

Finding Refuge

And now, we wait.

In the darkness, I reach for my nightstand. Along with my phone, I gather my essential emotions: Fear and courage. Doubt and faith. But most of all, I gather love. The love I feel is *chesed*. Not the limp *chesed* mistranslated as “loving kindness.” *Chesed* is way more powerful than that. *Chesed* is strong. It is resilient, not romantic. *Chesed* is the love born of our shared humanity that commands us to remember and act on this truth: We are all in this together. *Chesed* will carry us through.

Remembering is the hardest part about waking up these days. Gaining consciousness as I awake, I remember our reality today. I remember our lives just a few weeks ago. Just a week ago. Just Monday.

I remember standing at a graveside on Monday, limiting participation in the noble mitzvah of burying our dead to only the children of the deceased, in order to minimize the number of mourners who would take up the shovel.

Our daughter back suddenly Tuesday from Israel and Heller High, and wrestling with her new reality, as my heart broke, I remember saying to her, “You don’t get to be a kid anymore. You have to be an adult now.”

And I remember hurriedly passing a woman on the street on Wednesday, each of us trying to eyeball a six-foot distance while furtively avoiding each other, as if eye contact alone had the power to transmit the Coronavirus.

Thank God, I remember more than that. I remember that in God and in Judaism, we find refuge. In addition to remembering that when we love each other with *chesed* we are looking out for each other and living as the very best versions of ourselves, I also remember that Shabbat is coming. We need it like never before in our lives. Make Shabbat and take a Sabbath from it all. Call someone you love and then put down your phone. Put match to candles. Bless your children. Make Kiddush. Praise God for your food. Eat your meal with someone you love, even if your beloved can only be seen through a screen. Make love. Tomorrow, leave your phone plugged in and do something that makes you feel good.

And finally, I remember the power of prayer. Prayer is an act of surrender. Not surrender as in “giving up.” We must never, ever give up. We surrender as an act of giving over, so we can recognize where we end and where the limits of our power give way to a Higher Power. God needs us as partners, but the Eternal never asks us to carry the burden entirely or alone. We are not alone. We have God and we have each other.

Inspired by the words of the Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Yitzchak Yosef, as we head into Shabbat, I offer you a prayer for refuge.

Eloheinu, v'Elohei Avoteinu v'Imoteinu, Our God, and God of our ancestors. You were God individually to each of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs and collectively to them all. So, too, are you God to each one and all of us together.

Eternal God, to You alone is the glory and the goodness, the majesty and the magnificence. All in heaven and on earth look to You alone. Author of life and Authority of death, in Your hands is the soul of all the living and the spirit within all flesh.

May it be Your will and may Your heart be moved to be merciful toward all the people of the planet, to all the people of this land, to the Jewish people, and to the people of Beth El Hebrew Congregation. Protect and rescue all life from the suffering and sickness, plague and pandemic that may be visited upon us.

Grant agency, courage, and wisdom to those through whom You work. Clarify the minds and guide the hands of the researchers, medical professionals, and decision makers who work to end this plague. May it be Your will, faithful God of Israel, healer of illness: Act with deep kindness and compassion toward all people infected with this disease. Swiftly send healing and a complete cure.

Merciful God, please alight from Your Throne of Judgement. Sit instead upon Your Throne of Mercy. Decree upon us good judgments, salvation, and consolation for the sake of Your goodness and mercy. Help us and redeem us for the sake of your kindness.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to You, Adonai, my rock and my redeemer.

Blessed is the One who listens to our prayers. *Baruch Atah Adonai, Shomea Tefillah.*