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Dear Friends,

I recently had the privilege of addressing hundreds of high school students from around the world at the annual Yeshiva University National Model United Nations (YUNMUN).

At YUNMUN, high school students represent ambassadors from different countries who formulate policies to address the great global issues of the day. As the keynote speaker of the opening session, I addressed the collective student body about what it means to be an ambassador.



There are moments that define one's life, decisions that have lasting and significant impact. The Talmud (Berakhot 28b), for example, teaches us that when the great sage Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was on his deathbed, he was deeply concerned about the judgment that awaited him in the next world. Why would a Jewish leader of such stature be so worried about his fate?

Some commentaries have suggested that his apprehension was rooted in one dramatic moment that occurred many years earlier during the fatal siege of Jerusalem. When the Romans surrounded Jerusalem, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai left the city to meet secretly with Vespasian, the Roman general. Given the opportunity to ask for a political favor, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai made the historic decision to ask Vespasian to spare the lives of the great sages instead of beseeching him to not destroy Jerusalem. The profound consequences of this decision weighed on him throughout his life, even to his dying day.

Ultimately, the lesson of the story is that even in the face of such a historic decision, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai placed himself in the position to influence the fate of the Jewish people. The enormous weight of the decision did not prevent him from making one. He ran towards responsibility, not away from it. All his values, ideas and ideals came to the fore when faced with such an awesome moment. He saw that the purpose of his life was to be present and impactful by bringing his values into the world.

This is what it means to be an ambassador.

Ambassadors understand that they represent something greater than themselves. In this sense, we are all ambassadors. We represent our 3,000-year-old tradition and have the ability to bring our values into the world and become people of impact. In this country, we have seen this from members of our community at the highest levels of government—Ambassador David Friedman, Jason Greenblatt and Jack Lew, U.S. Secretary of the Treasury in the previous administration—to Sen. Joseph Lieberman, the great statesman, role model and YU professor.

But whether one is representing and impacting the United States or the State of Israel or one is representing and impacting one's day school and synagogue, family and community, workplace or industry, we all have a great role to play in the unfolding story of the Jewish people and humanity.

Being an ambassador begins with the recognition that you and your decisions represent much more than yourself. Being an ambassador means embracing responsibility and empowering others to do the same. This is what we teach at Yeshiva University, and this is the central lesson of these days: not just to be an

ambassador when sitting in YUNMUN but to be an ambassador throughout one's life, bringing our values into the world and sanctifying God's name in all that we do.

Warmly,

Dr. Ari Berman

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