

**Covid 19: A Retrospective**  
**Yielding a Cornucopia of Blessings**  
**Erev Rosh Hashanah 5782**

*If it's a choice between having a Jewish state, or losing 6 million of our people, I would readily give back your state, Dear God, if we could save 6 million Jewish lives lost in the Shoah.*

**I remember hearing these words spoken by Elie Wiesel, when I first met him as a student at Villanova University in 1979. He was making the argument as if speaking to God saying that the extermination of 6 million Jewish lives is too high a price to pay for the resettlement of our people in our ancient homeland, after 2,000 years in exile.**

**I share this comment by Wiesel at this time because what I'm about to speak about echoes the same sentiment.**

**In looking back at the last year and a half, so filled with world-wide misery, fear, dysfunction, illness, and death, I say that any lessons learned from this experience are null and void if we had the choice to trade wisdom gained for a pandemic that never occurred.**

**So while I will attempt to find the silver lining as it were in the dark clouds of covid 19, I do so with the full knowledge that none of what I'm about to say matters in the least, when compared to the pain and agony of watching loved ones die alone.**

**And yet, 18 months of a living hell has surely left its mark upon all of us. Some of us will be scarred for life by the trauma of the unimaginable consequences of living through this pandemic.**

**Economically, socially, educationally, and emotionally our lives have been upended, disfigured, and altered forever. Others while temporarily inconvenienced, will pick up the pieces and find new ways of living in what we pray will be a post pandemic world. All of us however, have much to learn regarding life lessons painfully taught by living in this time in history.**

**If we can take something positive out of the horror, then perhaps we can redeem the past by creating a brighter future for us and our children.**

**In other words, if we can learn to see the world now with “covid eyes,” we might even come to see that these lessons learned are reflective of quintessential Jewish values.**

**On this eve of the New Year 5782, allow me to share 5 insights born of personal experience that I hope never to forget, and more importantly, hope to embrace for the rest of my life.**

**The first take away that ought to be obvious, but is often overlooked, is that the people in your life matter above all else, and the one who should be given priority is the partner you choose to spend your life with.**

**When the first man, living in the Garden of Eden, realized that even in a place where every material desire was satisfied, that something was still missing, God created for him an *Ezer K'negdo*. *Ezer K'negdo* is an unusual Hebrew construction, but what it comes to mean is a life partner, a soul mate, one who completes you. To have a husband, a wife, a partner for life who shares your hopes and your dreams, helps to shoulder your burdens and your sorrows, who really “gets” you is**

**truly a blessing. In my case, and I'm sure for many others, covid brought about monumental changes that upset the normal order of things. Shaking things up sometimes allows us to see things more clearly, to appreciate more deeply, to love more intently. I don't want to embarrass her, but truly I am blessed beyond words to share my life with the most wonderful wife and mother, a rock of strength, and a deep reservoir of wisdom, compassion and love. Early on in the pandemic in only a two-bedroom house, we took in my youngest daughter, my eldest daughter, and my 2 grandchildren for a period of over 3 months. Somehow we managed working 3 jobs from home while taking care of 2 babies, none of which could have succeeded without Linda's strength, resourcefulness, patience, and endurance. She made it possible for Ariel and I to attend to our rabbinic obligations and Ashira to attend rabbinic school virtually. And then, when I became so ill with covid, she put herself at risk taking care of me when I couldn't even get out of bed, and then saved my life by doing research to find the best hospital in the area that would give me**

**the best chance to survive the deadly virus. In more ways than one, I owe my life to the love of my life.**

**To you Linda, my Partner for Life, I am forever grateful!**

**Coping with covid-19 has the power of opening our eyes to appreciate the people in our lives more than ever before. Spouses, children, siblings, parents, extended family and close friends have come to be all the more precious to us because at the end of the day, these are the people who matter most in our lives. Appreciating the value of *mishpacha* and *chaverim*, family and friends, is the first silver living.**

**The second enhanced awareness is our ability to acknowledge the dignity and worth of every human being and the work that they do that keeps our world from falling apart.**

**A rabbinic midrash from the 4th century celebrates the diversity and necessity of all who turn their hearts towards heaven in performing their chosen duties in this world.**

**The Midrash States:**

*My work is in the field and*

*His work is in the city.*

*I labor under the stars, and*

*You toil in the sun.*

*His occupation takes him*

*Far and wide, and my*

*Business is near to home.*

*None of this matters*

*So long as one's heart*

*Is in the right place.*

**Front line workers, first responders, essential laborers, doctors, nurses,  
teachers, grocery store employees, delivery drivers, scientists,**

**researchers, and so many more who were once taken for granted, were now the engine that kept us alive and able to function as a society. Lying in bed in the covid ward of the hospital, relying on brave and compassionate medical professionals and hospital workers who put their own lives on the line to care for me, helped me to realize the immense sacrifices made by so many during this pandemic.**

**Covid 19 has given us the opportunity to not ever take for granted the once “unseen” individuals who make life possible in the toughest of times, expressing gratitude and appreciation always for the unique talents and contributions they bring to the world.**

**The third realization has to do with connectivity, the felt human need to be in community, to maintain relationships despite the dangers posed by being in each other’s presence. So while we were socially distant, thanks to the miracle of e-technology, we remained virtually connected. While we were physically apart, we were never alone. And while it was far from ideal, fraught with all kinds of challenges especially for some of us who are digital immigrants as opposed to**

**digital natives, still the magical world of Zoom allowed our congregation to function as a *K'hillah K'doshah*, a holy congregation. More than ever, we needed one another for holidays, for prayer, for recreation, for learning, for Shabbat. We held it together because we needed one another like never before.**

**We became a congregation without walls; we welcomed one another into our once private spaces; our homes became our synagogues.**

**Barbara Streisand was right: "People who need people are the luckiest people in the world." The value of *K'hillah*, the understanding that a communal religion like Judaism ceases to exist without a minyan, even a virtual minyan, is a core tenet of our faith. Now that we can gather once again where once it was too dangerous, let us appreciate all the more what it means to build and maintain a *K'hillah K'doshah*.**

**A fourth transformative lesson has to do with humility, in Hebrew *anavah*. If we could step back and realize how almost overnight our world changed almost beyond recognition, not from a nuclear bomb or a devastating natural disaster, but by a microorganism, unseen by**



**the naked eye. A lethal virus changed our way of life possibly forever. It also did not discriminate between young and old, black or white, rich or poor, healthy or immune-compromised, Democrat or Republican. It was and is an equal opportunity killer. Yes, some communities or individuals were more vulnerable than others due to their exposure whether by choice or by necessity, but all of us were and continue to be potential hosts for this virus, even the vaccinated for this insidious plague.**

**We came to recognize how incredibly frail we are, how mighty nations came to a grinding halt, how despite all our vaunted strength, wisdom, and natural resources, we are no match for this virus. Indeed, as our Machzor teaches, "we are but dust, a particle floating in the wind, a cloud passing by, a dream soon forgotten." *Afar Anachhoo*, we are but dust and ashes. Likewise, we realized that viruses know no boundaries, travel freely, that what happens there, happens here, as well. Literally no one in the world was immune. These mind blowing, in your face, understandings surely humble us to the core teaching us**

**something else as well, that we are all in this together, and the only way out is by cooperating together for the common good. We've come to realize that refusing to be vaccinated is like driving while under the influence. We not only endanger ourselves, but potentially everyone else, with whom we come in contact.**

**Covid 19 has painfully taught us to remember that while we may have been created just a little lower than the angels, in the scheme of things, we are mere mortal. Covid 19 has also reminded us of our common humanity, of our shared existence, and that by caring primarily about yourself and your own wellbeing also protects those you love and the strangers who surround you.**

**Finally, and perhaps the most enduring result of contending with this malevolent virus, is the recognition that the spirit of humankind in the end will surely triumph over this disease.**

**Resilience, fortitude, perseverance, ingenuity, creativity, and the ability to make a way out of no way are the actionable words that define *Tikvah*, hope and faith which has sustained us throughout this**

**dark night. Individual and communal sacrifice, self-imposed limitations on our freedoms -and liberties for the sake of a greater good, namely the sanctity of life itself, are the derivatives of hope. We likewise should never forget the human will to prevail over nature, using our God-given talents to produce cures like Remdesivir which saved my life and so many others and the vaccines that would allow us to resume our lives as before.**

**As human beings and as Jews especially, the voice of hope *Kol Tikvah*, is the voice we listen to to overcome daunting obstacles and harrowing experiences. It is the magic elixir which allows us to see the silver lining even in the most ominous clouds, which threaten our destruction.**

**As we look back upon the last 18 months, let us recognize the blessings wrought in the wake of this dreadful disease. These include: a renewed appreciation for the irreplaceable blessing of the most important people in our lives, a recognition of the people who surround us day by day, doing their jobs that make life possible, a**

**congregation, a *K'hillah k'doshah*, which sustains our souls, a realization of how vulnerable we really are despite all our know how and technological achievements, and ultimately, the intangible hopes and dreams which burn brightly, lighting our way through the night.**

**Allow me to conclude with one of my favorite stories:**

*Long ago in a kingdom by the sea, the story is told of a king who was distraught after he found that a precious heirloom of his had been scarred. A ruby red sapphire which had been in the royal family for over 1,000 years had sustained a crack right down the middle after it fell inadvertently from the prince's hand. The king ordered his servants to scour the kingdom to find a jeweler who could repair the rare gem. A year went by but not even one of the many jewelers in the realm could fathom how to delicately extract the crack or camouflage it. The king was beside himself and ready to give up until one of his advisors suggested that they bring the damaged sapphire to the Chief Rabbi, who was considered to be one of the wisest of men in the realm. The Rabbi took the jewel and promised to return it in a week.*

*One week later, with great trepidation, the Rabbi presented the ruby red sapphire to his majesty, the king. When the king opened the box, he almost collapsed by the sheer beauty of the stone. He couldn't believe his eyes.*

*You see the crack which once marred the appearance of the sapphire was now the stem of a wondrous flower which added to the natural quality of the stone. The Rabbi engraved the stone in such a way that the crack literally blossomed as if overnight. The king handsomely rewarded the Rabbi for his ingenuity and creativity, and the king came to realize how out of tragedy can come great blessings.*

**So as we can well imagine, the scars of covid 19 will always be embedded deeply in our hearts, but it is what we do with those scars that ultimately tells the story.**

**Rosh Hashanah is our yearly re-embrace of hope and renewal, the soulful introspection which if done with sincerity, will yield great blessings in the year ahead.**

**O Holy One of Blessing, may the lessons learned from battling covid  
19 serve as an everlasting testament to that out of great peril can  
emerge great wisdom which can bring blessings into our lives.**

**May we redeem the past 18 months of pain and sorrow with faith and  
hope for a better day tomorrow. And let us say Amen.**