



## Being a Congregation in the Time of Corona

I was on a conference call with colleagues about a week ago. We were commiserating with all of the challenges we were going through in terms of trying to keep our synagogue communities going. Moving things online. Learning to use "zoom". Face timing appointments. And dealing with all of the uncertainties that the virus has created in so many of our lives. One of my colleagues said it best, "Last week we all began "new jobs." And she was right. Whether we were newly ordained rabbis or veterans for thirty plus years, all of a sudden our "jobs" changed. We began learning to do things we never did before, and finding ways to connect in ways we never thought possible.

And yet, at its core, "the job" of being a rabbi was and is still the same. It is a calling to serve the Jewish people, to be a part of a people's lives in moments of joy and sadness. To be part of defining Judaism for each generation or simply, but significantly, for a single moment in someone's life. All of this remains the same. All that "changed" was the method of delivery.

After I left the conference call, I began to think back to when I was first hired ...it was October 1987! (I started February 1988). One of the things that attracted me to serve this particular congregation was how the search committee described the origins of the synagogue and how they defined themselves. It began in with the choice of what to call the Temple. Some wanted, "Temple Ner Tamid" and others wanted "Congregation Ner Tamid." In the end "Congregation" won out. The founders realized quite wisely that what they were trying to create was not about a physical space, but rather about creating a community of people.

We are truly blessed with a beautiful building. And we all miss it terribly. Our current building has been a place for 13 years where we have held an incredible number of events that have touched the lives of every member of our synagogue. But, ultimately, if the Time of Corona has made us realize anything, it is that we strive not just to be "somewhere" but "with each other". We want to connect. We want to celebrate, worship, and do mitzvah work as part of a community that cares for one another.

There was a time when I viewed the internet and facebook as connecting somewhat random and casual friends together. But now it has become a powerful tool to insure that we are indeed gathering together. The secret isn't that technology has changed us, but that technology has enabled us to adapt and find a way to truly find each other when we need it most. And so we are celebrating Shabbat on our web stream and on facebook live; learning Torah via zoom; having Shabbat sing with preschoolers, learning Hebrew, holding religious school, creating a live stream Passover Seder... and on and on...not to mention our 40 plus volunteers who are making weekly phone calls of reassurance, volunteers doing shopping for homebound seniors (*dayeinu?!*) because we want to find ways to be there for and with each other.

There have been too many dark periods in Jewish history when we were forced to innovate either because of war or anti-semitism or persecution or an unfriendly government. And we always did one thing. We adapted. And we came through that period of history restored and renewed.

It is my hope that this time will be a much, much shorter period of time. But I do think it will change the way we look at our lives. The Time before Corona, and the Time after.

One thing will remain a constant; Before or After, we are there for each other. And *right now*, more than ever. For we are **Congregation Ner Tamid. A kehilat kedosha.** A holy community of remarkably caring people. We are all truly blessed.

*Chazak, chazak v'nitchazek. Be strong, be strong, and let us continue to give strength to one another.*