

IT'S IN OUR HANDS

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Each Friday night, we raise a glass to say Kiddush and sanctify the Shabbat, marking it as a special day. On its face, it's actually a strange ritual. Sundown to sundown on the seventh day of the week is Shabbat — with or without us making a declaration that it is so. But our sages insisted that we say Kiddush, that we affirmatively declare that we are sanctifying this holy day. I believe what the rabbis intended to convey is that on this day of rest, a day that is inherently passive, **we must never forget that even Shabbat is in our own hands.**

“The question is: what will we do to make sure its effects — not least of which, loss of life and time — are not for nothing?”

Shabbat may arrive on its own, but the quality of how we experience Shabbat is up to us. This lesson is more important today than it ever was. We're confronting the greatest health crisis in the last 100 years and perhaps the greatest economic crisis in the last 90 years. We can't walk into our offices, or go visit our friends. In many ways, life has turned upside down. **We must remember that how we encounter this crisis is in our own hands.**

There are, of course, heroes who are battling on the front lines: doctors, nurses, hospital staff, ambulance drivers, and Hatzalah volunteers working double time to combat the disease. Thousands of healthcare workers who came out of retirement to join the fight. **But even those of us not on the front lines can take matters into our own hands.** We can call people who are vulnerable or lonely. Connect with those who may be anxious or scared. Go grocery shopping for elderly neighbors. We need to use this time to spread more love to our families, to our friends, and to our acquaintances. We need to build the morale of our community so that together we can fight the virus. That is in our hands and we must grasp it.

Judaism is a religion of action. We're not just given Shabbat to receive and enjoy, but we act on it to accept it and make it ours. It's a holy day in and of itself, but we also take measures to feel its holiness — through reciting the Kiddush, enjoying festive meals, through special prayers.

Somehow like Shabbat — this pandemic is something that happened to us. It's a reality independent of ourselves. The question is: what will we do to make sure its effects — not least of which, loss of life and time — are not for nothing? That can turn this into something positive.

In years to come the coronavirus crisis will be a distant memory. We'll look back at this time and hopefully take pride in what we did for others and what we did to fight this disease. Hopefully, we can look back and say that for us, this was our finest hour.

