

# From the Rabbi's Desk

January 2022

Friends,

Happy New Year...again...and again. In Jewish tradition, there are four New Year observances. One is the first of the Hebrew month of Tishrei which corresponds to Rosh Hashanah. A second is the 15<sup>th</sup> of Sh'vat or Tu bi Sh'vat, the New Year for trees. A third is the first of the Hebrew month of Nissan, because Torah tells us that it is the first of the months. The fourth is the first of Elul, one month before Rosh Hashanah. That begins our time of introspection leading up to Rosh Hashanah. Add to these four, January 1<sup>st</sup> and we have five New Year celebrations.

No matter which new year we are talking about, each is a recognition of passing of time. We are always looking back and looking forward at the same time. Both views are opaque. We look back on the past with the wisdom gained from having lived it already. We look to the future and see only that which we feel are the most likely possibilities, for good or bad. Yet, the path to the future is so dependent on things beyond our control. We cannot see the future clearly, yet we prepare thoroughly as if it were a surety. Our clarity resides only in the right here and now. Our path, a string of these present moments.

How can I make the most of this present moment? Kohelet pondered that there was nothing new under the sun, that generations come and go; that despite human efforts, there are certain immutable fixtures that humankind can never change; perhaps that humankind could not even change its own core character. Kohelet's view was only clear in his present moment. Our reality was a distant and dim star to him, almost imperceptible. In our present moment, we know that humankind has changed the way we see the sun rising and setting. We've incredibly seen it from the moon but also tragically see it each day through a haze of pollutants. The oceans are rising as human activity has been slowly unlocking frozen lakes on the seas. God the Creator looks on as humankind creates new kinds of matter, a synthetic world colliding with the natural world. We are not gods, nor are the things we create divine. Yet, through our collective wisdom and knowledge, accumulated over centuries, we have stumbled into truly dominating our earthly house. Through collective action, we have nearly destroyed it. But my glass half full says that the same collective power, properly directed, can fulfill our obligation to protect and be caretaker of Earth.

The future may not be clear, but we do have the power to affect the future in our present moment. In the shadow of this New Year, I am taking a few moments to think about where I am right now and how the decisions I make today might make tomorrow more meaningful, for me and those around me. Can I be more engaged in civic endeavors? Can I reduce, reuse, repurpose and recycle more? Can I consume less? Can I learn more and understand more? Can I give more? Can I listen more and empathize more? Can I be more present for the person in front of me, family, friend or stranger? The answer to all of those, of course, is 'yes;' But, only if I am present in this moment, regardless of the date. What questions do you have? Let's make the most of our present moments answering our questions together.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Marc