

The background image shows the interior of a modern synagogue. The space is bright and airy, with a high ceiling and large, arched stained glass windows on the walls. The windows feature abstract designs in shades of blue, yellow, and orange. In the center, there is a small altar with a white cloth and a sign that reads "תורה צוה לנו משה מורשת יעקב" (Torah, which we were given, Moses, our inheritance, Jacob). The pews are made of light-colored wood and are arranged in a U-shape, facing the altar. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and contemplative.

Rabbi Yehuda Halpert

Speaking to an
**Empty
Shul**

Timeless Lessons
from Unprecedented
Times

Preface

ON WEDNESDAY NIGHT, MARCH 11, 2020, following a lengthy, intense, and contentious meeting involving the rabbis of the Rabbinical Council of Bergen County (the RCBC), the presidents and lay leadership of the community shuls (synagogues), the principals of the day schools and high schools, and representatives of local government and medical institutions, an unprecedented decision was made that “out of an abundance of caution,” Jewish communal life in Bergen County would shut down.¹ Effective Friday morning, March 13, 2020, yeshiva high schools and day schools would remain closed, shuls would be locked, weddings and *simchos* (celebrations) would be postponed, and attendance at funerals and *shivah* (mourning) homes would be restricted. Every aspect of Jewish communal life would be at a standstill.

While the suddenness and scope of the shutdown initially left individuals in shock, it was only a matter of time before the community lay and rabbinic leadership internalized both the enormity of what had occurred as well as the reality that the Jewish community needed to react and adapt. Formal education at both the high school and the elementary school level transitioned to online schooling. *Shiurim* (Torah lectures), morning and evening *beis midrash* programs (Torah study programs) and adult education classes continued via Zoom, and pseudo-*tefillah b'tzibbur* (communal prayers) were conducted via web-based software. These innovations and adjustments allowed for some semblance of communal structure to be maintained during the lockdown, but Shabbos (Sabbath)

1 See letter from the RCBC to the community dated March 12, 2020, attached as Appendix A.

remained orphaned as online solutions could not be translated into an Orthodox Shabbos experience.

One medium that was available to create a sense of community over Shabbos was the dissemination of *d'rashos* (sermons) on Friday that could be printed and then read over the course of Shabbos by community members. In lieu of joining together as a community on Shabbos morning to discuss world events and issues of import to the Jewish community through a Torah lens, members of the community could instead take some comfort in the idea that the *d'rashah* that they were reading was also being read by other members of the community and that the sermon was formulated and presented with the objective of speaking to their individual and communal experiences. Even after indoor and outdoor *minyanim* (communal prayer groups) resumed, the Shabbos *d'rashos* continued to be disseminated to the greater community on Friday afternoon, since many members, due to individual or family health concerns, remained hesitant to participate in indoor or even outdoor *minyanim*.

The pages that follow are the weekly Shabbos and Yom Tov (holiday) *d'rashos* as well as the *shiurim* and lectures that were formulated to address these specific events and unique circumstances. These oral and written presentations span from the start of the COVID-19 lockdown through the creation of the outdoor *minyanim*, the return to indoor *minyanim*, the *Yamim Noraim* (High Holiday) experience, the “Second Wave,” the approval of the Moderna, Pfizer, and Johnson & Johnson vaccines, the rollout of the vaccines, and then culminate with the one-year anniversary of the initial COVID-19 lockdown.

WHY PUBLISH THESE D’RASHOS?

The impetus for sharing these *d'rashos* and thoughts with the broader community is twofold. The first is a timeless Jewish value that requires no further justification or explanation: “*L’hagdil Torah u’l’ha’adirah*—To increase and glorify the study of Torah.” Namely, to share words of Torah and insights regarding the parashah (the portion that is read from the Torah each week) and regarding the Jewish holidays to enlighten and inspire the reader. The second is to provide a perspective on the spiritual

and religious challenges with which a community struggled during a time of crisis. While COVID-19 was neither the most traumatic nor the most tragic challenge the Jewish community has faced, the shutdown of Jewish communal infrastructure at a moment of crisis when Jews would traditionally seek spiritual and physical comfort from communal institutions, the isolation of individuals from loved ones and traditional support networks, the grief of those who lost beloved friends and family and were forced to mourn in private, coupled with the crippling financial burden, in the aggregate combined to present a historic calamity that warrants its own reflection and analysis.

The *d'rashos* and *shiurim* are presented chronologically in the order that they were delivered, and hopefully, this will have the effect of enabling the reader to experience the challenges that were endured and the religious struggles that were waged as the different stages of the pandemic unfolded. To this end, I have also included certain communal announcements and updates, especially around major events and holidays, amongst the *d'rashos*. These brief messages and communal announcements, while often not rich in substantive content, are intended to provide context and background to the state of mind of the members of the community as these events unfolded.

Despite the significance of context, as is the case with an individual's weekly shul experience, each *d'rashah* and lecture stands on its own, separate and apart from the *d'rashah* of the prior and subsequent week. Nevertheless, the *d'rashos* taken as a whole hopefully present a glimpse into the mindset of a community experiencing the pandemic as well as a road map for spiritual growth and fortitude in the face of future individual or communal challenges.

ORAL D'RASHOS PRESENTED IN WRITTEN FORM

An oral presentation is fundamentally different than a written text. Even when an exact transcript of a *d'rashah* exists, a sermon by its nature is an interactive form of communication between preacher and audience. Therefore, any written text, by definition, must differ from the actual sermon, as the written text misses the intangibles of the

speaker's delivery, such as the emphasis on certain words, the change in speed and tone, the use of hand and arm movements, as well as interactions with the listening audience. Furthermore, the written text notwithstanding, it is common for the rabbi to spontaneously deviate from the text in the heat of the moment or when it becomes apparent that a concept or an idea needs to be emphasized or repeated. Professor Marc Saperstein, who has written extensively on the history of Jewish preaching, makes the analogy that a sermon is comparable to a sonata played in concert for the first time; the printed pages of the musical score are similar, almost identical to the musical performance, but just as the sheet music can never capture the concert experience, the published *d'rashah* can never convey the raw power, emotion, and spiritual impact of the live presentation.²

While acknowledging the limitations of the written medium, the *d'rashos* contained in this work strive to faithfully recreate the sermons that were delivered during the course of the first year of the pandemic. The initial *d'rashos*, which were delivered during the preliminary stages of the lockdown, are primarily based on the written text that was distributed in writing on Friday afternoon via email and the community WhatsApp group chat. The later *d'rashos*, which were delivered in person on Shabbos day, were recreated from a combination of the written text that was distributed in writing on Friday afternoon via email and the community WhatsApp group chat and the notes that I used while presenting the *d'rashos* to the community. In certain instances, these notes were revised after Shabbos to reflect those occasions where the live presentation deviated materially from the written text. While in all instances the original text has been edited to translate and explain certain Hebrew phrases and concepts, to correct grammar and to include citations, I have otherwise attempted to preserve the “informal” spoken tone of the original presentation.

2 Marc Saperstein, *Agony in the Pulpit: Jewish Preaching in Response to Nazi Persecution and Mass Murder 1933–1945* (United States: Hebrew Union College Press, 2018), p. 29.

Finally, in an effort to further preserve the voice of the *d'rashah*, I have attempted to take advantage of an interesting quirk that arose as a result of the COVID lockdown. In the initial stages of the pandemic, in parallel to the circulation of the written Shabbos or Yom Tov sermons, I was also recording and distributing a WhatsApp voice note of that same sermon several hours before sunset. In a stroke of luck, as I was looking back at my notes in preparing this work for publication, I discovered that these WhatsApp voice notes had been retained in WhatsApp's archives and could still be accessed. Following an approach that my father successfully employed in his most recently published book,³ where he used QR codes appended to the text to allow the reader to access videos of the subject matter and thus create a multimedia experience, I have inserted QR codes into the footnotes of those written sermons that had a parallel WhatsApp voice note to allow the reader to hear a version of the *d'rashah* that was delivered at the outset of the pandemic.⁴ Nevertheless, upon review of the WhatsApp voice notes, I was struck by the fact that these voice notes sounded different to me than my standard Shabbos sermon. It then dawned on me that these *d'rashos* were not delivered in front of the congregation but were primarily read off of a script while I was sitting at my desk. During these recordings, there was no interaction with the congregants, no ability to read the room or feed off the energy of the audience, and there was certainly no contemporaneous give and take, which is often the secret sauce of a great sermon. Thus, ironically, these WhatsApp voice notes demonstrate that even a live recording of the text may not accurately recreate the in-person delivery of the Shabbos sermon.

As initially stated above, ultimately, the goal of this work is twofold: (1) to share words of Torah in order to enlighten and inspire the reader, and (2) to provide a historical perspective on the spiritual and religious challenges that a community struggled with during a time of crisis. While

3 Jonathan Halpert, *Driveway Hoops* (Tennessee: IngramSpark, 2022).

4 For a good example of the contrast between the original oral presentation and the final edited presentation contained herein, please refer to the voice note distributed on Erev Pesach (Passover Eve), April 8th, 2020 at 6:24 PM, which can be accessed on p. 51, and compare it to the written presentation at p. 49.

the written word alone would have been sufficient to accomplish both of the aforementioned goals, I hope that by presenting the *d'rashos* in a voice that is similar to the tone of the sermon delivered in shul, and that is supplemented, when possible, by voice recordings, the overall presentation will be enhanced, and the goal will be accomplished, even if the in-person *d'rashah* experience can never be completely duplicated.

A WORD ON ATTRIBUTION AND CITATIONS

Rabbi Elazar said in the name of Rabbi Chanina: Whoever quotes a statement and cites the name of the individual quoted brings redemption to the world, as it is stated, "And Esther reported it to the king in the name of Mordechai."⁵

One question that is often asked of pulpit rabbis is, "When do you prepare your sermons?" Although different rabbis, based on their individual schedules, set aside different times to actually record their thoughts in written form, most pulpit rabbis will tell you that they are always mentally preparing their sermons—twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Every social interaction, every blog post or tweet, every *daf* Gemara (page of Talmud) or verse of *Tanach* (Bible) learned, each and every one of these moments could be the source and/or inspiration for the content that makes up that week's *d'rashah*. Furthermore, aside from perhaps commentaries on the Pesach Haggadah,⁶ there is no genre of Torah literature as prevalent as "Insights into the Parashah." Starting with Rabbinic interpretations, moving forward to classic Rishonim⁷ and Acharonim,⁸ through modern-day online parashah forums and WhatsApp groups, we are privileged to be inundated with thoughts on

5 *Megillah* 15a: אמר ר' אלעזר א"ר חנינא כל האומר דבר בשם אומרו מביא גאולה לעולם שנאמר "ותאמר אסתר למלך בשם מרדכי".

6 The text recited at the Passover Seder on the first two nights of the Passover, including a narrative of the Exodus.

7 *Rishonim* (lit., the first ones) were the leading rabbinic figures and decisors who lived approximately during the eleventh to fifteenth centuries, in the era before the writing of the *Shulchan Aruch* (1563 CE) and following the Geonim (589–1038 CE).

8 *Acharonim* (lit., the last ones) were the leading rabbinic figures and decisors who lived from

the parashah throughout the week. Some of these thoughts are unique and original, others are a reformulation of previously explored topics and themes, and some are presumed by the author to be new material but, in fact, have been inspired by a *sefer* learned long ago or a *d'var Torah* (short speech) relayed at a life-cycle event—e.g., a *bris* (circumcision) or a bar mitzvah.⁹ As such, it is often difficult to remember, or determine, even at the time of the initial formulation of a sermon, the exact source of each individual idea that weaves its way into a sermon. As Rabbi Baruch Halevi Epstein points out in the introduction to his *Torah Temimah* commentary on the Torah:

During the years of preparation, I collected in my mind many different concepts, explanations, insights, and comments until, with respect to some of them, it was impossible for me at the time of preparation of this work to remember the name of their author, and with respect to certain ideas, it was unclear whether such ideas were my own or if they originated from another's analysis.¹⁰

approximately the sixteenth century, after the era of the writing of the *Shulchan Aruch* (1563 CE) to the present.

- 9 Bar mitzvah (lit., subject to the commandments) is the religious initiation ceremony of a boy who has reached the age of thirteen and is regarded as ready to observe religious precepts and eligible to take part in public worship.
- 10 Baruch Epstein, *Chumash Torah Temimah Hachadash*, Chorev, Yerushalayim, Hakdamah, p. 20. (translation mine). Rabbi Epstein goes on to beseech his readers that “nonetheless, if you find within my commentary a novel thought or insight that you have previously seen published in another *sefer*, please give me the benefit of the doubt and do not accuse me of covering myself in another’s garment as, thank God, such behavior is not within my character...but rather you should give me the benefit of the doubt based on the justifications previously cited.” Ironically, despite Rabbi Epstein’s supplication, he was accused of plagiarism on several occasions in the decades following the publication of his monumental work. See the sources cited in Dan Rabinowitz, “Rayna Batya and Other Learned Women: A Reevaluation of Rabbi Barukh Halevi Epstein’s Sources,” *Tradition* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2001): fn 4. Depending on your view of Rabbi Epstein’s failure to properly cite earlier sources, you may argue that the sentiment expressed in his introduction is a classic example whereby “the lady doth protest too much, methinks.” Alternatively, one could take the view that Rabbi Epstein was quite self-aware and was cognizant that there was a material risk, and likely even a good chance, that certain of his remarks and comments were a reformulation of earlier works, but he chose to publish them nonetheless, as the alternative would have been a much watered down version of his *sefer*. One piece of circumstantial evidence, essentially a Talmudic argument of *migo*

Nevertheless, in an effort to address this issue, while preparing these pages for publication, I have gone back and tried, to the best of my ability, to provide accurate and complete attribution of ideas and sources. However, to the extent that I may have failed to provide proper attribution or have unintentionally usurped an insight or novel thought from an earlier author, I ask *mechilah* (forgiveness) in advance and request that the reader give me the benefit of the doubt that such error arose as a result of time constraints and limited memory capacity.

(believe me that I am not lying because I could have fabricated a better lie), which points to Rabbi Epstein's innocence are his comments at *Rus* 3:9[15] and *Devarim* 23:1[3], where he effectively plagiarizes, or certainly fails to cite, his uncle, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (the *Netziv*), as to why the phrase "*kenaf aviv*" is a euphemism for a marital status, which is on a lower level, e.g., *yibum*, than a full-fledged *chuppah v'kiddushin*. (See *Haamek Davar*, *Devarim* 23:1). If Rabbi Epstein was intentionally pirating ideas, presumably he would have been more careful than to plagiarize from his uncle's *sefer*, as many readers of the *Torah Temimah* would likely have been aware that this concept was already suggested by the *Netziv* in his *Haamek Davar* commentary, as the *Torah Temimah* was first published in 1902, while *Haamek Davar*, was already published in 1879 and was widely available at that time. See Gil Perl, *The Pillar of Volozhin: Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin and the World of Nineteenth-Century Lithuanian Torah Scholarship* (Brookline: Academic Studies Press, 2012), pp. 284–87, where he presents compelling evidence that *Haamek Davar* had already been mostly composed as early as the mid-1860s. See also, Eitam Henkin, *Ta'arokh Lefanai Shulchan: Chayav, Zemano U'Mepaalo Shel HaRav Yechiel Mikhel Epstein Baal Arukh HaShulchan* (Hebrew) (Maggid Press, 2019), pp. 202–4, n. 42 (discussing Rabbi Epstein's failure to cite his own father, the *Aruch Hashulchan*, on several occasions).

Shabbos Parashas Tetzaveh/Zachor

MARCH 7, 2020 | מ"א אדר, תש"פ

The community is just beginning to internalize the fact that our members may be directly impacted by the COVID-19 virus. What started as a vague and distant concern, only affecting those living in the Far East, similar to the SARS or the MERS outbreaks of the past few years, is quickly morphing into a local issue, as many congregants have friends or family members who are directly impacted by the closures at Yeshiva University and the shutdown of the high schools and day schools in Riverdale and Westchester. Furthermore, although still viewed as an extreme and almost ludicrous measure, the number of Bergen County residents subject to a two-week quarantine period is increasing.¹

1 The historical synopses presented in italics before each *d'rashah* are based on a number of sources, including (i) personal interactions with members of the RCBC, members of Congregation Ahavat Shalom, and other Teaneck residents; (ii) local Jewish media coverage; (iii) weekly town hall meetings given by Michael Blair, then presiding partner of Debevoise & Plimpton, LLP; and (iv) summaries of certain news stories that were trending on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media outlets as reported on sites such as WinCalendar, which I considered to be relevant. The historical synopses were created without reference to any objective or consistently applied criteria, as the intent of the drafting was simply to give the reader the historical context as to what was taking place in the Teaneck Apartments, in Bergen County generally, across the United States, and throughout the world in the week leading up to the relevant *d'rashah*. Although I acknowledge that without following objective criteria in selecting news stories, the content curation, by definition, has been impacted by my own personal perspective and implicit bias. However, since my goal was to attempt to relay those

THE POWER OF TOUCH²

The *Aruch Hashulchan* rules, “Upon the arrival of the month of Adar, we are required to increase our level of joy.”³ In light of the events that we are witnessing across the world and in our local community, including the closure of institutions of Torah learning and the revelation that individuals have been hospitalized and quarantined, this is a difficult mandate to carry out. But, in an effort to comply, we will try to lighten the mood with a joke that has been circulating in Israel.

New Ministry of Health Guidelines have been published that state that (1) the general public should try to avoid hugging, kissing, and any unnecessary physical contact, and (2) Ashkenazim should continue their status-quo behavior.

All joking aside, over the course of the past few days, and especially beginning with this Shabbos, we have all attempted to comply with the health department’s new guidelines mandating no handshakes and limited physical contact. But, it turns out that compliance with these guidelines is actually very hard, as we humans deeply crave physical and tactile interaction. And while some societies may be more comfortable with public displays of physical affection than others, it is self-evident that physical contact is a powerful and instinctive human need.⁴ This reality, the power of human contact, holds the key to understanding the interactions in this week’s parashah.

events that were occurring in both the Jewish and general community, which, in my opinion, were impacting the perspective and mindset of the members of Congregation Ahavat Shalom and its rabbi, it seemed acceptable and arguably even appropriate if my curation of these news stories was impacted by my unconscious or even conscious bias.

2 This *d'rashah* was originally delivered in person at Congregation Ahavat Shalom before *Mussaf*, based on an outline and notes. I have expanded those notes into a full manuscript, as it seemed appropriate to include this *d'rashah* in the current volume, seeing as the content of the sermon reflected the fact that COVID-19 was beginning to have a direct and powerful impact on our community’s day-to-day activities and interactions. Little did we know at the time this *d'rashah* was delivered the events that would soon unfold!

3 Yechiel Michel Epstein, *Aruch Hashulchan*, *Orach Chaim* 686:6, based on *Taanis* 29a.

4 See footnote 11 below.

The Torah mandates that the Kohanim require special garments, and then prescribes the materials that are necessary to make these garments, as well as the manner in which they should be made. But the Torah goes one step further; the Torah commands Moshe to participate actively in the dressing of the Kohanim:

*You shall put them on Aharon your brother, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them, and consecrate them, and sanctify them, that they may minister to Me in the priest's office.*⁵

Is Moshe required to anoint and dress Aharon his brother? What an odd requirement! What unusual behavior! In fact, to highlight exactly how unusual this process was, there is actually a debate amongst the commentators as to how exactly this procedure was undertaken.

The *pasuk* says: “You shall put **them** on Aharon your brother.” What shall you place on Aharon your brother? What items are included in the phrase “them” referenced in the verse? At first glance, the commandment seems to refer to all the priestly garments. In fact, this is how *Rashi* explains the verses, namely that Moshe dressed Aharon in all eight garments including the shirt and the pants.⁶

But the *Ramban* objects. It can't be! It would be undignified for Moshe to dress Aharon, and as such, the *Ramban* clarifies that Moshe did not assist Aharon in putting his trousers on, and the proof is that the pants were mentioned separately in a distinct verse.⁷ However, if not for this insight, we would have concluded, as did *Rashi*, that Moshe had to fully dress Aharon in all of the priestly garments, not just the external garments! What is the significance of this action, “*v'hilbashta u'mashachta*—dressing

5 *Shemos* 28:41: והלבשת אתם את אהרן ואת בניו אתו ומשחת אתם ומלאת את ידם וקדשת אתם וכהנו לי.

6 *Rashi*, *Shemos* ad loc.

7 *Ramban*, *Shemos* 29:9: “And the reason why the breeches were singled out from the rest of the garments [by not being mentioned here] is that it was Moshe who dressed them with all the garments, as God commanded, ‘And you shall clothe them.’ But the breeches that were to cover the flesh of their nakedness, they themselves were put on in privacy. Therefore, He did not mention them here among the garments, ‘And you shall take the garments, and clothe Aharon...’ and therefore He separated them [from the other garments] in command and in punishment, as I have mentioned above.”

and anointing”? Is it just the symbolism of Moshe passing the mantle of *kehunah* to Aharon, or is there more going on here?

Let’s look at another interaction between brothers: “And [Yosef] fell upon his brother Binyamin’s neck and wept; and Binyamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and **after that** his brothers talked with him.”⁸

Yosef kisses Binyamin and cries, and then he kisses his brothers as well, and then, finally, “after that,” his brothers speak with him. After what? According to *Rashi*, after the brothers saw Yosef crying, they were finally comfortable with the idea that Yosef had truly forgiven them. Up until this point, the brothers were in suspense. They thought Yosef would have his revenge. But after the brothers saw Yosef cry with them the same way Yosef had cried with Binyamin, then the brothers could breathe again, and only then could they speak to Yosef.⁹

However, the *Ohr Hachaim* understands these verses differently and delivers a powerful lesson. Just like *Rashi*, the *Ohr Hachaim* struggles to understand what event the phrase “and after that” is referring to. After Yosef cried? Yes, but the crying was not sufficient. It was the crying combined with the human touch; only after the brothers experienced the physical contact that accompanied Yosef’s tears were the brothers truly convinced of the fact that Yosef would not harm them.¹⁰ The crying set the tone of reconciliation, but the physical embrace finally assuaged all doubts.¹¹

8 יפל על צוארי בנימן אחיו ויבך ובנימן בכה על צואריו. וינשק לכל אחיו ויבך עליהם ואחרי כן דברו אחיו אתו.

9 *Rashi* ad loc., “After they saw him crying.”

10 *Ohr Hachaim*, *Bereishis* 45:15.

11 Regarding the emotional significance of human touch, see Tiffany Field, *Touch* 2nd ed. (MIT Press, 2014), pp. 145–60. Field explains that the current policy in Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICU) has been revised to permit and encourage parents to hold and touch their premature infants. Earlier restrictive policies in most NICUs limited physical interaction due to concern that increased contact could lead to disease and infection. While the concern regarding infectious transmission remains present, new groundbreaking studies have demonstrated the significance of human contact on the development of the human child and that the positive impact of human touch likely outweighs the risk of infection. “In some of the most dramatic new findings, premature infants who were massaged for 15 minutes three times a day gained

If we go back to our parashah and the interaction between Moshe and Aharon, we realize that Moshe had it all. He was the political leader as well as the spiritual leader. Aharon was concerned that, perhaps, Moshe might be jealous of Aharon's new role as Kohen Gadol (High Priest). Aharon asked himself, "Does Moshe really want this for me? Will Moshe give up his role as Kohen Gadol and allow me to take this on?" But Moshe is not jealous, and he demonstrates his desire and excitement for Aharon to take on this role via the physical action of "*ve'hilbashta u'mashachta*." Just like Yosef and his brothers, only after Aharon experiences physical contact from Moshe, the tactile interaction that is necessitated by the obligation of "*ve'hilbashta u'mashachta*" does Aharon internalize that Moshe is at peace with the transition of power and with Aharon's ascension to the *keter kehunah* (crown of the priesthood).

This is the power of physical contact!

As the world begins to focus on physical contact as a means of disease transmission, we are forced to re-examine virtually every instance of human interaction and physical contact that we undertake. If we are engaging in this analysis, it seems appropriate to take the opportunity to do so not only from a medical perspective, but also from a Jewish law perspective. Who can we touch? Who should we be certain not to touch? How do we interact with the opposite gender in the workplace? When are we allowed to touch? When are we forbidden to touch?

The challenge of refraining from physical contact before marriage and adhering to the rules of family purity that limit physical contact even after marriage, can be extremely difficult to comply with, especially in the surrounding culture that places so much emphasis on physicality. This

weight 47% faster than others who were left alone in their incubators—the usual practice in the past. The massaged infants also showed signs that the nervous system was maturing more rapidly: they became more active than the other babies and more responsive to such things as a face or a rattle." The psychological and physical stunting of infants deprived of physical contact, although otherwise fed and cared for, had previously been observed in children orphaned during World War II. See René A. Spitz, "Hospitalism: An Inquiry into the Genesis of Psychiatric Conditions in Early Childhood," *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 1 (1945): pp. 53–74.

challenge is so difficult that many couples, during dating and engagement, are *meyash* (admit defeat) and conclude that they cannot maintain physical restrictions of this nature. For those among us who were *meyash* while dating, I would advise and advocate that, as a couple, you reconsider this issue now that you are married. Both as individuals and as a couple, you now relate to issues of intimacy in a more sophisticated and nuanced fashion, and you may find that joint spiritual and religious growth is one of the most intimate and meaningful journeys a married couple can embark on.

The power and impact of physical contact cannot be understated or underestimated. As we re-evaluate our physical interactions in light of best medical practices, it behooves us to take the opportunity to also reevaluate our physical interactions in light of best halachic practices.