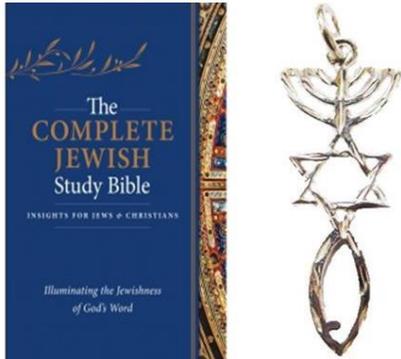


# ***Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update March 12, 2020 (16<sup>th</sup> Adar, 5780)***

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## **[For the Yachad Report Newsletter For March 2020](#)**

***Rays of Hope in Coronavirus Outbreak;*** Health system professionals have been responding to the outbreak of the coronavirus with stringent measures to prevent the spread of the disease in Israel. The procedures being taken in the country during the past month as the virus spreads across Europe and elsewhere do not differ much from the cautionary moves being taken by Western countries. There are now over 98,000 coronavirus cases globally and more than 3,300 people have died, according to a Reuters tally on Friday 6 March 2020. The coronavirus has produced one positive result for the time being: the security arena in the Middle East is relatively quiet. While the outbreak is not the only reason behind this, there was exceptional calm last week. Iran is one of the countries being hardest hit by the virus; apparently, visitors to the holy city of Qom were the main source of its spread. On Thur. 5 March 2020, there was a report about the first cases of people contracting the coronavirus in a district governed by the Palestinian Authority. The city of Bethlehem was put in a quarantine Thursday under an order from Israel's Defense Minister Naftali Bennett after seven COVID-19 cases were confirmed in the area. In the following hours, nine more patients were confirmed as infected, raising the overall count to 16. The Gaza Strip, which is more isolated is less exposed to the virus, but once it strikes there, it will be difficult to stop its spread. Good news emerges, however: More than half of those who contracted the virus have now recovered. It's retreating in China, where it first emerged, and in nearby South Korea. China over the weekend reported just 99 new cases, the first time it has had only a double-digit increase since 20 Jan 2020. Overall, China now counts 22,177 patients currently in treatment, while it has released 55,404.

***Israel Expands Coronavirus Regulations;*** Israel on Wed. 4 March 2020 announced new procedures to curb the spread of coronavirus. All Israelis returning from Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain and Austria were instructed to enter self-quarantine for a period of 14 days. Foreign citizens arriving from those countries will not be allowed into Israel. Israel had previously announced bans against East Asian nations such as China, South Korea, Thailand, Japan, and Vietnam when the spread of the novel coronavirus first began to make headlines in early Feb. 2020. Gatherings of over 5,000 people will not be permitted, and PM Netanyahu advised Israelis to avoid shaking hands. The Palestinian Authority has barred tourists and closed all mosques and churches in Bethlehem for the next two weeks after identifying cases of coronavirus in a Bethlehem hotel.

In a rare joint press conference, including Israel's Health Minister Yaakov Litzman and other health ministry officials, Netanyahu said, "We had to undertake extreme measures in order to slow down the infection rates in Israel and that's what happened. We must stress the importance of personal hygiene and to avoid shaking hands," he said. As of Friday 6 March 2020, seventeen coronavirus cases have been confirmed in Israel, with thousands more quarantined to prevent the virus from spreading. The 100,000 figure of global infections is largely symbolic but dwarfs other major outbreaks in recent decades, such as SARS, MERS, and Ebola. The virus is still much less widespread than annual flu epidemics, which results in up to 5 million annual severe cases around the world and from 290,000 to 650,000 deaths annually, according to WHO.

***Israelis, Palestinians Unite to Battle COVID-19;*** As coronavirus continues to appear in Israel and the Palestinian territories, the IDF and the Palestinian Authority have launched a joint effort to stop its spreading and prevent a massive outbreak, the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) reported over the weekend. According to the report, 250 COVID-19 testing kits were delivered to the Palestinian Authority. Joint training sessions for Israeli and Palestinian medical staff were set up to provide information on personal protection while handling a person thought to carry the virus. COGAT also provided the Palestinian public in PA-ruled Judea & Samaria and the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip with an Arabic translation of the Health Ministry's instructions on self-quarantine, designed to prevent a massive outbreak of the disease. The digital instructions were made accessible on various online platforms. A possible scenario feared by Palestinians is an outbreak of the virus in the Gaza Strip. Home to roughly two million residents, the strip of land is controlled by Hamas terrorists. Gaza's health crisis may make such an outbreak deadly and put in direct danger millions of people on both sides of the border. After hotel employees from Bethlehem were infected with COVID-19 upon coming into contact with Greek visitors who had the virus, the IDF, along with Palestinian security forces, isolated the city, populated by nearly 30,000 residents. Since Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas declared a national emergency after 16 residents were diagnosed as carriers of the virus, approximately 3,000 tourists have found themselves in quarantine at various hotels in Bethlehem, including fourteen USA tourists.

***Iran Plagued With Plagues;*** Iran is dealing with a deadly outbreak of coronavirus. As of the weekend, 4,747 had been confirmed of which 124 were fatal. COVID-19 has affected every Iranian province, with the largest number of cases recorded in Tehran. A recently re-elected member of the Iranian parliament, Fatemeh Rahbar, died on Saturday 7 March 2020. Rahbar becomes the latest senior Iranian official to have died from coronavirus. Some 23 lawmakers tested positive for the illness as of late last week. In addition to the virus that has hit thousands in the Islamic Republic, massive swarms of desert locusts have been arriving in Iran's southern regions. Government officials say the invasion is too huge to counter except with the use of pesticides. Reza Mir, Spokesman of Plant Protection Organization, said last week that the locusts have invaded the provinces of Hormozgan, Sistan and Baluchestan, Bushehr, Fars and Khuzestan. "The density of locusts in the swarms is so high that a 10-15 centimeter layer of dead locusts forms on the ground after spraying pesticides," he said.

***USA Plans to Approve Israeli Annexations Soon;*** White House Senior Advisor Jared Kushner told senators in a meeting last week that the Trump administration is pressing ahead with its Middle East peace plan, even with the Palestinians boycotting the process. The administration is urging the Palestinians to negotiate, warning that its current plan will move forward without their input if they don't. Kushner said the mapping and demarcation process will take months, and that the Palestinians could improve the proposal by negotiating. Otherwise, the USA will move ahead without their involvement. A joint American-Israel mapping committee convened in Jerusalem two weeks ago to begin discussing the demarcation of areas in Judea & Samaria to be recognized as part of Israel. The White House feels that because PM Netanyahu and Benny Gantz, his main rival, both support the plan, it can move ahead. The Palestinians have stated their refusal to accept the Trump administration's peace plan well before the plan was even unveiled, and since then

have refused to budge on the issue. In addition, the Palestinian Authority has been cracking down on any perceived efforts of "normalization" of ties with Israel in the months since the plan was unveiled.

***France Records 51,816 Anti-Semitic Incidents in 2019;*** A new online tool is being used to measure anti-Semitism on social media in France an organization for French Jews has revealed. In 2019, 51,816 incidents were picked up by the device. Of the anti-Semitic posts recorded, the majority (52%) referred to anti-Semitic stereotypes and conspiracy theories. Anti-Jewish and anti-Israel hatred featured in over two-thirds of posts (38% and 39% respectively). Some 13% of posters denied the Holocaust. In a media interview, the organization said the tool helped "to have a more complete picture of anti-Semitism in France," adding that "it was necessary to identify, quantify and qualify the hateful content present on the internet." In Jan. 2020, a survey by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) found that a staggering 70% of French Jews say they have been victims of anti-Semitism, 59% suffered physical abuse in school and 46% suffered verbal abuse at work. More than 8 out of 10 young French Jews have suffered at least one anti-Semitic incident, and 39% have been the victims of physical violence. Attempting to avoid anti-Semitic attacks, more than a third of French Jews refrain from wearing Jewish symbols in public, and a quarter avoids revealing their Jewish identity at work. Some 52% of French Jews have considered leaving France while Israel has seen several large waves of Aliyah of French Jews in recent years. Between the years 2000 and 2017, 10 percent of the French Jewish community, the largest in Europe, immigrated to Israel.

***Innovative Method to Improve Memory While Sleeping;*** Israeli researchers from Tel Aviv University (TAU) and the Weizmann Institute have developed a method to influence the process of memory formation in one of the two hemispheres of the brain during sleep. The technique, which uses scent to stimulate memory, could help those who have suffered brain damage to strengthen their memory. It could also restore brain balance for people suffering from post-traumatic-stress-disorder. "We know that during sleep, the process of memory consolidation takes place, during which memories recently accumulated in short-term memory located in the hippocampus are gradually transferred into long-term memory located in the cerebral cortex", explains Prof. Yuval Nir from the School of Neuroscience at TAU. "In this study, we sought to examine in depth the process of memory formation in the brain during sleep, by comparing brain activity between the areas where it occurs and others. Participants were asked to memorize the locations of words that appeared in front of them one after the other on a screen, some on the right and some on the left. The odor, linked in the brain of the participants in the learning task previously carried out, came from the nostril in which it was injected into the part of the brain situated on the same side. We compared its effect on the memory consolidation process on the side affected by the odor versus the side, which had not received the scent pulses. In particular, they found that sleep on the side of the brain that absorbed odor was lighter at that time, and the lighter it was, the better the subject's memory. The method that we have developed makes it possible for the first time to compare the process of memory consolidation in the two hemispheres of the brain," concluded Prof. Nir.

***Israel's Election Results are in: What Now?*** The exit polls of Monday's 2 March 2020 elections for the 23rd Knesset show that PM Benjamin Netanyahu obtained a decisive victory and is the leading candidate to form Israel's next government. As of mid-week, he was three seats short of establishing a government of 61 members. Final results will be calculated in the next few days after officials finish counting several hundred thousand votes cast by Israeli soldiers and some 4,000 ballots cast by Israelis confined to home quarantine after possible exposure to the coronavirus. With Netanyahu's clear personal victory, the options for the next government are still not clear. Though a right-wing government seems to be more realistic, as of now, a minority government, a national unity government, or even a fourth election can't be ruled out. Netanyahu faces another hurdle on the way towards forming a government: the Israeli judicial system. While half of the country has clearly stated that they want him to continue to serve in the top job despite the fact that he goes on trial on 17 March 2020 for bribery, fraud, and breach of trust charges, there has already been an appeal to the Supreme Court to stop him from being given the mandate to form a government. Regardless of the final

outcome, the election marks a devastating setback for Gantz's Blue and White party and its allies on the center-left, who had aspirations of toppling Netanyahu after more than a decade in power.

***Iran Accused of Lying About its Coronavirus Statistics;*** On Mon. 2 March 2020 media sources reported that Mohammed Mirmohammadi, a member of the inner circle of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had succumbed to the deadly coronavirus. Other top officials in the country are confirmed to be infected with the illness, according to multiple reports. The Iranian Health Ministry said that the country's known total of those who have been hit with the virus is 2,336. Iran reports 77 deaths so far, the second-highest country number after the virus's source, China, which reports some 3,000 fatalities. But the People's Mujahideen of Iran (MEK) a major resistance group said, also on Monday, that the death toll in Iran exceeds 1,000 and that those suffering from the illness are 20 times the official number put out by the government. Michael Rubin, a Middle East scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, warned that Iran could become a major conduit for spreading the virus to its neighbors. "The Iranian leadership appears more willing to blame others and sanctions rather than accept any accountability for themselves and so more people will die," said Rubin. "It's just one more way Iran will victimize Iraq, and from Iraq it could spread in a cross-sectarian way throughout the rest of the Middle East." Iran has closed schools and universities due to COVID-19, but religious Shiite shrines have remained open. The outbreak of the coronavirus in Iran began in Qom the religious city. Last week, Iranians were captured licking some of the shrines located there in defiance of the disease.

***Israeli Expert Views Coronavirus;*** The coronavirus epidemic is having a major impact on the economy, daily life and personal security of much of the world's population, as concern about the virus and the protective measures being taken keep increasing. Everyone who works in the fields of infectious diseases and public health is worried, with some justification, about the possible appearance of a new virulent and dangerous infectious agent that will rapidly spread around the world. With the rise in the number of people infected and who have fallen ill, and with the intensification of research into the disease and the isolation of its viral factor, a clearer picture of its nature and behavior and especially of its virulence has emerged. The corona family is familiar to us from the two SARS epidemics of 2002 and 2012 that were caused by other viruses from this family. According to the New England Journal of Medicine, the mortality rate from the current disease ranges from 0.5 to 2% and is significantly lower than the mortality rate from the 2002 SARS outbreak (9.5%) and much lower than the 2012 SARS outbreak (34.4%). It may even be close to the mortality rate from an ordinary flu outbreak in the USA. There are no grounds to fear a virulent epidemic that threatens the whole world and will cause widespread illness and death. It is quite likely that the current epidemic will behave like a flu epidemic with which we're familiar and will run its course within a few months, even though the infection rate may remain high since the current virus is highly contagious.

***Israeli Schools Prepare For Missile Attacks;*** On Tue. 3 March 2020 sirens went off in schools across the country as part of the Home Front Command's ongoing program to test preparedness for emergency scenarios, specifically for missile attacks. The exercise was held at 10:05, during recess, in order to test the ability of students to reach a protected space as quickly and efficiently as possible from locations around the school premises, rather than from individual classrooms. It also aimed to highlight the level of preparedness of the teachers in a missile attack scenario and enable an assessment of the suitability of the protected spaces, which are required to be regularly maintained. This particular exercise was preceded by extensive preparations in the various educational institutions, with instructors from the Home Front Command visiting schools in order to give teachers and students guidance on how best to respond in emergencies. A total of 2,354,000 students took part in the exercise. Of these students, 1,831,000 are elementary and high school students and 523,000 are preschoolers. In addition, 201,000 teachers took part in the exercise. The results of the exercise will be collated and then published ranking the local authorities according to their level of preparedness to meet the demands of an emergency situation in their schools.

***Pence: Sanders Would be the 'Most Anti-Israel President in History';*** Vice President Mike Pence slammed Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders at the AIPAC Policy Conference on Mon. 2 March 2020. Pence, who addressed the crowd said, “One of the leading candidates Bernie Sanders smeared Israel at last week’s debate and not a single candidate on that stage stood up to challenge him. But I’ll promise you we will always call out those who try to cloak their animus toward Israel inside a phony mantle of friendship.” Sanders recently accused PM Netanyahu of being a “reactionary racist” and have called Israel’s government “racist” in the past. He said recently that he would consider moving the USA embassy back to Tel Aviv. Pence made sure to emphasize President, Donald Trump's accomplishments when it comes to the USA's alliance with Israel. At the same time, he said Sanders, despite being Jewish, would be a president who doesn’t side with Israel. “The most pro-Israel president in history must not be replaced by one who would be the most anti-Israel president in the history of this nation,” Pence said to a cheering crowd. “That’s why we need four more years of President Trump in the White House.”

***Israeli Medical Center Named World's Ninth Best Hospital;*** Sheba Medical Center at Tel Hashomer, located east of Tel Aviv, has been named the ninth-best hospital in the world by leading USA magazine Newsweek. The hospital is Israel's largest medical facility and cares for approximately 1.6 million people annually. The facility is also home to more than one-quarter of all Israeli clinical research. Tens of thousands of medical professionals were invited to participate in the survey ranking the world's best hospitals, which also took into account results from patient surveys and other medical performance indicators. Sheba Medical Center was tasked with establishing Israel's first facility for the quarantine and treatment of individuals who test positive for the novel coronavirus, and citizens who returned from the Diamond Princess cruise ship in Japan. In addition to the hospital's technologically advanced Special Hospitalization Isolated Unit, health authorities have also instructed the Rambam Health Care Campus in Haifa and the Barzilai Medical Center in Ashkelon to prepare for the arrival of patients with the virus.



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