

**RfP, UN Human Rights, CEDAW
Panel: Confronting COVID May 14, 2020**

Remarks by Rabbi Rachel Rosenbluth
www.rbluth.com ~ rachel.rosenbluth@gmail.com

Hi, I'm Rabbi Rachel Rosenbluth and it's an honour to be here with women so committed to holiness and humanity.

In fact, I think back to the last time I gathered with people of different faiths – about two months ago, in Rajasthan India. I spent ten days in a gathering with thousands of Sufi Muslims in devotion, followed immediately by the beautifully colourful Indian festival of Holi, and the celebration of the Jewish holiday of Purim. At that time, it was Impossible to imagine that gathering would soon become obsolete.

Yet I'm glad to be gathered virtually amongst multi religious voices today, in solidarity, pursuing human rights, an act of sacred service.

As we have heard today, the consequences of COVID are immense. It is, in essence, a human rights issue, that affects everyone. It knows no boundaries or borders. Yet it has magnified the socio-economic disparities, and structural inequalities of our world.

And women are uniquely affected. They comprise a high percentage of the front-line workforce, with high responsibility, and high risk. There is a rise in domestic violence, economic uncertainty, higher rates of job loss among women, and the responsibility of juggling work with child care. And, immigrant, refugee and indigenous women, among the most vulnerable, are even more at risk.

It is a lot to bare, and human rights-based responses on social, political and economic levels are much needed. But today, within this context of faith based female leadership, I'm going to speak from a more personal, and spiritual perspective, and reflect on our collective human experience.

The major challenge that I see today - is timeless, universal and existential. It is the experience of human alienation - of loss, uncertainty and fear. Loss of loved ones, solitude in moments of crisis, uncertainty and fear about what will be, the distance of community and its touchstones of safety and stability.

Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl said, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

This is the role of faith leaders at this time – to collectively face our profound and fragile human experience, and invite a response of compassion.

Put Most simply, this is a call to care.

We begin by tending to our own wellbeing by being mindful and present with our humanness, acknowledging our own pain, uncertainty, loss and grief, bringing tenderness and care to

ourselves. Our wholeness contains our suffering. It is an invitation for healing and is a unique and empowering gift of female religious leadership today.

Practically, this is where our spiritual technologies of practice and ritual come into play - daily discipline invites us to presence, to slow down, to resource ourselves emotionally.

During this pandemic I have been leading daily yoga by zoom (which you are all welcome to join). It is now Ramadan in Islam, and it's sefirat haomer in the Jewish tradition. These practices attune our hearts and minds, invite mindful presence, and connect us with community with consciousness and Gd.

And so, we turn inward to our hearts, we bring compassion to our own homes and loved ones and then we can take compassion out into the community, advocating for those voices are not heard. Because, while the virus exposes the fragility of our interdependence, it also calls on us to wield it as our strength.

As we do that, our response rebuilds our new normal, on the foundations of love. Slowly the world that we pray for, becomes the world that we are actively creating. As my teacher Rabbi Ami Silver said, "let's become the answers to our prayers"

As Jewish sages say Olam chesed yibaneh, we will build a world of loving kindness.

In the Jewish calendar we are approaching Shavuot, our holiday that celebrates our freedom through receiving the Torah, becoming a community in covenant dedicated to and bound by laws of ethics, morality, care and justice. Freedom is thereby linked to our sense of responsibility for each other, for the earth, for the most vulnerable.

The faiths4rights toolkit provides a wonderful framework for joint commitment to justice and action. It understands the power and responsibility of faith communities, and enables us to educate our communities so that the call to care becomes a global one. This collaboration between RfP and the UN is a concrete way to walk in the ways of Gd, together.

What I would love to see is a network or platform for collaboration and sharing among our faith communities so we can learn from each other and work together.

I will end with a haiku - words of peace builder, John Paul Lederach,

they say we're at war
i think we're falling in love
with the human race

May we be blessed, as our veils, our habits, our dependencies shift during this time, to lead together with grace, intelligence and action. And may our togetherness in our humanity and in our holiness bring healing.

Fin.