

## Emerging Into the Light - Celebrating the Possibilities of a New Year

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A year ago, as the COVID-19 pandemic raged into its sixth month without a vaccine yet nearing readiness, we entered the Hebrew year 5781 amid a time of both reflection and trepidation. Our joy at welcoming the new year was muted by a pervasive fog of uncertainty, forcing us to trade the warmth of each other's company for the less welcoming glow of computer and television screens. I've written previously about the phenomenon of the Jewish people's shared inherited trauma. Our history is pockmarked with frequent calamity, which influences our cultural idiosyncrasies and informs how and when we engage in our religious observances. Tisha b'av, for instance, which we observed in July, is at its core a day to mourn the destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem. However, over the course of two millennia, this solemn day has become bloated with additional gravity, evolving into an opportunity to reflect on the vast humanitarian disasters that have befallen our people. Perhaps we as Jews were better prepared than most to weather the trauma of the past eighteen months and, as we celebrate the arrival of another new year, to reflect philosophically, rather than with dread or self-pity, on that which we have experienced.

It's most likely, even amid surging infection rates and the alarming spread of the persistent Delta variant of COVID-19, that this year's celebrations will be far more buoyant than those of a year ago. Perhaps we've simply decided that we're finished thinking of these as uncertain times, and instead have accepted that COVID is part of our new normal. The vaccines, despite their imperfections and varying degrees of effectiveness, have provided us with the necessary

peace of mind to stop waiting for a return to pre-COVID conditions, and instead to begin adapting to our current reality.

This holiday, many congregations will meet in person. Friends who may not have seen each other in months will embrace not only a new year, but each other, as well. Some will inevitably determine that they are not yet ready to venture out, and so will gather for a second consecutive year around computer screens or tablets rather than experience the High Holy Day liturgies from the pews of a sanctuary. Those of us who do return will likely be masked. These are not features of some temporary anomalous era on which we will look back with curiosity, but rather are now most likely permanent, or at least long-term, characteristics of the human experience.

Calamity forces us to evolve, to reset our expectations, and to adapt to non-ideal conditions. Throughout the pandemic, we've turned to "COVID silver linings" to help us cope with sudden and uncomfortable change. The reality is that our adaptability itself is a characteristic that is worthy of celebration, along with the arrival of 5782. Time and again, tragedy has tested the ingenuity and durability of the Jewish people. Each time, we have managed to meet the challenge. This time, the calamity is global and indiscriminate. We as Jews are not the isolated victim, but rather are part of the fabric from which humanity is weaving adaptive solutions.

Here in the Long Beach area, the pandemic provided the necessary backdrop and big-picture clarity to begin the process of integrating the Alpert JCC and Jewish Long Beach, thus finally dissolving the figurative firewalls that have acted as barriers to setting community priorities and developing programs and services to address them. Meanwhile, local Jewish communal agencies, along

with area congregations and other Jewishly-focused organizations, have served as a light unto our broader community, providing critically important social services, outreach, funding, and lifelines to meaningful engagement for the most vulnerable and isolated among us.

My July Chronicle column posited that we might dare to dream of an end to the pandemic and a joyous return to our pre-COVID way of life. While we are certainly better adapted to live with COVID today than we were a year ago, it was perhaps premature to characterize this stage of the pandemic as a reversion to the familiarity of our previous day-to-day existence. However, as we enter the reflective period of the High Holy Days, it is imperative that we celebrate all that our community and its institutions have achieved throughout this protracted global crisis. Now, perhaps more effectively than at any time in recent memory, we are guided by our Jewish values to successfully and decisively light the way forward not only for ourselves as Jews, but for the communities of which we are a part and about which we care so deeply.

As we observe these holiest of days, we will continue to reframe our current reality not as a temporary state of affairs, but rather as an evolutionary moment in human history. However, let us also allow ourselves to celebrate that which the pandemic has compelled us to achieve. Let us take satisfaction in the light that we have brought to those whom the crisis plunged into darkness, and in the strength with which we are emerging from a time of uncertainty to a time of resolve. It is with this spirit of perspective and renewal that my wife, Taina, daughter, Zoe, and I wish you and yours shana tovah u'metukah: a sweet, healthy, and joyful New Year. 🕊️

36  
HOURS



OF JEWISH LONG BEACH  
and ALPERT JCC



From 8:30 am June 23 to June 24 8:30 pm = **36 Hours**

36 Hours = **296 Total Gifts** with **11 New Donors**

Total Raised = **\$250,000** With Match = **\$350,000**

Thank you to everyone for their support, especially those who provided the match:

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**"At the heart of what it means to be a Jew is to ask questions."**

*Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso*

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