



Shabbat Hol Hamo'ed – September 24, 2021 – 18 Tishrei, 5782

Dear TBE Friends and Family,

The Festival of Sukkot, now in full swing, is referred to liturgically as *Z'man simchateinu* (the “Season of our Rejoicing” or “Happiness”). This designation invokes image of leisurely afternoons passed in the company of friends and *al fresco* dining in the *sukkah*. But for many, this *Z'man Simchateinu* – and, indeed, any occasion summarily designated as a “time of joy” – misses the mark in ways that can be not just tone-deaf but, for some, outright painful.

We have within in our community – indeed, in every community -- people for whom happiness will always be elusive. Whether the product of innate biochemistry, life experience, circumstances or some combination of factors that may never be clear, these individuals struggle - in some cases, perennially -to be able to glean even a small measure of joy from experiences that others find innately pleasurable. For some, it is not just “happiness” that remains beyond their reach but also the ability to summon the energy and focus to participate in routine social activities, hold a job, pursue a course of study, or maintain relationships with friends and loved ones. In extreme cases, the burden that this constant state of darkness entails can become so intense that life itself seems unbearable.

We have, in modern times, become far more astute at recognizing and responding to mental illness than was the case when the Biblical King Saul became incapacitated by visions so intense and terrifying that he could not tolerate the presence of others, even of loved ones. And we are surely more accepting as a society than the contemporaries of the prophet Eliyahu, whose contemporaries drove him into the hills for his volatile expressions of emotion (though we are not necessarily more sophisticated than those who imprisoned Jeremiah for sharing his paranormal visions).

But discussion of mental and emotional illness, which is assumed to affect about one in five Americans directly – and many more through the indirect effects of



mental illness on the family – remain largely a taboo in our society. What is more, the effort to access mental health services and obtain financial support for this care on terms comparable to care provided for physical ailments can be an uphill battle, despite a preponderance of evidence that mental illness is treatable.

I would like to see us commit during this “Season of Happiness” to creating, within the precincts of our congregation, an environment supportive of those with mental and emotional health challenges (and their support people). I would like to shape TBE into a space where those acknowledging mental illness are embraced without stigma, judgment or accusation. And finally, as we walk through September, identified by the National Alliance on Mental Illness as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, I would hope to see more members of our community, especially those involved in fields with a direct service-delivery component (education, social services, health care), undergo training as Mental Health First Responders, providing them with the tools to recognize and respond appropriately to individuals in a state of acute or incipient crisis.

Let us take the steps that might bring us collectively a few steps closer to a world where all can realize the vision of *Z’man Simchateinu*.

*Shabbat shalom* and *mo’adim l’simcha* – may we each be privileged to find something to celebrate in the dawn of this new year,

-- Rabbi Rachel Safman