

This time of year brings me back to our daughters' B'not Mitzvah eight years ago, Parashat Ki Tetzei. In this current period of uncertainty, fear, as well as hope, the lessons I learned from preparing that D'var Torah especially resonate for me this year.

Ki Tetzei lists seventy-four of the six hundred and thirteen commandments in the Torah. But at the end we are commanded, "You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget." I read Ki Tetzei as the child of Holocaust survivors, and understand it not as a list of random mitzvot, but in the larger context of remembrance that evil exists, bad things happen, whether that be in the form of antisemitism, hate, institutional racism, climate change or a pandemic. Rather than performing these mitzvot out of naive idealism, we perform them with the recognition that Amalek's existence must drive us to repair the world. Like Amalek, the pandemic and racial injustice have preyed on our most vulnerable.

As I reflect on this past year, it is with gratitude and pride that I have witnessed how our congregation has exemplified performing mitzvot in the context of COVID and injustice.

We first closed our building under Ilene Semiatin's strong and caring leadership. She guided our community through difficult decisions with tremendous foresight based on our highest Jewish value of Pikuach Nefesh, saving a life. We are so grateful to her. Our concern was to support one another and remain connected. We organized outreach under the leadership of Joan Rosen and Harriet Gluckman to provide virtual companionship, food drop off, and errands. As this pandemic continues and at-risk individuals remain isolated over many months, this work is more important than ever. If you, or someone you know, could use even a little support, please reach out to Vicky Farhi at [executivedirector@betamshalom.org](mailto:executivedirector@betamshalom.org).

We are so very fortunate for Rabbi Bronstein and Cantor Schiller's spiritual leadership. For these many months, they have enriched our souls with their prayer, wisdom and song. I have often remarked that their voices sound as if there are others in the room with them. They have uplifted us with their energy, all while praying in front of a Zoom screen in our Beit Midrash turned sound studio. It truly speaks to their talent and spirit.

Through Zoom, we have maintained a full and vibrant calendar of services, events, and education. This has allowed us to pray, to learn, to celebrate and to mourn. Special thanks to David Badain and Eric Levine for creating guidelines, instructions and training which have allowed us to remain engaged and connected. We are reminded, as we have learned before, that our community is so much stronger than our four walls or our big tent.

We can see this as we prepare for the High Holy Days. Our Social Action Committee organized a way to safely donate food, especially important now, all while picking up a gift bag and borrowing a Mahzor. Our Tikkun Olam committee, while continuing to support immigrant issues and rights, is expanding its focus towards fighting racial injustice. During this month of Elul, we blew shofars to wake us up and call us to action as part of the Say Their Names/Hear the Shofar Campaign. As we approach the election, a sub-committee of Tikkun Olam is engaging us in a critical get out the vote initiative.

Our Education Director, Abby Reiken, along with our teachers, have worked this summer to create a creative, flexible and enriching virtual Torah La'am program for the fall to educate and connect our families and children.

Our decisions concerning in-person activities are guided by our COVID Advisory Committee under the leadership of David Abramson. This team understands that while we must consider all of the medical and scientific evidence and recommendations for safe gatherings, we must also consider our Jewish values and the purpose and spirit of our gathering together.

Thankfully, we are slowly returning to in-person activities. We are blessed with a beautiful outdoor space, and we have had several outdoor, socially distanced, Kabbalat Shabbat services, including one for families. We even had an outdoor pizza dinner for our college students with the Rabbi! It was an important event for our young adult children who are headed to college at a time of unprecedented uncertainty.

Over the 25 years we have held our craft show, we developed meaningful relationships with artists, a large number of whom are Israeli. These artists need our support now as they are challenged with the financial fallout of the current pandemic. While the craft show has always been a reflection of our communal Jewish life, we also rely on the craft show as a source of income for our community. A small, innovative group of congregants, now The Virtual Craft Show committee, is hard at work creating a craft show that both maintains the essence of what has made it unique while innovating and expanding its scope and reach. Their vision is ambitious and exciting, and we look forward to sharing more about it in the weeks to come.

We simply would not be able to remain connected, serve our community, use our building and outdoor space safely, or engage in Tikkun Olam if it were not for our dedicated, creative and caring office and building staff. Whether remote or in-person, they work tirelessly to support all that we do. We are so grateful to Vicky Farhi, our Executive Director, and our office staff Berta Bumbelow, Lindsay Lever, and Marie Samtula; and to our building staff Roberto Lombert, Antony Tejada, Ruth Balarezo, Andy Lombert, and Westlin Gonzalez.

The strength and resilience of this community is humbling. The work that continues, the spirit that exists, and the commitment of so many, create hope and renewal despite and in response to all that is happening around us. As we usher in a New Year, we are aware of Amalek, but we must also recognize the goodness that exists and the mitzvot we must continue to do.

Wishing you and your families health and happiness in this coming year.

Shanah Tovah,

Barbara