



## Where Are You Going?

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A story is told about Rebbe Zusha of Anipoli, a beloved Chasidic rabbi who lived in Northern Poland in the 1700s, a place that was not particularly friendly to its Jewish residents. One night, Reb Zusha left his house and began to walk. Two big, burly, policeman stopped him and asked: “Where are you going?” Zusha took a breath and replied, “I don’t know.”

“That’s ridiculous. You must know where you’re going,” one policeman growled. “Tell us now or there will be severe consequences.” “I don’t know,” Zusha again replied.

“That’s it!” the second policeman shouted, lunging forward to grab him by the shoulders. The two officers marched him roughly to the prison and threw him behind bars. “Now,” they roared, “answer the question – WHERE ARE YOU GOING?”

“I told you,” Reb Zusha replied, “that I didn’t know – and clearly I was right. I thought I was going to shul, but instead here I am in jail.”

If you asked me two weeks ago, I would not have been as wise as Zusha. Based on a lifetime of being able to count on tomorrow being relatively similar to yesterday, I would have confidently projected how this week would play out. Yet here we are. Who could imagine the unprecedented and uncertain moment we find ourselves in?

And so, the question arises: How do we respond when suddenly everything we thought we knew changes – when suddenly tomorrow is not like yesterday, and the day after is even more uncertain?

I was struck by the contrast in two recent images. The first: The captain of the Diamond Princess cruise ship, which had been quarantined since late January. As Captain Gennaro Arma finally disembarked on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, cap tucked confidently under his arm, he was the very picture of calm, cool, and collected.

The accompanying article affirmed that wasn't just for show. Through 705 passengers becoming infected with COVID-19, 7 fatalities, and managing what reporters called a "floating coronavirus prison," Captain Arma had been completely unflappable. He regularly checked in with passengers, kept the crew's spirits up, shared bad news with hopeful humor, and, standing tall and proud, was the last one off the ship.

Princess Cruises President Jan Swartz quoted Arma as saying to the passengers, "A diamond is a piece of coal that does really well under pressure." Swartz added, "Captain Arma was a true diamond." In short, how most of us would like to be.

And then, the second image: This one from Star Market at 1 Boylston Street in Chestnut Hill at 5:30pm this past Thursday, just a short while after Superintendent David Fleishman announced that the Newton public schools would all be closed.

These are the shelves [photo]. Every cart was filled. The lines were halfway down the store – and ironically, while everyone was stocking up to protect themselves from contagion, social distancing wasn't a thing.

In all the ways Captain Arma is heroic but not entirely accessible, Star Market at 5:30 after school closures is totally accessible – but not heroic. The good news is that our Torah this morning gives us another option.

After the trauma of the Golden Calf and the drama of Moses' anger, what's left are perfect commandments – shattered. What was whole is now broken. So up Moses goes again to craft new tablets. These he brings down whole.

We don't often think about this part, but our ancestors had a dilemma. What to do with the broken tablets? They were so holy. They were so perfect. They were so whole. And now – shattered.

What they decided to do was not only beautiful then, it is one of the most relevant teachings of Torah now for our uncertain times. Our ancestors took the shattered pieces and placed them next to the whole pieces. They picked up both, as one, and carried them forward together.

Alex and Jordan, today there is wholeness. And today there is brokenness.

Alex, I look at you and see wholeness. Your parents, Greg and Andrea, kvelling. Your brother Daniel and your loving grandparents, filled with pride. Your yearning for a slower, sacred Shabbat manifest in this moment.

Jordan, I look at you and see wholeness. Your parents, Sarah and Simy, bursting with blessing watching you shine. Micah, who adores you, and your loving grandparents. The way you earned your gifts and your blessing, digging deep with humor and real heart.

And I see brokenness. Empty pews ... and all that goes with them.

Your Torah portion reminds us that this is the human condition. No one goes through life without shattered tablets. No one can be certain where we are going.

And maybe we won't be as cool under pressure as Captain Arma. But with the wisdom of the tablets, we don't have to give in to Star Market anxiety either.

To live in extraordinary times – and we do now live in extraordinary times – is to be called on to be a disciple of Reb Zusha, open not just to where you are going, but where you find yourself to be. To live in extraordinary times – and we do now live in extraordinary times – is to be called on, like our ancestors before us, to pick up both the wholeness and the brokenness of each moment – and keep on moving.

Shabbat Shalom.