

## Corona Diary #2- Praying for Jews and Praying for Humans

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During the past few weeks, we have all prayed as never before. Most of us have been precluded from attending our normal houses of prayer but, none the less, the level of fervor and passion with which we pray is unprecedented. Facing this global pandemic, we pray in a universal manner- for humanity at large. This pandemic has highlighted our shared identity with non-Jews. Firstly, we share vulnerability to this disease with all of humanity. Additionally, our vulnerability is co-dependent: we cannot protect ourselves and will only remain healthy if our broader community – Jew and non-Jew- exhibits moral responsibility and social discipline. This isn't a Jewish issue as we have experienced this crisis as citizens of the world- thinking about China, Italy and Spain.

Yet, the actual text of most of our tefillah is very national and very "Jewish". Personally, I have begun reciting the complete list of Avinu Malkeinu after Shmoneh Esrei and there are so many resonant lines about preventing pandemics. Each one of them pleads for plague prevention or plague relief– for Jewish victims. We ask that our homeland (nachalatecha) be spared from plague or that the people of the Covenant (bnei beritecha) be protected from a pandemic (and a host of other threats). How can we daven to G-d with language which are so "parochial" and so "narrowly focused" when the clear agenda of our tefillot is global. Without question, we pray first and foremost for the people closest to us; however the thought of only praying for Jews is morally grotesque just as it is impractical. How can we pray for an entire planet with a text of tefilla which focuses upon Jewish needs? It is crucial to find that "bridge" between our overall experience of this crisis – which is very universal- and our actual prayers which sound very Jewish. We must not bifurcate ourselves into two different people; We cannot process the pandemic in a universal fashion and daven in a more national manner. That type of schizophrenia can create disconnected experiences and listless tefillot.

Here are four suggestions for "bridging" between our overarching concerns for humanity and the very national tone of our nusach ha'Tefilla.

### 1. Adhere to Health Guidelines Because We are Jews.

Jews are chosen by G-d to set an example for the rest of humanity. Under normal conditions we represent the important values of monotheism and morality. Under pandemic conditions we must exhibit an additional value- the sanctity of life and the willingness to make severe personal sacrifices to protect life. The quarantined conditions we all face may seem severe and some are tempted to violate these restrictions. As mamlechet Cohanim (a Kingdom of Priests) we must be role models and demonstrate absolute fidelity to all medical guidelines – as strenuous as they are. Saving even one life constitutes a mitzvah of *Lo ta'amod al dam reiacha* which should be pursued even at the risk of personal peril. As a chosen nation we must lead by example. Two weeks ago, it was obvious that proper moral behavior in the work-place is an essential element of our “chosenness”. At this stage, fidelity to public health measures is our mandate.

### 2. Summon the Traditional ‘Components’ of Tefilla on Behalf of Humanity

We are all familiar with the foundations of our tefillot. We summon or evoke *zechut avot*, as well as perceived personal merits. Throughout the past 2000 years we summoned *zechut avot* on behalf of Jewish needs- survival, regeneration and, *b”h* in our century, the protection of our beloved State of Israel. At this stage we must summon those merits on behalf of humanity. As Jews, we have so many national *zechuyot*; over past century we have displayed incredible fortitude in recovering from the Holocaust and building our State in the face of such unimaginable odds. At this stage of history, we should summon our *zechuyot* on behalf of the healing of humanity. Keep in mind that Avraham davened for Avimelech- who hijacked his wife. He also negotiated fiercely on behalf of the sinful city of Sedom. I believe he would want us to summon his *zechuyot* on behalf of the millions of innocent people whose lives are currently imperiled.

### 3. Pray for the Shechinah

It is very challenging for many to sense the presence of G-d during a bleak pandemic. Hopefully, most believing Jews appreciate that the world is complex, and that G-d inheres within a world of suffering and evil- in a manner that we can't always decipher. If we were able to sense His presence after the Holocaust, we can certainly identify His presence during this very challenging epidemic. However, for many religious people and, and certainly for non-religious, the question of "Where is G-d" is a very vexing one. We care deeply about the presence of G-d in our world and whether humanity is capable of sensing His presence. Let us daven that humanity will see G-d despite the suffering. Let us pray that humanity will discover that G-d is righteous and merciful even they are currently exposed to such suffering.

#### 4.A Redeemed World is a Healed World

There is obviously something broken in our world- medically and, of course spiritually. We will try, and with G-d's help, succeed in overcoming this outbreak and healing our world. However, our efforts will always be partial and temporary. The world will only be fully healed when history has concluded and been redeemed. The core of our Shmoneh Esrei showcases our hopes for redemption. For Jews, national redemption isn't a private event but heralds an era of universal recognition of the G-d of Israel. The nations will gather in Jerusalem in a perfect world healed of all illness – both spiritual and physical. If we desire full healing it can only arrive with the redemption of history. Now, more than ever, our hopes for that historical closure are extremely potent and our prayers for that era should be heartfelt.