



Congregation Ner Tamid

on the Greenspan Campus for Jewish Life, Learning, and Spiritual Renewal

Unity in the Time of Corona

To read the papers and watch the news today one would think we can't agree on anything. To be sure there is divisiveness and important issues that need to be tackled. But once in a while it is nice to focus on what we have in common instead of what drives us apart.

Thus, it was a pleasure last week to have our Congregation be the local site for the ***Caravan of Unity***. The tour of this remarkable interfaith experience began in Israel and eventually made its way to Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, Agape Church in Los Angeles and our own Congregation in Henderson before heading onwards towards New York City. The theme of the Caravan is "Unity in the time of Pandemic".

On our *bima* (socially distanced, and with COVID-19 protocols in place of course) we welcomed leaders from the Muslim, Christian and Jewish faiths to celebrate our distinctness and our common humanity. We had presentations of faith, inter-faith dialogue, and music from different traditions, all of which were ultimately broadcast throughout the world.

I am often asked why I have participated in inter-faith dialogue for over thirty years. How can I sit at the table with people of so many diverse faiths who undoubtedly do not share all of the values that I as a Jew embrace? To be sure, there are moments when it is not easy. Sometimes the temptation to "walk away" is great. But what keeps me seated at the table is by focusing on what we have in common; issues that impact all of us, no matter what our race, creed or color. Issues impacting the environment, homelessness, poverty, access to medical care, and education for example effect all of us.

If living in the Time of Corona has taught us anything, it is that we can not solve the world's problems alone. We are inter-connected in ways that cross geography and politics and religion. And so, we are stronger when we act together. When we appreciate each other's differences and focus on our common humanity that is when true progress is made for all mankind.

The *midrash* teaches us that a single individual was created first to teach us that we are all descended from one person. The *midrash* then asks why man was created on the sixth day rather than the first. The answer? Should mankind become too proud, we would be reminded that even the lowly gnat was created before us!

It has taken the invisible virus, something even smaller than the gnat to humble us. Perhaps in rising from this pandemic we will find that we have more that brings us together than what divides us. There are many "Caravans of Unity" that come our way in life. Next time, don't hesitate to jump on board. I will save you a seat.

Rabbi Sanford Akselrad