

There are a number of possible different reactions to the coronavirus crisis we are going through.

We know that Hashem runs the world. At Yetzias Mitzrayim, Hashem broke all rules of nature to teach us that the concept behind avodo zoro—that there are independent forces which run the world—is false. Hashem created nature and controls nature. He decides whether to work within nature or break the laws of nature. Hashem destroyed all avodo zoro on the night of makkas bechoros. He left one avodo zoro intact—Ba'al Tzefone, the god of money, in order to lure Pharaoh and his army to pursue Klal Yisroel. That last avodo zoro was destroyed at kriyas Yam Suf. Hashem also works with sechar ve'onesh and midas hadin. At kriyas Yam Suf, Klal Yisroel saw each Egyptian receive the exact punishment he deserved. Only after all these lessons were taught could Klal Yisroel receive the Torah on Har Sinai with an absolute clarity of who Hashem is and the reality behind all existence.

The gemara has a concept of being somech geuloh to geuloh. There is a connection between Pesach and Purim. Purim was a seeming series of random events which happens to come together. The Ramban in Parshas Bo tells us that the nissim of Yetzias Mitzrayim were to reveal that even at times when Hashem works within tevah, things are still happening only because of Hashem's hashgocho and direction.

I will tell you my reaction to the current situation. But first, I want to discuss the response of a very self-confident darshan who claimed to have proof that no-one in Eretz Yisroel will die of the coronavirus and therefore no precautions are necessary. This is instructive to help us understand how to use maamorei Chazal to understand the world we live in and how not to use them.

He quoted a Tosefta on the posuk in Parshas Noach which says Hashem promised never to bring another mabul of water to destroy the world again. The Tosefta says that right before Moshiach, Hashem will bring a mabul of dever to destroy the non-Jews and no Jew will die from this plague. This darshan declared with absolute confidence that the coronavirus is the plague foretold by the Tosefta—Moshiach is right around the corner and we have nothing to fear from the virus. Therefore we need not take any safety measures against the virus.

Anyone who predicts the future today is either a novi or a fool. If there are no nevi'im today... who in the world told him that this virus is the makkoh of dever referred to in the Tosefta?

The gezeiras Tach ve'Tat saw a million Polish Jews slaughtered from massacres of the Chelminiki peasant uprising. The Jewish community in Poland was reeling from the loss—desperate to find some comfort and meaning to the tragedy. Soon after, Shabbtai Tzvi gained prominence in Turkey as one who claimed to be Moshiach and mass numbers of Jews fell prey to this false hope. Even many significant talmidei chachomim were fooled initially—the Knesses HaGedolah was taken in by him. The Taz sent his son-in-law to investigate these claims and he reported back that Shabbtai Tzvi was lax in a machlokes over an issur de'rabbanon. Based on that, the Taz declared him a phony and things started to unravel from there.

After that debacle, the Vaad Arba Aratzos, under the leadership of the Tosfos Yom Tov, passed a decree banning all predictions of Moshiach under any circumstances. The dangers of raising false hopes are very real. All of European Jewry accepted it. These types of predictions are still dangerous today because it causes people to throw caution into the wind. People are dying by the hundreds daily in Italy. It needs to

be taken very seriously.

No matter what the midrashim say, the biggest existential threat to the Jews living in Eretz Yisroel over the past decade or so has been Iran. Just a few months ago they made a concerted effort to ramp up their development of a nuclear weapon. Netanyahu and Trump in their overblown egos promised they would never let it happen. But they aren't in control. Without anyone lifting a finger, Hashem has used this virus to completely devastate the Iranian economy and suddenly Iran is no longer a threat. Even after the crisis will pass, Iran will remain only as a shadow of its former power and influence on the region and world. We don't really know what's happening in China and North Korea. They are closed societies.

In my thinking about the crisis, we can learn some important lessons about why things are happening. Over the past number of years, the LGBTQ community has gained more and more social acceptance in the Western world. Gay marriages have been given equal legal status as regular marriage, etc. I was asked in a Q&A session in Baltimore why it is our business if these deviant lifestyles become fully accepted in non-Jewish society. Why should frum Jews care? I responded that there are two reasons to care. One reason is that all social norms in non-Jewish society slowly but surely get imported into our community on some level. That is what always happened in the past and is going to continue to happen. It happens immediately in the Reform community and then it starts to trickle down into the frum world.

Another reason to be concerned is a midrash which frightens me personally very much. The midrash in Bereishis says the dor hamabul's fate was sealed only after the society degenerated so badly to the point where they made these perversions a normal part of life—giving it full rights and equal legal status and everything. Chazal say zhus brings churbon to the world and no-one is spared—both evil and righteous alike will suffer the consequences. Hashem despises zemosh—He simply reaches a point where it is no longer tolerated.

This is frightening because the world today is completely preoccupied and obsessed with zhus. And it follows a pattern. First people chase after natural taivos, then they get bored of them and start to experiment with unnatural taivos—mishkav zochor and mishkav beheimoh.

The night the two malochim came to Lot, Lot pleads for mercy for the people of Sdom. The malochim considered this plea. But then the people of Sdom came and tried to bang down the door to rape these malochim and they immediately decided there is no room for mercy—Sdom must be destroyed.

We live in a world that has lost any balance. It is rapidly losing basic belief in Hashem and becoming extremely secularized. I'm not a novi—I'm not pinpointing any aveiroh and saying this must be it. But Chazal teach us that certain behaviors are dangerous to the safety of the world. Europe used to be the bulwark of Christianity, but religious belief is in serious decline. Barring the coming of Moshiach, Christianity will be fading out completely from Europe in a couple of generations. The west is now openly and unabashedly pre-occupied with zhus. Christianity may be avodo zoro, but it had its place in Hashem's plan to uphold certain religious and moral values in the non-Jewish world. The Rambam says the religions of Christianity and Islam are bridge-religions to educate the pagan world in Torah ideas so that they can transition more smoothly to the truth when Moshiach comes.

So it is tragic to see what is happening to Christianity—it is weakening

and weakening—being replaced by a religion of money and zhus. It is a world divorced of spiritual values and ideas. I don't know how long Hashem can tolerate such a corrupt world. I'm just sharing my ideas.

So it is interesting to see that we are experiencing a financial churbon that we have not seen in our lifetime. The stock market is in freefall. Major industries are collapsing, and the billionaires are losing all their assets. We don't know if we will ever recover. The avodo zoro of money is being broken before our eyes. And we are now hearing statements of mayors and ministers who are encouraging the closing of all the bars and movie theaters and places of entertainment. My personal reaction is—fewer aveiros will now be perpetrated in the world.

In a world that has gone mad in one direction—money and zhus—where religion and religious people are openly mocked and derided, it is not strange that something like this should happen. We aren't nevi'im and we can't point to specific things, but we shouldn't be surprised to see Hashem bring something which directly impacts on these two secular religions.

What is our responsibility in this crisis? The question of leaving yeshivos open or closing early is a heavy matter that weighs on the mind of every rosh yeshiva. Be careful. Limud HaTorah saves us from destruction and we find many mekomos Torah still functioning. Limud HaTorah is one of the most important things in the world. It is vital. The secular newspapers of course understand that any essential activity for the society to function must continue despite the dangers, but all unnecessary activities and establishments like bars, concerts, museums, yeshivas and shuls need to be shut down. What they are trying to say is that they have their forms of secular entertainment and we have our forms of religious entertainment—both equally unnecessary in the midst of a pandemic. But they have it all wrong. Torah and tefilloh are vital activities for our survival as a nation. Ki hem chayenu ve'orech yomeinu.

It doesn't mean people should congregate in large crowds or go around from group to group. We have to take proper precautions and be smart. Stay within the same small group of people around you. But limud HaTorah is our anchor when Hashem is bringing a general upheaval to this world. It's disorienting—the whole thing makes no sense. There are two parts to this. There is the disease itself and the hysterical reaction we are having to the disease. The world is changing and it won't go back to being the same when it is over. Like many

historic events of the last century, the world will be different from here on. But we know that the basis of our survival is continued limud haTorah in a serious way.

There is another point to make. Hashem is turning over the world because Hashem looks at what people are doing and He is deeply dissatisfied with how the world has been functioning. It couldn't last this way in the long term. But we also have to take stock and check ourselves to see to what extent we ourselves as frum Jews are importing this corrupt lifestyle into our communities. The only values of the secular world we all live in are money and zhus. I noticed this and I knew that the world was going on borrowed time. It couldn't last. So Hashem brought something that affected these two areas directly. And we shouldn't delude ourselves—we are not going to be immune to what's happening. When churbon comes to the world, there is no distinction between tzaddikim and reshaim.

We cannot understand the cheshbon of Hashem—we aren't nevi'im, but we can make out certain facts on the ground and see what Hashem is doing. The entire balance of power in the Middle East is in total disarray. Iran and Hezbollah are completely defunct as threats to our safety. The Arab economy is in shambles because of the global drop in oil consumption. The entire world has been radically altered. We don't know why and we don't know how it is going to end up. But we should not let all this go to waste. We have to take a hisorrerus and look at ourselves very seriously and ask ourselves how much have we been affected by the craziness of western culture. How much have we let these values and attitudes seep into our neshomos and our families? What kabbolos can we take upon ourselves to eliminate these dangerous influences?

Whether you are in yeshiva or out of yeshiva, the biggest zechus we have to survive is limud haTorah. We will continue to learn Torah as a group and this is the biggest seguloh. Don't be taken in by what people tell you are popular segulos which just keeps Hashem out of the picture. The real segulos are teshuvoh, tefilloh and limud haTorah. Our zechuyos and aveiros—that's what really makes a difference. Segulos are not hocus pocus which let us think we can control our lives. That's avodo zoro—believing we can use spiritual forces of strings and amulets to protect ourselves from harm. We control what happens to the world by our mitzvos and aveiros. We need to take our Torah, our tefillos and our middos very seriously.