

Where do we go from here? I don't know about you — but I'm running on fumes at this point. My gas light is not just illuminated, it's blinking rapidly. It's totally possible I will run out of fuel before I make it to the gas station.

What is most painful is how close we came to waking up from this horrible nightmare. Back in June, we finally docked our boats after a year and half of sailing through the COVID seas, only to now find ourselves back out and unable to even see the shoreline.

Death, sickness, storms, instability, incompetence, hypocrisy all seem to be the new normal.

So, where do we go from here? Where do we turn? How do we continue to believe and have faith that things will ultimately work out when the world seems so chaotic?

Allow me to share 3 potential ways forward:

I.

The Hassidic tradition teaches, “If you think you can fix something, fix it, and if not — don't overly concern yourself about it.” This may seem like an over simplistic attitude, but it contains a profound truth. We have agency over some aspects of our lives and have no agency in other parts. Realizing that we have a ceiling for what we can influence can be very painful. We have a tendency to think we can repair, heal, or solve everything but that is simply wishful thinking. Recognizing these limits is part of the spiritual work of this day. I want to stop racism. I want to end global warming. I want to overturn the Texas Supreme Court, but this is beyond me, it's beyond us. This doesn't mean we can't work towards perfecting these areas of life (god forbid), but perhaps given the times we need to reprioritize where we put the majority of our energy.

Rav Kook teaches that highly focused love is the most powerful.

“The highest level of love for people is the love due to the individual...It is only a person rich in love for people and a love for each individual person who can reach the love for his own nation it its noblest dimension, spiritually, and practically.”

Our focus should be directed towards relationships, to every encounter we experience with another human being. You may not alleviate all world suffering, but you could do that for one person. That is enough. Hashem built the world on kindness and it can only be sustained by kindness.

II.

The world may seem devoid of blessings and light but we need to look harder. Blessings are right in front of us. In the Torah reading today, the Torah says that “God opened Hagar’s eyes and she saw a well” meaning the water and the well were there the entire time — she simply needed to look deeper. Nachman of Bratslav said, “The world is full of the light of God, but to see it we have to learn to open our eyes.” It’s easy to say, “we are in the same place as we were last year” That is insane! We’re not in the same place. Last year we were outside in a post-apocalyptic lot sitting 6 feet apart from each other. This year, we’re sitting inside in our brand new, beautiful shul and we’re only 3 feet apart. We’re literally closer together. Last year the vaccine was just a dream, and now every adult in this room has had it. The well is there my friends, we just need to really see, not just look.

III.

Put all faith in Hashem. I like to call this the Emunah Train.

Believe in the master plan. Hashem can only be King, if we establish ourselves as His people. Our tradition has many contradictory ideas and teachings, just look at the Gemara if you don’t believe me. One thing that I can tell you for certain, those who put their faith in Hashem are ultimately rewarded.

Sarah and Hannah have a child. We also learn that Yosef was liberated from prison on RH. These events occurred because of their unwavering faith in Hashem. For the entire month of Elul, through Sukkot we say, “Were it not for my faith that I shall see the Lord’s goodness in the land of the living. Hope in the Lord. Be strong and of good courage, and hope in the lord.”

Faith is not just an idea, it’s an action. Rabbi Heschel, “Faith’s power is revealed when man is able to exercise defiance in the face of adversity.”

These are hard times. These are really hard times. We’re ultimately judged on how we confront and respond to these challenges. Do we run from them or lean into them? I love sports for these exact reasons. You get to see this play out in dramatic fashion. How does a boxer react after he gets hit hard in the face. What about a gymnast who falls down? A basketball player who can’t hit a basket. You keep shooting.

This is what makes today so special. Us gathering today in the face of everything we have experienced these last 2 years is the greatest demonstration of Faith one can show. Our mere presence is sufficient.

Hashem should bless our community with health and fulfillment.