

From the Rabbi's Desk

July 2020

Friends,

Summer has just begun. It will be a summer unlike any we've experienced before. The world is changing quickly before our eyes. Since I wrote in this bulletin last, another social earthquake occurred. The murder of George Floyd has triggered social protests and marches across our country and around the world. These protests serve to cast yet another, even brighter light on systematic racism not only within our police and justice systems but also in healthcare and the marketplace. As I am writing to you now, the protests have not subsided but have evolved. The attention of both protestors and civic leaders has now turned to monuments. Stalled silent debates about the balance between progressive policy and preserving history have been replaced by swift action to remove symbols erected as much to intimidate minorities as they were to honor perceived heroes. By the time you read this, the protests will likely have set its sight on a different dimension of systematic inequality. As messy and ugly as this process has been, I think there is an overwhelming reason to have hope.

I have hope because our Jewish traditions, values, and experiences have prepared us to be allies and leaders in the public conversations shaping the face of change in our communities. We have a long tradition of storytelling, evidenced in our sacred texts. In these stories, we deal with the messiness of life. We grapple with eternal human struggles against baseless hatred. They inform how we can live in an imperfect world with faith and love in our hearts. Equally present in our sacred texts is a tradition of discourse. We engage in centuries-long debates and often preserve multiple perspectives, not just the loudest voice of any age. We recorded our struggles not only in narratives and discourse but also in performative rituals. These processes allow us to bring the wisdom gained from our collective experiences of destruction, exile, oppression, and hardship into our present challenging moments. If we engage with our narratives, discourses, and experiences, we can empathize with grieving parents, victims of hate crimes, sufferers of injustice, and those imprisoned in wall-less ghettos.

This summer will be necessarily different from any in recent memory as much because of the masks we will continue to wear as the conversations in which we will be engaged. As I wrote last month, when the pandemic is over, life will not return to as it was before. Our experiment of living in a virtual world will inform a more strongly connected and collaborative community. The social protests we are seeing and participating in will help us engage in essential conversations on racial justice and structural inequalities in our communities. Our voice is critical in these conversations. We must participate.

Over the summer, while I am simultaneously trying to take a little time off with my family, I will be continuing meaningful conversations and getting more involved in the Reform Movement's 2020 Civic Engagement Campaign – Every Voice, Every Vote. Over the next six months, we can make real progress towards a more just society. The 2020 Civic Engagement Campaign is not about politics. It is about bringing our Reform Jewish values to essential conversations in non-partisan ways. Our community will not reflect our values unless we are engaged in purposeful civic conversations. If you want to know more about how to get involved, contact me at morcekstrand@gmail.com or visit the Religious Action Center at www.rac.org.

Enjoy the summer,

L'Shalom,
Rabbi Marc