

Technology and Community in the age of Corona

Imagine that you have been teaching and learning basically the same way for a long, long time. And then overnight, you are asked to change your methods, learn a new system for teaching, make it fun, interesting, engaging, and have it ready ...tomorrow. In trying to figure out a methodology for online teaching I have found myself back in "grammar school".

It is a bit humbling.

Sure, I have friends, colleagues, youtube videos (see I am not that far behind) to show me the way. But I am used to talking with people. Taking my time and perhaps even having an instruction sheet.

So much of using an app is using intuitive knowledge. You just "play with it". And somehow, within a few minutes, you are a master. Until you talk with a ten year old and then you realize, you are a beginner. There are hidden rules and tools and methodologies that you just somehow "know" or a friend shows you. Once. And you are supposed to "get it". It has been a while since I felt a bit out of sync. But on the other hand, it's been a while since I have been challenged to try doing the same thing but in a whole new way.

It's incredible what a little "push" can do...

For example, it's amazing that within 72 hours colleagues put together a platform where they are sharing all kinds of activities for all ages at all hours of the day and night on a site called Jewitathome.com. Hmm has technology become the digital version of our grandparents? You know, the folks in our lives that sought to teach us traditions, and old world skills, and recipes and all the things that make up the culture and flavor of being Jewish. For years I have encouraged the "nextgen" to learn from the "previous gen" so that they can carry the torch. Well, by all indications, the torch has not only been passed, but it is burning bright and the flames are taking their own shape and hue. Has it taken a virus to kindle the creative genes inside us? To inspire us to rethink? Redo? Reembrace? What it means to be Jewish? After all if Judaism was irrelevant why would we be spending so much time making sure that people can still stay connected through digital classes, minyon, song fests, live-streaming? If the great "god of soccer" truly got the best of us, why are we looking for ways to celebrate the Shabbat in a community bonded by zoom or facebook? If we are truly a world where we were raising a generation that lacked community and "was known for bowling alone" then why is it that confined to our homes by quarantine we are looking for all kinds of ways to create community, find each other, and learn from each other, and yes, even celebrate together... even if we are not in the same physical space?

Perhaps it is not just the virus which is "contagious"... perhaps it is our desire to innovate...to create...to do more than survive, but thrive. If nothing else, we have learned we want to be with each other much more than we ever realized. So much so, that we push ourselves to get out of our comfort zones and try new ways of doing the same thing.... And too perhaps we realized that we are more dependent on each other than we ever thought. And in seeking to fulfill this need for community, we recognize that no matter how alone we may feel at times, we are sought after, cared for, and cherished by more people than we ever realized. Love. Friendship. Laughter...Let these be beyond contagious. Let them be infectious. And yes, the ultimate vaccine that will redeem and protect us all.

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