



Dear Friends and Colleagues:

In a bit of delightful serendipity, my wife gave me a gift of the physicist David Deutsch's book *The Beginning of Infinity* in the midst of this year's *asesret y'mai t'shuva*, the 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Hayom harat olam ("today the world is born"). It is unlikely that the authors of this centerpiece of the High Holiday liturgy had the Big Bang in mind, but it's what I always think of.

Carl Sagan helps us conjure that moment: "All the matter in the universe was concentrated at extremely high density—a kind of cosmic egg, reminiscent of the creation myths of many cultures." Then, the primordial explosion, occurring on "a day without yesterday" (as one of the originators of the theory, Georges Lemaître, put it), burst forth. After expanding from a singularity, the universe cooled sufficiently to make way for life as we know it.

Deutsch's book sets forth a bold proposition: He argues that the fundamental engine of human progress is our ongoing quest for better and better explanations. He notes with some awe the distance "between the enormous reach and power of our best theories and the precarious, local means by which we create them." We humans have always imagined truths about our universe that ought to be, long before we had the physical tools to prove them true, from the first [astronomical observations of an expanding universe](#) to this year's [discovery of two black holes colliding a billion light-years away](#), the first

evidence of gravitational waves, Einstein's ripples in the fabric of space-time.

While it may be the engine that drives progress, the search for better and better explanations of “what is there, what it does, and how, and why” can be disquieting, as this (and I suspect any) parent of young children can attest. Searching out new explanations requires us to be willing to shed old ones, destabilizing world views that have served us just fine up until now.

I keep coming back to this destabilizing-yet-indispensable questing for understanding as I think about the work of *cheshbon ha-nefesh*—the “accounting of the soul”—that is perhaps the essential undertaking of the 10 days of *teshuvah*. [Teshuvah](#) is literally defined as “return” and signifies repentance. We often conflate the two, believing that if we can only return to our original, purest self, we will have repented. But Deutsch is making the opposite point: It's only when we look for better and better understandings of ourselves that we can make any progress at all.

It's the clash between the Wizard of Oz's “If I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own back yard” and Tom Wolfe's “you can never go home again”—put more poetically by Heraclitus: No human ever steps in the same river twice, for it is not the same river, and she is not the same human.

What if [teshuvah](#) isn't the return to some elemental, pure version of ourselves, but instead represents the elemental quest for learning, for striving, for improvement? What if *teshuvah* is the essence of human progress, in tension not with sin but with stasis? What if, in these 10 days—a condensed, accelerated window that hearkens to the very moment of *harat olam*, the birth of the universe, whose release of energy 13.7 billion years ago made possible this best of all possible worlds—our work is to ask questions of ourselves to better understand what is there, and what we do, and how, and why?

These are certainly the questions that animate us at the Foundation, where we have the privilege of partnering with you at this extraordinary moment of human and Jewish history, to engage together in this act of *teshuvah*, questing to find yet better explanations, distilled from the breadth of Jewish teaching and learning, for what it means to live a good life.

L'shana tova,
Aaron



Save the Date

Wednesday, December 14, 2016

Along with our partners at the Jewish Education Project, we are pleased to present the 2016 Jewish Futures Conference. In addition to a full program and insights from **DAN ARIELY**, one of the world's foremost behavioral psychologists, the event will also feature the Inaugural Award Presentation for the Lippman Kanfer Prize for Applied Jewish Wisdom. Please save the date and [sign up below to be notified when registration opens](#). We'd love to see you there.

GIVING

The world of virtual education is still very new for the Jewish community, but it has proven its potential elsewhere - virtual tools can enable an excellent educator to get into more classrooms with great efficiency – which has some tremendous implications for the many Jewish communities in the US and around the world. For nearly ten years, [Bible Raps](#) evaluations have shown that their students retain the knowledge they've learned through the mnemonic of hip-hop. However, a consistent challenge for Bible Raps has been its dependence on a single educator and a small group of colleagues to deliver the programs. Despite being able to make a quite strong case for using hip hop as a medium to help bring Jewish teaching to students in ways that feel relevant and authentic to them, the realities of working with a small team has meant time-bound rather than ongoing engagement with students, and a

significant geographic constraint.

We are pleased to have supported Bible Raps in experimenting to execute increasingly successful virtual workshops. As a foundation with generous, but limited resources, we are constantly asking ourselves how best to deploy these in the service of our vision and mission. Here, our support has not only provided Bible Raps with resources to refine and test a unique pedagogy, but also to develop a proof of concept model for expanding virtual education in Jewish space, significantly scaling the reach and impact of exceptional educators previously bound by geography and other issues of access – something which we hope will be a valuable learning for the field at large.

To learn more about the specific insights and explorations of Bible Raps, [click here](#) to read [our blog post](#).

To learn more about how you can partner with Bible Raps to bring a virtual workshop to your community, [click here](#).

A speech bubble graphic with a dark red background and a black outline. Inside the bubble, the text "CAN I PRAY FOR OTHERS?" is written in a light purple, hand-drawn font. The bubble is centered on a dark grey background.

Sh'ma Now's [September issue, Hineni](#).

Now live: [October's issue. *Al tifrosh min hatzibur*](#) - Do not separate yourself from the community.

LEARNING

On September 21st, we convened a conversation on “New” Frameworks for Transmitting Jewish Wisdom, in collaboration with the Foundation for Jewish Camp.

We wanted to bring together individuals and organizations who have been using frameworks -- like ‘Jewish sensibilities,’ the mussar practice of working on middot and ‘Jewish values’ -- to share about their work and the challenges they have observed in using those frameworks. We wanted to learn more about what motivates these attempts to provide new/old frameworks and models for conveying Jewish wisdom, what the frameworks point towards/how do they 'work', what questions arise when using the frameworks and what steps might be taken to advance this enterprise.

A highlight of the conversation was identifying a number of conceptual and practical challenges, which included:

- 1) Choosing a language framework for capturing and presenting Jewish wisdom in an accessible way
- 2) Balancing accessibility with depth
- 3) Defining the ultimate purpose of applying Jewish wisdom
- 4) Identifying and employing educational approaches that move learners from exposure to internalization to inspired action
- 5) Dealing with the question of what is distinctively “Jewish” and what is universal in “Jewish wisdom”
- 6) Balancing a desire to meet people where they are and respond to their immediate needs with a desire to encourage them to move beyond where they are toward becoming their “best selves”
- 7) Encouraging people to do what can be done as individual work and simultaneously creating collective environments (communities) that both support and guide individual change

We remain curious about what steps might be taken to advance this conversation. If you are interested in collaborating to work on tackling any of these challenges , [please be in touch with us.](#)



We've moved offices!

Please change our physical mailing address in your files:

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SHARING

We appreciated Eliza Slavet's evolving [thoughts on alienation](#) during the Holidays as shared in [eJewishPhilanthropy](#) - which she has turned into an [emerging organization](#) (which happens to be a [Semifinalist for the Lippman Kanfer Prize for Applied Jewish Wisdom](#))

[Bible Raps](#) has created a [retreat](#), the weekend of November 18-20, to bring together Jewish educators and others who love hip hop to think, create and learn together in Philadelphia. Cost is only \$25, and includes a rap battle. Registration is open!

ICYMI, this past August, Beth Cousens released a fascinating exploratory study on what impact rabbinic literature has on students. ["A Text That Is Never Resolved": Skills, Knowledge, and Personal Meaning in Students' Experiences of Rabbinic Literature.](#)

The Jewish Education Project has a [microgrant program](#) to help organizations move ideas from thought to action. Applications are due by 9 am, October 26.

Looking for Sukkot ideas? [Makerspace tools](#) might help you add to your repertoire - a roundup from Digital JLearning Network.

What else should we be sharing?
[Click here to send us your recommendations!](#)



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