

## Rabbi's Message Summer 2021

Dear Friends,

A remarkable thing happened to me a few days ago when I met up for dinner with my dad and step-mom. It was nice, of course, to catch up with them, and the food was great, but it wasn't until the meal was over, until after I had walked them home from the restaurant, that the grandeur of the moment truly hit me. It was the moment I leaned to kiss my dad goodnight – the instant I felt the scraggly, scratchy, stubble of my dad's unshaven cheek – that it all hit me. This was the very first time since Covid-19 came around that I had actually touched my father's skin. To be honest, I had become so accustomed to not being able to touch him over the past 15 months, that I was grateful just to have the chance to be in the same room with him, so I was entirely accustomed to avoiding touch with my dad and step-mom. Because touchless communication had become our natural default, I was *hardly* prepared for the rush of emotion that ensued.

The scientific community tells us that we benefit from friendly touch not only emotionally, which should be entirely expected, but physiologically as well. Researchers have shown appropriate touch to increase our levels of oxytocin, which produces a number of physiological benefits, among which are reduced blood pressure, reduced levels of stress hormone, an increased threshold for pain, improved sleep, and the promotion of growth and healing. It's clear. People need people. We at the JCNWJ need people. We need each other.

Fortunately, though I cannot say exactly when hugs will again be safe and appropriate, or even *if* hugs will ever again be safe and appropriate, I do see the glimmers of light at the end of what has been a very long and dark 15-month tunnel. With New Jersey rates of immunization climbing day by day, and with therapeutic treatment for those already infected becoming more and more effective, we are now in the process of preparing for the day (sooner, we hope, rather than later) when our temple family will finally come back together in person. The plan is to have a small number of outdoor gatherings this summer, and then, God willing, in-person services for Rosh HaShanah.

I wish I could say for sure right here and now how *Yamim Noraim*, the High Holidays, will look, but at this point I cannot, because we always have – and always will – rely on the then-current “facts on the ground” to direct all decisions pertaining to the physical wellbeing of our congregation. That said, the Ritual Committee is optimistic that when it comes time for the New Year, we will likely be able to have – at the very least – an outdoor service with reduced seating capacity for members. And if current Covid trends continue through the summer, I expect we will be able to welcome congregants – and possibly even guests of members as well – into our air conditioned sanctuary. Also, no matter how or where services are conducted, one thing is for sure: we will make all services accessible live over the web as well

We've been physically distanced from each other so long now that we really can't know exactly what will happen when we come back together. But if the emotions I experienced when kissing

my dad and step-mom a few days ago are any predictor, I imagine there will be at least as many unexpected joys as there will be as expected ones. And I, for one, can't wait.

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Dubin