

FROM THE RABBI

"For the Times They are A-Changing"

Where did the year go? As I look back over this year of pandemic isolation, it feels like eons ago that we were together in our synagogue, singing, praying, learning, sharing meals and enjoying each other's company.

It was just a little more than a year ago that a group of OZ members joined me for our first-in-decades OZ trip to Israel. It was a delightful time of learning and sharing and bonding (not to mention wonderful food and many memorable experiences).

My own personal calendar was filled with significant events in late 2019/early 2020, including my daughter Aliza's wedding, a rabbinic trip to the memorials of the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, followed by sinus surgery in February, and then preparations for a glorious weekend of Cantor Steve's installation on March 7.

The following week we were able to celebrate Purim in person just before we went into lockdown. Already some folks were worried about the virus and stayed home. For those who gathered, it was fun, yet also clouded with the knowledge that an ominous time was soon to be upon us. Many of us thought our pandemic lockdown would be brief. We knew and understood so little about this. It turned out our isolation wasn't for two weeks, it wasn't a month, it wasn't a season – it is now a year and not nearly over.

Do you find yourself reflecting back for yourself on what just preceded the pandemic? It is meaningful to recall where we were before this time; to record for ourselves *who* we were and how we made the transition to what I call "pandemic-land." *Who* we were and how we lived before March, 2020, is now forever changed. And while it will take a long time to assess the ways we have changed and who we have become – as individuals, families, communities, nations and the world – there is no doubt that the "before and after" pictures look different.

Aside from the family, friend, income/work situations that have been impacted, there is a lot of chatter in the periodicals I read from the Jewish community about the dramatic shifts we are experiencing as communities. Everywhere, churches, mosques and synagogues worked quickly to redesign worship, funerals, life cycle events, pastoral care, learning and communal gatherings. We were charged up with creative energy even while grieving for what was lost by our inability to meet in person. We created new ways to connect with each other and connect as a community, but we were also missing so many of our community members who didn't enjoy or could not access the virtual synagogue experience and so chose to wait it out until we can return to in-person gatherings.

All the creative redesign of sacred community didn't sufficiently offset the stress of being restricted in our activities during the pandemic. The background waves of stress have coursed through everyone and sometimes strained interactions that were challenged when the pandemic gripped our hearts with concern for our well-being, livelihood and future. That is another reason why I reflect back to experiences pre-pandemic, to remember what and *who* is precious and recall what is possible. *Kohelet/Ecclesiastes* remarked, "Sow your seed in the morning, and don't hold back your hand in the evening, since you don't know which is going to succeed, the one or the other, or if both are equally good." (*Kohelet* 11:6)

Now, at the one-year anniversary of our pandemic experience, it is my hope that we can celebrate all that is good – friendship, community, song and music, learning and prayer, Torah, our history and the joy of children’s faces and voices; they will shape our future.

I have been humming an old favorite lately, from Bob Dylan:

The Times They Are A-Changin'

Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'

Our beloved synagogue community is seizing this moment so we can own our future. The times may be changing, but we are working to ensure that the inevitable changes wrought by this pandemic will be shaped by our intentions. So, while we celebrate who we were and who we became in our virtual world, we can also celebrate the amazing efforts of our Imagine 2025 team and all of you who have and will participate in charting the course of our future. We have a lot to look forward to enjoying as a vibrant community, together!

~ Rabbi Amy
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