

Mazal Tov in the Time of Corona

One by one I have had the challenging task of calling families whose children were to celebrate their son/daughters b'nai mitzvah in April, May and... "What do you think Rabbi? Will this virus scare be over? Will the Temple be reopened in time? What should we do?" All over America, perhaps all over the world, I suspect, rabbis have been asked to do the impossible-predict the future.

So much has changed in so little time. But a bar/bat mitzvah is an event unlike almost any other. From the time a child is born, parents look forward to this day; their son/daughter's affirmation of their Jewish heritage, the joy of bringing family together, the celebratory party in a "simcha extraordinaire!" But with each passing day. With each pronouncement by our government. With each news day providing a daily reminder that this virus was unlike any we had encountered, all that we were left with was uncertainty.

Most chose to postpone. And even this is a guess. (But surely this virus will be over with by the fall? Or 2021 or ??)

But one young man, Maverick, had a personal dream. And it was to celebrate his bar mitzvah on May 2nd. That was what he wanted. He had looked forward to this event for a long time. He had prepared for it. And although his party was going to be amazing (and I suspect at some point, it still will be), in this moment, on this day, it wasn't about the party, it was about affirming his Jewishness on his appointed day.

Our people have had our dreams shattered throughout history. We have weathered the antisemitism of ancient Egypt, the pogroms of Europe, the persecution of the Soviet Union...could we not find a way to weather this storm too?

Thanks to the technical skill of our Cantor, she was able to make it happen. Though there was only Maverick, his parents, and siblings present, many friends and family gathered on livestream to hear him chant from the Torah and his haftorah and lead a full Shabbat morning service. We might have had a wi-fi blip here and there. An audio slip now and again. But one thing was certain; Maverick had a bar mitzvah with everyone present to celebrate with him. We felt his passion, his joy, and his commitment. And as I shared with him in my remarks, "Maverick, you have not only made me proud, you have inspired me."

In this time of Corona, one thing is certain. We can still dream. And if we are determined, our dreams can come true. Hasn't that been the way of our people since our first dreamer Joseph? Or Herzl? Or our very own Maverick?

Mazal Tov Maverick, to you and your family. And may you continue to go "mi chayil, l'chayil...from strength to strength!"

Rabbi Sanford Akselrad

