

FROM THE RABBI

It starts to feel endless, doesn't it? Two years into this pandemic, we are tired of it; tired of the isolation, tired of the restrictions, tired of the suspicions of others or ourselves regarding virus protections, tired of minyan and services on Zoom, tired of reading the statistics of the day – how many infected, what is the percentage of our population, how many died? Tired of some of us working from home, others of no longer working, others working in highly stressful situations. Many of us are juggling situations with childcare and school with seemingly endless uncertainty. We and our world have been forever transformed and we don't yet even know what and who we will be in the future.

But these frustrations are tempered by the beauty we have cultivated during this time. We treasure, as we never did before, seeing each other on the screen, gathering at a social distance at the synagogue or in other places – being together in all kinds of ways both similar and different from anything in our lives prior to the pandemic. As Judy Chicago wrote in her epic poem,

“Merger”

And then all that has divided us will merge
And then compassion will be wedded to power
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind
And then both men and women will be gentle
And then both women and men will be strong
And then no person will be subject to another's will
And then all will be rich and free and varied
And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many
And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance
And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old
And then all will nourish the young
And then all will cherish life's creatures
And then everywhere will be called Eden once again

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We long for Eden “once again,” even as we know intellectually that it won't be literally “once again.” So what will it be? What do we hope for it to be and how can we make that come about?

That brings me to the moment in which we find ourselves – in the month of Adar. This year is one of the special years (seven times in each 19-year cycle) when we have two months of Adar. Our sages in the Talmud taught, “When Adar begins, happiness increases.” Adar is the time of year when we are commanded to be joyful! And this year, with two months of Adar, even more happiness awaits us.

This is to say, that if we act “as if” – if we consciously set our attitudes, our moods and our viewpoints toward joy and happiness, we can come to embody this posture of joy. And this can be the arrow that points toward our future, past this difficult time of conflict, pandemic isolation, illness, fear and loss. “Be Happy!” may sound silly – how can we just “*be*” happy? Our rabbis understood that this is about shifting our viewpoint—it is great psychological and spiritual wisdom. Adar and the joyous festival of Purim which is soon to come, help us to *create* happiness for ourselves and for our community. We need that happiness now, during a difficult time in our world.

The new CEO of the JCC of Manhattan, Rabbi Joanna Samuels, wrote a piece in early February, “*The Muscle of Optimism*.” She points toward our collective need for a “jolt of happiness,” and the way the month of Adar is our gateway to that transformation:

“The continued pandemic, the complicated world in which we live, the cold weather—each of these elements can create a pall of pessimism and ennui. And yet, here is the month of Adar to remind us to embrace optimism and joy. Our world is challenged on many fronts, yet heroic action and activism in service of a better future is taking place in every corner of our planet. The skies are gray.... But soon enough, spring will be here. It always comes.

...We have never needed two months of Adar as much as we do right now. Our lives have been upended for two years as we have managed living in a global pandemic. Plans were made and canceled; things opened and then closed; hope arose and then was dashed. The muscle of optimism has been tested, and we need some training to bring it back.

So in our extra month of Adar, as we look towards Purim and Passover, let's use this month wisely and joyfully.”

Be happy, it's Adar! This is how we will heal and how we will find our way toward wholeness for our future, together. Happy Adar!

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