

אלה תלדות

These are the generations.

The challenges of our time. Each generation faces its unique circumstances and opportunities. Those of our generations include the Covid pandemic, political and cultural division, and how to keep a vibrant, relevant Judaism. Sometimes, as a synagogue, we may feel immune to the outside issues and pressures. For good or ill, this is not one of those times.

In June, when I was granted the honor of your election as President of the CABI Board of Trustees, I pledged to you to build on the tremendous work of my predecessors and work together to confront our challenges. None of these has been more critical and difficult than the Covid pandemic, amidst the divisions in our society.

When the pandemic began devastating our world, the Board made the difficult decision of shutting down all in-person services and activities. We went virtual for nearly 18 months. Rabbi Dan and the staff did a great job of providing online Zoom and streaming experiences, distributed holiday packages, and worked tirelessly to keep our community engaged and together. But, even though online access brought in some people who had not been able to experience CABI such as those from out of the area or individuals who were isolated and could not attend in person, we all knew that it was not the same sharing of community as before, for it excluded people. People with limited technological resources, people who had difficulties working with computers and the Internet, and those who could not attain the same feeling and social binding that looking at an electronic screen provides, versus being physically surrounded by family, friends, and neighbors. But, as difficult a decision as it was, it was the right thing to do. It fit our Jewish values of Pikuach Nefesh, the principle that the preservation of human life overrides virtually any other religious rule.

In the spring and early summer of this year, in the now known false sense that the pandemic was waning, in the time when many of us were optimistic, that despite the strong political disagreements, people would vaccinate and we would be able to return soon to the old normal, a normal enhanced by the new reach of technology. At that time, on August 6, we returned to in-person gatherings. We returned with appropriate restrictions including outside services and requiring masks. However,

even by then, between the spread of the Delta variant and the reluctance of so many to vaccinate, we faced growing pressures to modify our policies.

Today, the Board has come to our current policy. To attend in-person High Holy Day services we are outside, requiring that everyone be vaccinated, wear masks, and register in advance so we can severely limit the number of people attending and provide socially distanced seating. In creating this policy, we have attempted to blend and balance recommendations of the CABI Covid Medical Advisory Committee, the need to preserve and improve CABI's community, and our place in the greater Boise, Treasure Valley, and Idaho communities.

There are many who disagree with this decision. I have heard from members of our medical committee and others who strongly feel we should return to online only and not take the risk of meeting in-person. Other people have stated that we are excluding them from attending and wrongly keeping them from being a part of CABI. In that respect, it is recognized that we are excluding people. We have likely further isolated those who are immune compromised or for other medical reasons cannot receive the vaccine. I look out at those here in-person and there is no one under the age of 12, since they cannot be vaccinated. The entire next generation unable to experience in-person, multi-generational Jewish religious services and feel the strong bond of our community.

This has been and will continue to be an indescribably difficult decision for myself and the Board of Trustees. Have we always gotten it right? I don't know. I do know that we have carefully weighed the advice and the situation and have made tough choices. With the pending change to fall and winter weather, which might soon prevent us from meeting outside, we will face another series of difficult alternatives. During this process, I ask for your forbearance, understanding, and patience. If you feel that our decisions are wrong, I seek atonement. I request your forgiveness. The Board and myself will continue to strive to make the best decision for all of us in the CABI community.

One group of people that I want to recognize throughout this period of time is the Rabbi, staff, and volunteers. They have endured and prospered during these difficult times. It may not be easily evident how much additional work and stress they have experienced. It has been complicated by the recent resignation of our Executive Director for personal family reasons. They have come through with a dedication towards CABI that has been a joy to see. One of my goals as President is to improve the operational excellence of our services, programs, facility, and administrative

practices. The Rabbi, staff, and Board members have already met to lay the groundwork for that process. Observing and interacting with them, I know we have the right people in place to move forward. The Executive Director Search Committee has been very active and we expect to start interviewing candidates very soon. I am cautiously optimistic that we will be able to find the right person for that critical position.

Lastly, but not least, it is imperative that even in challenging times when we can get absorbed in the current crises, that we not lose sight of improving the long term viability of CABI, so that we can keep and improve on the vibrant, relevant Judaism it can provide for future generations. This very, very generous community and prudent financial stewardship has placed CABI in a solid financial position. Some synagogues have suffered financially during these past times and face trying circumstances. But, you, the congregation, have shown your support and generosity and allowed us to keep moving forward. One of my primary goals is to build on that foundation and improve our long-term viability so that CABI can flourish no matter what the future holds. We have already made some progress in starting that process and will be sharing the information and the plan for the future with you shortly.

The Torah relates,

Remember the days of old,
Consider the years of ages past;
Ask your parents, they will inform you,
Your elders, they will tell you.

When future generations look back at these trying times and the people that inhabited it, what stories they will be able to tell. I know that together this wonderful community will continue to thrive. That CABI will continue to provide the tools for people to live a fulfilling Jewish life. For we can be the ones that future generations look back on and marvel: What it must have been like to be a part of that community. What it must have been like to keep the synagogue vibrant during those times. What it must have been like to provide for the continuing future flourishing of Judaism. May it be so. Ken yehi ratzon.

Mark Travis
Tishrei 5782 – September 2021