



My Dear Friends,

I hope this note finds you well.

It is difficult to absorb the year we have just experienced. For many, perhaps the most painful aspect has been the separation. In times of need, our natural instinct is to turn towards the people we love and for whom we care. But over the past few months, our commitment to stay safe has often prevented us from being present. Families and friends who normally spend Shabbat together, celebrate together, visit with one another, have been forced to become socially distant. Our Rosh Hashanah tables, usually filled with parents and grandparents, friends and neighbors, are now noticeably more bare. It is in this context that I think the core message of the shofar is particularly pertinent to us this year.

Shofar transforms us into a community of listeners. The sound of the shofar, our Rabbis explain, is that of a cry. When we listen to the shofar, we are being called to be present in a conversation of tears. To hear each other's cries and fears, actively listening and responding to the needs and concerns of those who surround us. And this is why Rosh Hashanah is the start of the season of teshuvah. "Doing nothing for others," wrote Horace Mann, "is the undoing of ourselves." But when we learn to listen to the tears of one another, we recreate ourselves. We exit the narrow constraints of our individual focus and expand the boundaries of our sense of self.

This year, perhaps more than ever before, we have experienced the narrow constraints of individual focus and gained an even deeper appreciation for the people and relationships we hold most dear. This year, perhaps more than ever before, we have grown in our understanding of how our personal conduct affects all those with whom we come in contact. And this year, perhaps more than ever before, we rededicate ourselves to listening to others and being present in their lives.

And this is the spirit that we foster at YU. At Yeshiva University we believe that this year will be the most important educational year in

our students' lives. For this is the year we learn to not only carry our own struggles, but listen and respond to the tears, needs and dreams of others. To act with greater sensitivity and compassion, and be present in the daily challenges and triumphs of our students, friends and colleagues. Dealing with Covid has pushed us to grow in so many ways. It has presented enormous hardships and difficulties, but also opened up new possibilities. In the next few weeks, I will be sending out a President's Report that details YU's significant growth in enrollment, donors and rankings and captures some of the ways in which we are not only addressing the needs of the day but also setting ourselves up for success in the world of tomorrow. But the key is our values, and it starts with learning to think beyond oneself. A listening community transforms the lives of all those inside of it.

We are bound with a common sense of empathy, responsibility and purpose. And we know that with God in our lives and our values as our compass we will navigate these uncharted waters together and emerge even stronger at the end of the journey.

My wish for each and every one of you - our students, parents, alumni, friends, faculty, administrators, supporters and community - is a new year filled with peace and prosperity, health and happiness, meaning and love.

Shanah Tovah

Ari Berman

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