

CONGREGATION  
SUKKAT SHALOM  
Bulletin

## Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Sam Gordon

The Covid-19 pandemic will end. Eventually, we will return to our "normal" way of life. Once more, we will return to restaurants, theaters, sports events. We will finally be able to visit with family and friends and travel freely.

But let us not be in too much of a rush to return back to "normal." Let us pause and deeply reflect on the truths exposed by this crisis. This great global human pandemic should change us. There are profound lessons we need to absorb before we rush to place this time behind us.

The plague of Covid-19 should demonstrate that a pandemic is not limited by borders, and a nation cannot be secure behind walls -- no matter their height. One part of the world cannot turn a blind eye to another. We share one earth, and threats to the environment and climate of one region affect one's own society.

Disease, poverty, population growth and hunger are challenges for rich and poor nations alike. Scientific knowledge must be shared among the world community. But it is also clear that this pandemic is not affecting us equally and without discrimination.

The statistics now show that more than 70 percent of the coronavirus deaths in Chicago have occurred among African-Americans. Covid-19 is exposing the failures of our society that we have overlooked for too long. This pandemic has

*"There are profound lessons we need to absorb before we rush to place this time behind us."*

please turn to page 2

## *Our Journey to Morocco: An Adventure in Time and Space*

By Beth Gomberg-Kirsch



We measure life in parameters of time and space.

When the Sukkat Shalom trip left for Morocco on March 1st, the Democratic

Party was in disarray with too many presidential candidates. The coronavirus was just beginning to show

its might but had yet to demonstrate its full, destructive powers. It was a time on the verge of change.

The most amazing aspect of our trip is that we were loaded into a capsule, launched into an exotic space, and witnessed from afar our world changing beyond recognition. It was a lot to process. We will forever remember our Morocco trip as a last respite before our new reality.

And now, about that space....

Morocco has a long history. I am always reminded that, as a country, the U.S. is relatively young. In world terms, we are novices. Morocco, perched between Spain (Europe) and Africa, has experienced centuries at the crossroads of cultures, ideas, religions, cuisines and art.

Each city we visited had its own flavor. The oldest site was Volubilis, established in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C.E. as a Phoenician town, later becoming a Roman city. Our own Patty Gerstenblith was a great

source of knowledge about this history.

Casablanca was a bustling, modern

hub with a huge mosque, the Mosque of Hassan II, which has room for 100,000 worshippers.

Fez, the home of Maimonides, was the oldest of the four imperial capitals. We wandered through the *shuks* and were introduced to the craftsmanship of local artisans. We had a group shopping experience at a leather co-op; many of us went home with new purses and jackets. Who knew leather could come in so many beautiful colors?

Rabat, the capital, was our next stop. The highlight of that city, and perhaps of the entire trip, was meeting with Mr. Andre Azoulay -- a senior advisor to King Mohammed VI of Morocco and leader of the local Jewish community. At age 78, he is a very impressive, understated statesman who is working for peace among Muslims and Jews -- in Morocco and around

please turn to page 3

## Rabbi's Message, cont'd

revealed the deep disparities that exist in our nation. We are confronted with the great American socioeconomic divide.

Far too many lack basic health insurance or job security. While we are urged to shelter at home and create social distance from each other, the truth is that only some of us can work at home or fulfill our duties remotely.

***"... will we be willing to confront the inequality and disparity that is, itself, a plague on our nation?"***

One cannot wait tables from home or earn tips from remote locations. Some have no option but to work in close contact with others and go to their jobs by public transportation. So many of our health workers, especially, are people of color or ethnic minorities. Undocumented workers are among those who serve those who need home care. They are all at additional risk.

There is also a vast divide between those who live in expansive homes and those families confined to one or two rooms. Far too many people are in our jails and prisons, often simply because they cannot afford bail. These places are hotbeds for the virus because of the close quarters and inability to socially-distance oneself. The homeless, whether in shelters or on the streets, are too often unprotected from this virus.

We are all affected by this pandemic and feel vulnerable to the danger to our health. But we are not suffering equally. When we are past this great danger, will we be willing to confront the inequality and disparity that is, itself, a plague on our nation?

Will we reject those who disregard scientific knowledge? Will expertise matter? Will the social safety-net once insured by the government be a valued commitment of our nation? When this is all over, will we remember what this epidemic has revealed about our society and our values?

On a more personal level, have we learned things about ourselves during these weeks of forced isolation? Have our priorities changed? Will we be different? We will have failed our own future if we merely return to past habits.

When the pandemic is over, we will open our doors and emerge into society. We will return to "normal." We will feel free and safe. But if we are blind to the inequities of our nation and world, we will have learned nothing.

It is now up to us to battle the plagues of inequality, injustice, disparity, xenophobia and poverty that remain the afflictions that threaten our world. If not now, when?

## Musical Notes: Take Pride as Our Young People Persevere

by Kenny Lyonswright, Cantorial Soloist

"Tradition!"

It's a wonderful song from a wonderful musical, but also an apt description of life as a Jew. For some of us, that means Bubbe's matzah-ball soup recipe at holidays. For others, it means living life "by the book." No matter our level of observance, there are ideas and values that bind Jews together across time and space:

***"If there is one thing we Jews can say for certain, it is that our people have endured hardship."***

*Tzedakah*, in which we give generously of our time or our resources. *Olam Chesed*, building the world with kindness. *Tikkun Olam*, repairing the world. These themes are all, to an extent, laid out for us in our sacred texts. There are some traditions, however, that exist not because they are written, but because they have been experienced by so many.

If there is one thing we Jews can say for certain, it is that our people have endured hardship. Having just finished celebrating Passover, we were reminded of our time in bondage in the land of Egypt. Less than one week later, we observed Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, reminding us of all that we lost a mere 75 years ago. There have been myriad events besides those two that have echoed across generations, compounding our shared suffering along with our resilience as Jews.

While I am involved in many lifecycle events at Sukkat Shalom, I am most entrenched in the B'nai Mitzvah celebrations. I have the privilege of spending individual time with all of our young people as they prepare to become adult members of our congregation. It is with them that I have seen this resilience close up in recent days.

***"I am truly proud of our young people for continuing one of the great Jewish traditions—perseverance."***

Our present situation is truly unique; it is unlike anything the world has seen in our lifetimes. Despite this—and all of the anxiety and uncertainty that comes with it—the young

people of this congregation have continued to meet and study with me. They have continued their commitment to learn and inherit Torah.

Many of them have decided to postpone their services, resulting in months of extra time spent maintaining the work they've prepared. Others have opted to observe their service over Zoom or other video-chat technology, meaning they will mark the occasion of their B'nai Mitzvah without friends or relatives celebrating with them in person.

I am truly proud of our young people for continuing one of the great Jewish traditions—perseverance. Finding the strength and determination to carry on is not an easy thing to do. As we all wrestle with how to persevere in the days ahead, we would do well to look to our young people who are showing us exactly how it is done.

## *Journey, cont'd*

the world. He told us that both Morocco's King and constitution promise that there are no Muslim Moroccans or Jewish Moroccans; instead, "we are ALL Moroccans."

Marrakech, the red city, was next. We explored more old synagogues and another Jewish quarter. We visited tombs and palaces whose craftsmanship was breathtaking. I have never seen so many stunning ceilings. The colorful streets and narrow alleyways made for sensory overload.

We went to a Berber village and visited a home that, by our standards, was quite primitive. Yet, we were privileged to partake in some local hospitality featuring mint tea. Then it was on to the Majorelle Garden, home of Yves St. Laurent, to see a slice of upscale, contemporary Morocco.

Our last stop was at Essaouria, a charming resort city from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. We saw the House of Memory, a recently dedicated memorial to the historical coexistence of Jewish and Muslim communities. We visited more restored synagogues and cemeteries and shopped in more markets. It is impossible to capture the essence of the trip in words; it was a myriad of experiences, sights and sensations.

One of the biggest rewards that we brought home was our new or renewed acquaintance with some of our fellow congregants. We now are friends who participated in a wondrous adventure at a time when the world began to pivot. The place we experienced together was amazing, but the time away was a gift. We were fortunate to come home just before our world changed forever. We are blessed.



*Congregants (left to right) Beth Gomberg-Hirsch, Abbey Romanek, Sue Singerman, Donna Horwitz, Marcia Slomowitz and Caryl Kushner seeking shelter from the Moroccan sun.*



*Rabbi Gordon and Patty Gerstenblith flanking Andre Azoulay, 78, a leader of Morocco's Jewish community.*



# Coping With Coronavirus Through Ritual and Community

*Adam Siegel, a Sukkat Shalom board member, posed the following questions to Rabbi Gordon about this unique time in our community's life.*

**Adam Siegel:** What are your thoughts on coping as the coronavirus crisis continues?

**Rabbi Gordon:** One of the great advantages of our time is that we have technology that allows us to stay in touch with each other and remain connected, whether by phone, text, email, Zoom, etc. We at Sukkat Shalom are doing our best to stay connected to our congregational family through phone calls, live-streamed worship and education programs, music and check-ins. It is important that we all can stay in touch.

**Adam:** How do we deal with the fear that we or someone we love might contract the virus?

**Rabbi Gordon:** The best way to allay fear is to take productive action to prevent exposure to the virus. We are supposed to shelter at home and practice social distancing. We applaud the bravery and service of people who don't always have that choice -- those in the health professions, first responders, transit workers, postal, package and food deliverers and others. At the congregation, we are leading all services and group discussions from our individual homes, seeking to model the safest behavior.

**Adam:** What thoughts do you have for conversations with our children on the virus and its impacts now and in the future? What topics would you suggest parents proactively bring up, and what topics would be counterproductive?

**Rabbi Gordon:** I think it is always important to listen to our children and answer them with honesty. Sometimes the best answer is "I don't know." We can also let them know that medical professionals and scientists are working very hard to find a cure for this disease. In the meantime, your children should mirror your precautions and be included in planning to protect your family. Finally, the habits we practice now -- washing hands, social distance -- may be good to continue into

the future until this virus is truly and clearly gone.

**Adam:** As we look ahead to spending more time in our homes, how could we use Jewish traditions and ritual to drive towards positive mental health?

**Rabbi Gordon:** I think ritual can be very important in creating a sense of stability and order. Sharing Shabbat in the home can bring family together, as well as using Zoom calls with relatives and friends. Participating in Sukkat Shalom's virtual Shabbat, Family School, song sessions and other online programs can help keep our community in meaningful contact. Jewish content in books and movies can also help us spend quality time. Take advantage of the extra time you have to share some classic movies like *An American Tale* or *Prince of Egypt* with your children.

**Adam:** What are some early signs we should be looking for in ourselves or loved ones that they're not doing okay, and how would you recommend we approach those conversations?

**Rabbi Gordon:** I won't pose as a therapist, but the key is to try to listen to each other -- adults and children. Are we getting enough sleep? Are we eating? Are we acting in unusual ways? Answers to these questions can offer signs that someone may need some help professionally in dealing with this crisis.

**Adam:** What advice would you have for those of us who are active socially in the Synagogue and other communities and depend on that social interaction?

**Rabbi Gordon:** From the outset of the crisis, we have moved quickly to offer virtual programming through Sukkat Shalom. There are also many resources available online that can offer stimulating, engaging and enjoyable Jewish knowledge, education, wisdom and experience. The PJ Library, [reformjudaism.org](http://reformjudaism.org), and [myjewishlearning.org](http://myjewishlearning.org) are just a few of the many resources available.

## Collages of Concern



*Since returning from Sukkat Shalom's Morocco trip, congregant Donna Horwitz has designed dozens of collages for family and friends providing reminders to help avoid the coronavirus. A Passover-themed one (above) contains pieces of matzoh along with references to the ten plagues.*

## Hineinu Committee is Here for You!

During this difficult time, members of the Hineinu Committee have been reaching out to the Sukkat Shalom community. Members are calling congregants to check in. We are providing assistance to those who need it or connecting them to someone who can help. We also delivered soup, prepared by our Women's Spirituality group, to those who could use it. (It couldn't hurt!)

If you need assistance, or know someone who does, please reach out to us by contacting Lynn Greenbaum at [lmgreenie5@gmail.com](mailto:lmgreenie5@gmail.com). We are here for you!



### CONGREGATION SUKKAT SHALOM

CONGREGATION SUKKAT SHALOM  
1001 CENTRAL AVENUE  
WILMETTE, ILLINOIS 60091  
847/ 251-2675  
[www.sukkatshalom.org](http://www.sukkatshalom.org)

#### Staff

Rabbi Sam Gordon  
Rabbi Carlie Daniels  
Cantorial Soloist Ken Lyonswright  
Andrew Schultz, Executive Director

#### Officers

Betsy Katten, President  
Lisa Fingerhut Carlton, Vice President  
Joel Wineberg, Treasurer  
Kathy Stein, Secretary  
Larry Friedman  
Adam Goldman  
Chris Gould  
Lynn Greenbaum  
Billy Pekin  
Abbey Romanek  
Adam Siegel  
John Shapiro  
Steve Madden, Treasurer Emeritus

#### Ex-Officio

Debra Shore, Ex-Officio, President  
Fred Wilson, Ex-Officio, President  
Jesse Peterson Hall, Ex-Officio, President  
Liz Sciortino, Ex-Officio, President  
Jane Rothschild, Ex-Officio, President  
Andrew Werth, Ex-Officio, President  
Matt Baker, Ex-Officio, President

## Family School, Lifelong Learning Programs Moving Online

by Rabbi Carlie Daniels

### FaceTime. Zoom. Skype. Google Hangouts.

Formerly, these apps were used for business conferences or keeping in touch with family and friends. During the current pandemic, however, these tools now facilitate learning, working, and even Passover Seders. As our students and families have adjusted to this new normal, our synagogue staff has reoriented our lifelong learning program to meet the needs of the community in this time of social distancing.

Allow me to describe what this new normal looks like: On the third Friday night in April, our Family School community gathered via Zoom for a virtual Shabbat with Rabbi Gordon, Cantorial Soloist Kenny Lyonswright, Alan Goodis (our Family School music specialist), all of our teachers, and me.

*“Many of the families with whom I’ve spoken are now accustomed to the reality of e-learning from home.”*

We welcomed Shabbat by singing, sharing reflections from the week, lighting Shabbat candles, and saying *kiddush* and *motzi* blessings over wine or grape juice and bread. The “room” was full (roughly 50 teachers and families participated) and there was much joy -- especially when we all unmuted at the very end to wish each other “Shabbat Shalom!” While we would much rather have convened face-to-face in our sanctuary, it was still a wonderful opportunity to be together on Shabbat.

Many of the families with whom I’ve spoken are now accustomed to the reality of e-learning from home. Our students are finding ways to keep busy beyond their online classrooms -- making art, building robots, and playing or biking outside. Our Family School plan is to continue to engage the community with creative and innovative online learning opportunities that address our desire to connect with one another and continue our Jewish learning.

Beyond Family School, all of our other lifelong learning programs have moved online. Despite the challenges of learning how to use these new digital platforms, we have continued to reach and teach the Sukkat Shalom community.

Torah study, adult education classes, Touchpoints, and many of our other groups have embraced this new normal. Touchpoints participants recently met online to check in with one another and discuss an assigned article. The consensus was that it was wonderful to be together, even though on-screen rather than in-person.

Rabbi Gordon has offered video sermons and Kenny Lyonswright continues to provide our community with beautiful music, both sacred and secular, delivered online. Even if you have never participated in Torah study or an adult education class, I encourage everyone to log on and give it a try -- no previous experience necessary!

Jewish tradition teaches: “Appoint for yourself a teacher, and acquire for yourself a friend.” (Pirkei Avot 1:6) This concept inspires the Jewish value of lifelong learning. In this time of social distancing, it is important to continue to connect with each other. By creating community and learning together online, we can renew and strengthen the relationships to carry us through this challenging time.

### We Want to Hear from You!

Do you have an idea for an article for the Sukkat Shalom newsletter? Do you want to submit your own? We want to hear from you. Please share your ideas and articles with newsletter editor John Kupper at [john@kuppercom.com](mailto:john@kuppercom.com).