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Dear «salutation»,

We have just begun a new year and, as always at this time of year, **I find it hard to believe that another year has passed. I remember as if it were yesterday when the entire world was in a panic over the approaching 21st century.** The hype was insane but in the end, it was just another turn of the year. It really had little significance for any of us in the long term. Hindsight is often the most accurate sight after all.

Today, as we begin our third consecutive year of the COVID pandemic I wish we had hindsight. We have all experienced a bit of insanity – massive lockdowns, widespread international panic, a total cessation of tourism to Israel, sporadic international travel if at all. I did not visit the US for more than a year and have still not been back to Australia since February 2020, as that country remains closed to tourists. **I would love to be able to say to you – hop on a plane and come on over – but I can't. And I miss you.**

But as **I search for meaning throughout it all, I have trouble seeing a message.** As scientists continue to grapple with the cause and best treatment for the disease, it is apparent how little they still know. And just as we think the pandemic is on its way out, another variant shows up that stumps doctors and politicians alike.

**I know we have different opinions on the best way to handle the situation and that is fine. Diversity is always good and healthy debate is what makes human beings tick.** But what saddens me is the divisions between good people that this pandemic has caused. An illness shared by so many should bring us closer to one another. Instead, we are all witness to those who have embraced extremes and allowed their opinions to affect how they relate to their friends and neighbors.

At CFOIC Heartland, **we have always believed that what unites us is Israel. We come from different faiths, different political persuasions, different countries. But we can all stand together and embrace one another as we embrace the people and Land of Israel. My prayer for this new year is that we will continue to love one another and love this precious land, the land G-d gave to my people.** One day we will have the wisdom about COVID that will unite us all. We will have that blessed hindsight that will help us understand what we have experienced. But until then and throughout, we will be sustained by a deep and abiding love for G-d and for all that He loves – all of His children on this great and wonderful earth. May G-d bless you!

Sincerely,

Sondra Oster Baras  
Director, Israel Office

P.S. «salutation», your donations to CFOIC Heartland have helped so many communities in Judea and Samaria! Enclosed is a special New Year greeting from all of us in the Heartland of Biblical Israel.