

September 15, 2021

Dear Shearith Israel family,

*Kippur 5782.* Even with the miracles of a new year, Covid-19 has not miraculously disappeared. True, there have been abundant miracles in getting it and keeping it under control in our geographic area. Still, it is not to be toyed with or ignored. Accordingly, for Kippur, we intend to employ the same precautions as we successfully used on Rosh HaShana. We will be holding services indoors in our Main Sanctuary and outdoors on Paved Paradise. Both will be socially distanced but, we predict, somewhat more full than on Rosh HaShana. We are observing the same vaccination regime, and we will all be masking and observing the other cautionary protocols both indoor and out. If we all stay at our seats avoiding unnecessary perambulation, and seriously consider the solemnity of the Day and refrain from talking (other than to the Almighty), we will have a safe, spirited, and spiritual Kippur.

Two post-scripts about Rosh HaShana. First, in addition to [the thank yous of last week](#), Lisa Rohde deserves special thanks as well, for overseeing Junior Congregation. So do our teen leaders, Matea Frieber, Reuben Frieber, and Barbara Sasson. Second, Faith Fogelman captured the spirit of the day so wonderfully in reminding us of Jimmy Webb's great song, made a hit by The Fifth Dimension, *Up, Up and Away*, that I have to share it with you:

*"Suspended under the twilight canopy,  
We'll search the clouds for a star to guide us"*

*Time.* As we head into Kippur 5782 on this short Wednesday, I thought I would address just about the hardest topic I can think of. I have no notion that you will read this after Kippur; your inboxes will be even more overstuffed by then. So I will be a bit brief(er) here, and if you print it – well there will be an unprecedentedly long break in services tomorrow or as you are eating tomorrow night?

It is time again to discuss time. Not the breezy, time-travel of the great treat by Jack Finney, *Time and Again*. And not the mind-bending but ultimately fun time-play of the movie *Inception* (btw, does anyone know of any more recent movies as clever as *Inception*? Beth and I are in the market.). No, I mean the heady, serious treatment of time, as is fitting for these Days of Awe. I begin with the fact that even [the lay press](#) has written recently on the trouble String Theory is having finding any empirical proof to support nine/ten or twenty-six different dimensions in its treatment of time. This may open the way for the ascendance of an alternative theory of time, my personal favorite, Roger Penrose's Conformal Cyclic Cosmology (oh the lovely, alliterative "CCC"). CCC doesn't need all those pesky dimensions of strings – but does need time scales of 10 to the *hundredth power*, over and over, in repeating cycles. See Penrose, *Cycles of Time* (2010). Like every other theory of cosmology, these theories are trying to grapple with that nagging, maddening reality that we call time.

Time, ah time. Everyone's nemesis. For Indiana Jones, the only thing he feared was snakes – so of course he is dropped into a pit full of snakes in the movie classic, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, where he utters the unforgettable line, "Why did it have to be snakes?!" For us, approaching

Kippur, our plaint is surely, why do we have to think about time? Time is our snakes – mine, anyway. In the words of Roger Kahn in the must-re-read *The Boys of Summer*, time is the “implacable enemy”.

What’s the big deal about time? Simply, we run out of it – and then we have no more of it. Benjamin Franklin penned the comment (I think he knew how funny it was when he wrote it):

“Our new Constitution is now established, everything seems to promise it will be durable; but, in this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes”

232 years since Franklin’s comment in 1789, the Constitution appears durable, so far. And for schleps like me who, when we make any money, make it as earned income, taxes, too, seem pretty certain. But death? That, alas, is something we can *really* count on. Sure, the inevitability of death is being challenged *theoretically*. But whether you like it when the ancient proverb says it (“time and tide wait for no man” – one point for an earlier citing than the Thirteenth Century) or when the Rolling Stones sing it ([Time Waits for No One](#)), we can ignore time, but it will not ignore us.

That’s not to say we don’t try to master time. We turn day into night with black-out shades, and night into day with indoor lighting. We try to modulate the weather of the seasons with heat and a/c – something refreshingly less available when Covid-19 forces so many more activities out-of-doors.

Judaism doesn’t really ever let us forget time, thankfully. We didn’t need Martin Heidegger to write *Time and Being* to explain that the truly authentic person is one who sees himself or herself as a being *in* time, as a being *towards* death (actually, are you in the growing number who think we didn’t need Martin Heidegger at all?). Around every corner Judaism teaches us that we should not ignore time. And we are especially aware of time this time of year. In tribute to the three-phase shofar blowings that we just heard on Rosh HaShana, I would like to offer three, three-word, three-syllable suggestions for how to tame time, for we will not conquer it:

*Slow time down.* Judaism gives us many ways to make more of our limited time by slowing it down. Observing Shabbat and Yom Tov slows down time. Mindfully preparing for Shabbat and Yom Tov become as important as observing the days themselves. Pausing each day to pray – ideally helping us make a minyan, but I digress – has a similar effect. Participating in our Kippur services is a keen way. Write me two or three suggestions from your own life; how do you slow time down?

*Fill time up.* I find that, usually, time goes faster if we jam more into it. So why my suggestion to fill time up? I suggest that because time, while our ultimate nemesis, is not our sole one: how we recollect how we have spent time has a huge bearing on our feelings of self-worth and happiness. Fill time up with meaningful pursuits because, when you think back on it, accomplishing worthwhile things will be immeasurably better for you than wasting the precious time we have been given.

*Stretch time out.* We can succeed by seeing ourselves as part of the larger, lasting J-continuum ([see my email of 7.16.2020](#)). Each of us is part of a Great Chain of Being – but not in its Christian sense. Think of ours as a Great J-Chain of Being. We are, each of us, an integral, indispensable part of a tradition that receives and passes on. The J-Chain is an endless series of cycles. Each of us is allotted our small share of cycles. How many Kippurs will we merit to observe with our community? Together, cumulated over time and space, the repeating cycles form an endless J-Chain. Endless in the way Rabbi Rohde beautifully describes (and chants) some of our liturgy as including “songs without end”. Endless in the way of the round egg we eat before fasts or upon returning from burying a family member, depicting the mouthless cry, our standing silent witness to evil and hurt and pain, yet at the same time depicting the cycle of life itself that is ever-renewing and ever-generating the capacity to Repair the World ([see my email of last week](#)). (If the song *Circle of Life* from the Lion King were a better song, we could sing it [here](#); but not even [Elton John](#) could fix it.)

It was deeply moving to be back in our sacred Sanctuary and on Paved Paradise with 300 of us praying together on Rosh HaShana. We hope that spending time as a community over Kippur will be as well. Sadly, as our dear congregational friend Margy-Ruth Davis beautifully says, there is present in all our lives now “Covid, of course, and what it took from us”. (She goes on to offer a prayer that I cannot improve on: “May the sweetness of 5782 more than compensate for the bitterness that has passed”.) We are in an epi-cycle of the J-Chain of Being that, while not at its nadir by any stretch, is also not at its apex. Let us slow, fill, and stretch time as wisely as we can to renew the cycle of life and to make the most out of dreaded time.

*Half-Full Report.*

*Another Week to Win!* Since I promised a short(er) email today, I will leave for later announcing the winners of the open contests, including (i) whether you agree with Tess Solomon that Oedipus Rex is a fairly described predecessor to the Talmudic story of *Appointment in Samarra*, and (ii) whether you can identify the actual locations in Karen Daar’s pics (which I set out below again – and by the way, Karen actually took the pics!):



*Picturing Paved Paradise.* But I can't ignore three items. First, Ruth Lazar accepted the challenge of picturing bringing coals to Newcastle on Paved Paradise and has our great thanks:



Second, did you see [the news item](#) that Lincoln Center has now uprooted its shameless copying of Paved Paradise and removed its grass? Ha! Our grass, like our love, is here to stay (for the *time* being, anyway).

Third, I know I obsess over this a little, but can someone calculate the odds that the very first discussion on the very page of Tractate *Beitzah* that we learn *on* the very day of Kippur this year (16a) in the Daf Yomi cycle is explicitly *about* Kippur?

Thank you all. Bless us all. Meaningful fast. B'sorot tovot!

Louis Solomon, Parnas