



Opinion »

Israel is ready to reopen. I'm not.

By Shoshanna Keats-Jaskoll

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Last night, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced an easing up of restrictions. No longer confined to 100 meters, we can go out for the first time in ages. National parks are reopening and even malls will open later in the week.

Nearly one in four Israelis are unemployed, up from a record low of four percent, and the economy has taken a big hit, so I know we need to reopen. And yet, I am scared. I could have sent my second grader back to school two days ago, but I have not. While the schools are doing an amazing job of using masks, purifying gel, and social distancing (15 kids to a classroom, half the normal size!), I'm just not ready. Over two months of quarantine — and knowing the threat is still there — has made me cautious.

Our family has been on lockdown longer than most. In late February, a few days after we returned from a family trip to Spain, we were told to quarantine at home as Madrid had suddenly become one of the cities worst affected by the coronavirus.

We got out of lockdown right before Megillah reading on Purim. Two days later, schools were closed and we were back in lockdown — this time, with the whole country. It is now the beginning of May, and other than a few trips to the store, and a drive I made my husband take me on for my sanity, we've been home, with four of our five children (our soldier had to remain on base and only came home for a few days after six weeks. We don't know when we'll see him again).

Trying to work and deal with homeschooling, Zoom meetings, devices, three meals a day, plus the "I'm hungry"s in between, seeking to maintain some semblance of health, both physical and mental, while staying safe, has been very trying. And yet we are of the lucky ones.

We have a safe home. My husband and I both have our jobs, and we have a loving family. I could not help thinking of those who have only some, or even none, of those blessings. We raised money to provide needy families with packages of toys to keep children happy and parents sane while supporting local businesses. Now, with the help of local organizations, we do the same with food deliveries.

The lockdowns, as severe and difficult as they have been, have been effective. Israel has done a fabulous job keeping her citizens safe. From total lockdowns of the worst-hit neighborhoods to quarantine hotels, from barring entry to non-citizens and phone tracking of the sick, Israelis took it seriously, with an emphasis on saving Sabba and Safta.

And while we had to spend Passover alone, and celebrate Israel's Independence and Memorial Days at home, it's a small price to pay for the health of the country.

Maybe that's why I'm scared to go out. I'm not ready to become part of the statistics.

It's going too fast for me, and I fear the repercussions.

As a family, we make our decisions day by day. Every evening my husband and I discuss what we are going to do. Are we going to send them to school? Are we going to go out? Are we going to see my parents, who we have not seen since the middle of February, other than two awkward visits from over six feet away?

It's debilitating not to see parents, siblings, cousins or even friends. At the same time, spending time as a nuclear family has made us stronger, being forced to make space for one another, making decisions together, listening to one another's concerns and choosing a path.

But the unknowns are scary. Being let out does not mean people won't get sick; it just means the health system will not collapse. And so for now, at this moment, we are not sending anyone to school and we are not heading to the malls.

But ask me tomorrow, and our decision might be different.

Living with all of these unknowns, you learn to just *be*, to wait. Wait for more information, for a clearer path. Hopefully some of the things we've learned will stick with us (like the chess we all learned over this quarantine in order to play with Zeidi online). Hopefully, we will continue talking things through, continue to compromise and make decisions based on what's good for everyone.

Hopefully, these are lessons we as a country will learn too.

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