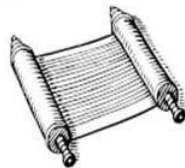


CMTL Pesach Reader 2020 Edition

Published by the Center for Modern Torah Leadership

Center for Modern Torah Leadership



חרות ואחריות

www.TorahLeadership.org

"Taking Responsibility for Torah"

Unless otherwise noted, all pieces are by Rabbi Klapper and published on the CMTL website or blog.

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Ho Lachmah Anya, Revisited

April 7, 2020

“This is the bread of poverty that was eaten by our ancestors in the land of Mitzrayim Anyone hungry – let them come and eat! Anyone in need – let them come eat a Pesach! This year – here; The coming year – in the land of Israel! This year – slaves; The coming year – free people!”

In previous years, some of us recited this paragraph ritually in well-guarded resort complexes, where the poor – unless previously invited – could not possibly hear us. What guests we had were close friends and family, most of them in similar economic situations to our own. The irony seemed stark. But it seems mild in retrospect.

In all other years, the desperately and publicly poor were rarely known to us personally. and so *ha lachmah anya*'s idealistic framework seemed uncomfortable and unsafe. This year, we have gone to the other extreme. Even our closest relatives and friends cannot join us, even though we are all in our own homes. Every additional person makes us less safe, and it is loneliness that makes us uncomfortable.

Can we nonetheless make sense of reciting this paragraph to open the Haggadah? Let's begin by recognizing that the paragraph is structured chronologically – we start in Mitzrayim at the point of the Exodus (“This is the bread our ancestors ate in the Land of Mitzrayim”), move to Israel during the Temple period (“Anyone in need – let him come eat a Pesach”), acknowledge contemporary reality, and finally express our hopes for the future. Our scripted invitation to the needy is a deliberate flashback to the Temple period, when all Israel was camped out in Jerusalem, and the “haves” provided for those who could not afford their own lamb for the Pesach sacrifice. It is not intended as a direct critique of Diaspora practice.

Nonetheless, surely one purpose of the Pesach sacrifice was to create a circumstance in which each Jew of means had direct responsibility for the poor. Can we maintain the spirit of the law when the letter remains sadly out of reach?

In 2017, I wrote that “I don't think the solution is necessarily open-air barbecue seders in public parks. Chazal (Bava Batra 7b) recognize a legitimate tension between the right to privacy and the obligation to remain accessible to the poor. Residents of a courtyard may legally compel each other to pay for the construction of a gatehouse; yet Elijah the prophet stopped visiting one chasid's courtyard once a gatehouse was built, in protest against his exclusion of the poor. The proper balance between these values depends on social and individual circumstances. In a perfect world, no one responds to the last-minute Pesach invitation, because all the poor have already been provided for. We can recline in the privacy and freedom of our houses and hotels without guilt, but only if we have done our part in advance to ensure that the poor have the wherewithal to make their own sederim.”

This year, we are more aware that it is not only the poor who need to be cared for before we can recline in comfort. We need to take care of those who are alone, isolated, and terribly afraid, and also of the many who are suddenly insecure about their economic and professional futures. Of the mourners who did not have the opportunities for closure and communal comforting that our religion and community are ordinarily so good at. And with the best of intentions, we cannot do that as well as we ordinarily would.

We can try. I have been enormously heartened and inspired by the responses to the various calls for taking care of people who will be alone this yom tov. Our community has been led well – the RCBC deserves special recognition, but rabbinic and lay leaders at every well have performed admirably.

While enormous practical and ethical challenges lie ahead, we can feel good about what we've done and optimistic about what we do. Next year in a community where everyone has a comfortable and sheltering seder to attend, and no Jew is left behind economically or emotionally.

הא לחמא עניא (from the Aryeh Klapper Haggadah, in progress)

April 10, 2017

הא לחמא עניא דאכלו אבהתנא בארעא דמצרים.

כל דכפין – ייתי ויכול; כל דצריך – ייתי ויפסח.

השתא – הכא; לשנה הבאה – בארעא דישראל.

השתא – עבדי; לשנה הבאה – בני חורין.

This is the bread of poverty that was eaten by our ancestors in the land of Mitzrayim

Anyone hungry – let them come and eat! Anyone in need – let them come eat a Pesach!

This year – here;

The coming year – in the land of Israel!

This year – slaves;

The coming year – free people!

In the United States, we generally recite this paragraph ritually in a locked house or apartment, or a well-guarded resort complex, where the poor – unless previously invited – could not possibly hear us. This seems too ironic for words. But it is also true that we live in environments where the desperately and publicly poor are rarely known to us personally, and so reasonable concerns of safety and privacy make the idealistic framework set out here uncomfortable and likely unwise. Can we nonetheless make sense of it? Let us begin by recognizing that the paragraph is structured chronologically – we start in Mitzrayim at the point of the Exodus (“This is the bread our ancestors ate in the Land of Mitzrayim”), move to Israel during the Temple period (“Anyone in need – let him come eat a Pesach”), acknowledge contemporary reality, and finally express our hopes for the future. Our scripted invitation to the needy is a deliberate flashback to the Temple period, when all Israel was camped out in Jerusalem, and the “haves” provided for those who could not afford their own lamb for the Pesach sacrifice. It is not intended as a direct critique of Diaspora practice. Nonetheless, surely one purpose of the Pesach sacrifice was to create a circumstance in which each Jew of means had direct responsibility for the poor. Can we maintain the spirit of the law when the letter remains sadly out of reach? I don’t think the solution is necessarily open-air barbecue seders in public parks. Chazal (Bava Batra 7b) recognize a legitimate tension between the right to privacy and the obligation to remain accessible to the poor. Residents of a courtyard may legally compel each other to pay for the construction of a gatehouse; yet Elijah the prophet stopped visiting one chasid’s courtyard once a gatehouse was built, in protest against his exclusion of the poor. The proper balance between these values depends on social and individual circumstances. In a perfect world, no one responds to the last-minute Pesach invitation, because all the poor have already been provided for. We can recline in the privacy and freedom of our houses and hotels without guilt, but only if we have done our part in advance to ensure that the poor have the wherewithal to make their own sederim.

Viral Ethics

Originally published in *Times of Israel*

March 13, 2020

Dear Friends,

The coronavirus epidemic is making social media more and more central to Jewish community. There will be fresh voices and fresh ears in all our online spaces. We should take this opportunity to develop a more robust Torah infrastructure for our virtual interactions.

Here is one suggestion: The rules of lashon hora hold us accountable not only for our own words, but also for the reactions they foreseeably provoke in others. My mother a”h loved to teach non-Jewish college students about the prohibition against saying something good about somebody in contexts where that will provoke others to speak ill of them.

Social media fosters precisely that kind of rekhilut – sharing hot takes or other material that stimulates people to write heated and often nasty responses and counter-responses. These are often distortions or hoaxes, but even when the OP is true, the Torah mandates that we consider whether sharing it serves a constructive purpose.

As with all aspects of lashon hara, it is extremely difficult to create a community that supports this norm. And as with all norms of lashon hora, it can be twisted to suppress dissent and discussion. But I think we need to try.

Test case: Should you share this post? Doing so risks provoking some people to make comments that are cynical or harmful with no constructive purpose. Yet allowing such people to control our communal discourse creates a vicious spiral.

I encourage you to share it. I ask everyone who reads it to consider carefully how you express your response, whether you agree or disagree. I ask everyone who reads the responses to consider carefully how you respond to them. Please also consider how best to curate others’ responses on your own timelines.

Best case scenario is that this conversation develops into a useful model for communal discourse going forward.

Thank you very much for your consideration and cooperation.

Aryeh Klapper

Dean, Center for Modern Torah Leadership

A Clarification of Sh'at Hadchak

Originally posted on Facebook

March 9, 2020

A brief and hopefully clarifying note on sh'at hadchak kebedieved dami with regard to listening to megillah via electronic transmission. (Note: This draft has been changed in response to many cogent comments from Summer Beit Midrash alums, and I expect that there are still many factors I haven't paid enough attention to.)

Bedieved means "once it's already done". In the context of DO mitzvot, this means that there is a better way to do the mitzvah, but if one already did it in the bedieved way, then one has fulfilled one's obligation. Generally, you don't need to do the mitzvah again even if you have the opportunity to do so.

Sh'at hadchak kebedieved dami means that in a situation of sh'at hadchak, one may or must intentionally do the mitzvah in the bedieved way.

Sometimes, however, a way of doing the mitzvah is bedieved not because it's objectively less than ideal, but rather because some opinions hold that one does not fulfill the mitzvah that way at all. Ideally one satisfies those opinions, but bedieved one can rely on the opinions that say it's ok.

The term bedieved here does not reflect a single objective condition – it already happened – but rather bedieved in this context means sh'at hadchak. It reflects a sliding scale – the more difficult the situation is, the weaker or less authoritative a position you can rely on. In extremely difficult positions, one can rely even on positions that, if you relied on them in an ordinary situation, we would require you to repeat the mitzvah.

Perhaps the more relevant phrase for such situations is כדאי הוא רבי פלוני לסמוך עליו בשעת הדחק, meaning "Rabbi X is worthy of being relied on in a sh'at hadchak." But that is not necessarily precise either, since it seems to relate to the author of a position rather than to the position itself.

So we may not have a perfect phrase for saying that in extreme circumstances, one can rely on positions that in ordinary circumstances are not sufficient even bedieved.

The halakhic consensus as I understand it is that in ordinary circumstances, a person who heard the megillah via an electronic transmission would be required to hear it again. They did not fulfill their obligation even bedieved. However, there is a position that one can fulfill one's obligation in that way. (I am bracketing the question of whether that position would extend equally to all forms of transmission) If I am correct, allowing one to hear the megillah via electronic transmission constitutes reliance on a person or position in a sh'at hadchak, and not an instance of treating a sh'at hadchak as if the act were already done.

The nafka minahs, or practical imports, are that

- a) one may not rely on an electronically transmitted megillah reading for reasons other than the health concerns that specifically generated this heter (or other circumstances that rise to the same extreme sh'at hadchak level);
- b) those with health concerns should if possible find a way to hear the megillah read live from a kosher megillah in circumstances that don't raise those concerns; and
- c) communities should make every effort to provide such opportunities even if they are also livestreaming. (If communities simply cannot meet the demand, that would constitute a sh'at hadchak. Communities must also consider the ethics of situations in which some people have access to megillahs/readers and others don't.)

This does not mean that people who have been determined to be at risk, or to potentially pose a risk to others, should attend public readings. They must not. People under quarantine who show up at shul should be told to leave, in absolute terms, and told that they are engaging in utterly forbidden and incredibly selfish behavior. If they refuse, they should be identified to the appropriate synagogue authorities, who should have them removed.

In Halakhic Emergencies, Break Glass and Then Read Directions Carefully

March 13, 2020

The Purim coronavirus crisis generated numerous public statements that the mitzvah of hearing the megillah could be fulfilled via a livestream. Coincidentally, after the publication of [my Facebook post](#) clarifying the difference between *sh'at hadchak* and *bedieved*, many of those statements were updated to say that livestreaming was sufficient only when no live option was available. Really what they meant to say was that livestreaming **might** be sufficient to fulfill the mitzvah, and that public and private health concerns required us to rely on that possibility when no safe in-person option was available.

Maybe they were right the first time? Rav Moshe Feinstein's three responsa on the subject seem to state clearly that it seems more likely than not that one can fulfill the megillah by hearing it via microphone or telephone.

Rav Moshe is hesitant to permit this in practice because of social policy concerns. Such concerns should not affect the underlying halakhic question of whether one's obligation has been fulfilled. If changed circumstances have obviated Rav Moshe's concerns, or if one simply doesn't share those concerns, then his position should be an adequate basis for relying on livestreaming in non-emergency situations.

I disagree with this read of Rav Moshe. This claim arises from an imprecise reading of Rav Moshe's responsa, which are carefully nuanced and jurisprudentially sophisticated. Let's take a look at them in some detail (complete texts with my translation are available [here](#)).

The opening paragraph of Igrot Moshe OC2:108 states that "it is inappropriate (אין ראוי) to read the megillah so that people will hear via microphone." Rabbi Feinstein then denies a report that he had previously ruled that one need not object (אין למחות בידם) to people who do this.

In the body of the responsum, however, Rav Moshe rejects his correspondent's confident assumption that one cannot fulfill one's obligation via microphone, because the sound is produced by something which is not itself obligated in the mitzvah. Rav Moshe contends that the microphonic sound is more likely than not **considered** to be the voice of the human speaker. He furthermore is not certain that it is physically correct to say that the microphone produces an independent voice. He concludes:

For this reason it is possible that one should not object (אין למחות) on halakhic grounds to those who wish to read the megillah via microphone,

and there is no risk of corrupting other mitzvot such as shofar and Torah reading on Shabbat and yom tov, because it is forbidden to speak into a microphone on Shabbat and yom tov,

and regarding mitzvot of speech on weekdays, if they were also to read via microphone, if one should not object regarding megillah – all the more so (one should not object) to these.

However, since the matter is not unequivocally permitted, and this is a new matter entirely (ענין חדש בכלל),

one should object (אין למחות) in order to restrain them from chasing after other novelties, which they are ardently attracted to in these lands, as Your Honor wrote.

Rav Moshe formally presents the issue as whether one must object to synagogues that read the megillah via microphone. His conclusion is that one must, but on social policy rather than halakhic grounds. Our question is whether this means that on pure halakhic grounds he endorses the position.

On first blush the answer is yes, since he states that it is more likely correct than not.

But on second thought, maybe not. There are at least three other teshuvot in which Rav Moshe states that an answer is more likely correct than not, and nonetheless frames the halakhah as “One should not object” rather than as “One may act so”:

1. OC 1:93 – The more likely correct position for a Shabbat blech is that covering the fire is sufficient, and one need not cover the controls. Therefore one can be lenient *bish'at hadchak* and need not object to people who rely on this position in ordinary situations.
2. OC 2:84 – The more likely correct position is that attaching things by sticking a needle through them is permitted on Shabbat. This position is certainly correct regarding diapers, where the attachment is necessarily temporary. However, one should not object to women who attach jewelry this way, even though the attachment may last.
3. OC 4:62 – The more likely correct position regarding Shabbat ending time is that of Arukh HaShulchan, and therefore one should not object to people who rely on it. But perhaps it is appropriate to be stringent and account for the conflicting positions.

What emerges from these cases is that Rav Moshe uses “more likely correct than not” for positions that he would choose where a choice is necessary, but that he would rather have people play it safe and avoid choosing. However, he believes that one cannot object to people who make the choice even when choosing is unnecessary. Applying those rules to our case, he would prefer that people not rely on hearing the megillah via microphone, but if someone had already heard it via microphone, he would tell them not to make the berakhot if they read it for themselves later. Not quite endorsement, but pretty close.

However, careful attention to Rav Moshe’s language in OC 2:108 reveals an additional wrinkle. In addition to the language of “more likely correct than not,” Rav Moshe offers another ground for not issuing a definitive ruling:

כיון שלא ברור להיתר והוא ענין חדש
since the matter is not unequivocally permitted, and this is a new matter

The phrase *inyan chadash* also appears in YD 3:30, where the issue is whether placing items in a steam oven constitutes the method of koshering known as *hag'alah*. Rav Moshe states that it seems reasonable that this works. However, because it is a new matter that never came before the rishonim, he permits it only for items that are clean, have been unused for 24 hours, are not generally used for sharp foods. He also states that one should not be lenient even to that extent for Pesach koshering, because even “negative absorbed taste” is forbidden. All this seems more definitive and less positive than his rulings in the three cases above that do not involve a “new matter.” Moreover, the hesitations here are not connected in any way to fears of sociological impact.

Like our case, YD 3:30 is a new matter because it involves new technology. I suggest that Rav Moshe regards rulings about unprecedented technology as inherently tentative. One might have misunderstood the reality, or misjudged the stakes, or erred in some other crucial way. The ruling in such cases will be to avoid choosing among positions if at all possible.

This insight helps explain two confusing elements of a different *teshuvah* regarding microphones.

In OC 4:91:4, dated 5732, Rav Moshe rules that a hospitalized woman should hear *havdalah* by phone if no in-person option is available, and cites his psak in OC2:208 as precedent. But he adds two surprising things.

- 1) *Havdalah* is like all other weekday speech mitzvot in this regard, **except for *keriyat Sh'ma* and *Birkat HaMazon***. One **must object** to anyone setting out to fulfill the Shema and Birkat HaMazon via microphone.

If Rav Moshe endorses the position that hearing via microphone fulfills one's obligation, why should one object in those two cases?

- 2) One must answer Amen to blessings heard via telephone or microphone out of doubt = *misafek*.

Why is this considered a doubt? If it is more likely true than not, we have a majority = *rov*!

I suggest that the answer to both questions is that Rav Moshe had a sort of metadoubt about all rulings issued with regard to new scientific realities. Such rulings may seem "more likely than not," but the overall odds never go above 50%, i.e. never escape the category *safek*. Therefore: One should object to the use of microphones to fulfill Biblical commandments, such as *keriat shema* and *birkat hamazon*. (*Havdalah* is only Biblical when it actually ends Shabbat for you; once you've said *atah chonantanu* or *barukh hamavdil ben kodesh lechol* it becomes Rabbinic.)

In OC 4:126, dated 5740, Rav Moshe returns to the question of whether one can hear the megillah via microphone. A school knew that when its *beit kneset* was packed, as for example to hear the *megillah*, the female students could not hear without a microphone. They had the option of delaying the reading until the cafeteria was cleaned up, and having two smaller minyanim, or else of using the microphone. Rav Moshe insisted that they delay the reading despite what he acknowledges as a "slight *dchak*," without detailing his rationale.

Delaying the megillah means delaying the breakfast. So Rav Moshe imposes a high standard to be considered a sufficient *sh'at hadchak* to allow reliance on microphones. Since he does not mention sociological concerns here, his concerns presumably are genuinely halakhic. This demonstrates again that his *psak* in this context was tentative.

In other words – forced to choose, Rav Moshe chose the position that hearing the megillah by microphone or telephone was sufficient. But he tried to avoid the choice whenever possible, He took a much stronger position against relying on technology for Biblical mitzvot, and emphasized that Amen is answered out of doubt, because he understood that changes in scientific understanding, halakhic understanding, and reality might reveal that his evaluation was wrong. **He was trying to rule as necessary in the moment while avoiding setting a precedent.**

In the forty years since Rav Moshe's third teshuvah, the world has changed enormously. Wireless connections and digital signal processing mean that we are dealing with completely different technology than he discussed. His notion that the propagation of sound waves (which he is somewhat skeptical of) is no different than the transformation of speech into bits seems off. He never discusses systems where microphones generate sound through multiple speakers handling different frequencies. The internet and virtual reality have radically different social roles.

For all these reasons, I think that Rav Moshe's position is a weak reed to build on. In a truly extreme *sh'at hadchak* such as mass quarantines, it can still be relied on. But the halakhic dialogue about fulfilling mitzvot via electronic transmission or other forms of virtual reality should begin from first principles.

(How) Does Halakhah Take Economic and Other Inequalities into Account?

March 20, 2020

The Talmud (Moed Qattan 27a-b) records a series of rabbinic decrees made to protect the dignity of the poor in the contexts of burial and bereavement. For example, “Originally, when they brought (food) to houses of mourning, the rich would use baskets of silver or gold, while the poor used baskets of peeled willow twigs.” Rabban Gamliel led by example and ordered that his own burial shrouds be plain linen. The concluding Mishnah of Masekhet Taanit teaches similarly that the daughters of Jerusalem all wore borrowed white dresses to the public celebrations of 15 Av “so as not to embarrass she who had none.”

However, this does not mean that halakhah always prioritizes the dignity of the poor above other values. Mishnah Bikkurim 3:8 records that “The rich brought their *bikkurim* in baskets of silver or gold, while the poor brought them in baskets of peeled willow twigs.” Tosafot Yom Tov asks: Doesn’t this embarrass the poor? Why didn’t they decree that the rich had to use willow baskets, as they did regarding mourners? Some suggest that the honor of the Temple took precedence. Maybe halakhah is most interested in the dignity of poor mourners, or would-be brides. Or perhaps the Rabbis left *bikkurim* alone because the baskets were given to the *kohanim*, and therefore the rich paid directly and proportionately for their ostentation.

The modern equivalents of gold and silver baskets may be etrogim from family trees descended directly from King David’s, or matzot made so labor-intensively that they are worth their weight in gold. These extravagant products may support businesses that employ many people who would otherwise be poor. The risks are that the poor may be embarrassed to eat their machine matzahs or carry their asymmetrical etrogim, and disengage from the community, or worse, that the non-rich will be driven to spend unsustainable sums on mere halakhic baubles.

All these are cases where halakhah clearly requires nothing beyond the capacity of the poor. What happens, however, when **baseline** halakhah becomes too heavy a burden on the poor, so that they need to avail themselves of halakhic leniencies? Do the non-poor have a right to keep baseline halakhah, even if that will embarrass the poor, or should halakhic authorities – as best they can – seek to compel everyone to adopt the relaxed standard? (Note that Deborah Klapper argues that the same question often arises in the context of disabilities, as for example use of Shabbat elevators.) Is it a Torah value to ensure that the poor can freely invite the rich to meals, or to borrow their lulavim?

A fascinating responsum from the year 1852 addressed this issue head-on. Rabbi Yaakov Meir ben Chayyim Padua, Rabbi of Brisk, was asked to allow the eating of a type בעבליך (=chickpeas?), a type of *kitniyot*, because the poor would find little else to eat otherwise. Likely there was a potato shortage. Rabbi Padua easily reaches the conclusion that this is permissible for the poor. He then goes further:

If you were to say: Here too we will say this because circumstances are pressing (sh’at hadchak), so let us permit this exclusively for the poor who have nothing else to eat, but not for the burghers or the rich –

It would be improper to do this, because in truth there is no intrinsic prohibition, or even trace of a prohibition, in this (eating kitniyot), just (it was prohibited) for some reason they had, that one might come to error or something else (see Pri Chadash 453), and if we permit it for the poor and not the rich – the poor will have their joy of yom tov removed, because they will say: “There is something prohibited about this, but they permitted it to them because of the pressure of circumstances,” and they will be denied the joy of yom tov,

We find that Chazal were afraid of such consequences, as they say in Tractate Niddah “If so, his heart (conscience) will trouble him and he will separate (from his wife) and not fulfill the commandment of procreation” –

so too here, if we permit for the poor alone, some of the G-d-fearing will have their hearts trouble them, and they will avoid eating בעבליך, and thus they will be denied the joy of yom tov. (Teshuvot Maharim miBrisk 48)

Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman makes a similar argument in Responsa Melameid L'Hoil 1:58 (the responsum is undated, so late 19th-early 20th century). German public schools met on Saturday. Rich Jewish parents could afford tutors for their children to make up the material missed, but the poor would fail if they were absent. Rabbi Hoffman writes:

You might suggest that the Jew should hire a private tutor to teach his child the material covered in school on Shabbat. Unfortunately, because of our many sins most Jews are poor and incapable of affording the expense of a private tutor for the Shabbat material. Therefore, since the learning is a prerequisite for making a living, it is certainly considered a “slight mitzvah” and universally considered permitted, just like arranging an apprenticeship for a child is permitted in Shulkhan Arukh Orach Chayyim 307:5.

I say further that there are places where even those who can afford a private tutor would do better to send their children to school on Shabbat just as the poor people are compelled to do. An example would be those places where many of our nation, because of our many sins, desecrate the Shabbat by writing, and Jewish students who don't write on Shabbat are rare. If there are more Jewish students committed to not writing on Shabbat, their hands will be strengthened – “they will help one another and say to each other: “Be strong!” If the G-d-fearing students are few, though, we must be concerned that – Heaven forbid – they will not withstand this test of their commitment. Certainly at least the weakest of them will falter. It is appropriate for the rich to do something that doesn't even amount to a “small prohibition” in order to save their Jewish brethren from “great prohibitions.”

I don't mean to say that Maharim miBrisk or Rav Hoffman were necessarily correct in their rulings, or that they expressed a dispositive halakhic principle. For example, Maharim MiBrisk's ruling was lovingly criticized by Rabbi Malkiel Tenenbaum (Divrei Malkiel 1:28) writing in response to a potato shortage in 1880. Rabbi Tenenbaum permits all kitniyot, but only for the poor.

Since the whole basis of the leniency we have explained with Heaven's help is the pressure and compulsion of circumstances – therefore one may not permit except for the poor who endure that pressure, and not for the rich, and everyone who can make the effort not to eat kitniyot without experiencing that pressure is certainly forbidden to eat kitniyot.

But Rabbi Tenenbaum then provides another reason for insisting that the rich share the halakhic lot of the poor:

But according to what we are told, the gaon Maharim miBrisk spoke well in accordance with his times, when food was enormously expensive and there was no money, and certainly that tzaddik realized that there were many people who were ashamed to proclaim their poverty, and kept up the appearance of wealth, so that it would be humiliating for them to eat kitniyot, and they would instead endure the humiliation of hunger on yom tov – therefore he garbed himself in righteousness, as befit him and commanded that all of them eat, as this almost touched on pikuach nefesh according to what I've heard of the great expensiveness and hunger of that time, and in such circumstances we can say that “Better for a chaver to violate a lighter prohibition, etc. (= if he thereby prevents an am ha'etz from violating a greater prohibition).”

Our ongoing crisis will pose many similar dilemmas. Challenges of supply may put inflationary pressure on Pesach products (although so far the news is good), and people who have for years been treated by relatives to Pesach vacations will now be forced to make their own sederim, and find it hard to maintain the yom tov dignity that they are accustomed to. For example, my grandfather z”l refused to join us at the

YU Sukkah for yom tov the year after they switched to serving on disposable dishes. Yet I don't have Pesach china, or Pesach dishwashers.

Perhaps more seriously, the halakhic options available to the elderly and the immunosuppressed, or the quarantined, may become very different than those available to the rest of us. Specifically with regard to mourners, can we say that they must rely on options for kaddish that would be insufficient for the rest of us? Perhaps yes; perhaps this is an opportunity to correct the magical thinking that has arisen around kaddish. But no such arguments would have applied to the megillah, or will to Birkat Kohanim on yom tov. But perhaps we are less concerned outside the sphere of mourning?

Each halakhic issue in any case requires separate treatment. I hope only to have shown that poskim can and should think about class distinctions and other social consequences as they help us navigate these challenging times.

Fighting COVID-19 through Each Amidah Blessing

By Rabbi Judah Kerbel (SBM '15)

March 26, 2020

Originally published in *Times of Israel*

Every Rosh Ha-Shannah and Yom Kippur, we declare that three things can overturn an awful decree: repentance, prayer, and charity. While Rambam and Ramban famously disputed whether our thrice daily prayers constitute a *mitzvah d'oraita* (positive commandment), all would agree that in a time of distress, in a time of desperation, it is a *mitzvah* to pray. Many of us are limited in our ability to actively wipe out the novel coronavirus or cure those who are ill, but our expression of prayer is one aid we can turn to in order to do our share to fight the spread of this virus. It is a religious imperative to pray at a time of disaster and plague (Rambam Ta'aniyot 1:1; Shulhan Arukh Orah Hayim 576:5). In a time where we need to connect with and come closer with God, tefillah can be that instrument.

Tefillah for many is the most natural way to have a conversation with God. While text is fixed no matter the circumstance, different situations and context may inform the intention behind the blessing in different ways. On any given day, I personally try to use the blessings of the Amidah as an opportunity to frame the various issues I encounter in life. The current crisis, found in the pandemic of the novel coronavirus, not only creates a requirement for prayer but also inspires the way through which we recite the blessings of the Amidah.

What follows is a short *kavannah* for each blessing of the Amidah. Some blessings lend themselves to obvious connections; others may be more of a stretch. If even some of these speak to you, great; hopefully they will at least provide a springboard for framing the urgency of the moment in the context of prayer.

1. **Avot** – as we approach You, we know that You are in charge of this world and that we stand in front of You. Your deeds are great in a way that we cannot begin to describe. You are inherently a *gomeil chasadim tovim*, You bestow acts of loving-kindness. Just as You were the “shield of Abraham,” You are our shield. I believe in God’s propensity for kindness and protection.
2. **Gevurot** (Divine Might) – The virus is a manifestation of the fact that God is in control of this world and, through a microscopic species, possesses ultimate power. At the same time, God is *rofei cholim*, as God heals the ill. Once those who are ill are healed, God will be *matir assurim*—we will be able to emerge from the prisons of quarantines and social distancing.
3. **Kedusha** (Holiness) – *u-kedoshim b'chol yom yehalelucha, selah!* (and the holy ones praise You daily, Selah!) Even though we are not able to gather to say *kedusha*, the holy Jewish people are still able to pray from home and continue to pray on a daily basis. We will not cease our service of God!
4. **Da'at** (Knowledge) – we need a lot of wisdom at this moment. Please grant insight to scientists and medical professionals to assist them in developing vaccines and treatment for this novel coronavirus. Please grant wisdom to all of us to make the right decisions in a time of great uncertainty.
5. **Teshuva** (Repentance) – “Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah” – allow us to return to our *batei midrash* and *yeshivot* to learn Torah together. “Draw us near, Our King, to Your service” – allow us to return to the place where we serve you, in our shuls! “Bring us back to You in full ‘teshuva’” – may we come back to the way things are supposed to be because that is what You want.¹

¹ See Rabbi Menachem Penner’s comments here: <https://www.facebook.com/yakov.horowitz/videos/1901170853348245/>

6. **Selicha** (Forgiveness) – the human condition is that we are flawed, and therefore, we do not live forever. Yet, even if we are deserving of punishment, please forgive us and accept our efforts to be better human beings.
7. **Ge'ulah** (Redemption) – “look on our affliction” – look at all of the suffering throughout the world and feel our pain. “Plead our cause” – not just to empathize with our suffering, but to be on our team. And “redeem us soon for Your name’s sake” – so that we can all be healthy and serve you wholeheartedly.
8. **Refuah** (Healing) – the lists of those in need of healing grow longer and longer. Help us cut down those lists by granting a full recovery to those infected by the virus. “Heal us, Lord, and we shall be healed. Save us and we shall be saved” – only You, in Your great compassion, have the power to grant a complete healing.
9. **Birkat Ha-Shanim** (Prosperity) – due to the viral nature of this disease, many are forced to not work and have lost their livelihood. Please grant those who are suffering economic challenges blessing and prosperity soon!
10. **Kibbutz Galuyot** (Ingathering of Exiles) – as this pandemic has become a global crisis, we are not able to travel. Many who make the pilgrimage to Eretz Yisrael during Pesach will not be able to. Gather us soon so that we can visit Your holy land and support the State of Israel.
11. **Hashavat Ha-Mishpat** (Restore justice) – “restore our judges as at first and our counselors as at the beginning” – Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch wrote that “our people need leaders, men who will champion truth.”² Please grant our leaders the courage to lead us through difficult times that take great coordination and vision in order to protect us.
12. **Birkat Ha-Minim** (Against Enemies) – the novel coronavirus is the greatest enemy of the human race at this moment. Destroy it and remove it without delay so that we may all merit to live and serve You faithfully!
13. **Tzaddikim** (The Righteous) – have compassion on the righteous and pious among us, that they will not receive undue suffering. May we all merit to be counted among them.
14. **Binyan Yerushalayim** (Rebuilding Jerusalem) – it is even more painful to not have a Beit Ha-Mikdash during a time of distress like this. Your Holy Temple is meant to serve as a place of prayer for all people, and this is a time period during which all nations of the world need to reach You. May we merit soon to have Your divine Presence so we can reach You more directly.
15. **Malkhut Beit David** (Kingdom of David) – “for yearn for Your salvation all day.” This blessing speaks of the coming of Mashiach. We are told that he will come either “*be’itah*,” in its proper time, or “*achishena*,” God will hurry His coming. Whether this pandemic comes to an end after its proper or course or through God’s more direct intervention, may that time come sooner than later. May we be redeemed from a sorrowful world sooner than later.
We may not always properly yearn for salvation, but now is a time we yearn to be all together in a rebuilt Jerusalem performing the *korban Pesach*, paschal sacrifice.
16. **Shema Koleinu** (Hear our Prayers) – God, we are desperate for this to come to an end. Please listen to the voices of those who are sick. Please listen to the voices of those who have family and friends who are sick. Please listen to the voices of those who are suffering in isolation. Have mercy and compassion on us during this difficult time, and “do not turn us away empty-handed from Your presence.”

² As cited in the *Koren Ani Tefillah Siddur*, ed. Rabbi Dr. Jay Goldmintz, p. 325.

17. **Avodah** (Temple Service) – we do not offer sacrifices anymore, but “instead of bulls we offer the prayer of our lips” (Hosea 14:3). May our prayers be acceptable to you as are sacrifices. May the recital of *Pitum Ha-Ketoret* take the place of offering incense in order to stop this plague.
18. **Hoda’ah** (Thanksgiving) – Even in the midst of crisis, we are thankful for everything we do have. We are thankful for every moment we have to live. For every person who recovers from the virus. For whatever unintended blessings may come out of this difficult time. Our lives are entrusted to you, and we thank You for every small miracle we may experience.
19. **Peace** – may this be a time where the world comes together. Where our leaders come together. May we have peace in our homes, as we spend more time in close quarters with our family. May we have inner peace during a time that provokes anxiety and uncertainty.

“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart find favor before You, Lord my Rock and Redeemer” (Psalms 19:15).³

³ Some translations, by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, adapted from the *Koren Ani Tefillah Siddur*.

Prayer for Medical Workers

By Rabbi Stephen Belsky (SBM '12)

Originally published on Facebook

March 26, 2020

I was asked, so here is a prayer for the medical workers and researchers on the front lines of treating the afflicted and finding a cure for the COVID19 coronavirus pandemic

מי שבירך אבותינו אברהם יצחק ויעקב
ואמותינו שרה רבקה רחל ולאה
ורפא את מרים הנביאה
וחזקיהו מלך יהודה
ונעמן שר־צבא ארם
ומי מרה וסיר אלישע
הוא יברך וישמור ויחזק וְיַעֲזֵר
את החובשים ואת האחיות ואת הרופאים
ואת כל הפועלים בתחום הרפואה והטיפול
המחרפים נפשם להצלת חיי בריותיו
בעמדם בין המתים ובין החיים לעצור את המגפה
אֲלֵהִים לָנוּ מִחֶסֶד וְעֵז עֲזָרָה בְּצָרוֹת נִמְצָא מֵאֵד
רפאנו ' ונירפא, הושיענו וניוושע, כי תהילתנו אתה
כשם שלימדת את משה רבינו לעשות את נחש הנחשת
ואת אהרן הכהן להקטיר קטורת לפניך
אנא אל נא תן נא חכמה בלב כל המדענים והחוקרים
למצוא תרופה למכה
והנח נא רוח חסד ורחמים על כל מנהיגי המדינות
לשמור את שלום הארצות ובריאות העמים
שנזכה ונראה כולנו אותו יום בו כל יושבי תבל ישכנו לבטח
ומלאה הארץ דעה את ' כמים לים מכסים
כי טוב אתה לכל ורחמיך על כל מעשיך
רופא חולי כל בשר אתה ומפליא לעשות
כן יהי רצון
ונאמר אמן

May the One who blessed our ancestors,
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah;
who healed Miriam the Prophet, Hezekiah King of Judah, Naaman the Aramean General, and the waters
of Marah and Elisha's pottage;
bless, guard, strengthen, and embolden
the emergency responders, the nurses, and the doctors,
and all those who work in the field of medicine and treatment
who risk their lives
to save the lives of human beings, Gd's creations,
standing between the living and the dead to stop the plague.
God, our shelter and strength! Help in times of trouble, always accessible!
Heal us, God, and we will be healed; rescue us, and we will be rescued; for You are our praise!
Just as you taught Moses our Teacher to craft the bronze serpent,
and Aaron the Priest to offer incense before you,
please, God, please, grant, please, wisdom in the hearts and minds of all the scientists and researchers
to find a remedy for this plague,
and please, bestow a spirit of loyalty and compassion upon the leaders of all states
to preserve the peace of nations and the health of peoples –
so that all of us may merit to behold that day when all inhabitants of the Earth will dwell in safety,

and the Earth will be full of the knowledge of God as water fills the seas.
For You are good to all, and have compassion on all Your handiwork;
You heal the sick of all flesh, performing wonders.
May such be Your will,
and let us say, amein.

Facing the Halakhic Challenges of the Current Crisis

March 27, 2020

The ongoing Covid-19 crisis presents our community with innumerable practical challenges. As with all political leadership, halakhic crisis management depends on effective communication as well as effective action. Led by the superbly Nachshonian RCBC, local and national Modern Orthodox leadership has done a superb job of communicating the absolute priority of social distancing. There have also been many substantive halakhic opinions issued on narrower issues. But the effectiveness of those opinions has sometimes been limited by challenges of communication.

Let me start with an example that is about the context of halakhah, rather than about halakhah itself. There have been many statements about the safety of mikvaot, and therefore the permissibility of immersion, for women who are not at high risk. These properly include caveats that our information about the virus is constantly being updated, which justifies the exclusion of high-risk women.

This is very important. But there are other issues that also must be dealt with. An excellent Israeli directive began with the following:

A woman who feels terrified by the necessity to go to mikveh – is not obligated to immerse.

Her life and peace of mind come before all.

From a halakhic perspective, she of course remains in a condition of prohibition until she next immerses.

Together with this, I will try to explain, as one who is in charge of the mikvaot of X, why in my humble opinion immersion in the mikvah is secure with a high degree of likelihood.

This creates an entirely different tone. It expresses a sensitivity to the possibility of spousal coercion, and validates a woman's right to make their own judgments about safety. It makes clear that trust must be earned rather than assumed. This makes it much more likely that trust will be earned. And that trust will be greatly needed.

At the same time, even this statement has no long-term plan for a community in which many women feel that the mikvaot are genuinely unsafe, let alone for the couples in which the women are being specifically told that they should not go, with no prospect of short-term change. There is also a possibility that experiencing the mikvah under hazmat conditions will be immensely stressful for a significant number of women, with long-term effects.

We also need a plan that can survive our being wrong a few times, as we inevitably will be. Some mikvah somewhere will likely become at least a suspected vector of infection at some point. What resources will we have to demonstrate that it is an anomaly, and that just about every mikvah is in fact punctiliously carrying out recommended best practices? I personally am reeling from the number of infections in Israel attributed to Purim celebrations.

There may be no such plan. But we also cannot casually expect mass religious heroism. In the absence of confidence that we have a humanly realistic plan, people will embrace other plans that seem humanly realistic, even if we strongly doubt their halakhic bona fides.

A major challenge here is that halakhah has a strong preference for dealing with exceptions to standard law in a private, case-by-case fashion. There are good reasons for that – making public exceptions weakens the law and leniencies are often abused. Keeping leniencies individual enables poskim to be more flexible in each case. But I suspect there is a tipping point at which everyone knows that there will have to be so many exceptions that a public rule is necessary.

It would be helpful if we could effectively teach ROSH's idea that some halakhic positions are totally out of bounds – except in emergencies. ROSH held that a dried out lulav was Biblically invalid under ordinary circumstances, but that when literally no other lulav was obtainable, one could make a blessing on a dried out lulav. One would be perfectly justified in denouncing someone who counseled the use of a desiccated lulav in an ordinary year. But what if there's a legitimate reason to fear that no lulavim will be available this year? The Raavad disagreed strongly with ROSH, and the Beit Yosef compromised – yes wave the lulav, but no berakhah. We need at least to make that compromise comprehensible to people (and for ourselves as well, clarify how it plays out with regard to DON'Ts).

The dispute among ROSH, RAAVAD, and Beit Yosef is also key to many of the conversations about virtual ritual. Almost everyone agrees that virtual davening communities do not have the depth of connection and spirituality of in-person communities. Almost everyone agrees that if we could allow mourners to say kaddish now, without fear that next year's mourners would be much likely to show up in person, we would. The question is whether it's possible to allow it now without the laity drawing the lesson that in principle it's good enough.

Crisis leniencies often face another tension. State the actual standard for leniency, and many people who desperately need that leniency, are perhaps even required to use it, will refuse to. State a lower standard, and of course many people will use it who should not be permitted to.

Last week's dvar Torah discussed this question with regard to relaxing the prohibition against kitniyot for the poor in a time of scarcity. Maharim MiBrisk held that it was necessary to relax the prohibition for all, lest the poor feel stigmatized and fail to have the halakhically required joy of yom tov. Divrei Malkiel disagreed. However, Divrei Malkiel conceded that in an economic crisis, many of the genteel poor, who were keeping up the appearances of their past condition, would refuse to take advantage of leniencies if that required acknowledging their poverty. He therefore conceded that in such a crisis Maharim MiBrisk's position would be justified.

This dynamic underlies the conversation about ZOOM seders and communication devices over a three-day yom tov. We all understand that three days without human contact on yom tov will pose a severe health challenge to some of our most vulnerable community members. If we publicly set the standard for leniency as medically verified risk of suicide, not many people will use it unjustifiably. However, it is equally certain that many people who are at risk will refuse to use it. They may be in denial about the severity of their condition (and for that reason may not even have a therapist). Or they may be unwilling to admit their condition to others. A specific aspect of permitting electronic communication is that it requires coordination with a second party. I can't ask you to ZOOM your seder unless we both classify it as pikuach nefesh.

On the other hand, we also all understand that separating families at the seder will cause enormous and profound unhappiness. If we set the standard for leniency at risk of great sadness, many people will use it who cannot plausibly be classified as in danger. Some rabbis may think that the lower standard is proper. But those who don't cannot escape choosing between Scylla and Charybdis.

This is a halakhic tension. But the fundamental issue is whether we can communicate one of these positions effectively enough that mostly the right people use the leniency without guilt, while the wrong ones don't use it at all.

It might help to think about setting up two committees. The first would discuss ways of credibly certifying the Covid-19 precautions of specific mikvaot. The second would engage in halakhic disaster planning. What if mikvaot become actually unsafe? What if we have a dramatic rise in marital unhappiness? What if the first days of yom tov show a dramatic spike in severe depression? Each of these committees must include representative men and women, as well as both halakhists and professionals or volunteers who can credibly convey the concerns and reaction of the community to proposed rulings. If we eschew a formal structure, we need to find ways to ensure that we have the conversations informally.

My belief is that having these conversations will yield both better policy and better communication.

How to Save Lives During a Three-Day Yom Tov?

Originally Published in *Times of Israel*

April 2, 2020

Pikuach nefesh (=lifesaving) pushes aside almost all prohibitions, including those of Shabbat and Yom Tov.

There are at least four ways that social isolation can create pikuach nefesh situations during the upcoming three-day yom tov.

1. People at high risk of death from COVID-19 may risk infection in order to spend time with family or friends
2. People may risk infecting others in order to spend time with family or friends
3. People may become directly suicidal or develop very severe mental illness, such as clinical depression
4. People may become ill and unable to care for themselves

Halakhah should be decided in the ways that IN PRACTICE minimizes the overall risk to life posed by these factors.

As secondary factors, poskim must take into account at least three other values:

1. Minimizing the number of UNNECESSARY violations of Shabbat and Yom Tov
2. Preserving an immediate Yom Tov and Shabbat atmosphere of simchah and kedushah
3. Preventing long-term damage to the Yom Tov and Shabbat atmosphere of our community

Halakhic decisions can be made “wholesale” or “retail.” Some issues are best decided on a communal level. For example, following the lead of the RCBC, the Boston Orthodox rabbinate and many others forbade all public ritual. These are examples of effective “wholesale” psakim. Poskim may similarly choose to issue across-the-board leniencies where any limitations or restrictions will inevitably cause people to act in ways that risk lives.

However, this does not mean that all of halakhah is presumptively suspended during the current crisis. For example: based on pikuach nefesh, one may violate even Biblical prohibitions to fulfill the desires of a choleh sheyesh bo sakkanah (=deathly ill person). The reason for this is that we assume that anything which soothes the mind of a deathly ill patient may contribute to their longevity. However, not everyone who is in danger is a choleh. For example, if I see someone walking obliviously toward a railroad crossing, I cannot feed them a cheeseburger just because they ask for one.

Another important distinction is that preventive measures do not ALWAYS rise to the level of pikuach nefesh. Halakhah does not ban all risk in life, nor require us to spend all our efforts and make all our choices with only longevity in mind. This is true both individually and communally. Psak regarding preventive measures depends on the extent of risk, the reasonableness of the contention that violating the prohibition will lower that risk, and the degree of prohibition.

These distinctions are key to the conversation regarding electronic communication during the upcoming yom tov. One question is whether soothing the minds of those statistically at-risk for

Covid-19 makes them less likely to catch the disease, or more likely to survive if they catch it. Such people are not yet cholim, and so there is no presumption that one can do whatever they ask, or that any degree of psychological comfort justifies every degree of halakhic violation. Indeed, some people may be negatively affected by being treated as if they are already sick. Moreover, breaking Shabbat or yom tov can itself be a trauma for some people who are deeply committed to observance.

Another question is whether these leniencies relate to preventive measures that rise to the level of pikuach nefesh. The psakim banning minyan do not permit driving on Shabbat to buy hand sanitizer, nor do they permit online lashon hora in order to discourage people from meeting friends to gossip.

In light of the above, if giving blanket permission to ZOOM seders on Yom Tov is the best way to prevent people from endangering themselves or others, then poskim should permit them even if many specific ZOOM seders may have no such effect. Similarly, poskim should give blanket permission for check-in phone calls on Shabbat and yom tov if that is the best way to ensure that suicidal individuals receive competent help or to ensure that dangerously ill people obtain proper medical care.

But overly broad leniencies can be unnecessary or counterproductive. Because such psakim must be judged by their real-world outcomes, a ruling that isn't followed is a failure even if you think people should follow it. Effective psak cannot make psychological demands that people will not meet, or be based on minority halakhic positions that are nonstarters in the relevant community, even if you think those minority positions are objectively correct. For example: electronic communication requires the parties at both ends to be willing to engage in it. Ruling that people living alone can videoconference into family seders, or call friends, will not help unless their family and friends cooperate. Since families and friendships often cross communal boundaries, these kinds of leniencies can work only if they are broadly accepted.

A similar consideration applies to the pikuach nefesh concerns of suicide and mental disorders. The people at greatest psychological risk will often refuse to acknowledge that risk, certainly not prophylactically. They may also be stubbornly resistant to unfamiliar leniencies, and unlikely to take advantage of religiously uncomfortable options such as ZOOM sedarim. It doesn't matter whether we think they should; what matters is whether they will. In these and other cases, a broadly accepted narrow ruling is therefore much more effective than a narrowly accepted broad ruling.

Conversely, we must be equally wary of excessively limiting a ruling. For example, requiring medical certification of a suicide risk in order to permit videoconferencing on yom tov runs the risk that the leniency will be dramatically underused. Even people who voluntarily go to therapists, and have access to adequate mental health care, may be unwilling to disclose their mental health challenges to others, and again, videoconferencing requires both sides to participate.

Finding the delicate, lifesaving middle ground between excessive leniency and excessive stringency is extraordinarily hard when dealing with diverse communities. Poskim therefore try very hard to make "retail" rather than "wholesale" decisions. A standard halakhic tactic for accomplishing this is to publish a relatively stringent standard together with a note that anyone with a case anywhere approaching that standard should ask their local Orthodox rabbi. This tactic works well when everyone in the audience has a relationship with a rabbi to whom they are comfortable asking such questions. However, the flood of inquiries opened by the institution of Yoatzot Halakhah suggests that this is not true within every community. Because the downside – death – of people choosing not to ask and "just be machmir" is so great in the present circumstances, I think it would be better to publish a relatively or even maximally lenient standard and offer people the ability to make decisions themselves. That standard must

be formulated practically and concretely. At the same time, it should strongly encourage people to consult with competent halakhic authorities, especially when a decision must be accepted by multiple people in order to be implemented.

When all is said and done, competent halakhic authorities will not all give the same answers, for many legitimate reasons. For example, they may start from different halakhic positions about technology on yom tov and Shabbat, or about whether a high standard that is nonetheless short of pikuach nefesh can justify certain leniencies. My point here is to emphasize that competence in this matter requires deep understanding of the psychological stakes and communal realities; willingness to make difficult halakhic decisions in situations of safeik pikuach nefesh; and the ability to handle the ambiguities of situations which are not obviously pikuach nefesh.

Practically speaking, I think it is very unlikely that across-the-board leniencies for electronic communication on yom tov will gain the support they need to be effective in most of our communities. I therefore don't see much benefit in arguing for or against them. Instead, I believe that our entire community must brainstorm other tactics to diminish each of the four pikuach nefesh risks we began with. Some of these, such as the risk that people living alone will fall ill, would not anyway be helped much by ZOOM seders.

Here are some sample ideas:

1. Everyone living alone, but especially the elderly, will have a pre-arranged check-in time each day, say by a knock at the window. If they don't respond, someone should call them a short time later, and if they still don't respond, call 911.
2. Everyone living alone will have a way to call friends or family, and ideally random community members, in a way that ensures their call will be picked up. They will be strongly encouraged to make such calls if there is even a small chance that doing so will increase their safety. Protocols for answering these calls will include being supportive of the person for making them.

I am confident that many communities are already arranging similar approaches, in consultation with competent halakhic authorities. **We urgently need to arrange the sharing of best practices as widely as possible.**

This process will require rabbis and laity thinking together seriously about halakhah in immediate and practical terms, and may therefore become a small positive outcome of this terribly difficult situation.

Wishing us all joy, health, sanity, and a chag kasher vesameiach!

Embrace New Parts of the Haggadah

By Rabbanit Leah Sarna (SBM '14)

Originally published in *The Washington Post*

April 6, 2020

The Haggadah, the text that guides Jewish families through the retelling of the Exodus story at the seder night, is a long and complex composition. So long that many have argued for paring it back: too much to get through before dinner. But to me, its length provides promise.

Passover during a pandemic means families torn apart, grief, fear, loneliness and more. My advice? Let the texts take the lead, and not just because, with many fewer people and opinions around the table, there will be plenty of time to fill.

Instead, it's worth revisiting the Haggadah as a whole because in a strange year, some of the usual favorites might not resonate. They might be painful reminders of joyful seders past, or call for you to do activities that aren't possible at your miniature stay-at-home-seder. But if you can't find meaning or comfort in your usual favorites, trust that you will find solace somewhere in the texts you haven't focused on in previous years.

As I've been preparing for my own micro-seders this year, there's a certain line in the Haggadah that I keep coming back to. After the seder meal, we recite Psalm 118. Verse 5 reads: "From the strait I have called, Lord." In the context of the Haggadah, "the strait" is a pun in Hebrew: "meytzar" (strait) echoes the word "mitzrayim" (Egypt). In my family, this line is always sung to a boisterous, table-banging melody that fits well into the triumphant tone of Psalm 118 as a whole.

However, this line was recently set to a powerful — and more downbeat — new tune by musician Deborah Sacks Mintz. Her song and these words, which typically have passed me by in the jumble of Psalm 118, feel appropriate to our moment. Stuck at home in the middle of a pandemic, we, like the Psalmist, call out from our own "strait" and pray for salvation. These ancient psalms have provided language for the Jewish people to pray throughout the many difficulties of our history. That very same language is serving me well today. I've never dwelled on this line at the seder night before, but I certainly will this year.

The length and complexity of the Passover texts are a promise of ever-unfolding meaning. Open yourself to them, and you will find that they open themselves to you.

Rabbanit Leah Sarna is director of religious engagement at Anshe Sholom B'nai Israel Congregation.

Making Seder Out of the Zoom Seder Controversy

By Rabbi Shlomo Zuckier (SBM '12)

Originally published in *The Lehrhaus*

April 7, 2020

Introduction

The crisis precipitated by the novel Coronavirus and the distancing measures in its wake have led to a flurry of halakhic decisions, many of which reflect deep questions of Jewish law and values. Placing any system under stress serves to reveal its tensions and gaps, and Halakhah is no different.

Possibly the most acute example of this appears in the case of Zoom *Sedarim*, which featured a controversy starting around Rosh Hodesh Nisan on both sides of the Atlantic. As we will see, these discussions are complex, as several different scenarios are being discussed, and a variety of halakhic and meta-halakhic issues are at stake – the halakhic status of electricity, questions of unity and diversity in halakhic decision-making, and the phenomenology of virtual reality.

The goal of this article is to make some *seder*, some order, out of the controversy, to separate out the various issues at hand and emphasize both new trends as well as consensus views that emerge from the discussion. The decisions presented on a variety of issues reflect in many cases surprising developments or applications of Halakhah, and we will find several cases of unlikely alliances between divergent parties.

Recap of Events

The debate began with the pronouncement of the “Association of Rabbis of the *Maghreb* in Israel,” a group of fourteen Moroccan rabbis who asserted that, in order to allow families to include grandparents in their *Seders* this year as usual, despite social distancing, it would be permissible to set up a Zoom call before *Hag* and include the larger family together in one festive *seudah*. The response was immediate and powerful: it was attacked by current Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel David Lau and even more forcefully by former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar. Rabbi Yitzchok Zilberstein, a major decisor for the *Haredi* world, penned an objection as well. Several rabbis retracted their endorsement of the original position almost immediately, and the decision was reissued with a mere seven of the original fourteen signatories. Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon offered an alternative – having a Zoom pre-*Seder* on the afternoon of *Erev Pesah* to sing holiday tunes with extended family prior to logging off and holding a classical *Seder* with the smaller group in the room – a suggestion that has gained much traction, echoed by both Israeli and American colleagues.

In America, while some have addressed the question of using Zoom to facilitate multi-generational *Seders*, most of the discourse surrounds a different issue, those who live alone and for whom being isolated for three days might lead to mental health challenges. In cases of danger to life there is an uncontroversial permission to violate the usual rules of Yom Tov; the question here has primarily been what exactly is included in *pikuah nefesh*, life-saving measures.

Speaking generally, then, there are really two separate discourses going on – an Israeli discussion over family unity and preserving the multi-generational *Seder*, and an American discussion over preserving life through cellphones, Zoom meetings and other virtual means. This is at least partially a function of circumstance: the calendar outside Israel this year features a so-called “three day Yom Tov,” over 72 hours without electronic communication, a real challenge for some who are isolated physically and may have a history of mental health challenges. One wonders whether certain deep-seated cultural differences may play a role as well: Israel, and particularly its sizable Sephardic community, is very committed to the *hamulah*, close familial kinship, and especially joint religious experiences. As some of the written decisions indicate, it is not clear that everyone will partake in a *Seder* if it does not include the extended family. On the other side, Orthodox communities in the United States are increasingly weakening the stigma of mental health and raising publicly more halakhic issues in that vein.

I would like to consider here three different debates or shifts that have occurred as a part of these discussions, and to analyze what underlies these debates.

Zoom *be-Seder*?

The dispute here does not feature much purely halakhic discussion aside from one major, longstanding debate. On both sides, the Israeli decisors have rarely invoked technical halakhic considerations in their decisions, preferring to focus on the broader policy concerns: will people follow the details and scope of the permissive view? Will this lead to disunity among rabbinic decisors? Will this facilitate increased observance and health?

The major halakhic debate lurking in the background is the question, first raised in the late nineteenth century, as to how electricity should be viewed by Halakhah. All agree that the use of electrical appliances is prohibited on Shabbat, but there are four different theories that have been offered as to why this is the case. Everyone knew electricity must be prohibited, but they just didn't know what the precise basis of the prohibition would be. The approaches, discussed at length in many volumes, can be roughly summarized in bare-bones fashion as follows:

1. *Eish* – Electricity is like a fire in the wire, prohibited due to the *melakhah* of *Eish*.
2. *Boneh* – The use of electricity, which entails building circuits and empowering electronic appliances, entails the completion of a building project, prohibited due to the *melakhah* of *Boneh*. This view is most closely associated with the Hazon Ish.
3. *Derabanan/Molid* – Electricity is not biblically prohibited, but it entails a rabbinic prohibition (or possibly a “strong *minhag*,” in some formulations), possibly because it creates something new. This is the view attributed to R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, and is also the most prevalent view among responsa today.
4. *Makkeh be-Patish* – Since using electricity involves a constructive, creative act, it is included in this “catch-all” *melakhah*. This view is championed by R. Asher Weiss.

There are many differences between these views in their application on Shabbat. Possibly the most significant difference between these views applies in connection with Yom Tov. Since fire is permitted to be used on Yom Tov for a purpose, those who see electricity as *Eish* may generally use it. This is not only the view of many Moroccan decisors, but of other Sephardic and Ashkenazic *poskim* as well, most prominently the *Arukh ha-Shulhan*. (Several students of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik have related that it was his practice to turn on and off lights on Yom Tov, as well.)

Over the past half-century, the consensus view has been primarily to follow approach 3, which gives a fair amount of flexibility in applying the prohibition of electricity on Shabbat, although it also means it is generally prohibited on Yom Tov. To a significant degree, Moroccan and other decisors have minimized communal reliance on the opposing position, despite still accepting it “*me-ikkar ha-din*,” as the basic law. There seems to have been a preference for uniform communal standards: if Moroccan and other Sephardic Jews use electricity on Yom Tov while their Ashkenazi neighbors are told not to, that would weaken that prohibition and create an unusual communal dynamic. (Consider the parallel scenario of *kitniyot*, where Israel has seen a trend in recent years of *Ashkenazim giving up the practice*.)

The question is, what happens in a moment of crisis? Is there room to rely on that permissive position once again? The Moroccan rabbis' decision asserted that, with the proper safeguards, they could rely on it. In a scenario with the computer set up before Yom Tov (so adjusting it hopefully wouldn't even be necessary), very clear statements that this be done only in extreme circumstances like this year for those who need it, and a clear purpose serving the sanctity of the day, they saw fit to allow *Zoom Seders*.

Those representing the opposing view have generally not attempted to delegitimize the halakhic position itself, but instead to raise policy questions surrounding it that serve to render the position moot. Several of these are raised by the original *pesak* and parried, only to be resurrected by its critics, including concerns of a slippery slope and the argument that using Zoom is *uvdin de-hol*, a weekday-like activity.

In addition to these policy questions, the main animating force behind the Israeli discussion is how to apply the widespread view among some Moroccan and Ashkenazi decisors of the previous generation that electricity may be used on Yom Tov for one's holiday needs. It is for that reason that the attacks on that decision, as well as the retractions, invoked considerations such as "rabbinic unity," "the nature of halakhic decision-making," and the like. While several of the opposing arguments refer in a general sense to issues of Jewish law that permitting Zoom raises, they generally do not make sustained halakhic arguments (with the exceptions largely stemming from American decisors). This can be attributed to the fact that, at least before one gets to the meta-halakhic issues, all agree that there is a strong argument to be made in the Moroccan tradition to permit Zoom *Seders*.

In fact, one argument offered against the Zoom *Seder* by an Israeli decisor, when considered closely, reveals the difficulty of using meta-halakhic categories. Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein, a prolific author on halakhic topics, was asked by his brother-in-law and acknowledged *gadol* R. Chaim Kanievsky to offer a response to Zoom *Seders* stemming from the *Haredi* world. His response draws primarily on a responsum by Rav Moshe Feinstein disallowing use of timers to set automatic activities to take place on Shabbat because that entails *zilzul* Shabbat, a denigration of the day. Hosting a Zoom *Seder*, even if set up before Yom Tov, he argues, would similarly serve as a denigration of Yom Tov. The problem with this position is that *ziluta* is inherently a subjective thing; the greatest proof to this is that, at least in American observant communities, the use of timers and "Shabbos clocks" is widespread, relying on several positions that disagree with Rav Moshe. Presumably this shift away from Rav Moshe's decision is at least partially due to the fact that as various technologies became more ubiquitous and less jarring, they became less of a denigration to Shabbat for them to happen automatically.

Thus, one might raise the question that, while Rav Zilberstein's decision works to prohibit Zoom on Yom Tov today, it might not work at some future point when automated videos are more widespread and less of a denigration to the day. Consider the fact that many shuls have rotating screens running all Shabbat giving the day's schedule, which would have felt antithetical to the spirit of the day just 25 years ago.

And yet, one can turn the question of technology's relentless advance around, as well: even if one might theoretically find a permissible way to use Zoom on Yom Tov, would the day still offer the experience we have come to associate with it? Or has the phenomenon of "twenty-four hours without screens" merged with the identity of Yom Tov (and Shabbat) to such a degree that such a distinction is not possible? This question might reveal a tension between technical and experiential ways of approaching Yom Tov here, a distinction to which we will return below.

The meta- and para-halakhic arguments deployed against the Moroccan permissive ruling thus argue against relying on that decision, but generally do not attack its fundamental basis. As reliance on electronic appliances and communication becomes more central to day-to-day life, these broader arguments might militate either for greater stringency (to distinguish Shabbat from weekdays) or, alternatively, greater leniency in applying existing halakhic categories to use of Zoom and similar applications.

Zooming to Save Lives

Across the pond, the discussion in the United States regarding use of Zoom to support those in danger has also been an interesting one. Once again, the core halakhic issue has been laid out long ago – this case in consensus rather than debate. As the Talmud and Shulhan Arukh set out, when a person's life is endangered, even if only doubtfully so, one may – and must! – violate Shabbat or Yom Tov without any

worry. The divergences among different opinions thus hinge on questions of where to draw the line, as well as how exactly to implement and publicize this permissive ruling.

As to the extent of *pikuah nefesh* that would justify performance of *melakhah*, Rav Hershel Schachter published an important and fairly wide-ranging permissive position. He writes that it is permitted to violate Yom Tov through whatever means would be helpful, not only in a case where there is certain risk to a person's life (through self-harm), but even in a case where there is a minor possibility of risk. Furthermore, even in cases that don't carry any risk to a person's life, but would potentially lead to significant downgrading of one's mental health ("losing one's mind"), it is permitted to violate Yom Tov by whatever means necessary, including phone or Zoom calls to the relevant individuals. This is a permissive position, although it draws upon earlier principles, both that of the aforementioned *Shulhan Arukh* and the position of the Soloveitchik family that loss of mental health qualifies for *pikuah nefesh* as well. Rabbi Yoni Rosensweig went into even greater detail in delineating specific scenarios and where he would see the threshold of health risks permitting the violation of Yom Tov.

Maybe the most significant shift is one focused on messaging rather than content. Rav Schachter's important decision was originally communicated to rabbis with the stipulation that it not be publicly disseminated, presumably based on the fear that it might be misconstrued or misapplied. Days later, presumably after consultation with rabbis and others regarding the risks, the same decision was publicized in fleshed-out form for public consumption.

His decision was followed by a similar ruling by Rav Dovid Cohen, more squarely in the Haredi American world, also endorsing use of technology in cases of risk. Just yesterday, Rav Mordechai Willig suggested that all rabbis be accessible by phone to congregants who may be in crisis over Yom Tov. Presumably the decision by all these rabbis to publicize their ruling in this way was made with the understanding that the risk of publicizing the *pesak* and having it be misunderstood was dwarfed by the risk of not having enough people be aware of the permissive position, which might lead to them endangering their lives.

Is Zoom for Real?

One other set of discussions taking place primarily in America relates to the way that one classifies the use of electronic communications. This discourse builds upon but extends beyond the various positions noted above as to why electricity is prohibited on Shabbat. It focuses on the question of how to understand virtual communication, as part of the broader phenomenological question of how to understand and classify virtual reality, which is becoming more and more pressing each day. In a sense, these questions are relevant not only because it is necessary to consider the nature of Zoom and other technologies in evaluating their halakhic permissibility, but also because the world we live in has migrated communication almost exclusively to the medium of texting, e-mail, WhatsApp, Zoom, and other virtual means. This shift in experience can be seen as a question not only of Halakhah but of phenomenology as well.

This question of how to evaluate technologies in this vein carries countless ramifications. For example: Is sending someone a text message, or writing on a computer screen, considered a form of "writing" that is prohibited on Shabbat? If one hears a *berakhah* over Zoom, is it proper to say Amen? Can one fulfill *mitzvot* through virtual modes of communication?

There are essentially two views of this issue of how to view virtual reality from the perspective of Halakhah: a realist and a formalist view. Do we take seriously these new experiences with technology and say that, in real terms, typing a text on a computer or phone accomplishes the same goal of writing letters and is to be considered "*Kotev*?" Or do we say that, formally applying the halakhic categories, the text needs to be written on paper with some form of ink (see *Shabbat 104b*), and this does not qualify, at least not in full form?

As should be clear, this is not a question of leniency versus stringency – it runs in both directions, and is primarily a question of phenomenology and definition of categories. Every legal system has to define and

redefine its categories as it faces new realities. With the shift in human interaction, and the corresponding new halakhic realities, this question of defining virtual reality emerges. (And, of course, it is possible to distinguish between different scenarios and emerge with complex views that depend on the particular category at hand. Still, there is a certain commonality among the examples that make them worth exploring together.)

This question first arose recently not in the context of Pesah but a month prior, right before Purim, when Rav Schachter wrote, drawing upon a position of Rav Moshe Feinstein, that those in quarantine with no other option could listen to the Megillah via Zoom or a phone call and fulfill the commandment in that way. This presumes that listening to the *Megillah* through a virtual medium qualifies as “hearing it” rather than serving as a detached experience.

There is another hint of a realist view in Rav Schachter’s distinction between phone calls and Zoom meetings. He asserts that, in cases that do not rise to *pikuah nefesh* but have some other overriding reason to allow contact (such as helping someone carry out their *Seder* despite lacking other options), it is possible to start a phone call before Yom Tov and continue it over the *Seder*. (He is very hesitant in embracing this option, and suggests that every alternative option be considered.) However, he asserts, one should not have a Zoom meeting, because that would violate *Roshem*, a subcategory of the prohibited action of *Kotev* (writing), as participating in a video means one is broadcasting a particular picture. While, he asserts, it is not prohibited to look into one’s own computer, because that is “like a mirror,” communicating that image to others over Zoom qualifies as *Roshem*. The difference-maker between a case of turning on one’s own camera and the scenario of sending it to others is presumably based not on electronic differences but on experiential ones – the real effect of having others see one’s video at a distance, qualifies as the prohibition of *Roshem*.

There are limits to this realist view, however: while one can “hear” or “write” from a distance, one cannot form a virtual quorum; presence is still lacking, as Rav Schachter spells out in another recent decision. Presumably there are distinctions to be made between the various categories. As technologies advance and new questions emerge, we will have to wait and see how various decisors treat each scenario.

The Israel-based decisors do not raise these issues. Presumably, part of this is attributable to their views on how to apply *Roshem*. But one might also see an opposition to the realist approach reflected here.⁴ Additionally, some of the Israeli *teshuvot* go out of their way to note that one cannot fulfill the *mitzvot* of the *Seder* by hearing it over Zoom – virtual presence is insufficient. Generally speaking, the formalist approach will continue applying the previous, technical categories – use of electricity and the like – and not consider emergent categories such as *Roshem*. This seems to characterize both sides of the Israeli discourse fairly well.

On the other hand, Rav Schachter has found some unlikely allies in conceptualizing virtual communication as “real” – Rabbi Ysoscher Katz of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and two rabbis of the egalitarian halakhic Yeshivat Hadar, Rabbis Ethan Tucker and Aviva Richman.

R. Katz published a primer giving practical advice as to how to use Zoom over Yom Tov for those at mental health risk. While generally following the guidelines that R. Schachter did, R. Katz asserts that both activating a new Zoom session and turning on a computer may be prohibited biblically, which has implications for how one might try to use a *shinui* in doing so, where possible. This argument has not, to my knowledge, been asserted by any of the many articles that have discussed this issue (although see now the recent position publicized by Eretz Hemdah). R. Katz notes further that, in cases where there is no risk, using Zoom on Yom Tov “is not merely a biblical or Rabbinic prohibition; it is, in fact, much worse... [it] will undermine the core essence of Shabbat and *chag*.” Related to his realist view of technology, R. Katz makes an appeal based on the nature of the day and the human experience of interaction with

⁴ Additionally, Rav Eliezer Melamed of Yeshivat Har Bracha, who allows saving Kaddish and Barkhu over “virtual *Minyanim*” (a topic for another occasion!) does so on the basis that there is no prohibition of taking God’s name in vain in doing so, but not that there is any constituting of a *Minyan* in doing so.

technology as something that should be prohibited, and severely so, regardless of one's views of the technicalities of electricity. It appears that R. Katz is self-aware of his phenomenological stance; he argued several months ago that "once the definition of what is considered 'doing' changes, our understanding of what constitutes a 'melacha' has to change as well."

The Hadar article regarding Zoom goes in several other interesting directions. It not only invokes "writing" as potentially prohibiting several scenarios including use of chat functions, saving a recording, or possibly having one's image be seen (the last in agreement with Rav Schachter), but it also suggests some new potentially forbidden activities involved in using Zoom. One is the issue of *Hashma'at Kol*, making noise, which is not usually applied for transmission of regular human speech. Most surprising is the invocation of the prohibition of *Tehum*, the prohibition to walk outside of one's area on Shabbat and Yom Tov. While applying this category is "admittedly more of a metaphoric concern" as no one is moving, the article argues that "part of Shabbat and Yom Tov is remaining local and making do with the things and people who were in your spatial civilization when you began Shabbat." (One reading this line hears echoes of a critique of the Conservative movement's *teshuvah* permitting driving to *shul* on Shabbat.)

While I don't think arguments of this type have been offered in halakhic sources in the past, and I don't see them gaining traction within Orthodoxy in the future, this view does reflect a similarly realist conception of technology. If on Shabbat one is meant to interact only with one's local geographic community, that should remain true for interaction through technology as well.

This realist view appears in a different context in the letter, as well. Specifically, Rabbis Tucker and Richman are open to the possibility of fulfilling various verbal and aural obligations at the *Seder* over a Zoom or phone call, although they assert it is better for one to not rely on this and rather recite those texts oneself, if possible. This reflects that same realist approach, although applied here for the sake of a leniency.

Conclusion

The halakhic debates over Zoom and Pesah, when dissected into their component parts, bring to light deep-seated debates on a variety of halakhic and meta-halakhic issues. Questions of the halakhic status of electricity as well as its phenomenology and the ramifications of offering differential decisions for various groups and doing so publicly or privately, all shape various parts of this debate. When one boils down the questions that divide between the various positions, rather than the standard "right wing versus left wing" explanation, one finds a distinct set of differentiating factors:

1. What are one's views about the halakhic status of electricity on Yom Tov, both in theory and in practice? This largely breaks down along communal lines, between Moroccan rabbis (along with some Ashkenazi precedents) and the mainstream view.
2. To what extent is one thinking locally or globally in deciding these halakhic issues? For example: Should one worry about implications for different communities? The "slippery slope" extending this permission to future scenarios? For what Yom Tov and Shabbat might look like in the future? Is it better to keep a decision "under wraps" or to disseminate it, and what are the stakes?
3. Is one a realist or a formalist regarding virtual reality technology? Does hearing over Zoom constitute actual halakhic hearing? Does commenting online or projecting one's image over Zoom constitute halakhic writing? Can one fulfill various *mitzvot* like the *Megillah* or parts of the *Seder* virtually?

Amid the great challenges posed by the novel Coronavirus, we find fascinating new developments and halakhic disputes coming to the fore as well. The changes to daily life, caused by advances in technology and exacerbated by social distancing, present both new realities and new halakhic questions. This debate over Zoom *Seders* lays bare several of these issues, all of which have yet to be fully resolved. Although

there is widespread agreement on some of the practical rulings this year, the divergent reasoning employed by the various decisors makes it clear that tensions still remain and that we can expect these fundamental questions to continue rearing their heads for years to come.

Public Halakhic Guidance

Originally published on Facebook

April 5, 2020

Public Halakhic Guidance:

The mental health consequences of complete isolation for a three-day yom tov cannot be confidently predicted. Therefore, it is imperative that anyone spending Pesach alone or as a caretaker be able to call friends, family, and rabbis if they feel AT ANY RISK of depression or other grave disorders, let alone if they have suicidal ideation. It is dangerously wrong to suggest that they wait for more severe symptoms to develop. Friends, family, and rabbis must not hesitate to pick up such calls and talk at whatever length seems best. I strongly encourage everyone to reach out to people who will be alone and arrange to recognize their phone numbers or arrange signals to ensure that their phone calls will be picked up.

In the current circumstances, avoiding the mutual exposures inherent in ER admissions may itself be a contribution to lifesaving. So I emphasize again the obligation of making and answering potentially helpful phone calls at the earliest stages of concern.

Ensuring Everyone a Safe Passover

Rabbinical Council of America Statement

Originally published on Facebook

April 7, 2020

As we enter the holiday of Pesach during this time of crisis and upheaval, we are deeply concerned about the safety and welfare of some of the members of our community. The social isolation which is so necessary at this time can significantly impact a person's mental or physical well-being. The upcoming three day yom tov of Passover and Shabbat, during which observant Jews will not use telephones and other forms of electronic communication, may increase someone's sense of isolation and depression, and may negatively impact vulnerable individuals. Our Torah places high value on the preservation of life. Pikuach nefesh (saving a life) overrides almost every other mitzvah in the Torah. Pikuach nefesh, in cases of potential physical or mental harm, requires us to act in ways that are otherwise prohibited.

Because of our great concern, in consultation with our poskim, we share the following instructions:

Those who are at risk of mental deterioration must not wait for severe symptoms, such as suicidal ideation (thinking about committing suicide), to develop before calling for help; preventative calls are Halachically obligatory. Furthermore, it is important to do all we can to prevent hospitalization. In the current circumstances, avoiding the exposure to Covid-19 that may occur if at a hospital is an important factor in protecting one's health. One who feels at any risk of physical danger or depression due to mental, physical, substance abuse, or abuse issues, or other grave disorders, is required to use a phone on Yom Tov or Shabbat to call for help.

Whom should they call?

In cases of immediate danger, call 911. In other cases, some may prefer to call a therapist, friend, family member, rabbi, the hotline at Amudim (888-7-AMUDIM, 888-726-8346 or 718-972-3000), or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255).

Those with a friend or family member who might call them for such a reason, must leave their phones on during Shabbat and Yom Tov and monitor the caller ID of calls received. They should not hesitate to answer the phone or return a call when that person calls on Shabbat or Yom Tov and may speak as long as is necessary. As public figures known to many, communal rabbis must monitor their phones throughout Yom Tov and Shabbat. If the caller seems to be in immediate danger, they must call 911. If they are not sure what is best for the caller, they should consult with a mental health professional for guidance or call 911. These calls should be encouraged and supported by all of us without judgment or stigma.

Those who know someone who is at risk—a family member, friend or neighbor—should reach out to him/her in a way that maintains the restrictions of social distancing. It is permissible to call him/her on the telephone on Shabbat or Yom Tov.

In non-emergency situations, one should make and answer calls with a shinui (for example, using one's weaker hand or a knuckle). In emergency situations, one should call for help in the fastest and most efficient way possible.

We pray for an end to this terrible pandemic, for the recovery of those afflicted with the virus, and for the safety and well-being of all those who struggle during these difficult times.

A Literal Religious Translation of Shir HaShirim

2009

If we assume that Shir HaShirim is in fact intended to be an allegory, this would mean that the allegorical meaning is the p'shat of the sefer. However, to write allegorically means writing with two levels of meaning in mind, that of the literal understanding, and the desired non-literal message. The allegory is created by the relationship between the literal meaning and the allegorical meaning. Without first understanding the mashal, any interpretation of the nimshal is not true to the text. So, for example, if the allegory of Shir Hashirim is about the relationship between God and Israel, then the characters, Shepherdess and her beloved, actually refer (l'fi pshuto) to Israel and God. However, the text on the literal level must still be meaningful and coherent in order for the second level meaning, rightly called the true meaning, to be abstracted from it (isn't that what allegory is after all). If it were the case that the text has no literal meaning, then we would not be dealing with an allegorical text, but rather with a coded text. The Shepherdess would not simply refer to Israel, but, in contradistinction to other times it is

used, the word itself would actually mean Israel. If this were to be the case, any object could have been used, and the story itself need not have been coherent, and there would be absolutely no reason to translate it literally (as in the normal usage of the words), as doing so would simply be getting it wrong. However, I think that we have traditionally held that Shir Hashirim is an allegory, and therefore, needs to be understood in relationship to the literal meaning.

Rabbi Elliot Stern, based on Rabbi Aryeh Klapper

In this edition, to our knowledge the first literal translation of Shir HaShirim that makes the religious allegory explicit, changes in speaker are visually represented in the English text. The male speaks in bold, the female in plaintext, and the chorus in italics. Many terms for animals in the text are double entendre for the allegory, for example צבא־קוח, or within the allegory, for example תורים – the translation of the former is always the animal, and of the latter is eclectic.

The Song of all Songs
Written by Shlomoh

Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth
For Your intimacies are better than wine.
Your oils are the best fragrance,
and oils perfume Your Name;
Therefore the maidens love You.

“Attract me!”

“We will run after you”.

“The King brought me into His rooms!”

**“We will rejoice ecstatically in you,
celebrate your intimacy above wine”.**

“They love You deservedly.”

I am blackened but pleasing,
daughters of Jerusalem,
like the tents of Kedar,
like the tapestries of Shlomoh.
Don't look at my blackness,
at how the sun has tanned me!
My mother's sons
treated me with burning contempt,
they made me a vineyard guard;
My own vineyard. I have not tended.

“Tell me, the One my soul loves,
where do You graze,
where do You relax at noon?
Why should I be like a vulture
among Your friends' flocks?”

**“If you can't understand on your own,
most beautiful of women,
you must follow in the footsteps of the flocks,
and herd your goats
near the tents of the herders.”**

**“To a mare of Pharaoh's chariots,
I compare you, my companion.
Your cheeks are adorned by rows of jewels,
your neck with necklaces.
We will make you rows of gold,
with points of silver.”**

While the king reclined,
my nard sent forth its fragrance.
“My Love is a bundle of myrrh to me –
He will lie between my breasts!
My Love is a cluster of henna to me,
in the vineyards of Goatspring!”

שיר השירים
אשר לשלמה:

ישקני מנשיקות פיהו
כי טובים דדיך מיין:
לריח שמניך טובים
שמן תורק שמך
על כן עלמות אהבוך:

משכני

אחריו נרוצה
הביאני המלך חדריו
נגילה ונשמחה בך
נזכירה דדיך מיין
מישרים אהבוך: ס

שחורה אני ונאווה
בנות ירושלם
כאהלי קדר
כיריעות שלמה:
אל תראוני שאני שחרחרת
ששזפתני השמש
בני אמי
נחרו בי
שמני נטרה את הכרמים
כרמי שלי לא נטרתי:

הגידה לי שאהבה נפשי
איכה תרעה
איכה תרביץ בצהרים
שלמה אהיה כעטיה
על עדרי חבריך:
אם לא תדעי לך
היפה בנשים
צאי לך בעקבי הצאן
ורעי את גדיתיך
על משכנות הרעים: ס

לססתי ברכבי פרעה
דמיתך רעיתי:
נאוו לחייך בתרים
צוארך בחרוזים:
תורי זהב נעשה לך
עם נקדות הכסף:
עד שהמלך במסבו
נרדי נתן ריחו:
צרור המר דודי לי
בין שדי ילין:
אשכל הכפר דודי לי
ככרמי עין גדי: ס

<p>“Behold, you are beautiful, my companion, Behold, you are beautiful, your eyes are devastating.” “Behold, You are beautiful, my Intimate, also pleasant, and our bedding is fresh. The beams of our house are cedars, our rafters are cypress.”</p>	<p>הנך יפה רעיתי הנך יפה עיניך יונים: הנך יפה דודי אף נעים אף ערשנו רעננה: קרות בתינו ארזים >רחיטנו < רהיטנו ברותים:</p>
<p>“I am the rose of the Sharon plain, the lily of the valleys” “Like a lily among brambles, so is my companion among the lasses”. “Like an apple among the forest trees, so is my Intimate among the lads. I have yearned to sit in His shade, with His fruit sweet on my palate. May He bring me to the celebration house, with His banner of love above me!” (Support me with tree trunks, let me lie against the apple trees! For I am sick with love.) “His left hand under my head, with His right hand hugging me.” “I demand your oath, lasses of Jerusalem, by the deer or the rams of the field, not to awaken or arouse the love until she desires.”</p> <p>The voice of my Intimate – behold it comes, skipping over the hills, bounding over the valleys. My Intimate is like a deer, or like a young ram. There it stands behind our wall, overlooking the windows, shining through the crevices. My Intimate prompted me: “Arise, my companion, and go! For behold the winter has passed, the rain has shifted and departed. The buds are visible in the land; the time of singing has come; and the voice of the dove is heard in our land. The fig has put forth its early fruit, and the ripening grapes are redolent. Arise, my companion, my beauty, and go!”</p> <p>“My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the lee of the stairs, show me your appearance, project your voice to me!</p>	<p>אני חבצלת השרון שושנת העמקים: כשושנה בין החוחים כן רעיתי בין הבנות: כתפוח בעצי היער כן דודי בין הבנים בצלו חמדתי וישבתי ופריו מתוק לחכי: הביאני אל בית היין ודגלו עלי אהבה: סמכוני באשישות רפדוני בתפוחים כי חולת אהבה אני: שמאלו תחת לראשי וימינו תחבקני: השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלים בצבאות או באילות השדה אם תעירו ואם תעוררו את האהבה עד שתחפץ: ס</p> <p>קול דודי הנה זה בא מדלג על ההרים מקפץ על הגבעות: דומה דודי לצבי או לעפר האילים הנה זה עומד אחר כתלנו משגיח מן החלונות מציץ מן החרכים: ענה דודי ואמר לי קומי לך רעיתי יפתי ולכי לך: כי הנה <הסתו> הסתיו עבר הגשם חלף הלך לו: הנצנים נראו בארץ עת הזמיר הגיע וקול התור נשמע בארצנו: התאנה חנטה פגיה והגפנים סמדר נתנו ריח קומי <לכי> לך רעיתי יפתי ולכי לך: ס</p> <p>יונתי בחגוי הסלע בסתר המדרגה הראיני את מראיך השמיעיני את קולך</p>

<p>For your voice is precious, and your appearance pleasing.”</p> <p>Grab foxes for us, the little foxes that damage vineyards, for our vineyard is ripening. My Intimate for me, and I for my Intimate, Who grazes among the lilies. “Until the day blows away, until the shadows flee - wander, my Intimate, be like the deer or the young hart on the hills of Beter.”</p>	<p>כי קולך ערב ומראיך נאוה: ס</p> <p>אחזו לנו שועלים שועלים קטנים מחבלים כרמים וכרמינו סמדר: דודי לי ואני לו הרעה בשושנים: עד שיפוח היום ונסו הצללים סב דמה לך דודי לצבי או לעפר האילים על הרי בתר: ס</p>
<p>While lying down in the nights, I have sought the One my soul loves; I have sought Him, but I have not found Him. Let me arise and wander the city; in the squares and streets I will seek Him Whom my soul loves; I have sought Him, but I have not found Him. The watchmen wandering the city found me: “The One Whom my soul loves, have you seen Him?” I had almost passed them by when I found the One Whom my soul loves. I grabbed Him! I will not loose Him, not until I bring Him to my mother’s house, to the room of my conception. “I demand your oath, lasses of Jerusalem, by the deer or the rams of the field, not to awaken or arouse the love until she desires.”</p> <p><i>“Who is this ascending from the wilderness like columns of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all the merchant’s powders?”</i> Here is the bed of Shlomoh, with sixty warriors surrounding it, of the warriors of Israel. All grasp swords and are trained in war; each has his sword on his thigh, fearing the terrors of the night.</p> <p>Shlomoh made himself a palanquin from the trees of Lebanon. He made its pillars of silver, its back of gold, its seat of royal purple. Inside it was inlaid with love from the lasses of Jerusalem. “Go out, lasses of Zion,</p>	<p>על משכבי בלילות בקשתי את שאהבה נפשי בקשתי ולא מצאתיו: אקומה נא ואסובבה בעיר בשוקים וברחבות אבקשה את שאהבה נפשי בקשתי ולא מצאתיו: מצאוני השמרים הסבבים בעיר את שאהבה נפשי ראיתם: כמעט שעברתי מהם עד שמצאתי את שאהבה נפשי אחזתי ולא ארפנו עד שהביאתיו אל בית אמי ואל חדר הורת: השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלם בצבאות או באילות השדה אם תעירו ואם תעוררו את האהבה עד שתחפץ: ס</p> <p>מי זאת עלה מן המדבר כתימרות עשן מקטרת מור ולבונה מכל אבקת רוקל: הנה מטתו שלשלמה ששים גברים סביב לה מגברי ישראל: כלם אחזי חרב מלמדי מלחמה איש חרבו על ירכו מפחד בלילות: ס</p> <p>אפריון עשה לו המלך שלמה מעצי הלבנון: עמודיו עשה כסף רפידתו זהב מרכבו ארגמן תוכו רצוף אהבה מבנות ירושלם: צאינה וראינה בנות ציון</p>

<p>and see King Shlomoh, wearing the crown his mother crowned him with on his wedding day, on the day his heart rejoiced!”</p>	<p>במלך שלמה בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו ביום חתנתו וביום שמחת לבו: ס</p>
<p>“Behold, you are beautiful, my companion, behold you are beautiful, your eyes are devastating behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats cascading from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes just emerged from the wash, all bearing twins, with none childless. Your lips are like a crimson thread, and your throat is attractive, your cheeks are like a pomegranate rind behind your veil. Your neck is like the Tower of David, built with turrets, a thousand shields hanging from it, all the conquests of the warriors. Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a doe, that graze among the lilies.” “Before the day blows away, and the shadows flee, I will take myself to the Mount of Myrrh, and the hills of levonah” “All of you is beautiful, my companion, and there is no flaw in you”.</p> <p>“With me from Lebanon, my bride, you will come with me from Lebanon. You will gaze from the height of loyalty, from the heights of Snir and Chermon, from the lairs of lions, from the hills of leopards. You have taken my heart, my sister my bride, you have taken my heart with one of your eyes, with one necklace from your neck. How beautiful your intimacies are, my sister my bride; how much better than wine your intimacies, and the fragrance of your oils than any perfumes. Your lips drip naphth, bride, honey and milk lie under your tongue, and the fragrance of your clothes is like the fragrance of Lebanon.”</p> <p>“A locked garden is my sister my bride, a locked mound, a sealed spring.</p>	<p>הנך יפה רעיתי הנך יפה עיניך יונים מבעד לצמתך שערך כעדר העזים שגלשו מהר גלעד: שניך כעדר הקצובות שעלו מן הרחצה שכלם מתאימות ושכלה אין בהם: כחוט השני שפתתך ומדברך נאוה כפלח הרמון רקתך מבעד לצמתך: כמגדל דויד צוארך בנוי לתלפיות אלף המגן תלוי עליו כל שלטי הגבורים: שני שדיך כשני עפרים תאומי צביה הרועים בשושנים: עד שיפוח היום ונסו הצללים אלך לי אל הר המור ואל גבעת הלבונה: כלך יפה רעיתי ומום אין בך: ס</p> <p>אתי מלבנון כלה אתי מלבנון תבואי תשורי מראש אמנה מראש שניר וחרמון ממענות אריות מהררי נמרים: לבבתני אחתי כלה לבבתני <באחד> באחת מעיניך באחד ענק מצורניך: מה יפו דדיך אחתי כלה מה טבו דדיך מיין וריה שמניך מכל בשמים: נפת תטפנה שפתותיך כלה דבש וחלב תחת לשונך וריה שלמתך כריח לבנון: ס</p> <p>גן נעול אחתי כלה גל נעול מעין חתום:</p>

<p>Your branches are an orchard of pomegranates, with sweet fruits for dessert, also henna and nard. Nard, karkom, kanah, and cinnamon, with twigs of levonah. myrrh and ahalot, with all the best perfumes. A spring feeding many gardens, an effervescent fountain, flowing down from Lebanon.” “Awake, O North wind, and come to Yemen! Blow, and the perfumes of my garden will flow! Let my Intimate come to His garden, and let Him eat its sweet fruits.”</p>	<p>שלחך פרדס רמונים עם פרי מגדים כפרים עם נרדים: נרד וכרכם קנה וקנמון עם כל עצי לבונה מר וזהלות עם כל ראשי בשמים: מעין גנים באר מים חיים ונזלים מן לבנון: עורי צפון ובואי תימן הפיחי גני יזלו בשמי יבא דודי לגנו ויאכל פרי מגדיו:</p>
<p>“I have come to my garden, my sister my bride! I have gathered my perfumed myrrh, eaten my honey forest, drunk my wine and milk; the kind that lovers eat, that intimates drink and get drunk on. “</p> <p>I was asleep, with my heart aroused; the sound of my Intimate pounding: “Open for me, my sister my companion my dove my perfect, for my head is full of dew, my locks with night rains.” “I’ve taken off my robe: should I put it back on? I’ve washed my feet: should I dirty them again?” My Intimate let go of the keyhole, but my insides churned for him. I arose to open for my Intimate, my hands dripping myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh, on the palmplate of the lock. I opened for my Intimate! But my Intimate was vanished and gone. My life to hear Him speak! I sought Him but could not find Him, I called Him but He did not reply. The watchmen wandering the city found me; they struck me and wounded me; they removed my veil from me, the guardians of the walls. “I demand your oath, daughters of Jerusalem: If you find my Intimate, you must tell Him that I am sick with love!” “How perfect your intimacy is, most perfect of women;</p>	<p>באתי לגני אחתי כלה אריתי מורי עם בשמי אכלתי יערי עם דבשי שתיתי ייני עם חלבי אכלו רעים שתו ושכרו דודים: 0</p> <p>אני ישנה ולבי ער קול דודי דופק פתחי לי אחתי רעיתי יונתי תמתי שראשי נמלא טל קוצותי רסיסי לילה: פשטתי את כתנתי איככה אלבשנה רחצתי את רגלי איככה אטנפם: דודי שלח ידו מן החר ומעי המו עליו: קמתי אני לפתח לדודי וידי נטפו מור ואצבעתי מור עבר על כפות המנעול: פתחתי אני לדודי ודודי חמק עבר נפשי יצאה בדברו בקשתיהו ולא מצאתיהו קראתיו ולא ענני: מצאני השמרים הסבבים בעיר הכוני פצעוני נשאו את רידי מעלי שמרי החמות: השבעתי אתכם בנות ירושלם אם תמצאו את דודי מה תגידו לו שחולת אהבה אני: מה דורך מדוד היפה בנשים מה דורך מדוד</p>

<p><i>how perfect beyond words your intimacy, that you have imposed this oath upon us.”</i> My Intimate is bright and flushed, a banner for myriads. His head is purest gold, His locks are piled on each other, black as the raven. His eyes are like doves on streams of water, rinsing in milk, perched on stones. His cheeks are like spice-furrows, with towers of perfume; His lips like lilies, wafting flowing myrrh. His arms are turned of gold, set in beryl; His abdomen smooth ivory studded with sapphires. His thighs are marble pillars, founded on pedestals of purest gold; His appearance like Lebanon, select as cedars. His palate is all sweetness, and all of Him arouses desire; this is my Intimate and this is my Companion, lasses of Jerusalem.</p>	<p>שכנה השבעתנו: דודי צח ואדום דגול מרבבה: ראשו כתם פז קוצותיו תלתלים שחרות כעורב: עיניו כיונים על אפיקי מים רחצות בחלב ישבות על מלאת: לחיו כערוגת הבשם מגדלות מרקחים שפתותיו שושנים נטפות מור עבר: ידיו גלילי זהב ממלאים בתרשיש מעיו עשת שן מעלפת ספירים: שוקיו עמודי שש מיסדים על אדני פז מראהו כלבנון בחור כארזים: חכו ממתקים וכלו מחמדים זה דודי וזה רעי בנות ירושלם:</p>
<p><i>Where has your Intimate gone, most beautiful of women?</i> <i>Toward where has your Intimate set His course, that we may seek Him with you?</i> My Intimate has descended to His garden, to the spice-furrows, to pasture in the gardens and graze among the lilies. I for my Intimate, and my Intimate for me, Who grazes among the lilies.</p> <p>You are beautiful, my companion, as All-women’s-desire, attractive as Jerusalem, awesome as a bannered army. Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overpromised me; your hair is like a flock of goats cascading from Mt. Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes just emerged from the wash, all bearing twins, with none miscarrying. Your cheeks are like a pomegranate rind behind your veil. Sixty of my women are queens,</p>	<p>אנה הלך דודך היפה בנשים אנה פנה דודך ונבקשנו עמך: דודי ירד לגנו לערוגות הבשם לרעות בגנים וללקט שושנים: אני לדודי ודודי לי הרעה בשושנים: 0</p> <p>יפה את רעיתי כתרצה נאוה כירושלם אימה כנדגלות: הסבי עיניך מנגדי שהם הרהיבני שערך כעדר העזים שגלשו מן הגלעד: שניך כעדר הרחלים שעלו מן הרחצה שכלם מתאימות ושכלה אין בהם: כפלח הרמון רקתך מבעד לצמתך: ששים המה מלכות</p>

<p>and eighty concubines, and maidens beyond number. But my dove, my perfect one, is unique – unique to her mother, brilliant to her birthmother; Daughters praise her when they see her, and queens and concubines exalt her!</p> <p><i>Who is this who looks out like the morning star, beautiful as the moon, brilliant as the sun, awesome as a bannered army?</i></p> <p>I descended to a chestnut garden, to see the buds of the wadis, to see if the grape had flowered, if the pomegranates had fruited. I could not know that my soul had placed me in the chariot of my nation's Ruler.</p>	<p>ושמנים פילגשים ועלמות אין מספר: אחת היא יונתי תמתי אחת היא לאמה ברה היא ליולדתה ראוה בנות ויאשרוה מלכות ופילגשים ויהללוה: ֹ</p> <p>מי זאת הנשקפה כמו שחר יפה כלבנה ברה כחמה אימה כנדגלות: ֹ</p> <p>אל גנת אגוז ירדתי לראות באבי הנחל לראות הפרחה הגפן הנצו הרמנים: לא ידעתי נפשי שמתני מרכבות עמי נדיב:</p>
<p><i>Return, O return, woman of Completion; return, O return, and we will feast our eyes on you. What, will you feast your eyes on the woman of Completion as if she were a dancer in the camps! How beautiful your footsteps in your boots, O daughter of a ruler; the sheathes of your thighs like rings carved by an artisan. Your navel is a clear goblet, with nothing lacking in its blend; your belly is a mound of wheat enclosed in lilies. Your two breasts are like two foals, twin deer. Your neck is like the ivory tower, your eyes calculating pools near the public gate; your nose is like the tower of Lebanon, overlooking the approach to Damascus. Your head upon you like Carmel, and the fringes of your head like royal purple; a king imprisoned in their flow. How beautiful you have made this and how pleasant; love with all delights. This – your figure rising like a palm, and your breasts like clusters of dates.</i></p>	<p>שובי שובי השולמית שובי שובי ונחזה בך מה תחזו בשולמית כמחלת המחנים: מה יפו פעמיך בנעלים בת נדיב חמוקי ירכיך כמו חלאים מעשה ידי אמן: שררך אגן הסהר אל יחסר המזג בטנך ערמת חטים סוגה בשושנים: שני שדיך כשני עפרים תאמי צביה: צוארך כמגדל השן עיניך ברכות בחשבון על שער בת רבים אפך כמגדל הלבנון צופה פני דמשק: ראשך עליך ככרמל ודלת ראשך כארגמן מלך אסור ברהטים: מה יפית ומה נעמת אהבה בתענוגים: זאת קומתך דמתה לתמר ושדיך לאשכולות: אמרתי אעלה בתמר</p>

*I said – I will climb the palm,
I will grasp its finger-stalks;
Let your breasts, please, be like clusters of
grapes, and the scent of your face like apples,
and your palate like fine wine,
deserving my intimacy,
animating sleeping lips.
I for my Intimate, and His passion upon me.*

*“Come, my Intimate,
let us go out to the field,
let us lodge in the villages.
We will go eagerly to the vineyards,
we will see if the grapevine has flowered,
the grapes budded, the pomegranates
fruiting; there I will present my intimacy to
You.
The mandrakes have given off their scent,
and at our doorstep all sweet fruit;
new and old,
my Intimate,
I have stored up for You.”*

אחזה בסנסניו
ויהיו נא שדיך כאשכולות הגפן
וריח אפך כתפוחים:
וחכך כיון הטוב
הולך לדודי למישרים
דובב שפתי ישנים:
אני לדודי ועלי תשוקתו: 0

לכה דודי
נצא השדה
נלינה בכפרים:
נשכימה לכרמים
נראה אם פרחה הגפן
פתח הסמדר הנצו הרמונים
שם אתן את דדי לך:
הדודאים נתנו ריח
ועל פתחינו כל מגדים
חדשים גם ישנים
דודי
צפנתי לך:

*If You could only be like a brother to me,
who nursed my mother’s breasts with me;
then if I found You outside I would kiss You,
still they would not disdain me.
I would take charge of You,
bring you to my mother’s house;
You would teach me!
I would kiss Your lips with spiced wine,
with the juice of my pomegranates.
(His left hand beneath my head,
with His right hand hugging me.)
I have demanded your oath,
daughters of Jerusalem,
lest you awaken or arouse the love
until she desires.*

*Who is this
ascending from the wilderness,
leaning on her Intimate?
I aroused you under the apple tree,
there where your mother labored with you,
there where your birthmother labored for
you.
“Stamp me like a seal on Your heart,
like a seal on Your arm,
because love is strong as death,
jealousy unyielding as the grave.
Its embers
are fiery embers*

מי יתנך כאח לי
יונק שדיי אמי
אמצאך בחוץ אשקך
גם לא יבוזו לי:
אנהגך
אביאך אל בית אמי
תלמדני
אשקך מיין הרקח
מעסיס רמני:
שמאלו תחת ראשי
וימינו תחבקני:
השבעתי אתכם
בנות ירושלם
מה תעירו ומה תעררו את האהבה
עד שתחפץ: 0

מי זאת
עלה מן המדבר
מתרפקת על דודה
תחת התפוח עוררתך
שמה חבלתך אמך
שמה חבלה ילדתך:
שימני כחותם על לבך
כחותם על זרועך
כי עזה כמות אהבה
קשה כשאול קנאה
רשפיה
רשפי אש
שלהבתיה:

***from the flame of God.”
Mighty waters could not quench the love,
and rivers could not sweep it away,
though if a man gave
all the wealth of his house
for love,
they would surely disdain him.***

***“We have a little sister,
who has no breasts.
What will we do for our sister
on the day she is spoken for?”
If she is a wall,
we will bind upon her a silver rampart;
but if she is a door,
we will bar her with a cedar plank.
“I am a wall, and my breasts are like
towers”; then I became in His eyes a source
of peace.***

***Shlomoh had a vineyard in the Field of
Plenty; he gave the vineyard to the
watchmen.
Each would get a thousand of silver for its
fruits.***

***“My vineyard is before me;
the thousand are for you, Shlomoh,
and two hundred for those who guard its
fruit.”***

***She who dwells in gardens,
whose friends heed her voice,
tell me your will.***

***“Flee, my Intimate,
make yourself like a deer
or like an antelope fawn
on spice mountains.”***

מים רבים לא יוכלו לכבות את האהבה
ונהרות לא ישטפוה
אם יתן איש
את כל הון ביתו
באהבה
בוז יבוזו לו: 8

אחות לנו קטנה
ושדים אין לה
מה נעשה לאחתנו
ביום שידבר בה:
אם חומה היא
נבנה עליה טירת כסף
ואם דלת היא
נצור עליה לוח ארז:

אני חומה ושדי כמגדלות אז הייתי בעיניו כמוצאת שלום: 9

כרם היה לשלמה בבעל המון
נתן את הכרם לנטרים
איש יבא בפריו אלף כסף:
כרמי שלי לפני
האלף לך שלמה
ומאתים לנטרים את פריו:
היושבת בגנים
חברים מקשיבים לקולך
השמיעיני:
ברח דודי
ודמה לך לצבי
או לעפר האילים
על הרי בשמים: