

# UPHILL CLIMB

Rabbi Elliot Cosgrove, Park Avenue Synagogue

There's an old joke about the difference between an optimist and a pessimist. The pessimist says, "This is beyond anything we could have imagined — things couldn't possibly get any worse." To which the optimist smiles and responds, "Sure they could!"

I feel these days like that optimist. Here we are, facing trouble after trouble, one anxiety after another. And in this unnatural virtual, solitary reality. With fears for our health, jobs, families. Concern for our neighbors. Marking one holiday after the next from our homes. **What sort of humanity is it, separated one from another?**

I read a journal article from a social psychologist on a fascinating study that talked about visual perception — the way that our psychological resources impact how we see things. This particular study was on how we see the steepness of a hill in front of us. The subjective measure of how steep the hill is, is affected by our psychology, our physical fitness, our age, by whether we have a big backpack on our backs, by all sorts of things. The article goes on to say that participants who thought of a supportive friend during the task of looking at the hill saw a less steep hill than participants who didn't think of someone they loved. In other words, the hills that we have to climb — and there are more than we can count right now — are made surmountable by way of connection and relation with other people.

While we would never have chosen the circumstances of the last six months, right now people are seeing past each other's quirks and failings, realizing that relationships are more important and letting bygones be bygones. We're expressing concern for each other. Most importantly, we're realizing that in addition to exercising, eating right, and social distancing — we're each better off by having one another. **When we reach out and connect to each other, when we realize that even in this most inhuman condition, we can lean into our shared humanity and know we are capable of transmitting far more than a deadly virus.**

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