

Social Connection, Reflection, and Renewal in 5784



THE JEWISH VALUE FOR CONNECTION

Our sages and Jewish texts teach that the highest form of holiness is realized when individuals are connected and are part of a collective. This connection can be between two people, or it can be part of a larger group. At many important spiritual moments, we are told to pray in a minyan, a group of at least 10 Jewish adults. Our ancestors understood that relationships serve as a source of healing and that strength is derived from being part of a community. Further, the Talmud teaches we are responsible for each other and by supporting one another we all benefit.

In May 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory on the public health crisis of loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection in our country. Disconnection negatively impacts our mental, physical, and community health while strong social connections lead to increased longevity, stronger immune systems, faster disease recovery, lower rates of depression and anxiety, and improved community safety and resilience.

Some of the ways we connect shifted during the Covid-19 pandemic, which makes it especially important for each of us to contemplate our social connections. Additionally, at JFS Jewish Disabilities Advocates, we know people with disabilities experience both significantly higher levels of loneliness and barriers to connection and belonging. As we approach the High Holy Days, let us 1) consider how we are fulfilling our own needs for social connection and 2) challenge ourselves to ensure that others, who may also want to receive the benefits of connection, do.

Our Mark for Social Connection

In Jewish tradition, we look at ways to improve ourselves each year. This is especially true during the period leading up to Yom Kippur, when we say the Hebrew words “Al Chet” as we recite a confession of our “sins”. “Chet” is frequently translated as “sin,” but it literally means “to miss the mark.” While we may not have set goals for social connection last year, we can reflect on what our social connection looked like, what might have been lacking, and the intention we want to bring to connecting in the coming year.

- 1. How did I miss the mark for my own social connection in 5783? Was my social connection fulfilling? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?*
- 2. What is my mark for social connection in 5784? Who do I want to connect (or reconnect) with for my own fulfillment? What new connections am I seeking? How can I clearly share my need for connection with others?*
- 3. How will I commit to meeting my mark this year? What is my plan for connection? How will I connect (phone, virtually, in person)?*
- 4. How will I help ensure others, especially those at risk of disconnection, experience the benefits of social connection in the coming year? What will I do to become more aware of the isolation or loneliness some may be experiencing and reach out to them? Can I challenge myself to ask someone if they prefer to be alone or if they would like company?*

Hitting My Mark in 5784

Think about your “mark” for social connections with family, friends, new connections, and those more likely to be alone (some of these categories may overlap). In each circle, write your goals for connecting in 5784 and your plan for doing so (e.g., make weekly calls to my aunt who lives alone; plan quarterly Zoom meeting with high school friends; regularly text my cousin who experiences anxiety; greet and get to know to 1 new person at every kiddush; join a synagogue committee).

Share your image with others or hang it up somewhere where you will see it regularly. You may also put your image in an envelope to be opened in six months, and then assess if you are meeting your goals.

