

Dear Chavraya,

From out of brokenness, there can emerge a great light. As through cracks in the sidewalk, tree roots rising toward the light, and as little flowers breaking through hard ground, we too can rise through the cracks in the certainty of how we assumed life would simply be. Rising toward the light of new insight, we can embrace new strengths, fear softened by the blessing of new-found humility. These are hard times and we are unsure, afraid before the unknown. So much has come to a standstill, so much has been cancelled, our lives rearranged and turned upside down, all beyond our power to determine even the details of day to day.

For ourselves and for children in our lives, it seems to me important to take agency for that which we can do in these days of the Coronavirus. First of all to take care and be careful in all the ways we are told will help in reducing susceptibility to disease. How shall we give shape to the new insights that emerge? First of all, what are the insights that come to us? Perhaps it would be helpful to write them down and make of them meditations in shaping our days. What are the strengths we find within ourselves, and creative ways of filling time, imagining with our children things to do to bring joy to ourselves and to others? If working from home, perhaps to envision a better way of work-life balance than we are often able to act upon.

One of the greatest ways of healing and responding to stress and danger is to reach out to others and to act for a greater wellbeing. That is at the root of all activism for the sake of a better world, how to act on behalf of others, to look beyond ourselves. As we seek and share ways to respond to the needs of those more vulnerable in our own community, reaching out is a way of connecting from house to house and heart to heart. We can all become weavers of invisible threads of connection, gossamer strands that in their fragility join us with all the strength of soul and spirit. From the list of our members on the website, members section, shalom43, just call someone and say hello, how are you? It is so simple, but we rarely do it. Now is the time to act on new insights and needs.

In terminology that many of us are hearing for the first time, there are great teachings and lessons. I shudder at the thought of "social distancing," even as I understand what it means and why it is important, keeping enough physical distance among us now in an effort to prevent unwitting spread of the virus from one to another. In social distancing, which happens in negative ways all the time, the challenge is to think of deeper ways to be close to each other. Social distance between one group and another, whether in matters of race, of power, of gender, and all the ways that divide, needs to be bridged if we will come to a great healing as a society. So we can imagine in this time of separation for the sake of a greater good, how shall we come together and bridge the social distance that is always there but not spoken of? So it is in hearing of ways to spread out the timing of the virus striking, the importance of "flattening the curve." With a new term by which to speak of a quest for greater health and protection for the vulnerable, so for all the disparities which cause some to be more vulnerable all the time. The challenge beyond the moment is to "flatten the curve," even as we strive to bend the arc toward justice.

There are lessons to be learned now from the unique reality of a disease that threatens the human family. We are all threatened, susceptible across all borders and differences, reminding us that in the most basic ways of human biology we are all one. The Coronavirus does not distinguish based on race, or religion, or place of national origin. It does not distinguish between rich and poor or the folk and the famous. It does not respect borders, nor distinguish between migrant and citizen, vulnerable human beings all. An invisible virus is joining nations one to another in common concern, collective danger begging for a collective response and sharing of resources. All are equally vulnerable, neither military might nor economic power offering protection. In the way of the Biblical sabbatical year, when rich and poor, land owner and migrant, foraged for food shoulder to shoulder in ownerless fields, so too we are all in the field together foraging for a cure, seeking the way of health and healing. It is our challenge now, if ever it was, to learn and apply in positive ways the ultimate lesson of the Coronavirus, that humanity truly is one.

From house to house and heart to heart, beginning with our own community, we seek ways to bridge the distance and to remember that we are one. In being responsible for each other, we affirm the way of health and healing, of wholeness that emerges through the brokenness of this time. Though we are not meeting together in shul, we can be joined with each other through the personal prayers of each one that surround us all. In whatever way your words form, in tear drops that tell of the inner places from which they've come, or in the silent meditations of your heart, please pray one for another. As needs among us become clear, and requests for volunteers are made, please respond to help in whatever ways you can. In the new reality of "social distancing," we can learn new ways to diminish social distance and become a greater whole, each one needed and each one valued as part of our holy community.

That is the message at the beginning of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Ki Tissa* (Ex. 30:11-34:35). The portion begins with the law of the *half-shekel/machatzit ha'shekel*. Every person is to give but a half-shekel, a very small amount so that every one can give and be counted, thus, *the rich shall not give more and the poor not less....* The Torah speaks of the half-shekel as a way to prevent the *plague/negef* from striking among us, *negef* as plague or disease. So it becomes real in teaching a deeper truth in the way the giving of a half-shekel evolves over time. It becomes in effect a communal tax in which all are obligated to give for the sake of the community. That each one is but a half becomes a teaching on the deeper truth of the original purpose in the giving of but half a shekel. We are each only a half and we need each other to be whole. We cannot ward off disease in a magical way, but as a community supported by each of its members, we can protect each other from the loneliness and fear that becomes its own plague in the face of the unknown.

As we light Shabbos candles, please offer your own prayers on behalf of the community. Each one's prayers are needed, as each one's presence. A reminder that we need each other, in our incompleteness is our beauty and our strength. In

the brokenness of this time, may great light emerge and illumine a new path toward healing and wholeness.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor