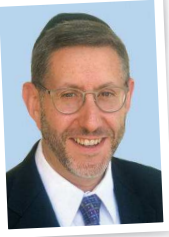


FROM THE EDITOR

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otherwise we might stumble into the abyss.

I remember, not long after I had arrived at yeshiva in upstate New York, attending a minyan at a shiva house, and the *alter bochur* (older student) who drove me there commenting as we quickly walked towards the house, perhaps trying to comfort me and provide some words of inspiration for a younger student, about the beauty that is inherent in a life lived in adherence to the Torah – about how every situation is accounted for and a person always knows what he must do, even in times of grief and sorrow, having been provided with a plan, purpose, and routine where

As a former crisis-line volunteer, who had spoken to many a lost and desperate soul, his words resonated deeply with me – and I have recalled them again and again over the years. One of the things that often leads people down the road of depression and despair is a break in routine, deciding, for example, not to get up, to stay in bed, to stop doing the things that they had been doing. We are fragile beings and it doesn't take much to throw us off course with the result being a rapid downward spiral.

There's hardly a part of the world that hasn't been under some form of lockdown for the past few weeks, with many unable to work from home. Scores of people on social media joke about how, with no reason to get dressed, they've been living in their pyjamas, sleeping until all hours, losing all track of time, with one day flowing into the next, lost in a Netflix oblivion. Some have even been posting photos, dressing up in their finest clothes, including ball gowns, just to take out their rubbish, since it's the only time that they ever step outside and it's the only thing that they really have to look forward to anymore.

As Shavuot approaches, we now have, perhaps, a new appreciation for the priceless and precious treasure that is the Torah and the lofty existence that it inspires and obligates us to lead. We are a people who live each day with meaning and connection – to G-d and to each other.

As is the case every day, we wake each morning giving thanks for the precious gift of another day here on earth – and we likely say *modeh ani* (the expression of gratitude to Hashem that we're meant to utter upon opening our eyes) now with a bit more focus and concentration these days, truly appreciating our own good health and well-being, as well as that of our family. Staying in pyjamas all day simply isn't an option, as we have to get dressed, as well as wash up, so that we can stand before our Creator and daven. And we need to know what day it is, as each day is marked by a *shir shel yom* (song of the day), and davening changes depending on things such as the day of the week, whether it's Rosh Chodesh, and the list goes on and on. And with the start of the omer, we've even begun counting each day that passes. Whether we want to be or not, we're forced to live in the present, focused and very much aware of the passage of time.

And the fact is, we can't ever simply lose track of time, day blending into day, week blending into week, because, no matter what, Shabbos is still Shabbos – something to always look forward to, to plan and save special things for, to prepare for – an oasis in time to spend with our family; a precious day where we are all disconnected from our seemingly endless and all-consuming virtual existence. We clean. We cook special food. We set a beautiful table. We get dressed up in special clothes. It's all in honour of the Shabbos Queen, the special guest that comes to us each week regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves and no matter the level of lockdown. In our neck of the woods, our neighbour, Moshe Erster, has even organised a special "over the fence" kabbalas Shabbos (following the success of his "over the fence" Hallel during Pesach) for the homes surrounding his – a little something extra to look forward to each week. There is something about a Jewish *neshama* (soul) that aches to be connected to other Jews, and there is something so special about uniting together in song.

The situations and circumstances in which we find ourselves can and do change, but the Torah remains our constant guide, providing meaning and purpose where we would otherwise be lost.

From everyone at *JL*, we wish you a good Yom Tov and chag sameach.

ROBERT SUSSMAN, EDITOR

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ON THE COVER:

WHEN SHAVUOS WAS CELEBRATED IN THE TIMES OF THE BEIS HAMIKDASH (TEMPLE), A SPECIAL OFFERING FROM THE NEW CROP OF WHEAT THAT HAD BEEN HARVESTED, TWO LOAVES OF BREAD (AKA SHTEI HALECHEM), WAS BROUGHT. THE GRAIN HARVEST ALSO FEATURES PROMINENTLY IN MEGILAS RUS (THE BOOK OF RUTH) WHICH IS READ ON SHAVUOS.

