

5780: What I Lost, What I Found

Reflections from the BZBI Community

My losses and discoveries over the past year have been quite simple.

My great loss has been time. Time with my grandchildren and children. I have missed birthdays and family holiday celebrations. I have lost time in making happy memories and deepening family traditions. I miss the physical, in-person connections with family and friends.

These are the intangibles I will never regain.

My gains in this time has been a return to hobbies lost to my busy world. I have been sewing, knitting, needlepointing, reading, walking, running, practicing yoga, taking online classes, baking and cooking with great pleasure. Sewing for my grandchildren and sending surprises has become rewarding. My son gets shipments of my cookies and cakes and never knows what to expect. My husband, Chuck, has become quite a sous chef and I enjoy our time together.

My world is different, as is everyone's'. I strive to make the connections I have lost in new ways.

— *Eileen Dwell*

First and foremost, I have lost the opportunity to hug and kiss those dear to me, but I have discovered other ways to relate to and amuse them, both virtually, and more recently in person. I have also been amazed at the newfound talents that some of my loved ones have exhibited during this time.

I have lost occasions to attend theater, concerts, movies in person accompanied by a large tub of popcorn, but have discovered that I enjoyed attending an orchestra "gala" in jeans, and that microwave popcorn with Netflix or a YouTube video can be a substitute.

I have lost some hands-on participation in nonprofit ventures, but I have found that I enjoy providing breakfast bars for the homeless on the streets during my morning walks.

I have lost in-person visits with people, but I have found I can bring cheer by telephoning some who are otherwise shut-in and isolated. And although I have lost actual travel, I found joy in attending a dear relative's birthday celebration across the country online.

I lost our part-time housekeeper, who retired during the pandemic, but found that cleaning is great exercise, and I discovered a newfound admiration for those who do it daily for a living.

Finally I learned the harm in all stereotypes, even positive ones, which could be viewed as offensive to religious, ethnic and racial groups, as they might create unrealistic expectations among members of those groups.

— *Anonymous*

Things I have lost:

Time

Sleep

Sanity

Sense of Security

Three masks

My temper

Things I have gained:

Camaraderie

Perspective

Humility

Gratitude

Resilience (hopefully)

— *Johannah Lebow*

This year our BZBI community suffered an irreplaceable loss, that of Rabbi Ezekiel Nissim Musleah.

Some years ago, Rabbi Stone wrote an essay entitled “Torah as a Spiritual Garment.” In it, he discusses the rabbinic tradition of *Torah l’sh’ma*, of learning Torah for its own sake. He writes that the very goal of spirituality is “to refine the soul in order for this spiritual garment” — the Torah — “to affix itself to one’s soul. A person whose soul is prepared to bear Torah is one who is able to emulate the *middot* of a spiritual master—*middot* such as kindness, humility, patience, and righteousness.”

Rabbi Musleah was such a soul — a soul affixed to the spiritual garment of Torah.

Rabbi Musleah read Torah at BZBI for 30 years. We were the beneficiaries of his *love* of Torah. But Rabbi Musleah did more than read and teach Torah. He spread holiness in the world. This was his timeless gift to us: Holiness.

— Heidi George

Last summer, before Covid-19 wreaked havoc with our lives, I had the opportunity to attend a Shabbat weekend led by Rabbi Ron Isaacs. He talked a lot about gratitude and explained that one of the reasons many observant Jews try to say 100 blessings each day is so they have the opportunity to reflect on all the things they are grateful for.

I found that idea intriguing, so I committed, for one week, to notice and thank G-d for 100 things I am grateful for each day. I noticed obvious things, like my family and my health, and small things, like getting out of bed, the shining sun, the taste of chocolate, and a phone call from a friend. At the end of the week I was astounded by how it changed my perspective on the world and on my life. I am a much happier person today than I was before and starting that gratitude practice was the inflection point.

Six month later came Covid-19. I leaned in hard to my gratitude practice, making a conscious effort each day to focus on the small things for which I am grateful – my garden, a weekly pre-Shabbat Zoom with my friends so we can light candles together, the ability to breathe. I am grateful for the time to do things that would have been impossible in my pre-Covid 19 life, like starting each day with a cup of coffee and the

newspapers in my garden, the time to make Challah each week, and spending time with my teenage daughter every day.

While Covid-19 has negatively impacted virtually every aspect of our lives, the blessing I have gained is time — time to reflect, to be grateful, and to reconnect with the things that are most important in my life and give me joy.

—*Cara Levinson*

I lost my grandmother this year, the day before Yom Kippur. In losing her, I learned the full extent of her generosity.

I learned that, in addition to donating regularly to a domestic violence shelter, she had chosen some personal items of value to be sold with the proceeds going to the same shelter, and that my grandfather is still receiving mailers for a dozen different charities she subscribed to. I have reconnected with some extended family members, some of whom I have seen less of in recent years as people got married and have children and moved out of town; they told me their own cherished memories of my grandmother, and I learned that she still sent out birthday cards to all.

I got to look through all of her photos and saw how close she was to her siblings, and gained a fuller appreciation for how much it hurt her to be the only one left.

Now I call my grandfather more, and say “I love you” more, and I have more compassion for my father, even when we clash.

I miss her. A memory is never going to be as good as the real thing, but I feel as though my memory is more complete, and I cherish it more deeply.

—*Alex Asal*