

The Jewish Vaccination

Category: Holidays, Yom Kippur, Holidays

Everybody is waiting for the coronavirus vaccine, but no one wants to be the first one to try it. What was the basis for the original vaccine? And how can we immunize our children before they go out into the world?

The Coronavirus Vaccine

In recent weeks, I've noticed an interesting phenomenon. On one hand, the entire world is anxiously awaiting the development of a coronavirus vaccine. On the other hand, everyone I spoke to has said very assuredly, "Listen, I'm not going to be the first one to be vaccinated. I'll wait to see how things turn out, and then I'll decide."

This is true of people from across the political spectrum.

Some conservatives don't see the need for a vaccine at all. They claim that the virus isn't as bad as the media makes it, and some go as far as to say that it's actually a conspiracy.

Liberals say the opposite. They say that the government is pushing big pharma to produce a vaccine too quickly. They have shortened the testing process and have pressured the FDA to approve the vaccine before they can properly evaluate the results. Therefore, it is impossible to trust its safety.

If so, the question arises, who is the vaccine for?

The First Vaccination

The concept of vaccination against disease is one of the greatest scientific achievements of medical history which has saved countless lives all over the world. Without a doubt, it is among the greatest achievements of all times.

It was a discovery of a physician and scientist named Dr. Louis Pasteur. Dr. Pasteur's other famous discovery is found in his name: the pasteurization of milk, wine, beer, and other foods, to lessen the number of germs found in the item. He

is the one who discovered that to escape a virus, we could make use of the very virus itself.

Dr. Pasteur famously used his theory for the treatments of several illnesses, including rabies, and when his discoveries proved successful, he began to treat other illnesses in the same fashion.

Dr. Pasteur's discovery serves as the basis of all vaccinations until this very day. All vaccines that are being produced now for COVID-19 (aside for those produced by one single company) are produced with the same methods he used. The body is prompted to develop antibodies by injecting an organism of the very same virus, and then, when faced with the actual disease, it is able to fight it off.

There is a fascinating statement in a book called Mavo Shearim, which was written during Dr. Pasteur's lifetime. Quoting reliable sources, the author states in the name of Dr. Rabbi Yisrael Michel Rabinowitz - a Jewish friend of Dr. Pasteur - that Dr. Pasteur made his discovery based on a teaching of the Talmud.

Dr. Rabinowitz lived in Paris, where he began to translate the Talmud into French. A volume of Seder Moed reached Dr. Pasteur and it piked his curiosity, so he began to read it. In the middle of Tractate Yoma, he discovered an interesting statement. "If one was bitten by a wild dog (a dog with rabies) he should be fed lobes of the dog's liver."

Surprised by this statement, he realized that the Talmud was saying something very profound; that an illness can be cured through the very illness itself. He began to research this concept, and the result is the vaccines that we have today.

Are Your Children Immunized?

My friends, I am going to leave the immunizations to the scientists. Our job on Yom Kippur is to ask ourselves, "Are we immunizing our children before they go out into the big world. Are we giving them the tools to retain their Judaism?"

Some individuals maintain that attending services on Yom Kippur will give their children a Jewish identity. But realistically - attending a synagogue while fasting, while the chazzan drones on endlessly and the Rabbi gives a speech that seems to go on forever - is this going to encourage young Jews to remain Jewish? Sending

our children to Hebrew School is likewise important, but will that stem the tide of assimilation?

The real immunization against assimilation is the Jewish kitchen.

On Yom Kippur, we are forbidden to eat food, but we are not forbidden to talk about food...

Matzah ball soup on a Friday night in a Jewish home - that is Jewish immunization. My daughter and son-in-law direct the Chabad in Ohio University. Whenever a Jewish student is ill, they send over a bowl of chicken soup and the kid already feels half-better. Because the bowl of matzah ball soup makes him feel as if his mother came to visit him. It makes him feel connected.

Every holiday has its distinct Jewish food. Chanukah has delicious latkes, Purim has Hamantaschen, and Pesach has Matzah. Not everyone thinks that Matzah is delicious, but everyone remembers the taste. On Shavuot, we eat dairy, and on Rosh Hashanah, we did an apple into honey. In fact, Rosh Hashanah in our day seems to be recognized by an apple in honey more than the Shofar itself.

Yom Kippur has a special food too. Obviously, we don't eat it on Yom Kippur; we eat it on the day before. It is called Kreplach.

I'm not sure how many of you ate Kreplach today, but it's your loss. If you don't know what Kreplach are, ask your neighbor - who is sitting a full six feet away from you. Personally, my expertise is in being a Kreplach consumer; I'm less involved in the details of preparing and cooking it. But I want to share with you a story about a Krepl.

A Krepl for Judaism

My grandfather, Rabbi Aharon Chazan, immigrated from Russia to Israel, and became very involved in helping the new Russian immigrants reconnect with Judaism in the Holy Land.

In the nineties, when hundreds of thousands of Jews immigrated, he became a one-man-institution, working tirelessly for their benefit. One local religious ministry appointed him to be their agent in determining the Jewish status of those who wished to marry. Whenever a couple would come to them to arrange a

Chupah, they would be sent to Rabbi Chazan to determine whether they were actually Jewish.

One day, a young man came to my grandfather and asked to confirm his Judaism. He had no documentation to prove it, so my grandfather asked him several questions about Judaism. But this young man was clueless. He knew nothing at all. Nonetheless, he insisted that his mother was Jewish.

My grandfather asked to meet with the mother, but she lived in Moscow. He decided to speak to her over the phone. He asked her whether she remembered anything about Jewish holidays. "Did you ever hear of Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur?"

She was as clueless as her son. He kept on prying her for information, but she didn't seem to remember anything. At the end, she said, "I do remember one thing. My mother would make a food called Kreplach."

My grandfather was delighted. "If your mother made Kreplach, there is no question that you are Jewish!"

What is Deep Inside

Why do we eat Kreplach before Yom Kippur?

A krepl is like a dumpling. It is made of dough and stuffed with meat. From our vantage point, the meat is not visible. It is concealed by the dough.

The Rebbe would often quote the verse from Shmuel, "*Al tabet el mar'ehu*, don't focus on his external appearance." When you meet a Jew, the Rebbe said, don't judge him by his appearance. Deep inside, under the dough, there is a pristine Jewish soul that loves G-d and loves other Jews as well. Therefore, as a preparation for Yom Kippur, we remind G-d - and more importantly, we remind ourselves - that under our external façade there is a soul yearning for some Matza ball soup - yearning for spirituality. Deep inside, every Jew is connected to G-d, to His Torah and to His people.