

We Were ALL There This Time

Tradition teaches that we were all present at Sinai to hear the Ten Commandments. We were all redeemed from Egyptian bondage; we all experienced the horrors of slavery. By extension, it makes sense that any past Jewish experience affects us all. We all should understand how it felt when the Temple was destroyed twice. The Spanish Inquisition, expulsion from Spain, the Crusades and other events are all part of our collective memory. Many in our community were alive during the Holocaust, some experiencing those terrors first-hand. More recently, the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center affected our lives deeply to this day. With each of these events, the world changed, and we responded with changes.

I admit I was not actually present for any of those events. Even the recent ones. I was not alive during the Holocaust, though I know many who were, and I have been able to learn from their personal experiences. I was alive during 9/11, and my life changed; but not as dramatically as those who were in New York and lost loved ones. As a Jew, I have collective memory of ancient experiences, but not as real as those who were ACTUALLY at Sinai, or in Egypt or in Europe when those powerful, world-changing events happened.

The COVID-19 experience is different. Every city, town, village and country has been affected by this virus. Those who became ill or lost loved ones experienced the most intimate trauma. Some Coronavirus victims have lingering symptoms; others had mysterious relapses. Even those of us who escaped the illness, or had mild symptoms and recovered, have been changed by this time period. None of us will forget what it's like to remain masked and to not see another's face. We won't forget observing High Holidays on a computer screen. The isolation, remaining far from loved ones in the interest of safety, was uncomfortable, frustrating and potentially devastating. We all missed simchas, missed watching young people grow, and were often unable to be with dear ones who were sick or dying. There were missed opportunities for graduations, proms, b'nai mitzvot and weddings. Emotional scars developed when we could not pay our respects for a funeral or shiva visit. Many had economic trauma that may be permanent.

The whole world has changed. What's next? After the Temple was destroyed, we developed rabbinic Judaism that remains vibrant to this day. When we were expelled from Spain, many immigrated to the Americas to develop thriving Jewish communities. After the Holocaust, it was apparent to Jewish people and the United Nations it was time to establish the State of Israel.

Rosh Hashana celebrates the beginning of Creation. When the modern world changes, it becomes our responsibility to re-create. We've found new ways to worship and connect. In the coming years, we'll continue to re-create the world as we know it, just as our ancestors did. Challenges help motivate us to work together to make the world this world what it should be.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Dan Gordon

Temple Beth Torah