

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

I usually don't write about movies I watched, the main reason being is that I don't watch too many movies. However, last week I watched the film *Don't Look Up*, which moved me to share some thoughts on the climate crisis, the COVID 19 pandemic, the political divide in our country and in the world, and other similar "light" subjects.

But first a little about the movie.

*Don't Look Up is a 2021 American satirical science fiction film written, produced, and directed by Adam McKay.*

*The plot?*

*Kate Dibiasky, an astronomy grad student, and her professor Dr. Randall Mindy, make an astounding discovery of a comet orbiting within the solar system. The problem - it's on a direct collision course with Earth. The other problem? No one really seems to care. Turns out warning mankind about a planet-killer the size of Mount Everest is an inconvenient fact to navigate. With only six months until the comet makes impact, managing the 24-hour news cycle and gaining the attention of the social media obsessed public before it's too late proves shockingly comical - what will it take to get the world to just look up?*

The movie, which is an allegory for climate change, left me with mixed emotions. At times, I found it entertaining and even funny. During other parts of the movie, I found it deeply disturbing. Let me explain (spoilers alert).

Kate Dibiasky and Dr. Randall Mindy try to convey the message (perhaps the message of the movie itself) that unless we do something (who the "we" are and what the "something" is, is not clear), our planet is doomed.

Now, if we were to think that this is just a science fiction movie, then we would continue with our lives, after enjoying two hours of entertainment and popcorn. The problem is that the movie is so overcharged with parallels from our recent and current political reality, that it makes it impossible not to take sides. Either you are with those who look up and see the imminent doom of the planet, or you are with those who bury their heads in the sand and refuse to look up. Either you believe in the scientific community or you don't. Either you are for saving planet earth, or for making money.

And the problem with taking sides in this either/or fallacy is that it can leave you with a sense of hazardous denial or dangerous depression.

Burying your head in the sand, denying the climate crisis, and underestimating the seriousness of COVID 19 will prevent you from taking action, from doing your part to make a difference.

However, telling yourself that COVID is here to stay, that our country is heading towards a tyranny (either from the right or the left), that our grandchildren may not have a world to enjoy, will fill you with sadness, pessimism, and depression.

So what's the answer? *Look Up!* – or *Don't Look Up!* Is there any Jewish wisdom to help us navigate this conundrum? The answer, I believe, is yes.

Jewish texts tell us that each of us needs to do his or her share to make the situation better. In Hebrew we call this *hishtadlut* – trying your best. It is up to us to get all the vaccines and boosters available and to implement policies that will keep us both physically and mentally sane. It is up to us to improve the public discourse, bringing a sense of morality and civility, kindness and compassion to the spaces we share with

others. It is up to us to be mindful that Hashem gave us this world both to enjoy it and to take care of it.

In other words, it is up to us to do our share to make a difference.

Now, once we do our share, our hishtadlut, the Jewish way invites us to look at life with optimism. It reminds us that the world is a good place, that all that Hashem created is good, and that there are wonderful people out there. The Jewish way encourages us to give thanks to Hashem, whose kindness endures forever, and to constantly count each of our many blessings, including our families, our community, our friends, and the scientific community that will get us out of this pandemic.

My humble advice: limit, if you can, your exposure to the media, to toxic people, and to divisive Facebook groups. Look up at all the good out there, and believe things will get better. They will. Believe me.

So, should you watch the movie *Don't Look Up*? Not sure, but if you do, try to laugh and most importantly, take it with a grain of salt.

With love, faith and optimism,

Rabbi Manes Kogan