

FROM THE RABBI

The Best of Times and the Worst of Times

As the rollout of the Coronavirus vaccine is beginning, the air is filling with a sense of hopefulness for a relief from pandemic isolation and fear. And at the same time, the experts tell us the worst of the worst is upon us. Sickness and loss are all around us, fueling grief and stress. During these dark days, I have been thinking about Kohelet/Ecclesiastes, and Pete Seeger's modern version "Turn, Turn, Turn!"

A season is set for everything, a time for every experience under heaven:

A time for being born and a time for dying, A time for planting and a time for uprooting the planted; A time for slaying and a time for healing, A time for tearing down and a time for building up; A time for weeping and a time for laughing, A time for wailing and a time for dancing; A time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones, A time for embracing and a time for shunning embraces; A time for seeking and a time for losing, A time for keeping and a time for discarding; A time for ripping and a time for sewing, A time for silence and a time for speaking; A time for loving and a time for hating; A time for war and a time for peace. What value, then, can the [man] of affairs get from what [he] earns? I have observed the business that God gave [man] to be concerned with: [He] brings everything to pass precisely at its time; [He] also puts eternity in their mind, but without man ever guessing, from first to last, all the things that God brings to pass. Thus I realized that the only worthwhile thing there is for them is to enjoy themselves and do what is good in their lifetime; also, that whenever a man does eat and drink and get enjoyment out of all his wealth, it is a gift of God. (Kohelet/Ecclesiastes 3:1-13)

Confined to our homes, living with unprecedented social restrictions, this is a time for tearing down, for shunning embraces, for quiet acceptance in the face of fear and loss. If only we could make this go away faster! We may cry out, but it doesn't change anything. What is left is to "do what is good in [their] lifetime," as Kohelet reflected. And that we are!

In the past months our G'MaCH Committee, led by Eric and Karen Corbman, guided by Cantor Steve with me, have reached out to many of our members, especially isolated seniors, and those who are ill.

Our Social Action Committee, led by Michael Schaal, has been focusing on issues of Race and Racism, partnering with our Adult Education Committee, led by Nancy Sugarman. When I think about what gives me joy and hope and light during these dark days, it is entering the Zoom room with the amazing OZ folks who gather for these and other committees. So many of you are pouring yourselves into community connection, learning, and the pursuit of justice as our calling. Our Religious Committee, led by Basha Brody and Navah Spero is engaged in thoughtful ongoing conversation about ways to offer a wide range of engaging and accessible prayer and holiday celebrations for our diverse communal needs. Change is a challenging, time-consuming and a long-term endeavor. All of our dedicated volunteers give me joy and hope and inspiration as we work together to move our community forward into a new day.

"There is a time for every experience under heaven." Kohelet understood our natural proclivity for frustration at the way things are, and our impatience at the pace of change. Suddenly so much isn't what we want it to be! We feel everything acutely during this pandemic time. The stress is real and sometimes overwhelming. Stress may even unconsciously inform how we respond to each other and to the many challenges in our lives and in our world. And then, when we come together virtually, we share the glow of seeing each other's faces, the soothing reassurance of hearing each other's voices, and warmth of feeling each other's presence and love. Oh, how we appreciate community! Rarely has the value of community been so alive for us.

It is wonderful that in so many ways our community is connecting, supporting, uplifting and being present for each other.

As I spend many hours each day responding to messages from many of you, meeting with many of you, and working with our amazing volunteers and our staff, I always feel that it is never enough. In my own impatience to reach and support and connect, I have to remind myself of the words of Kohelet, *"a time for every experience under heaven."* I love hearing from you and seeing you. Please reach out if we haven't connected lately.

Among the many innovations of this crazy time, our outdoor Chanukah menorah-lighting was especially fun and a great team effort. See photo in Hebrew School article. Among the many connections we have enjoyed in our virtual synagogue world, the nationwide USCJ IllumiNation Chanukah event, convening congregations from every state and a few other countries, attracting over 1600 participants, was absolutely awesome. I was honored to be a partner for that event. Over Chanukah, we sang with our amazing OZ singers and musicians (thanks to our amazing Cantor Steve), Nefesh Mountain, Yoel Sykes, and Neshama Carlebach -- it was close to heaven! Now we are planning Purim. Stay tuned!

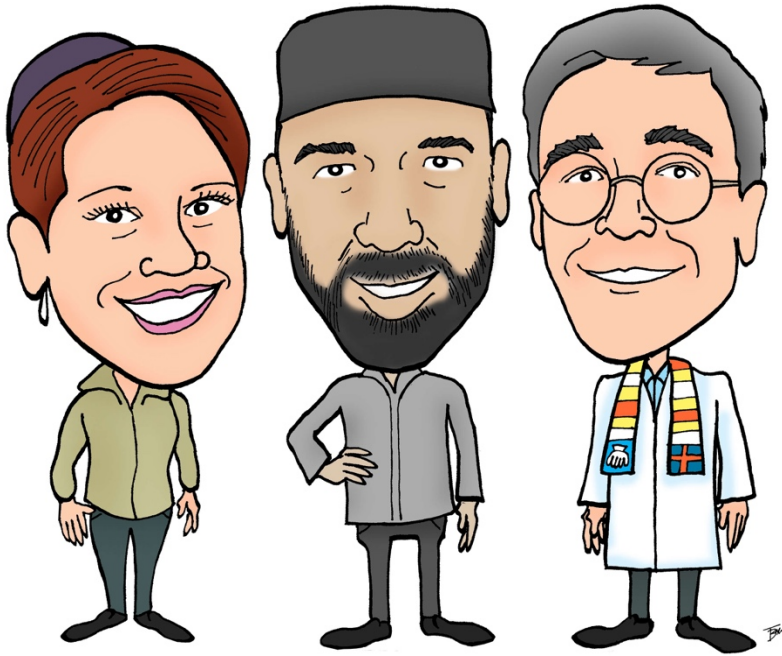
As I conclude this message, I can't help but sing another of my most favorite songs, from Israeli singer-songwriter David Broza, *"Yiheyh Tov/Things will be Good."* (It has been the ringtone on my phone for years.) The chorus prays,

<i>And all will be good</i>	<i>Veyihyeh tov</i>
<i>yes, all will be good</i>	<i>yihyeh tov, ken</i>
<i>though I sometimes break down</i>	<i>lif'amim ani nishbar</i>
<i>but this night</i>	<i>az halailah</i>
<i>oh, this night,</i>	<i>ho halailah</i>
<i>I will stay with you</i>	<i>itach ani nish'ar</i>

May it be so! Be well and stay safe.

See next page

On another note, if you haven't had a chance to listen to the podcast I created with Imam Islam Hassan and Rev. Ken White, I hope you will find a chance to hear it. [Kipah, Kufi and Collar](#) is available on various podcast services.



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