

# SPRING, 2020

BY Doris H. Goldstein

After several days of sodden, dripping skies and a cool wind swaying the barren tree branches, I looked out my kitchen window and saw what seemed like a miracle. The spindle trunk and bare branches of a redbud tree were covered in tiny clusters of dark pink flowers. The late blooming daffodils painted white dots with yellow centers throughout the dead leaves in the perennial garden. A bright sun highlighted a passing fluttering, pale yellow butterfly. And a scarlet cardinal perched in a distant tree like a signal light. Even a nearby hanging basket had survived the mild winter and now sprouted a spray of magenta flowers.

What a beautiful sight! With great anticipation I thought about the days ahead when the forest canopy would look like a delicate, pale green lace tablecloth spread across the sky. Of being out of doors reveling in benevolent warmth, crystal clear blue skies, birds beginning to call to each other and just the hint of the fragrance of newly flowering trees.

My mind leapt ahead to the coming holy days for Christians and Jews....Easter and Passover. A time of family gatherings, special holiday foods, more colorful clothing and of increased attention to the spiritual messages within each tradition. Under normal circumstances, this season uplifts our spirits and invigorates our senses to be open to each other and the natural beauty around us.

Of course, the Spring of 2020 is so different. A world-wide pandemic has upended every aspect of being in every stratum of society..... every government, every profession, every culture, every business, every relationship and every action and reaction of every human being on the planet. It has brought physical pain and death to thousands. It has taxed the capabilities of the world's finest minds to subdue and conquer it. It has erased conventional thinking and caused disruption of every normality we accept as a given. Covid-19 will long be remembered; it will evoke the memory of deaths, society in disarray and fear of the unknown; it has exposed our weaknesses yet encouraged our humanity and has shown the power within each individual to cope with circumstances far beyond our ability to control.

So what is Covid-19? A virus like the unknown thousands which live everywhere....land, water and sky. A recent newspaper article described a "virosphere.....bigger than you can imagine.....the true figure might be as high as 10 trillion." Should we be afraid of every one of them? Perhaps.

Like most viruses, Covid-19 is a substance so small it can only be seen under a microscope but its secrets have not yet been totally unlocked by science. A tiny organism that can lurk on a door handle or be carried in a minute airborne droplet that, when released and multiplied, can cause untold harm to animals, birds, or humans. Like a crouching lion in the tall grasses of the savannah, it can strike silently, without warning, bringing down the healthiest or the most vulnerable almost in equal fashion. It can linger, undetected, for weeks, spreading its venom to others and ultimately attacking the simple act of breathing.

But like an emerging flower or flying cardinal, this virus is also part of the natural world. While we love and embrace those aspects of nature that soothe our senses in times of despair, we are naturally repelled by the destructive forces that threaten our lives. How do we cope with these diametrically opposing realities? Do we turn for answers to what many call 'God' or some other unseen force at work in the world? How can such a 'being' be the source of sublime pleasure and terrible consequences at the same time? There are no easy answers so perhaps we train our minds not to contemplate these truths and find ways to deal with whichever circumstance is before us.

Of greater importance than searching for answers to a question that is probably unanswerable, is

Will society be changed when a degree of normality returns?

Will we treasure our family, friends and community after this long separation?

Will we appreciate those who are the unsung, barely noticed glue of our daily lives....the postal workers, the grocery cashiers, baggers and stockers, the migrant workers who harvest our food and the truckers who deliver it, the municipal workers who collect our trash, the restaurant dish washers....so many whose labor makes our lives run smoothly.

Can we ever adequately honor all of those concerned with our health and safety who come to work each day with the knowledge they may be infected, suffer from the disease and even die?

Will we insist that we begin to adequately address the terrible inequality in health care and opportunity for so many underserved and not honored elements of our country?

The test of our humanity and our democracy lies in how we answer these questions.