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# The Coronavirus as a Metaphor for the Giants We Have Lost - Yated.com

10-12 minutes

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Our publisher, Rabbi Lipschutz, wrote eloquently last week about the tremendous losses we have all experienced these past few weeks.

When the *Chazon Ish* passed away, the Brisker Rov commented that “it is now a different world. Yesterday it was a world *with* the *Chazon Ish*. Today, it is a world *without* the *Chazon Ish*.”

I am sure that we have all felt that whenever we finally *do* return to “normal,” we will have already entered a new world. Even when we *do* arrive at some semblance of usualness in *shul*, school, work, camp, shopping and interpersonal relationships, some things will unfortunately not change. Until we meet them at *techiyas hameisim*, we will be lacking many incredible individuals – personally and communally – in our lives.

The *posuk* (*Shemos* 1:6) tells us, “Yosef died, and all his brothers and that entire generation.” The *Seforno* comments,

“When all the seventy original souls who went down to Mitzrayim passed away, the next generation began to deteriorate.” I remember hearing from Rav Mordechai Gifter *zt”l* (also corroborated in *Ohel Moshe, Shemos*, page 54) that even after Yaakov Avinu passed away, the *zekeinim* – the elders – kept his legacy alive. However, after they passed away as well, there was no one to halt *Klal Yisroel’s* decline into the 49 levels of defilement.

I have heard from many people who feel that we have not just lost individuals. We have lost a generation. If we properly appreciate the words of the *Seforno* as understood by Rav Gifter, we must be very careful going forward. Many of the “eyes of the congregation” are gone, and just reading some of the biographical material about the Novominsker Rebbe *zt”l*, we should indeed be terrified to be bereft of his wisdom and guidance. Of course, we should look forward to *minyanim*, *botei medrash* and the sweet sounds of multitudes learning Torah, but we should also move cautiously without so many of our *zekeinim*. To be sure, we know that every generation produces its own leaders, as needed by that era (*Rosh Hashanah* 25b), but rarely, besides the various *churbanos* of *Klal Yisroel’s* history, have so many passed away in so short a time.

I would therefore like to venture an approach to dealing with our losses that connects directly, *middah keneged middah*, to how we have been attempting to battle this particular *mageifah*.

As we know, we have been warned by all the medical

authorities to practice social distancing and avoid surface or even air contacts with whoever might be infected. This means that a virus or other dangers can linger for a long time.

It is interesting that *Chazal* have a description for the effect of a *tzaddik* on his surroundings. When Yaakov Avinu left Be'er Sheva, the Torah records where he came from and where he went. *Rashi* (*Bereishis* 28:1) famously asks why the Torah had to mention Be'er Sheva; surely all we needed to know was that he went to Choron. *Rashi* answers that "when a *tzaddik* departs from a place, he leaves an impression. At the time that a *tzaddik* is in a city, he is its magnificence, he is its splendor, he is its grandeur. Once he has departed from there, its magnificence has gone away, its splendor has gone away, and its grandeur has gone away." Even children know this *Rashi*, but we are now living it every day.

Let us think for a moment. The *harchakos* the medical experts have taught us illustrate that when something evil and destructive has been in the air and on surfaces, it does not leave so easily. We have been wearing masks and gloves to avoid this danger. But *Chazal* teach us that *middah tovah merubah*, the concomitant good is always better than the evil (*Sotah* 11a). Therefore, this is the time to study the lessons of those we have lost, for their *kedusha* and guidance, their example and their *middos*, are available for absorption by spiritual osmosis, as long as we are willing to make the effort. Indeed, the Kosover Rebbe (*Mayanah Shel Torah, Vayeitzei*) stresses that the propitious time to seize the *roshem* – the impression – the *tzaddik* has made is just after his departure.

He likens this to the fact that a flame flares up just before it is extinguished.

I am just going to attempt to derive the tiniest amount of greatness from some of the recent *niftorim* whom I knew. Some were more well-known than others, but all left behind a profound *roshem* upon all who came into contact with them. In a time when we cannot make any physical contact at all, it may actually be easier to connect spiritually and to someone's essence.

I will begin with Dr. Marvin Schick. Please forgive me for referring to him as Marvin, for that is what he wanted to be called and how I referred to him for over 40 years. I worked for and with him in R.J.J., the Rabbi Jacob Joseph School of Staten Island, where I was the *menahel* and he was the president. In truth, in the early transitional years from the famed *yeshiva* on Henry Street on the Lower East Side, I got to see Marvin in his glory, shaping *chinuch* and Torah in America. Although he later impacted *Klal Yisroel* in many ways, through his founding of COLPA and leadership of the Avi Chai Foundation, his first and lifelong love was R.J.J. Always following the guidance that he had received long ago from Rav Aharon Kotler *zt"l*, he made sure that everything was done *al taharas hakodesh*. He always made sure that each *rebbe* and the pre-school *moros* had all the proper *hashkafos* and loved what they were doing. His dedication to R.J.J. and *chinuch* in general was such that absolutely no one could criticize him for demanding more than he demanded of himself. I actually looked forward to his annual fundraising letter for R.J.J. even

after I had moved on to *rabbonus*. He personalized every note with special regards to my *rebbetzin*, who used to work for him as a pre-school *morah*. He was always unfailingly kind, generous in praise, and blunt when he felt criticism was in order.

The *roshem* Marvin left was of a man totally devoted to the *klal*. To my knowledge, he never drove a car or owned a home, although he could have made millions for himself. His personal *tzedakah* was high above the *maasar* line and he supported many *mosdos* that were competitive with his own. Eventually, Marvin founded four distinct *yeshivos* in Staten Island, each according to the needs of that particular community and level of religiosity.

One lesson I learned and believe we can all learn from Dr. Marvin Schick is to always expand one's horizons. The point is to accomplish, not to receive credit. The goal is to change the world for the better and not worry about pettiness or trivialities. He was a truly a giant and I suspect we will all discover even more of his accomplishments for Torah and *Klal Yisroel*.

I did not know Noach Dear as well, but I admired and respected him greatly. One of his colleague *frum* judges told me just after his *petirah* that "Noach lived to do *chesed*." Indeed, I personally benefitted from his adherence to the *posuk* of "*olam chesed yibaneh*" in a unique way. I was scheduled to spend a week in Eretz Yisroel lecturing at Ohr Somayach, when I realized that my passport had expired. To make matters much worse, I was born in Germany and so had no valid birth

certificate or any acceptable paperwork. It was the day I was scheduled to leave and the passport office had just closed. I was ready to give up.

Noach Dear to the rescue.

Apparently, Vice President Al Gore was in town. Noach called him and the office opened once again. “Why, I didn’t know y’all know the vice president,” the impressed young man greeted me. I received my passport, with a wonderful 6 minutes to spare. I later heard from friends that this was just a typical day for the judge.

There are indeed people who *do chesed* and there are those who live it. Noach’s *roshem* upon us was that one doesn’t have to bifurcate his life into the religious and the professional part. Hashem gives us abilities, opportunities and tests to see if we really mean to live what my *rebbe*, Rav Yitzchok Hutner *zt”l*, called “a broad life.” Noach Dear lived such a life, indeed.

Rav Label Katz *zt”l* was a *posek* and a *tzaddik*, but I learned a lesson from him that I would like to share at this sad but special time. I took *chosson* classes with him, which I have in turn passed along to many others. However, at the end of every series of *chassanim*, he taught us how to put on a *tallis*. Surely, it wasn’t part of the curriculum or required for a busy *posek*, *rov* and *rosh yeshiva*. But Rav Katz taught us by example that above all, you must be clear and practical. Who else is going to teach a young man getting married how to put on a *tallis*? Perhaps some fathers will, but just in case, Rav Label made sure that we were all ready for that first *Shacharis*. He left an

indelible *roshem* for which I will be forever grateful.

Rabbi Chaim Dahan *zt"l* combined talents that don't always coexist. He was a beloved pre-1-A *rebbe*, but also a popular *maggid shiur* for Torah Anytime. A Telzer *talmid* to the core, he could also sing his traditional *Sephardi* liturgy so that even a nearly tone-deaf *Litvak* like myself could follow and be uplifted. Rav Chaim made a *roshem* on me and my family about how much a person can accomplish in so many ways. It didn't matter to him what the age of listeners were. What mattered was the depth of their perception and how much they could grow from *shiurim* and *davening*.

Finally, I will miss my dear friend and colleague, Rav Shlomo Elozor Wulliger. We spent approximately the past 20 years sharing the podium at the Meisner *Pesach* Program. Honestly, "I went to teach and I came away learning." Rav Wulliger was a *rov*, social worker, therapist and much more. He was a *chossid* of not one *rebbe*, but of many, and became close to them all. When a family of developmentally disabled boys lost their father, he made sure to provide them with fatherly guidance and attention. A *rov* in many *shuls* throughout the United States, he was also at home in *shtieblech* and *yeshivos* all over. He made a *roshem* on all who heard him that one can combine *chassidus* with professionalism, wit and reason, and down-to-earth advice, and adapt our ancient Torah to the modern world. He made a *roshem* that said, "Don't be *metzamtzeim* yourself. Don't accept limitations."

May all the lofty *neshamos* who have recently left this world

have an *aliyah* through our learning from them and  
perpetuating the *roshem* they left behind.