

| PERSPECTIVE |

ALONE WE SIT

By **Rabbi Aaron Lopiansky** | MARCH 18, 2020

I am alone, you suddenly realize. Who am I? Do I have a self, apart from society?

For anyone who learned in a yeshivah, this is Rav Chaim's famous formulation for appropriately approaching Torah. If this is the appropriate approach for halachah, it is certainly the approach for our perspective on Hashem's hashgachah.



The problem is that as we try to make some sense of the coronavirus threat, even "what" is confoundingly difficult to evaluate. Are we witnessing a fleeting nightmare, which, while frightening, will soon blow over and fade from memory? Will the virus's toll on human life be comparable to the typical seasonal flu — or will it chas v'shalom morph into a huge health crisis?

Will the economic ramifications be limited to a temporary dip in profits, swiftly compensated by a rebounding economy? Or will we witness a cascade of economic dominoes falling down, burying us under another long recession?

We don't know, and it will be a while until we really know. But there is a "what" that we must ponder, and that "what" is the emotion that we all have experienced to some degree in the wake of this virus: the emotion of bedidus, solitude.

From the people who are actually quarantined because they have contracted the disease, to the high-risk population that is totally homebound, to the shuls that have been closed down, to the streets that are desolate — bedidus has descended upon us. In this day and age when everything and everyone is typically caught up in the hustle and bustle of life, solitude is an eerie and disconcerting feeling.

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When we go to shul, we hop onto the tzibbur's bandwagon. If the tzibbur is warm and the chazzan inspiring, we feel we have davened well. But now, locked out of shul, it is just me and Hashem — and all the time in the world. What does my solitary davening feel like? Is the tzibbur merely enhancing my davening, or are "they" the ones davening and I'm hitching along for a ride? After all, davening is and always is primarily a personal relationship with Hashem.

And what is our Shabbos like without the crowd's hustle and bustle? Can I personally feel "Shabbosdig," or am I dependent on everyone around me to create my Shabbos for me?

And what about my core relationships. Do I look forward to spending time with my spouse? And is the interaction with my children meaningful to me?

This year many of us will have to make Pesach ourselves for the first time in a long time. True, it will be hard work. But past the apprehension, are we also anticipating the beauty of Pesach? Or has our sense of Pesach become totally identified with the "getaway"?

There is much to ponder, and HaKadosh Baruch Hu seems to be giving us much time to ponder. Maybe this enforced solitude will give all of us a chance to discover ourselves, our spouses and children, and above all, the Ribbono shel Olam.

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Rav Lopiansky has authored several seforim, including the recently released Orchos Chaim, Ben Torah for Life.

(Originally featured in Mishpacha, Issue 803)

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