

Kol Nidrei 5781/2020 - If not Now When?

In May of 2019, detectors picked up a signal from space that turned out to be the energy from two stellar black holes crashing into each other. One was 66 times the mass of our sun and the other a husky 85 times the mass of the sun.

The end result: The first ever discovered intermediate black hole, at 142 times the mass of the sun.

This crash happened about 7 billion years ago, when the universe was about half its current age, but is only being detected now because it is that far away from us.

https://www.nbcnews.com/science/space/biggest-bang-big-bang-scientists-detect-collision-huge-black-holes-rcna106?cid=sm_npd_nn_fb_ma&fbclid=IwAR246Qc1OqI9q0mcCOI1Jhmvqj3SKJFr6vd9peDgqeDj8uo97KNv_JITCQM&fbclid=IwAR2ac3hRlvqT-IAiya_-CssANoEwpR5Lb9rw2oISFXLfqSm8oYclyRe-ZyM&fbclid=IwAR1Xz7VcKfsphJ5I2fptoss_7TLkXj0tPlzD0kQqo1Zey6_T6BKAg6ldt4s

The speed of sound is approximately 450 mph in space. This collision occurred so far away that it took 7 billion years for our scientists to hear the crash. I complain about driving the two and a half hours to Champaign. If a sound wave had children could you imagine being stuck flying through space for 7 billion years with them? Are we there yet? Can we get ice cream? Look kids, the Milky Way! Did you know that...yes dad, ug you've told us like a bajillion times already. Are we there yet?

1.3 million earths could fit in our sun. The mass of the black hole after the collision is 142 times the mass of our sun. I can't imagine God's mood having to clean up that mess.

When I look at an ant, I feel like a giant. When I look up in the sky and see the moon or the sun, I feel smaller than an ant. When I finish a long run, or a challenging project I feel as strong as an ox.

When I look at what something microscopic like Covid-19 has done to the world I feel as helpless as a fly.

When we look up at the stars there's so much space between every speck of light. To the naked eye it all looks empty, but as a huge fan of the Hubble Telescope, the images downloaded show us a vastly different picture. The telescope sees what we cannot. It's vision fills the void with the colors and gases that fill space in visuals we can barely comprehend.

In our daily lives the smallest thing can tip the balance of how we feel for the rest of the day. We burn our toast, we break a mug, we spill our coffee, can set the tone for how we feel from that moment forward. Small moments that set the path of our day, our week, sometimes our lives.

Sometimes our lives in this world make us feel so small, and sometimes we feel as if we can move mountains.

It is a time in our world where the smallest act can affect an amazing amount of people. Wear a mask, don't wear a mask. Socially distance don't socially distance, vote don't vote.

In August I dropped my oldest, David, off at the University of Illinois for his freshman year of college. In the middle of a global pandemic I was besides myself with concern internally while a wall of stoicism and optimism externally. I was optimistic because the university pandemic task force had students tested the moment we arrived on campus and twice weekly mandatory testing for every student, faculty member and employee. I was pessimistic because, well, teenagers think they're invincible, and have been known to be stupid on occasion.

David made it 18 whole days before he tested positive with the Corona virus. His mother and I had managed to keep him safe for 160 days while allowing him to see his friends socially distanced, but within 18 days all that was gone. He has recovered from the

fevers, night sweats and general fatigue and hopefully will have no lasting side effects.

Rabbi Hillel said long ago, In a place where no one behaves like a human being, you must strive to be human! Hillel, in *Pirke Avot* 2.6

He also said, (1) "**If I am not for myself**, who will be for me? And being for **myself**, what **am I**? And **if not** now, **when**?"

This is the time where we must all strive to be human. As Jews we may be exhausted at this point of it always coming down to us to be more human than everyone else. But as a light to the nations, historically it has been our task to lead the way for the rest of the world to see the light. We understand Hillel's words in our souls, in our bones. Time and time again no one has been there for us as a people. We've had to fight to survive to gain the freedoms and comforts we've acquired, but the last four years have shown us that we must still fight for our safety. The last four years have shown us that hatred still lives next door, the next town over, a few towns away. While we love our neighbors we must also be wary of those who haven't lifted their hearts to love everyone as they wish to be loved.

"And being for myself, what am I?" Most of us spend our lives trying to understand who we are, who we want to be. We search near and far, within and without to comprehend our purpose in this life. The search is never easy and the path is never clear and yet we search, often feeling alone and as if we have no guidance towards finding our path to discover ourselves.

"If not now when?" If we always say, "I will get around to it." "I will get to it tomorrow," often we never get to it at all. Our lives today, surrounded by social media, digital devices and technological distractions lead us to forget we were walking on a path at all. The digital opiates help us forget what we were doing, why we were

doing it and how important it is to get things done. Only recently, I stopped looking at facebook. I've made it almost two weeks. I watched the first ten minutes of *The Social Dilemma* on Netflix and vowed to stop scrolling facebook when I felt the void press in, when I felt anxious, when I felt I couldn't sit on the couch without looking at something to remind me there is a world still out there.

Personally, I think I'm always chanting "if not now, when?" in my soul. I grew up post Vietnam War and post Civil Rights Movement, and waited for liberty and justice for all. I just finished reading Isabel Wilkerson's book, *Warmth of Other Suns*, and reading about the July 11, 1951 Cicero Riot over Housing desegregation. In that riot white European immigrants, maybe in America less than two decades, burnt down an entire apartment building when a college educated Black couple, that could trace their lives in America back over 200 years, tried to move into their apartment. The police cited the landlord and the realtor for the disturbance. None of the arsonists were arrested.

If not now when? When will we fix everything that needs to be fixed? If we are a light to the nations what will it take for us to call everyone to action to make the world a better place?

The smallest things in the universe matter. Whether it is a small act of kindness, the smallest, microscopic virus or a cellular anomaly our lives are changed by the smallest changes in our existence on a daily basis.

I pray every day, maybe not in words, often silently, but I pray for my family, my friends, my city, state, nation and the world. I pray every day for a solution to all that ails us and the world. Despite everything that has happened in my life I still pray. Despite everything that is happening in our state I still pray. Despite everything that is happening in governments throughout the

world, I still pray. Despite how many people hate me for being Jewish I still pray for them and pray for myself. Despite how many movements exist to deny me my existence, I still pray that we can find a way to coexist peacefully. I pray that someday everyone shares my vision.

Together we must continue the work to improve the world. Together we must hold up a mirror to racism, antisemitism, systemic inequalities. We must stop thinking that crime is the problem and address the fact that underfunded schools and educational programs have led to over 5 decades of crime and poverty. A lack of options and support maintains a system that insures a majority of our population stays uneducated and impoverished. If not now when? We all want to live in a world where we feel safe. We all want to live lives of contentment where we grow old with our friends and family. We pray for health and success so that someday we might die peacefully in bed surrounded by all of our loved ones.

Nicolas Ferriol, also known as Le Févriol or Triboulet (1479–1536), was one of the most celebrated jesters in history. He served two French kings: Louis XII and Francis I. He had all of the qualities necessary in a good court jester, most importantly, the gift of quick wit. This wit not only made him successful but it also nearly resulted in his doom. Fortunately, that very same wit ultimately saved his life.

His ability to get himself in trouble was legendary. Once a nobleman was upset about being made the butt of Triboulet's jokes and threatened to kill the jester. Triboulet ran to the king, telling him that the man was planning on hanging him. The king attempted to calm the jester, saying, "Don't worry! If he hangs you

I'll have him beheaded fifteen minutes later." Triboulet retorted, "Well, would it be possible to behead him 15 minutes before?"

Another time, Triboulet's sense of frivolity got out of control, and he slapped the king on the royal bum. The monarch lost his temper and threatened to execute Triboulet. A bit later, the monarch calmed down a little and promised to forgive Triboulet if he could think of an apology more insulting than the offending deed. A few seconds later, Triboulet responded: "I'm so sorry, your majesty, that I didn't recognize you! I mistook you for the Queen!"

Ultimately, Triboulet's joking went too far. He offended Francis I to the degree that the king ordered the execution of the jester. Out of recognition of the jester's years of faithful service, however, the king granted Triboulet the right to choose the way he would die.

Triboulet lost no time in responding. "Good sire, for Saint Nitouche's and Saint Pansard's sake, patrons of insanity, I choose to die from old age." Francis I found his response so hilarious that he commuted the death sentence and, instead, banished the jester from the realm.

<https://commonplacefacts.wordpress.com/2019/11/07/triboulet-the-jester-who-was-condemned-and-saved-by-his-wits/>

The insanity of our reality doesn't feel like it can be real. We've seen such vast changes in our world in only the last eight months. We've witnessed divisions we've been able to ignore for decades. The disparities that have always been nearly invisible blind us in their tragic immensity. If not now, when?

If we look away now we will miss a chance to make some of the greatest changes within ourselves and with our world. If we lose our humanity we lose our ability to see the humanity of our neighbor suffering differently right next to us. If we turn our hearts

to stone, we will never again be able to feel for ourselves, let alone all those who dream to feel the blessings we've created in our lives. We must feel for those who still strive for a better life while working to eradicate hateful rhetoric that makes them still think we as Jews are somehow to blame for anything. This is the paradox of being Jewish, we must constantly save the world from itself even as it spits its most vile lies in our face. If we don't work to change their baseless hatreds we will be crushed under their rush to destroy themselves with nowhere on this earth to protect us. If not now, when?

Like Triboulet, we all wish to die from old age, peacefully in our bed. We wish to see a world where our children and our children's children flourish in a world at peace, where humans coexist without famine, poverty, plague, drought, war or baseless hatred. We wish to wash these times away towards a new tomorrow where neighbors truly see and care about each other, where we work together to mend the world.

If I am not for myself, who am I? If I am only for myself, what am I? If not now when? We must keep ourselves together and understand ourselves in order to be the change we wish to see in the world. This Yom Kippur I hope you find the healing, forgiveness and peace you seek. I hope you find the words that lift your heart and spirit to be able to do the work ahead. I hope together we can create the change we need in order to be our best selves in our miraculous lives set within this vast gorgeous universe of ours. Be a blessing. Bless those who bless you. Be blessed in all you do. Embrace the blessings you receive. May you be written for a sweet and healthy new year.

Cain yehi ratzhon - may this be God's will
ANTHEM - SWEET CAROLINE