

Note from Rabbi Seth on Shabbat HaChodesh: Renewal and Resources in an Uncertain Time

March 20, 2020

Dear ones,

We're about to enter Shabbat after a frenzied week that saw most of us leave campus, saying good-bye in person to close friends, roommates, and partners, not knowing when we'll have the chance to see each other face to face in the near future, and mourning the premature end of the semester, and in some cases, college. We're all settling into the realization and the reality that the current state of affairs is something we'll be dealing with for many weeks. Whether or not we live in a state that is formally in lock-down, whether or not we are or know someone who is ill or at risk of becoming ill, each of us, together with millions of others, are deeply impacted by the coronavirus.

One of my colleagues, Rabbi Jill Jacobs, wrote that in the special Torah reading for this Shabbat, known as Shabbat HaChodesh, we find the Israelites also hunkering down in their homes, as a plague passes through Egypt. While we do not believe that COVID-19 is a punishment from God, or that it will spare any community, it might allow us to identify with the fear of the people hiding out, waiting for the plague to pass, as well as the anxiety of those who were setting out on a journey to a new place, not knowing what their world will look like when they arrive.

The word, "chodesh" which gives this Shabbat its special name, means "month" in Hebrew. But the three Hebrew letters (the "root") of this word also make the word, "chiddush," or newness or renewal. And I think there's an important lesson in it for us at this time. We are all settling into a very new way of life, some parts of which are scary and difficult. But with this new beginning also comes the opportunity for renewal, for recreating ourselves and our environment, for discovering new wellsprings of strength and insight that we perhaps had not found before. For building connections with the people we care about while also stretching ourselves to support the most vulnerable.

As we enter this phase together, I want to share a few resources for staying connected to Jewish life, and for finding balance and calm, that I think might be useful.

1) We're going to take a break from Friday night services this week. (Today is my daughter Mia's birthday, and we're going to be calling her grandparents this evening...) **Resuming next week, Friday March 27, we will gather for a short Friday night service at 6:00pm EDT at <https://zoom.us/j/8321750148>.** Whether you came to services each week at the JRC or never made it, you are always welcome to join. Each week we will light Shabbat candles, sing some songs, and take some quiet time together. I hope you're be able to join! (And you should also check out the many synagogues across the country who are offering streaming services...I will have some suggestions next week!)

2) I found [this article](#) by Rabbi Emily Cohen of Lab/Shul particularly helpful for me.

3) Hillel International (which we are not formally affiliated with at Williams) has launched virtual meet-ups and online gatherings that bring you together with Jewish and Jewish students from around the world in real-time.

Visit <https://welcome.hillel.org/hillelathome/> for more information.

4) For those looking for meditation and spirituality based resources, The [Institute for Jewish Spirituality](#) is offering a variety of essential resources to help us meet this challenging time, including daily meditation groups, a meditation starter kit, Here's what they've got so far:

DAILY ONLINE MEDITATION SIT | FREE

M-F 12:30 - 1:00 PM ET (W 12:30 - 1:15 PM ET)

Beginning Thursday, March 12 and running thru March 27. Led by some great folks including [Jordan Bendat-Appell](#), [Sam Feinsmith](#), [Rachel D. Goldenberg](#), [Jonathan Slater](#), [Dorothy Richman](#), and [Jenny Sherling Solomon](#), with other leaders to come.

[MEDITATION STARTER KIT](#) | FREE

The Jewish Meditation Starter Kit is designed to give anyone interested in starting a Jewish meditation practice the confidence and guidance to begin. This kit includes tools and resources to feel prepared and inspired.

5) In the coming weeks, I'll be resuming Jewish learning groups that had been running during the semester. If you now find yourself interested in deepening your Jewish education by exploring topics such as Torah study, mysticism, personal development, or Talmud, please be in touch, and we'll explore what's right for you!

6) As always, I and my colleagues in the [Chaplains' Office](#) are available to meet with you via video or phone. Please feel free to reach out to any of us if you would like someone to talk with in the weeks ahead.

Wishing you, your loved ones, and your friends a Shabbat of healing, centering, and renewal...

Rabbi Seth

Rabbi Seth Wax
Jewish Chaplain
Williams College
39 Chapin Hall Drive, Room 205
Williamstown, MA 01267
413-597-2483