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**Daniel Greenberg**

**Script for BBC Thought for the Day**

**15 July 2019**

**Nail-bars**

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Good morning.

This week has seen the reopening of a number of kinds of business in the beauty industry including nail bars and beauty salons.

The government’s guidance described the phased approach to businesses in the lockdown by reference to goods and services that are “essential”. Initially, only essential trade could continue; and now, as lockdown eases, some non-essential services can resume.

But perhaps the last few months have taught us to distinguish between two kinds of essential.

There are things that I need to remain physically healthy: food, medicines and healthcare services.

But there are also things that I need to remain mentally healthy, and those go far beyond what might be regarded as the formal mental healthcare sector.

The Talmud in Tractate Taanis 22a tells a story about a rabbi standing in a busy marketplace and challenging Elijah the prophet to identify someone who is assured of a place in the world to come. Elijah scans the rabbis, priests, well-dressed traders and affluent customers and finally points to two non-descript looking men drinking in a corner. The rabbi approaches and asks them what they do that makes them so special. They explain that Elijah must have made a mistake: they are nothing special, only clowns in a circus. Their only professional objective is that everyone leaves the circus happier and more cheerful than they went in. The point of the story is, of course, that Elijah made no mistake: helping people to feel good about themselves is both essential and meritorious.

Lockdown may have taught us to reclassify as luxuries some things we thought of as essential; but perhaps it has also shown that some things that are luxuries in one sense may be essential to people’s wellbeing.

Lockdown has of course been far more traumatic and challenging for some people than for others; but many of us will have found it at least depressing in some degree. Like the clowns in the Talmudic story, nail salons and other beauty-sector services aim to help people to feel better about themselves, and to make customers generally more cheerful and well-disposed. Whether we see this from a religious perspective or not, perhaps we can see more clearly post-lockdown that these services are in what might be called the frontline of the wellbeing sector, and that they deserve society’s recognition, gratitude and appreciation.