

## Rosh Hashannah Day 1

On August 28th, 1963, Martin Luther King Junior rose to the podium as the final speaker at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In front of more than 250,000 people, King began his address, which is now most famously known as his “I have a dream” speech. But did you know, that the dream section wasn’t actually in MLK’s prepared remarks for that day?

You see, King had debuted the phrase “I have a dream” in a speech at least nine months before the March on Washington, and used it several times in the months thereafter. His advisers discouraged him from using the same theme again in DC, and so he wrote a version of the speech that didn’t include it. But, amazingly, towards the end of King’s address, the gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, who was sitting just behind him as he spoke, and was quite familiar with his previous addresses, shouted out- “Tell them about the dream, Martin.”

Abandoning his prepared text, King improvised the rest of his speech, and the rest is history. How close we were to never hearing that dream. Of never being able to dream together of the type of world that King called on each of us to work to create together. And while King would not live to see that dream fulfilled, it continues to inspire us to this very day.

If most of us were told, “tell ‘em about the dream,” we’d be more likely to start telling everyone about the one where we show up to school in our underwear than one where we are reflecting on visions for our future. King’s dream fits more neatly in themes found in utopian authors, who dreamt of a more perfect world, a place where we’d all wish to live. In earlier times, there were no shortage of dreams for the future. The Jewish tradition spoke of the Garden of Eden, not only as a place where Adam and Eve once resided, but a place for us to someday return to as well. My first introduction to this idea was in the movie, *An American Tail* as the mice all sing, “there are no cats in America and the streets are paved with cheese” as they prepare to set sail for the new world.

And yet, in recent years, I can't help but think that our dreams have lessened. Now, one possible explanation for this is that so many of our dreams have already come true. In 1820, 84% of the world lived in extreme poverty. Today that number is under 10%. 50 years ago, 1 in 5 children died before their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday, now, it is 1 in 20. For close to 2000 years, we dreamt of a time where we could return to the land of Israel, sovereign in our land. And then, in 1948 it happened. We prayed facing Jerusalem, hoping to someday return to our eternal capital, and then in 1967 we did. 1000s of years' worth of dreams, things never before imagined possible, have become fulfilled over the course of our lifetimes. What more is there to dream?

Another, perhaps more challenging explanation for our inability to dream, is suggested by Dutch historian and author Rutger Bregman in his work, [Utopia for Realists](#) where he writes, "But the real crisis of our times, of my generation, is not that we don't have it good, or even that we might be worse off later on. No, the real crisis is that we can't come up with anything better."

We choose to hold onto our old dreams, dreams that have already been fulfilled, rather than finding a new one. As these dreams became real, we don't replace them with new dreams. We simply work to preserve the old ones because we can't come up with a dream of our own.

Now this shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone who has been part of an institution. Almost all institutions move very rapidly from the desire to *create* something to the need to *preserve* what has already been created. We set sail for a utopia, but then we land there, and even though we see a better country, we don't setting sail once more for an even better future, as Oscar Wilde suggested, we instead have chosen to settle on our perfectly reasonable, pre-existing dream. What does it mean to live in a world where we have stopped dreaming about what can be possible and have, instead, chosen to simply preserve what we have already achieved? A dream fulfilled is no dream at all.

When I was studying in Israel this summer, Yehudah Kurtzer, the President of the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America, challenged us in this regard, asserting that any dream that is actualized in our lifetimes is just not big enough of a dream. In fact, the only way to make sure that we are aspiring as high as we should is to accept that *we will never live to see our own dreams fulfilled*. In tractate Taanit in the Babylonian Talmud, the verse from Psalm 126 that begins our Shabbat and Holiday Birkat HaMazon, Grace After Meals is explored. R' Yochanan said: This righteous man, also known as Choni the Circle Maker was troubled his whole life about the meaning of the verse, Shir Hamaalot... A Song of Ascents, When God returned the captivity of Zion, we were as dreamers.' He wondered, how is it possible for someone to dream the same dream continuously for seventy years?

And then, one day, that same Choni is walking down the road and encounters an old man planting a carob tree. Choni asks how long a carob tree takes to grow and the old man replied, 70 years. Choni was curious, what would inspire this man to plant a tree that he would never see grow. Choni asks him whether he thinks he will see this tree reach its full potential and the old man replied, just as I benefitted from the carob trees planted by my ancestors, so too am I planting this tree for my descendants.

Notice how this old man is not only caring for the trees that he inherited. He is planting new ones. Trees that he will never bear fruit for him, but will provide sustenance to his children's children's children.

There is great honour in preserving that which we have inherited. On a trip to France more than a decade ago, Staci and I went to a family-owned vineyard in Beaujolais that featured wine from vines that were more than 100 years old. When asked why he kept those vines intact, as older vines produce far less fruit (though more flavourful), it was because he knew that his grandfather had planted those vines and he didn't have the heart to replace them. But this vintner didn't only care for his grandfather's vines. He planted new ones and hoped that, someday, his own grandchildren would benefit from them as well.

The hard part is not the dreaming, though that is not without its challenges. The hard part is dreaming so big that you know you will never see that dream come to pass. Working towards a dream where your best hope is that your children or your children's children might see it.

Seymour Fox, a prominent professor of Jewish education and one of the founders of the Ramah camping movement once taught that kool aid, grape juice, and cognac are all essentially grape products. If we aspire for grape juice, we will likely only end up with kool aid, but if we aspire towards cognac, at the very least, we'll have some delicious grape juice. Put another way, "Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll land among the stars."

In 1962, in a country beset with civil strife and international crises, John F Kennedy declared his intention to land a man on the moon within the decade. While JFK was assassinated on November 22, 1963, Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon on July 16, 1969. In 1877, Naphtali Hertz Imber wrote the poem that would be the foundation for the Israeli National Anthem. In the face of pogroms and centuries of persecution, he shared that his hope was not lost, the hope dreamt for centuries, that we would return to the land of our ancestors, and 39 years after his passing, we did.

The biggest, the best dreams were so big that those who dreamt them never saw them fulfilled. They dreamt for the arrival of the third commonwealth and the return of sovereignty for the Jewish people in the land of Israel. The preservation of that cannot be our dream. That was an amazing dream, but it was someone else's dream. What will our dream for Israel be? Is it peace in the land? Is it religious freedom for all its inhabitants? Is it peaceful coexistence with her neighbours or two nations finding sovereign homelands? Those are the dreams worth dreaming.

Most of us here are not indigenous to this country. Our ancestors (or we) came to this land in search of freedom and a better life for our families. And now, that dream is fulfilled. What is our new dream for ourselves and for our country?

When I arrived here, we aspired towards a successful amalgamation of two congregations. Due to the hard work of this community, we have been blessed to see that dream come to fruition. We are a model to other congregations across North America. What is our new dream for this congregation? (I'll talk a little bit about this at Kol Nidre)

Harriet Tubman once said, ““Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.” As we begin this new year together, there is no better time for dreaming. In fact, if this sermon has been long enough, some of you may be dreaming already. The world can be different, it can be better than it is. We know it can be, because we've seen it in our dreams.

Shannah Tovah.