

# ***Yachad Ministries' Israel's News Update March 26, 2020*** ***(1<sup>st</sup> Nisan, 5780)***



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

***Israel Experiences First Coronavirus Death;*** The Health Ministry announced on Friday evening 20 March 2020 that an 88-year-old man died at the Shaare Zedek Hospital in Jerusalem after being diagnosed with coronavirus. The patient, who had suffered from multiple and significant preexisting conditions, arrived at the hospital in very serious condition a week ago and was hospitalized in the isolated ward dedicated to coronavirus patients. "The patient was treated extensively, comprehensively and closely by the staff and underwent CPR during the week as a result of heart failure," the hospital said on Friday night. "In the last few hours, his condition had deteriorated and he passed away later that evening. The death is the first fatality in Israel from the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. The 88-year-old was the 45th confirmed case of coronavirus in Israel. He came from a nursing home in Jerusalem and was likely infected after being in the vicinity of a social worker in the nursing home who contracted the virus from a French tourist. The manager of the nursing home has gone into isolation, and other occupants and workers in the home have contracted the virus as well. On Friday afternoon, the Health Ministry confirmed the number of coronavirus cases in Israel had reached 705, ten of whom are in serious condition. Another 18 patients are in moderate condition, and 662 are in light condition. Israel is tightening its guidelines to slow the spread of the coronavirus - and PM Benjamin Netanyahu made it clear that law enforcement will make sure the new Health Ministry rules are taken seriously. The emergency lockdown regulations will be in effect for the next seven days, Netanyahu said in a televised address Thur. night 19 March 2020, announcing the guidelines. He said not enough Israelis were adhering to the original regulations. "You are ordered to stay at home," he said. "This isn't a request, this isn't a recommendation, but a binding requirement that will be enforced." Israelis will be able to leave home for groceries, medical treatment and other essential services. They may drive to work if their place of work is still open.

***Israeli Expert Speaks From Frontlines on Coronavirus;*** Dr. Elli Rosenberg runs the coronavirus unit at the Soroka Medical Center in Beersheba. He told media sources: "What we're trying to do is maximize patient care with minimal staff exposure. Technology helps. A coin-sized monitor taped to their chest - developed by an Israeli startup company - continuously transmits vital signs by Bluetooth to our control center. We also have tablets for the patients that measure their temperature and can serve as a stethoscope. Students and

faculty from the engineering department at Ben-Gurion University are building a telemedicine robot to our specifications. "Q: What's your take on Israel's handling of the pandemic? Rosenberg: "In the beginning, I thought this was handled way too aggressively and that the measures the government decided on were extreme. As time progressed, especially with examples coming in from different countries around the world of how governments responded and what the consequences were - for better and for worse - I slowly shifted to the point right now where I hope we're not too late with the actions we're taking. If we want to beat this, social distancing and personal hygiene and increased testing have to be implemented and enforced at the highest level."

***David Freedman Claims "All the Dislocation Is the Cost of Saving Lives";*** USA Ambassador to Israel David Friedman discussed the COVID-19 pandemic in an interview: "The visibility is unprecedented. The infectious disease experts now understand how to stem the advancement of the disease, and the global quarantine certainly is new. The entire world is watching the spread in real time, and the numbers come out daily with 24/7 commentary. We are not used to this type of isolation and, with the bombardment of information; our reactions may have become obsessive. And, of course, the curtailment on mobility is destroying parts of the world economy. But in an important sense, all the dislocation we are seeing is the cost of saving lives that generations ago probably would have been lost." As the coronavirus came suddenly out of stealth mode, many of the startups that can help defeat it are based in Israel. They are working on diagnosis, mitigation, patient tracking, and contamination prevention, protecting medical staff, education, and exercise for the homebound.

***Israel Pharmaceutical Helps USA in Coronavirus Battle;*** Teva has announced it will donate more than 6 million doses of hydroxychloroquine sulfate tablets to hospitals across the USA. from March 31. The tablets are approved by the USA FDA for the treatment of malaria, lupus, and rheumatoid arthritis. They are currently under investigation to determine their efficacy against the coronavirus and USA officials have asked for their immediate availability and use. Over 10 million tablets are expected to be shipped within a month

***Israel's Public Transport Rules Brings Cleaner Air;*** The fall in economic activity, in-particular, car journeys and public transport use, has significantly improved Israel's air quality, the Ministry of Environmental Protection reports. Israel's Ministry of Environmental Protection has announced that the decline in economic activity caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly reduced air pollution in Israel over the past week. The concentration of nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) in the atmosphere has fallen to 30% below average levels. The government's draconian instructions, which have sought to flatten the infection curve and reduce social contact to allow the health system to cope with the spreading epidemic, have in-particular significantly cut use of public transport and vehicle usage. Travel on public transport is down 50% in Jerusalem, 60% in the greater Tel Aviv area, and 85% in the Sharon area.

***Depreciation of the Shekel Has Positive Points;*** The depreciation of the shekel against the dollar is a positive development that should help the Israeli economy overcome the coronavirus crisis, global ratings agency S&P believes. The global rating agency expects Israel to avoid a recession in 2020 and even record 2% growth, even though Israel's Ministry of Finance itself sees a best-case scenario of 0% growth in 2020. However, S&P says, "A full recession is not expected at this stage due to the robustness of the domestic economy and it will happen only in the event of an additional hit to the economy such as a geopolitical event or the collapse of real estate prices", S&P said, "Although Israel is also suffering a substantial slowdown because of the coronavirus outbreak, the local currency is actually depreciating, which is a factor that could help in the future by strengthening exports and bringing back inflation. S&P also pointed out that Israel's original economic growth forecast was significantly higher than the euro bloc but that the Covid-19 outbreak will ultimately depend on the length and severity of the virus and the degree of success of the measures taken by the government and the Bank of Israel. However, S&P's economists see a worldwide recession with global GDP growth of just 1%-1.5% in 2020.

***Solitude can be Healing;*** International best-selling novelist Jack Engelhard has this to say about the forced solitude that tens of thousands around the world are experiencing right now as victims or potential victims of coronavirus. "Maybe a pause in the way we live is not such a bad thing - not including those who are ill, of course. Maybe it's not a bad idea -thinking about keeping ourselves at home and apart from other people, owing to the China Virus - at least for a time. The NBA (pro-basketball) has canceled its entire season. Trump suspends travel from Europe. Schools, stadiums, streets, theaters, businesses, subways, dances, parties, all that and more, are canceled, empty, or near empty, in keeping to common sense and the warnings from officials, based on the advice of doctors. Positively Sci-Fi. Did Richard Matheson ("I am Legend") write this? Stephen King? Ray Bradbury? This is a zombie world – don't touch, don't smell, don't feel, don't look, don't interact with strangers, friends, and even members of your own family. Walk alone. Drive alone. Wash hands. Stay off the subways. Keep away from crowds. So perhaps, since this means everybody, everywhere, there won't be the usual Hamas riots along the Gaza border, thanks to the moratorium, and the gangs in Brooklyn who terrify Jews and even their own people will keep off the streets since they are brave only when part of a mob, but never when they walk alone. The hooligans who trample the streets from Berkeley to Paris, to Brussels, to Teheran may also heed the ban for their own safety. Those might be some of the benefits when an entire world goes on lock-up. Among the champions of voluntary solitude, two come immediately to mind, J.D. Salinger and Michel de Montaigne. They did okay keeping themselves in isolation. Salinger disliked being around people. Just getting touched, even recognized by someone, drove him bonkers. All he did, in his room, was write a great novel. All by himself. There was no audience cheering him or jeering him from stands. Maybe, once-in-a-while, it's okay to sit back and ride along with nothing more than your imagination, or read a book, instead of turning to Twitter for the cacophony. Alone, in silence, you could find yourself the repository of all the world. You are the exemplar of everyone else. The Talmud thinks so. So did Montaigne (1533-1592), who wrote an essay "On Solitude," its many rewards, and he was, in fact, the father of the Essay. King David, much earlier gave us the poetic Essay, the Psalms, – never to be matched, or even approached. David's inspiration and ecstasy came when he was young and alone in the fields as a shepherd. For those of us who need our daily bread of Torah, but mustn't go out now, the computer came along just in time. With this outbreak, is this heaven's way of telling us to turn down the volume? It has gotten awfully loud. Maybe we're being told that it is time to take a pause, retreat, to think about what we are doing, where we are going, and what's the rush? As the Rebbe and my father used to say...nothing is happenstance...nothing is random. There's a reason for everything.

***Pope Frances Calls on Believers to Keep Sabbath;*** Bishop of Rome and leader of the worldwide Catholic Church Pope Francis has called on believers to keep the Sabbath as "the Jews followed and still observe". "We live with the accelerator down from morning to night," Francis said. "This damages mental health, spiritual health, and physical health. More so: it affects and destroys the family, and therefore society. 'On the seventh day, He rested'. What the Jews followed and still observe, was to consider the Sabbath as holy. On Saturday you rest. One day of the week -that's the least- out of gratitude, to worship *God, to spend time with the family, to play, to do all these things. We are not machines!*"

***Israeli Scientists Working on 'Passive Vaccine' for Coronavirus;*** Rehovot based biopharmaceutical company Kamada has announced that it has started to work on developing a blood-plasma derived treatment against the coronavirus. "The concept that we are developing is not new. People that are exposed to a virus develop antibodies for that virus," said Amir London, Chief Executive Officer of Kamada. "If patients who have recovered from the disease and are in convalescence donate plasma, there is a very good likelihood that in that plasma there are going to be antibodies," said London. Kamada has two FDA-approved products, including an anti-rabies treatment that is sold all over the world. The company, which is publicly traded in Tel Aviv, is also the sole supplier of anti-snake venom to the Health Ministry. London explained that they plan to collect plasma from patients recovering from COVID-19 and to purify its antibodies using their proprietary technology. "There is no assurance that this attempt will be successful because we don't know yet what is

going to be the level of antibodies in the plasma of people who recovered from COVID-19". "But based on our experience, as well as on the experience of other companies in the field, we believe there is going to be a sufficient quantity of them. For sure, we know how to purify the plasma. The kind of treatment that Kamada aims to develop is known among professionals as a "passive vaccine". A vaccine triggers the immune system of a person to develop antibodies; in this case, we are providing the antibodies themselves," said London. "Our treatment is a medicine: It targets the severely ill patients, whose situation is worsening and who need a booster to fight the virus." Kamada is working to collect plasma in different facilities from people who have recovered from the viral disease.

***Clinical Trial for USA Coronavirus Vaccine Begins Next Week;*** A clinical trial to evaluate a vaccine designed to protect against the new coronavirus begins on Mon. 23 March 2020 an unnamed USA government official announced. The trial is taking place at the Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute in Seattle, Washington, where COVID-19 cases have surged and authorities have banned mass gatherings. The early-stage, or phase 1 trial will test the vaccine on 45 males and non-pregnant females between the ages of 18 and 55. Meanwhile, Israeli scientists are on the cusp of developing a vaccine themselves. Israeli scientists have, for the last four years, already been developing a vaccine against infectious bronchitis virus, which affects poultry. "Our basic concept was to develop the technology and not specifically a vaccine for this kind or that kind of virus," said Dr. Chen Katz, MIGAL's biotechnology group leader. After scientists sequenced the DNA of the novel coronavirus causing the current worldwide outbreak, the MIGAL (The Galilee Research Institute) researchers examined it and found that the poultry coronavirus has high genetic similarity to the human one and that it uses the same infection mechanism, which increases the likelihood of achieving an effective human vaccine in a very short period of time, according to Katz.

***'A Matter of Life and Death' Says Israeli PM;*** PM Binyamin Netanyahu addressed the nation on the ongoing efforts to contain the novel coronavirus on Tues. night 17 March 2020. Netanyahu demanded that the public act responsibly. "I am glad we haven't lost anyone yet, but it won't last. It's not a matter of freedom, it's a matter of life and death." The Prime Minister noted that in order to reduce the number of casualties in the epidemic, "we will dramatically increase the isolation capacity for carriers. We will track down those who came in contact with coronavirus patients and inform them of the 14-day isolation. Many more people are expected to go into isolation. This is not a recommendation but an obligation that will be enforced without compromise." Netanyahu noted that the Shin Bet is taking action, and the number of tests will be increased dramatically to at least 3,000 tests a day. "If you do not have to go to work, I ask you not to leave the house. Reduce your travel only to essential travel," the prime minister added.

***Israel's Police Preparing for 'Inevitable' Nationwide Lockdown;*** Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan has instructed the Israel Police to prepare for a complete lockdown of the country, calling such a move "inevitable," according to Hebrew media reports on Wed. 18 March 2020. According to the reports, Erdan held a conference call the previous night with the chief of police and heads of other security agencies, following the latest update to guidelines issued by the Health Ministry to stem the growing number of Israelis infected with the coronavirus. "I am convinced that in view of the situation that has arisen, this is an inevitable decision that will save many lives," Erdan said. The public security minister was said to have requested that police and security chiefs urgently prepare and present to him a detailed plan for implementing a countrywide lockdown, in which only essential workers will be allowed to leave their homes, while other citizens will only be allowed out in order to buy supplies and for medical treatment. If a lockdown is ordered, police will be placed in charge of enforcement, while the IDF Home Front Command will be in charge of the supply of essential items. Erdan told participants in the conference call that while a decision to impose a complete lockdown would be a very difficult one, in the current situation it is preferable to take tough measures for a short time in order to defeat the coronavirus quickly and prevent deaths. The Health Ministry introduced sweeping new restrictions to curb the spread of the coronavirus this week, instructing Israelis not to leave their homes unless absolutely necessary but stopping short of imposing a mandatory lockdown. Health Ministry

Director-General Moshe Bar Siman-Tov warned following the new directives that thousands of Israelis could die of the virus if anti-contagion measures were not adhered to.

***Another Winter Storm In Israel;*** As the winter months draw to a close, the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee) continues to fill, rising two centimeters since Tue.17 March 2020. As of the following morning, the Kinneret's water level stood at 209 meters and 44 centimeters below sea level, and just 64 centimeters from maximum capacity. Wed. was mostly cloudy. During the morning hours, there was local rainfall from northern Israel to the northern Negev. The rains lessened during the day, while harsh winds continued to blow. Temperatures will drop to lower than the seasonal average. Thursday will see intermittent rainfall in northern and central Israel. There may be thunderstorms in northern Israel. Harsh winds will blow, and temperatures will remain below the seasonal average. Friday will bring intermittent rainfall in northern and central Israel, and there may be isolated thunderstorms. Local rains will fall in the northern Negev. Snow will fall on Mount Hermon, and there may also be snow in the northern Golan Heights. Temperatures will remain lower than average, and there is a chance of flooding in the Jordan Valley, The Judean Desert, and Dead Sea areas.



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