

Community Strength, By Ariella Katcoff, age 11

These times alone have been the nightmares of my life but have also made me realize just how important communities are and can be. My communities go from my family, to my friends at school and shul, to my neighbors, and to my teachers. A couple weeks ago, my mom and I were sitting down and discussing our summer plans, trying to fill the time we would have normally spent at our neighborhood pool, when suddenly it hit me. This summer was going to be very lonely and sad with no friends and family. No barbecues at the pool, no playing on the swings, no sleepovers and play-dates, not even any hugging.

Later that night I started thinking. I thought about what would happen if we could never be together as a community again. I thought about all of the great things we should have been able to do, but did not have the chance to do. I hoped this would all end soon; I prayed it would.

The next day, I told my parents that I needed to find some way to be with others, even if we had to stay distant. They agreed, and we decided to take one of our friends' up on their offer to let us use their pool. We thanked them and started making plans. A few days later, we went over to the pool and had a great time. We stayed six feet apart and wore masks when we were out of the water and got to race each other. I had a wonderful time and wanted to come back.

A few days later I was in the mood to go back to the pool. Sadly, when I told my mom, she told me it was going to rain that day and wasn't hot enough. Then the next day, the same thing happened; I wanted to go to the pool again, but the weather still wasn't cooperating. This same thing continued for the entire next week and soon, I was beginning to feel very lonely and sad, even with a few zoom calls a week.

Eventually, we were able to go to the pool. Spending time with my friends and playing in the pool catching pennies was fun. One time, I tried to see how long I could hold my breath underwater to catch a bunch of pennies. It was hard, but I did it anyway. Something that was even harder though, was leaving their home. It felt weird, holding myself back from hugging the family, but I managed. This tradition of going to the pool went on for several weeks.

As time went by, my days started getting busier. I began messaging and calling my school friends more and more, until my mom got mad because I was using her computer too much.

She decided that my friends and I needed to get together physically, so we arranged a play-date with two of my friends. When they came, we made friendship bracelets to keep each other together, even when we were apart. The whole time, we were all laughing and being silly. At the end, we tossed each other our bracelets and gave each other air hugs. When they left, my mom and I started getting ready for dinner.

Later that night, we had havdalah on Zoom with our shul. As we swayed together in the flame of the candle, I finally realized how strong our community was. I knew our friends at the pool were kind and welcoming to let us swim and come into their home. I knew my school friends were caring to take out their time to talk and message with me about these crazy times. And I knew my shul was generous to schedule a Zoom for havdalah and services every week. I finally felt the community love that I had been missing.