



Miami Jewish Health



Shabbat Shalom! #284

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Rosh Hashanah

The fight against Alzheimer's disease must never stop – not even in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic and its sequels have taken over most aspects of our lives for the last six months, and all signs point to continued disruption for some more time. We live with fear of catching the virus. Our routines have changed dramatically. We must practice social distancing and remain isolated. And so on.

This pandemic has become the biggest concern of all of us, to the point where we tend to forget about the concerns we used to have before the virus appeared. Some of such concerns surely seem to be less important now than before – whether we will go on vacation soon or not, whether we will see a movie in the theatre or on TV, and so on. But many of the concerns we had before the pandemic still retain their importance, and might even have become of more pressing import. Yet, they seem to pale in comparison to the pandemic and may end up being placed in the back burner.

Among the main concerns we had before the pandemic made its appearance is the other major epidemic in our society – Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. Our concern for Alzheimer's disease must always remain front and center, even during the Covid-19 pandemic. Not only must efforts continue to find a cure and to care for those affected by Alzheimer's disease despite the overwhelming nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, but it also must be recognized that the measures in place to protect the health of our elders may be exacerbating the impact of Alzheimer's disease on the vulnerable populations.

I have made it my goal to raise awareness about Alzheimer's disease and its tragic consequences every year during Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah is the time when we assess our acts and attitudes and find ways to change them for the better in the year ahead. Rosh Hashanah is also a time when we are comforted by knowing that we are not alone in this task, as we are reassured that God supports us and encourages us in our work to be better and make this world better. And so, Rosh Hashanah is a most appropriate time to assess what we have been doing in the fight against Alzheimer's so

far, to reaffirm our commitment to continue the fight in the year ahead, and to feel God's reassurance and support in this mission.

In particular, the message of divine support and reassurance in this endeavor is clear from the "Psalm for the Season of Repentance," Psalm 27. During the month preceding the High Holidays and during the holiday period, we recite Psalm 27 twice daily. Not only does its recitation help us address our fears and stress our hopes, but it also reassures us that we are not alone. As written in the last verses of the Psalm:

*Teach me **Your way**, O Lord, lead me on a **straight path** ...*

***Deliver me** not to the will of my enemies ...*

***Hope** in the Lord, be **strong and courageous**, and **hope** in the Lord (Ps. 27:11-14)*

These words acquire a special meaning as we think of the need to continue fighting against Alzheimer's disease and as we think of the importance of deepening the fight in view of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. We pray to be shown **God's way, a straight path**, that will guide us in our fight against Alzheimer's. We pray to be **delivered from the enemy** represented by the effects and sequels of the Covid-19 pandemic that affect our readiness to fight Alzheimer's disease. We pray that we can keep the **hope** that our work against Alzheimer's will be successful in bringing an end to the suffering of those affected by the disease. We pray to be **strong and courageous** as we keep gearing up for the fight. And we pray yet again for **hope**, the hope that even when things seem so difficult, when success is not obvious and when suffering is not yet ended, we may still go on and keep fighting against this cruel disease.

But what does this mean in practical terms? What is it that we must do, each one of us, to keep fighting against Alzheimer's disease? Let me cite, as I did in my Rosh Hashanah remarks of last year, the words of Lynda Everman, founder of Clergy Against Alzheimer's, who wrote with regard to our personal fight against Alzheimer's:

Awareness is a good beginning, and empathy is essential, but they need to be coupled with action.¹

Despite the manifold effects of the insidious Covid-19 virus, we must keep trying to raise *awareness* of the disease, to nourish our *empathy* for those suffering from it and their loved ones, and to remain involved in taking concrete *action* to support the fight against Alzheimer's disease. This is a plan of action for all of us, for the new year and beyond.

On this Rosh Hashanah, may we be blessed with hope for a sweet and healthy new year, a year when the Covid-19 pandemic will hopefully disappear, but also a year when the fight against Alzheimer's disease will continue strong and unabated – as it needs to be.

Shabbat Shalom! Shanah Tovah!

¹ Lynda Everman, "Growing Our Voices. Let's Talk About Dementia." Blog written on the occasion of World Alzheimer's Month, organized by Alzheimer's Disease International (my emphasis).