

# From the Rabbi's Desk

April 2021

Friends,

We just passed a milestone. It is now over a year since we began doing everything at Temple Emanu-El in the virtual world. It hasn't been all bad. We've learned a lot.

We've been able to stay face to face with the help of Zoom. We've done many of the same programs and even added a few new ones.

Most importantly, we've stayed safe. But it hasn't been easy. We've had to make difficult decisions about lifecycle events, especially bar and bat mitzvah celebrations. Most families have elected to move the date in hopes of waiting out the pandemic. But this has created new problems and stresses. Even our regular Shabbat services are not the same. Each time we do a service or program on Zoom, it is like producing a television show. Every second must be planned. Although Zoom allows us to hold a conversation, it's a bit unnatural when large groups meet. Each person has to wait their turn to speak, and knowing exactly when it's your turn isn't always straightforward. How many times have we heard, "you're muted." Sometimes our internet connections are not reliable. Thankfully, internet service in New London, where I live, is good. Yet, some of you at home have had problems connecting.

Nonetheless, going virtual has been invaluable. So much so that we are working on plans to install cameras and production equipment at the Temple. The future is here, and we are leaning into it. Thank you to Sean Bendick for taking on the challenge of setting up the new system. When we can re-enter the Temple for regular worship and programs, we will still be just as connected to those at home as we are right now.

Everyone should be able to be connected. We will need a corp of tech-savvy people to help run the show on Shabbat, Festivals, and special events.

I'm mentioning all of this because the end of the pandemic seems to be in sight. But how quickly will it get here? The answer to that question is in our hands. The pipeline of vaccines is nearly full. By mid-April, everyone over sixteen will be able to schedule a vaccination appointment. I am asking you to get vaccinated if you are medically able.

During the pandemic, the Jewish value of *p'kuach nefesh* has guided our actions. One expression of *p'kuach nefesh* comes from the Talmud Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 4:1 – Whoever destroys one soul; it is as if an entire world has been destroyed; whoever saves one soul; it is as if a whole world has been saved. We continue to hold tightly to this value. It has kept us home and safer this past year. It has mandated (not the Governor or anyone else) that we wear masks and social distance.

Now we must use *p'kuach nefesh* to guide our decisions about being vaccinated. Of course, we should question the safety of vaccines and all medicines. But we should do so with the help of experts. Back in January, I organized a webinar to address vaccine hesitancy. We spoke to medical, pharmaceutical, and public health experts, our own Jonathan Rowe, among them during this webinar. The webinar answered many questions. Now three vaccines are available.

Medical experts agree that these three vaccines are safe and effective. When it is your turn, please get vaccinated. Vaccines won't change our social situation unless the majority of us are willing to take them. Jewish values tell us that we must take the vaccine if we are able. If you have concerns based upon your medical situation, speak to your doctor. As I am writing this article, I'm waiting for my window to register to open. How quickly the end of the pandemic arrives depends upon each one of us. I'm getting vaccinated, and I hope you will too.

Looking forward to seeing you in person,  
Getting vaccinated soon,

Rabbi Marc