

### **Pandemic reflections**

For a retiree like me, the pandemic restrictions meant less shopping; less concerts, movies and festivals; no catching up with friends for a coffee or a meal; not seeing children and a grandchild regularly and in particular, no travel. The latter was particularly upsetting when one has a child and grandchildren overseas. We saw each other via Facetime but each session came also with a little sadness because of not knowing when we could see each other in person.

I read more books and watched more TV, free and Netflix. I spent more time than usual gardening – weeding, growing vegies and constructing frames of nets to keep out possums. I walked and cycled around the neighbourhood and when necessary only within the 5 km limit. Before the distance limits, we explored local parks and natural areas on the outskirts of Melbourne, e.g., the Dandenongs, Cardinia Reservoir, Jells Park, Braeside Park and King Lake National Park. To minimise boredom of walking in the same area, I used a photocopied map to allow a new street or two to be walked each time. I eventually covered most of the suburb and parts of surrounding suburbs with a greater appreciation of architecture and gardens being one significant benefit. By the time restrictions were lifted, I had had enough and just could not face more street walking.

Although not overly religious in the accepted meaning of the word, I usually walk about half an hour to shule every Shabbat. Restrictions meant an extended time reading *The Age* in the morning, and then so as not to lose the exercise benefits of the regular walks to shule, I did a long walk of 1-1/2 hours before lunch. I did another shorter walk later in the day.

I felt a greater loss of the social aspect of shule rather than the davening part. Chatting to friends, especially at the Kiddush, was definitely something greatly missed.

Pesach was a little sad. We took out a minimum of Pesachdik dishes and preparation was less thorough than usual. On the first night, we left an iPad on the table so children could at least follow the Seder, much of the first half read and discussed as normal. Interesting is that friends definitely more religious than us used the iPad and others less religious did not. The second night, for the two of us only, we modified the Seder, making it a bit shorter.

On Shabbat, Shavuot and especially on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, I spent time reading some of the prayers in English and other related Jewish literature. One barely has time to do this at shule when continually trying to keep up. This was definitely an informative experience. I also kept up with regular shule newsletters and other Jewish online subscriptions. We made our usual succah but with less decoration as no one else was going to see it or eat in it.

We lit our Yortzeit candles in memory of parents as usual and watched a Yom Hashoa commemoration on Zoom.

I participated in bi-monthly Jewish book club meetings via Zoom. We read the books and discussed them but it was a slightly frustrating experience as not everyone could talk freely or raise a point at any time. I am certain we would have got more out of the meetings had they been in person.

I also participated in a weekly meeting to read Yiddish literature via Zoom. Again, we managed but occasional interruptions caused mainly by technological glitches caused frustration. Also not all our regular participants joined in so we became a much smaller group.

Overall, I don't think my attitude to Jewishness and Jewish practice changed much, apart from the limits on practice at the time – i.e. no shule, family activities etc. I did think about these things though and occasionally reflected on what it must have been like for Jews in the past when minor causes or major persecutions prevented them living their normal Jewish lives.

I think whenever we get back to as close to “normal” as possible that my attitude to Jewishness and practice will be similar to what it was before. Not meeting with, or seeing friends and acquaintances regularly, certainly emphasised the importance of “socialising”, while activities like shopping or eating out are now less taken for granted.

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