

“Gam zeh ya’avor – This too shall pass”

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Like all of you, this has been an extraordinarily difficult time for me. Having to do things differently, being stuck at home, missing giving people hugs, and not being able to see my community in person has been trying. But not even the fear of me or my loved ones getting sick, or the economy crashing has been the worst part. For me, the hardest part is the not knowing. Not knowing how long this will go on, not knowing how many people’s lives will be hurt. Not knowing, not knowing, not knowing. That for me can be crazy making.

For those of you who know me well, you know that I am a planner. It’s very hard for me to stay in the moment. Right after Purim I start thinking about what our staff can dress as next year. 48 hours after Yom Kippur, I start stressing about what I’ll talk about at the next High Holidays. When my oldest child turned 1 and was promoted to the infant room to the toddler room, I started to sob uncontrollably as I realized I only had 17 more years of him living in our house.

It’s as though I can access everyday in my calendar in my brain at all times. And not knowing what will happen, or when, that just stresses me out.

And it was in the midst of lamenting the uncertainty of our current situation that I was reminded of an old story about King Solomon, a story that has often given me comfort, and reminded me of the importance of looking at the blessings that can be found, right now, on this day, in this moment.

“It is said that King Solomon once tried to humble Benaiah ben Yehoyada, his most trusted minister. It was around Passover when he said to him, “Benaiah, there is a certain ring that I want you to bring to me. I wish to wear it for the Sukkot festival.”

Benaiah replied: "If it exists anywhere on earth, your majesty, I will find it and bring it to you, but what is so special about this ring?"

"It has special powers," answered the king. "If a happy man looks at it, he becomes sad, and if a sad man looks at it, he becomes happy."

Solomon knew that no such ring existed in the world, but he sent his minister off on this impossible task anyway.

Spring passed and then summer, and still Benaiah had no idea where he could find the ring. On the day before Sukkot, he decided to take a walk in one of the poorest quarters of Jerusalem. He passed by a merchant who had begun to set out the day's wares on a shabby carpet.

"Have you by any chance heard of a special ring that makes the happy wearer forget his joy and

the broken-hearted wearer forget his sorrows?" he asked.

He watched the elderly man take a plain gold ring from his carpet and engrave something on it. When Benaiah read the words on the ring, his face broke out in a wide smile.

That night the entire city welcomed in the festival of Sukkot with great joy.

"Well, my friend," said King Solomon, "have you found what I sent you after?" All the ministers laughed and Solomon himself smiled.

To everyone's surprise, Benaiah held up a small gold ring and declared, "Here it is, your majesty!" As soon as Solomon read the inscription, the smile vanished from his face.

The jeweler had written three Hebrew letters on the gold band: Gimel, Zayin, Yud, which begin the words "Gam zeh ya'avov - This too shall pass."

At that moment Solomon realized that all his wisdom and fabulous wealth and tremendous power were but fleeting things, for one day he would be nothing but dust." **

Perhaps it was because of this that King Solomon was inspired to write the Book of Kohelet, the Book of Ecclesiastes, the book that contains these timeless words:

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.
(Kohelet 3:1)

When we are in the middle of something, it is hard to imagine that it could ever end. Whether it is joy or sadness, it's sometimes hard to remember that life was any other way, or could be different again.

When will this end? Three weeks? Three months? Longer?

While we don't know when, we should take comfort in knowing that this too shall pass. Because the story of King Solomon reminds us that whether it is a joyous time or a sad one, there is one immutable truth – the one constant in life, is change. There is a season for everything, we don't have any power over that. We only have the power to control how we will respond to it.

When life is good, will we remember to slow down, and appreciate our blessings?

When life is difficult, will we remember to have faith that a better tomorrow is possible?

To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.

During times of uncertainty, may we find comfort from our loved ones.

During times of illness, may all who care for us be granted wisdom and insight, and the tools to bring healing.

May it be your will O God that we experience pain, loss and fear as but a fleeting moment, and that times of joy, love and good health be felt in abundance and around the world, soon, speedily and without delay.

Ken yehi ratzon - May this be God's will, Amen.

**This version of the King Solomon story is adapted from a telling of it by Rabbi Daniel Gropper.