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Rosh Hashanah 5781

In March we closed down. We panic- bought toilet paper. I remember going to the store and feeling utterly terrified that I might only be able to get 6 roles of toilet paper. I worried we would get sick, I worried that you would all get sick. I worried about being present for people.

We all hunkered down. We thought maybe it would be for a month. We thought as parents that we could do this for a month. Crazyly splitting our time between work and school and trying to keep some semblance of a life. But then April turned into May, May into June. Those of you who live alone- what can I say, this has felt endless. The human need for physical contact is something we never thought we would have to live without.

Our high school seniors- prom was cancelled, graduation went online, many of you walked across a lonely stage as you were filmed receiving your diploma. So many tears and lost moments. And then college. Would it happen? Would schools re-open? The summer began with some dread.

Summer camp was cancelled, but work wasn't. Overnight parents became camp directors, cheerleaders, masters of multiple schedules while we made primal screams on the inside.

Our seniors in nursing care facilities faced lonely nights and days without contact as families showed up to send as much love as they could through windows.

But we also baked, made gardens, bought puppies, built websites and businesses, learned how to leyn Torah and somehow to adapt our lives to this moment.

As we hunkered down in this utterly difficult time we tried to create schedules to master small things, to make some sense out of this time, all the while the world kept heading towards disaster. Outside our doors the virus raged on, the country embattled without any leadership on the federal level, racial injustice broiled in our cities and America headed towards deep division. So how in the world do we make sense of all of this? How do we find order, direction? Where do we go from here? How do we survive in our own corners of the world where uncertainty reigns, where the world

feels more divided than ever? As we barrel our way into 5781 what can we possibly expect from this new year?

I want to approach these questions with a paradigm that I believe can serve us through these uncertain times. It is found In Rav Joseph Soloveitchik's famous work *The Lonely Man of Faith* where he describes 2 foundational parts of the human being, Adam I and Adam II. In the beginning of creation God creates Adam- the human being, in God's image and asks the human to increase and rule over the earth. Soloveitchik writes:

"Man's likeness to God expresses itself in man's striving and ability to become a creator. Adam the first who was fashioned in the image of God was blessed with great drive for creative activity and immeasurable resources for the realization of this goal, the most outstanding of which is the intelligence, the human mind, capable of confronting the outside world and inquiring into complex workings." (page 12) This likeness to God as a co-creator is called Adam I.

At the same time as human beings are created to be like God, we are also made of the dust of the earth, we are humble creatures that like order. We

are told to cultivate, to be stewards, and keep the earth. This is Adam II in Soloveitchik terms.

Soloveitchik teaches that the great dialectical tension of human existence is the battle between these 2 parts of ourselves.

If this pandemic has taught me anything it is that we have a need to control something in the quietness of our homes and at the same time we can be visionary in our capacity to be creators on a large scale- visionaries of a new world, bold explorers of ideas, of medicine, of education, of new energy, of radical equity.

Adam II- the one who wants to control and cultivate- the humble steward, let's talk about him first. In our tradition these character traits are best exemplified in the story of Noah in the midst of the flood. God sends a flood to wipe out the world (let me be clear that I do not believe God sent the Corona virus) and Noah does exactly as he is told, he enters the teivah (the ark) with the animals and his family. As the waters rage outside, Noah is inside without a compass, without the ability to steer the ark or even see the weather outside. He cannot control the flood or the world and so he goes inside. He becomes the master orderer of the ark, the only thing he

can control. In a midrash in masechet Sanhedrin we are given a picture of what happened in the ark.

Eliezer asked Shem, Noah's oldest son: How did you manage to take care of the many kinds of animals (with such divergent habits?) Shem replied: the truth is we had much trouble in the ark. The creature whose habit it was to eat by day, we fed by day; the one who ate by night, we fed by night. As for the chameleon, my father did not know what it ate. One day, as my father was sitting and cutting a pomegranate, a worm fell out of it and the chameleon consumed it. After that, he would knead some prickly reeds infested with worms and feed it with them.

The scene is one of a careful caretaker watching over every creature, nurturing, growing, mindfully seeing what each animal needed to survive and becoming the giver of sustenance. Noah became like so many of us these past 6 months. Sourdough bakers, plant mothers and fathers, new dog owners, homeschool teachers, camp directors, pickling masters, new cooks, nurturers of caterpillars into butterflies....

By cocooning in our homes we were flattening the curve, we were saving humanity and we were also saving our own psychies. We had to be in charge somewhere and if it could not be out in the world, then our own inner worlds would have to do. It is part of the human condition to seek order, to grow things, to do (laasot) so we did in the only way we knew possible. In our teivot with no compass, no anchor, no time frame and no direction.

But this inner world we cultivated was not only cozy and bright, it has also been one of rage, of loneliness of separation and anxiety, of endless days-one linking to the next without any hope or vision for what comes next. Spring turning into summer, summer turning into fall. School online, no camp, back to school online. With no end in sight.

In our private ceremonies we have buried our loved ones, masked- 6 feet apart, carrying our own shovels. We attended zoom shivas, cried as our loved ones endured long hospital visits alone...Life in the cocoon has been complicated both comforting and at times excruciating.

In a recent article in the NYTimes Sam Anderson wrote about life inside a cocoon. As young children we learn very quickly of the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly but we spend little to no time learning about the

transformative time inside the cocoon. What happens there? Is it cozy, warm and controlled or is it messy and bleak?

Anderson writes:

Terrible things happen in there: a campaign of grisly desolation that would put most horror movies to shame. What a caterpillar is doing, in its self-imposed quarantine, is basically digesting itself. It is using enzymes to reduce its body to goo, turning itself into a soup of ex-caterpillar — a nearly formless sludge oozing around a couple of leftover essential organs (tracheal tubes, gut).

Only after this near-total self-annihilation can the new growth begin. Inside that gruesome mush are special clusters of cells called “imaginal discs,” ...Imaginal discs are basically the seeds of crucial butterfly structures: eyes, wings, genitalia and so on. These parts gorge themselves on the protein of the deconstructed caterpillar, growing exponentially, taking form, becoming real. That’s how you get a butterfly: out of the horrid meltdown of a modest caterpillar.

Though I may still have all of my parts- the grisly days of tween anger bottled in a house, of dear ones holding grief alone in empty homes, of the loss of boundary between home and work and school, of concern for lost

wages, of no childcare while working full time jobs, of lost work in a time of reckless government have taken their toll. These are our guts oozing. These are just some of the moments and traumas we have endured over the last 6 months in our cocoons.

If that was where the story ended, we would never experience metamorphosis, but the caterpillar turns into the butterfly and Adam II also has his counterpart of Adam I. We are not just cocooning. We struggle through the cocoon because we must emerge. The High Holiday liturgy urges us to believe that change is possible and that indeed we will emerge from this cocoon.

The great call of the shofar is both a call to the past---the ram's horn in the thicket that saved the life of Yitzhak- that turned his fate from death to life. The verses in the musaf shofarot service as well as the constant refrain of the calling of the horn is meant to awaken us to action. To move out of the cocoon, the sound reminds us that the world needs us, that redemption only comes with the move outward. This year it may not be a physical move from inside to outside but the liturgy is asking us to not only face

interward- but to bring our souls, our creativity, our legal practices, our organizing, our consciousness to this moment.

Throughout the shofarot section of the musaf service, the verses that we read are of a future redemption- The shofar inspires us with hope for the ultimate ingathering of our people and their deliverance from exile, as it is said, “וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִתְקַע בְּשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל וּבָאוּ הָאֲבֵדִים בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשׁוּר” ' And it will be on that day that a great shofar will be sounded; and those who were lost will come together” (Yeshaya 27:13)

The verses continue and say the shofar will be sounded amidst the stormy south wind- in the midst of chaos as a reminder that we will rise.

(Zechariah)

The end of this section of musaf asks God to help us by gathering us who have felt so scattered- Today is harat olam- Today the world stands at a birth and its future depends on our ability to re-make, re-form, re-create using the raw material that God gave to us.

We say to God Min Hametizar karati Yah, Anani bimerhav Yah- From our narrow straits we are calling out- answer us with the ability to be expansive- to emerge from the narrowness that we have found ourselves in and let us be co-creators for a new world.

To be co-creators with God we are pushed from being in that space of Adam II, the stewards of the earth, the tillers of the soil, the humble humans that can only order our own space to Adam I- created in God's image with the ability to be cosmic with our intelligence, our ability to solve epic issues, and to create alongside God.

In one of the greatest articles ever written entitled Majesty and Humility by the Rav- Joseph Dov Solotveitchik he writes: *"The power stored up within man is exceedingly great, is all-encompassing, but all too often it slumbers within and does not bestir itself from its deep sleep. The command of creation, beating deep within the consciousness of Judaism, proclaims: Awake ye slumberers from your sleep. Realize, actualize yourselves, your own potentialities and possibilities, and go forth to meet your G-d. The unfolding of man's spirit that soars to the very heavens, that is the meaning*

of creation.....Action and creation are the true distinguishing marks of authentic existence.”

Action and creation are the true distinguishing marks of authentic existence. In a recent article in the Atlantic titled *How Disaster Shaped the Modern City*, Derek Thompson writes: “Natural and man-made disasters have shaped our greatest cities, and our ideas about human progress, for millennia.”

Out of the midst of terrible calamity humans rose up and used the best of our capabilities to create solutions for natural and man-made disaster.

Thompson writes: “Once Rome’s ancient aqueducts were no longer functional—damaged first by invaders and then ravaged by time—the city’s population dwindled to a few tens of thousands, reviving only during the Renaissance, when engineers restored the flow of water. The Lisbon earthquake of 1755 proved so devastating that it caused Enlightenment philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau to question the very merits of urban civilization and call for a return to the natural world. But it also led to the birth of earthquake engineering, which has evolved to make San Francisco, Tokyo, and countless other cities more resilient.” Thompson

writes of the cholera outbreak of 1832 in Great Britain when life expectancy fell to the average age of 26 and the blame for this outbreak was placed on individuals for their moral shortcomings. What was miraculous about this particular time was that a government official named Edwin Chadwick set out to research public health.

Thompson writes: “Chadwick undertook one of the earliest public-health investigations in history—a hodgepodge of mapmaking, census-taking, and dumpster diving. They looked at sewers, dumps, and waterways. They interviewed police officers, factory inspectors, and others as they explored the relationship between city design and disease proliferation.. The cholera outbreak was a major event that forced the British government to reckon with the costs of industrial capitalism. That reckoning would also change the way Western cities thought about the role of the state in ensuring public health.”

If these examples feel too far removed from us now, then we can turn to the last 6 months for another example.

As we cocooned in our homes, America continued in a battle for its very soul. The death of George Floyd, brought a video of a black man being

suffocated by a white police officer for 8 minutes and 46 seconds.

Suddenly in the midst of our lockdown millions put on masks and headed out to the streets. Not to just protest the wrongful killing of George Floyd but to say we are dreamers, we are builders, there must be another way.

In a stunning article in Vanity Fair, famed writer Jesmyn Ward wrote of her beloved husband who she lost to Covid 19 but also this moment in our country's history. She wrote:

I woke to people in the streets. I woke to Minneapolis burning. I woke to protests in America's heartland, Black people blocking the highways.... I woke to droves of people, masses of people in Paris, sidewalk to sidewalk, moving like a river down the boulevards.The people marched, and I had never known that there could be rivers such as this, and as protesters chanted and stomped, as they grimaced and shouted and groaned, tears burned my eyes. They glazed my face.

I sat in my stuffy pandemic bedroom and thought I might never stop crying. The revelation that Black Americans were not alone in this, that others around the world believed that Black Lives Matter broke something in me, some immutable belief I'd carried with me my whole life."

By July 3rd, 26 million people had participated in the protests for racial justice. Across the United States, there have been more than 4,700 demonstrations, or an average of 140 per day, since the first protests began in Minneapolis on May 26, according to a NY Times analysis. And the reason? Hard to pin down just one but amongst them is the way that we have paid attention differently to the killing of black people in our society. Maybe because we had more time to sit and notice and maybe also because we were ready to use our hands, our voices, our feet and our persons for a radical act of re-form. Though protesting is only the start- the number of corporations, schools, institutions like this very synagogue to sign on for Diversity and Equity training to change the internal workings of what we have always done is in the millions.

Though we are exhausted, though this virus has taken its toll on us and the rest of the world, that voice is calling- to fix, to innovate, to cure, to organize against hate, to vote, to rise from these ashes and to build the new world that awaits us. It is on us. When we sing Zochreinu l'chaim this year- let us remember that we are not only asking God to remember us for life- we are reminding ourselves too, to remember that we are in this life. We are here as Adam I and Adam II. We need to live between these 2 poles of

existence- so plant your flowers, bake your bread, breathe when your teens scream at you in your cocoons and also remember you are a creator.

May it be a new year indeed and may we meet this moment in history with our compassion, our intelligence, and our ability to dream big. The world needs each one of us. Shanah Tovah.