



My Dear Friends,

Today we mourn the loss of a hero of the Jewish people and Yeshiva University. Hy Arbesfeld lived and breathed all of the values that we stand for. His overwhelming kindness and generosity, his deeply rooted piety and virtue, his unparalleled devotion to Torah, its study and its teachers. He was a sitting Trustee of RIETS who passed away from this dreaded virus. His loss has left us in grief and tears.

We live in a time like no other. The news is grim. The numbers staggering. The destruction left in the wake of this invisible invader is beyond comprehension. Thank God many of us can sit at home and maintain safety precautions. Even so there is much anxiety and sadness as each of us knows of a loved one, friend or neighbor who has passed away or is currently fighting for their lives.

I have never before better understood what the night of Pesach must have been like in ancient Egypt. The Torah describes a Destroyer who was let loose to plague the houses of Egypt. All in Egypt were trembling in fear and wailing in mourning. Sitting locked in their homes, the Jews were surrounded by terror, uncertain about their fate. At that time, Moshe showed them the way forward, instructed them in God's teachings and inspired them with the vision of a dawn of redemption.

Living in New York at this time, we know that we are sitting in the midst of an unforgiving pandemic which appears to be getting worse before it will get better. This already has taken a painful toll and we need to brace for the storm.

What is helpful to us during these tumultuous times is to focus on the models of people whose example shows us the way forward. And we are blessed to have these people as leaders of our YU community.

Our Roshei Yeshiva have shown incredible leadership through their sensitive and life affirming halakhic decisions which have been a defining feature in helping our community navigate through these

uncharted waters. Our graduates in the rabbinic and educational fields throughout this country and beyond have stood as the spiritual and emotional support system for our entire community. Our alumni and friends actively seek to help others in this time of crisis, most especially our doctors, nurses, and health care professionals who are on the front lines, including our partners in Montefiore and medical students in Einstein. Our faculty have created new vehicles to help those in need of assistance from web-based social work support groups, to workshops for parents who are homeschooling their children to the virtual speech clinic and psychological teletherapy services. Our community professionals have brought important and compelling teachings to the broader community, attracting an average of over ten thousand users a day to our web-based programming like YUTorah.

I am so proud of our Yeshiva University community who have shown us the way of how to lead with our values. And this is especially the case when it comes to our students. It has been inspiring to see the way they have continued their studies in trying circumstances and brought an amazing spirit of caring and compassion by taking on additional projects like virtual visits and phone calls to the homebound and elderly as well as one on one video conferencing lessons for public school children.

You can tell a lot about a community by how it responds to crisis and our community has never been more united and committed to not only weathering this storm but building a better future.

For me, so much of this activity is reflected in Hy's role model and unbounded generosity. He had such *hakarat ha-tov* to Yeshiva University for the scholarship funding it provided him from the time he entered into our high school to the days he left as a *musmach* and student of the Rav. He led by word and deed, and his personal example showed us the way forward during times of prosperity and times of challenge.

If there is some *nechamah* for all of us during this time filled with anxiety and sadness it is that we are walking through this darkness together. Together as a community and together with Hashem. There will be a dawn at the end of this journey, and with Hashem's blessing and our values as our compass we will greet the new light together.

Wishing you and your loved ones a Shabbat of safety and peace,

Ari Berman

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