

Jewish Nevada in the Time of Corona

Last Tuesday, sitting in the comfort of my home, behind my computer, I had the remarkable experience of sitting at a virtual table with colleagues from all the various spectrums in Las Vegas/Henderson. Orthodox, Hasidic, Chabad, Kollel, reform, conservative and independent. What was even more remarkable was that this wasn't the first meeting that we have had since the Corona virus pandemic broke out and forced our community to shutter the doors of its synagogues and Jewish institutions.

With wisdom and an outstretched arm, Jewish Nevada has been proactive in providing a forum for us all to share best practices, what our obstacles and concerns are, and how we might resolve them together. In applying for federal grants, Jewish Nevada helped congregations every step of the way, and provided important webinars that addressed our questions. Our Congregation was able to obtain over \$200,000 in grants at a time when we needed it most. Kudos go to my dedicated staff led by Linda Rosen in this endeavor, as well as our lay leaders. Along the way, Jewish Nevada was there asking, "Do we need help? What can we do to help make things easier?" In anticipation of the emergency needs of many who lost their jobs, Jewish Nevada established a fund of over \$250,000 to be distributed immediately to the Congregations and JFSA so that those hit hardest could come to us and get grant money to pay for food and medicine and unplanned emergencies. And they did this without being asked. They knew what needed to be done, and they did it. With pride, I sit on this board as the representative from the Board of Rabbis. But I also am a donor and supporter of Jewish Nevada precisely for this reason. There are times when it is "raining overseas" and we need to reach our arms out to help our brethren in Europe or Israel. But sometimes, the clouds just hover overhead in our own backyard. At a time when many on a board such as this might wonder, "How can we give away this kind of money? Our donors may not give to us and where will be?" Not this board. They understood that donors give because of what we do; not because of what we don't do. "Don't give until it hurts," past Federation President Art Marshall used to tell us. "Give until it feels good." It is nice to see a return to this approach.

And so why were we meeting on Tuesday? We all are anxious about opening up our synagogues. It is top on everyone's list. And each of us individually is also wondering what are the other shuls doing? And how can this one be open and this one be closed. Listening to each rabbi speak, it was clear that each synagogue had its own needs and abilities to respond. Orthodox Jews hold daily minyanim. A virtual *minyán* won't work. Nor can they use technology on Shabbat. Some temples will open very slowly and continue web streaming services. Other synagogues don't want to be responsible for the safety of people who might attend and accidentally pass the virus on to the community and therefore will remain physically closed for the time being. And let's be honest, many who attend synagogues with such gusto fall into the vulnerable population. (Perhaps it is time for the younger members of our community to step up and make their physical presence known when we all do open up.) But make no mistake about it, *all* of us will open up. Maybe not at the same time. Or in the same way. But that's ok. If there was anything I took away from Tuesday's meeting, it was this: "it's ok; being Jewish is not a competition." Each of us is trying our best to bring Yiddishkeit to our community. It may have taken the power of zoom and the curse of a pandemic to bring us together into one room. But I guarantee you, with this kind of leadership, it is only the beginning. Even social distancing will not keep us apart. For we are stronger together.

One last thought. I often have said that during this time we are not in the same boat, but we are indeed in the same storm. I have said that because the pandemic has impacted all of us in so many ways. Some have lost jobs; some have lost loved ones and not been able to attend their funerals. Some have died. Others recovered just fine. And still others have had to deal with matters of social isolation and loneliness. The storm has hit us all differently. But this past week, I felt for the first time, in a long time, perhaps we are finding our way out of the storm by becoming passengers in the same boat. The journey is long. Times are uncertain. But we have each other. Indeed. We have each other.