

## September 2020 Message from Rabbi Dubin

Dear Friends,

While home from college for the past six months as campus remained shut down because of Covid-19, my son, Liron, took it upon himself to start sending weekly questions by e-mail to his grandparents. Questions have ranged from the deeply personal (“*Do you have any regrets? If so, what are they or what are some of the biggest ones?*”) to the quite mundane (“*Do you prefer vacationing in cold or hot weather?*”)

One of the questions Liron posed was, “What was the worst disaster you can remember?” Expecting answers like 9/11, or Katrina, or even WWII, Liron was surprised that each one of his grandparents replied with the same answer: Covid-19.

This has indeed been a challenging and tragic six months for us, for the State of New Jersey, for the United States, indeed, for the entire globe. Included in the entire globe, of course, is the Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey. As 115 Youmans Avenue has for all intents and purposes been closed down – with Hebrew School and B’nei Mitzvah Training and Shabbat Worship and Torah Study and Board Meetings and Reel Theology and Mindful Meditation all relegated to Zoom – we have experienced the profound loss of in-person physical interaction. There has been no hugging, no sharing of Oneg Shabbat, no cooking or baking together, no singing together... Anything that involves close indoor interaction has been put on hold until that time when our medical health experts will tell us it is once again finally safe for us to do so. These past six months have quite likely been the most challenging our community has ever experienced.

Yet here we are. Still together. Still learning. Still worshipping together. Still supporting one another. Throughout the Pandemic thus far, we’ve found ways not only to adapt, but actually to thrive. Where there have been safe ways to gather outdoors, we have done so. Yoga and a couple ice cream gatherings have been crucial to helping us keep it all together. And, again, Zoom has been a particular blessing. It has enabled us to continue offering so much of what we provide to the community. As a result, in some areas, we’ve actually been able to do more, not less, than usual. Not only did our Hebrew School and B’nei Mitzvah training continue through the pandemic, but we even decided to extend youth learning into the summer, which is something we never would have even considered had the computer technology not been there to make it possible.

Moreover, in a time when we long for each other’s company, Zoom has enabled us to gather together every Saturday night – regardless of where each of us is at the time physically – to bid farewell to Shabbat with a brief Havdalah service. This, of course, is in addition to the fact that we have managed to double the number of Shabbat Evening services (instead of biweekly, we are now meeting weekly over Zoom) so long as the Pandemic continues. Of particular satisfaction to me is the fact that some

of our members who have certain challenges that make it difficult for them to join us in person when we are at 115 Youmans Avenue on Friday nights have actually become great regulars over Zoom.

Yes, we do want to return to in-person worship as soon as it is possible, but one thing we have learned from this experience is that even when we do, we must continue offering virtual attendance opportunities for those who are unable to join us in the building. Fortunately, with the experience of these past six months behind us, when the time comes, we will understand exactly how to do it.

As you know, our Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur worship will be remote this year over Zoom. We are excited that so many of you have chosen to participate in the preparatory process already, and can't wait to engage in the full worship experience together, starting with Erev Rosh HaShanah on Friday Night, September 18.

One of the innovations we will be introducing this year comes on Sunday, September 20, the second day of Rosh HaShanah. We are all familiar with the Passover Seder, but few of us of Ashkenazi descent have experienced the popular Sephardic celebration of a Rosh HaShanah Seder. This year at the JCNWJ, we will offer just such an experience on Day 2 of Rosh HaShanah. Rather than meeting for a full morning service followed by a communal luncheon for the New year, as we usually do, we will instead begin with a very short service and then move directly into a special Rosh HaShanah Seder during the lunch hour.

As with Passover this past April, I will prepare a presentation of all the necessary holiday foods and lead the service from my home. For those who'd like to participate most fully in the Seder, here is a list of foods you will want to have on hand:

Apple  
Pomegranate  
Pumpkin (squash, gourd)  
Carrots  
Wine  
A fish (or cabbage or garlic)  
head

Honey  
Beets  
Dates  
Leeks or  
Scallions  
Round Challah



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Looking forward to celebrating Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur with you all,

Rabbi Dubin