Anticipatory Memory: Remembering the Future

Part of the Fall Learning Series, Back to the Future: Jewish Perspectives on What Comes Next

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As vice chancellor for Religious Life and Engagement, Rabbi Gordon Tucker focuses on enhancing Jewish life at JTS, enriching our study of Judaism with the joy and deep understanding that only lived experience can provide. A leading scholar and interpreter of Conservative Judaism, he also articulates the enduring power of JTS's compelling approach to Jewish law and Jewish life, while strengthening JTS's religious leadership through partnerships with organizations in the Conservative Movement and beyond.

Rabbi Tucker served from 1994 to 2018 as senior rabbi of one of North America's foremost Conservative congregations, Temple Israel Center in White Plains, NY. Under his leadership, the synagogue flourished and was characterized by vibrant communal life and an exceptional devotion to Jewish learning. While at Temple Israel Center, Rabbi Tucker mentored numerous JTS Rabbinical School students who worked at the synagogue as part of the prestigious Gladstein Fellowship in Entrepreneurial Rabbinic Leadership. He served, as well, as an adjunct JTS faculty member, teaching courses in Jewish thought and ethics, the history and philosophy of Conservative Judaism, and leadership skills for rabbis.

His interests are in modern Jewish thought, religious ethics, and philosophy of halakhah. He has published a translation and commentary on Abraham Joshua Heschel's magnum opus on rabbinic theology, with the English title Heavenly Torah, as well as many articles and essays in his fields of interest. His commentary on Pirkei Avot appeared more recently in Pirkei Avot Lev Shalem, published by the Rabbinical Assembly.

TEXTS FOR "ANTICIPATORY MEMORY: REMEMBERING THE FUTURE"

A. SOME STRANGE FORMULATIONS

From the Insertion for New Moon and Festivals in the Amidah

אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ וֵא-לֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ יַעֲלֶה וְיָבֹא וְיַגִּיעַ וְיֵרָאֶה וְיֵרָצֶה וְיִשָּׁמַע וְיִפָּקֵד וְיִזָּכֵר זִכְרוֹנֵנוּ וּפִקְדוֹנֵנוּ וְזִכְרוֹן אֲבוֹתֵינוּ. **וְזִכְרוֹן מָשִׁיחַ בֶּן דָּוִד עַבְדֶּךָ**. וְזִכְרוֹן יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִיר קָדְשֶׁךָ.

Our God and God of our ancestors, may there ascend, come, and reach, appear, be desired, and heard, counted and recalled our remembrance and reckoning; the remembrance of our fathers; **the remembrance of the Messiah the son of David, Your servant**; the remembrance of Jerusalem, city of Your Holiness.

Isaiah 47:7

וַתֹּאמְרִי לְעוֹלָם אֶהְיֶה גְּבֶרֶת עַד לֹא־שַׂמְתְּ אֵלֶּה עַל־לִבֵּךְ **לֹא זָכַרְתְּ אַחֲרִיתָהּ**:

You said, "I shall be mistress forever," so that you did not lay these things to heart or **remember their end**.

Lamentations (Eikhah) 1:9

טֻמְאָתָהּ בְּשׁוּלֶיהָ **לֹא זָכְרָה אַחֲרִיתָהּ** וַתֵּרֶד פְּלָאִים אֵין מְנַחֵם לָהּ:

Her uncleanness was in her skirts; **she did not remember her future**; her downfall was appalling, with none to comfort her.

B. A VERY STRANGE MIDRASH ON AN APPARENTLY SIMPLE VERSE

Exodus 19:4

אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרָיִם וָאֶשָּׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל־כַּנְפֵי נְשָׁרִים **וָאָבִא אֶתְכֶם אֵלָי**:

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings **and brought you to Me**.

Jerusalem Targum ("Pseudo-Jonathan") on Exodus 19:4

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians; how I bore you upon the clouds as upon eagles' wings from Pelusium (biblical "Rameses"), to take you to the site of the holy Temple, there to offer the Paschal sacrifice; and on the same night brought you back to Pelusium, and from there have brought you close so as to receive My instruction.

C. A POSSIBLE RESOLUTION

Goldstein, Rebecca, *Incompleteness: The Proof and Paradox of Kurt Gödel*, pp. 254-255

Is there anything we know more intimately than the fleetingness of time, the transience of each and every moment? Yet, strangely enough, it isn't so..... not if we take Einstein's physics seriously.....

In Einstein's physics, there is no passage of time, no unidirectional flow away from the fixed past and toward the uncertain future. The temporal component of space-time is as static as the spatial components; physical time is as still as physical space. It is all laid out, the whole spread of events, in the tenseless four-dimensional space-time manifold..... as Einstein told Rudolf Carnap, "The experience of the now means something special for man, something essentially different from the past and the future, but this important difference does not and cannot occur within physics".....

Yehudah Halevi, Prelude to *Nishmat*, in Scheindlin, Raymond, *The Gazelle*, pp. 155-159

יְחִידָה, שַׁחֲרִי הָאֵל וְסִפָּיו
וְכִקְטֹרֶת תְּנִי שִׁירֵךְ בְּאַפָּיו
הֲלוֹא אִם תִּרְדְּפִי הַבְלֵי זְמַנֵּךְ
וְתֹאמְרִי בִּי אֱמֶת הֵם כָּל כְּשָׁפָיו
וְתַזְלִי אַחֲרָיו לֵילֵךְ וְיוֹמֵךְ
וְתֶעֱרַב לָךְ תְּנוּמָה מִנְּשָׁפָיו
דְּעִי כִּי אֵין בְּיָדַיִךְ מְאוּמָה
אֶבֶל עֵץ יִבְשׁוּ מָחָר עֳנָפָיו
הֱיִי לִפְנֵי אֵ-לֹהַיִךְ וּמַלְכֵּךְ
אֲשֶׁר בָּאת לַחֲסוֹת תַּחַת כְּנָפָיו
שְׁמוֹ יִגְדַּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ בְּפִי כֹּל
אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמַת אֵ- לוֹהַּ חַי בְּאַפָּיו.

My soul, seek God at dawn, attend His house,
And set your song like incense before Him.
For if you run to try to trap Time's vapors,
Mistaking his illusions for the truth,
And wander wayward, night and day behind him,
Loving lazy mornings after nights of pleasure —
Know that nothing really is your own
Except a tree whose boughs will one day wither.
Then be before your Lord, your God and King,
From whom you seek protection underneath His wing.
His name be ever magnified and sanctified:
Let every mouth that breathes His greatness sing.

R. Abraham Joshua Heschel of Apt (Opatow), *Ohev Yisrael*, Commentary on Ki Tetze

באדם שייך עבר ועתיד. אבל אצל הש"י אינו שייך זה.

Human beings are subject to past and future, but this does not apply to the Blessed God.

From: Hoffman, Lawrence, "Remembering the Dead: By Us and by God", in: *May God Remember* (ed. L. Hoffman), pp. 22-29

Time "passes"; space does not. Because time passes us by, bit by bit, we tell people to pay attention to what's happening; for a time "comes" and then it inevitably "goes". Space, on the other hand, is a huge undifferentiated terrain in which we must locate ourselves and through which we may pass back and forth if we like, endlessly visiting and revisiting sites that exist simultaneously on a map…..

[T]he Rabbis treated God's memory other than we do; it was, for them, a spatial, not a temporal thing…..

When we say of God, *Zokher chasdei avot*, "God remembers the righteousness of the ancestors", it is not that God flips through an old picture album to remember the good old days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Imagine God instead surveying space like time: God looks at our ancestors and then at us and links the two with the connective tissue of divine grace.

We can now see what prayers for God to remember do. They provide pointers that, as it were, attract God's attention on the divine map of space-time. With regard to our deceased, it is as if we understand that they are dead only from the perspective of human beings, for whom space is unending but time is not. In God's mind's eye, however, time too is all-present, so that even those who die are as alive as ever.

D. WHAT IT CAN MEAN FOR US TODAY

Gerson D. Cohen, *The Soteriology of R. Abraham Maimuni*, 1967, reprinted in *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures*, pp. 223–4

In the view of Maimonides, the *ultimate* reward of the righteous was not the messianic redemption and the resurrection connected with it, but the incorporeal state of the soul in the world to come. In attempting to understand Maimonides' reading of classical texts, Nahmanides noted that Maimonides' view of the sequence of eschatological rewards derived from the latter's understanding of the term *olam ha-ba*. According to Nahmanides, Maimonides could say that *ha-olam ha-ba* was not a world to be created in the future but one that is already in existence, one into which the souls of the righteous enter immediately after death, because Maimonides understood the Hebrew expression as it was used by Andalusians. Only among the latter, Nahmanides claimed, would one find the usage of the expression *ha-olam ha-ba* as the state of immortality

enjoyed by the soul at the present time immediately after the death of the body. Not only was Nahmanides right that Andalusians used the words *ha-olam ha-ba* in that sense, but evidence can also be adduced that they even used the single word *olam* and its inflections in that sense. Abraham Maimuni, brought up under an Andalusian curriculum, absorbed such usage as a matter of course.....Thus, in his *Milhamot ha-Shem*, composed in defense of his father's eschatology, he cited in proof that the state of incorporeal bliss is one reached by the great sages even in the present world the Talmudic blessing: עוֹלָמְךָ תִּרְאֶה בְּחַיֶּיךָ וְאַחֲרִיתְךָ לְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם

(May you experience the eternity that is yours while you live,
And may your future thus be of life eternal).

Goldstein, Rebecca, *Incompleteness: The Proof and Paradox of Kurt Gödel*, p. 255

Einstein, living "under the sword of Damocles" [he had already been diagnosed with a growing and fatal abdominal aneurysm], seemed to take comfort in his vision of tenseless physical objectivity. In a condolence letter to the widow of Michele Besso, his longtime friend and fellow physicist, Einstein [who would die less than 5 weeks later] wrote: "In quitting this strange world he has once again preceded me by just a little. That doesn't mean anything. For us convinced physicists the distinction between past, present, and future is only an illusion, albeit a persistent one."

Creedal formulation of Maimonides' 12th principle of faith

I believe with full faith in the coming of the Messiah, and, though he tarry, I anticipate him, nonetheless, on every day, when he may come.

From: Schwarzschild, S., The Pursuit of the Ideal (ed. Menachem Kellner), pp. 209, 212

…..on Jewish teaching the Messiah has not yet come. Indeed, since the Jews of all generations recite the Maimonidean credo every day of their lives, as will those of all future generations, the logic of this formulation entails that-if one may put it like this-the Messiah will always not yet have come, into all historical eternity. It is his coming, or rather the expectation of his coming, not his arrival, his "advent," that is obligatory Jewish faith. In Maimonides' own words, "Set no time limit to his coming!" (Isaac Abrabanel even makes an argument against Maimonides out of this: a "principle of the faith" would have to be non-temporally true; once the Messiah has come one would no longer "believe" in and "anticipate" his coming)

The eternal moral striving that is produced by the eternal delay of the Messianic advent can be deftly summarized here in two ways. Akiba Ernst Simon has written: "After having always again said our no to every claim of redemption that has been proffered to us, we have gone on our long way, the Law on our shoulders and backs, thus remaining with that beloved and endured burden in an unredeemed world-the unredeemed people of redemption and witness of its coming."