

## Progressively Speaking: To live life worried about risk is to not live at all

Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner looks ahead to the High Holy Days and offers a Reform response to our working patterns



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It's time for normal business to resume. That's the message from the government, in any case, as it continues to make clear its desire for workers to leave behind their home working and return to the office.

I have some sympathy with the difficult task at hand – there is real damage to some parts of our economy being caused by the radical shifts in how we work now.

At the same time, it is vital to not put people at undue risk. We know that the value of life is paramount. But to live life caring only about minimising all risk is to not live at all. How do we decide where the balance lies?

Our tradition has further guidance beyond the commandment to save lives. Torah commands us to build a bannister around a flat roof to ensure people do not fall off. Maimonides extends this to mean we must take all actions necessary to prevent foreseeable risks.

In commentaries to the Shulchan Aruch, we are also taught about how much risk one should take to save a life. A person is not required to put their life in definite danger to save another, but where the danger is only possible, we are encouraged to genuinely reflect on the degree of risk and not be overly cautious in our approach.

What does this mean? Flooding back to our usual lives is a risk we can see coming – we know this is likely to lead to more infections, so we must do something to prevent this.

There is a risk to continuing our distanced way of living, but this risk does not seem overwhelming.

We have made it this far, and while disruption may occur, we are very likely to see society continue to evolve and adapt.

In Reform Judaism, we have had a very similar dilemma around these High Holy Days. There is something lost by keeping our distance, but we believe in our ability as a community to adapt and find alternative ways to have a meaningful connection while being able to protect our vulnerable members. We have opened our doors to all who want to connect safely in our most intensely spiritual time of year.

I think our communities show how it is possible to adapt and thrive to keep others safe, even when that seems difficult to achieve.

It is not just for our sake – we can be a light to the nation and an example of how to face up to a new normal.

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