In January, I joined the worldwide book club of *Daf Yomi,* reading one page of the Talmud each day on a seven and a half year cycle. It’s been a meaningful way to feel connected to other Jews across millennia, continents, and denominations. Now, we’re in *Masechet Shabbat*, which feels like amazingly relevant gift in our current moment, in which many of us are simultaneously seeking distance and connection. This past week focused on how to divide *Rashut HaRabim* or the public domain, from *Rashut HaYachid*, the private domain, as they relate to where carrying is or is not permissible on Shabbat. This section even makes rulings about how to pass objects from one domain into another without violating Shabbat, depending upon how many handbreadths span the threshold, which mirrors the new GrubHub policy of contactless food delivery to follow the public health guidelines of maintaining at least six feet of separation.

Tonight I want to focus on *karmelit*, which is the intermediate space between these two domains. It can include a narrow alleyway, or interestingly, the open seas. These domains are not defined by who owns them, but rather by how they are used. In keeping with the geography of our current Torah reading finishing up the book of *Shemot*, *Shabbat 6b* wonders why the desert is sometimes included in enumerations of the public spaces, and sometimes excluded. In response to this apparent inconsistency, Abaye responds, just as he usually does, “*lo kashia*” or “this is not a difficulty” because where the desert **is** listed among the public domains, refers to the time when Israel was dwelling in the desert, and it was an area frequented by the multitudes. And where the desert **is** **not** enumerated among the public domains refers to the time**s** when multitudes do not congregate there.

Right now, places that used to be indisputably *Rashut HaRabim*, like Grand Central Terminal or the main sanctuary at CBE, are appearing (in photos I’ve seen posted online) completely desolate and deserted in the original sense of the term. They have now become liminal spaces, and while I doubt that a *posek* would consider them to be *halachically karmelit,* these former gathering places are now at least emotionally hard to define. So, where do we gather now, in a time of social distancing if not outright quarantine? Clearly on Zoom, for one, which is now where my daughter goes to school, where I go to work, and where my extended family is tentatively planning to host an eSeder for *Pesach*.

Maybe we can also gather symbolically in this potentially isolating time by giving each other gifts. The last time I saw many of you in person was on Purim, when one of the four *mitzvot* is *mishloach manot,* traditionally giving baskets of food to friends. Now, I’m part of Facebook groups where people offer to give supplies that are in shortage, like toilet paper or facemasks, to those who might need them. People are sharing resources, from links to online learning activities to occupy kids who are now home-schooled to inspiring poems, songs, or *berakhot* for challenging times. Of course, Daf Yomi has something timely to say about gift giving in this week’s readings, too.

In *Shabbat 10b* it says “One who gives a gift to another must inform him that he is giving it to him….Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: One who gives a gift of bread to a child needs to inform [the child’s] mother that he gave it to him. The Gemara asks: What does he do to the child, so that his mother will know that he gave him a gift? Abaye said: He should smear [the child] with oil or place blue shadow around his eye in an obvious manner. When the mother of the child notices and asks him about it, he will tell her that so-and-so gave him a piece of bread.”

Ok, that face paint system is kind of an odd way of getting a message across, but they couldn’t just send a text message saying “Hey, check your stoop, I left a casserole there for you guys”. So **not only** should we give each other gifts, **we must also** explicitly communicate about the gifts we are giving, to remind people of the blessings they are receiving, so that they are not taken for granted. This points to a good way to ensure that our generosity is acknowledged, appreciated, and in turn, spurs on more acts of generosity and the chain of gifts continues throughout the community, building new links and strengthening existing ties.

Referencing *Parashat Ki Tisa*, which was last week’s Torah reading, Page 10b of *Masechet Shabbat* also says that it was “taught in a *baraita* that the verse stating in Exodus 31:13 ‘For I am G-d Who sanctifies you,’ means that the Holy One, Blessed be G-d, said to Moses: I have a good gift in My treasure house and Shabbat is its name, and I seek to give it to Israel. Go inform them about it.” In other words, this teaches us by example, saying that G-d too must explicitly communicate to Moses to directly specify to the people that the commandment to keep and remember Shabbat is itself a gift. Tomorrow’s Torah portion, *Vayakhel Pekudei*, opens with *Shemot 35:2* in which Moses relays HaShem’s commandments to the assembled Israelites, saying “Six days work may be done, but on the seventh day you shall have sanctity, a day of complete rest to the Lord”. Not only is observing Shabbat a *mitzvah*, it is also an act of generosity to the community. We can especially appreciate that now when we are even more tied to our internet-enabled devices than we were before all meetings moved online, a deepening dependence on technology that I didn’t think was even possible. This makes it all the more important to step back, unplug, and just **be** for a day. Rest and celebration are vital in uncertain times, and we should be thankful for having received them as a gift that can never be quarantined or hoarded.

My prayer for us is that though we are socially distanced and although we may be having a wide range of experiences in response to the novel Coronavirus and the novel *karmelit* spaces that it creates, we can continue to find ways to give and receive gifts to and from each other and HaShem. I pray that we find ourselves on the same page, whether it’s literally by learning *Daf Yomi*, digitally by joining here for online Kabbalat Shabbat, or spiritually by simply remembering that come what may, we’re all in this together.

Shabbat shalom