YOU'RE GONNA MISS THIS
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz
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Among the many challenges of this pandemic has been an inability to imagine how it will end? For 8 months it's been hard, if not impossible to imagine how we get out of this; when we can take our masks off, when we can hug again, travel again, breathe easy again.

All of that changed a few weeks ago when the first reports of the successful stage three trials of the vaccines were breaking news. For the first time in a long time, I allowed myself to imagine the world as it one day might me; I gave my spirit permission to hope. Each day as the news of COVID cases, hospitalizations and deaths continues to break alarming records and bring unimaginable suffering and sadness; I have been comforted by the very possible reality that this will end, that we not only see the light at the end of the tunnel but will one day maybe in the next 6-9 months bask in its warmth and glow.

As I contemplate life after all of this three thoughts consume me and weigh heavy on my soul.

1. What am I looking forward to doing again that I have not been able to do in this pandemic?
2. What will I continue not to do as a matter of choice that the pandemic imposed upon be as a matter of obligation?
3. What am I going to miss about this period of time?

I think we have all spent a lot of time contemplating the first and second question, but maybe no time or not enough time on the last one first; when you're in the midst of a crisis its unthinkable to contemplate what you will miss about it; kinda defeats the definition crisis if you long for it not to end.

Don't get me wrong I very much want this pandemic to end; but there are things about it am going to miss and things I realize now I am running out of time to accomplish or achieve before life returns to what used to pass for normal.

Tonight as we sit on the cusp of a New Year, as we bask in the glow of if not the light at the end of the tunnel then at least the hanukkah lights that remind us too of the miracle of our people's survival against great odds I want to dwell on this question. What am I going to miss about the great COVID Pandemic of 2020?

I will tell you this, it's not nothing.

Our family entered into our social isolation and physical distancing like I know a lot of you did. We embraced it, leaned into it, what choice did we have? Even with its hardships and challenges we found things that we appreciated. Time with those we lived with and loved. A slowing down of life and outside obligations. We couldn't run from place to place, activity to

activity, appointment to appointment; no one could we were all home and for me; I had never really been home before.

I used to describe my work as a 9-5 job with colleagues and a 5-9 job working with volunteers. Then on the weekends I'd try to blend both worlds into something holy and transformative.

My work during the pandemic was different, I'd wake up and my commute was 2 flights of stairs and about 15" to my home office, where I am leading services from now. A traffic jam was getting past the dog in the hallway. I've worked non-stop, like many of you. I had terrible work life boundaries to begin with and COVID has exploited that to what I know is an unsustainable level.

BUT – when I was done for the day, or at least for the moment, I was already home; if my kids needed it me for homework or wanted to play, I wasn't at the office I was in the next room and zoom has both a mute button and an end meeting button. I'll probably miss those more than I can imagine right now.

When I was growing up in the 1970s and 80s I would ask my parents and grandparents, "what was it like in the during the war?" They would speak of air raid drills, blackout blinds, rationing butter, sugar, rubber. My dad remembers his last piece of chewing gum. My mom remembers uncles going off to war in uniform and some not coming back.

We will remember this time too. Children and grandchildren not yet born will ask those who are, who lived through it, "what did you do during the COVID Pandemic of 2020?" Their answers will change as we get further from this period, history is always written by the survivors and remembered imprecisely. But they will remember, and stories will be passed down. What lessons will be discerned and learned from them?

I am sure they will tell of the trauma of online learning in its infancy. The horror of zoom and MS teams last April & May when our children tried to do school on zoom and we tried to be parent, teacher, employee and tech support all at the same time.

I hope we will honour and remember all of those that worked so hard to protect us, those who died from this virus and those whose lives have been forever changed by the illness and the loss.

I hope that when we speak of this time we will retell how during the crisis, there was a huge wave of solidarity that arose in the society. People were sewing facemasks, cheering medical staff, and helping elderlies with shopping.

They might remember baking bread, meals together three times a day, scheduled zoom calls with family, walks, bike rides and camping. Our family will remember the great 30 day RV trip of 2020. We went, we saw, we survived – at times even without wifi. If we made a shirt that's what it would say.

But they and all of us will also remember, wearing masks and those that fought against them. We will remember the scarcity of hand sanitizer and making our own. That we learned what PPE was, why its important and ponder a supply chain that doesn't make it domestically. We will tell stories of wiping down our cereal boxes and not hugging family or friends. We will speak incredulously of Zoom bar mitzvah and funerals, flattening the curve, experiencing the surge. Testing and isolating, hoarding toilet paper, searching for yeast, line ups for grocery stores and Starbucks and all the other *mishigas* that happened in 2020 in the midst of a Global Pandemic.

But in the midst of all the remembering; which you can only do when you think you are closer to the end than you are to the beginning as maybe we are now; will there also be regret? Missed opportunities, time not taken, goal attempted or achieved?

Some people used the pandemic to get really physically fit – I was not one of them. Others wrote that novel they had always been planning but never had the time. They had the time, and they took it. Some organized their homes, make scrapbooks, created works of art and music. Some losing a job or not being able to do their job as they always had with travel and endless meetings found new callings and occupations. Some found purpose and meaning.

But for some of us the books we intended to read have just piled up on our bedside table. The gym shoes are still in their box, the crafting materials we ordered online and planned to learn how to use never got passed reading the directions. If we are lucky, we have 4-6 months left of this pause and isolation, then the vaccines will be in wide distribution and even if we haven't gotten our jab yet, G-d willing enough will that life will come inching back.

If we are lucky? Or will we think that unlucky, unfortunate? Pandemics like this happen every hundred years or so; it should never happen again in our lifetime.

So, the question hangs; did you make the most of your pandemic?

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, taught that our lives derive their ultimate value and sense of purpose not necessarily by what receives most of our time, but what commands our deepest commitment.

To what are you committed to? If all of this is going to if not end, at least dramatically change what do you want to make of the pandemic time that you have left? We may never be home as much as we have been, be as close to those in our homes and as far from those outside of them. Expectations placed upon us by others, by ourselves have been adjusted for life during COVID; those will change too; COVID will one day no longer be the excuse – but if we truly reflect on the experience and the lessons learned we might be able to make it the reason in a good way for what we have committed ourselves to when it all behind us.