

A COVID Reflection Summer 2021

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the *fruit of the vine*.

At first thought, one might not expect fruit to come from a vine. An unkempt vine, after all, can strangle a plant. But a vine is phototropic, meaning that it pushes itself toward the light, maneuvering its way around its obstacles to bear its fruit and achieve its full potential.

Nothing in life has been “normal” since the onset of the covid era. In fact, the “new normal” to which we adapted at the start of the pandemic has transformed into many different iterations of our daily reality. All throughout, clergy around the world have struggled with a singular issue of unifying importance: that is, how does a religious community continue its traditions when all its members are physically absent and separated from one another? This is a challenge we have all been facing since March of 2020.

In spite of these new obstacles, my guiding principle as a rabbinical student has been to care for and attend to the spiritual well-being of those whom I serve, and I had the opportunity to put this principle into practice through my work as TJF fellow at Wise Temple this past summer.

This summer has been one of dynamic change as Jewish communities at large prepare for all possibilities in the coming year — either in person or not, or somewhere in between. From revamping the 6th grade and junior high religious school curricula to teaching adult education classes and leading Shabbat services in between, creative productivity and innovative learning continued amid and despite the certainty of impending uncertainty.

In effect, the consequences of covid have many “feeling around in the dark,” experimenting with new models of engagement and ways of teaching to accommodate new and emerging changes in the communal landscape. Stereotypically, the one who “feels around in the dark” might fail to inspire much confidence; however, the experience this summer has been much closer that of a vine, spiraling its way around the garden standing post. As a phototropic vine grows toward the sunlight around whatever it must to bear its fruit, such has been the growth of my rabbinate over the course of this period — unimpeded by the obstacles of the moment, I know I’ll be ready to enjoy the fruit of that vine, sweetened only by its winding progress upward toward the sunshine.