



Recently emerging from a period in which my wife and her family sat shiva for my father-in-law, I saw firsthand the kind of *chesed* felt by mourners. Family, friends, colleagues, and community members from all stages of our lives visited, brought food and provided comfort by being present during this difficult time.

This experience is reflective of the laws of *avelut* which simultaneously promotes isolation and comfort. Those in mourning sit on lower chairs, they rend their garments, and set

themselves apart from others, while at the same time the community is invited in to provide solace and care. The separateness of mourning is different from other forms of halakhic isolation such as a *metzora*, who is commanded to actually leave the camp entirely. Not so those in mourning. Their separateness occurs within the framework of community.

Over the last year and a half, the entire world has become familiar with the dual notion of isolation and comfort. While strictly upholding protocols like wearing masks and socially

distancing which kept us apart, we also experienced tremendous kindness and compassion. From essential workers and heroes on the front lines to the essential people in our own lives. We waited in lines to have our temperature checked, and at the same time, we checked in with our elderly family, reached out to one another and tended to each other's needs.

But what happens when the trauma and tragedy subsides? The kindness we extend to one another during times of crisis can lose much of its



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman at <https://www.yutorah.org/Rabbi-Dr-Ari-Berman>

urgency. When returning to a new normal, the needs of others are not always noticed as starkly or obviously. That is why we need to focus on the protocols of our new normal. *Olam chessed yibaneh*, the world was built with kindness (Psalms 89:3). We need to rebuild our world with kindness as well.

Rav Kook famously remarked, that just as the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because of *sinat chinam*, baseless hatred between one another, it will be rebuilt through *ahavat chinam* baseless love between one another. But in order for our community to transform our protocols of distance into a renewed sense of togetherness, just abolishing social distancing protocols is not enough. We need protocols that bring us together. We need to operationalize the interactions that foster the sense of communal chessed, communal togetherness, and communal cohesion that we otherwise too often take for granted. We need to embody a chessed community.

A good place to start is to transform those very touchpoints where we would have otherwise been pausing for health protocols into moments of connection. If walking into a Yeshiva University building the past year required a long line for a temperature check, we can't go back to just walking through doors and into rooms

Just abolishing social distancing protocols is not enough. We need protocols that bring us together.

without expressing gratitude for those stationed at the entranceways who keep us safe. We should enter every room asking ourselves who needs a kind word, a warm smile, or a helping hand? We need to commit to become proactively warm and kind to one

another. Our old protocols kept us apart, we need new protocols to rejoin together.

And that is our collective responsibility this coming year. To embody a *chessed* community, a community which systematically ensures that everyone is uplifted. And as we enter Tisha Ba'av, and think of this period of mourning, I ask each of you to consider what "halachot" could bring us together.

Watching a spouse sit shiva is a heart-wrenching experience. But it is also heartening. I personally saw the outpouring of communal support and experienced the urgency with which our community takes care of one another. And that's why I am so confident that we have the instinctive capacity to continue our *chessed* even as we turn the next page towards a new normal. We are a *chessed* community. It is in our fiber, it is who we are. So even as our safety protocol disappears, I know our *chessed* will endure.

