

Concerns about the Easing of Restrictions in Eretz Yisrael

Translated by Elli Fischer

Sunday, parashas Acharei Mos-Kedoshim

THIS MORNING WE RECEIVED notice that, *baruch Hashem*, we can go out to daven in open spaces with *minyanim* of nineteen people, that [men] can go to the *mikveh*...and I am extremely apprehensive.

I think that the representatives of our community who have been fighting against these regulations are making a grave mistake. These are not “*gezeiros*” (decrees of a hostile government). When we isolate ourselves in our homes, we are not doing it for the government or for “them,” for others. We are doing it for ourselves. We are doing it for our children. More accurately, we are doing this for our parents and for the elderly among us. We are doing it because this is what Chazal commanded us to do. I have stressed—dozens of times, hundreds of times—the words of the Gemara:¹ “When there is a plague in the city, go inside.” Chazal quote the *pasuk* from the *Navi Yeshayahu*:² “Go, my people, enter your chambers and close your doors behind you.” When we isolate and quarantine ourselves, each person in their home, it is not for “them.” These are not *gezeiros* that one must fight against. We are doing this for ourselves.

In the wider world, there are leaders who say, “We need to stimulate the economy! Let a few old people die. The

main thing is money. The main thing is the economy.” This is not our *hashkafah*. This is not how we view the world.

Who are these old people who might die? For us, the elderly are not the past. In our world, the elderly are the future. The *Ziknei Yisrael*, the Elders of Israel, are the “*einei ha’eidah*,” the “eyes of the congregation.”³ They are our future, not our past. Each person should look closely at his immediate environs and consider: Who are these “old people” who might be endangered? It’s his *rav*. It’s his *rosh yeshiva*, grandmother, and grandfather. Look each of these people in the eye. Who among them are we prepared to relinquish? Which of them are we willing to give up on? On the elderly rabbi? The senior *rosh yeshiva*? The *zeyde*? The *bubbe*?

These are not “*gezeiros*.” We are isolating ourselves at home to protect everyone.

The situation in Eretz Yisrael is, *baruch Hashem*, much better than abroad, in *chutz la’aretz*. I said three weeks ago—and it is difficult for me to repeat, because these are harsh words—that we will take this seriously only when people start to die. To our great sorrow, people are dying. In *chutz la’aretz*, just within our communities in the United States, almost a thousand people have died.

1 *Bava Kamma* 60b.

2 26:20.

3 *Bamidbar* 15:24; *Bava Basra* 4a.

The Inyana D'yoma newsletters have been sponsored by the Nechamkin family, Rabbi Yoni and Randi Levin, and אלישע וזהבה כהן.

There are hundreds more in Europe. Just this morning, I addressed two halachic questions. They called me from France. There were four funerals of people from our communities this morning in France, and right now there is no room in the Jewish cemetery. They asked me whether it is better to bury them in a mixed cemetery, of Jews and non-Jews, or to bury family members one on top of the other, in a single grave. These are the questions that communities in *chutz la'aretz* are dealing with.

I was also asked this morning, from the US: A thirty-five-year-old man died from the coronavirus. A young man of thirty-five. Family members in Eretz Yisrael want to know when to begin their *aveilus*.

Within our communities, hundreds of people in Europe and almost a thousand in the US have died. The **only** reason that our situation in Eretz Yisrael is better—it's the same virus, and we, like they, are human beings—the sole reason is that we began taking isolating measures before they did. We stayed home.

That is why I am so terrified now. They will start *minyanim* in every open space, in every park: nineteen on the east side, another nineteen on the west side, another *minyan* to the north and another to the south, and a few *minyanim* in the middle. We will start crowding in the *mikveh* every morning. I hope I am proven wrong.

We have started seeing a positive trend in Eretz Yisrael: For the first time since the plague broke out, the number of new recoveries is greater than the number of new cases of infection. But this trend can reverse in one day, in one moment, if we loosen the reins and once again start getting together and coming close to one another. The trend can be reversed in just one day, and then, to our dismay, people young and old will die.

But the elderly are precious to us—no less than the young! Our elders are not superfluous. We need them. Every Jew is a world unto themselves; anyone who sustains one Jewish life is considered as though they sustained an entire world, and anyone who destroys one Jewish life is considered as though they destroyed an entire world.⁴

Therefore, all of the leniencies that we have instituted remain as they were. *Minyanim* should continue in backyards, porches, and balconies. In our present circumstances, it is permitted *l'chatchilah* to make a *minyan* by joining people on balconies and in yards if they can see one another. There is no dispute between Sephardim and Ashkenazim here. This ruling is based on the *Shulchan Aruch*, whose author was a Sephardi, as is known. Under the present circumstances, people that can see one another from yards, porches, and balconies combine to form a *minyan* for any *davar she'b'kedushah: Kaddish, Kedushah, Kriyas HaTorah, and Birkas Kohanim*.

I want these *minyanim* to continue. They are preferable to [*minyanim* that require] entering a public space, because, once again, people, and primarily youngsters, do not understand. Who will supervise them? Young men will meet up with one another, the virus will be transmitted from one to the next, and the price will ultimately be paid primarily by the infirm and the elderly. They deserve to live. There are many ill and infirm people among us who may yet live for decades hence. They do not deserve to die. We must show them compassion, and the elderly likewise.

The same applies to the *mikveh*. Standing under the shower head for five minutes amounts to nine *kabin* [of water] and is effective for *tevilas Ezra* for one who is ill or under pressing circumstances, and it is certainly effective to fulfill the *middas chassidus* of immersing in the morning before *tefillah*.

I cannot be *frummer* than the Ministry of Health, and so cannot say that [davening in open spaces and going to the men's *mikveh*] are forbidden. However, I am begging and pleading: Act with extreme caution! Those who go outside to pray—and I wish blessings on them, too—should keep their distance from one another when entering and exiting [the prayer space]. They should remain apart while praying, and everyone must wear a mask; most importantly, on their way to davening and on their way home, they should not walk together or engage in light conversations with one another. It is especially important to watch over the young people

4 *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 4:5.

and make sure they do not come into contact with one another or come too close to one another.

May Hakadosh Baruch Hu keep all pain and plague away from His people, Beis Yisrael. We will continue to daven to Hashem to send a *refuah sheleimah* to all who are sick.

This Friday and Shabbos will be Rosh Chodesh Iyar. The *dorshei reshumos*, those who explicate allusions, say

that the Hebrew letters of Iyar stand for “*Ani Hashem Rofecha*—I, Hashem, am your Healer.” May Hashem heal all of the sick. May He comfort all of the brokenhearted people who have lost loved ones to this terrible plague. And may we all merit a *yeshuas olamin*.

These essays were written during various stages of the coronavirus pandemic. Facts and knowledge about this virus change daily. Torah is forever.