

## Shabbat HaGadol Message from Hazzan Vogel

Entering into Shabbat HaGadol, the final Shabbat before Pesah, the news of the spread of coronavirus across the globe has gotten increasingly grim. In place of anticipating a joyous celebration with our family and friends next week, we are, instead, literally feeling the sense of descent into the dark and narrow straights of Mitzra'im. Each day has brought us greater limitations on our movements, restrictions on our freedoms and a sense of lack of control over our lives. The passage of the Haggadah "B'chol Dor Vador" – in every generation we must see ourselves as if we had *personally* gone out from Mitzra'im, has never seemed so real.

Dealing with our fears, fears for the safety and well-being of ourselves and for our loved ones is *real*. We are relying on every possible coping mechanism that we have. Meditation, yoga, spiritual reflection, prayer, music, humor and human connection have been invited into our lives.

My message to you for this Shabbat is in the form of a song. It derives from a teaching of the great Hassidic Rebbe Nachman of Bratslav.

*Kol ha-olam kulo gesher tzar m'od v'ha-ikkar lo l'faheid k'lal.*

"The whole world is a narrow bridge, and the essential thing is not to fear at all."

But there is something disturbing about these lyrics. Is it really possible to not fear? Isn't some fear justified – healthy in fact? How could the Israelites not have feared on their journey fleeing Egypt? Don't our fears make us more careful in times of existential threat – during a pandemic?

I learned something about this song this week. What Rebbe Nachman actually said was something different. The official translation of his teaching is: "Know that when a person needs to cross an exceedingly

narrow bridge, the general rule and the fundamental principle is that one should not frighten oneself at all.”

Not to frighten yourself – this narrow bridge of life that we travel, is actually, at all times quite daunting, fraught with risk and danger. Rebbe Nachman, one writer has said, would have approved of FDR’s words, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself – nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”

Rebbe Nachman concludes this passage, “You should understand the power of encouraging yourself, and never yield to despair, God forbid, no matter what happens. The main thing is always to be happy, to gladden yourself in any way possible.”

From studying Rebbe Nachman’s life we know that he was well acquainted with despair and depression, and yet he taught his followers to hope and to sing.

Rabbi David Wolpe writes, “The world is a bridge on which we pass from one thing to another. There is no stability. Each new place, new change, creates fear. Rebbe Nachman did not compare the world to a field on which we might rest, but to a bridge, the symbol of passage, of journeying. And the secret is not to find a safe place, but to navigate the narrow crossing and remain unafraid.”

I pray that sometime in the next few weeks or months that we will *all* come out of this *Mitzra’im* – the *Mitzra’im* that *our* generation is facing. I pray that by whatever means we can, that we will stay strong and not succumb to fear.

[Please sing with me.](#)