



My Dear Friends,

As we mark the one year pre-Purim anniversary of the Covid outbreak in which our world has turned upside down, our lives seem to parallel the story of Megillat Esther. With the constant day-to-day shifts and sharp reversals of fortune we regularly witness as waves rise and fall, it is as if we are living in Shushan. Acts that were once deemed virtuous like visiting one's elderly parents or attending large holiday celebrations are now potentially dangerous. And words that were once off-putting, like social distancing, are now preferred.

As such, the message of the Jews of Shushan is more relevant for us this year perhaps more than ever before. For while the particulars of their unfolding story were unknown, the Jewish community did know how to respond to times of crisis. They politically and strategically worked to undo the evil decree, they strengthened and supported each other through kindness and compassion, and they ultimately placed their faith in God. That is why the way we celebrate the holiday is by caring for the poor, giving gifts to one another, and reading the story. For while the name of God is never mentioned in the story, the stabilizing, loving and assuring presence of God is felt throughout.

This Purim has a special meaning for my family and me as we celebrate this weekend the Bar Mitzvah of my youngest son, Yonatan. To prepare for his Bar Mitzvah, Yonatan learned to read his *parshah* and *haftorah*, and also finished half of *shas mishnayot*. But nothing could have prepared him for this big day like the experience of living through Covid this past year.

As his father, I just want to protect him. I remember the first time I held Yonatan after he was born in Hadassah Hospital in the middle of the night. Telling him bedtime stories in his early years in his room in Neve Daniel. Explaining to him why we were going to America in the middle of his childhood. Sitting with him on the hood of our car watching our first July 4th fireworks. And studying with him these years as he grew and matured to be such an incredible young man. I love him so deeply my heart can burst. And I wish I could protect him throughout his life and tell him that nothing will ever go wrong. But that is not true. And what's more he lived through this year of Covid, and he knows that it is not true. But the greatest

gifts I can give him are the lessons I learned from my father: to study and live by our Torah values and tradition; to be a giver, not a taker; and to cherish the relationships that will give him comfort, joy and meaning in his life. His relationships with his family and friends, who care for him and love him. And his relationship with God. For in all times, both happy and sad, with God by his side, he will never be alone.

I think this year we have all grown up a little. We better understand and are better primed to handle our current challenges while capitalizing on the opportunities that our new reality presents. Of course, we all just want to protect our children throughout their lives, but the more important gift we can give them is to teach them how to live with meaning and purpose. This Purim, let's not just celebrate but communicate. Speak to your family and friends about what you learned this year; share with them the life lessons that you find most meaningful. In a topsy-turvy world with roiling waves, let's be an anchor to those we love.

Wishing you a joyous and meaningful Purim,

Ari Berman
President, Yeshiva University

You are subscribed to emails from the Office of the President.

Office of the President, Yeshiva University
2495 Amsterdam Avenue, Belfer Hall 12th Floor
New York, NY 10033

[Unsubscribe](#)