

B"H

## A Pesach Unlike Any Other

חג הפסח – תהא שנת פדוּתֵינו

A printable smorgasbord of thoughts to enhance your Seder table.

By Rabbi Mordechai Lipskier

כאן צוה ה' את הברכה, Crown Heights,

### להדליק נר של יום טוב

#### ALL DRESSED UP WITH NOWHERE TO GO

“What’s the point of new clothes this Pesach,” my daughter asked, “if there’s no one to see them?” She’s right. And this may actually be one of the blessings of social distancing.

When Moshe Rabbeinu ascended Har Sinai, Hashem instructed him, “No man shall ascend with you.” Chassidishe *seforim* apply this directive to every Jew’s ascent up the mountain of G-dly service. “Don’t take anyone with you,” Hashem instructs us. As we climb, we should envision that we are alone, just us and Hashem. We are free from inhibition and insecurity, with no need to seek others’ approval. (Toldos Yaakov Yossef, Ha’azinu)

A similar interpretation is also applied to the verse in Parshas Tzav, read this year on Shabbos Hagadol: “And the kohen shall don his linen tunic, and he shall don his linen trousers on his flesh.” The Hebrew word for linen is *bad*, which comes from the word “alone,” so named because flax grows in lone stalks. (Tzemach Dovid, Robinovitz, on this verse.)

The kohen’s clothes were made from this material because his service reached a place of oneness with Hashem, where sin cannot interfere. (See Toras Shmuel 5632 pg. 77.)

One of the greatest challenges we face today is living for others. Hunger for approval influences our spending habits, mode of dress, behavior and even speech, to the point where we may not see value in dressing up for yom tov when there’s no one to impress.

In prison, the Alter Rebbe wanted to keep the *halacha* of wearing special garments for Shabbos, but he didn’t have a change of clothes. He improvised by removing the ribbon from his socks and tying it back on only for Shabbos. (Litutei Sippurim, 54)

Spending yom tov alone gives us the unique opportunity to hit the reset button on our need for social approval. There may be no one to impress, but Hashem is with us, even in isolation, and it is for Him that we honor yom tov.

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## קדש

### FATHER'S ALREADY HOME?

Traditionally, we begin the Seder with the children chanting, “When father comes home from shul, he makes *kiddush* immediately, so that the children don’t fall asleep and are able to ask the *mah nishtanah*.”

One year, the Shpoler Zaide’s son stopped chanting after the words: “... makes *kiddush* immediately.” When his father inquired, the child explained that his teacher had only taught that much.

The next night, the teacher attended their Seder. The Shpoler Zaide asked why he hadn’t taught further, and the teacher explained that he felt it unnecessary, since this reason does not always apply. Sometimes no children are present, for example.

“You are toying with a deep and long-standing *minhag*,” the Shpoler Zaide objected. This chant is also directed to Hashem, he explained. When Hashem goes “home” (descends on high) after *davening*, we want Him to take note of how precious His children are. They work hard preparing for Pesach and then joyously *daven* and sing *hallel*. We are asking, therefore, that He be “*mekadesh*” (i.e. betrothe) us right away and bring moshiah, lest we fall into a dangerous slumber, and stop asking *mah nishtanah*—why is this *galus* different from all others? Why is it so long? (Sipurei Chassidim, Zevin)

This year, with shuls closed *r”l*, fathers will already be at home, making it possible for us to begin *kiddush* faster than ever before. To Hashem we say- do the same for us and bring the *geulah* immediately!

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## זמן חירותינו

### FREE AT LAST

At his prime, Howard Hughes was one of the most successful businessmen in the world. Despite his immense wealth and power, he became so paranoid and obsessive-compulsive that he trusted no one. His health deteriorated until he died in the spring of 1976. At a *farbrengen* on the 11<sup>th</sup> of Nissan that year, the Rebbe shared a simple, yet deep, lesson.

Freedom is very individual. It depends more on the person than on the circumstances. There were people, the Rebbe explained, in horrific circumstances such as the concentration camps, who were able to retain an inner freedom and peace by attaching their thoughts and feelings to a higher place, i.e., Hashem. Conversely, we have someone like Howard Hughes, whose money could buy anything (he once purchased a hotel just to remove a certain light-up sign that disturbed him!) and yet he was a slave. His fortune and power didn’t liberate him, it shackled him. He was his own prisoner.

On Pesach, the Rebbe concluded, we’re faced with a conundrum. We celebrate our freedom, but at the same time we bemoan the fact that we are still in *galus*. And both are true. Even in *galus* circumstances, our inner freedom—our bond with Hashem and our ability to overcome secular pressures—is in our hands. (Sichos Kodosh 5776)

This year, we're not around many people so our circumstances are whatever we make of them. What an opportune time to revisit our sense of freedom. How much do we do, and refrain from doing, because of our image? Because of our need to impress others or gain their approval? It's time to live with true freedom, doing the right thing with pride and confidence.

Hughes' wealth isolated him. Let's use *our* isolation to get in touch with our true spiritual wealth.

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## מגיד

### JOY!

The Arizal writes that the Haggadah should be recited in a loud voice and with immense joy. (Sicha, second night of Pesach 5712)

This year that may prove challenging for us. But we know that "joy breaks boundaries," and we'd all like to break free of the restrictions this disease has engendered. So let's make an effort to conduct the Seder with an extra measure of joy. It'll be something our families will remember, and with Hashem's help it will break through not only the boundaries of our current situation, but the entire *galus*, flinging us readily into moshiach times.

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## עבדים היינו...

### LONELY? DANCE!

During a Pesach Seder with his students, the Baal Shem Tov began to laugh. He explained that at that moment, in a small village, one of his chassidim, a simple student, was sitting at his Seder table with his wife. They had no children. After his wife asked the four questions and they drank the first two cups of wine, he recounted a teaching he had heard from his rebbe, the Baal Shem Tov: When a husband and wife merit, the *shechina* resides with them. When they realized they were causing a revelation of G-dliness, they became overjoyed and began dancing. This, concluded the Baal Shem Tov, caused immense joy in Heaven, which is why I, too, laughed. (Sefer Hasichos 5683 pg. 40)

This year, Pesach may be a lonely yom tov. For those fortunate enough to be with family, let's do our utmost to promote peace in the home and create an environment conducive to Hashem's presence. If we only make space for Him, Hashem will join us.

And indeed, why not dance? It's just us, our family and Hashem. Be free. Be happy. Dance!

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## מכת בכורות

### BLOODY DOORPOSTS

At the time of *makas bechoros*, Hashem instructed the Jews to brush blood on the inside of their doorposts. Did Hashem really need help distinguishing the Jewish homes from the Egyptian ones? If so, shouldn't it have been placed on the *outside* doorposts? And why blood, a sign of death and devastation?

The Beis Yosef, who merited to learn Torah directly from an angel, explained that the blood was not for Hashem; it was to cultivate the Jews' trust in Him. Surrounded by death, the sight of blood would naturally increase their anxiety. But their trust in Hashem was so strong that following His command put them at ease. (Madig Meisharim, Parshas Bo)

Unfortunately, many of us are sitting in our homes this Pesach surrounded by suffering or even death *r"l*. Let us strengthen our trust in Hashem and recognize that He is in charge, orchestrating everything we see. He is always with us, protecting us. Following His directives, and davening to Him with complete faith, can bring salvation to us and to the many Jews who so desperately need it.

We were redeemed from Mitzrayim in the *zechus* of our *emunah*. Let's keep our *emunah* in moshiach strong and hasten his coming.

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**בכל דור... יצא ממצרים**

## **CHANGE OF PLANS**

One of the realities we've had to deal with this Pesach is the abrupt change of plans. All our lives, to one degree or another, have been significantly impacted.

In a letter written at the beginning of his *nesius* the Rebbe drew on the topic of the *ananei ha'kavod* that surrounded B'nei Yisrael on their journey through the desert after leaving Mitzrayim, (which we commemorate by sitting in a sukkah during the yom tov of Sukkos).

... Every single day, morning and evening, a man is obliged to regard himself as if he is now at the moment of the Exodus from Egypt. [In a spiritual sense,] "This refers to the release of the Divine soul from the confinement of the body... by engaging in the Torah and the commandments in general, and in particular through accepting the Sovereignty of Heaven [during the recital of the *Shema*]."

To refer to the manner in which this concept was expressed by my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe, ז"ל:

The first thing one must do is get out of his straits and bounds. In terms of *avodah* in general, these constitute the lifestyle that a person plans out for himself. The particular straits and bounds grow out of the life situation in which he chooses to establish for himself...

First of all, there has to be an Exodus from this spiritual Egypt, from all these confinements and constrictions. For example, no matter what a person's plans are, they must include fixed daily periods for Torah study, and his prayers should be attended to conscientiously, not [merely] to discharge his formal obligations.

After the Exodus from Egypt comes the Splitting of the Red Sea. As soon as a person begins to undertake the task of *avodah*, obstacles arise, each of them tough and truly formidable — just as, when the Children of Israel were on their way out of Egypt, the enemy was behind them, the sea lay before them, and they themselves were in the wilderness.

The Splitting of the Sea was wrought from Above. G-d made a path there for the Children of Israel, just like a road on the dry land — except that there first had to be one man, characterized by self-sacrifice, who was prepared to leap into the sea. That done, G-d transformed it into dry land. [...]

G-d then caused them to dwell in *sukkos*. By way of analogy: A newborn is bathed from filth and swaddled in clean cloth, not only to protect him from uncleanness from without, but also to straighten and strengthen his limbs — albeit temporarily, but this stands him in good stead throughout the time in which he grows to be a man.

So, too, in *avodah*: When a person brings himself to the point at which he has freed himself from the constrictions of his own mindset so that he is now unburdened of his former life-plans, the evil of his natural soul and the material and physical needs of his life become more refined. Immediately thereafter, there must be [the next step] — “and the Children of Israel journeyed... to Sukkos.” A *sukkah* is a *makkif*, an encompassing light, but it is an encompassing light that has an inward effect, just as swaddling an infant lends strength to his limbs even when he is a man.

This, then, is the inner meaning of the words, “I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in *sukkos* when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.”

(I Will Write it in Their Hearts [SIE] vol. 6 letter number 780)

Hashem drastically changed our plans this year. Now we're isolated with our immediate family or, for some, entirely alone. Instead of seeing our situation as one of neglect or mishap, G-d forbid, let's try to reframe it. We are overcoming great challenges, splitting seas if you will. We are leaving the Mitzrayim of what we thought our life should look like and entering the direct, caring Hands of Hashem.

Lean into it. Let Him swaddle and protect us. Not only will we feel better now, it will condition us for the future as well.

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שמחים בבנין עירך...גאל ישראל

## A BEAR HUG

According to the Jewish calendar, Tisha B'Av and the first day of Pesach will always occur on the same day of the week. (See Midrash Pesichta to Eicha 15.)

What's the connection between these two days? Aren't they polar opposites?

The Tzemach Tzedek, whose *yahrzeit* we mark on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Nissan, explains that these two days are really not as antithetical as they seem. Pesach represents Hashem's right hand—kindness and compassion—and it is therefore the time of our redemption. Tisha B'Av, on the other hand, represents Hashem's left hand—demanding and harsh. Which actually stems from an intense love; it takes deep love for a parent to hide their compassion and discipline their child.

When Moshiach comes we'll have the complete synthesis—deep love that can also manifest as kindness and compassion, which is why the third Beis Hamikdash will be everlasting. (Ohr HaTorah Nach vol. 2 pg. 1044)

We must demand that Hashem put an end to Tisha B'Av as we know it, and to all pain and suffering.

This Pesach should be the one that transforms Tisha B'Av into a yom tov of joy, when the only "aloneness" we will experience is that of *betach badad ein Yaakov* - "And Israel dwelled safely and alone as Jacob [blessed them]," and *am l'vadad yishkon* - "It is a nation that will dwell alone, and will not be reckoned with among the nations." (See sicha of Matos-Masei 5734)

We want Hashem to embrace us with *both* hands.

We want moshiach now!

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**מצה: מיכלא דמהימנותא**

### PIOUS HERETIC

Before Pesach one year, the Baal Shem Tov was in a notably serious mood. His chassidim worried, and their concern grew as the Rebbe directed them to recite specific *tefillos* and do extra mitzvos. At the Seder, the Baal Shem Tov sang the Haggadah with the usual joyous tunes, but shared no Torah thoughts. His serious frame of mind persisted, until suddenly, eyes closed, he laughed loudly and announced, "Blessed is Hashem and His nation of 'Yisroelkes' who outdo Yisroel Baal Shem Tov."

He explained that a terrible pogrom against a Jewish village had been plotted for the first night of Pesach, and there was nothing he could do to annul the decree. In another town, a simple couple with no children, adherents of the Baal Shem Tov and his teachings, sat alone at their Seder. After the wife asked the Four Questions and they drank a few cups of wine, the husband told the story of Pesach. When he described Pharaoh's decree to throw the Jewish baby boys into the Nile, the wife protested, "If Hashem were to bless *us* with a child, you can be sure I wouldn't treat him the way Hashem treats us!" And so began their debate. She protested the dismal Jewish plight and he defended Hashem's decisions. Ultimately they concluded that just as Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim, he will take us out of this *galus*, and they erupted into spontaneous and joyful dancing.

"These Jews," announced the Baal Shem Tov, "just annulled the decree."

He explained to his students that the essence of *bitachon* is a firm trust that no matter how grim the circumstances, Hashem will help. This, however, is only with regard to our own plight. When we see another Jew suffering, saying "Hashem will surely help" is a sin. It's our responsibility to do whatever we can and implore Hashem to help them. (Igros Kodesh of the Rebbe Rayatz, vol. 3, pg. 72)

At our yom tov tables this year we'll probably be having the same debate that couple had. Some of us (or parts of ourselves) will argue in Hashem's defense, while others (or other parts of ourselves) will call out Hashem for the horrific plight of our fellow Jews. And both will be correct. For ourselves, we must work on strengthening our faith and trust. With regards to others, we must audaciously demand that He not cause any further hurt.

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## על אכילת מרור

### A WAY IN

The great Reb Chaim of Sanz was very ill before his passing and the doctors forbade him from eating *maror*. At the Seder, he held the *maror* in his hand and began to recite the *bracha*, “*Baruch atoh ... asher kidshanu b’mitzvosov v’tzivanu ...*” but instead of finishing with “*al achilas maror*,” he said, “*v’nishmartem l’nafshosechem*” (the commandment to safeguard our health). (Taamei Haminhagim, *maror*.)

By *not* eating the *maror*, he fulfilled the will of He Who commanded us to eat it.

At the moment, there are many mitzvos that we’re not able to perform. Instead of feeling disheartened, we should realize that by refraining, we are fulfilling Hashem’s command to safeguard our health.

But notice that the Sanzer Rov held the *maror* while saying the *bracha*. Perhaps it was because even when we’re put into situations where Torah tells us not to do certain mitzvos, we can and should still “hold onto” them as much as possible.

During his 5687 imprisonment, the Frieddiker Rebbe behaved brazenly toward the officers. When they asked him if he knows where he is, implying that he should be more respectful, he responded, “Yes, I’m in a place that’s exempt from having a mezuzah.”

The Rebbe shared this story and explained his father-in-law’s response. Having a mezuzah protects a Jew, and since the Frieddiker Rebbe couldn’t have an actual mezuzah with him, he looked for an opportunity to *discuss* the laws, thereby gaining the protection it gives. (12 Tammuz 5734)

Likewise, although we don’t say *shehechianu* on the last days of Pesach, the rebbeim were particular to discuss *why* we don’t. (Acharon shel Pesach 5743)

As Yidden and chassidim, we don’t look for a way out; we look for ways in.

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## לשנה הבאה בירושלים

### ONE SNEEZE

My nine-year-old son was disappointed when we arrived at the grocery store and he wasn’t allowed in. No matter how quiet and well-behaved he promised to be, it was clear, the new COVID-19 policy was posted. We swallowed the reality and he waited outside while I shopped alone.

Later, something occurred to me which gave us both a sense of comfort and encouragement.

The Rebbe often quoted the words of the Rambam:

“A person should always look at himself as equally balanced between merit and sin and the world as equally balanced between merit and sin. If he performs one sin, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of guilt and brings destruction upon himself. [On the other hand,] if he performs one mitzvah, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of merit and brings deliverance and salvation to himself and others.” (Hilchos Teshuva 3:4)

This is true regarding adults *and* children alike.

Today, we have become aware that one single sneeze of a nine-year-old child can spin an entire store, community, city and world, into chaos. His single “sin” can bring destruction.

How much more so in the positive. One single act can not only be contagious; it can change the entire world for the better.

The 11<sup>th</sup> of Nissan is the Rebbe’s birthday. The 14<sup>th</sup> of the Nissan is the Rambam’s.

Let’s take their inspiration. Do it. Get others to do it: One single act can bring Moshiach now.

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**תפלה, ברכת כהנים**

### **IS YIDISHKAIT POSTPONED, C”V?**

Under normal circumstances, Yiddishkeit is very much about structure. Today, that structure has been temporarily torn down. No school, shul, or *mikveh*. We can’t share in each other’s *simchos* or help others in the usual ways.

This lack of infrastructure can leave us feeling as though Yiddishkeit is suspended until further notice. *What’s the use in pretending we’re doing things right when we’re not*, we might wonder.

Over 3000 years ago on the first day of Nissan, Moshe Rabbeinu initiated the work in the Mishkan. Under normal circumstances, as they traveled through the desert, assembling the Mishkan in each new place they camped, no *avoda* was done until it was entirely erected, including the courtyard. On the day of initiation, however, Moshe built the inner part of the Mishkan, placed one *keli* at a time inside, and performed its *avoda*, before the courtyard had been set up. Why didn’t he wait until everything was in place?

The Rebbe explained that when Moshe dedicated the Mishkan, he didn’t only dedicate that *first* Mishkan, but all future ones. And since he foresaw the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, and a time when B’nei Yisrael would have to bring *korbanos* at the holy site but without the structure, he wanted to perform the initiation in a way that would encompass the future non-ideal *avoda*. (Likutei Sichos vol. 31 pg. 223)

Perhaps we can say that we are living this reality right now. We must keep in mind that Hashem foresaw this. He’s the One who designed Yiddishkeit, and He’s the One orchestrating the circumstances that have dismantled its normal configuration.

He believes in us and knows we can do our part under the most trying times.

We now have the ability to bring a “*korban*”—i.e. to bring ourselves closer to Hashem, even without the holy walls of a shul.

Like Moshe did, we must grab every opportunity. Even if it’s not ideal or seems small, it’s cherished by Hashem.

This effort is not only the right thing to do, it’s also good for us and our families. Any amount of “normalcy” and holiness we can maintain will benefit us in this abnormal time.



May we merit very soon to take part in building the permanent house of Hashem, with Moshiach now.

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**כי בסוכות הושבתי את בני ישראל בהוציא אותם מארץ מצרים (קריאה ליום שני של פסח)**

## **SOCIAL DISTANCE?**

A gentile professor asked the Holy Ruzhiner why the *ananei ha'kavod* left when Aharon Hakohen passed away. The Ruzhiner answered: It's known that bodies give off heat. When people gather, if they share an emotional bond, their body heat will mix. But if they're not emotionally connected, their heat will rise and remain separate. Aharon Hakohen, we know, "loved and pursued peace," so the clouds were an actual outcome of his influence. Once he passed, the clouds which had been generated by the heat of the love he had created, disappeared. (Beis Yisroel)

Over the past few weeks we've come to understand just how influential social closeness is.

Perhaps this ordeal can inspire us to reexamine our social interactions. We can harness the power of social closeness to create protective clouds of glory, or, G-d forbid, to spread disease.

This unusual time can be used to reflect honestly and resolve to improve our social interactions, in person and virtually, so that they are holy and appropriate and bring only blessings and health.

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## **אמונה ובטחון**

### **A STORY: THE NOBLEWOMAN WHO TRIED STEALING FAITH**

Reb Baruch Mezhibuzher went to visit a chossid who was deathly ill; closer to the next world than to this one. Reb Baruch reassured the terrified family that the chossid would recover. With renewed hope, they escorted the Rebbe to his carriage, and he returned to Mezhibuzh.

Reb Baruch sent his attendant to the town square each morning for the next few days, to see if news had arrived from the sickly chossid's family. The news was always grim. One morning, the attendant heard that a wealthy noblewoman had arrived from that town. He hurried to her hotel and returned with the devastating news: the sick man's *levaya* had taken place the day before.

With a heavy heart he schlepped himself to the Rebbe and relayed the bitter news. Immediately the Rebbe returned to his study. The attendant could hear the Rebbe talking. "Hashem! Does my *bitachon* (trust) in You mean *nothing*?!" Then, a few minutes later, "No, Hashem would not shame my *bitachon*." He opened the door and instructed his attendant to go back for an update.

Bewildered, the attendant did as instructed, and sure enough, he received the most gratifying news: the ill chossid was having a miraculous recovery! He hurried to the Rebbe who was pleased but not at all shocked. "When I heard that he had died, I knew it couldn't be true," he explained. "I knew that as long as I *trusted* that Hashem would heal this man, he would be healed. And I also knew that my trust was strong. I realized that it must have been the Satan himself, disguised as a noblewoman, attempting to rob me of my *bitachon*."

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that before a Jew is given a challenge, Heaven forbid, he is first challenged with his *bitachon*. We must ask Hashem to preserve our *bitachon*; it is the virtue that will carry us through all challenges and enable us to experience positive outcomes. (Kesser Shem Tov 113)

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### פרשת צו – שבת הגדול

#### ASHES, ASHES: DON'T FALL DOWN!

Yossel tells his boss, “We’re doing some heavy Pesach cleaning at home tomorrow and my wife needs me to help haul stuff up to the attic.”

“Sorry, Abe,” the boss replies, “We’re short-handed and I just can’t give you the day off.”

“Thanks, Boss,” says Yossel, “I knew I could count on you!”

This year things are so different. We’re not working a steady job or engaging in our daily routines. The roles of father and mother are being shared unusually.

#### Ashes, Ashes...

One of the daily services performed by the kohanim discussed in the beginning of this week’s parsha involved removing one scoop of the ashes from the top of the *mizbeach* and placing them on the ground near the *mizbeach*’s ramp, where they were miraculously swallowed by the ground. This job was considered a great honor and the kohen would wear his priestly garments. Each morning the kohanim drew lots to determine who would receive the privilege of removing the ashes.

But every so often the pile of ashes on the *mizbeach* needed to be properly cleaned out. On these occasions, the same kohen who had won the drawing would remove his usual priestly garments, dress in less prestigious clothes, and take the ashes out of the Temple to a sacred place.

Why did he need to change his clothes?

Our *chachomim* liken the daily removal of ashes to a servant pouring wine for his master. True, his clothes may get a little dirty in the process, but since he’s serving in the presence of his master it’s only fitting that he dress appropriately. The occasional deep cleaning of the ashes, however, is likened to preparing food in the kitchen. The master is not present, so the servant wears simpler, dirtier clothes.

But if these two services are so different (similar to the roles of chef and waiter), shouldn’t they be done by two different kohanim? Why must the same kohen do both and change his clothes in between?

Doing so demonstrates that when we’re serving Hashem on His terms, no matter what the work entails, it is holy. Had the roles been filled by different kohanim, it would insinuate that one role is greater than the other. But when they’re both done by the same person, we understand that they are equally honorable. (Likutei Sichos vol. 37 pg. 5)

During this devastating time, we have a choice to either be frustrated and even insulted by our sense of displacement. (I don't belong sitting at home all day. I have a job! Why am I playing with my two-year-old? I should be at a shiur!)

Or we can recognize that for now, this is our *avoda*. Right now Hashem wants us to be *here*. This role, and the one we are used to playing, are equally honorable, because, like the kohen's tasks, both are for Him.

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