



Attitude in the Time of Corona

There is a *midrash* that teaches that there is a message written on a piece of paper kept in each of our two pockets. In one pocket the words written are, “*It is for your sake that the world was created.*” In the second pocket the words written are, “*You are but dust and ashes.*”

I reflect upon this *midrash* often as I look at the world in which we live, and the roller coaster ride of emotions that occur as we watch the daily news, hear about the challenges facing our loved ones, and look for a measure of hope in the year to come. What role if any can we play in shaping our world?

On the one hand, we know that our country, our community, our families, our selves are capable of the most magnificent things. People are given the gift of wisdom, intellectual curiosity, invention, and the desire to understand the world. And this is complemented by the emotional gifts of love, hope, friendship, and a desire to make the world better for ourselves and our children.

But there is a balance.

Our lives our finite. We all will die. And it is unknown what we will accomplish in our short span of years. We wonder what our “dash” might be? And we are also cautioned towards humility lest we be tempted by arrogance. Dust and ashes is perhaps too dark. But perhaps thinking we are the center of the universe is too egotistical.

What then is our place in the world? Who are we? And what is it that we might do to have a lasting impact?

In our darker moments facing COVID-19 we might ask ourselves these very questions. We feel vulnerable and frail; our lives uncertain, and ponderous.

It is comforting therefore to get some good news. News that points towards an end to this life of ambiguity. A vaccine! No, *two* vaccines seem to be in the offing! There will be lots of work ahead to be sure... and decisions to make, but it looks like by June most who want the vaccine will find it available.

This is incredibly exciting news!

And yet, we have been disappointed before.

In one pocket we are reminded that we can do anything! But the other pocket reminds us not to think such lofty thoughts.

Could it be possible that both are true? To quote Robert Browning... “*that a man’s reach should exceed his grasp?*”

If living in the time of corona has taught us anything, especially as we approach the delivery of a vaccine, it is that we are capable of great things. That we as a society can focus our energy for the good of all mankind. We can get discouraged; we can despair...*but we must always live with hope.*

Which world do you live in? Which pocket do you reach for the most? What keeps you most grounded, and what allows you to fly? And if there were a third pocket, what words would be written on that piece of paper?

In life, attitude is often everything.

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