



Transitioning Beyond Covid

Many Jewish life-cycle events, festivals and customs encompass a transition between one stage and another. After a wedding, we continue the celebration with the week of *sheva brachot* and continue this special energy throughout the first year of marriage, the *shana rishona*.

community is mirrored as we move from a time of tragedy to a new chapter in history.

Channeling the halachic tradition, it is important to define a time for us to pause and consider which habits formed during this time are important to us as individuals and communities, consciously adopting those we would like to keep and those we would not.

Many questions have been raised. Working often required a commute and more face-to-face interactions, but now we know this is not always necessary, and we may forgo human engagement in some ways. Is this okay? Similarly, is it appropriate to adapt to more online activity in an effort to save money and time? Even on a basic level, will fewer people tread outside their homes for groceries when they can order virtually at the click of a button? There will be inevitable good coming out of this, yet at the same time, we are at risk of some new habits replacing our crucial in-person interactions. This is true universally, and it will have a unique impact on our particular communities as well.

If the physical community of Jewish ritual is important, we must consider how crucial this aspect is to our people when Covid-19 finally passes. Are there any areas in which we should, in the words of Eicha, “renew our days as of old?”

Usually, maintaining old habits is easier than creating new ones, but in this case, perhaps the roles are reversed. Some have become more lax with regard to going to synagogue or *shiurim* and this needs to be rethought. It may not be a challenge to hold onto some new habits that have been developed over the course of the last year or so, but it will be a challenge to make sure we leave room for the right long-standing ones that have shaped us as individuals and societies.

So as we transition out of the communal mourning of Tisha B'Av through *Shabbat Nachamu*, it is important that we take the time to focus on developing an exit strategy into a hopeful future. For once in our lives, our focus does not need to be on forming new habits alone but rather on rediscovering and reclaiming the time-tested old ones.

After the passing of a loved one, family members enter different phases of mourning, starting immediately with the pre-burial *aninut* stage, then the week of *shiva*, then one month since the passing (*shloshim*), up until the first anniversary or *yahrzeit*. These stages enable us to take the time to process our emotions properly and transition forward in a steady and structured way.

The Shabbat following Tisha B'Av, *Shabbat Nachamu*, is another example of this, when we move beyond the three weeks of mourning culminating in Tisha B'Av, the saddest day in the Jewish calendar.

As the world slowly and unevenly emerges from Covid-19, this transition for us as individuals, nations and the Jewish

From the ancient Beit HaMikdash in Yerushalayim to the synagogue, from the Diaspora to Israel, Jewish ritual throughout the ages, while evolving, has always relied on a physical sense of community. With the adaptability learned through the pandemic, so many Jews around the world have managed to retain elements of this sense of community even from afar, such as learning Torah through Zoom or praying in a smaller *minyan* with neighbors at a safe distance. At the same time, many have faced terrible realities such as not being able to attend in-person events; for example, I was forced to deliver my grandmother's eulogy online and others have experienced countless Shabbat services and meals alone. This is far from the face-to-face interactions upon which our tradition thrives.

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