

It is about four years since the COVID pandemic hit the US and since we shut down our regular in-person programming. Though it's been more than two years since we began gathering in person again, many of us found it comfortable to attend events on our couches, to support each other over zoom. Many of us have not felt fully motivated to find our way back to in-person engagement with community. Perhaps we have other priorities now that are fulling using up our energetic capacity. And that's fine. Priorities change.

But I also know that it is all too easy to retreat inside when the world outside feels difficult. Many midrashim on Parashat Vayeshev ("And he settled") suggest that after 20 years of wandering Jacob sought to find tranquility, to turn inward and stop engaging with the rest of the world – only, in that very portion, to have his favored son, Joseph, sold into slavery by his other sons. This teaches, according to BEreshit Rabbah, that the righteous should not try to disengage from the world.

Perhaps it is obvious to observe that this is likely to be a difficult year, with shocking political news that quickly becomes normal every day. The challenge will be step out of our homes, to resist the temptation to disengage. As Timothy Snyder has written in *On Tyranny*, change can only be achieved when people "find themselves in places that are not their homes, and among groups who were not previously their friends."

What can be both maddening and beautiful about a synagogue is that not everyone here will be your friend. You will find yourself attracted to some people here, you will find others downright obnoxious. And, ideally, you'll show up so that the person you find obnoxious has support when they need to say kaddish, anyway. And they'll show up for you. Maybe you'll eventually become friends, but that's beside the point. The point is to decide that we value what we are cocreating enough that we don't need be ideologically identical – or even to like everyone here – in order to show up to cocreate it.

This January, we are embarking on both programming experiments within the building and interfaith collaborations, described inside, to attempt to build a stronger local social fabric. I have promised that the synagogue will be here for those who are targeted, and for each of you. Will you be here?