

Sabbatical: Reflections on the First Two Months

On Spiritual Practice: Thus far, my work in the area of spiritual practice has been a great blessing. Simply carving out a prayer space in each day has given me an opportunity to focus on the present moment, to create calm and find new insights. Try it! You can start each day by singing the Traditional formula that thanks God for waking up in the morning. Click [here](#) for a favorite camp melody. Or try starting with a chant by Rabbi Shefa Gold. You can find more about her [here](#) and click on [this link](#) to hear a familiar melody. Note the teaching on this page as well. Rabbi Gold explains beautifully how one short phrase helps us to cultivate an acceptance of what we can control and what we cannot (no easy feat during a crisis). I have been learning with her through the [Institute for Jewish Spirituality](#), an organization which has stepped up their resources for challenging times. You can see and join their offerings by searching [here](#). They even have a daily meditation session.

In addition, I have intensified my study and practice of Mussar, Jewish values and ethics, focusing on the qualities/values/attributes that are most necessary at this time. You can find resources to think about Mussar at [mussarinstitute.org](#). They are running a very accessible program called [Mussar In A Time of Crisis](#). Also, I know that many of you kindly bought [The Mussar Torah Commentary](#) in which I had an essay published. If it is still sitting on your shelf, you can familiarize yourself with Mussar by reading the essay for this week's Torah portion, *Tzav* (the second portion in Leviticus), by Rabbi Nicole Auerbach. The lesson is timely: it speaks about ORDER! and how we find it in the world. Follow along with the appropriate essay week to week and you may find hidden gems of inspiration.

Social Justice: With so much out of our immediate control, it has been some comfort to know that there are still places we can have some power, especially in the realm of making our society a more just one. Unlike social action which usually involves concrete actions to deliver goods, services or funding where it is necessary (and is critical work to be done!), social justice is about advocacy and finding the causes that our personal Jewish values and individual life experiences prompt us to support. For me, this translates into working with the URJ's [Religious Action Center](#) (RAC). With their coaching, I understand more and more how the world becomes even less just for certain groups of people when a pandemic hits. For instance, refugees, those who live in poverty, or victims of racism are at an even higher risk of suffering at this time. In this moment, they especially need those who can take action on their behalf. While social action is happening everywhere (schools, food banks, free student tutoring on line, etc) I have been looking to the RAC, [HIAS](#) and [T'ruah](#) (the Rabbinic Call for Human Rights) to help guide me towards actions I can take on behalf of vulnerable populations and towards legislation that I might want to support or oppose. Each of these organizations has Haggadah resources as well: [Religious Action Center Haggadah\(s\)](#) [HIAS Haggadah](#) [T'ruah Haggadah](#)

Innovation in the Jewish community: While I have begun to explore the communities that interest me and to speak to people there, I am most struck by what has happened over the last month to the Jewish community as it moved on line. It became immediately apparent to me that "community" is something we speak about and cherish, but all too often take for granted.

In a crisis, without buildings to come together in, we are coming together on line en masse. How inspiring! Individuals are reaching out to the Jewish communities that hold meaning for them and seeking to be “present” there. My learning is that we all need to matter to others. No doubt, this idea will heavily inform how we eventually rebuild our synagogue communities in person. One representative of a synagogue I am studying summed it up well when he said : “When you enter our doors, you cannot remain anonymous.” Being part of their community comes with the understanding that you will be known, that you will be noticed by others who will celebrate and struggle with you, who will not only welcome you but will be present for you whenever you need them.