

Megillat Covid

Crying Out

Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

Lonely sits the city once great with people¹ --
her subways now empty, her classrooms closed.
Refrigerator trucks² await the bodies of the dead
wrapped in sheets of plastic and stacked like logs.
Mourners keep a painful distance, unable to embrace.

At testing sites cars line up for hours before dawn
only to be turned away when swabs and reagents run out.³
At food pantries cars line up for hours before dawn
creeping across asphalt until a stranger masked and gloved
places a too-small box of food in the trunk.

And our children: the lucky ones ache
for their friends, forget what school felt like,
cry for lost birthday parties and closed playgrounds.⁴
Some wake in the night from nightmares of the virus,
a rising tide washing everyone away. Some die.

We suffer anxiety attacks in the grocery store;⁵
did someone breathe virus in this recirculated air?
Things we've lost: touch, song, trust, safety,
a year of childhood -- if we're fortunate. If.
Where are the seeds of hope on this darkest day?⁶

We stay home to protect the vulnerable.
We pace confined spaces, memorize every inch of wall.
Our synagogues are shuttered, we are exiled to Zoom.
We cry out from the depths.⁷ Do You suffer with us, God?
Who will we be when the pandemic is gone?

¹ [Eicha 1:1](#)

² [I fear our era's defining symbol will be the refrigerator truck](#), *The Washington Post*

³ [NPR report](#), spring 2020

⁴ [To Be A Parent Right Now...](#), *Esquire*, July 2020

⁵ [How to Deal With the Overwhelming Anxiety...](#), *wellandgood.com*, May 2020

⁶ [Causes of Destruction, Seeds of Hope](#), *Conservative Yeshiva / Sefaria*

⁷ [Eicha 3:55](#)