



## ***Masks in the Time of Corona***

By the Jewish calendar, it has been a year since we shuttered our shuls, and the words “social distancing” “mask wearing” and “Covid-19” entered into our vocabulary. I remember it distinctly because it came right at the time of Purim. We had just finished enjoying a wonderful Tuesday night Purim carnival and fabulous Purim spiel by the children and whispers of this outbreak began filling the conversation in the social hall. The realization that our lives were about to change began slowly. As I looked around the social hall I wondered if anyone present had Covid? What would that mean for our community? Would we have to close the Temple? As the new reality crept into our minds and that of our leadership, changes began to occur. By Friday night we decided no more onegs. And we would limit the number of people allowed in for services. Two days later, we decided that wasn’t enough. And by Monday the Temple doors were closed and employees were all working from home; religious school and preschool all went virtual. Everyone learned “zoom”.

A year of this. It seems like forever. And at the same time, it is amazing how quickly we can adjust our lives to a new reality. The irony of wearing masks, which is one of the main customs of Purim, has not been lost on me however! Of all the Jewish holidays to “inaugurate” this new discipline required by Covid-19, surely this holiday will always be oddly, ironically, inextricably intertwined.

One main reason that we wear masks on Purim is that the name of God is not mentioned at all in the Book of Esther! The salvation of the Jewish people from the horror planned by Haman is left to the heroism of Mordechai and Esther. Esther must risk death in order to appear before the King unbidden. Mordechai reminds her that it is perhaps for this very moment in time she was created. Clearly the moment demanded both courage and a miracle. But God’s role in this drama remained hidden.

Purim is a holiday which reminds us that there are times when God wears a mask. When God remains hidden from us and we wonder whether God is watching, listening, acting or absent. No doubt some of these thoughts have crossed all of our minds as our nation passed 500,000 deaths this week from Covid-19.

Purim is unlike any other Jewish holiday where God’s presence is at the center. Purim is a holiday where we are at the center. Our destiny is in our hands. We wear masks to keep us safe from the virus. But we wear masks as a reminder that even when God is hidden, God is still very present. Our faith is challenged, but it is not destroyed. In fact, faith and the need to maintain our faith is at the center of our ability to have hope.

While the Corona virus is not a Holocaust, it is a time of great loss and spiritual challenge. Therefore, a poem written by a prisoner in the Cologne concentration camp comes to mind.

*I believe in the sun  
Even when it is not shining  
And I believe in love,  
Even when there’s no one there.  
And I believe in God,  
Even when He is silent.*

*We mourn the passing of too many on this year anniversary. Our lives are forever changed. Yet, we know that there will be a time of rejoicing again. When masks will be removed, and the sun will shine again. On that day we will see God’s face reflected in our own.*