ITS OK TO CRY
RABBI DAN MOSKOVITZ
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Yesterday I cried in my car.

You shouldn't worry - I was parked at the time.

I share this not for sympathy or even empathy – I know that I have both and I feel your support. I share this because, these are harrowing times, we all feel the tremendous weight of worry:

- for ourselves, if we are relatively young, we know the vast majority of cases are mild to moderate, but some aren't.
    - If we are older the danger increases with age, though interesting to me I have found amongst many of our elders a rationalism and calm that if I wasn't freaking out so much worrying about them I would take comfort in.
- for our aged parents, if we still have them and for some compounded worry that they are beyond our reach in other cities or countries
- for our children – as normalcy evaporates. I told my children the other night as we cancelled plans for our son's birthday party at the movies that they will tell their own children how they survived the Pandemic of 2020. And they will, the vast, vast majority of all of us, even the aged will survive this – but we will be forever changed by it – I hope for the better.
- for our city and country as it attempts to 'flatten the curve'. I long for the days when that phrase was most often rendered in my head as I looked in the mirror at my belly or hips.
- I'd say that I worry for our world as this pandemic is truly global, but the sweep of this virus is so vast that I can't wrap my head around the whole world experiencing this crisis all at once.
    - If ever an example was given that there are no true borders that what happens here effects people over there and visaversa – this is an example.
        - Refugee Crises
        - Climate Change
        - Economic Disparity
        - And now a Pandemic – we are all connected. There are no Chinese COVID-19 victims, or Italian, or Israeli, or Iranian or American or Canadian – there are just people living in different parts of the world all with the same fears, uncertainty, worry and prayers for healing. Just people, just human beings – there is NOTHING so different about any of us, except perhaps age, which

> is only a matter of time that it protects any of us more than the rest of us.

That's why I cried in my car, and I share it with you because I learned from that cathartic cry that it is ok to be scared, its ok to cry. Not because I did it, and I don't want to be the only one crying in my car, where the kids can't see me but because I felt a lot better after – and you might too.

There was a cartoon that was being passed around on the internet, I guess we call that a meme. It was of a couple looking at their computer and the caption was as the man turned to his wife over her shoulder, "That's funny all of my friends on Facebook, who last month were constitutional law experts are now epidemiologists."

I thought it was funny.

I know very little about the science of all of this – though I am trying to keep up, and Dr Henry and our congregant Dr Patty Daly and their teams are incredible in their competence and expertise. But I know almost nothing about science that is helpful here.

What I would like to offer, what I think might be of help is the power of prayer. Not to change God, not to change the course of this virus. As I wrote in my letter to the congregation, though this is a natural evil, I do not think it is punishment from God or within God's control. My faith doesn't work like that.

I want to suggest and teach for a moment the power of prayer not to change God, but to change each of us.

Sarah Hurwitz, writes in her book "Here All Along" – which I am sure many of you are tired of hearing me praise and talk about. She describes a form of chassid prayer called Hitbodedut. The word, which sounds a bit like the last name of one of the former democratic candidates for president refers to a practice of self-secluded Jewish meditation popularized by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810).

The practice as he taught is an unstructured, spontaneous and individualized form of prayer and meditation through which each individual establishes a close, personal relationship with God through a free flowing monologue. Where some people go out into the woods and make a primal scream, Jews, at least Jews who are students of this practice go out into the woods and kvetch.

Not only kvetch, but thank, and question and plead and wonder and acknowledge, outload without stopping to think or formulate your thoughts. You just talk to God. It's a stream of consciousness practice that takes some practices, but like the cry in my car, it can be incredibly cathartic and remarkably revealing of your inner thoughts and feelings.

Its not unlike the famous Jewish folk story of the young uneducated shepherd who comes to the synagogue to pray. Not knowing the prayers of the established liturgy, he sits in the back row and sings the alphabet over and over again (maybe he was also washing his hands?). The men of the synagogue confront him: “Why do you disturb our prayers with your gibberish?”

The boy explains, “I don’t know the prayer. But I wish to thank God for my sheep and the stream, for the warmth of the sun and the silver moon that keeps me company when I sleep. I am the alphabet and surely God can put the letters in the correct order to make the prayers.”

In this worrying and frightening time, give voice, actual voice to your thoughts and feelings, your fears and your anxieties. Not to change God, not to stop the virus, but to change yourself. To give you insight and courage, and patience and perspective and confidence and hope and calm and gratitude. In doing so you might just find your prayers, not those in this book (or on that screen) but the prayers that are deep in your soul. Go out into the woods, they tell us the virus in not as communicable outside, and talk to God.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught:

“Those who honestly search, those who yearn and fail, we did not presume to judge. Let them pray to be able to pray, and if they do not succeed, if they have no tears to shed, let them yearn for tears, let them try to discover their heart and let them take strength from the certainty that this too is a high form of prayer.”

Talk to God, Cry to God, be silent with God, it’s all prayer, and it all helps. I know it is helping me; I pray that it will help you.