

7/29/22 - EREV RH 5783 - We are Here

We are here. Physically we are present in this room and physically, those on zoom are present within your homes. Where is here? Geographically we are in Illinois in our various locations or somewhere in the United States of America. But, where is here? Spatially we are on planet earth, but none of us really know where we are in space. Spatially, we are in the moment of the sun setting on September 25th of the Gregorian Calendar in the year 2022 and beginning the year 5783 on the first of Tishrei on the Hebrew Calendar. Bottom line, we are somewhere in our universe, a mere pebble floating in space amidst the billions of pebbles according to what the new James Webb Space Telescope has been showing us these past several months.

In 1922 we understood and could view 100,000 light years of our galaxy. Now the known universe measures 93 billion light years. A measure of time and space we can see in a picture, but can barely fathom as we all struggle with our own existence and the unknown length of our days on this planet. As we view these new images from the James Webb telescope, most of us are like “ew, pretty!” Pretty stars, pretty galaxies, much better resolution images of old nebulae we’ve seen before.

We all see without the ability to truly comprehend what we are seeing. I imagine Moses felt something similar when trying to discern the nature of the burning bush. What am I seeing here? Is this real? Am I here? I imagine Abraham felt something similar when he looked up at the evening sky, imagining his offspring and ancestors numbering greater than the stars. Where am I? Who am I that God has chosen me? How will all of this come to pass?

We stare into the depths of space and return to the same question we all return to at this moment each fall. Where am I? What does it all mean? What does any of it mean? Where am I going and how do I get there? What does my existence mean in all of this?

It is a lot to think about, but this moment is THE moment we are meant to spend ten days just thinking about this! I ponder this every day. I save picture after picture after picture of our universe wondering at the grandness of it all as I digest my smallness in the scope of things and weigh how best to make a difference in the world by any means possible. Mark Twain concluded his famous Harper's Magazine article from 1898, Concerning the JewsL

“To conclude. - If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race. It suggests a nebulous dim puff of star-dust lost in the blaze of the Milky Way. Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also way out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers.

He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished.

The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?”

[Harper's Magazine v.99 1899 June-November](#)

Our secret must be our belief that God placed us here for a reason. Our secret is in the value we place on education and knowledge. Our secret is that we always work our hardest to get from here to there in hopes of

someday arriving at the promised land. We believe that we must learn from our past and survive any way we can. We try to make our way on our planet while looking at the stars and hoping our numbers someday achieve God's promise to Abraham.

This year challenged all of us in ways we never could have imagined and I have so much to say about that. Each year we return to this moment and hope we are a year wiser and not just a year older. We hope we've softened our hearts while hardening our resolve to do the work to make this world a better place. Because if too many of us hardened our hearts and softened our resolve to do the work we are all in a lot of trouble.

This year we will falter. We will hate to see ourselves on the same paths towards the same goals. We will fail at times where we've failed before and succeed in moments where we doubted success was possible.

This year we dream of accomplishing just one of the things we think will make us happier, more successful, smarter, thinner, perhaps even taller. I can dream of 5 foot 8 all of my days. It doesn't mean I can't accomplish a lot at 5 foot 7 (or if we're really going there a few years back my doc measured me at 5 foot 6 and a half. My identity crushed, I realized Somehow I've already started to shrink). What does it mean to accept ourselves as enough?

We know what we will see in the world as a people. The violence, the divisions, the wars, the sectarianism, religious persecutions of the innocent. Our Jewish history inside and outside of Torah shows us all too well the violence and heartlessness of the world, but struggles weekly to teach us how to be better human beings so we might find others like us and together teach other humans how to mend the world.

Abraham struggled with God to save Sodom and Gomorrah yet Noah didn't even blink at the thought of God destroying all of humanity with the flood. He simply planted the trees, waited for them to grow and built himself an ark to shut out the rest of the world to its demise. It never even crossed his mind that while the trees grew to provide the wood for the Ark he could

have walked the earth to convince people to change their ways, to save them, making the ark and coming flood unnecessary.

The rabbis teach that until Noah opened the ark and saw all the dead bodies and devastation wrought upon the earth, Noah had no idea of the measure of his sin.

Joseph's brothers murdered everyone in Schem for the rape of their sister, Dinah, and sold Joseph into slavery yet Joseph saves all of Egypt in order to save them some day. He forgives them, knowing it was God's will, and brings them under his protection delighted at the gift of seeing his father alive after twenty years of separation, blessed to show Jacob his grandchildren. Joseph doesn't lean in to learn to be like his brothers. He matures and learns who he is in order to be able to forgive them and save his entire family. All of this so that we might all sit here today remembering his level of forgiveness.

Our universe is so vast we are but dust within the cosmos. Yet we are all formed from the death of stars. The atoms that build our very foundations of existence contain stardust and energy that has been coursing through the universe for billions of years. Scientists even believe that the water we drink contains elements older than our sun.

Within our personal universe it takes real resolve to look inward and feel the energy of the stars course through our bodies.

It isn't that we need to understand the foundation of the universe as much as we must learn to appreciate the significance of our very existence. In the vastness we must come to understand our role in improving reality and the lives of those who surround us. Some of us might even change the world as we know it, making it a little better and a little safer for all those who come after us.

Until this year I never knew our rabbis taught this parable we all know well. The midrash tells the story of passengers on a boat. As the boat pulled away from the dock to begin its voyage, one passenger opened his bag

and took out a drill. The other passengers became alarmed as he put the drill bit against the floor under his seat and began to make a hole in the bottom of the boat. The other passengers, in fear and astonishment, pleaded with him, "Stop! What are you doing?" The man was surprised by their objections. He calmly said, "What business is it of yours? Why should you care? I'm only drilling under my own seat. I have no intention of drilling under yours." The other passengers frantically told him, "The seat might only be yours, but the water will rise up to drown us all!"

[Leviticus Rabbah 4:6](#)

Even thousands of years ago our rabbis understood our world. One planet, one boat, one holy vessel carrying us all safely into our future. The majority of space is a vacuum with temperatures at -454.81 degrees Fahrenheit. And we complain when here in Chicago when it is -10 degrees in January or 95 degrees in July. We sit here comfortably hurtling through the freezing vacuum of space protected beyond our comprehension held gently on this incredible planet. We've been spared for eons from the lack of life on the moon and mars. We sit here blessed, a humanity isolated only from each other by our own inability to see one another as family.

May this year see us in health counting our endless blessings. May we all do the work that changes the world for good, healing all that must be healed. May you always be the light you wish to see within humanity. Cayn yehi ratzon - May this be God's will.

L'shanah tovah

[Anthem - Maybe It's Time \(from A Star is Born Soundtrack\)](#)