

## Masorti Judaism at this difficult time

By Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg

Across our communities, and among young people through Noam and Marom, our first priority in these difficult weeks has been to reach out to everybody we can, to show solidarity, offer support, listen to different needs and concerns, provide engaging Jewish activities of all kinds and strengthen our emotional and spiritual resilience together.

I have been very moved to hear how many people of all ages and across and beyond our congregations feel included and strengthened.

An equal priority is to fulfil our responsibilities towards the wider society in which we live by appreciating all those who work to keep us safe: frontline NHS workers, those who put food on the shop shelves, collect our rubbish and enable society to continue to function under lockdown. May God give them strength; we are all in their debt.

Many of our members have joined efforts to collect products for foodbanks, make visors and gowns, take food to hospitals and ensure that older and more vulnerable people have the medicines and provisions they need. This is a time of collective *chesed* and *tsedakah*, loving kindness and concern for social justice, the like of which I have never before experienced. These values are at the heart of Masorti, and of all forms of, Judaism and we want to encourage everyone to participate in the belief that, even in isolation, there is never nothing we can do. A text, a phone call, an old-fashioned letter of appreciation can mean the world, giving an exhausted worker renewed resolve to keep on going.

It remains of constant importance to live these values according to our Judaism, trying to meet our communal, spiritual and halakhic challenges with the balance of commitment to tradition and sensitivity to changing realities which is the core of Masorti philosophy.

On a personal level, I find myself turning again and again to the night-time prayer of the four archangels:

*In the name of the God of Israel:*

*At my right hand is Michael, who is like God (in lovingkindness);*

*At my left hand is Gavriel, God is my strength;*

*Before me is Uriel, God is my light;*

*Behind me is Raphael, God is healing;*

*And over my head is Shechinat El, the protective presence of God.*

I wish on behalf of us all that we find kindness and resilience, and that God's light may guide us. These are unprecedented times and the way ahead is uncertain. Bound together by love of Torah, Jews have always found the solidarity, determination and faith to come through harsh days and challenging experiences with renewed creativity and resolve.

In these anxious weeks of isolation, we must remember that we belong not only to the community of the present, but to that invisible communion of more than a hundred generations with their wisdom, courage, tenacity, insight and love. They hold out their arms to us at this time; they reach out to us through the Torah, in our prayer books, our melodies, in our celebrations of the holidays, and also in our mourning.

They embrace us, and breathe strength into our spirit. They are with us and God is with us in our hearts.

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