

To the members of HERJC:

I sincerely hope that everyone is healthy and managing to endure the global crisis we all have been facing. My condolences to anyone who has lost a loved one or a friend to the pandemic, and sympathy to those who are experiencing financial hardship due to the economic shutdown. Perhaps we are seeing the start of a turnaround in both areas. Only time will tell.

I wanted to let you know some of what has been going on at HERJC during these unusual times and some of what we can look forward to in the future.

#### The Building:

All membership functions have been suspended from the use of the building. Luckily, this has created an opportunity to thoroughly clean and disinfect the entire premises. Additionally, major ceiling and floor work has been taking place in the ballroom and reception room areas which will significantly enhance the caterer's space, hopefully leading to many more bookings and events.

#### Services:

We have been holding all daily, Shabbat, and Yom Tov services virtually via ZOOM. While not the same as being there live, there has developed quite a lively camaraderie among the virtual worshippers. It's nice to see everyone's face (instead of the backs of their heads), and we have connected with a number of former members, out-of-towners, as well as many who are new to the group. If you haven't participated, it's really worth a try. (The ZOOM link is published every week and is available on the HERJC home page at [www.herjc.org](http://www.herjc.org).) As has been our usual custom, congregants will deliver the d'var Torah each week at Shabbat morning services throughout the summer, starting this Shabbat. Hazzan Zakarin has been providing Shabbat programs each week for nursery and religious school aged kids before and ending Shabbat.

#### Events:

While not held in the building, we have been offering on-line opportunities for all ages. Our weekly lunch and learn (Tuesdays at 1:00) series have included very interesting talks by congregants and outside speakers. This past week featured a fascinating virtual tour of the city of Jerusalem by a professional tour guide. Rabbi's Talmud and Bible classes have been on-going. Board and committee meetings continue to be held virtually on ZOOM.

#### Staff:

The HERJC office and building crews have been working diligently, under difficult conditions. All the functions that are required to maintain the premises and to keep everything operating are continuing as before, with rotating schedules in the office to maintain safe spacing.

#### Youth:

Both nursery school and religious school, as well as our youth programs have shifted to on-line learning and activities. Cheryl, Hazzan, and Rebecca have been working tirelessly to rework curriculum and programs to offer as much interaction as possible. Many programs will continue into the summer. All our teachers are making a great effort to stay connected with our children.

#### Rabbi:

As you know, Rabbi Warmflash is retiring as of the end of this month (although he is currently on vacation). As of July 1, he will assume the roll of *Rabbi Emeritus*, and in the absence of another Rabbi, he will continue to live in the community and be available to officiate at life-cycle events, and for pastoral

duties as requested. He will also continue to serve as our *Halachic* authority and will manage the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund.

#### Rabbi Search:

Over the last 6 months, the Rabbi Search Committee engaged in a painstaking process of reviewing resumes for HERJC's full-time Rabbi position. The committee reviewed seven resumes, engaged in two telephone interviews and a live interview before the process was halted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges raised by COVID-19, the committee continued its work and ultimately made a unanimous recommendation to HERJC's Board of Directors. As part of its consideration of the committee's recommendation, Board members participated in three virtual meetings where Board members had the opportunity to ask questions of the Rabbi candidate and to hear from him about his vision for HERJC. In addition to these smaller meetings, Board members received written evaluations from our professional leaders, Hazzan Zakarin, Ethel Liebeskind, Cheryl Karp and Rabbi Warmflash himself, each of whom took part in one-on-one conversations with the Rabbi candidate. Finally, Board members collectively took part in a final virtual interview with the Rabbi candidate to hear a d'var Torah and address additional questions from Board members. Ultimately, the Board voted overwhelmingly to advance the Rabbi candidate to HERJC's entire membership for approval.

Customarily, the next step in the committee's work would be to schedule a weekend for the Rabbi candidate to visit our community. Unfortunately, the realities of COVID-19 have precluded any visit in the near future. The committee is working in conjunction with the Rabbi candidate to engage in a number of virtual events – attending morning and evening minyan services; leading a Shabbat service; providing a 10-12 minute video link from the Rabbi candidate to all congregants; providing a special 6-8 minute video link from the Rabbi candidate to Nursery School families; participating in a Talmud/Bible class for Congregants to view; and putting together additional social gatherings for Congregants to virtually meet the Rabbi candidate. If our situation remains unchanged after the Summer, these virtual events will be provided to the Congregation to enable members to interact with, and learn about, the Rabbi candidate so they can knowledgeably vote at a Membership Meeting. Such a meeting will not likely occur until sometime in the Fall, meaning the Rabbi candidate would not begin his duties at HERJC until 2021.

Given the above, the Executive Committee proactively took the following steps. First and foremost, the committee secured Rabbi Warmflash's services for the High Holidays in September. Since the High Holidays will be planned under adverse and changing circumstances, having Rabbi Warmflash officiate will afford us a stabilizing force in a fluid and unsure situation this year. The second action taken by the Executive Committee is to engage an interim Rabbi to handle post-High Holidays needs for our synagogue, including officiating at life cycle events, Halachic oversight, pastoral care and a calming Rabbinic interim presence until our candidate is able to begin his duties as HERJC's regular Rabbi. To that end, the interim post will offer us a bridge between Rabbi Warmflash and the incredible Rabbi candidate we will present to the Congregation as a whole after the Summer. We will continue to share information with you throughout the Summer regarding the Membership Meeting and the vote on the Rabbi candidate. If there is sufficient interest, we may schedule one or more virtual meetings to give congregants an opportunity to ask questions and get more clarification on the process.

### What lies ahead?

With state guidelines and regulations shifting, it is hard to predict exactly when and for what purposes we can return to the use of the building; school, services, activities, etc. One thing for certain is that it won't look the same as before, and understandably we are all likely to have varying comfort levels about using the building, even with new health and safety procedures in place. Certainly safe distancing, wearing of masks, hand washing and sanitizing will be the norm where appropriate.

As of now, we plan to open school in September following at a minimum whatever regulations are then in place. We are studying and evaluating what options we might pursue for daily minyan, Shabbat services, and for the High Holidays and Sukkot. This will no doubt be a daunting task, so we ask for your patience. We realize it may be difficult to make plans for the holidays, but we do not want to rush into a decision without thorough consideration. Safety and security will always be our paramount concerns; we may all need to make adjustments in our expectations and routines. Your cooperation and support is greatly appreciated.

Please keep in mind that depending on the course of the pandemic, things may shift and change frequently and perhaps dramatically. As of this writing many states and regions are experiencing an up-tick in new cases. Let's hope there is no major resurgence of infections in our area and the world over as well.

I must take this opportunity to acknowledge all the hard work of our staff, teachers, clergy, directors, and volunteers who have put in a really extra effort to keep us going in this difficult and extraordinary time. *Yasher Koach*, to you all.

Wishing all a healthy and peaceful summer,

Harold Kislik (for the HERJC Board of Directors, *and with grateful assistance from Stephen Moelis*)