

Prayers During the Time of Pandemic  
By Rabbi Avi Winokur

SHS President Jeremy Newberg reminded me in our texted “L’Hayim’s” last night (me, The Glenlivet 18; Jeremy, Red Breast Single Pot Still Irish Whiskey 12) that “you started with 9/11 and conclude with Coronavirus. Crazy.”

It was true, but with 9/11 we could gather together in community as we did. The fear was and still is real from that terrible day that shook our nation to its foundation, but we could gather together. Today, shaken again, we cannot gather together in community. No hugs, no swaying to the music, no gathering in prayer. I thought I might send out a bit of prayer as we approach this Shabbat.

The *Barkhu*, often known as “the Call to Prayer,” ushers us into the central part of our services: “Let us bless Adonai the Blessed One.” The response I offer, written by one of my prolific and thoughtful colleagues, captures so well what it means for so many of us to answer that call and to pray, to really pray from the heart and from the soul in these times.

A Prayer of Hope During this Pandemic  
by Rabbi Naomi Levy

We are frightened, God,  
Worried for our loved ones,  
Worried for our world.  
Helpless and confused,  
We turn to You  
Seeking comfort, faith and hope.

Teach us, God, to turn our panic into patience,  
And our fear into acts of kindness and support.  
Our strong must watch out for our weak,  
Our young must take care of our old.  
Help each one of us to do our part to halt the spread of this virus.

Send strength and courage to the doctors and nurses  
In the frontlines of this battle,  
Fortify them with the full force of their healing powers.  
Send wisdom and insight to the scientists  
Working day and night across the world to discover healing treatments.  
Bless their efforts, God.  
Fill our leaders with the wisdom and the courage  
To choose wisely and act quickly.  
Help us, God, to see that we are one world,  
One people  
Who will rise above this pandemic together.

Send us health, God,  
Watch over us,  
Grace us with Your love,  
Bless us with Your healing light.  
Hear us, God,  
Heal us, God,  
Amen.

Shortly after the *Barkhu* we arrive at the *Sh'ma*, often proclaimed as “the central affirmation of Jewish faith.” It is also, to my mind, the central affirmation of our peoplehood, or community, as well. Thanks to colleague Rabbi Toba Spitzer for sharing this moving affirmation of faith—at its deepest, also an affirmation of what it means to live in community—i.e., in communion with each other in these times.

Pandemic, by Lynn Ungar

What if you thought of it  
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—  
the most sacred of times?  
Cease from travel.  
Cease from buying and selling.  
Give up, just for now,  
on trying to make the world  
different than it is.  
Sing. Pray. Touch only those  
to whom you commit your life.  
Center down.  
And when your body has become still,  
reach out with your heart.  
Know that we are connected  
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.  
(You could hardly deny it now.)  
Know that our lives  
are in one another's hands.  
(Surely, that has come clear.)  
Do not reach out your hands.  
Reach out your heart.  
Reach out your words.  
Reach out all the tendrils  
of compassion that move, invisibly,  
where we cannot touch.  
Promise this world your love—  
for better or for worse,  
in sickness and in health,  
so long as we all shall live.

Is it not a kind of affirmation, a kind of *Sh'ma*, a kind of call that we send out to each other:

Promise this world your love—  
for better or for worse,  
in sickness and in health,  
so long as we all shall live.

Let us resolve to lend strength to each other during these difficult days and look forward with hope and faith to the day when we again join together in celebration and communion, in dance, in song, and in prayer.