

Respect: The basis for moving forward

Uncertainty in such an uncertain world



THE DOCTOR IS IN
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We have been dealing with a virus that's mutating, multiple lockdowns, the inability to see or be with our loved ones, financial difficulties, Zoom-based school and learning, election woes with yet a fourth underway, and so much more. We are so very exhausted by it all. Who could have possibly imagined from the outset that it would last this long and impact us on so many different levels?

In spite of this and maybe because of it, we owe it to ourselves to acknowledge it out loud and pat ourselves on the back, being thankful that we have not only survived this year but have repeatedly made the most of a very difficult situation. Elated and very appreciative that we finally have a vaccine in plentiful supply and being administered with rapid speed, most of us over the age of 16 will not only have received the first dose, but also the second, if not already, very soon. What a truly liberating gift we hope this will be. This might allow each of us to protect ourselves, see our loved ones again, and to finally return to activities we once cherished in our "old" world.

But this is not the "old" world, and we make a great mistake if we think that nothing has changed. In light of this, each of us should stop to reflect and see how we want to return to our old life in this new world. What would we like to do differently with respect to ourselves, our loved ones, our family, our friends and our greater community? Have you started? How have you changed? Do you see things through a different lens and with a different value system? How have you become a better person than you once were?

Recently, I was asked to consult on a video conference call with a hi-tech company's full team of employees scattered across the globe. The company had experienced a tragedy and, as is often the case, I believe I may have learned more from them, than they did from me. Noteworthy was witnessing the phenomenal sense of community. People exuded kindness and support as they listened to and were there for each other in so many ways. They didn't interrupt when someone spoke, and they were very present both in the actual conversation and on the screen. With more than 100 people on the call, it appeared that only those with young children or with low bandwidth turned off their video.

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These employees appreciated what they did and valued their workplace environment. They liked going into work, enjoyed and respected the people they worked with and for, and clearly felt valued and respected in return by their coworkers at all levels. What also was evident was the tremendous sense of isolation many have experienced in working from home over the last year. Usually, we think just of seniors as the ones being affected this way. However, for everyone – single, married, divorced, from young child to octogenarian, not to mention those who are ill or

dying and their families – the pandemic has tossed everything up in the air and scattered the pieces seemingly randomly.

While we may have wanted to think that we have "only" physically distanced ourselves from others, we inevitably have truly socially and emotionally distanced as well. Vision and touch, not to mention the other senses, are extremely important in ensuring our well-being in ways we don't even realize.

WE ALL NEED to see each other – more than a screenshot or in a small square in a Zoom call – and appreciate each other's facial features beyond the very small area revealed around the eyes. We need to feel their smile and general presence without a mask. We ache from the pain of being restrained from connectedness to others and painfully crave the gentle hugs with those we love. They are crucial to our physical and emotional health. Deprived of touch, smell, visual cues and more for so long, we must now not only figuratively but literally reach out to one another in an honest, sincere and safe way. Our relationships are the very fabric of our society and depend on it.



WE NEED to feel their smile and general presence without a mask. (Chen Leopold/Flash90)

I contrast the caring I witnessed to the devastation at the US Capitol in Washington, DC: physical violence, verbal abuse and total disrespect of people and property, without any regard for boundaries, which seemed nonexistent, or at best blurred or ignored. Watching the mishandling of objects that were not theirs to touch and the crossing into areas that were out of bounds, I, like many, was absolutely horrified.

Social psychology studies have suggested that under the right conditions, most of us have the potential to cause devastation and harm. Who are we, what values do we have, what are we capable of – both good and bad, and how do we want to honor and respect who we choose to be and how we want to be seen by others? Now, perhaps more than ever before, as we exit this lockdown and spread our wings again, we must look at each and every relationship, and our behavior towards our partner, our family, our friends, our community and on a global level. We must decide if we choose to look after each other

or to be selfishly absorbed in our own life.

While the American situation appears so extreme, it is no less relevant to life here in Israel. We have all witnessed horrific vitriol as nasty epithets were slung at political opponents. Maybe we need to let our contenders know that the time has come for unity and community and that they will lose our votes for such disrespectful behavior towards their opponents. Each candidate, and each person in general, deserves respect, regardless of whether or not we agree with them. Feeling good at the expense of another reflects poor judgment and speaks volumes about those involved.

Where is the respect we showed back in March for the healthcare professionals who have worked tirelessly day and night to look after all of us, sacrificing themselves and their families in every which way possible, when some of the very people they look after have not taken the steps they needed to avoid catching COVID? The time for healing is now. Despite being home with our families for almost a year, many couples and parents and children are less connected with each other than ever before, threatening the very cornerstone of relationships. Domestic violence and abuse have increased, tolerance and kindness toward each other have decreased, and few want to listen, let alone be available to hear someone else. Respect comes from listening to the other person even when we may disagree.

We have come together to fight the pandemic over these past many months. Now our job is to come together and invest in those relationships we care about. ■

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