

## Reopening and Jewish Values

Spring is moving towards summer, and with the increasing availability of COVID-19 vaccination, and increasing numbers of individuals vaccinated in our community, many of us are feeling hopeful about the ways we may reconnect in person after so much time spent physically distant from each other.

While I know that many of us are excited to re-engage in person, it is important that we take stock of the realities of our community.

It is my fervent hope that all of our members who are eligible for the vaccine will receive it. To participate in vaccination and building herd immunity is to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *u'vacharta v'chayim*: "choose life."

Even if all our members who are eligible for vaccination were to receive it, however, the fact will remain that vaccination is not possible for everyone in our community. Many of the people I eagerly wish to see are children under the age of 16, for whom the vaccine is not yet available. We have committed and active members who have medical contraindications to receiving the COVID vaccine. Our community must balance our commitment to choosing life with other core Jewish values including avoiding *halbanat panim*, causing shame to another; and *al tifrosh min hatzibur* – not separating the community.

As we look forward to more in-person events, we are not currently planning to require people to provide proof of vaccination to join us. To do so would be to effectively reject children from our community, as well as to subject people with medical complications to scrutiny that may effectively communicate unwelcome. No one attending an in-person event should assume that everyone else in attendance is vaccinated.

This does mean that it is upon all of us to maintain community safety, particularly masking and social distancing at our events. We know how to do this; we took great care in our in-person events last summer and throughout this year. We have not had any recorded COVID transmission at any of our events in the past year, *baruch Hashem* (thank God).

The process of reconnecting is not going to be a mirror of the process by which we moved our programming and community virtual in March and April of 2020. Then, we had to act quickly, for the sake of saving lives and maintaining community. As we reopen, we will have to be deliberate and cautious – again, for the sake of saving lives and maintaining community.