

## Parshas Chaye Sarah - 5781

An important thought occurred to me this week. Towards the end of the second *bais hamikdash* the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah* realized that the *bais hamikdash* would not be around much longer and this exile wasn't going to be for only seventy years. It was going to be for an extended period of time. One of the consequences that they faced was the cessation of *avodah*. The *mishnah* in Pirkei Avos tells us that the world stands on three pillars, *torah, avodah u'gemilus chassadim*. In the time of the *bais hamikdash* the expression of *avodah* was *korbanos*. The *kohanim* and *levi'im* offered *korbanos* on a daily basis and this fulfilled the vital role of keeping the world supported. When the *bais hamikdash* is destroyed, how will the world stand without one of the three pillars?

The *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah* came up with an amazing innovation. They instituted formal prayer. There is a debate whether there is a Biblical obligation to *daven* but even those that maintain that there is such an obligation, it was only necessary to *daven* once a day and the format was short and subjective. 1) praise Hashem, 2) ask for your needs and 3) thank Hashem. If a person could accomplish this in a sentence or two, the *mitzvah* was fulfilled. *Davening* would now have set times and a mandated text that one must say. The reason I characterize this as an amazing innovation is that they replaced one pillar with another. They switched from *avodah* being defined as *korbanos* to *avodah* being defined as *tefilla*. Redefining one of the pillars that support the world is amazingly innovative.

In some ways, I think we are facing a similar situation. As a result of the virus, one of the mainstays of our existence as religious Jews is, for many people, no longer available. Coming to shul, especially as we experience a significant uptick in cases is not an option. Sadly, we do not have the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah* to replace *davening* in shul with something else. This makes the situation even more difficult to manage. What can we do to supplement what so many of us are missing because we cannot attend shul? One of the essential pillars of our religious lives is not present and may not be present for months, if not longer *ch"v*. We are not the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah* but that does not absolve us of our responsibility to replace what is missing, even if the replacement is not the same as the original.

Coming to shul actually fulfills many different roles and aspects of our lives. The truth is that *davening* can be done even without a *minyan*. I don't want anyone to walk away thinking that *davening* with a *minyan* is not important and something that should be considered optional. It is obligatory and generally, one should make a concerted effort to *daven* with a *minyan*. However, its value does not outweigh concerns for health and well-being. At times we struggle to make a *minyan* in shul and once in a while we do not

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have a *minyán*, but I take comfort knowing that everyone is safe and sound. But *shul* isn't only about *davening*. Commentators note that the name for a *shul* in Hebrew is a *beis haknesses* – house of gathering rather than *beis tefilla* – house of prayer. If you think about it, the more correct phrase is *beis tefilla*, since it is where we go to *daven*. However, in addition to *davening*, it is where we socialize and connect with other like-minded people. It is the place where community comes together. We are individuals and our homes are where families live but the *shul* is where community comes alive and becomes a dynamic force in our lives. *Shul* is where we celebrate and mourn, *shul* is where we *daven* and learn and *shul* is where we connect together and together with Hashem.

If we find ourselves in a state in which we cannot do those things, we have to think like the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah* and figure out a replacement for those activities. *Davening* is not an activity that we can currently do together but there are many things that we can do together. Recently, we resumed the Tuesday night class and added a class on Thursday night. Two different days and two different topics to have more opportunities to learn together. Learning is something that we can continue to do together even though we are remote. Please join us for these classes. I think the people attending are enjoying them and if the times do not work into your schedule, we are recording them and sending out links so that one could watch or listen at your convenience. On Tuesdays we are exploring the 13 principles of faith to clarify what are the authentic and essential Jewish beliefs. On Thursdays we are having an interactive *halachic* discussion. So far it has been lively and engaging. If you have an idea for another class or another topic, please let me know. We are also continuing the series about untapped community resources. Our community is incredibly fortunate to have many outstanding chesed organizations that provide an incredible amount of support. If you have extra time and are looking for ways to help and contribute, please make sure to attend and learn about what opportunities are available. Do any of our creative minds have an idea or ideas for a chesed project that we can do together without having to physically gather together? Surely we can find something that we can do as a *shul* to contribute to the community or perhaps something Israel related.

Nobody wants the current state of affairs to continue but we understand that it is not in our control to put an end to it. Rather than complain and bemoan our current state, we should be searching for ways to take advantage of the time and collaborate together as a *shul*. We are so blessed with a diverse group of people who have so many different ideas, talents and interests and our task is to find a way to tap into our collective potential to contribute in a tangible way that we can point to and use as a source of

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pride. I look forward to your thoughts and ideas and then implementing those ideas into something we will all be proud of.

**This week's drosha is sponsored anonymously in appreciation for all that the Rov does for every individual and family in the community and beyond. May he and his family enjoy health and prosperity. May we all be a source of nachas for the efforts he has invested 24/7.**

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**Ralph Siegel ([ralph@siegel5.com](mailto:ralph@siegel5.com)) or Ellen Cohen ([ecohen1916@gmail.com](mailto:ecohen1916@gmail.com))**

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