spoils of war on a ship to sail across the Mediterranean back to Rome.

While sailing, God caused a huge storm in the Mediterranean that threatened to swamp Titus' ship. Titus quickly scrambled to the deck of the ship and yelled defiantly at God, "It seems to me that the God of the Jews only has power over the oceans; when Pharaoh and others came to attack He drowned them, and now he seeks to drown me. If their God is truly mighty let him come and attack me on dry land!"

A voice came out from heaven and declared, "You evil man, the son of an evil man (his father was Vespasian – another beauty). I have in my kingdom a puny creature known as a gnat. When you get to dry land let me see if you can defeat even the smallest creature in my army." Sure enough when Titus landed, a gnat entered his head through his nose and bored its way into his brain and caused him intense pain and suffering for many years. When he was about to die he instructed his officers to burn his body and scatter the ashes over the seven seas "so that the God of the Jews shouldn't come after me."

I have heard it said in the name of Rabbi Asher Weiss that we see God responded to the absolute chutzpah (hubris) of Titus – a totally delusional and self-centered individual living within the fantasy of his own perceived unlimited power – with the smallest creature in the animal kingdom. In other words, God showed him that not only did he not have power over the world, he couldn't even defend himself from the smallest of God's creatures.

I find this story remarkably relevant to what we are experiencing today and incredibly parallel to our own times. As a society we have become more self-involved, self-absorbed, and self-centered than perhaps any other time in world history. In short, we have become selfish. Need proof? Did you ever notice that the actual names of some of this generation's biggest technological innovations are all about "me"? Ever hear of the "I"phone, the "I"pad, or the "I"cloud? How about this generation's obsession with the "selfie"?

In our families, we have become more selfish than ever. How else could we account for such a dismal success rate for the typical marriage? We tend to forget that the real reason to get married is to share and become a giver and nurturer. This is how we build healthy families and children who are outwardly focused. But we infect our kids with the same disease; self-

centeredness, an expectation of entitlements, and train them to give in to every self-indulgent thought that enters their head. The saddest part? We don't even try. Marriage, like televisions, computers, and everything else, is disposable. This isn't working for me? Time to reboot – throw it all out and try again.

That's just on the personal level. On a communal level, we are solely focused on what affects us and nary a care of how anyone else is impacted. There used to be a time in our history, not that long ago, when both the Republican and Democratic parties had the understanding that while they have different perspectives, both are working together for the greater good of their great nation. Compromise was a necessary component of politics. Today, politics is mostly about assigning blame and doing whatever is possible to block the interests of the other. The good of the nation is hardly even a consideration.

In the past, when politics got a little one sided or if there was a scandal brewing, the nation could rely on a mostly impartial arbiter of information – the national media outlets. Today that thought is totally laughable. The liberal media treats every republican with disdain and mockery and the conservative media fights tooth and nail to promote its agenda. Both sides conveniently ignore facts that run counter to their mission. They simply manufacture news to their slant. Perversely, each side touts themselves as seeking to protect the interests of the American people. Please. Even the media outlets are incredibly selfish.

Never has this self-centeredness been more evident than looking at how our world treats our planet. Do you think that global warming and sea rise is an insidious fantasy of the liberal leaning scientists? Perhaps you should come to Miami Beach where I can show you how much things have changed even in just the last several decades. I am sorry to say, but by most scientific measures our planet is ill and it is reaching the critical point of no return. Why? Because most of us treat this planet like a little kid throwing garbage out the window of a moving car; someone else will clean it up, someone else's problem.

What is God's response to this arrogant self-centered selfishness? "I am going to send you the tiniest creature in my kingdom and let's see how you do against it." Our world has quite literally shut down, we have been brought to our knees. By what? The tiniest of creatures. This COVID-19 virus is about 500 nanometers.

Let me put that in perspective for you. A bacteria (like the dreaded E.coli) is roughly one micron in size. A micron is 1/1000 of a millimeter. A nanometer is 1/1000 of a micron. This virus is about 40-60 nanometers. I think we can all agree that this virus, which is too small to even be seen under a typical microscope, is about as small as you can get.

The name of this organism is the coronavirus; thus named because the shape of it appears to have a crown on its head. Perhaps this is a hint as to who is really in charge and king over everything else?

What has this disease caused us to learn about ourselves? Well first and foremost that we are all interconnected. Some foolish person making a poor decision a half a world away can quite literally affect nearly every single person on the planet in some way. There should no longer be a self-centered perspective of "us vs. them" – we are all in this together.

When a war must be fought, it can only be done effectively as a united front; in war it becomes quickly evident that self-interests go out the window and soldiers get sacrificed in the interest of the "greater good." In our war, the victims are many and our self-sacrificing soldiers on the front lines of this war are the healthcare workers and first responders quite literally putting their lives (and that of their families) on the line. Sadly, many of these soldiers have died in the line of duty.

On the front lines, suddenly class distinctions become irrelevant. To a patient lying in an ICU, the last thing he cares about is what religion or ethnicity or political affiliation his doctor/nurse belong to. It's not simply unimportant in the grand scheme of things, it would be ungrateful to even consider those labels. This caregiver is doing everything in their power, at

great personal peril, to save you. You learn to care about them as people as well.

In this war, our lives or that of our loved ones, may be saved by an Arab doctor or a Chareidi one, or for that matter an illegal immigrant performing some personal kindness. We need to learn and appreciate everyone who is on board to give to the greater good. I truly believe, that if called upon, the vast majority of humankind is ready to serve in that capacity. Humanity begins by ignoring perceived divisions and work together.

Perhaps the lasting image, in my mind at least, is seeing everyone on the streets, in stores, and walking around outside in face masks. Covering our face, perhaps the one part of our body that defines our very individuality, is probably the greatest lesson of all. Not surprisingly, even our personal technology points to this. That very same phone that has been built to open and unlock on facial recognition, doesn't recognize us anymore. The lesson should be clear, we need to redefine who we are, focus less on ourselves and determine how we fit into society at large.

It's true, difficult times bring out both the best and worst in people. Those who don't get the message will continue to act selfishly. Some will continue to selfishly gather for a variety of reasons that they justify in the face of communal and governmental pressure. Others will price gouge on hoarded medical supplies or try to take advantage of the difficult situation that others find themselves in.

But I believe that the vast majority of humanity is good and well meaning and well intentioned. The fact that we rarely see headlines about the many thousands of people who follow the government's guidelines for not gathering in groups, or the unsung heroes who are out there doing whatever they can to help others every day, doesn't mean they don't exist. No, we aren't perfect, but hopefully most of us can learn to improve ourselves, show leadership, take responsibility, and focus on improving the world.

Pressure can either crush something or turn a piece of coal into a diamond. In these difficult and pressure filled times we must recommit to become something more than what we are, and be sure not to crumble into nothingness. We must stand up, take responsibility for ourselves, and show leadership and resolve.

Yes, some will spend this time of isolation bingeing every single movie or show available to them. But hopefully most people will be self-reflective and will begin to consider that for most of their lives they wished they had both the time and the opportunity to do exactly what they want when they want without interference. Now they have to figure out what to do with that opportunity that they have always pined for.

So where to begin? Obviously, there is no secret formula for coping with the difficulties of isolation. But we should begin by acknowledging that when things begin to spin out of control we must start focusing on taking control back wherever we can. These areas include our daily schedule, what we eat, our health, how we interact with our family, and working on our emotional well-being.

There is a well known story from a Chassidic master that goes something like, "When I was young I planned on changing the world. When that seemed unattainable I decided that I wanted to change my country. As I got a little older I decided that I would just focus on changing my city. After I got married I decided that I would be satisfied if I could just improve my family. After that failed, I decided to work on myself."

"Once I managed to improve myself, I was able to impact my family, my city, my country, and the world."

When we all take ownership that our responsibility to improve everyone else begins with improving ourselves, we will then be able to give others what they need and work together for a greater good. At that point we can start looking forward to the beginning of a unified society not divided by petty differences. We thus become a brotherhood of man, children of a single God. May we merit to see the day when the entire world recognizes and serves the one true God and embraces his mission for a unified world. As the

prophet says (Zecharia 14:9), "On that day Hashem will be One and His Name will be One.

from: Esplanade Capital <jeisenstadt@esplanadecap.com> date: Apr 14, 2020, 4:24 PM subject:

Rabbi Yisroel Reisman

Topic - An idea regarding Kavod Chitzoni and Kavod Penimi

As we prepare for Shabbos Chag Pesach, a wonderful Shabbos, a very special Shabbos. Zman Cheirusainu. A Shabbos where the very first Seder Kos will be a Mitzvah D'oraissa of Kiddush in addition to the other Mitzvos D'oraissa that we have on the Seder night.

Let me share with you a few thoughts regarding the Yom Tov. I would like to start with something which at least at the outset seems to be technical but has a very deep Machshava. That is that we all know that on Chol Hamoed we do not take haircuts and the reason for that is, Shelo Yekaneis L'regel K'shehu Minuval. The purpose is to encourage people to take haircuts Erev Yom Tov or the day before Erev Yom Tov. But the idea is Shelo Yekaneis L'regel K'shehu Minuval that a person should go into the Yom Tov with a proper haircut.

In other words, Yiddishkeit says a person with a proper haircut that is the beauty of a person, that is the way a person should be. It is interesting that nevertheless when it comes to a Nazir we say as it says in Bamidbar 6:5 (קדש יקדשנו--גדל פרע, קער ראשו). We say that a sign of Kedusha is someone who is not into the growing of his hair. Someone who is Farkert, somebody who is not into the growing of his hair. Someone who is Farkert, somebody who is (גדל פרע, קער ראשו). Somebody who doesn't grow his hair long and that seems to be a Siman or a sign of a level of Kedusha. It is a general question which needs an explanation. How is it that by Nazir not caring about the growing of the hair is a sign of Kedusha, not caring about Chitzonios and when it comes to Yom Tov we want people to go in with a proper haircut. The truth is that it is not only a Yom Tov Kasha as every Erev Shabbos it is a Mitzvah to take a haircut.

I saw in the Emes L'yaakov on Nach Cheilek Bais which is the first Cheilek that actually came out, that he talks about this Yesod and I would like to explain it by using Rav Yaakov's idea and then attaching it to an idea that I saw in the Ohr Gedalyahu and to be Metzareif two Rosh Yeshivos of Torah Vodaath, to one Machshava.

Let's start with Rav Yaakov. Rav Yaakov says that there are two different things, Kavod Chitzoni and Kavod Penimi. He says that certainly the Kavod Penimi of a person, the greatness of a person is a person who doesn't pay attention to things which are signs of Gaiva, things which are signs of haughtiness, a person being immaculately presentable among people. Avada, Kavod Penimi is that a person should care about spiritual things, not about things which are Megusham, things that are Kavod Gashmi.

Nevertheless, there is an idea of Kavod Chitzoni. Kavod Chitzoni is a Melech or a Kohen Gadol who is obligated to go around with a fresh haircut. The idea of taking a haircut L'kavod Shabbos and L'kavod Yom Tov. There is a Kavod Chitzoni. The idea of going into a Yom Tov or going into a Shabbos, is to show the world how you consider the days that are coming upon us to be very special days. That you go towards it with a proper Kavod Chitzoni. In the Penimios of course, a person should not pay too much attention to the Gashmiodika ideas that are very much the Nekuda of many many people.

Rav Gedalya Schorr brings in the Ohr Gedalyahu somewhere in a footnote, B'sheim one of the Gedolei Chassidus, that Aderes V'emunah L'chai Olamim. The Pizmon, the poem of Aderes V'emunah L'chai Olamim, Habina V'hab'racha L'chai Olamim are pairs of things that are in essence, opposites. They are things that are not compatible. But L'chai Olamim, by HKB"H these things do become compatible.

Some of them are easy to understand. Hagaiva V'hagedula, to be truly great and giving and at the same time have Gaiva, doesn't make any sense. They are really things that are complete opposites and Mimeila it is something

which only L'chai Olamim, HKB"H can put the two of them together and it is not a Stira.

Hahod V'hahadar L'chai Olamim. Hod and Hadar are opposites. Hadar is Kavod Chitzoni, it is something that is beautiful to the eye like for example Pri Eitz Hadar has to do with beauty. Hod on the other hand, has to do with Kavod Penimi.

It says that Moshe Rabbeinu had Karnei Hod. Rashi says in Parshas Ki Sisa calls the Ruchniyasdika rays that were coming from him as Karnei Hod. Where it says in the Posuk (וְנִתְּתָה מְהוֹרָדָּךְ, עֲלֶיךָ). Put from your beauty on him. It is talking about spiritual beauty. So Hod and Hadar are things that are not compatible. They are opposites. By the Borei Olam Hod and Hadar are L'chai Olamim.

So that we understand that Hod is a Hod Penimi and Hadar is a beauty that shows Chitzonios. For Yom Tov we have to show the Chitzonios as we prepare for Yom Tov. But for ourselves, we have to worry more about the Hod. So it interesting, we go from Erev Pesach where we have to take a haircut straight into the Yimai Hasefira. The Yimai Hasefira are days on which we are not allowed to take a haircut. We go from Hadar, Chitzoni to the Hod Penimi. On the Yimai Hasefira we want to champion the Middah of Hod that we should be able to have the inner Penimios which is great, which doesn't care about how a person looks on the outside. So we have these two competing values that are very important to us.

According to what we just said, the Chitzoniosdika Kavod and a Penimiosdika Kavod going into Yom Tov is Kavod Chitzoni and Aveilus and Sefira are times of Kavod Penimi it is very beautiful that the Issur of taking a haircut in Sefira which is a time to work on the Hod Penimi ends on Lag B'omer which in Middos is Hod Sheb'hod. It is a day of extreme value of Hod, reaching Hod Sheb'hod and after that you can take a haircut, because the Avoda of Hod lasts until 33 days in the Omer. This is a technical idea with a beautiful message.

<http://torahweb.org/torah/docs/rsch/RavSchachter-Corona-23-April-08-2020.pdf>

Piskei Halacha on Coronavirus Shaylas

Rav Hershel Schachter

23. Due to the highly contagious nature of coronavirus, there are certain governments that have mandated either immediate burial or cremation (this is not the case currently in the United States). Under those circumstances, every effort should be made to avoid cremation. Therefore if a Jew would pass away on Shabbos, the burial should be done immediately (on Shabbos) by non-Jews. In addition, the storage facilities of many funeral homes in New York (and elsewhere) are currently filled to capacity and have raised concerns regarding the upcoming Yom Tov. Under these tragic circumstances, we must allow that the burial be performed on Yom Tov. Relatives who wish to participate would not be permitted to walk beyond the techum, nor would they be allowed to accompany the hearse in a car.

On Yom Tov Sheini, it is theoretically possible for Jews to be involved in the actual burial, and in that case they would be permitted to join in the car and travel beyond the techum. This would only be relevant for those who would be physically involved in the burial (digging the grave, lowering the castket into the ground and filling in the grave with dirt). No one else including close family members would be allowed to travel to the cemetery.

Ordinarily, one who travels to a cemetery on Yom Tov Sheini for a burial, would be required to stay in a local Jewish home for the remainder of Yom Tov, but due to the current necessity of social distancing, this is impossible. Therefore, they may return to their homes on Yom Tov Sheini. However, due to the current danger, it is strongly recommended that all burials be done by professionals with the use of machines. Accordingly, the family members would unfortunately not be present at the burial on Yom Tov.

24. Often, a patient's chances for survival are significantly increased when someone is advocating on their behalf, especially if this advocate is himself a doctor or medical professional. In the current situation, family members are usually not allowed in the hospital, both due to overcrowding and to concerns about their own safety.

The halacha is that we violate the laws of Shabbos even if there is only a slight chance that it will save a life. If family members - especially medical workers - would call the doctors or nurses tending to their loved ones to check in and to discuss the situation, it

may lead to greater care and concern for the patient, thus increasing the chances of survival. Therefore, the family should arrange that these communications be made, even on Shabbos and Yom Tov, in order to advocate for the patient in the hospital.

http://torahweb.org/torah/special/2020/rsch_sakana.html

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

The Correct Behavior When Dealing with Danger

[From several weeks ago]

Many have the mistaken impression that the Jewish religion places much emphasis on death and respect for the dead; after all, we recite kaddish, yizkor, observe shiva, and yahrzeit, etc. This is a gross misunderstanding. The respect that we show for the dead is a carryover from the respect that we show for the living. The Gemorah (Kesubos 17a, see Shitah Mekubetzes) tells us that whenever there is a conflict between kovod ha'chayim and kovod ha'meisim, kovod ha'chayim takes precedence. When the chevra kadisha brings in the aron at a funeral, everyone stands up. People mistakenly think that we stand up out of respect for the niftar, but in many cases we never stood up for him when he was alive, so why should we stand up for him now that he passed away? The Bartenurah (Mishnayos Bikurim 3:3) explains that we are not standing up out of respect for the niftar but rather out of respect for the members of the chevra kadisha who are presently involved in the fulfillment of a mitzvah. The respect for the living is based on the premise that all human beings were created b'tzelem Elokim. When the Torah requires us to demonstrate kovod ha'meis, it means that even after the person passed away and no longer has tzelem Elokim, i.e. a neshama, we still have to act respectfully towards the body because it used to have a tzelem Elokim.

Of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos, one of the most important is the mitzvah of v'chai bohem v'lo sh'yomus bohem (Yoma 85b). Not only does the halacha require that if there is a sofek sakanah we must violate almost all of the mitzvos in the Torah to save a life, but we are also required to do so even if there is only a s'fek s'feika, a remote possibility (Yoma 85a). The Gemorah (ibid) adds that even if the likelihood is that by violating Shabbos or whatever other aveira we most probably will not be saving anyone's life, we still do not abstain from the action due to that likelihood (rove - majority).

When Bnei Yisroel were traveling in the midbar for 40 years, the weather conditions were such that there was a slight sakanah in performing bris milah. Most of the sh'votim did not fulfill the mitzvah except for sheivet Levi[1]. They had an Orthodox rabbi among them, i.e. Moshe Rabbeinu. Why didn't all the shevatim ask him what to do about this sofek sakanah? If it is a real sofek sakanah he should not have permitted sheivet Levi to perform the mitzvah despite their pietistic protests, and if the sofek sakanah was so insignificant that it simply should have been dismissed, why didn't he insist that all the shevatim perform the mitzvah of milah?

The Gemorah (Yevamos 12b) tells us that the answer is to be found in Tehillim (116:6), "Shomer p'soyim Hashem." Whenever there is a slight sofek sakanah that is nowhere near fifty-fifty[2], the halacha declares that it depends on the attitude of the patient. If the patient whose life is at risk (or the parent of the patient who is responsible for his well-being) is personally not nervous about the danger, then the halacha does not consider it a sofek sakanah; we apply "Shomer p'soyim Hashem." But if the patient whose life is at risk is nervous and concerned about the sofek sakanah, then the halacha requires us to act based on, "V'chai bohem v'lo sh'yomus bohem", and the sofek sakanah takes precedence over almost all of the mitzvos of the Torah. Shevet Levi had bitachon, and therefore were not concerned, and therefore for their children it was not considered a sofek sakanah, but with respect to the other shevatim who were concerned it was in fact a sofek sakanah, so every shevet was acting k'din.

However, if one individual is not concerned, but the nature of the sakanah is such that everyone is interdependent and the individual who personally is not nervous may possibly spread a disease to others who are concerned about its spread, then the concept of Shomer p'soyim Hashem does not apply. The individual who is not concerned does not have the right to determine for the others who are concerned that there is no sakanah for them.

The Rakanti[3] relates that one of Ba'alei Ha'tosfos was deathly sick before Yom Kippur and the doctors warned him that if he fasts he will certainly die but if he eats on Yom Kippur there is a slim chance that he may survive. He decided to fast, and of course he died. All of the Ba'alei Ha'tosfos were upset over his decision and felt that he went against the halacha.

If a terrorist threatens to kill me unless I violate one of the mitzvos of the Torah, the halacha usually is that pikuach nefesh takes precedence over most of the mitzvos in the Torah. What if an individual wants to put up a fight knowing that he may well lose his life but thinks that by being moser nefesh he will fulfill the mitzvah of kiddush Hashem? This matter was a famous dispute amongst the Rishonim. The Rambam's opinion is that one may not volunteer to give up his life al kiddush Hashem when not required by halacha because this is tantamount to suicide[4]. Many other Rishonim

disagreed with the Rambam. However, if there is no terrorist pressuring me to violate my religion, but there is merely a dangerous situation of sickness then all of the Ba'alei Ha'tosfos agreed with the Rambam that it would not constitute a midas chassidus to ignore the sakanah[5].

In determining what is a sakanah and what is not, the practice of the Tanoim always was to follow the doctors of their generation. Every so often the Rambam would take a stand on a medical issue against what it says in the Gemorah and the Chasam Sofer (Teshuvos, Yoreh Deah #101) explains that the Rambam was a doctor and he did exactly as the Tanoim did, namely, to follow the doctors of his generation. The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 331:9) also says explicitly that we follow the doctors of our generation even in contradiction to the medicine recommended in the Gemorah. We should certainly do the same as the Rambam and the Shulchan Aruch and follow the doctors of our generation in determining what is considered a sakanah and what is not considered a sakanah.

Some well-meaning individuals have blown out of halachic proportion the significance of tefillah b'tzibur and talmud Torah b'rabim and have opted to ignore the sofek sakanah presented by the corona virus when in conflict with these two most important mitzvos. We live in a generation where many b'nei Torah tend to exaggerate the significance of Torah and tefillah. Although their intention is certainly l'shaim Shomayim, we must all keep in mind that when paskening shailos, one may not rely on an exaggeration.

All exaggerations by definition are sheker - a misrepresentation of the truth of the Torah. Rav Chaim Volozhiner signs off quite a few of his teshuvos saying, "Keil Emes, Nosan lanu Toras Emes, u'bilti el ho'em es einu - the true God gave us the true Torah, and we only look for the truth." Any exaggeration in the area of Torah and halacha is clearly a misrepresentation of our religion. The commentaries on Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 157) refer to the comments of the Maharshal in his sefer Yam Shel Shlomo (Bava Kamma 38a) that to misrepresent a law of the Torah constitutes an aveira related to avodah zarah[6] and as such would be subject to the principle of yeihoreig v'al ya'avur.

With respect to a sofek sakanah the halacha clearly requires that we go extremely l'chumrah. Especially religious Jews, who know that they are charged with a mission in life, should certainly be extremely machmir on matters of sofek sakanah.

Although every word of a poem appears in the dictionary, the poet conveys an idea by putting the words in a certain order. So too, different people can have the same ideas and the same principles, but if you put them in a different arrangement you have changed the whole understanding of each one of the principles[7]. Once you exaggerate the significance of any particular mitzvah, you have misrepresented the whole picture of kol haTorah kula.

[1] See Rashi, Devarim 33:9. [2] See Achiezer, volume 1, #23,2. [3] Siman 166; see Teshuvos Dvar Yehoshua, vol. 2 #94 [4] Hilchos Yesodei haTorah, 5:1. [5] See Mishna Berura 328:6. [6] Because we believe that the Torah is a description of the essence of G-d, misrepresenting the Torah is tantamount to misrepresenting G-d Himself [7] Thoughts 1:22, by Blaise Pascal

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com> reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha SHEMINI Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The death of the two sons of Aaron remains one of the great mysteries in Torah narrative. The Midrash and the commentators offer various explanations as to the cause of this tragedy. The sons did not want to marry, they had somehow drunk wine and were inebriated, as well as other faults ascribed to them. And since the work of the priests was so holy and delicate, their deaths occurred. However, this is a difficult path to follow in order to explain - if human beings can ever explain - why bad things happen to good people.

Some of the commentators see this as retribution to Aaron himself for his role in allowing the Golden Calf to be created, and to have caused the Jewish people to be seen in such a hideous fashion immediately after receiving the Torah. The problem with this explanation is, naturally, that we learn that the sins of the father are not to be visited upon the children nor the sins of the children to be visited upon their parents. Because of these difficulties, no matter what type of explanation we wish to explore, it seems to me that the response of Aaron to this tragedy is really the only response that human beings can make. That response was silence.

Aaron does not say anything, and in that silence, there is an acceptance of the fact that the judgment of heaven is always inscrutable to humans. Despite our best efforts and the wisdom of our commentaries, many times in life, the question remains stronger than any potential answer that can be offered. And this itself draws the line between the Creator and the created, between heaven and earth.

We would naturally like to be able to understand everything. The basic hubris of human beings is that we can figure everything out for ourselves. You will notice that this is always a trait that exists within young children, who want to do everything on their own, and who think that they are capable. This human trait has a positive side to it because it allows us to be creative and inventive, to attempt new things, and to gain new insights into life. However, it also has drawbacks. We eventually bump up against the wall of ideas that we do not understand, which, to our mind, is irrational and even unjustified. We are, therefore, left in confusion and disappointment. The only solution is silence and acceptance, and, so to speak, the ability to move on even if we do not understand the events themselves.

I think that this will be the type of response that is necessary when the current coronavirus pandemic finally departs. There will be many who will assign reasons and causes for its occurrence. However, whatever reasons and whatever ideas are assigned, will eventually be found wanting on the scale of human judgment and rational understanding. We will have to accept it for what it is and attempt to move on. Just as Aaron did, we will move forward and accept the judgment of heaven and renew ourselves in the service of God and of Israel. We must look forward to better times and to productive achievements. I hope that this will occur quickly, peacefully, and with goodness. In any event, let us pray for better times and the ability to be silent when noisy explanations do not really help. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

from: Daniel Keren <keren18@juno.com> via gmail.mcsv.net date: Apr 12, 2020, 8:06 PM subject: Shabbos Stories for the Corona Virus Pandemic of 5780

Rabbi Yechiel Spero

This time is unprecedented. It might feel like a sad time. It is a scary time, but it might feel like it's sad also. I would like to talk to you why we shouldn't be sad – why we should be upbeat and cheerful and happy. I would like to share with you [a story].

The following story ... took place a hundred years ago, but this story is really happening every single day. In the early 1900s there was a plague called typhus. Typhus could wipe out a whole town or village and people were dropping like flies. When the plague came to the town of Nikoliev, the Rav, Reb Meir Shlomo Yanofsky was a tzaddik and strengthened the people.

One day, the Rav got sick and was quarantined. There was one Jew, Rav Asher Grossman, who went to visit the hospital. When he arrived, he was told that he was not permitted to enter the gates because of the contagious disease. So instead, he stood outside the hospital and he opened the Tanya.

Without knowing if anyone was listening, he began to cry out, ain ra yoired milimala – no bad will come down from heaven (Igeres HaKodesh 11). He read it out loud twice with great emphasis. Rav Asher would do this every day and sometimes he would continue reading further about why it is important for a person to distance himself from sadness and that a person should not be sad.

After five weeks, Rav Meir Shlomo Yanofsky was released from the hospital. At a kiddush thanking Hashem for his health, he said, “There is one person that I want to thank. I was down and destitute. I was broken. I had nothing left until I heard that beautiful sound – ain ra yoired milimala. The Ribono Shel Olam never sends bad to us.

“Even if something looks like bad and feels bad, the Ribono Shel Olam in his infinite wisdom and kindness loves us more than anything in the world and He would never hurt us. He just wants us to come closer and this is how

He is doing it. I wouldn't have heard those words, I would have fallen into depression and sadness and I don't know if I ever would have made it out.”

He hugged and kissed Rav Asher Grossman and thanked him for saving his life. There are many points in davening that we can focus on. At the end of davening when we say, shoimer Yisrael, shoimer shearis Yisrael, think about that the One Being can protect us is Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Sometimes we have a tendency to run through tachnun, but now we have plenty of time. Take your time and say the words with thought. There are three pesukim that we say, which Rav Perr suggested to be said with extra concentration.

When a person feels uneasy and tense he should say these pesukim and it will work like magic to calm him down. These are pesukim about bitachon. Baruch hagever asher yivtach b'Hashem v'haya Hashem miyvach. Bitchu b'Hashem adei ad ki v'kah Hashem tzur olamim. V'yivtechu vecha yodei shimecha ki lo ozavta dorshecha, Hashem.

The Ribono Shel Olam never leaves us. He never has and He never will. So chin up everybody. It's going to be a little bit of a challenge, but we're up to it. We have the strength and have the ability. I'm looking forward to seeing you all. We miss you. Be Happy.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald <ezbuchwald@njop.org> subject: Weekly Torah Message From **Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald**

rabbibuchwald.njop.org Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message - Shemini 5780-2020 “The Responsibilities of Leadership” (Revised and updated from Parashat Shemini 5761-2001) Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald In the opening chapters of this week's parasha, parashat Shemini, Moses summons Aaron, Aaron's sons and the elders of Israel to participate in one of the most exalted ceremonies in Jewish history, the inauguration of the Tabernacle and the consecration of Aaron and his sons to serve as the priests of the People of Israel.

According to tradition, the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, had been built and completed on the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, coinciding with the future date of the celebration of Chanukah. Starting from the twenty-third of Adar, Moses, serving as the temporary High Priest, practiced each day, for seven days, erecting and taking down the Tabernacle. Moses also served as the interim High Priest during the sanctification of the new priests and the dedication of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was finally erected permanently on the first day of the month of Nisan, at which time the Kohanim (priests) assumed their new roles.

The inauguration day was the day for which Aaron had longed, for his entire life. After enduring the travails of slavery in Egypt as well as the momentous revelation at Sinai, Aaron could finally feel proud of what he had accomplished. Leviticus 10:1 describes the initial ceremony:

וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי אֶהֱרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אִישׁ מִחֶמְתוֹ, וַיִּתְּנוּ בָהֶן אֵשׁ, וַיִּשְׂימוּ עָלֶיהָ קִטְרֶת, וַיִּקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי ה', הַשֵּׁם אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה אֹהֶם ,

And the sons of Aaron, Nadav and Abihu, each took his fire-pan, put fire on them and placed incense on it, and they brought before G-d an alien fire that He had not commanded them.

Scripture (Leviticus 10: 2-3) goes on to describe: And a fire came forth from before G-d and consumed them [Nadav and Abihu], and they died before G-d. Moses said to Aaron: “Of this did G-d speak saying: ‘I will be sanctified through those who are nearest me, thus will I be honored before the entire people.’” And Aaron was silent.

On the greatest day of Aaron's life, tragedy strikes. Aaron's two oldest sons are dead and Aaron remains silent.

Many theories are proposed by our commentaries as to why Nadav and Abihu met this tragic fate. There are those who say that Nadav and Abihu were arrogant, and truly sinful, and deserving of death. Others say that they were so pure and holy, that they needed to be taken away from a world polluted with evil.

Some commentators suggest that the strange fire that Nadav and Abihu offered was intended to fulfill a personal urge they had for their own self-

expression. After all, every person has a right to self-expression, but apparently not when serving as a Kohain. Those serving as Kohanim, dressed in the priestly garments, are limited by the rules of the Priesthood, and all their actions must be directed to serve purely on behalf of the People of Israel. Personal needs and desires for self-expression have no place here.

The tragic story of Nadav and Abihu teaches that despite the privileges and glory that come with leadership, responsibility is a basic part of leadership as well, and responsibility, perforce, results in limitations.

Over the past fifty years, America has seen a significant diminution of confidence in its leaders. Support for, and confidence in, both the presidency and the Congress has reached new lows. Many attribute the loss of respect and confidence to the leaders' own actions and behaviors. They have ceased to act as leaders, and have been increasingly acting as "regular guys." That sad reality has resulted in the demeaning and "defining down" of the Office of President and the role of Congress.

Many contemporary social philosophers see validity in separating the questionable personal lives and actions of public officials, from their public lives. Judaism does not see it that way. Those who serve in leadership roles have responsibilities. If they do not wish to abide by those responsibilities and high moral standards, let them not assume leadership roles.

There's wisdom in parashat Shemini. Wisdom not only for the ancients, but for all generations, past, present and future. Leadership requires responsibility. Leadership results in limitations. Face it, or flee from it! May you be blessed.

from: Lehrhaus <editors@thelehrhaus.com>
date: Mar 31, 2020, 9:29 AM
subject: **Birkat Ha-ilanot amidst Covid-19**

By Rabbi Shmuel Hain

1. Shelo Hiser Be-Olamu Kelum

The world right now feels even more broken than usual. As the spouse of a healthcare worker on the front lines, I am terrified. As a community rabbi, I have already co-officiated at a funeral for a COVID-19 victim. The previously vibrant woman died alone and most of her family could not even attend the graveside service. Pop-up hospitals and temporary morgues in New York City and elsewhere are our unimaginable reality. At first glance, there is nothing more incongruous with this particular moment than the special blessing we recite during the month of Nisan—the Birkat Ha-Ilanot.

Once a year, beginning on Rosh Hodesh Nisan, upon first witnessing the budding of fruit trees, we affirm that God's world is perfect. The source for this Halakhah and for the text of this singular blessing is the Bavli in Berakhot (43b) which states:

One who goes out during the month of Nisan and sees (fruit) trees starting to blossom recites the blessing: "Barukh Atah Hashem Elokeinu Melekh Ha-Olam Shelo Hiser Be-Olamu Kelum (alt. Davar) U'Varah Vo Beriyot Tovot Ve-Ilanot Tovot Le-hanot Bahem Benei Adam." Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has left nothing lacking in the world, and created in it goodly creatures and goodly trees to give mankind pleasure.[1]

Rabbi Norman Lamm noted[2] that the formulation of this blessing is bold, and highly problematic. One could even suggest that the blessing suffers from a fatal flaw. How can we in good conscience utter the words of this blessing – shelo hiser be-olamu kelum– and praise God for a world with "nothing wanting?" In a world filled with so much suffering, with disease, tragedy, natural disasters, and evil, this is not just false praise, it is absolute fiction! When so much of society is broken, especially at this time of crisis, how can we have the audacity to make the outrageous claim shelo hiser be-olamu kelum?

It indeed is a fiction, but, as Rabbi Lamm explained, "oh, what a glorious fiction it is!" The fiction is precisely the point. Once a year, at the first signs of spring and renewal, we look at the world through rose-tinted glasses. We are hopelessly optimistic. And we proudly project that optimism with the blessing on budding fruit trees- shelo hiser be-olamu kelum. During the month of Nisan, the time designated for past and future redemption, we momentarily overlook all of the imperfections of the world, maybe even ignore for a second all of the suffering during this horrific health crisis, and we unequivocally state- she-lo hiser be-olamu kelum– what a flawless world you, God, have created.

This blessing, with its rich and challenging theological message, may also reflect a profound insight about our emotional well-being. When I was a Psychology major in college, one of the more controversial theories emerging at the time was the theory of Depressive Realism. Depressive realism argues that mildly depressed individuals may

actually make more realistic inferences than do non-depressed individuals about the world around them and about contingent events, like the possibility of a tragedy occurring or a pandemic. Previously, depressed individuals were thought to have a skewed negative cognitive bias that resulted in distorted beliefs about the world. Depressive realism counters that this negativity may reflect a more accurate assessment of the world. Additional studies have revealed that non-depressed individuals' estimations are the ones that are actually biased- in an overly positive direction. It turns out our emotional health and well being may be aided by an overly optimistic perspective on the world; a positive cognitive bias promotes greater happiness, satisfaction, and an increased ability to cope with adversity. Shelo hiser be-olamu kelum, indeed.

This blessing, then, represents Judaism's annual spring-time asseveration of a positive cognitive bias. Throughout our history, even and especially during times of peril, we have confidently proclaimed shelo hiser be-olamu kelum to inspire us to remain optimistic about the future of our people and of the entire world.

Indeed, the most profound experience I had reciting this blessing was on a trip to Poland 25 years ago this week. Enunciating this blessing on some fruit trees at the entrance of Auschwitz, in the shadow of the Shoah, I felt the full power of proclaiming shelo hiser be-olamu kelum. I hope to once again have the opportunity to recite this blessing, full throatedly, even this year during this global pandemic. I hope to see the possibility of a perfect world with nothing lacking, especially now when we are all reeling from COVID-19.

I hope.

2. Borei Nefashot Rabot Ve-Hesronan

There is another blessing of praise, one that is an everyday staple in Jewish liturgy, which seems to subvert Birkat Ha-Ilanot and its assertion of flawlessness. That blessing is Borei Nefashot, the baseline berakhah ahronah we say all the time after snack foods. The text of this blessing praises God who is borei nefashot rabot v-hesronan- the Creator of a variety of souls and hesronan- their deficiencies, flaws, or lackings. Rather than declaring that creation is flawless, this blessing does the opposite. It thanks God for what we are lacking, affirming all of our imperfections.

How can we, in Hodesh Nisan, proclaim that the world God created is flawless, while simultaneously thanking God for creating flawed souls?

There are a number of possible resolutions to this apparent contradiction,[3] but one meaningful explanation is to distinguish between the world God created and each individual nefesh- each being, each imperfect soul that God formed. Essentially, what we are acknowledging through borei nefashot is that God did not create people to be self-sufficient. Each one of us is incomplete and lacking. And that's a blessed thing. Lo tov heyot ha-adam levado. We each need the love and support of another- a spouse, a parent, a child, or a close friend. We each need our community to help complete us- to make us better people, to inspire us, to learn from others and also to support us in times of need and celebrate with us in times of joy. We need our community to shape and inspire our Jewish values and commitments, and to educate and transmit our traditions in a sophisticated, relevant way to our children.

Borei Nefashot reminds us that no individual is complete on their own. It teaches us that we need help and we need to reach out to one another. We need to form partnerships and covenantal communities- as families, as shuls, as Jews, and as citizens of the world. We acknowledge and bless God for creating us in need, because it challenges us to seek out others for help and to seek out ways to help one another.

According to this perspective, the blessings do not contradict each other. The world God created, in toto, lacks nothing. Part of that completeness are the very deficiencies of each individual creature. Built into creation are the vulnerabilities of each being necessitating the other and community. If anything, these last few weeks have taught us how much we are social beings and how vital it is to live in community with others.

3. The Tragic Gap: Between Borei Nefashot and Birkat Ha-Ilanot

But there is an even more essential, even existential, dialectic presented by these two berakhot. Perhaps instead of resolving the tension between birkat ha-ilanot and borei nefashot, there is something particularly meaningful in holding on to these twin orientations, these dueling berakhot and their opposing formulations, simultaneously in our mind.

Holding both of these blessings at once demonstrates the capacity to stand and act in the space that Parker Palmer refers to as "the Tragic Gap." [4] The Tragic Gap is the chasm between the reality of a given situation and an alternative reality we know to be possible because we have experienced it, albeit briefly. It is not called tragic because it is sad, but because (in the Greek myth and Shakespearian sense of the word) it is inevitable, inexorable. The form it takes changes over time, but there will always be a distance between what the world is and what it could and should be.

Palmer explains that to truly live with purpose in this world, we must learn how to function in the gap between what is and what could and should be. We must do whatever we can to narrow the Tragic Gap by improving our flawed existence. This

work can be very difficult. Palmer notes that it is tempting to try to run away from the gap. If we cannot abide that tension, we resolve it by collapsing into one pole or the other. Some give in to the reality of the world as it is and adopt a posture of corrosive cynicism. If the world is so flawed, my only recourse is to make sure I look out for myself and get mine. Others slide into the pure possibility of irrelevant idealism. They ignore reality and do harm by promoting misplaced optimism.

But these two blessings, taken together, demand that we not give in to either impulse. We must resist equally both cynical and Pollyannaish perspectives. Instead of sliding in one direction, these blessings invite us to fully inhabit the Tragic Gap. Birkat Ha-Ilanot allows us to experience, albeit briefly, a perfect world, even as Borei Nefashot affirms that living in a flawed world is an inescapable, and necessary, part of the human condition. These berakhot require us to hold the tension between reality and possibility in an active way, to take agency by standing in the gap and demonstrating with our own lives another way of creative living. Through these berakhot we broadcast our aspiration to bridge the gap, slowly working towards achieving a more perfect world.

During this Nisan, the Tragic Gap seems more like an untraversable gulf. In New York City, the latest epicenter of COVID-19, the numbers and images are horrifying and can be overwhelming. The instinct to give in to the dark reality of the present moment is natural. Stories about people running into hospitals to steal precious personal protective gear show how during dark times there are some who look out only for themselves. The attraction of overly optimistic or beautiful timelines that wish away the public health crisis in the near future is alluring. Let us, instead, take our cue from the people who are actively living in the Tragic Gap, in every sense of the phrase. The heroic health care workers on the front lines of this crisis are doing all they can to narrow the tragic gap and to bring about a better reality. Following their lead, we should all be inspired to fully actualize a world she-lo hiser bo kelum, right now when it is ravaged by disease and isolation, and beyond.[5]

[1] See https://www.halachipedia.com/index.php?title=Birkat_Ilanot for a review of a number of practical halakhic issues regarding this blessing.

[2] I heard this from Rabbi Lamm in a very memorable address at my RIETS Hag Ha-Semikhah in late March 2002.

[3] Tosafot in Berakhot (37a s.v. “Borei”) for example, explain that the Hesronan of Borei Nefashot actually blesses God for creating necessities (like water and bread) which human beings require and would be incomplete without. This is in contrast to “Kol Ma She-Barah” which includes non-essential items. According to Tosafot, Borei Nefashot does not affirm our imperfections. It praises God for embedding in creation solutions for our needs. This is not the plain sense of the blessing and may reflect discomfort with praising God for creating deficiencies. For an overview of rabbinic literature on this blessing and how it may have evolved from two different blessings, see Yissachar Yaakovson, *Netiv Binah*: Vol. III, (1973), 99-103.

[4] See, for example, <http://www.couragerenewal.org/the-tragic-gap/>.

[5] **This reflection is dedicated to all of the health care workers on the frontlines of the COVID-19 crisis.**

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from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>

subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Shemini

פרשת שמני תשפ

ויהי ביום השמיני קרא משה לאהרן ולבניו ולזקני ישראל

It was on the eighth day, Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons, and the elders of Yisrael. (9:1)

The command to bring the offerings was for Aharon *HaKohen* alone. Why were the *Zekeinim*, Elders, included in the summons? *Rashi* explains that Moshe *Rabbeinu* wanted the Elders to hear for themselves that Hashem had elevated Aharon to the position of *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest. They should not suspect that Aharon had seized it for himself, or that Moshe had played favorites and given it to his older brother. Partiality, especially toward close relatives, has a way of raising people's ire. To assuage the situation and clear the air, Moshe stated that it was Hashem's command. It is certainly true that people love to talk, and Moshe rightfully ameliorated their concerns. Why, then, was it necessary for Moshe to repeat himself? In *Parshas Tzav* (8:5), Moshe says to the congregation, “This is the thing that Hashem commanded to be done.” *Rashi* (to *Parshas Tzav*) explains that Moshe is actually saying, “You will see that everything that I do before you is upon the directive and command of Hashem and not for my honor or for the honor of my brother.” Why does Moshe repeat himself (*Parshas Shemini*), in asserting that neither nepotism nor personal agenda was involved?

Horav Moshe Feinstein, זל, maintains that a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, who also guides a community or functions as a mentor to people, must – exclusive of

his abstract knowledge and scholarship – also be versed in practical, applied hands – on *halachah*. In other words, knowing the *halachah*, but lacking the awareness and sensitivity of how and when to apply and present it in the most lucid manner, is not practical. While it certainly does not make one any less of a scholar, it does limit his accessibility to – and acceptance by – the very people he seeks to guide and reach. Imagine that an individual knows all of the laws of *kashrus* concerning an animal, but has never had the practical knowledge of seeing the animal and its anatomy. How can he possibly know how to recognize what is and is not kosher? Sensitivity in presenting the *halachah* to certain people is just as prudent as knowing the *halachah*.

Thus, the first time Moshe informed the nation that Aharon was Hashem's choice for the position of *Kohen Gadol*, he conveyed to them that Aharon possessed the erudition, personal sanctity and ethical/moral character crucial for the role of *Kohen Gadol*. This, however, is not all a *Kohen Gadol* requires if he is to navigate the labyrinth of personalities, emotions and ideologies of the nation successfully. As the *Kohen Gadol*, he is the spiritual vanguard, exemplar guiding spirit, and mentor of the nation. Erudition alone is not sufficient. He requires utilitarian common sensical knowledge as well. After observing Aharon during the seven-day Inauguration period, Moshe told the people that Aharon was highly qualified to execute the functions of *Kehunah Gedolah*. This meant that not only was he spiritually fit and scholarly erudite, he was also a sensitive and pragmatic leader, capable of: communicating their spiritual obligations to the people; and dealing with each Jew's spiritual challenge. He would be the perfect leader for the nation.

זאת החיה אשר תאכלו

These are the life forms that you may eat. (11:2)

Rashi explains that the word *chayah*, life, is related to the word *chaim*, life. Because *Klal Yisrael* are *davuk*, cleave, to Hashem, they are fit to be alive. He separated them from impurity and decreed commandments upon them in order to maintain their purity of soul, thus continuing their relationship with Hashem, which, consequently, grants them life. To put it simply: Our adherence to the laws of *kashrus* grants us “life” status. Our people have kept the laws of *kashrus* for thousands of years, ever since Hashem gave us the Torah. Hashem entered into a covenant with the Jewish People and gave them the Torah, which obligates each Jew to uphold and fulfill its commandments. The *kashrus* laws are part of that covenant. Kosher is covenantal food. *Kabbalah* teaches that non-kosher food impedes the soul's spiritual potential. Last, as *Rashi* teaches: “We are alive if we keep kosher, since it makes us suitable to maintain our relationship with Hashem.” Thus, one who disregards the obligation to eat covenantal food severs his relationship with Hashem, the Source of life.

Bearing this in mind, when one attempts to reach out to our spiritually estranged brothers or sisters and finds that they simply do not “understand” what he/she is teaching, it could quite possibly be as a result of their “diet.” Obviously, I do not mean cholesterol, fat, etc. but non-kosher food prevents the soul from achieving its potential. We Jews are different. Our *neshamah* is delicate, and, as a result, it does not tolerate *devarim temaim*, impure/contaminated things entering our system.

Two *yeshivah* students would study together daily in one of the premier *yeshivos* in Bnei Brak. Chaim Leib and Efraim/Efi, spent every afternoon deeply ensconced in the sea of Torah. Suddenly, out of nowhere, Efi began to have difficulty understanding the *svaros*, logic, of the subject matter. Originally a fine *lamdan*, analytic Torah scholar, he seemed to slack off in his ability to understand – let alone initiate novellae. As the weeks passed, it became increasingly obvious that Efi had a problem, when he could not even navigate the *Talmud*. Since he was otherwise in perfect physical and emotional health, his cognitive skill seemingly unimpaired in anything other than Torah, Chaim Leib suggested that they go together to seek out the opinion of a spiritual advisor. Being in Bnei Brak, who better to speak with than *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita*?

Chaim Leib and Efraim visited *Rav* Chaim, and, after waiting in line for some time, they finally stood before the *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of the generation, and presented their dilemma. Chaim Leib asked the question, since Efi felt ill at ease asking *Rav* Chaim why he just could not understand a simple *svara*, logical statement. Chaim Leib described Efi's total devotion to Torah, his diligence in study, and his G-d-fearing, ethical demeanor. What was the cause for his present spiritual remission?

Rav Chaim listened, took one look at Efi, and said, “Let your friend stop eating *bassar b'cholov*, meat and milk (which is a prohibited admixture), and he will feel fine.” Understandably, both Chaim Leib and Efi were floored. Efi was a *frum*, observant young man. The thought of him consuming forbidden foods was preposterous. Nonetheless, *Rav* Chaim had spoken. He neither minced words, nor did he say anything that was not well thought-out and halachically supported. If *Rav* Chaim said that something was amiss, then something was amiss.

Efi denied any wrongdoing. Chaim Leib had difficulty believing him. After all, *Rav* Chaim had spoken. Back and forth went the accusations and denials, until

finally Efi blurted out the truth: he had sinned, but it had not been his fault. He blamed Chaim Leib. “Me?” Chaim Leib screamed. “What did I do?” Efi now told his story (or, rather, his excuse), “One afternoon, I came to learn as usual, after having eaten a filling lunch in the *yeshivah*. That day the *yeshivah* had served chicken schnitzel, which was quite good. You offered me a coffee without asking me if I was *fleishig*. When I saw the coffee with the cheese danish that accompanied it, I just did not have the strength of character to override the temptation and say, ‘Sorry, I am *fleishig*.’ Afterwards, I felt terrible about my sin, but what could I do – it was over. The problem was that I never took into consideration *Chazal’s* statement that, once one sins, the *aveirah*, sinful act, soon becomes permissible in his eyes: *Nichnas b’chum ha’heter*, he enters into the boundary of permissiveness. The trajectory of sin takes one down in a free fall, which causes the sin to lose its negative image. He no longer thinks that what he is doing is wrong. Everyone is to blame, but him. In his eyes, he is the victim, not the perpetrator.

Chaim Leib could not believe what he was hearing. His good friend, his *chavrusa*, study partner, with whom he had spent countless hours studying Torah, had fallen into the trap of sin. To make things worse – he blamed him for what had happened. Efi was, nonetheless, a *ben Torah* who had fallen. As such, one who realizes that he has sinned can turn around and repent – which he did. With time, as Efi’s *teshuvah*, return, took hold, so did his learning. His cognitive ability returned, until the old Efi was back.

One thing bothered Chaim Leib, which he could not get out of his mind: How did *Rav* Chaim know that Efi was eating a prohibitive mixture of milk and meat? Chaim Leib returned to the home of the *gadol hador*, waited in line for a while, and, after reminding *Rav* Chaim of the incident, asked how he was so certain that Efi had sinned. *Rav* Chaim explained that one of the commentators to the *Shulchan Aruch* asserts that one who transgresses *Hilchos baasar b’cholov* will have the image of a goat on his forehead (as in, “Do not cook a goat in his mother’s milk”). *Rav* Chaim said, “It was quite simple. I saw the image of a goat on his forehead. Thus, I knew that he had sinned. Eating prohibited foods stuffs the heart and impedes the mind.” Efi became a victim of his own infraction.

**אל תשקצו את נפשתיכם בכל השרץ השרץ ולא תטמאו בהם ונטמאתם בהם
Do not make your souls abominable by means of any teeming thing; do not contaminate yourselves through them lest you become contaminated through them. (11:43)**

Through the vehicle of a number of *mitzvos*, the Torah exhorts us to distance ourselves from prohibited foods. The prohibitions come in various forms: Some foods have once been kosher/appropriate for eating until they contracted a form of *tumah*, ritual contamination, rendering them spiritually unsuitable for Jewish consumption. *Neveilah* is a dead carcass, which has not been ritually slaughtered, rendering it unkosher, so that it is *tamei*, unclean. *Sheratzim*, creeping creatures, in various sizes and physical build, may not be eaten. Bugs and insects, both land and water based, are restricted from Jewish consumption. They are all included under the rubric of *maacholot asuros*, prohibited foods. The Torah concludes these laws with the admonishment: *V’nitmeisem bam*, “Lest you become contaminated through them.” *Rashi* quotes *Chazal* (*Yoma* 39a): “If you contaminate yourself by eating forbidden foods in this world, I will render you *tamei*, contaminated, in *Olam Habba*, the World to Come.” Frightening. It is as if one who eats forbidden foods become what he eats. It transforms his spiritual makeup.

Consuming prohibited foods dulls one’s spiritual potential. A Jew is initially holy, and his mission in life is to continue sanctifying himself, so that he is worthy of a “seat at the table,” a place in the World-to-Come. Hashem is holy. He is our Creator and Heavenly Father. What father does not want his son to follow in his footsteps?

Sadly, despite all the opportunities available to sustain *kashrus* observance, it is still a challenge for many people who simply do not understand the significance of *kashrus* or why a Jew must sanctify himself and maintain himself on a level of *kedushah*, holiness. For a Jew, being good, moral, ethical is not sufficient. He must be *kadosh*, strive to be holy.

A teenager fell in with the wrong crowd. His friends convinced him that the life of a Torah Jew is archaic and out of touch with the world. Life is all about fun – the more fun, the more life. To live life in the fast lane without “speed limits” requires money, considerable amounts of money. Unless one is born into money, or has a very good source of income, lots of money (especially for a teenager) cannot be obtained legally. As a result, Shimon (the teenager’s name) resorted to a life of crime. Thus, in addition to rebelling against Hashem, he turned his back and sinned against his fellow Jews. Stealing and drugs – both using and dealing-became a way of life.

The youth had not always been like this. Growing up in a *frum*, observant, home, where Torah study and *mitzvah* observance were paramount, he was, at first, no different than his siblings. It was when he fell under the influence of a boy in his class (a boy who was sorting out his own family issues), that Shimon began to descend to the

spiritual nadir of depravity. It all came to a halt when a policeman caught up with him, arrested him, and availed him of a prison cell in exchange for his nice room at home.

Prior to standing before the judge for sentencing, he met with a prominent psychologist to discuss his fate. The psychologist felt that Shimon had always been a nice boy until he had fallen into a funk and sought the comradeship of others who did not have – or adhere to – his way of life. He ended up falling under their influence and here we are today; deciding how and where he will spend the next few years of his life. It was the judge’s feeling that Shimon had two opportunities for rehabilitation: prison; or a working *kibbutz* where the discipline is strong and responsibilities are demanding. There is one major difference between the two: In prison, he would be permitted to eat kosher food. The downside is the clientele with whom he would be consorting 24/7: prisoners, offenders, felons and worse. The *kibbutz* would provide him with a far better selection of friends, but kosher food would not be available. Obviously, this was a non-observant *kibbutz* where *kashrus* observance was anathema. What would it be: *Kashrus* or total exposure to the dregs of society?

The parents asked *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, for a *halachic* ruling in the matter. *Hovav Yitzchak, Shlita*, deferred to his father-in-law, *Horav Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv, zl*, who rendered his decision: return to prison. He explained that it is forbidden to feed non-kosher food even to a child. To place this boy in a non-*frum* *kibbutz* that does not ascribe to the laws of *kashrus* is similar to feeding him non-kosher food. While it is true that in prison he would be exposed to degenerates and other dregs of society where he may pick up more unsavory ways of living, it is something that he would do on his own. If he goes to the *Kibbutz*, we would be feeding him non-kosher food.

Second, living in the *kibbutz* with people who, for the most part, maintain ethical, cultured behavior, the boy might become like them and be led to believe that he is fine, that he is lacking nothing as a Jew. Under such circumstances, he would have little likelihood that he would ever do *teshuvah*, repent, his past/present way of life. If he were to go to prison, however, he will realize that, at best, he will become a model prisoner – but a prisoner nonetheless. If he wants to achieve more and better, he would have to repent. Imagine, this boy had fallen so much that prison for him was the best chance of rehabilitation. How careful we must be concerning the friends with whom our children socialize. One unsavory friend can destroy a budding future. Children are not experienced in discerning good from bad; parents, however, should be. It is their responsibility to monitor their children’s relationships. While they might offend someone now – they could be saving their child’s future.

Va’ani Tefillah

ותפלתם מהרה באהבה תקבל ברצון

U’Sefillasam meheirah sekabeil b’ratzon. And their prayer speedily accept with favor.

In earlier times, when life was not filled with constant challenge, each and every prayer was Heavenly reviewed, and the “litmus” test of *kavanah*, intention, concentration/devotion, was affirmed for purity of mind and sincerity of heart. Once a prayer passed the test, it was sent up through the channels of prayer to the Heavenly Throne. Today, as we experience the birth pangs of *Moshiach*, with both moral and spiritual challenges abounding, every prayer receives immediate attention, as it is forthright sent to Hashem. *Achas Shoalti* explains this change with a parable originally employed by the *Chafetz Chaim*.

A wealthy landowner had a servant whom he called Moishka. Moishka was a devoted servant who would do anything for his master. Unfortunately, Moishka did not do well in those areas of service that required cognition, since he was not endowed with a surplus of acumen. One day the master asked him to fetch a glass of water. He returned with a glass of dark water, having left the sand and sediment from the bottom of the well in the glass. “Moishka,” the master admonished, “from now on, when I ask for water, I want filtered water. Run all water through a filter – a few times.” A few weeks later, a fire broke out on the master’s land. The master called for water – which Moishka brought – eventually. By the time he arrived, the fire had already destroyed ten homes. When the master screamed at Moishka for taking his sweet time in bringing water, Moishka reminded him that he was occupied with his master’s demands to provide filtered water. It takes time to filter water.

We all know what the master replied to this foolish excuse: “When a fire is raging, we do not need filtered water to extinguish the fire. Likewise, with prayer, during the period preceding *Moshiach’s* arrival, we are undergoing so many challenges in life that proper concentration is in and of itself a major challenge. The fire is raging. Every prayer offered by a Jew receives immediate attention. The “filter” is not necessary.

*Sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Kenny Fixler
in memory of his father*

ישראל חיים ב"ר יצחק ק"ל

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Parshas Shemini
True Service of God

Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, each took his pan, put fire in them, and placed incense upon it, and they brought foreign fire before God, which He had not commanded them. (Vayikra10:1)

MOST OF US probably read this as if it has nothing to do with us. Nadav and Avihu made a grave mistake and lost their lives because of it, greatly dampening the entire experience of one of the greatest moments in history, the inauguration of the Mishkan. How could they have been so wrong at so important a moment?

Then Moshe Rabbeinu turned the entire thing on its head. While we're shaking our heads in disdain and disbelief, Moshe tells Aharon that his sons' acts and deaths revealed that Nadav and Avihu were actually greater than even the two of them! THEY died sanctifying GOD'S Name!

Huh?

And while we scratch our heads in utter confusion, we might happen to take a look at Sha'ar HaGilgulim to find out just how important Nadav and Avihu were. Their physical lives may have been short, but their spiritual lives were long and meaningful. They reincarnated into all kinds of important people in Tanach, giving them access to prophecy as a result.

Nevertheless, they HAD made a big mistake, and they HAD been executed by Heaven for it. Midrash and Kabbalah can greatly deepen our understanding of just about anything, especially this tragic episode in the Torah. And believe you me, both of them do.

But, as the Talmud states, at the end of the "journey," we still have to come back to what the Torah says on the simplest of levels, and that is, that Nadav and Avihu offered a "foreign fire before God, which He had not commanded them." And ironically, **COVID-19** has made this verse more relevant to us than it has been in a long time, if ever.

I have spent more time washing my hands in the last few weeks than I have in the last year. My mother always told me to wash my hands with soap for 20 seconds, which I faithfully did NOT do. It wasn't out a lack of respect for my mother, just a lack of belief in the need for such extreme cleanliness. Not one to say "I told you so," I have done this to myself on her behalf.

The hardest part to get used to, is not dovening in a minyan. Unquestionably my dovening has been more heartfelt over the last few weeks than it usually is in shul. In shul I have to keep up, and the pace is usually faster than what I need, to be able to put myself completely, or at least mostly, into what I am saying. And dovening with others is naturally somewhat distracting.

But still there are things I just can't do alone, like say or answer to Kaddish, Borchu, or Kedushah. They are "Devarim Sh'b'Kedushah," which require a minyan to say. And sometimes we need a minyan to "carry" us, when our bodies just don't have the energy to put themselves into tefillah. At home the energy has to come from within oneself each time.

And what about someone who is in aveilus or has a yahrzeit? Miss dovening? Miss Kaddish day after day, dovening after dovening? That's SO hard to do. What will happen to the relative's soul if Kaddish isn't said for him or her on time?

Everyone skips minyan at some point or other. Sometimes it's because we're not feeling well, but even then it's a struggle. There are times people go to shul when halachically they really shouldn't, for their own health and especially for the health of others. And the opposite is also true—they stay home when they halachically probably could have gone and been part of a minyan.

The mikvah too. In some circles, men going to the mikvah is not only a go. Missing it one day is psychologically tantamount to a sin. Even though there are signs warning people not to use the mikvah, if they have something that could make others sick, many people dunk anyhow.

That's Jews for you—they LOVE their mitzvos. Everyone loves a wedding, but Jews have an additional element to consider—it's a MITZVAH to bring joy to the chasan and kallah. And if that means dancing until you are soaking wet with sweat and in very close proximity to others doing the same, well, all the more worthy is the self-sacrifice for the joy of others.

I can't remember the last time I missed a weekly parsha on Shabbos. Males have an obligation to hear every word of the Torah each year, read in a minyan from a kosher Sefer Torah. If you miss a weekly reading, ideally you're supposed to make it up. Sometimes people returning fromchutz l'aretz need to have a special reading of a

parsha they missed, because they came back to Eretz Yisroel when the weekly parsha in the Diaspora was a week behind.

Even on a Shabbos when I could barely walk for one reason or another, I still went to shul to hear the parsha. Not too long ago I had some foot trouble. Because of the pain it took 15 minutes to hobble down a hill I usually walk in two minutes. And when a voice inside said, "Turn around...go back home," another voice said, "No way! We're not missing a parsha!"

The question is to what extent a person at a time of crisis needs to put his health—and clearly the health of others—at risk to fulfill a mitzvah in the IDEAL manner. Is it called mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice for God and Torah, when a person breaks the rules from the Health Ministry so he can get to minyan, make a bris with friends, or participate in a chasanah?

What about when the rabbis themselves tell you that you HAVE to listen to the Misrad HaBriut? If you don't listen to them, and the rabbis represent the opinion of God in this world, then who are you doing the mitzvah for?

It has to do with what is called a "frum yetzer hara." That's a yetzer hara that knows it can't get a person to commit an outright sin—the person is too frum for that. So instead it finds a way to turn a mitzvah into a sin and a sin into a mitzvah. This way the person can believe that his action—which is really a sin—is a mitzvah.

The problem is in the gray areas. Am I really that sick or that contagious? Isn't there some positive purpose in speaking this loshon hara? What are the odds that I have the virus? Or that I will get it if I go to shul? If I don't report all my income, then I'll have more money for tzedakah, etc.

In the words of one famous rabbi (who spoke in Yiddish), "What does God say?" After all, it's HIS mitzvos we're supposed to be doing, not OUR version of them. It's God we have to please, not some inner definition of who we are or what we have to do. Many people think they know the answer to that question when in fact they do not, and they therefore act incorrectly.

Intuition can play an important role in decision-making. But it can't be confused with the sense of insecurity, that one often feels when having to work counterintuitively. That can happen every time someone becomes accustomed to doing mitzvos a particular way for a period of time, and is then told to adapt to a whole new way.

The Gemora says that a person's prayers are only really heard when he is part of a minyan (Brochos 6a). That would certainly make it difficult not to go to one, if you care about God hearing your prayers. This is especially so if you are someone who doesn't always put much intention into your prayers.

However, just a few lines later the Gemora says that if a person is prevented from doing a mitzvah for reasons beyond his control, from HEAVEN'S point of view, it is as if he actually did the mitzvah. As long as the person reasonably did his part in trying to do the mitzvah, nothing more is expected from him.

So if you ran to minyan and only eight other people showed up, that's not your problem. You went to a minyan that usually works, with no way of knowing that it wouldn't that time. You did your part, and that's all that matters to heaven. You may not be able to say or answer Devarim Sh'b'Kedushah, but from God's standpoint it will be as if you did.

You want to go to shul but the virus has you locked up at home? If it weren't for the pandemic, you'd be dovening at the amud, or at least saying Kaddish for someone who has died? Not only will it count on behalf of the niftar as if you did, but he will receive the additional merit of your doing the right thing, the HALACHIC thing, despite your internal opposition.

That is true service of God. It is hard to understand why God would shut down the social part of Torah life, but He has. The virus is just the agent He used to do it. And not just the social part of Torah life, but all close interactive parts of Torah life, like yeshivah boys helping to clean for Pesach, or people going shopping for food.

But as hard as that is to accept for us, it is what He wants. If a piece of treif meat is accidentally and unrecognizably combined with two pieces of kosher meat, all of them can be eaten. Not because it makes sense, but because God says so. (We just don't do eat all three because the rabbis know that we'd still think we're eating a piece of treif meat with the Torah's permission.)

The bottom line, is that we have to make sure that when we do the mitzvos of God, they are really the mitzvos of God, not just our idea of them. When the "mitzvos" we do are not what GOD wants at the moment, no matter how much they were at other times, they end up being sins instead. As this week's parsha makes perfectly clear, that does not get Heavenly applause, just the opposite.