

(#2)

Marc's Kol Shalom Journal: Koli, Kulanu קולי, כולנו

Dear Kol Shalom,

This is the second journal entry and now there's an official title: "Koli, Kulanu," which is Hebrew for "My Voice, All of Us." Thanks to Daniella Friedman, who came up with the name Kol Shalom for our congregation (sitting around Toby Moss' dining room table in 2001) and also suggested retaining Kol in the title of this journal.

Change is the topic of today's Koli, Kulanu journal entry.

I love listening to [On Being](#) (which I highly recommend), and on a recent morning walk I listened to a [conversation](#) with an African-American Buddhist leader, [Angel Kyodo Williams](#). In that conversation she says:

[W]e are at a time, so incredibly unique in human history, where there is a meaningful number of us that are not driven by mere survival, and we are not defined by the work that we do or the place from which we come. We are able to be transient. We can move around places. We can create meaning out of things and ways of being and work that we choose to do. And we can recreate it, over and over again. We're not defined by where we are or what we do. We can make meaning out of it, but we are not defined by it in a way that former cultures and societies that were limited in transportation and had a necessity to be able to put food on the table, and so we farmed, and so we did a whole bunch of things that were about fundamental necessities.

This got me thinking again about change, which is a topic on my mind these days. Long ago, societies were tribal, and so we took our identity from the place we inhabited, the work we did, and our community's belief system, including religion. For example, our ancient Israelite forebears lived in the land of Israel, worked mostly in agriculture, and identified with the Israelite religion which included the Temple in Jerusalem, festivals to mark the agricultural cycle, Shabbat to rest from the wearying manual labor on farms and in fields, and a moral code on how to treat other Israelites as well as people outside our tribe.

When the Temple was destroyed, our people still lived in Israel and still farmed, and over a short period of time the Sages transformed Israelite religion to not center on the Temple; Shabbat and agricultural festivals became rituals for the synagogue and home. The Sages fundamentally changed religious practice to meet a new time and a new set of challenges.

When Israelites were exiled from the land of Israel and became Jews, we took our beliefs with us. But we no longer lived in the land of Israel and over time few of us worked in agriculture. So generations of rabbis interpreted our codes of Jewish law for our lives in towns and small villages, for work in trade and professions, and for communities from Africa to Europe to Asia and beyond. The rabbis made significant changes to religious practice to meet a new time and a new set of challenges.

Today, as Angel Kyodo Williams reminds us, we are no longer defined by from the place we inhabited, the work we did, and our community's belief system, including religion. As a practicing Conservative

Jew, I am not 100% defined by my religious beliefs, I have many other roles in life that my Jewish practice informs but does not define. I choose to practice Conservative Judaism, which I consider to be the most authentic form of Jewish practice. My Conservative Judaism informs my thinking and acting as a professional, as a father/husband/brother, as a community member, a consumer, a health patient, and my many other roles in life.

We have many Jews today who identify as members of a tribe; we eat bagels, socialize with or attend events oriented to Jews, support Israel, and fight discrimination against Jews. Other Jews don't identify primarily as members of a tribe; Judaism is a set of beliefs that influences us. Synagogue membership is optional, attending services is optional, doing mitzvot is optional.

Times are changing, and we must change. If Judaism is to survive, and if synagogues (including Kol Shalom) are to survive, there has to be something compelling that engages people so they want to learn more, and want to associate with people with similar beliefs, values, and practices. To me, it all starts with being a kehillah k'dosha, a sacred community. Kol Shalom must shine brightly as a place where we practice acts of loving kindness and merciful justice.

Jewish institutions, synagogues, and Kol Shalom must change if we are to serve people. We must change so that our offerings are compelling. We all are Jews by choice, and there are many choices "out there" for socializing, learning, praying, spiritual fulfillment, and tribal identification. We must make significant changes to our religious practice, and our offerings as a synagogue, to meet a new time and a new set of challenges.

I want to be in dialogue with you. You can click [here](#) to send me a message, or you can email me at mplieber@ymail.com. I am thrilled to hear from you, to get to know you better, and to hear your suggestions on continuing Kol Shalom's growth and value to you.

Thank you for your help and for your part in our kehillah k'dosha, our sacred community!