



October 2021

Dear Friend of Israel,

We have just completed the Jewish holiday season, that spans most of the month of Tishrei, the 7th Biblical month. Beginning with the more serious holidays – the Jewish New Year, Rosh HaShanah, and then Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and ending with the joyous Feast of Tabernacles and Simchat Torah, **it is a month filled with prayer, family gatherings, self-reflection and pure joy.** When the holidays are over, we are happy to get back to routine, but we try to retain some new commitment or reflection that will enable us to reach a higher spiritual place in the new year.

After more than a year and a half dealing with the COVID pandemic, **none of us in Israel can escape reflections of the effect this terrible disease has had on us.** A few months ago, after the vaccinations had taken effect in Israel, we were sure that COVID was on its way out. But as the summer progressed, our numbers escalated again, and as we approached the New Year and the start of the school year, we dreaded what the numbers would be like. Israel launched the 3rd vaccine and that had a positive effect, but COVID is still with us and will be with us for some time.

We were grateful that, unlike last year, **we were able to gather in the synagogues and pray together, in contrast to the small backyard and street prayer services we created last year.** We were grateful for the family meals, outdoor picnics and Succah gatherings that were able to resume this year. But at the same time, COVID is always on our mind – as people go into quarantine because of their exposure to someone who became ill, and as others continue to become infected, including some who have been vaccinated.

This is a plague, not that different from Biblical plagues. And while G-d has blessed us with far more scientific knowledge than at any time in history, and while our doctors and scientists have discovered vaccines and medications that certainly help us, there is always some mystery remaining, some new twist that leaves us all puzzled. *"The hidden things are for the Lord our G-d. The revealed things are for us and for our children" (Deuteronomy 29:28).* Some things will remain a mystery forever. But **our job is to seek G-d, to try to understand His ways and to follow His commandments. We will not always understand His ways, but we can draw comfort when we know we are following His ways.**

I hope that COVID has not affected you too badly and I pray that despite all that we have experienced this past year, you are able to stay focused on G-d's ways. And that includes focusing on Israel: G-d focuses on Israel and I hope you will too.

Sincerely,

Sondra Oster Baras
Director, Israel Office

P.S. You can help protect families in Rechalim by providing vital surveillance cameras. You can read all about Rechalim and their needs in the enclosed Heartland Highlight. They need your help today!