

## In Tribute to Our Physicians and Healthcare Workers

Emor 5780

As I am certain was true for tens of millions of Americans, I was deeply pained and saddened to learn of the death by suicide of Dr. Lorna Breen, an Emergency Room physician who had been working tirelessly doing the grueling, heartbreaking, and dangerous work of treating patients afflicted with COVID-19. It is axiomatic that Dr. Breen herself must be seen as a victim of this cruel disease, which has now taken the lives of more of our fellow citizens than over two decades of armed conflict in Vietnam.

Over the last two months, our community has been thrust into the epicenter of a pandemic. We have all felt the burden of this unprecedented disruption, but, to be sure, the burden, as is always the case, is not distributed equally. Our community, even at this moment, mourns the loss of each and every person as an *olam maleh*, as our Sages taught, a complete world unto themselves, inimitable and completely irreplaceable.

At a different plane, we ache for those who were deprived of precious time spent with loved ones as they slipped away, and then again, of a full and proper *levaya* and shiva. We constantly worry about the individuals in our community who live alone and have spent countless solitary hours, and, to be sure, we are only beginning to grapple with the immense economic consequences of this pandemic.

And yet, even in the midst of this terrible scourge, there is something in our community for which we all must be grateful. The physicians and healthcare workers of our community, over the last two months, have been nothing short of extraordinary. I certainly do not think it is necessary to point out their tireless efforts on behalf of us all, honoring not only the highest standards of their noble profession, but consciously and modestly serving as exceptional *shlichim*, human agents, for He alone who is the 'trusted and faithful Healer.' Individually, and collectively, they have been a singular *Kiddush Hashem*, the defining mitzvah of the Jewish people, which is found in this week's parshah.

If I have anything at all to add to the communal consciousness surrounding their contributions, it is from a rabbinic point of view. As I'm certain is the case with everyone of my colleagues, I have received many dozens of hours of expert consultation from these physicians, across so many different specialties implicated by this virus, and all of this, during the greatest medical crisis in a century.

To a person, every man and woman in this exceptional cohort, none of whom would ever wish to be named, often speaking from the floor of the ICU, or well past midnight, or both, has been able

to provide the requisite expert guidance which halakha requires in dealing with medical matters, let alone, pandemics. In the weeks and months ahead, the guidance of these trusted physicians will surely be amongst our most valuable communal assets.

Dr. Breen's tragic passing reminds us all not to take the courage, competence, professionalism, and, though this word is abused in description of athletes and cultural figures of no moral standing, true heroism, of our physicians and healthcare professionals for granted. We can scarcely imagine what they have dealt with during this time, when many of us may perceive ourselves as subject to imposition of one form or another. May He who is good to all, and who has compassion upon all of his creatures, shield them and protect them, even as they do much the same for all of us. On behalf of a grateful community, we say thank you.