

Dear Friends,

It's a confusing time for us all. A time that is challenging us on so many levels – ranking from basic survival instincts, practical reality - to being tested mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

We're struggling. Our lives are being upturned.

Let's take a few minutes to center ourselves amidst the chaos. Let's, together, breathe for a moment.

Let's get through this together. B'ezras Hashem.

The kids are all home and we're being asked to clean for Pesach.

The world has become unstable. How can we feel stability?

Tough questions.

But I would like to answer a different question.

Y"YH when this is all behind us, and it will be, b'ezras Hashem, **how do we want to look back at this period?** How do we want ourselves and our families to remember this time?

Can we try, despite the difficulty and amidst the noise, to find the strength to rise above the present and look into the future with an end goal in mind? It will better shape our responses and lend this ordeal more meaning. Can we let this trial bring us to deeper awareness, greater connection, more meaning, and more appreciation?

Let's support each other and hold hands while we keep our morale up.

In the post-Purim, pre-Pesach panic, let's remember **everything was planned by our Beloved Father, including the timing.**

Let's find trust in the process, and connect to our faith, even if it means digging deep.

I know for some it means crawling under the piles of Lego strewn all over the place. For some it means pausing the racing thoughts of panic obsessing our minds. But Hashem is looking at us with pride and encouragement.

Let's tap into the source of His strength and His belief in us.

We're here between Purim and Pesach, in a zone defined by women. Esther was the heroine of the Purim story and we're soon to encounter Yocheved and Miriam, who in their role as midwives, defied Paroh's decree, and saved the Jewish babies.

Two types of situations. In Mitzrayim, the enemy was clear and so was the way forward. What was needed was the courage to stand true to their convictions. This, Miriam and Yocheved demonstrated every time they cooed to a newborn, each time they swaddled sweet-smelling skin.

And what of Purim? What kind of a heroine was Esther? The feminine spirit is compared to water, mayim. The very word for water, mayim, can be broken down into Mah and yud mem. Mah – What? Plus the yud mem, which denotes plural.

Water is many whats. It defies definition. Pour water into a glass the shape of a square, and it will take on that shape. Pour it into a round bowl, and the water becomes a sphere. This characteristic—the ability to change and adapt, **the fluidity is a feminine strength.** Let's look at how it played out in the story of Esther.

In the story of Esther, there is so much uncertainty. Esther was taken to the palace of Achashverosh, to await her turn to come before him. For what end? What Heavenly purpose was this to serve? Years before Haman's genocidal plan, no one knew. Even as the story reaches a crescendo, uncertainty reigns. Mordechai urges Esther to come before the king and intervene on behalf of klal Yisrael: Who knows if it was for this hour that you became queen? Mordechai frames this as a question. It wasn't clear. Nothing was clear.

And yet, one thing was clear.

The Midrash tells us that Esther, afraid of being outed as a shomer Shabbos, employed seven maids, one for each day of the week. The maid employed on Shabbos would assume that she was seeing Esther's usual behavior and would have no idea that Esther was observing Shabbos. Esther was in an unthinkable position. She was in a prison of sensuality. And she showed the fluidity of the feminine spirit.

For years, **Esther was kept in a gilded cage, her identity a secret, with nothing but her faith to sustain her.** And what did she do? She used her feminine energy to make it work. **She adapted. She figured it out.** She used her chochmah and binah to devise a way for her to observe the mitzvos, to sustain herself, to stoke her faith.

Earlier, we find that Miriam watched over her brother Moshe. Where? By the watery banks of the Nile River. At that point, she could not avert the decree that all baby boys had to be placed in the Nile. **But in that untenable situation, she found a place where she could have an impact.**

She stood and watched over him. And she took an example from her mother Yocheved. Yes, her baby had to be put into the Nile. But who said he had to be put directly into the water? And so she fashioned a teivah—hear the echo of the teivah of Noach, which saved humanity from destruction—a basket. She covered it in tar, to make it waterproof. Within a situation of desperation and anguish, she

used her feminine spirit to cushion the decree, to do everything she could to save her child, the future *go'el* of klal Yisrael.

We're all in a situation of uncertainty. We don't know what government measures will be rolled out next. We don't know where this invisible virus will hit. The world feels like it is going mad.

Some of us are scared. Some of the people we know are in quarantine. We know people who are elderly or who have a compromised immune system. Some are being careful and some we're begging to take active steps to protect themselves. There are many, many people, particularly those in the tourist and travel industry, but really everywhere, whose *parnassa* has been virtually wiped out overnight. I know nurses and other health care workers who are daily putting themselves at risk, and who are working under impossible conditions.

And those of us who are fortunate and are not touched directly by this illness, our entire lives have been disrupted. Daycare has been curtailed or shut down entirely, leaving us scrambling for some kind of routine that includes work, childcare, Pesach prep—and sanity, somewhere in the picture..

Where does this leave us?

For one thing, we have the fluidity in how we want to make things work, for us and for our families. **We all have different answers, but we can all ask the questions:** how much news do I want to see and want my children to see? How many news updates will help me keep up to date with the latest measures, and how many will destroy my peace of mind and make my kids feel anxious? If kids are home, how can I give them one meaningful activity each day? How do I want them to look back on this? What kind of support do I need to get through this, and how can I obtain that support? What do I want to teach my children about davening? What about *shemiras halashon*?

It's hard. It's super hard. It's pushing us beyond, beyond, beyond. But wait. **We have the feminine strength of figuring this out. We can make it work, and we can make it work in a way that can leave us stronger for it.**

And we have a **fluidity in how we see the situation**. Which stories do we decide to tell ourselves? In every time of difficulty, there are stories of beauty. Here, we are hearing how, in Eretz Yisrael, chasunahs are taking place in living rooms, with neighbors dancing on their porches to join in the simchah. That's authentic joy. There are kids coming out on porches and having a kumzitz together. There are volunteers who are delivering food to those in quarantine. As women, we have a fluidity of focus. We can talk about numbers, cases, potential food shortages. Or we can talk about resilience, togetherness, and kindness.

It's up to us.

In that vein, here's our response. Let's fill ourselves and our families, with positive thoughts, small inspirations throughout the day. Over this period this forum will be used to send 5 short minutes of meaning your way, Small hugs of **bitachon, hope and empowerment**. Alongside we will be distributing printed material – practical suggestions that can benefit your family.

Let's make this a family project of strength and resilience. **Let's get through this together. B'ezras Hashem.**

Sincerely,

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