Rabbi Moshe Mitrani and what to do in times of an epidemic.

THE LIFE OF RABBI MOSHE

Rabbi Yosef de Trani (or Mitrani. Trani is a small town in Puglia, in South Italy, probably the family's origin was from this city) escaped from Spain at the time of the expulsion in 1492, and reached Thessaloniki, Greece. There, in the year 1500, his son Ribbi Moshe was born. At the age of 18, Ribbi Moshe moved to Erets Israel and settled in the city of Tsefat/Safed where a small Jewish colony was developing; led by the well known Rab Ya'aqob Berab. By the 16 century, Tsefat became the most important Jewish center in the world. And the influence of the Rabbis who were there is still felt today. Rabbi Miterani was one of those influential Rabbis. He was also known by his acronym- Mabbit (□□□□□□ □□□□ □□ □□□) □"□□□.
Around the year 1530, Rabbi Miterani received his Semikha (a renewed rabbinical ordination) from Rabbi Yaakob Berab, along with Ribbi Yosef Caro, the famous author of the Shulhan Arukh. Rabbi Yosef Caro and Rabbi Miterani were inseparable colleagues and served together in the Bet Din (rabbinical Court) of Tsefat, the latter for 54 years. Rabbi Miterani succeeded Rabbi Yosef Caro as head of the Bet Din when Rabbi Caro died in 1575. Rabbi Miterani passed away at the age of 80. He left behind children who followed his rabbinical vocation and wrote several books. His most famous Halacha books are "Qiriat Sefer" and his responsa, "Shut Hamabit" .
He also wrote a very particular book called BET ELOKIM, which I want to tell you about today.

BET ELOKIM

The book is divided into 3 parts: the first part refers to Tefila- prayer. The second part is about Teshuba-repentance.

And the third part, Yesodot- the ideas, beliefs and philosophical foundations of Judaism.
In the first part, chapter 16, Rabbi Miterani refers to *deber*, that is, the deadly epidemics that occasionally appear in the world and affects cities, towns, countries, or in times of globalization- the entire planet.
He first describes the most famous epidemics mentioned in the Tanakh. The plague in the times of Pinehas, when 24,000 people died . That of Qorah where 14,700 Jews died. And finally the epidemic that hit Israel in the time of King David, where 70,000 people died.

ADULTS OR CHILDREN?
Rabbi Miterani then mentions the epidemics that plagued the world in his own time. Biblical epidemics affected mostly adult men. Death was immediate, sudden, and the plague was short. It could be over in a day.
Plagues in Rabbi Miterani's time, like in our times, were not sudden, but would last for weeks or even months. People died daily, and like David haMelekh himself (see Tehilim Psalm 30) some of those who became ill, recovered.
The most dramatic thing that Rabbi Miterani writes is that the plagues and epidemics of his time affected mostly "innocent children" □□□ □□ □□ □□□□□□□. Similarly, the Spanish Influenza in 1918 affected mostly young adults and pregnant women. Today, despite the general madness, we have to be thankful that B"H children are not that vulnerable to this virus. Children and young adults can get the virus and might have symptoms of a common cold. But unlike what happens with the elderly, the young immune system of children and adolescents is effective and usually overcomes this virus.

DO NOT PUT YOURSELF AT RISK
Rabbi Miterani says that unlike the divine plagues cited in the Tora, contemporary epidemics may appear to us to be a "natural" phenomenon. The Rabbi quotes doctors of his time who explained that *"the rarefied air that one breathes makes one*

die”. But the final verdict, the Rabbi explains, then and now, is still in the hands of the Creator, as we say in the Tefilot de Rosh haShana.

The Rabbi also criticizes those who take unnecessary risks, by negligently exposing themselves to contagion. ” וקצתם שאינם
מחויבים אז בעונש ההוא אלא שהם מסתכנים בעצמם לעמוד במקום הסכנה
ואינם ראויים לשיעשה להם נס ונדבק בהם החולי ההוא וה ‘ יתברך יודע
בחירתם וחותמם למיתה *“Even if someone was not destined to die, if he stays in a dangerous place where he shouldn’t be, might not be worthy of a miraculous Divine intervention, and he might be condemn to die.”*

We must take Rabbi Miterani’s words into account and avoiding taking risks. Because today, even if the lives of children and young adults, B”H, are not in danger they can become carriers of this virus, and involuntarily spread it to the elderly by being in contact with them, or with someone who will eventually be in contact with elders. ANYONE CAN BECOME, ח”ו AN INVOLUNTARY POTENTIAL KILLER. Grandparents are the most exposed in this entire pandemic. **And we must protect ourselves to protect them**. This is very important to bear in mind, especially in our communities where staying in the family many times means staying with the “extended families”, grandparents, grandchildren, cousins, etc. WE ARE FORCED TO DO THE UNTHINKABLE UNTIL THIS PANDEMIC IS OVER: SEPARATE FROM OUR BELOVED FAMILY MEMBERS.

WHAT TO DO NOW?

Although Rabbi Moshe leaves open the difficult eternal question of why bad things happen to good people, he explains how we Jews react in times of tragedy.

He mentions the areas where we should improve: וירבה בתפילה
וצדקה ותחנונים לפני הא-ל יתברך בתשובה ומעשים טובים

In my own words,

Tefila, praying to God, asking Him to heal those who are sick, and begging Him to protect those who are healthy.

Tsedaka, helping and assisting with food, resources, money those who are most affected by this epidemic.

Teshuba, repenting of our wrong actions. Trying to improve the observance of His Tora.
Ma’asim Tobim, becoming better people. Better parents, better children, better spouses.

We pray that soon, B’H, this epidemic will be over and we will return to normality, which we will now surely value more than ever!