

Chevre/Friends,

There is a concept that I learned in rabbinical school that I have occasionally thought about but never truly engaged in until now, during this period of COVID-19. Kiddush Ha-Hayyim is a relatively new term first attributed to Rabbi Isaac Nissenbaum, a rabbi in the Warsaw ghetto. Rabbi Nissenbaum created the concept of Kiddush Ha-Hayyim in stark contrast to the classical commandment of Kiddush Ha-Shem. What do these two terms mean and how do they help us navigate holding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur during COVID-19?

Kiddush Ha-Shem is a concept we often romanticize in the Yom Kippur liturgy when we talk about the many people throughout Jewish history who martyred themselves so that we could live today as Jews. Kiddush Ha-Shem, the sanctity of Gd's name, refers to the practice of being a martyr. Kiddush Ha-Hayyim on the other hand refers to the idea that one must do everything one can (except kill another person, have an illicit sexual relationship, or worship a false Gd) to stay alive. Rabbi Nissenbaum wrote: "In the past our enemies demanded our soul and the Jew sacrificed his body in sanctifying Gd's name. Now the enemy demands the body of the Jew. That makes it imperative for the Jew to defend it and protect it." As it is written in Leviticus 18:5 "You shall observe My decrees and my judgments which a person shall carry out and live by them- I am Adonai" Rabbi Nissenbaum like others since have emphasized "in order to live by them," not to die for them.

### **What does this have to do with our lives today?**

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are at the end of September. By now, in a normal year, we would hear the choir practicing, be tutoring different Torah and Haftarah readers, picking new songs for the band to play, looking forward to reconnecting with friends and family and imagining how it all would look and sound at the interfaith center in Wilde Lake. But this year is not like all other years. The opportunity for a vaccine to be created in time for us to plan for the High Holy Days has passed. The time is now for us to

plan something different, something creative, spiritual that reflects the demands of the day while maintaining a connection to the past and the future.

Our Religious Practices Committee, under the direction of John Evans, proposed last Tuesday to CJC's Board a comprehensive High Holy Day plan. I am incredibly grateful to the Religious Practices Committee who have taken so much time to help me brainstorm different ways our Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur can look and feel meaningful and still follow the CDC's recommendations of social distancing. I am also grateful to our Board under the leadership of Alan Pomerantz and Eileen Singleton, for voting unanimously to accept the Committee's proposal.

### **What is the bottom line?**

We will not be meeting at Wilde Lake this year. The vast majority of CJC congregants will be watching the service virtually, either through Zoom or Facebook or both. If legally permitted, there will be a few people who are necessary for the service to be enacted in person performing parts of the service live. Parts of the service will be pre-recorded for others to enjoy at their leisure.

As I type these words, I am filled with sadness. This is not the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur I pictured in my mind, the one I hoped for, the one I look forward to every year. And it is the holy day that will preserve the most lives so that the following year, B'ezrat Hashem, we can gather safely as one community again! For if we gather this year, we run the risk of many of us not being here the following year to gather. That would be a violation of the concept of Kiddush Ha-Hayyim and a travesty to our community and to Gd.

As I type these words I am also filled with some trepidation, and to be honest, a little excitement. Trepidation because this is all new. Although we have been learning from the Shabbat virtual services, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur take things to a different level of participation. None of us

knows how to do services in a meaningful way this way. That is enough to make anyone run for the hills. Excitement because where there is a crack, the light can come in if we let it. Truly it is this last thought that I am holding on to. The world is broken right now. Our job is to save as many lives as possible so that Gd's sacred life can shine through, guiding us during this difficult time.

If you would like more information, or have ideas of creating community during this pandemic, please contact me as soon as possible. I would love as many partners as possible in creating a High Holy Day experience that is not just memorable because of COVID-19 but also because it reflects a sacred communities attempt to live our ancient tradition into our contemporary lives.

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