Kveller

The Jewish Way to Survive the Coronavirus

By Yvette Alt Miller Mar 3, 2020

"Don't go to Costco," a friend warned on Facebook. "Lines out the door, no bottled water, toilet paper, or paper towels left!"

Another friend told of seeing a toddler sobbing while sitting in a grocery store shopping cart, wailing that "Mommy said we'll all die of 'coco virus'" unless she stocked up on dry goods.

This scene isn't only playing out at my local Chicago stores: Across the U.S., foods, cleaning supplies, paper goods, and the like are in short supply as people hoard supplies in fear of a major coronavirus outbreak. *The New York Times* recently reported that hand sanitizer was virtually unavailable in most New York area stores, as some panicked shoppers hoarded this crucial supply. Face masks, too, are unavailable in many places worldwide, also due to hoarding by some consumers.

It's disconcerting to see people panic in this way. Stocking up on essentials in case one faces two weeks of quarantine (the time it takes for Covid-19 symptoms to emerge) is sensible, but some consumers seem to be taking this advice to the extreme, fitting out their homes for months of self-sufficiency if the (unlikely) need should arise. In some quarters, there seems to be an "us against the world" feeling, with some people seemingly fearing that basic services and utilities — running water, health care services, even electricity — might come to an end as the virus spreads, and stocking up the necessary supplies accordingly.

However, according to the experts, hoarding and turning inward is the very opposite of what we should be doing right now. The U.S.'s Center for Disease Control (CDC), for instance, recently released a list of ways to prepare for Covid-19 becoming more widespread — and building trust and community, and thinking of others, are central in fighting this new disease.

"Get to know your neighbors," the CDC suggests; doing so can help us watch out for each other and share resources if need be. Now is the time for building contacts, including sharing phone numbers and creating ways to easily keep in touch to monitor vulnerable people in our community, and to give ourselves more resources if the need should arise. Rather than turning inward, reaching out to others — even if it's just through emails or phone calls — can help provide vital sources of information, and help us identify neighbors and friends who might be sick and need help.

As it happens, the Jewish community, as a whole, has lived by these principles for thousands of years. Throughout history, people have often noted how the Jewish people have survived and thrived for so many millennia, even while other ancient nations disappeared from the historical scene. One key to Jewish resilience has always been our community: We've always lived among our fellow Jews and looked out for one another's well being. We've long recognized that we're strongest when we stand together, helping and supporting each other.

That spirit of community has allowed us to thrive, and today is no exception. God willing, we'll get Covid-19 under control soon. When we do, it will be in large part because even in this difficult time, we refuse to close ourselves off from others and only care about what happens inside our own homes. In order to contain Covid-19, we also have to think of others.

Practicing personal hygiene is crucial in slowing the spread of Covid-19 — and other diseases, too. Israel's Ministry of Health has issued the common-sense advice to "clean your hands often by washing them with soap and water or using an alcohol-based sanitizer, clean hands especially after coughing and sneezing…." Yet personal hygiene doesn't only extend to ourselves: A crucial part of slowing the virus' spread is staying home when we're sick. "Stay home when you are sick, except to get medical care," the CDC has advised.

Despite this strong advice, I have seen people flouting this common sense advice all around me. It's still flu season, and everywhere I go I seem to observe people hacking and coughing, all going about their daily business. It's not only me: I've heard from people across the country who've also been complaining that, a time when sick people are being advised to stay home, not everyone seems to be heeding this call.

Going out when you're sick is inconsiderate at the best of times, but now with the threat of Covid-19 getting us all worried, surely we should heed health care professionals' advice and stay home when ill. Even if what we are suffering from is just a cold, going out when we're symptomatic can increase the burden on a health system that might soon have to deal with Covid-19. "Of course, if you yourself have any illness (cold or flu!), don't sneeze or cough on people!" observes Zeynep Tufekci, a professor at the University of North Carolina, noting that the more people get sick and need medical resources for the flu and other common ailments, the more strained our medical system will be in dealing with Covid-19.

I recently asked a friend who has a terrible cold yet has been going to work and running errands why she didn't just stay home, particularly in light of current advice not to venture out when ill. "It's just not practical," she replied. I get it: It's inconvenient not to soldier on even when we're sick, but these are not ordinary times. When so many of us are taking extraordinary precautions to prepare for a potential Covid-19 outbreak in our areas, let's not limit our preparations to what's going on only in our own homes. Let's extend the same concern to others. That means reaching out and monitoring our neighbors to see if they need help. That means staying indoors even when we're sick, even if it's inconvenient. That means being concerned with our neighbors and others, not only with ourselves and our immediate families.

So let's put the recommendations of the CDC and other health organizations in place. That means stocking up on essential medicines and some basic goods but not hoarding items that we have no use for. That means not panicking our children nor ourselves, since panicked people rarely think straight and

aren't as effective in following common sense advice. It means practicing personal hygiene in our homes, and also not venturing out when we're sick. That means taking care of ourselves, and others.

Two thousand years ago, the Jewish sage Hillel asked, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, who am I?" (Pirkei Avot, 1:14) Each of us is obligated to take care of ourselves and those nearest to us, but we also need to make sure that we don't veer into selfishness, and that we work to protect other people's wellbeing, too. Let's resist the temptation to turn inward and only think of ourselves. Let's respond to the new Covid-19 virus in a way that we can look back on one day with pride, knowing that we faced this challenge with grace, a touch of Yiddishkeit, and a concern for the wellbeing of ourselves *and* others.

For more recommendations on minimizing the threat and spread of Covid-19, please see this guideline on preventing community spread and this guideline on prepping your household.

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