



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday August 19, 2022 ~ Parsha: Eikev

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

High Holiday Wisdom from the CDC

You have all heard my joke over the years that even though I'm a doctor (an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in 2017), I'm not a "real" doctor. You have also heard me joke over the years that I was a science major, but in actuality, it was political science. Accordingly, I do not have the medical or scientific knowledge to fully weigh in on yesterday's bombshell announcement from the CDC director (and member of the tribe) Dr. Rochelle Walensky. So, I'm not going to make any comments about the CDC and the various criticisms of it that have emerged over the past several years. I will simply acknowledge that what often unites both liberals and conservatives, democrats and republicans, elected officials as well as ordinary citizens, is a lack of confidence in the CDC's leadership and its communication with the American people.

But what I can judge, and what I want you to think is the content of the public announcement yesterday that. Think about what the CDC said:

1. The CDC recognizes that there is a problem.
2. It has acknowledged the many ways it has failed in its mission.
3. It has acknowledged the ways that their failures have impacted the lives of the American people and undermined the confidence that it is capable of addressing the nation's health concerns.
4. It has called in outside experts to help them make necessary changes.
5. Perhaps most significant of all: In the words of Dr. Walensky, "To be frank, we are responsible for some pretty dramatic, pretty public mistakes.... This is our watershed moment. We must pivot...For 75 years, CDC has been preparing for COVID-19, and in our big moment, our performance did not reliably meet expectations.

The CDC has provided an important example of what the High Holiday season is all about. We recognize that there is an issue that needs to be addressed. We acknowledge a problem that needs to be solved. We admit a mistake that needs to be rectified. We may have ignored it, or pretended that the issue/problem/mistake wasn't that important or wasn't that big a deal, but it turns out that we were wrong. *Teshuva*, the great idea of the High Holidays, is the belief that human beings are capable of making corrections. If we have the courage and the faith, we can address what is wrong and what is broken. Instead of doubling down on our errors and our misjudgments, instead of acknowledging our human frailty and the mistakes that all good people are going to make, we remember that we are capable of change. This season of the year beckons us. Think about your lives. What is right and good that needs to be sustained and nurtured? But perhaps more importantly, this is the season to ask what is wrong, or what is broken (or to be more accurate, what did I break?). Then, having asked that question, thinking about what we need to do to address the issues, to fix them, and to ameliorate the damage that our misdeeds have caused. Ask those questions honestly and the High Holidays will transform your life.

As I said earlier, I am not in a position to judge the CDC's public statement in all of its complexity. But as a rabbi, I can tell you that they are on the right track to repairing their relationship with the American public. Let's learn from them, their mistakes, their admission of error, and their commitment to doing better.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner