

A College Rabbi's Moving Message to the Class of 2020

By [Simcha Weinstein](#) May 8, 2020



Congrats and condolences to all the graduates out there. Like it or not, you've been inducted in an exclusive club. One that may just define you forever: the Class of 2020.

Your final semester was savaged due to Covid-19. You will forgo the celebrations you worked so hard for. You now enter the worst economy since the Great Depression. And forget about Plan B, Starbucks isn't hiring, or even open.

A perk of being the rabbi to Brooklyn's Pratt Institute is the yearly ritual of switching my black hat for a black cap and sitting on the stage of Radio City Music Hall. Even if the service can be a *schlep*, I always cry at the end.

But now, like everything else, commencement will now be a Zoom only affair.

If Bubbe and Zayde manage to log in, they will only be able to *schep* virtual *naches* in a medium where there is often no connection, only confusion.

You can take comfort in knowing that every graduate in the nation, if not the world, is going through the same thing. You will forever share the memory of graduating in the same boat, and now you've all been thrown into the deep end.

In a normal job market, success is often a combination of luck and timing, and the class of 2020 has had neither. Yet, whilst you are the generation of destruction, you are also the generation of rebuilding.

College students are more resourceful and committed than often credited. I've seen you sleep in the studio. Covid-19 may have unmade the world, but you will remake it. Timing will force you to create your own luck and rebuild the world in *your* image

Bubbe and Zayde have much to be proud of.

I've witnessed the stress and anxiety of a final semester, and you have had to face that semester without a library or a coffee shop. In the face of a spring break that never ended, you never got to say goodbye to your campus. You had to finish your time academia back where it began, in your childhood bedroom.

The challenges placed on the Class of 2020 are profound. And you've passed a test far more rigorous than any final. You have built a support system as much as strong as any immune system.

The Torah teaches (OK, I'm a rabbi, so you knew this was coming!) that after the biblical flood, Noah would eventually invent the plow, the innovative tool for working the ground that would revolutionize the work of agriculture. Like Noah, you will rebuild a new world – not by replicating the old one, but through innovation, *chutzpah*, and support from each other.

There will be no returning to normal after Covid-19. You will blaze the trail of a new normal. Research shows that after anxiety-provoking events, societies become more empathic. You will lead a more cooperative and altruistic world informed by your experiences.

When the water subsides and the pandemic ends (and yes, it *will* end), our future will depend on the Class of 2020. Take a bow and move your virtual tassels from right to left. You have done your rabbi and your world proud.

You will steer us into a safer world where one hand truly washes the other.

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