

**The Chief Rabbi's Rosh Hashanah Message 5783**

In his book entitled 'Messy', the economist Tim Harford tells a remarkable story about the pianist Keith Jarrett.

In January 1975, arriving at the Cologne Opera House to play a Jazz concert for 1400 people, Jarrett was horrified not to find the grand piano he had been expecting. The piano was far too small to achieve any quality of sound, the keys were sticking, the pedals didn't work and the felt was worn away in the upper register. Jarrett explained that the event would have to be cancelled, but the inexperienced concert promoter begged him to reconsider. After much pleading, Jarrett took pity on the young promoter and agreed to perform on the unplayable piano.

A moment of musical history followed. Forced to adapt and improvise, Jarrett energetically achieved the necessary volume from the defective piano. He avoided the tinny high notes and focused instead on the middle register. Remarkably, Jarrett brought the house down and the recording of this concert became the best-selling solo Jazz album and the best-selling piano album of all time.

In some respects, our post-pandemic experience feels like being asked to perform on an unplayable piano. During an exceptionally challenging period, we longed for a time when we could step back out onto the stage of our lives, free of restrictions. Baruch Hashem, this has indeed transpired, but the world we have returned to is not the one we expected. The enduring impact of the pandemic and the devastating invasion of Ukraine have been compounded by political instability both at home and abroad. Many people are struggling financially. Significant aspects of our national infrastructure, from healthcare to travel, seem to be in turmoil. Many societies are polarised and fractious. We are far from where we want to be.

Rabbi Joseph B Soloveitchik differentiated between the concepts of 'Goral' (fate) and 'Yiud' (destiny). Our fate is the hand of cards that we are dealt; our destiny is the way we choose to play it. Responding positively to the external forces beyond our control, we have the capacity to carve out a glorious destiny by adapting, learning from our challenges and becoming stronger because of them.

In Parashat Noach, Hashem declares, "When I cause clouds to cloud over the Earth, then the rainbow will be seen amongst the clouds." The most spectacular rainbows, bathing the heavens in an arc of beautiful colour, are not created despite the clouds, but precisely because of them.

Like a rainbow of spectacular beauty breaking through the darkest of storm clouds, you have responded to the pandemic with an unprecedented outpouring of lovingkindness, fundraising and volunteering. However, as we consider our shared purpose over these High Holy Days, many serious challenges remain. This is a time to focus on our spirituality and the real purpose of our existence, to redouble our commitment to our families, as well as to our communities and to society, and to do more for the most vulnerable. In this spirit, we will succeed in not only playing the unplayable piano, but also in creating something of immeasurable and lasting value.

Valerie and I extend our heartfelt wishes to you all for a happy, peaceful and fulfilling New Year.



**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

