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I'm not a doctor, but I am a rabbi. Here's my spiritual prescription for the coronavirus. - Jewish Telegraphic Agency

Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz

10-12 minutes

PHOENIX ([JTA](https://www.jta.org)) — I am not a medical professional, an epidemiologist or an expert on pandemics. I leave the serious information in those important fields for the professionals who have the appropriate training to help us get through the coronavirus epidemic.

Even though I do not possess medical knowledge, as a rabbi and social activist, I believe I can try to humbly prescribe ethical vaccines that can remedy jilted nerves and worried minds. My words are not meant to heal physically but to inspire spiritually.

At this challenging time, it seems appropriate that those in the positions to (re)build confidence should do so. In that spirit, I am sharing thoughts on how we might be able to spiritually cope with the uncertain reality that has rapidly spread throughout the world. The coronavirus is not only a disease of

the body, but also presents an existential crisis that has put governments, businesses and, most important, communities and individuals on edge.

[I pray](#) that we can get through it all. People are scared — and rightly so. We are truly living in an [era of plague](#); we are largely unprepared. Communities throughout the world have been caught off-guard by the virus' potent potential for wanton havoc and daily disruption.

But hope can't be lost. At this moment, we want to protect ourselves and our families; this is human nature. From a Jewish perspective, from a social justice perspective, from a human perspective, we cannot descend into pointed tribalism at a time when we must come together as a collective of mind and soul. The coronavirus is a huge burden placed on humanity, but one that can be handled through shared action, compassion and a desire to see this disease contained before more lives are needlessly lost.

As I reflected inward about how the coronavirus is affecting the world, I thought about soul remedies that could help guide us — in the Jewish community and beyond — through this arduous ordeal and into a brighter tomorrow. Here's my six-part prescription for getting through this crisis with our souls intact.

1. There is no value in placing blame.

We are already seeing our worst impulses play out in this crisis. Because the present strain of coronavirus originated in China, some are blaming “the Chinese” or even all Asians for the

outbreak, which is absurd and hateful. And then there are community leaders such as an ultra-Orthodox rabbi who [bizarrely blamed](#) the LGBTQ community for spreading the disease. These are the wrong reactions: Whatever we do, we cannot fall into the trap of blame. Blame harms more than it helps; it is myopic and never leads to practical solutions. Of course, we must hold reckless public officials accountable if they neglect public welfare, but this is different from directing baseless blame at large populations. Rather than join the blaming team, we should join the helping team.

There are times where we cannot help as much as we'd like, but we can still do as much as we can from a distance. We must simply adjust our mindset to think about how we can all effectively work together with the help of experts to deal with the task at hand.

2. Be afraid.

Yes, this must sound like unusual advice in a time of pandemic. But we must be skeptical of those in office who say "Everything is fine. Stop panicking and live your life!" It is a natural human emotion to be afraid of the unknown and the uncertain. We live in times where every day's events constitute a reminder that we cannot control the world as much as we might want. Politically, culturally and spiritually, the world is experiencing levels of disequilibrium that are difficult to endure. It would seem then that, rationally, we should live in fear of what tomorrow may bring. Rather than denying that human impulse to have fear in the face of serious risks, we can channel that fear productively.

Hold the fear. Hold your love ones close. But don't be held motionless — physically, emotionally or spiritually — by this disease. Feel it but own it, refine it, control it. Use it. We need to react boldly to situations such as the one that challenges us right now and with the clarity of mind that tells us that fear should inspire us to be courageous; troubling times calls for passionate and resolute leadership. Our fear can inspire us to hold one another even closer and with deeper resolve.

3. Wipe out evil.

In the Jewish tradition, the nation of Amalek is synonymous with the worst evil imaginable. The Amalekites saw the most vulnerable among the Israelites and instead of helping them, pursued and killed them, targeting in particular the weakest among the weak. The Torah records the deeds of the Amalekites and their actions, juxtaposing the meekness of the Jewish people with the pure cruelty of the nation of Amalek. We are commanded to vanquish Amalek and eliminate its memory from this world. The coronavirus — the disease itself! — is Amalek-like since it appears to have the most serious consequences for some of the most vulnerable among us, the elderly and the immunocompromised. By protecting and supporting the most vulnerable people around the world, we have the ability to live up to the commandment to wipe out Amalek once more.

As tensions among communities may run high, we must learn again the lessons of interdependence: The coronavirus demonstrates the profound ignorance of the belief that we keep

ourselves “safe” by building walls to separate us from our neighbors and by locking up immigrants at the border. In a world as interconnected as ours, we keep ourselves safe by respecting the truths revealed by science, by cooperating and working together within and among nations, by caring for the most vulnerable among us, and by creating a society that keeps as many of us as possible healthy and financially secure. In a world so focused on “us vs. them,” the coronavirus reminds us that in a profound sense, there is only us.

The only sane path forward is more compassion, more justice, and more humility about the degree to which we need each other.

4. Embrace a sabbatical.

One of Judaism’s great gifts to the world is the idea of the Sabbath, the sacred break from the labors of the week. But the Sabbath is more than lounging around with nothing to do. It’s about renewal and the need to nourish the soul through extra time to study. One of the side effects of the coronavirus might be the ability for those who need to stay home to use that time away from the workplace or the outside world productively. Some folks need to show up at work, travel and go about business as usual. But to the extent that one can, it will be vital to care of yourself and those that you love. Through the gift of physical and spiritual rest, we may experience breakthroughs that will allow our society to manage this disease more effectively.

5. Be gentle.

Always be gentle with others. Everyone is doing the best they can. Human beings are fundamentally frail. To compensate for uncertainty and imperfection in this moment, some people will act out with pure hubris. But this hubris hides vulnerability and pain. We do not know what others go through on a daily basis.

The coronavirus may give us the ability to realize that humility in the face of great challenge can be a factor leading us toward communal healing. To be under quarantine, as whole countries are essentially imposing at this point, cannot be a pleasant feeling. It's isolating and humiliating. To be gentle also means to be empathetic to those who find themselves cut off from society. This disease has upended routines all over the world. We can be understanding of how it has ruined the daily lives of people who only want to support themselves and their families. This universal reality brings us together rather than tearing us apart. Let us have the strength to be understanding and kind in this time of great tumult.

6. Love is contagious, too.

The coronavirus is highly contagious, but so are the actions we can take inspired by love and joy. We are reminded yet again of the total interconnectedness of all life on this planet. The amazing phenomenon of life and its parallel humbling frailty can inspire wonder and deeper empathy. While, of course, we must heed medical experts to undertake precautionary measures to avoid the spread of the virus, we can also do our

best to spread happiness and positivity, international cooperation and a positive attitude to help quell this virus.

To give up on the better angels of our nature is akin to defeat. At the least, to acknowledge people's good intentions and engage others out of love rather than fear are ways to help defeat the trials put before us by the coronavirus. Spread love, spread warmth, spread optimism. The times may seem bleak, but we can all do our part to ensure that a brighter tomorrow is around the corner.

Friends, this is a difficult time for all. No one has been spared from the effects of the coronavirus. Not all of us will be infected by the virus, but we are already affected. There is no denying that the global attention to this ailment has radically shifted the world's power landscape indefinitely. But, for a moment, looking past these macro-effects can offer an opportunity to consider how each of us, at an individual level, can be spiritually renewed in our collective efforts to halt this disease and get through this moment.



is the President & Dean of the Valley Beit Midrash (Jewish pluralistic adult learning & leadership), the Founder & President of Uri L'Tzedek (Orthodox Social Justice), the Founder and CEO of Shamayim (Jewish animal advocacy), the Founder and

President of YATOM, (Jewish foster and adoption network), and the author of seventeen books on Jewish ethics. The opinions expressed here represent the author's and do not represent any organizations he is affiliated with.

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