

CANTOR'S NOTES



BY CANTOR
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Shalom! I am thrilled to be your new cantor. I'm so pleased to be part of the TBE team and am grateful to everyone who made it possible! I look forward to getting acquainted, however possible under current circumstances.

Moving to a new city or job is a daunting transition for anyone, even in normal times. My interviews at TBE began as COVID-19 seeped into the news; by my final one, we were socially distanced as everything was shutting down. Now that I'm in Great Neck, it's masks in public; but I'm training B'nei Mitzvah students, leading services and doing everything else online rather than in person. It's all changed so quickly—so much is upside down! Everything I do as a cantor to bring people together in muted, *Hollywood Squares* arrangement of Zoom, an online software platform that actually prevents people from singing together.

It is challenging to get to know people like this.

Heracitus wrote, "The only constant is change." We are all living in a time of significant personal, societal and global change. So much rapid change at once produces a form of psychological paralysis known as "change shock." Perhaps you've felt it—staring blankly at your laptop screen, in pajamas, as the soundbought proofs and cable news blares in the background. It seems to accelerate daily, along with our heart rates and anxiety levels. We're all enduring, simultaneously, the pandemic, political familial proximity—the list goes on.

Each of these is a potential "lifequake," a psychologically seismic, life-altering event. We know the effect of negative news like serious health events, the death of a loved one, major financial loss or a social setback. Positive ones also have an impact, though: marriage, the birth of a child, a new home, a new job, winning lotto or retirement.

Bruce Feiler's new best-selling book, *Life Is in the Transitions*, notes that we all experience eight to ten lifequakes—each requiring adjustment averaging five years. As his title suggests, we spend half our lives working through lifequakes. Good or bad, each has tremors, aftershocks, loss, joy and rebuilding phases. But through them, we can learn, grow and repair (*tikkun*) to become more the humans G-d intended. The question is how?

The Jewish tradition speaks of two states of mind, each related to something we care about, and our anticipation of what will happen to it in the future. The first is an acute sense of loss. The Talmud (Sukkah, 30b) names the particular sense of despair over something continually pined for—

despite being unreclaimable, *yeiush*. We're all grappling with loss of what was, wishing it will return yet knowing it will never be the same.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov focused on this in his famous quotes:

Ein shum ye'ush ba'olam idel
אין שום יאוש בעולם כלי
There is no despair in the world
(that can't be overcome).

Kol ha'olam kulo geshet tzar me'od,
כל העולם כולו גשיר צר קטן

vaha'ikar lo le'yachad klal.
והיעקר לא לתדה כלי

All the world is a very narrow bridge, and the essential thing is not to be overwhelmed by fear.

Attachments to the familiar comfort us—but can lead to our being stuck in the past (TV reruns, anyone?).

As time passes, our proximity to that pain diminishes and we gain new perspectives. Overcoming *yeiush* requires letting go of yesterday, living in the now and anticipating tomorrow.

The inverse of *yeiush* is *tikvah*, familiar from Israel's national anthem, "The Hope." In Hebrew, words morph as they change tense. Interestingly, though, in Hebrew there is no good future tense for the word or even concept of hope. "I will hope" is a clumsy expression. Instead, we say "*Yesh tikvah*," (I have hope) or "*Aini m'kaveti*," (I hope). For hope to be alive, we must nurture it in the now. We can't hope for the past, only for the future while in the present.

Am Yisrael, The People of Israel, have survived by learning to overcome obstacles, oppression and the neverending march of time that is change.

In Your goodness, You daily renew creation. This radical statement isn't passive optimism. The Eternal models hope as an active state through daily renewal. We can ritualize this through prayerful recitation of words, a quick family morning affirmation or private journaling. Doing so can diminish despair in our world.

Likewise, our morning blessings, *Nissim b'Chol Yom* (Daily Miracles), are a rich ritual of the potential and poetry found in every moment of waking up—providing the opportunity to be mindful and grateful for the minuscule microseconds as our minds click on a set tone for the entire day. Over time, this and other ritual recitations of gratitude produce a context of continuity that stands up to any backdrop of change.

When our newly freed ancestors left Egypt, they could hardly take care of themselves let alone create a society or govern a land. Upon their first arrival to the land flowing with milk and honey, they were unprepared for the transition. But it was in the chrysalis of the Sinai desert that they created and adopted the laws and commandments, festival seasons, social structure and spiritual rituals which helped them navigate through very uncertain times.

Am Yisrael, The People of Israel, have survived by learning to overcome obstacles, oppression and the neverending march of time that is change. We were not lost amidst a Red Sea of lifequakes; with the Eternal's help, we marched through it. We memorialized the "Song of the Sea" moment into a daily ritual recitation of *Mi Chamosha*. What new rituals will you adopt this new year to create more hope?



Morning minyan, Torah Study, Shabbat services, TribEs, stocking food-pantry shelves and social-action initiatives— Temple Beth-El offers so many. What new rituals can you create in your own home?

Change may be the only constant for the foreseeable future. Yet, as we head into 5781, as long as we create, reinterpret and adopt rituals to overcome lifequakes, we can say "*Yesh tikvah*," we have hope. 🌱