

Hiding Self-View

Like many of us who are blessed to be able to work during this most unusual time, my days are filled with Zoom meetings – some days Zoom meetings back-to-back for hours and hours.

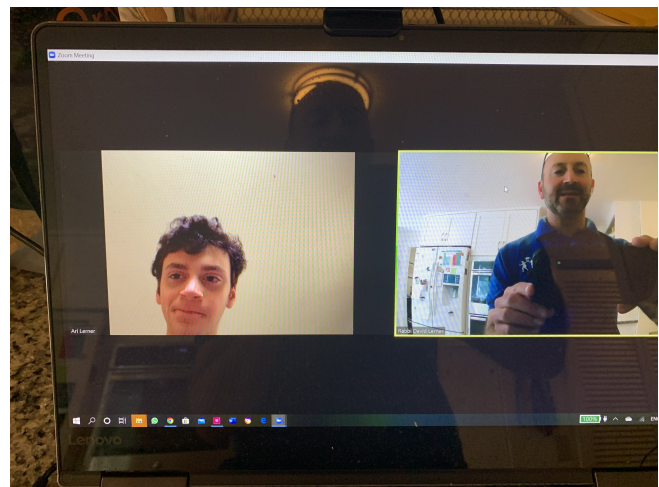
To paraphrase the Yiddish, we can become *oys-k'ZOOM't*, when our eyes start to glaze over from too many hours staring at the screen.



But there is another problem with regular Zoom meetings, which is that you can see yourself. Even when you are meeting with someone one-on-one in Zoom, you have two boxes: you and the other person.

How many times have your eyes drifted over to your box? Well, of course, they do. Let me speak for myself, I often find myself staring at my own face.

Am I actually in the box?
Is my *kippah* on straight?
Boy, what happened to all
my hair?
Or for many of you, when
will I finally get a haircut?

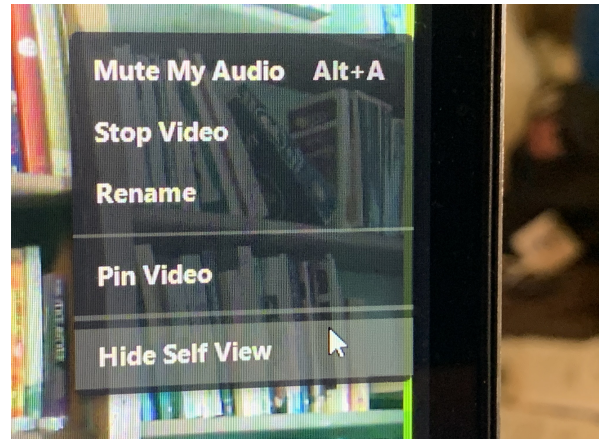


That is, until a couple of weeks ago when a friend told me about a feature on Zoom. She told me to move my arrow over the three dots in the top right corner of my Zoom box and click there. It offers a number of options like muting yourself. Below that is an option, you may not have noticed: “Hide Self-View.”

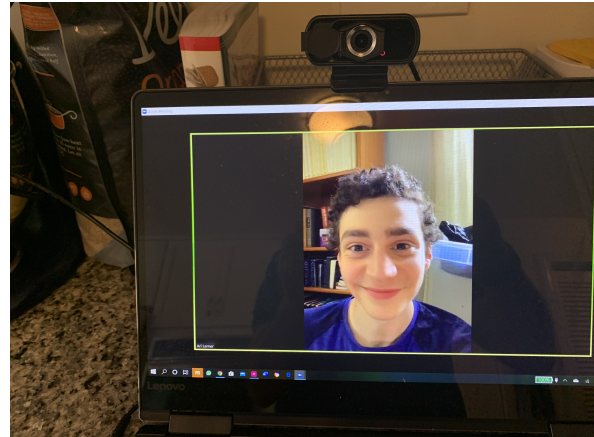
I clicked it.

Suddenly, I disappeared.

My screen jumped from two boxes to one.



Instead of glancing side to side from looking at myself to looking at my friend, I was looking just at her. And since her image was centered on the screen and much larger, I could both see her more clearly and look directly into her face since my camera was centered right above her.



Until that moment, every Zoom meeting I was in included me. And the normal, self-conscious human tendency is to look at yourself. But it is not normal to be in a conversation with someone else and see *yourself*.

The truth is it not only takes you away from the other person, but it is exhausting as your brain has to know how to process extra information about yourself, in addition to trying to follow the other person and the conversation.

No wonder we are all Zoomed out!

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The *Sefat Emet*, Rabbi Yehudah Leib Alter of Ger, comments that one of the greatest things we can do is to be a *shaliah* – a messenger, an emissary. There is something so important and wonderful about actually bringing something to someone else. I am thinking about how so many people I know are volunteering to bring other people food, visits, and other necessities.



The Sefat Emet reminds us that we are all scouts, messengers, asked by God to perform *mitzvot* in this realm.

That is what all of human existence is about.

But then he adds another critical aspect of performing *mitzvot* and serving as messengers for God. We have to try to negate our own desires,

our own focus on our own selves. We have to try to put aside our own needs for a moment.

That's what the ten scouts struggled with in this week's Torah reading. They could not get beyond themselves. Their own fears, their own worries.

The *Sefat Emet* reminds us that we are not sending the scouts for themselves, but they are doing something for others, for God, for the people, for something beyond themselves.

That is the essence of our tradition.

As my teacher, Rabbi Art Green wrote while everything we do can contain some aspect of holiness, some aspect of eternal meaning, in order

to fully achieve that, we are asked to “negate our will before that of God, and do all you do only for the sake of heaven.”

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That reminds us of this moment. Amidst this pandemic, we realize that our actions are not just about ourselves. We wear our masks not merely to protect ourselves, but to protect others.



When we hide our self-view on Zoom, we perform an act of *tzimtzum*, of Kabbalistic contraction – making ourselves a little smaller, so that there can be more room for others.

As we enter into a summer like no other, let us renew our commitments to one another and make sure we close our own boxes, hiding our self-view at times, so we can make space and care for everyone else.