

Sadness in the Time of Corona

It was 7 p.m. on Friday night. Our weekly web stream was beginning. "Shabbat Shalom!" exclaimed Cantor Hutchings. "Tonight, is our 18th Shabbat we have been streaming since the start of the pandemic" The number 18 usually stands for *chai-life*. But this past Shabbas when I heard the number eighteen uttered it stopped me in my tracks. "Has it been that long?" I thought. "Have we been dealing with this pandemic for 18 weeks?!" The days and weeks continue to blur together. I have lost track of time.

A part of me fights against the so called "new normal". The social isolation. The endless zoom calls. The constant bad news on television. And the next day, more bad news. "When will things open up?" I wonder. When will school resume and children can go back and study not in the new normal way, but in *the* normal way. At desks. With other children. And with a teacher in front of them trying to keep their attention. *This* is normal. When will the hotels be open, and movie theatres, and all manner of businesses? Each day we ask. And each day we are forced to understand. We are simply not there yet. *Sadness.*

I hear it in the voices of those I seek to console as they realize plans made long ago cannot be fulfilled. "Rabbi, *this is not the way I had planned my son's bar mitzvah.*" "We were going to plan an anniversary party for our fortieth and we have to postpone. We are too afraid someone might get sick at our gathering." There are no words that can magically change the "new" normal back to the "old" normal. We are all feeling the oppression of eighteen. Eighteen weeks of wondering when this will end. When we won't have to live in a state of fear. Or ambiguity. *Sadness.*

Breathe...

And breathe again.

And again.

There are more emotions that dwell inside ourselves. More emotions besides sadness. Perhaps we have forgotten them. Or lost track of them. Or we have allowed sadness to dominate.

Breathe...

And breathe again.

Now choose.

Choose how you want to respond to today; to this moment. Will you lead with sadness? Or will you lead with something more basic? Let's start with a smile. And then laughter. And an act of kindness. There, that's the spirit. A gentle reflection. A moment of joy. A reminder of what is important. And *who* is important. Now look hard to find a measure of that which is so important, **optimism**. To know, and believe, and understand that what we are going through is *temporary*.

This too will end.

Positive feelings need to be cultivated as much as any. Do not allow them to be buried. Uncover them. Feel them. And let the number **eighteen** be renewed for what it truly is... *life and living.*

Forward, always forward....