

## **RABBI'S MESSAGE**

### **A ROLLER COASTER YEAR**

2017 is now in the past, and 2018 is our future. In the Houston area, it's hard to imagine a more emotional year than 2017. In fact, it's hard to even remember anything that happened prior to Hurricane Harvey flooding the city. There are those in our community who are still not in their own homes. Many have had to make major adjustments in their lives.

This hurricane affected the entire community, whether your personal home was damaged or not. I was at a service recently which closed with personal expressions of gratitude. One person said, "I am grateful that my house did not flood, and I am in my own home." Another said, "I am grateful that I will be able to go back to my house at the end of December and wake up in my own home January 1; I am also grateful that I have been able to spend time with my grandchildren while I was displaced."

It isn't easy to express gratitude when dealing with tragedy. And yet, the mood in the city, rather than despair, was one of hopefulness. Despite the constant reminders of debris on the streets, there seemed to be an attitude that said, "We'll get through this together." Neighbors and strangers helping each other, crowded homes or downsized apartments or hotel rooms, hopefully letting those who had suffered the most damage know, "you are not alone."

At these times, I am reminded of lessons from the Book of Job. When Job's life was going splendidly, he praised G-d; when he lost everything, he praised G-d. But his friends tried to lay the blame on Job himself. They suggested that his misfortune must have been a punishment for some unknown misdeeds or moral failings. Rather than be supportive of a friend in need, they accused him of bringing on his own troubles. And Job, through deep introspection, said, "G-d gives; G-d takes away. Blessed be the name of G-d."

Whether it is a hurricane, ill health, unemployment or other stresses, nobody asks to be a victim. These are the times when we can be most supportive of each other, knowing that any of us can suffer an unexpected tragedy. When there is a community to help out, with both practical needs and emotional encouragement, we can face anything together.

And then...the Astros won the World Series! Without diminishing anyone's personal difficulties, the Astros brought a special joy to Houston. Even those who have never cared about baseball in the past got caught up in the feeling of accomplishment. These young men said, "We can do it!" And they did! They took a city that was still looking at soggy drywall and furniture on the streets, and infused a sense of hopefulness that is difficult to compare. A baseball victory doesn't change our lives, but it helped us conclude 2017 feeling pretty good about our community.

**L'shalom,**

*Rabbi Dan Gordon*