

Tikkun Olam

— On Repairing the World

Part 6: Simple Things to do in 5781 to Improve the World

BY BETH SIRULL

At Rosh Hashanah, we practice T'shuva, literally "returning." Tradition calls upon us to assess our behavior in the previous year, to seek—and grant—forgiveness with equal grace. We are to return to our better selves, to enter the new year determined to do better.

T'shuva is even more critical this year. As we review 5780 and look to 5781, we must examine the momentous events that occurred during the year and are still rocking our nation and world. COVID-19 and the violent killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, among others, surely define this past year.

We must look at what we are each going to do to improve the world, so that one year from now, at the start of 5782, we can all gather in synagogues and with family and friends in celebration. What are we each going to do so that one year from now, at the start of 5782, all of our American compatriots will be treated equitably across our society, in business, the justice system, the hospital and the voting booth?

In previous columns, especially as the coronavirus has raged, wreaking havoc in our Jewish community and across the globe, I have beseeched you to contribute to COVID relief funds. As the virus continues unfettered, I still ask that if you can, you contribute to help those who are most affected, those who have lost livelihoods and are struggling to put food on the table. One way to give relief to those in our community impacted by the virus is giving to the San Diego Jewish Community COVID Emergency Fund.

While it may come as a surprise to some, demographic studies suggest that approximately 15% of the American Jewish community are Jews of Color. Communities of color

have generally experienced greater negative impacts from COVID-19. Jews of Color are no different. Consider a donation to the Jews of Color Initiative (jewsofcolorinitiative.org).

While donations are important—and make no mistake, I beg you to contribute what you can as the needs are great—there is so much more you can do. There is nothing more important than stemming the tide of the coronavirus. To that end, wear a mask. Stay socially distant from others. Wash your hands. These are three simple things that we can all do. And we must.

There's more. Our tradition calls on us: Justice, justice, you shall pursue. This instruction from Torah (Parasha Shoftim, Deuteronomy 16:21) is easy to understand, but not always so easy to follow. Yet, in the wake of extensive social unrest, many feel a heightened need to seek justice on behalf of the Black community, where injustice has pervaded the American experience for hundreds of years.

Support the Black community. Purchase from Black-owned businesses. Visit the Central San Diego Black Chamber of Commerce to learn about businesses that are offering what you need. Or support the Black Business Relief Grant Fund (sdblackchamber.org).

Simply opening a bank account at a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) may be one of the easiest ways to help address racial wealth inequality in our community. These accounts are insured by the Federal government like any other bank account; there is no cost or risk to you. CDFIs are certified by the US Department of Treasury and are dedicated to delivering responsible, affordable lending and other financial services to help low-income, low-wealth

and other disadvantaged people and communities join the economic mainstream. Self-Help Credit Union, one of the oldest CDFIs, operates in seven states and has a branch here in San Diego; in its 38-year history, over 80% of the loans it made went to low-income borrowers and over 60% to people of color.

At the Jewish Community Foundation in San Diego, we hold a portion of our operating reserve at the local branch of Self-Help Credit Union. While we earn interest, not only are these funds being lent out to communities of color, they are being invested locally in San Diego. With this simple act of opening an account and depositing funds, we are pursuing justice. And, by standing up and sharing this act with Jewish and secular agencies and individuals across our region, we are furthering this pursuit as others follow our lead.

At the Jewish Community Foundation of San Diego, we have a core belief that guides our actions. We believe in the power of every individual to make a difference and that collectively we can change the world. Now is the time for each and every one of us to do our part: Wear a mask and stay socially distant to stop the spread of the coronavirus, support those who are impacted by the virus and help to build a more just society.

I harbor no illusions that we will have fully accomplished either of these goals by the time we gather for Rosh Hashanah one year from now. I pray we will have made substantial progress on both counts.☆

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