

## The Impossible Takes a Little Longer

by Rabbi David Hartley Mark

There is no good news these days, it seems. Perhaps as a reaction to staying indoors, people have adopted the worst devil-may-care behaviors. These activities were certainly acceptable back in the days of goldfish-swallowing, phonebooth-packing, and flagpole-sitting, but today, they border dangerously on the life-threatening—not just for the practitioner, but for everyone else.

One of my favorite stories has all the nations of the world adrift in one leaky, about-to-be-swamped boat. While the boat drifts along with no apparent destination, one foolish-minded soul pulls out an old-fashioned hand drill. He begins to industriously drill on the floorboards beneath him.

“What are you doing, you idiot?” shout his fellow passengers, “You’ll sink the boat!”

“What do you care?” he retorts, “I’m only drilling beneath my seat!”

Now is the time to be thinking about the destiny of humanity, rather than looking at the overall situation and thinking, “What’s in it for me?” I was impressed by the implications of that thought when I saw an online ad for a face-mask, but not the fabled KN-95: this particular mask was covered with Swarovski crystals, and all I could think was, “I wonder how much that costs,” and an old New Yorker caption, “Some of us are willing to sacrifice comfort for style.”

I cannot be prouder of our congregants and friends, who are bearing the housebound solitude of this period with a will. Survival is key—survival for the sake of our children and friends; survival for the sake of the Jewish People; survival for the sake of humanity. I also recall a pessimistic poem by Robert Frost, “Fire and Ice” (1920), in which that brilliant but lugubrious poet discusses alternate ways in which humanity might self-destruct, long before the atomic bomb was invented. For Frost, the thing that would kill everyone was not some mysterious virus, but hatred—a burning animosity of the kind we witness in our nation, and the world, today.

To this hatred, to these feelings of doubt and distrust which many of us feel, I stoutly say, “L’Chaim”—to life. We will survive; we are wired that way. Buried in our chromosomes is a sacred code which urges us to carry on, even when current events appear at their most evil and depressing.

Finally, I am reminded of our Israeli brothers and sisters, who, faced with a similar threat to their human existence, are not complaining, not fighting with innocent tradespeople about whether to wear a mask or not: they are going about their business. I note that, months ago, when it appeared as though Israel might emerge disease-free, some Solon suggested that they open the schools. That was when the virus came back in its full force. Let that be a lesson to other misguided leaders. When Abraham was about to sacrifice his child Isaac, the Lord God sent an angel to prevent him. I doubt that that will recur; saving our children is up to us.

No: I am thinking of Israel’s first and greatest prime minister, the indomitable David Ben-Gurion, who, when asked how Israel was able to accomplish so many wondrous, almost superhuman tasks, modestly and puckishly answered, “In Israel, difficult things we do quickly. The impossible takes a little longer.” So may it be for us, and so may we triumph, in the end.