

New Words in the Time of Corona

I remember two years ago I had never heard of the words Corona or COVID. And within a short while I learned another new word “Zoom” as in “Zoom meetings”. And as the days and weeks unfolded, I learned other new words, many dealing with technology or having to navigate the “new normal”. Other words that were indeed familiar took on a new sense of urgency. Words like “normalcy” or “resiliency” or “ambiguity” or “fear”. Somehow these every day words began appearing, well, every day. Sometimes they were used to caution or preach. Sometimes they were used to guide or calm. And at times they were used to bring us together and provide a measure of hope.

In this spirit, I come to the new word of today. No, it’s no longer “pandemic”; that, apparently, was yesterday’s word. Today’s word is “endemic”. It is a word I had never heard of until recently. Curious, I looked it up. According to the dictionary it is *“of a disease or condition regularly found among particular people or in a certain area.”* In other words, being in an endemic is not the “holy grail” of where we hoped to arrive at, but it is in the neighborhood next door. COVID has not been eliminated according to scientists, but it is becoming according to many scientists and pundits, a disease that just “is”. Like the flu or the common cold, COVID will perhaps never go away, but will become something that we learn to live with. Which obviously is better than what has transpired these past two years; a disease we learned to die with.

The reality is as with all transitions and situations filled with ambiguity and misunderstandings and multiple interpretations, we don’t quite know whether we are in a pandemic or an endemic. Nonetheless, we stand at the precipice of hope. Of making a decision which for each of us is very personal, and for society, very telling.

We are all tired of being tired. We are all “over” the pandemic and ready to move on. What we aren’t quite certain, of course, is whether the pandemic is done with us, and ready to move on.

I look around each day, and I am certain that everyone has begun making up their minds. Even folks who haven’t made up their minds have at least made a decision not to make up their minds. In a week or a month or maybe two or three, what I

hope for is that we have some clarity. What I also hope for is that with this clarity we won't have finger pointing one way or the other. I told you so's won't make things better. Nor will it help us learn to live with each other better, let alone a virus.

We are in this together. If we have learned nothing else, that should be a central message, should it not? That we live on one planet. What happens across the globe, impacts what happens here. And what happens here, touches the lives of folks far away in parts unknown and known.

We are in this together. *We are stronger together.*

As quickly as COVID has spread, I can only pray that this universal message has gone viral. For there are more things to fight than a virus; that was just to get our attention. Challenges abound. The environment, , affordable healthcare, racial equality and quality education to name a few. Now that our eyes are wide open, let's use them to see, to really see the challenges that confront us all. Let's make up our minds not just what we will fight against, but what we will for.

The word for today is "determination".

Rabbi Sanford Akselrad