

**May the old year go and take its plagues with it;**

*Thought for the Day*

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*Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 18 September 2020*

Tonight is the start of Rosh haShanah, the Jewish New Year – and what a year it’s been!

In terms of the rhythm of the Jewish year, lockdown began just in time to ruin everyone’s plans for Passover, and now, just before Rosh haShanah, when we thought life might be gradually returning to some kind of normality, we have new local lockdowns and blanket restrictions on gatherings. Fortunately the few exceptions include worship, so most synagogues will be holding services – but not as we knew them! Some will be on Zoom, some in shifts, some in parallel, pared back to the bare minimum.

On Passover the celebratory meal starts with an invitation to “all who are hungry to come and eat”; this year we had to turn that round and take food to the hungry to eat in isolation. But even this terrible cloud had a silver lining: the sense of community, of belonging, of mutual support has been tangible. After the initial shock of not being able to meet, more of us than ever are meeting, albeit in a new virtual world. For me it’s typified by the very first event the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities had to rethink – we’d planned a small house party on Arran, where a turn-out of 25 would have been a success, but no-one could travel and our German performers were stuck in a cottage in Fife. So we took a leap in the dark: with no experience – no-one had any back then – we moved it online – and 634 people registered, from more countries than we had expected people!

So there is room to be positive, even as we look back on this darkest of years. Tonight many eastern Jewish communities will begin the first service of the new year with a 13th century prayer that is sadly again very relevant – and so I wish you all: ***“May the old year go and take its plagues with it; may the new year begin and bring only blessings!”***