



Congregation Ner Tamid

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

Seeing Mom in the Time of Corona

You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old; you shall revere your God: I am the Eternal your God. Lev. 19:32

One of the hardest and cruelest aspects of COVID 19 was the inability of family members and friends to gather with one another. At funerals, weddings, baby namings, graduations and so many special occasions loved ones were told to stay apart for fear of transmitting or contracting the corona virus.

As vaccinations have become more widespread, travel has begun to normalize and folks are eagerly reuniting with loved ones. About seven weeks ago I was able to see my mom for the first time in over a year. She is 92 and lives in a small group home in California with very strict protocols. Even with both of us having been vaccinated the group home still required that I keep my social distance and “suit up”. Reluctantly I agreed because seven weeks ago I felt it was better to be safe than sorry. My annoyance at the inconvenience was weighed against my delight at being able to visit my mom.

As she has experienced decline in recent years, especially during COVID, she wondered why I didn't come to visit sooner. In her mind it had been over *five years* since I had visited. I don't care how old you are, your mom is still your mom, and in their presence the child comes forth. I tried to explain what the virus was and why visitation was impossible but she did not accept this. Duly chastised I changed the subject. Again. And again. Next week I am going to visit again for a longer period of time. And thankfully, now I can make plans to visit with increasing frequency. I am hoping this California based group home will relax its standards a bit. But regardless, visits are not ideal because they are just snap shots of the life of a woman who gave me so much and now due to illness has lost so much. And yet, important to her now, as always, is to be with people. Especially her children.

COVID may have magnified the problem of social isolation, but it did not invent it. Millions of aging loved ones long for social connection and to be remembered. Millions of seniors live in apartments longing for community but feeling isolated due to illness, lack of transportation, confusion with technology and numerous other issues.

This is not a new problem, but it is one that we should not ignore. As we were loved, so too must we show love. As we long for friendship, we too should strive to be a friend.

Hmm...I wonder who taught me those time-tested values? I wonder.

Rabbi Sanford Akselrad