

**Spiritual Message from
Rabbi Steven J Rubenstein, BCC
Director of Spiritual Care
Jewish Senior *Life*, Rochester, NY**



With each new day we are reminded how difficult it is to rise to the challenges that we all are facing with the Coronavirus 19. Our elders are experiencing isolation from families and friends, despite our best efforts to provide meaningful activities. Families are feeling anxious about how their loved ones are doing in their absence, despite all efforts to increase communication electronically. And staff are fearful of contracting the disease, despite our best efforts at “best practices.”

I have been in touch with my colleagues in other senior living facilities around the country, and we are not alone in what we are experiencing. In the spiritual world, we encourage people to reach into that open space inside each of us to envision what is in our souls, where we know deep down, that when our faith is strong, that, here, too, we are not alone ~ because God is with us. In addition, we are surrounded by others to support us in our efforts.

During this past week my e-mail address has been bombarded with hundreds of inspirational messages to help us get through the day. One source made the claim that the name of the diseases that we are combating is called *Corona*, which is the rays of a star that form a crown. In Judaism, God is referred to as “King.” We look to a king for guidance and support.

The most common place to find a crown in Judaism is not on the head of a person, but rather on the wooden scrolls of the Torah. Torah with a small “t” means learning. In Judaism we value learning. In relation to fighting this disease, each day we learn more about what works and what doesn’t in attempting to stop the spread of disease. We are learning from each other how to be a help to one another, and to allay our fears by reaching out with our hearts rather than our hands.

One of the first lessons that the sages teach in the Ethic of our Ancestors is the following quote:

“On three things is our world (firmly) established:
Torah ~ learning;

A'vo'dah ~ worship, praying to God
Ge'mee'loot Cha'sa'deem ~ acts of loving kindness"

This is then followed by a wise saying: "Put a fence around the Torah."

From this I have learned this past week that we are learning new things each day about what we need to do to care for one another properly. Praying, having a spiritual practice of some kind, is what helps us to create a greater sense of balance (whether it is exercise, yoga, meditation, or worship). Each act that we perform, for our elders and our residents, and for fellow staff, is an important part of who we are at JSL and the family that we have created for ourselves. As for that wise saying, putting a fence around things, we must be vigilant in our precautions as we protect ourselves as well as those whom we are treating and caring for.

However, my learning this week did not end here. I have, also, learned that the *crown* is a significant symbol in Christianity. I read that in the Book of James and in the Book of Revelation that the *crown* of life is bestowed upon "those who persevere under trials."

Elsewhere it is recorded that Jesus said, "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer... Be faithful (to what you do) and I will give you the Crown of life." King David, who is common to both faith traditions reminds us in Psalm 27, as we pass through the valley of shadows, "I have no fear for You are with me."

God is with each one of us. We are there for each other. Let us not fear what lies ahead, but rather trust in one another. A corona can only be seen when there is darkness. And a shadow can only be seen when there is a source of light. Let us remind ourselves that the light is there to inspire us as we move forward in our appointed positions, each of us contributing to the health and well-being of the people whom we serve, and to remember the words of King Solomon, who also faced adversity with these words of encouragement: This, too, shall pass.

Rabbi Steven J Rubenstein, BCC
Director of Spiritual Care