

HOPE IN THE TIME OF PANDEMIC: AN INTERFAITH CONVERSATION

Sponsored by the Sandra & Irwin Mandel Fund
Adath Jeshurun Congregation



Lessons from the School of Hope....

- False hope vs. true hope
- Hope *for* and hope *in*
- Hoping *with*
- Hope has *agency*
- Hope is a journey



“Today I would like to share something very personal with you.

“As some of you may know, I have recently had some issues with my health which raised concerns and impacted upon my work. After many medical appointments and examinations, I was finally diagnosed with multiple sclerosis on 15th January this year.

“When the doctors first raised the possibility of it last year, I felt as if the world had collapsed around me. I went through a rollercoaster of feelings of panic, fear and devastation. I had many, many questions. How would this impact my life? My work?

“I have since spent a lot of time researching multiple sclerosis and its implications and have met with many doctors. With each new piece of information, I realize I previously had a false image of this disease. Multiple sclerosis is a disease of the central nervous system and, while no known cure exists, thanks to huge medical advances over the years a large majority of people affected by it are able to live full and fulfilling lives.

“It’s going to take me a while to get to know this condition and how I will manage it for myself. There will come times when I will have to face challenges and make adjustments, but in finding the right balance of treatment I am confident and optimistic that I will continue to live my life – and travel and perform – as before. I’m looking forward to continuing my season as planned.”

“Sharing this with everybody was not an easy decision, but I believe it is the right one.

“MS is a very misunderstood disease in our society and by being open about it **I hope I can encourage others** (especially those who are diagnosed with it when they think their lives have only just begun) to do the same.

“An acknowledgement is not a weakness, but a way to protect and gain strength, both for oneself and for those around us. I am grateful to my loved ones who have shown me so much support and love over the past few months. They have not only had their own emotions to deal with but have also had to face questions about my welfare. In clarifying my situation, I also hope to relieve them and give them the time and space to process this.

“Sometimes life leads you on **an unexpected path**, and I am at the very beginning of this new one for me. However, I strongly believe it is up to us to make the best.”



-Alice Sara Ott, February 16, 2019, *pizzicato*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PM0HqmpYIY&t=2376s>



Rabbi Sharon Brous

***Lo l'hityaesh!* said Rabbi Nahman.** Do not despair! Never, ever give up. Just because things are, does not mean that they must be. Just because it has never before been, does not mean it can never be. Just because the story of your life has been set in prose does not mean in an instant it can't turn into poetry.

Every moment could be the moment your dreams are realized. **We are called to give ourselves a second chance, and to give one to others, too....to our partners, parents, children, friends, and ourselves. *Lo l'hityaesh* – try just one more time!**


All of that is true. It's just that it's not the whole truth. Yes, we should dream great dreams. Big, audacious dreams. We should believe in the power of change, we should fight for love. But sometimes, when we're so laser focused on Plan A, we ignore evidence that this plan has no reasonable chance of succeeding. **At some point, determination turns into delusion.**

There is a time for hope and a time for a good back-up plan. **A time for holding on and a time for letting go. A time for a valiant *lo l'hityaesh* - never despair! And a time for what's called in our tradition *ye-ush* – despair.**

The concept of *ye-ush* originates in the Talmudic discussion of *hashavat aveidah*, lost objects. The Torah is explicit that if a person comes across a lost object, she is obligated to return it to the owner (Deuteronomy 22: 1-3). The Rabbis make it clear that she has to go to great lengths to return it - posting around the neighborhood, knocking on doors, announcing it at the public square. But once the owner has given up on retrieving it, the finder is no longer obligated to keep searching.

The thing about *ye-ush* is that it is a legal principle that is dependent entirely on a spiritual and mental state: your recognition that hope is truly lost. It's completely personal. **Nobody else can tell you when you're done... not your folks, best friend, partner, or your therapist. Only you will know when you reach the point of *ye-ush*.**

Sometimes we need to move on, not only from hopes and expectations for others, but also from our own dreams. It's so hard to contemplate walking away when you've given so much of yourself. Yet that's precisely what we must sometimes do. **Declare *ye-ush*, so that we can grieve and begin to rebuild.**



ESCHATOLOGY
a symbolic explanation for the
end of things that makes
sense of everything else



U.S. RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE SURVEY

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES: DIVERSE AND POLITICALLY RELEVANT

JUNE 2008

Life After Death

	NET believe	Yes, believe in life after death Absolutely certain	Fairly certain	Not certain	Don't believe in life after death	Other/ Don't know	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Total population	74	50	19	6	18	9	=100
Protestant	81	62	16	3	12	6	=100
<i>Evangelical churches</i>	86	71	12	1	10	4	=100
<i>Mainline churches</i>	78	49	24	6	14	8	=100
<i>Historically black churches</i>	79	62	13	3	14	7	=100
Catholic	77	45	25	7	15	8	=100
Mormon	98	88	8	2	1	1	=100
Jehovah's Witness	42	37	4	1	45	13	=100
Orthodox	74	47	23	4	19	7	=100
Jewish	39	16	15	7	45	16	=100
Muslim	77	67	7	3	18	5	=100
Buddhist	68	32	25	9	24	8	=100
Hindu	65	33	21	10	26	8	=100
Unaffiliated	48	21	19	9	39	13	=100
<i>Atheist</i>	18	5	8	5	75	8	=100
<i>Agnostic</i>	35	11	14	10	45	20	=100
<i>Secular unaffiliated</i>	44	14	19	11	43	14	=100
<i>Religious unaffiliated</i>	66	36	23	7	22	12	=100

Question: Do you believe in life after death? [IF YES, ASK]: How certain are you about this belief? Are you absolutely certain, fairly certain, not too certain, or not at all certain?

Miracles and the Supernatural

	Believe in miracles			Believe in angels and demons		
	NET	Completely	Mostly	NET	Completely	Mostly
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total population	79	47	32	68	40	28
Protestant	86	54	32	79	50	29
<i>Evangelical churches</i>	88	61	27	87	61	26
<i>Mainline churches</i>	81	42	39	65	31	34
<i>Historically black churches</i>	88	58	30	87	59	28
Catholic	83	47	36	69	35	34
Mormon	96	80	16	88	59	29
Jehovah's Witness	30	15	15	95	78	17
Orthodox	79	43	36	66	34	32
Jewish	52	21	31	21	9	12
Muslim	69	39	30	79	45	34
Buddhist	62	31	31	37	14	23
Hindu	69	24	45	37	18	19
Unaffiliated	55	25	30	40	18	22
<i>Atheist</i>	21	11	10	14	6	8
<i>Agnostic</i>	37	14	23	19	7	12
<i>Secular unaffiliated</i>	48	19	29	29	10	19
<i>Religious unaffiliated</i>	78	40	38	68	35	33

Question: Here are a few statements. For each one, please tell me if you completely agree with it, mostly agree with it, mostly disagree with it, or completely disagree with it. The first/next one is [INSERT; RANDOMIZE]...do you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree or completely disagree?

(a) Miracles still occur today as in ancient times.

(b) Angels and demons are active in the world.

EMET VE-EMUNAH

אמת ואמונה



**STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES
OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM**

**The Jewish Theological Seminary of America
The Rabbinical Assembly
United Synagogue of America
Women's League for Conservative Judaism
Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs**

For the individual human being, we affirm that death does not mean extinction and oblivion. This conviction is articulated in our tradition in the two doctrines of the bodily resurrection of the dead and the continuing existence, after death and through eternity, of the individual soul.

In the course of our history, both of these doctrines have been understood in widely varying ways. For some of us, they are literal truths which enable us to confront death and the death of our loved ones with courage and equanimity. Others understand these teachings in a more figurative way. The doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, omnipresent in our liturgy, affirms in a striking way the value Judaism accords to our bodily existence in our concrete historical and social setting. Beyond this, we know that our genetic make-up will persist through our progeny, long after our deaths and as long as humankind survives.

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul affirms that our identities and our ability to touch other people and society does not end with the physical death of our bodies. Great personalities from the beginning of history remain potent influences in the world. On a more personal level, our friends and the members of our families who are gone are still palpably alive for us to this day.

We **reassert** the doctrine of Judaism that **the soul is immortal**, grounding the belief on the divine nature of human spirit, which forever finds bliss in righteousness and misery in wickedness. We **reject** as ideas not rooted in Judaism, the **beliefs both in bodily resurrection and in Gehenna and Eden** (Hell and Paradise) as abodes for everlasting punishment and reward.

Declaration of Principles
("The Pittsburgh Platform") 1885

Judaism affirms that **man is created in the Divine image. His spirit is immortal.** He is an active co-worker with God.

The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism
("The Columbus Platform") 1937

The trials of our own time and the challenges of modern culture have made steady belief and clear understanding difficult for some. Nevertheless, we ground our lives, personally and communally, on God's reality and remain open to new experiences and conceptions of the Divine. **Amid the mystery we call life, we affirm that human beings, created in God's image, share in God's eternity despite the mystery we call death.**

Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective
(San Francisco) 1976

We affirm that every human being is created **בצלם אלוהים (*b'tzelem Elohim*), in the image of God**, and that therefore every human life is sacred. We trust in our tradition's promise that, **although God created us as finite beings, the spirit within us is eternal.**

A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism
(Pittsburgh) 1999

יְנַאֲמֵן אֲתָהּ לְהַחְיֹת מֵתִים. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, מְחַיֵּה הַמֵּתִים.

Faithful art Thou to grant eternal life to the departed. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who callest the dead to life everlasting.

High Holiday Prayerbook, 1951

Faithful are You in giving life to the dead. Praised are You, Lord, Master of Life and Death.

Mahzor for Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur, 1972

You are faithful in bringing life to the dead. Barukh Atah Adonai, who gives life to the dead.

Mahzor Lev Shalem, 2010

Thou wilt fulfil Thy promise of immortal life unto those who sleep in the dust. Praised be Thou, who hast implanted within us immortality.

Union Prayer Book, 1930

You keep faith with those who sleep in the dust. Blessed in the Lord, the Source of Life.

The New Union Prayer Book, 1975

Faithfully giving life to all (reviving that which is dead). Blessed are You, Adonai, who gives life to all (revives the dead).

Mishkan Tefillah, 2007

Faithful and true, worthy of our trust, You sustain our immortal yearnings; in You we place our undying hopes. Wellspring of Blessing, Power eternal, You are the One who gives and renews all life.

Mishkan HaNefesh, 2015

“Resurrection of the Dead” as Metaphor

ר"ש בן יהוצדק כל מי שנאמרה הלכה בשמו בעולם הזה שפתותיו דובבות
בקבר שנאמר דובב שפתי ישנים

Rabbi *Shimon ben Yehotzadak* taught: Anyone whose teaching is cited by name in this world, (it is as if) his lips are moving from the grave, as it says in the Songs of Songs (7.10) “his gentle lips move in sleep.”
Sanhedrin 90b

מר רבי יהושע בן לוי: הרוֹאֶה אֶת חֲבִירוֹ לְאַחַר שְׁלֹשִׁים יוֹם, אוֹמֵר: “בָּרוּךְ ... שֶׁהִחְיִינוּ
וְקִיָּמנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה.” לְאַחַר שָׁנִים עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ, אוֹמֵר: “בָּרוּךְ ... מְחַיֶּה הַמֵּתִים”

Said Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: Upon seeing a friend that one has not seen for 30 days, one says “Praised are You, God, Who has kept us in life, and sustained us, and allowed us to reach this moment.” But if twelve months have elapsed, one says; “Praised are You, God, Who brings the dead back to life.”

Berachot 58b

7th Inning Stretch



**Please take 60 seconds to stand up and stretch
before we continue!**

“...for a Catholic, the world is a very crowded place....”

Tobias Wolff, author





The
communion
of saints





Remembering and being re- membered....

- The dead teach us how to live
- The dead teach us how to love
- As we remember them, the dead re-
member us

Psalm 23: A Psalm of David.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;

he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death,

I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
my whole life long.



The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.”

Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.”

I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act,” says the LORD.



COLLANTES, Francisco
(1599-1656)

The Vision of Ezekiel
1630
Museo del Prado, Madrid



בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי, הַבּוֹטֵעַ בְּתוֹכֵנוּ אֶהָבָה וְתִקְוָה.

Baruch atah, Adonai, hanotei-a b'tocheinu ahavah v'tikvah.

Blessed are You, Eternal Presence,
who implants within us love and hope for the future.