

# OUR LIVES HAVE CHANGED

Rabbi Kim Ettlinger



Last year, in preparation for the Yamim Noraim I made some suggestions for creating a spiritual home, a *kehilat kedushah*, a holy sanctuary in our homes when we couldn't sit together in shule. I was and am still humbled by how many of you shared your stories of the space you set aside in your living rooms, your dining rooms, your bedrooms, any space you could find, to create holiness.

Many of you shared how you dressed up, changed your clothes to feel special, how you went out of your way to connect through Zoom or Facetime with family and friends to push away the feelings of isolation and loneliness, even if for moments.

I was surprised that I was surprised to be caught by surprise. A strange use of the word, I realise. But, truly, I often underestimate the power of and the impact of the words I use. Sometimes, things said innocently can have a deep and profound effect, sometimes meaningfully, and sometimes deeply hurtful. And sometimes, I say things hoping for profundity, but they float through the air with weightlessness, like a bubble that suddenly pops into nothingness.

This year, as I write this article, we do not know what the restrictions will be. Will it be the same as last year? Will we be in our homes, or will some of us be in shule? Will some of us want

to be in shule? And, if so, how many? Regardless of where we gather, we are a religious and holy community, a *kehilah kedushah*, as I mentioned at the start. Our melodies remain the same, as are the prayers, but once again we reach them differently. We have changed. Yes, the last 12 months have been unprecedented. Are we overusing that word? Perhaps... We are different, we have seen an inner resilience that we never imagined.

Generally, as we know, life can be challenging at the best of times. This year I anticipate that the introspection we need certainly is pushing our patience, and our tolerance further. With each lockdown, our sighs are deepening, and I know I'm being polite in this description. We continually ask ourselves, how much more can we take? Our literal and metaphorical masks seem to be even more suffocating than the first time we used them? How au fait have we become with recognising people by looking at their eyes... Perhaps a positive outcome?

I feel a sense of sadness and awe when my 20-month-old daughter goes to the bowl where I keep my masks, and picks one up to put on herself and then walks to the door waving and saying 'bye bye' in pretend play. And, sometimes, not even pretend play, sometimes, when we actually leave to

go to daycare, or for an outing. I see her growth, her development and the reality of our lives.

Our lives have changed, and for me, I want to say, not for the better or for the worse. It has just changed. In preparation for the High Holy Days, These days of Awe, I am looking forward to counting the moments of AWE. There are many.

## Many of them are perhaps the same as last year?

- Connecting and reconnecting with family and friends
- Spending more time with those I live with
- Focusing on what is important to me
- Seeing the eyes before the physical person
- Hearing the voice and the words
- Appreciating going outdoors
- Appreciating travel: local (of course) and interstate

Many times, I've actually stopped to smell the flowers in bloom. Yes I've sneezed. Yes, I've received looks.

## In preparation for these High Holy Days, I'd like to share with you a prayer written by a colleague who preceded me at Peninsula Temple Sholom in Burlingame, San Francisco, Rabbi David Wirtschafter

For doctors and nurses continuing to treat their patients,  
**Modim anachnu lach.**

For mental and behavioral health professionals continuing to offer comfort and encouragement,  
**Modim anachnu lach.**

For teachers and professors continuing to offer instruction,  
**Modim anachnu lach.**

For first responders continuing to rush to our aid,  
**Modim anachnu lach.**

For essential workers continuing to put food on our tables,  
**Modim anachnu lach.**

For nursing home employees and caregivers continuing to tend to the elderly and infirm,  
**Modim anachnu lach.**

For the unemployed and underemployed continuing to help their families and communities,  
**Modim anachnu lach.**

For family and friends continuing to inquire about us,  
**Modim anachnu lach.**

For continuing to see and hear one another remotely until we can gather in person,  
**Modim anachnu lach.**

**Baruch ata, Adonai, hatov shimcha ul'cha na-eh l'hodot.  
Blessed are You, Adonai, Your name inspires goodness  
and Your caring deserves our thanks.**

*This rendering of Hodaah, the daily prayer of Thanksgiving, is greatly informed by an alternative version in Mishkan T'filah adapted from the work of that late Unitarian Universalist minister, Eugene Picket.*