

Shabbat Shalom and Shanah Tovah!

On behalf of my co-president Alan Pomerantz and myself, I'd like to welcome you to Columbia Jewish Congregation! Wherever you are right now, I hope you are healthy and comfortable and in a place where you can feel peace. I also hope you're in a place with stable wifi.

I've never been involved in planning the high holiday services but I know there is a lot of effort that goes into it. This year's planning involved all of the usual work and coordination with the added twist of the pandemic. And I saw firsthand how hard our clergy, staff, volunteers, and others worked to prepare for today and the coming days. And in past years, when we arrived at this point, Erev Rosh Hashanah, things might have run a bit on autopilot - we'd walked those steps before. But not this year. We had a successful test run of our new camera system that will be used for the sanctuary services, But will all the pieces fit together smoothly, will everything work, and will everyone know where to click when? I'm pretty confident in our technology plan and our outreach efforts to the congregation. And I need to start these remarks with a HUGE thank you and physically distant hug to the people that put so much effort and thought into putting all of these pieces together - the services as well as the related activities - Rabbi Starr, Cantor Kintisch, Robin Rosenfeld, Leilani Lucca, John Evans and the whole Religious Practices Committee, our new Technology Committee led by Bruce Levine, with a special shout out to Joe Herman and Daniel Goldstein, Mike Shaw the Meeting House facilities manager, and Brandon Miekjohn our behind the scenes technology support. As a result of the revised service format, we also did some new and different things this year:

Thanks to

- Roni Berkowitz and Matt Fagan for coordinating the online Preparations for Elul testimonial recordings
- To Harriet Bachman and Ronee Rothman for facilitating our Rosh Hashanah Food Donations to Grassroots Day Resource Center?
- Thanks to Steve Rothman, Glenn Unger, Pearl Laufer, Rodney Starr-Kramer, and Elliot Rodberg for assisting with Mahzor curbside pickup
- And thanks to Elijah Singleton and Risa Kramer for blowing shofar during Mahzor pickup

There were so many new moving parts to piece together and I can't thank you all enough for all that you did to make all of it possible.

Next, I'd like to read a message from Renee Brimfield, who oversees our Tzedakah Fund.

Although I am not here to stand before you, I hope my words convey the importance of giving to support our community. Now, more than ever, we are all confronted with the impact of this global scourge. I can't think of any time in my life where being part of a supportive community was more important. Every day I think of another sector of our world that has been negatively affected by this pandemic. And, as Joe Biden said in his acceptance speech, "History has delivered us to one of the most difficult moments America has ever faced. Four historic crises. All at the same time. A perfect storm - "

"The worst pandemic in over 100 years. The worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. The most compelling call for racial justice since the '60s. And the undeniable realities and accelerating threats of climate change."

And yet, it has also delivered one of the best opportunities to look beyond ourselves to serve the greater good. What more motivation do we need to make a difference in the world beyond ourselves?

The Hebrew word tzedakah itself – comes from the Hebrew root tzedek, which means justice. When we as Jews give tzedakah, we not only support one in need, but we view ourselves as distributing our funds as a means of bringing more good into this world.

We, at CJC, use the Tzedakah Fund to help individuals in our community. We help people have food, shelter, and utilities, for the most part. The effects of that giving go far beyond just helping that individual. It is like the Butterfly Effect – the impact of our small act of giving can have effects we cannot even imagine. The ability to shelter your family, to feed your children, to make the car payment so you can get to work, to buy the medicine that your child needs – this is what helps people to move ahead, to make a difference in their world, and, by extension, our world.

So, as you say the prayers, reflect on the coming year, ask for forgiveness, during these unprecedented services, consider the two aspects of tzedakah – one with the hand and one with the heart – and please make a donation to CJC’s Tzedakah Fund.

Ok, Eileen here again.

Renee told me that in the last 5 years, she has responded to over 1,700 requests and distributed over \$50,000. In many cases, a fulfilled request helps more than one person so we’ve probably helped 3 or 4 thousand people in our community. Thanks to those that have donated in the past, or purchased Giant gift cards from CJC. And much thanks to you Renee for your dedication to the tzedakah fund and overseeing its allocation.

Last year, as I was sitting in services at the Wilde Lake Interfaith Center as a co-president to be, and listening to Alan give his president’s messages, I was really impressed each time he spoke. And I definitely remember thinking, with some apprehension, next year, it will also be me up there, speaking to my fellow congregants in a full sanctuary. [insert your favorite pandemic joke here] And what am I going to say to add to the service? I asked Alan how he came up with ideas for what to talk about, and he said to speak from the heart. So that is what I will try to do.

I found what was in my heart right now is related to Renee's question: “What more motivation do we need to make a difference in the world beyond ourselves?” In addition to supporting the tzedakah fund, we can make a difference by voting. And encouraging others to vote too.

I obviously won’t tell you who to vote for. I will remind you about the importance of learning about the candidates up and down the ballot and voting for the candidates that you believe will work to improve the world for you and others. It’s clear our leaders matter.

While there is no commandment to vote, it is considered a mitzvah. I’d like to read a post on [THE MITZVAH OF VOTING](#), dated February 18, 2019  
By Rabbi David Russo

“There is a fascinating story told about the 20th century Israeli rabbi, the Chazon Ish. On Election Day, the Chazon Ish ran into a fellow Jew. “Did you vote yet” inquired the Chazon Ish. The person responded, “No.” “Why not,” the Chazon Ish persisted. The person responded, “I don’t have the three Israeli pounds to pay the poll tax.” The Chazon Ish would not give up. “Do you own a pair of tefillin,” he continued. “Of course,” the person replied. “Well, go and sell your pair of tefillin and use the funds to pay the poll tax so that you can go and vote,” said the Chazon Ish.

The Chazon Ish later explained that wearing tefillin is a mitzvah, but voting in the election is also a mitzvah. He was not worried that this Jew would not put on tefillin. If need be, he would borrow a pair. But he was afraid that this person would not perform this other mitzvah – voting in the election.

Rabbi Russo concludes: For the Chazon Ish, voting was so important that it superseded owning tefillin, which is used on a daily basis. His stated reason was because the person could easily borrow tefillin. But I also wonder if the Chazon Ish was making a broader point – that elections impact the day to day lives of every person in society. Just like tefillin, our vote matters not only on the day of the election, but every day after it until the next one.”

Ok, Eileen here again.

That story really resonated with me and I think it’s an excellent message to carry with you into the voting booth.

I know CJC folks are generally politically aware and active “we walk the walk” as we like to say, and I’m sure many of you are already planning to vote. I hope you will remind others to vote too. And help them navigate the process if needed this year.

In closing, I will reiterate, wherever you are today and during these Days of Awe, I hope you are healthy and safe. I hope you feel the warmth of our CJC community radiating through your screen. And I hope you have a meaningful holiday. Wishing you a very happy new year filled with health, peace, and hope.

Shanah Tovah