

Rabbi's Message October 2021

Dear Friends,

For almost 19 months now, we've been ever-vigilant in the fight against COVID-19. For almost 19 months now, we've been holding our breath, worrying about our loved-ones' health and safety. For almost 19 months now, we've been firing on all cylinders, reinventing our Jewish wheels so as to make them roll effortlessly across the Zoom screen. Suffice it to say, that for almost 19 months now we've been living in a constant state of tension, bracing ourselves for potential disaster until this deadly virus is finally gone, once and for all. And, in the process, we've worked ourselves into a state of exhaustion. It's time we take a moment to rest – not from keeping ourselves safe, but from exerting so much energy worrying about it all, because we can hold our breath for only so long. It's time to rest. We need that. We deserve that.

We are on the cusp of concluding the jam-packed month of Tishrei, during which we've celebrated the birthday of the world, atoned for our sins, expressed gratitude for the harvest, and celebrated the splendor of Torah. Four distinct holidays – each one an absolute gem, but with practically no rest in between. Speaking for myself, during the month of Tishrei, I feel as if I'm the ball in a game of Jewish pinball, ricocheting from one sacred holiday to the next to the next to the next. Even in normal times, by the end of this month, I'm ready for a break. So this year, when we add COVID to the mix, the only way to describe how I feel is “utterly spent.” I've given what I can, and unless I take a moment to regroup, I'll be of no use to anyone.

Fortunately, the Jewish calendar seems to understand, which is why on Tuesday, October 5, the month of Cheshvan will begin at sunset. Why is this such a life-saver? Because Cheshvan is the one month of the entire year in which we do not celebrate a single holiday other than Shabbat, the day of rest. Cheshvan is our opportunity to take a step back, take a breath, and prepare ourselves to move forward in good health.

At Simchat Torah, we read about the seven days of Creation. It's an interesting story for so many reasons, but this year, as I feel myself aching from exhaustion, the central question that I find needs to be asked and considered is, “Did God create the world in six days and then rest on the seventh? Or did God create the world in seven days?”

This is no frivolous question, especially this year, because the answer has profound theological bearing on my state of exhaustion this year. As one who feels commanded to walk in the ways of God, it matters whether Creation includes the day of rest, or whether the seventh day is discrete from the first six.

As I ponder the question, I find myself thinking about my cell phone. Like most of you, I plug it in to charge every night, because were I to just let it sit on my night table unplugged overnight, it would be of no use to me the next day; the charge would be gone and the phone inoperable. By concluding my days of heavy phone usage by making sure the electricity will be coursing through it during those hours when I'm asleep, however, I ensure it will be fully charged when I wake up, ready to be of full service.

The same, I would say, can be said of the Seven days of Creation. Though “all” God does is rest on that seventh day, there is nothing static about it. So too with us. The seventh day of Shabbat is provided to us so that we can recharge our own batteries, in order to ensure that when the first day of the week comes,

we'll be re-energized and ready to go once again. There is nothing inactive about the seventh day of rest. It is every bit as necessary to the act of Creation (and the "re-Creation" that we endeavor to achieve each week) as the first six, which is why I side with those who argue that rather than creating for six days and resting on the seventh, God took the entire seven days to create the world.

So as you move forward, feeling exhausted, please understand that rest is not only a human need, it's also an opportunity for us to walk in God's ways of Creation. Typically, we take one day each week to recharge ourselves, but at this time of year, we are blessed with an entire month of rest. Please remember, however, this does not mean we unplug and do nothing for all 29 days of the month. Rather, we take the active step of plugging in. And we do so by allowing ourselves the opportunity to enjoy that which invigorates us, whether it be spending extra time with friends and family, finally getting to that book that's been sitting on our bedside table for months, pursuing the hobbies we love, or anything else that will leave us fully ready to be our best selves by the end of the month. No matter what method of recharging works best for you, however, I hope you will also remember that we at the JCNWJ will continue gathering for Shabbat, for Hebrew School, for Sisterhood, and for everything else we do. We look forward to seeing you at these times so we can help recharge each other, together.

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Dubin