



### A Message from Rabbi Jessica

To say that we are living in strange times would be to state the obvious, and yet, I find myself saying it daily. In the time I am privileged to utilize thinking about such things, I notice that I am primarily looking at the pandemic and human behavior in its wake through two vastly different frames. Depending on how I am feeling and what my experiencing in any given moment, I am balancing both:

(1) a sense of great concern for the physical and financial health and wellbeing of those of us who have been blessed with these, and an even greater anxiety for those who live in the growing margins of societal health and wellbeing; **and**

(2) optimism about the abundant creativity, compassion, and ingenuity of individuals, groups, and communities (even when maintained virtually), and great faith in our resilience, which sparks confidence in our shared ability to maximize the psycho-spiritual and intellectual health and wellbeing of kol yoshevei tevel / כל יושבי תבל (all who dwell on the planet) as well as the health of the Earth and its surrounding atmosphere.

This week we begin, in Ohio, a period of redefining what it means to live in community with very strict rules about our behavior. By State mandate, we are staying in our homes to avoid the spread of COVID-19. We are restricting our physical exposure to a very small number of people - our "tribe" - with whom we share food, shelter, and germs. We are following communal rules that tell us where we can go, what businesses will remain open, how we will care for the sick, and how we will bury the dead. We are cancelling in-person social gatherings from seders to weddings. We are figuring out what it means to create the safest and most sacred spaces to live wisely.

This week, too, we begin Sefer Vayikra ~ the Book of Leviticus in our annual cycle of Torah. Vayikra is a difficult book for any 21st century reader. I studied for an entire semester in rabbinical school, with [Rabbi Laura Duhan Kaplan](#) and a small virtual community of colleagues (on Zoom, by the way), the book of Vayikra in a class Reb Laura called, "Learning to Love Leviticus." Yet, I still wrestle with the chapters upon chapters of animal sacrifice and the level of detail offered on blood, entrails, and salt. I am pained and outraged by the ways in which passages from Leviticus are used, still today, by some to shame and restrict the loving acts of others. I struggle with the depiction of a God that is soothed by the pleasing scent (רֵיחַ) / re'ach ni'choach) of burning animal parts.

And ... despite the discomfort and in the midst of all of these very alien concepts, Vayikra depicts for us the beginnings of the carefully constructed and clearly instructed parts of Torah which will create communal order and societal structure for those depicted in our most formative biblical stories - b'nei Yisrael (the children of Israel/Jacob) and the mixed multitudes that journey out of Mitzrayim (biblical Egypt) with them. This level of order is no small feat for a group of people whom Moshe would surely describe, if he spoke to us in modern parlance, as "herding cats." They have just escaped from slavery pursued by Pharaoh's army, crossed a miraculously parted sea, traveled through the desert whining about their discomfort, received Torah at Har Sinai, and have the post-traumatic stress and excitement from their close encounters of the Sacred kind.

For all of the strangeness of our current circumstances, perhaps one of its many blessings is the opportunity to view, through the new lens it is providing, Vayikra's somewhat off-putting and odd-sounding text depicting the norms, rules, and rituals of bringing offerings. Perhaps there isn't as great a difference as we may imagine. For aren't we, too, finding ways to make voluntary offerings of gratitude, thanksgiving, peace, and communal appreciation? Aren't we, too, continually defining ways to lift up shared values and request forgiveness?

While we are navigating our own journey through the the proverbial desert of Coronavirus, and as we begin to imagine our 5780/2020 experience of Passover through the mitzrayim (narrowness) of social distancing and travel restrictions, we bring to this year's reading of Vayikra a very different perspective than ever before.

May we find hope and comfort in new places and may we find insight and light in old passages.

Shavua tov,  
Rabbi Jessica

**Sukkat Shalom  
Shabbat  
Programming  
for  
March 28, 2020  
3 Nisan 5780**

**Communal:**

**11 am** - Shabbat Morning "Ahhhh" with Rabbi Jessica. Join Rabbi Jessica for 45 minutes of Shabbat morning tefilah (prayer) and meditative chant. We will end our time together with Kiddush and a virtual beginning to Shabbat lunch. Please enter [Rabbi Jessica's Zoom Room](#) the way that you would enter any sacred space, prepared to create sacred community.

**Adult Focused:**

**2 pm** - Torah Study (lay-led communal conversation about the Parashat haShavua (the weekly Torah portion). Best way to read the Torah portion online, according to Rabbi Jessica, is at [Sefaria.org](#). She encourages all to explore this incredible and free online resource and, if you are inspired to do so, to make a donation to support their work. **need link**

**3pm** - Adult Hebrew Learning - ongoing

**Youth Focused:**

**4pm** - Virtual Makhela and Teva Travelers' Story Time in [Joanie's Zoom Room](#). Please join and visit the facebook group to get the details on Makhela and Teva Travelers activities as well as links for Hebrew fun and learning kids can all be doing at home.

**5pm** - Hebrew Zoom Room Breakouts

**Communal:**

**8pm** - Virtual Communal Havdalah with Rabbi Jessica in [her Zoom Room](#). **Note CHANGE of time; same venue.**

Our days are getting longer and Havdalah is officially at 8:33pm this week but we will meet at 8:00 to maximize attendance before our individual and family evening activities.

**Stay tuned for new information coming soon**  
about our communal seder. We will still be having our first  
**Sukkat Shalom EARTH SEDER**  
as will other communities around the globe.  
You will be able to buy a hagaddah for this event  
through Rabbi Jessica or online. Details coming before Shabbat!  
You can read a review of this new hagaddah [here](#).

Martin Buber, quoting Rabbi Pinchas said: "When a person is singing and cannot lift his/her voice and another comes along and sings with him/her, another who can lift that person's voice, then the first will be able to lift his/her voice too. That is the secret of the bond between spirit and spirit." (Tales of the Hasidim)

**Beloved Members of the ALEPH Community:**

We hope that you and members of your families and communities are feeling safe and that the spiritual practices that we have cultivated and the communities that we have built over the last decades are buoying you personally as you support those who look to you for guidance.

We want to be here for you.

We have reached out to our teachers and leaders, asking them to share words of comfort and strength and make themselves available for online classes, concerts, and services. We hope to start at least two morning services online and one online "Town Hall for Network Communities" within the next week. We will offer workshops to support you both as individuals and caregivers. Let us know what you need. We will do our best to help you find it. In addition, if you have resources to share with other communities **PLEASE** share them with us.

It is indeed a frightening time. There are so many unknowns. It is not a time to offer false comfort or deny the fear we feel. My sense is that the goal of spiritual practice is to make peace with the fact that life is so filled with unknowns. But it isn't easy.

We are all familiar with Rebbe Nachman's words that *life is a narrow bridge and the most important thing is to not be afraid*. But that's a tall order in the midst of this unprecedented and anxious time. I would like to amend Rebbe Nachman's maxim to say that the most important thing is to be companions for each other on the narrow bridge. I know the challenge of this when many of us are sequestered in our homes. But I think that the community we have built over the last decades has tools to meet this challenge.

Stay safe. We are blessed to have each other as a community. I have great gratitude for all the deep work we have been privileged to share over these years. I hope that this has laid a foundation for us to weather this frightening time and be companions for each other as we navigate the narrow bridge.

Stay in Touch - Let's Sing Together

Love,  
Anne

Rabbi Anne Brener, ALEPH Communities Committee Chair

**An addendum from Rabbi Jessica:**  
*Included in Rabbi Anne's message to Renewal communities like ours was this beautiful rendition of the prayer, Ana b'Khoach, a mystical prayer-poem (piyyut) with 42 words (not including the chaitma/seal at the end of the prayer). I often use this prayer in personal meditation with a variety of tunes and am particularly fond of the first line: Source of Rachamim / Compassion, with loving strength, please untie our tzuris (our tangled and tight places).*

**The words can be found here at Open Siddur.**  
**Anne's message attached this recording of Reb Zalman, z"l: Ana Bekaach**

**LIMMUD FESTIVAL**  
March 29, 2020  
12 - 5 PM, EDT

A virtual gathering of Jewish community and ideas during times of social distance.

**FEATURING:**

AND MANY MORE!

**Dozens of Sessions  
Hundreds of People  
One Shared Future**

**\$18**  
Individual Session  
Virtual Event

Dear Friend,

We offer you a **Virtual Shabbat Box** — one that doesn't contain challah or candles, but rather essays, meditations and other resources. We invite you to download and digest these resources to experience the spirit of Shabbat.

In the past weeks, the sudden shutting down of much of society left many of us in a numb state-of-shock. A week later, many us are slowly adjusting to the new normal of social distancing, while juggling obligations and perhaps getting a bit of cabin fever. While this **Virtual Shabbat Box** can't replace being with your Jewish community in person, we do hope it helps you experience the joys and sensations of Shabbat and provides you a measure of spiritual sustenance. If you're able to connect with your community via technology, we hope the Shabbat Box is a helpful supplement.

We look forward to packing more Shabbat Boxes to deliver to you. And we would like to introduce you to **Recon Connect**, the online hub of live experiences from across the **Reconstruction** movement. Recon Connect will be frequently updated with upcoming, live events including opportunities for study, prayer and celebration.

Until we can next see you face-to-face, we look forward to connecting online.

*Shabbat Shalom,*  
Reconstructing Judaism

**Recon Connect**

If you ever had any doubt that Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was correct when he described Judaism as "an evolving civilization" rather than a religion ...

Here's a new way to DO JEWISH - learning, listening, singing, dancing, playing, creating ... beyond our Sukkat Shalom or central Ohio Jewish community.

Judaism Unbound is incubating Jewish LIVE. Want to know more? Dan and Len Mexton their new initiative in their most recent [Judaism Unbound podcast, episode 214](#).

<https://www.jewishlive.org>

**Communal Information for central Ohio's Jewish community is available from [JewishColumbus](#)**

The following events are either canceled or postponed:

- April 20: Board of Rabbi's Yom HaShoah
- April 24: Yom HaShoah at City Hall
- April 27: Yom HaZikaron at the JCC
- April 29: Yom Ha'atzkamat Adult's Night Out at the JCC
- May 3: PJ Library Yom Haatzkamat at Hoover

**Suggested links from Sukkat Shalom Members who work in Public Health:**

- [Ohio Department of Health](#) offers guidance on staying healthy, explanations on current closings and links for other valuable health sites.
- [The CDC's COVID-19 site](#).
- The podcast of Dr. Abdul El-Sayed, former city health commissioner, updates listeners on what you need to know about COVID-19, what led us to this crisis in the first place, and what policies can lead us out. New episodes of **America Disected: Coronavirus** are released every Tuesday & Friday.
- And, to keep you healthy, we recommend a few meditation and yoga links to calm Corona-nerves!

<https://www.thefyi.org/toolkits/coronavirus/>  
<https://www.tenpercent.com/coronavirusanxietyguide>  
<https://www.giveyoga.com/book/week>

- Finally, for those of us trying to keep work and families going at the same time, here are some great activities to do with the kids and some [good nutrition links](#)

**Learn more about our kehilah/community, including how to support our kehilah/community by visiting our website: [sukkatshalomcolumbus.org](#)**

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