

FROM THE RABBI

Mourning, Remembering and Celebrating and Envisioning

What a year it has been. I am referring, of course, to the year since mid-March 2020. It was the worst of times and the best of times. Worst, with the suffering of those who have been ill and those who have lost family and friends. Worst, when those who lost loved ones were unable to comfort them, say goodbye, or even bury them. Loss upon loss, pain upon pain. Worst, with the challenges of isolation, and parents juggling work and teaching children. Worst, with children missing classroom and community and friends. Worst, with jobs lost and income challenged, reduced or lost. Worst, with political turmoil roiling our hearts and our country in frightening ways. Worst, in keeping us separated from our beloved sacred community and sacred synagogue space.

Worst in the missing our exercise opportunities and too much sitting in front of screens – those COVID-15 or 20 or more (pounds, that is) – with less resilient, healthy bodies just when strength and health is so important. Maybe you're the lucky ones who didn't succumb to this trend *kol hakavod* (Yay for you!) I am personally taking advantage of beautiful spring skies and warming air to walk more and eat more vegetables! For all the sadness and grief so many of us have experienced, there is sorrow that lingers. COVID left us with a very heavy weight.

How could we call this the “best of times” with all this stress, loss, suffering and upheaval? Surely the weight of the bad is greater than the good, right? For those who have experienced loss, we are here with boundless sympathy and love. With that love, the depth of goodness begins to emerge. I hope we will carry this goodness forward into our new reality.

We have missed being close to each other in person, missed the hugs and handshakes. In their place we have added virtual hugs, face-to-face funerals on Zoom, face-to-face shiva minyans that brought us close in intimate ways. We have embraced mourners in our daily minyan from other congregations that don't offer regular minyans and we have welcomed family and friends from all over the world in our life cycle events, Shabbat services, and yahrzeit and shiva minyans.

We have welcomed guest rabbis/cantors/teachers/musicians for what would have been ordinary services or classes and for major events presented for our community. We have learned that “it's a small world” is really true now that we are on Zoom! We are just beginning to imagine how we will continue this trend once we are back in person.

Dr. Ron Wolfson, who wrote the monumentally important book, *Relational Judaism*, reflecting on this transitional time of planning to return to synagogue at some point said, “*Synagogues are not just buildings, they are communities of sacred relationships where every person feels seen and heard and respected and no one is isolated.*” In this book he quotes Dr. Arnold Eisen “*The strength of community, as of ritual, lies in its potential to bring people together despite differing backgrounds and beliefs to take them out of themselves into a space “between” and*

then return to themselves, to their private spaces, transformed.” (I had the pleasure of attending a recent webinar with Dr. Wolfson, Dr. Bruce Powell and Dr. Wendy Mogel, presenting their new book, *Raising A+ Human Beings*.)

In a rough time of pandemic loss and isolation, along the way many of us have been able to increase the modes of connection available to us. For me, getting out of the house for walks has brought me so much closer to the wonderful neighbors who have been here all along, but I had not been able to enjoy – until now.

Seeing your faces on the screen has been uplifting and joyous. And still, I am also deeply saddened to realize whom I am missing – those of you who dislike or can't access Zoom and have not been together with our virtual community over this year. I hope that when we are back together inperson, we will be able to share what we have learned and created during this time. It has been an incredible time of experimentation, creativity, exploration and values clarification.

Step by step, as more of us are vaccinated and beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel, we can feel the emerging possibilities for renewal. With caution and expert guidance, we will plan our return together. When we do, as Rav Abraham Isaac Kook said over a century ago, *“the old will be made new, and the new made holy.”*

~ Rabbi Amy
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