



Halakhic Questions

with Rav Yosef Zvi Rimon

Visiting Grandparents During the Coronavirus Pandemic

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QUESTION

Shalom Rabbi. We have elderly parents who want us to visit them with the grandchildren. We are concerned about visiting due to the outbreak of the second wave of COVID-19, but they'd rather have more time with the grandchildren than a longer life with loneliness. Must we accept their opinion?

RESPONSE

The Rambam (Hilkhot Rotze'ah UShmirat HaNefesh 11:5) writes:

*The Sages prohibited many things because they involve danger to life. **Anyone who violates them and says "I am hereby endangering myself – what (concern) do others have with me?" – or (he says) "I don't really care," we punish him with rabbinic lashes.***

The implication is that it is prohibited for a person to enter into a dangerous situation. Despite this, are there ever instances in which it is permitted to endanger oneself?

The Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 112a) implies that a person is permitted to endanger himself in order to earn a livelihood. Similarly, the **Noda BiYehuda** (*Yoreh De'a* 10) states that a person who must endanger himself (to some degree) as part of earning his livelihood may do so. Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Iggerot Moshe, Hoshen Mishpat* 1:104) and other halakhic authorities rule similarly.

The Danger of Loneliness

It appears from the words of the halakhic authorities that living a normal life while making an honest living outweighs the prohibition of self-endangerment. It would seem that the reason is that **sometimes, avoiding danger can itself create danger!** If we tell someone he cannot make a living, this can create a grave danger, whether due to idleness and boredom or because he cannot survive without a livelihood.

We can apply this principle to our case: **while loneliness is not the same as livelihood, it is still a grave danger for the elderly.** Everyone needs company, especially an older person who is alone much of the time anyway. If we deny him the possibility of being with others, there could be a grave danger to his mental health. Therefore, it is reasonable to permit someone to put themselves in danger in order to overcome loneliness.

God Protects Fools

There may be an additional consideration that occasionally allows one to endanger oneself. The Talmud (*Avoda Zara* 30b, *Nidda* 31b, etc.) says it is permitted to put oneself in danger because of "*shomer peta'im Hashem*" (literally: God protects fools). Meaning, if everyone acts in a certain manner, that reality is not considered dangerous. Consequently, such endangerment is permitted. From here it appears it is permitted for a person to expose himself to dangers people normally expose themselves to, while adhering to all the required safety precautions, since this is the natural way to live (see *Mesilat Yesharim*, chap. 9).

Regarding COVID-19, since the public health authorities have established various leniencies, which most people follow, one can apply the principle of *shomer peta'im Hashem*. As long as people act carefully and in accordance with the rules (in the way most people do), one may certainly leave the house, and even visit grandparents, while maintaining distance and wearing masks.

Practical Halakha

Practically speaking, one may visit grandparents, especially when they are keen for such visits, and when the law allows it. However, one must wear a mask and observe all the required rules. It is true that there is greater protection against COVID-19 when grandparents are alone, but loneliness is also a risk, especially for the elderly, and one must strike a balance. When people strictly follow Health Ministry rules, it is not merely permitted to visit grandparents during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is **a mitzva**.