

RABBI'S MESSAGE

A Year Like No Other...Again!

This New Year will be like no other New Year. That is obvious. Nobody can underestimate the impact that the Coronavirus pandemic will have as we observe High Holidays this year. But wait! Isn't *every* New Year like no other? There have been incredible experiences preceding Rosh Hashana, both locally and in our Jewish world. Shortly after I began at Temple Beth Torah, the Second Intifada disrupted the Jewish world with violence and terrorism in Israel just before Rosh Hashana. One year later, the September 11th attacks shook the entire world. Hurricanes Katrina, Ike and Harvey disrupted our lives just before the New Year began. And we have survived each of these, due in large part, to community members coming together to support each other. Sometimes even horrible catastrophes have led to new ways to improve the world.

And what about throughout history? Horrible events have plagued the Jewish people since the destruction of the Holy Temple, including the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the Holocaust and more. Countless times, calamities, either initiated by people or nature, turned our world upside down. And we continue to survive and thrive.

I am reminded of a Chinese folk tale that presents valuable lessons for today.

There once was a man who owned a magnificent horse that everyone admired and told him how blessed he was. Cautiously, the man responded, "What may be a blessing could be curse." When the horse ran away, his neighbors all consoled him on his horrible luck, suggesting it might be a curse. Now the man said, "What may be a curse could be a blessing." The horse returned, leading a herd of several wild horses. The law of the land allowed him to keep the horses, and his neighbors congratulated him on his blessing. Again, he said, "What may be a blessing could be curse." His only son tried to ride one of the wild horses and broke his leg, leaving his neighbors to wonder if the man was now cursed. Later, the king's army came recruiting all able-bodied young men to fight in a horrible war. Many were killed, but the man's son was exempt because of his injury. To this day, the people of that village still say, "What may be blessing could be a curse, and what may be a curse could be a blessing."

There is nothing good about broken legs, hurricanes, terrorism, or deadly diseases. Our response, though, makes a difference. The destruction of the Temple and the elimination of Priestly sacrifices led us to new ways to be Jewish. Perhaps the isolation we experience due to Coronavirus can lead us to new ways to reach out and connect with each other. Part of the Torah reading on Yom Kippur states "*I set before you life and death, blessing and curse... Choose life!*" (Deut. 30:19) In the midst of our most difficult times, may we discover some blessings. Especially this year...and all the rest.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon