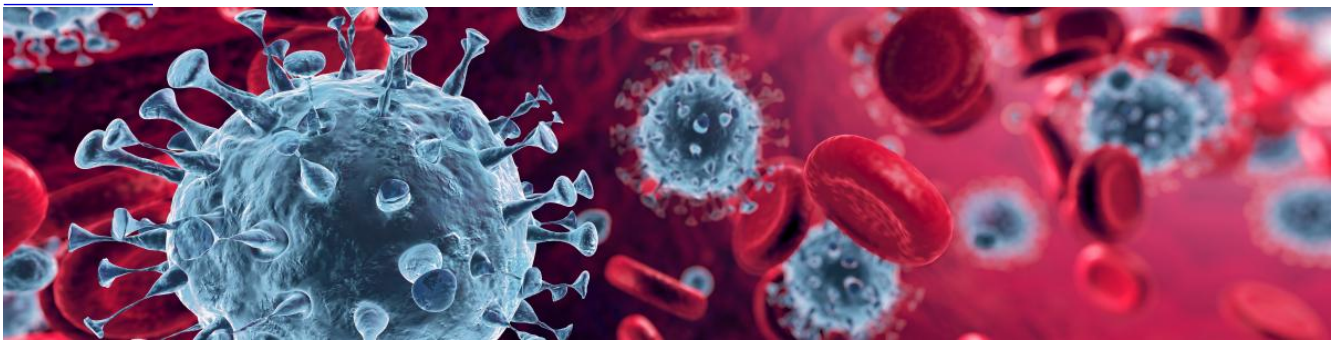
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This is an abridged version of an article by Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo, written for the Jerusalem Post.

The coronavirus crisis, in spite of its terrible downsides, also offers us a positive opportunity.

What is happening to us is that we suddenly hear what Abraham Joshua Heschel called "a perpetual murmur from the waves beyond the shore," which until now we didn't hear. Not because it wasn't there before, but because we have been deafened by the curse of taking our lives for granted. We tell ourselves that we're fine, that we have almost everything under control, and that we're close to becoming the masters of the Universe. One more step, a bit more patience, and we'll be there: absolute certainty; absolute security; absolute health.

And now, to our utmost dread, we have fallen into the hands of one tiny virus that forces us to our knees, causing us not only to be aware that we've lost our certainty, but to realize that we never had it to begin with!

And this wake-up call is actually an enormous blessing, enabling us to become genuine realists. This tiny virus forces us to admit that our self-assured sense of health is a farce, and that our certainty of being able to breathe, walk, speak and think, come what may, is all wishful thinking.

How wise were the sages of Israel when they instituted the custom of making a blessing on almost anything, whether it is eating, drinking, observing natural phenomena, or smelling extravagant aromas. They depicted all these activities as nothing less than totally miraculous.

And how did they come up with the bizarre suggestion that we should say a blessing after we have relieved ourselves? Who would ever think of making a blessing on something as physical as that?

For the sages, nothing was taken for granted, and all was seen in the light of radical amazement. They walked through life with a constant "Wow" on their lips, and they wanted us to share in this uplifting

experience when making a blessing. They knew that to take things for granted is to be spiritually dead.

True, to live in quarantine for two weeks, (our grandparents lived for years in hiding in the days of the Holocaust!) stop kissing and shaking hands, be forced to cancel our plans for vacation, be unable to drink a cup of coffee in a restaurant, or visit a cinema, and be thrown into a nearly impossible situation of dealing with our young children while being unable to go to work, is far from a joke.

But is it not also something very special, which we never imagined? Suddenly we find ourselves on a new mental planet. We are forced to rethink our lives, develop a new mentality, and live a radically different kind of life that we never envisioned. It asks us to break with the monotony that most of us are used to. Almost all of us jump into routine every morning – whether it's a job, or the need to sleep, eat, or entertain ourselves. And now, one little virus suddenly forces us to rethink everything, making us wonder what this life of ours is really all about.

This unforeseen interruption gives us the time to meditate on our lives, learn Torah, read books of wisdom we would otherwise never get to, and above all, to pray as we never did before.

But now we stand in terror and in awe, asking what will happen now. What is our future? And we are aware that nobody knows the answer, not even our greatest experts, and surely not our leaders.

All of this is in fact very liberating. It creates new space in our minds and souls and offers us opportunities that we forgot existed.

The mask has fallen, and reality has confronted us as never before.

We suddenly become aware that life is a gift that is unearned and it may be a little dangerous to feel too much at home in this world. We are offered the chance to make a distinction between the vital and the futile; the trivial and the important; what needs to inspire us (and we should cling to) and what to drop.

While we still have no clue as to what coronavirus will do to our world, our health, and our finances (perhaps all our precautions are not only exaggerated but even counter-productive?), we all recognize that something divine is at stake.

So, what to do? Let me quote a colleague of mine, Rabbi Moss from Australia: "Close your eyes and feel the uncertainty and make peace with it. Embrace your cluelessness. Because in all confusion there is

one thing you know for sure: you are in the hands of God."

And let us not forget: once this trial is behind us and almost all of us will have escaped in good health, the greatest challenge will still await us. Will we fall back into our old ways, or will we be transformed and live a life of spiritual grandeur?

"The Lion has roared. Who will not fear?" (*Amos* 3:8).