

Dear JFGRS families,

To say that this year, pandemic and all, has caused unprecedented changes in our lives is to state the obvious, if not the hyperbolic understatement of the century. Some of us have lost close ones to the dreaded disease, more of us have had to endure reduced or eliminated contact with people we love in order to keep the most vulnerable, the elderly and medically compromised, as safe as possible. All of us have had to adjust to a world gone topsy-turvy. If not for the internet we would be completely isolated in our homes. If not for the comfortable 21st century suburban existence that most of us are used to, we would not even be able to say such a mundane phrase as “the comforts of home.” New technologies have enabled business, commerce, communication, schools and yes, even religious gatherings, to continue safely.

We point out these obvious indicators of the new reality to contrast to what hasn't changed at all – the timeless importance and beauty of our cherished Jewish tradition: our People, our commandments and rituals, our Community and its central locations in the synagogues, and our commitment to continue the unbroken chain *L'dor VaDor* – to teach our children from generation to generation.

We have heard other communities lament the fear that some folks may want to “take a break” or “opt out” this year, from synagogue membership, Jewish community involvement, or school enrollment. After all, there is so much else on our collective plates. Children will have new realities for secular school. Their social time has been disrupted. There is economic uncertainty and many adults are experiencing job reduction and unemployment.

But we urge you to take the high road here. Staying involved in your Har Zion Community, indeed turning to that community if you have previously not been very involved, will help us as a community fulfill the commandment to uphold those who have fallen. To take time off from your sacred community is simply not an option if you want that community to be there for you, and for the myriad of others who see themselves as part of that unbroken chain. The sage Hillel wisely said, “Do not separate yourself from the community.” We need each other. Your children need each other. In the next few years, your children will celebrate becoming B'nai Mitzvah – perhaps in our magnificent Sanctuary, perhaps in a smaller, more intimate setting, perhaps with technological support to include those for whom in person gatherings are not safe. The learning they will be doing in the coming year, whether in Hebrew reading, prayer literacy, Torah, or Jewish civilization, is essential to their competence to function as adults in the Jewish community.

Please do the right thing, and register now for the JFGRS 2020-21 school year. Opt for the hybrid – in person and online – program, or for online only if you feel that is necessary. Join in Zoom-based services and programs. While staying home safely, make Friday night into Shabbat. Talk about your Jewish story to your children. They won't forget.

*B'shalom,*

Rabbi Shawn and Dr. Schatz