

A calendar that goes back 5, 777 years tells you something about time perspective in Judaism. We are not focused on the short term.

If it takes an extra 40 years to get to the Promised Land, well its more important that we do it right.

The walls of Jerusalem were breached almost 2,000 years ago, but we still sit on the floor to mourn their destruction.

5,777 is an interesting number. It is very large and yet not beyond our imagination. It is perhaps the span of history, if we associate history with literacy.

Life has existed for billions of years, but we can't really think about billions.

Speaking to us in human language, 5777 tells us to focus on the long haul.

By starting the Torah with creation, the infusion of order into a chaotic universe, we are also announcing that our concerns go beyond the parochial, beyond our own people. We are to stretch beyond the selfishness of me and my, whether that is my family, my nation or my generation.

Thinking beyond the present generations is how we as Jews have organized family life for centuries. You might think that we owe respect and honor to our parents

because of what they did to help us when we were young, but that's not how Jewish tradition understands it.

We treat our parents with respect and care when they are older, because we saw them take care of our grandparents in this loving way. It is the opposite of the story of the boy carving a wooden plate for his parents. Remember him? He saw his parents take the good china away from his aged grandparents, whose hands were no longer steady. He wanted to be ready. We reap what we have sown. It's part of the beautiful Shma Koleinu prayer that we sing on Yom Kippur- do not cast we aside when I am old, when I am frail do not abandon me.

And we invest so much in our children not because we are expecting dividends later on, but because we are hoping they will do the same for their own children, our grandchildren. The chain of tradition is not just a photo-op at Bar and Bat Mitzvah services, it is an awareness that infuses Jewish culture throughout the generations. In one of the earliest documents we have written by a Jewish woman, in the diary of Gluckel of Hameln, we find the story of a mother bird, who asks her chicks, not a promise of loyalty to her, but a promise of self- sacrifice for their own hatchlings.

Now that we have our early childhood center, my office is a very different place. My window opens up to the play area where the preschool classes spend many hours in the good weather. The sounds of their play are the background noise of my day- or not so background when they come up to window and knock and want me to pay attention to them-right now.

The work of making the world a better place, can sometimes feel abstract or remote- it feels a lot less so with a bunch of three year olds gathered at my window. What will we, the current generation of grown –ups bequeath to them? What is the impact of what we do, on what will be their lives?

During this past month of Elul, one of the mothers of a young child, approached me with a project she is involved with called “Dear Tomorrow.” People are encouraged to write letters, or post photo’s or video’s to their children, or grandchildren, nieces, nephews, or special friends, which will be delivered in the future, in 2030 or 2050. Thinking about the future, the writers make commitments to the people they love to act in future enhancing ways.

One mother wrote: “I want you to watch the sunset and feel hope for your tomorrow. I want you to witness the massive changes we made as a society to protect you and this precious planet.” The organizers include economists and

other hard data people and they have the evidence that just writing a letter of this sort powerfully influences behavior. Another mother wrote explicitly about her motivation to act: "I promise to use my vote and my voice to ensure a better future for you." The strategy is meant to help overcome a particular bias, which we all share to some extent, in that we tend to discount the future for the present. Remember when you were young and one cookie now was so much better than two cookies promised for later. Even adults believe that \$100 now is better than \$120 later. Later is theoretical, it may or may not come. Life is short we say, eat dessert first. But actions that make the future more salient to us, more real, can change the discount we give to the future. Imagining the future more vividly makes us more willing today to make sacrifices for a better tomorrow. Imagining the future more concretely, the future of someone we love and care about, changes our thinking and can promote action.

The reputable scientific community has given us lots of information as to the risks of climate change for the future. But in terms of their reception by society at large, these scientists are like the prophets of ancient Israel. As Isaiah described it, those he spoke to "hear, indeed, but do not understand. See, indeed, but do not grasp." The words of the prophets were ignored and the prophets found themselves hounded or even in jail. They were appreciated only after disaster

struck. It was only then that their prophecies were gathered up and made part of our scripture. It was only after the disasters they warned us about happened that we took them seriously. But that is not an option this time. Are we going to wait for Miami Beach to be under water? For illness and instability to spread across the globe?

I understand, there is so much that we deal with every day and so often the urgent squeezes out the important. I know it happens to me—it's the reason why I am up after 10 pm writing sermons and eulogies: they were on the top of my to do list, but all day long there were urgent issues, phone calls and meetings, to take care of.

A lot of people ask, why, if we know that climate change is such a present danger—if the military and insurance companies, hardly hotbeds of environmental activism, are planning for it, why are we doing so little?

Some say it is because we are shut down by the emotions we feel when really thinking about the implications of climate change. We live in the state of denial, so as to be able to function. Others say that is because we are resistant to making the changes that would be needed, changes more profound than recycling newspapers and cans, or even starting our own backyard composting.

Jewish tradition has another answer, which I find insightful.

IN the Talmud, it says that on Rosh Hashanah we imagine God taking out three books. One is for the totally righteous, one is for the totally wicked, and one is for the bein-oni, the middling, those neither totally righteous or totally wicked. The book of the righteous and the book of the wicked are sealed on that day, but God keeps the third book open a little longer. The crowds at High Holiday Services imply that most of us believe we are in this middle group. But when Maimonides writes this passage of the Talmud into his famous book the Mishneh Torah, he writes it differently. For Maimonides, the righteous person is not the person who is completely righteous, but the person who has one righteous act more than wicked acts, the person who is 51% righteous, and the wicked person is the opposite, 51% wicked. We and our world constantly live in the tension of being on the edge, with one single act having the potential to tip us one way or the other. Rabbi Shai Held asks, why would Maimonides rewrite the Talmud in this way? Maimonides knew what it says. Rabbi Held holds it was for educational purposes and I think it applies to the issue of responding to global warming.

Some people are saints- like my husband--they turn off the water while soaping up in the shower, they take public transportation even if to meetings in the

middle of Los Altos Hills, they eat meat only when it is leftovers and they are insuring that the cow didn't die in vain, they are passionate one issue voters on the question: do you believe in science. Others are el destructo. But most of us are in the middle and knowing that's where most everyone else is, we don't feel that motivated to do anything much about it. We are comfortable believing we are no better but also no worse than everyone else.

But what if we accept Maimonides approach? What if being righteous is within our grasp? What if it is based on that next choice that we are about to make?

What if our world is in limbo, awaiting our next decision, to fall either into doom or to deliverance? Then I think the vast middle might perk up and see the power of our own actions on the creation of the future.

There are rays of light. We are generating more energy from renewable resources. Younger people are driving less. Individuals and organization are harnessing the power they have as shareholders to influence large companies. Countries that we thought would never agree to make concessions have signed on. And there are things we know that would help us to go further, like carbon offsets, higher density housing and more public transportation, if only we had the political will to make them actual.

As individuals a little knowledge can go a long way. Do you know what your household's carbon footprint is? Once you know it is easier to determine where the big wins might be for your family. If the bulk of your carbon usage is those daily drives to work or school, could those be replaced with carpooling, or even public transportation for a part of the distance? Maybe for your household it's reducing your consumption of meat- or putting solar panels on your roof? Do you live in a community that is looking at building housing? Perhaps your voice will make a difference in encouraging plans that are sustainable for the future.

You can find your carbon footprint easily on line, but to make it even simpler and more motivating, after yuntef open the Temple's homepage and you can link right to our footprint monitor. See where you are today and make a pledge for the year to come. We will aggregate those pledges and make a congregational contribution towards a better future . In some ways it is like writing a letter to the future- in that it will change your sense of who you are. Once you are someone who has acted to make a difference, you will be more conscious of other actions, at home, at work, and at the polls, that can multiply your impact.

I look at our children outside my window, and I calculate, what year will it be when they are my age? What kind of world will they experience in 2070- or even

when they graduate from college in 2030? My world was full of trees, because past generations planted for me, can we do any less?