

From the Rabbi's Desk

May 2018

As many of you know, Polly, the kids, and I reside in Mystic. Our house is just far enough off the beaten path to keep the neighborhood quiet and just close enough that we can walk to “downtown” Mystic. Our landlord is so wonderful that we are in no hurry to own a house (sorry, real estate folks in our community). I have just one tiny complaint. The mailbox is down the street, a couple of hundred yards away. It seems like a small thing. During the summer it's fine. Nava, Ilan, and I will walk down to fetch the mail. But in the winter or when it's raining, who wants to get out of the car. Not me. And what's in there these days anyway? Most of our bills come electronically. There's *The Leader* and our *Bulletin*, but to be honest, sometimes the mail can sit for quite a while in the snailbox. And what piles up? Junk mail. Most of it goes straight from the snailbox to the recycle bin.

“Junk mail” has bridged the communications gap between snail mail and e-mail. I remember the first time I heard the term “snail mail.” I was a research assistant in college back in the late 80's. My professor mentioned having to snail mail someone. I actually had no idea what he was talking about. What was so snail about the mail? Sending a letter cross-country in just a couple of days seemed pretty quick back then. Thirty years later, most of my mail comes at nearly the speed of light, delivered in an instant, the junk mail, just as fast as the important messages. Enter the new word, Spam.

There may be a few of you who have tried Spam. Hardly anyone will admit it. Culinary, Spam has been relegated to the butt of jokes, or meal horror stories. But, someone must eat it because Hormel still sells it. In fact, Spam sales are strong. This is where kosher starts to look like a good idea after all. But no problem; I can roll the cart right on by in the grocery aisle. But I can't get away from the spam e-mail or the spam snail mail. It just keeps coming, littering my snailbox and inbox. Spam has been described as information that comes so fast and in such high volume that the flow of information drowns out the purposeful messages. It's migrated out of the e-mail world into apps, too.

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My phone would constantly like to give me alerts for just about everything. Every app I download first asks me if I want to enable alerts. No, No, No! E-mail, Twitter, Facebook, Weather, and even my Pittsburgh Penguins app all want a piece of my attention. Stop!

In the virtual world, the signal to noise ratio has dropped so far that, at least for me, the internet has become an undesirable but necessary wasteland. It has information vital to modern life but leaves one thirsty for real relationships. E-mail and Facebook have ceased to be the easy ways to communicate with the people who are most important in my life. If you are reading this in your snail mail, you've made that list, by the way. Be assured, I want to communicate with you, I want to know what is going on in your life, be there for you, celebrate with you, laugh with you, cry, and mourn with you. I do my best to respond to all of the messages you send me. But when it's really important, do e-mail, but please, please, I welcome you to be a little old fashioned too...pick up the phone, stop by, write a letter. I'd love to hear your voice, see you, decipher your handwriting, or have a real conversation.

Rabbi Marc