

From grand designs to stargazing

A Rosh Hashanah resource for Jewish organisations to process 2020

This resource has been designed to help individuals, teams and organisations process the time they've experienced since March 2020. For so many, each working and waking moment has felt surreal, uncertain and anxiety-provoking. We encourage you to carve out time for yourself and your organisations to pause and reflect as we approach our High Holidays, and hope this proves a useful resource to make some sense of everything that's been going on.

“If you're a leader, you may suffer with an audience. Others are counting on us to be strong, to be stable, to be a guide through the ambiguity of living. And we don't always feel safe to say ‘I feel unsettled myself’”.

Dr Erica Brown in *Take your soul to work*

That discomfort you're feeling is grief

David Kessler in the Harvard Business Review suggests that we are all experiencing grief over what has been lost in the last few months. So, begin by asking which stage of grief you might be in. Are you surprised by your own or others' reactions?

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's six stages of reactions to grief are:

Shock ▶ Denial ▶ Anger ▶ Bargaining ▶ Depression ▶ Acceptance

The time of grief in the Jewish calendar is Tisha B'Av. Take a few minutes to watch [this video introduction](#) to Tisha B'Av and consider the following line from the book of Eicha, read each year.

“My eyes are spent with tears,
My heart is in tumult,
My being melts away
Over the ruin of my poor people”

Lamentations 2:11

כָּלוּ בְדִמְעוֹת עֵינַי חֲמֻרְמוֹרוֹ מַעֵי נִשְׁפָּךְ
לְאָרֶץ כְּבֹדִי עַל־שֹׁבֵר בֵּית־עַמִּי



- How does this picture of the grief we re-enact yearly resonate with your experience of the past few months?
- Which stage of grief do you consider yourself to be at – and why?
- How can you support others better by understanding where they are?

Further reading: see David Kessler in the HBR “[That discomfort you're feeling is grief](#)”

Psychological Transitions

This year we have been forced to grapple with fast-paced, unexpected change, and open-ended uncertainty. [William Bridges' model of psychological transitions](#) addresses how our minds respond to change, catching up with the new reality. Bridges identifies three stages:

- **ending, losing, letting go** of old ways and identities
- **the neutral zone** where the old reality is gone and the new one isn't yet fully formed
- **the new beginning** working with new energy and purpose.

We currently find ourselves in a hugely extended neutral zone. People in our organisations, in Bridges' words, "are in flux and may feel confusion and distress". There are two things that our people need from us now more than ever:

Safety

Physical safety is a new area of our consciousness, as we've integrated hand-washing, anti-bacterial gel, face-masks and social distancing into our everyday habits. But what of psychological safety? Sometimes physical safety can be a distraction from facing up to the psychological safety measures that leaders need to put in place at this time.



- How have you ensured your own physical and psychological safety over the past few months?
- What could you do now to ensure the psychological safety of your community colleagues?

Read more about how to create psychological safety in this [McKinsey interview with the experts](#)

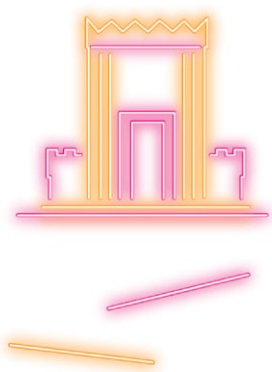
Care

Leaders have shared with us that the first question they now ask those they work with is "How are you?" rather than the previous "What's going on?" Asking how someone really is in these times is not prying - it's an essential step to relating to where they are. The response to the question usually determines the direction of the subsequent conversation. Leaders in 2020 are responsible for containing anxiety, offering both stability and adaptability in response to the emotional needs of those they work with. Stability AND adaptability – the new leadership reality of opposites and polarities!

This resource considers the polarities of mourning a lost temple (marked by Tisha B'Av), and building a sukkah (marked by Sukkot). In fact, during the intermediate period between these two dates in the calendar, we read seven Haftarat of "consolation" or care, which begin with the famous words from Isaiah 40, "Comfort, comfort my people," says your G-d..."; in Hebrew, "*nachamu nachamu ami.*" [Read more...](#)



- How has the care you offer to those you work with shifted over the past months?
- Do you have the bandwidth to offer care right now, and if not, how can you ensure that your colleagues are cared for?
- How do you care for yourself, and ensure your own support?



Star gazing

A key part of the “neutral zone” in William Bridges’ model is “that interim spaciousness that all possibilities, creativity and innovative ideas can come to life and flourish” (Susan Bridges). In other words, being in an extended neutral zone is not all bad. Along with the uncertainty and anxiety comes the possibility of re-addressing our goals, values and purpose. For many organisations, our “why”, the reason we exist, remains unchanged, however the “what” and “how” have. The shake-up demands that we change our plans and tactics, not our vision.

It also gives us the opportunity to connect more directly with people – giving them the time that perhaps we haven’t before. Relating to them in a different way. Showing them our vulnerabilities – that we too have been affected by all of this, and we don’t have all the answers. Vulnerability AND optimism – another new leadership reality of opposites and polarities! Watch Simon Sinek explain why

[It’s time to embrace vulnerability.](#)

Just as we imagined the grief period as mourning the fallen Temple, we imagine this extended “neutral zone” as moving into a Sukkah. A sukkah is a temporary structure, designed to move with us around our desert wanderings, a far cry from the impressive fixed and solid Temple in Jerusalem.

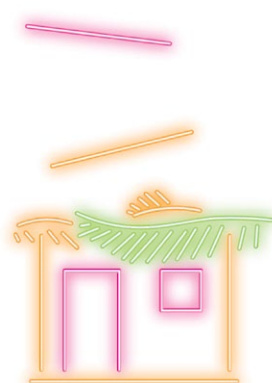
In *This is real and you are completely unprepared* Rabbi Alan Lew paints a picture of the journey from Temple to Sukkah:

we finally come home to the mere idea of the very house that crumbled and fell in the first place.



Use this space to write down words you associate with the Temple, representing our life before. We’ve made a start for you:

Solid, confident, established, hard power...



Now use this space to write down words you associate with a sukkah, representing the structure we currently inhabit:

Vulnerable, exposed, uncertain, portable...



“It would seem that the ideal sukkah should be firm enough to have a reasonable chance of serving out its eight days, but not so stable as to lose all appearance of its temporary nature. Many of us are chastened as we work by memories of years when the winds scattered the poles and branches of our ruined sukkah across the gardens and streets”.

Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg, *The Eternal Journey; Meditations on the Jewish Year*

Eating in a sukkah might be chillier. There might be the edge of anxiety about the weather, the strength of the structure, our ability to withstand the discomfort. But we are also somehow closer to one another. Our vulnerability brings home our essential humanity. And together, we can look up at the stars and dream about the future.



- How might you see this period of time as your organisation’s “sukkot”?
- How can this metaphor inform the way you operate at the moment?

Further reading

McKinsey – [How to demonstrate calm and optimism in a crisis](#), Jacqueline Brassey and Michiel Kruyt

Roffey Park – [Resilience in challenging times](#), Jackie Brown & Dr Arlene Egan

The Kings Fund – [Maintaining motivation uncertain times](#), Sally Hulks

Did you use this resource to frame a conversation in your organisation? Tell us how it went at laurence@thejlc.org

שְׁנָה טוֹבָה

Shana Tova from Lead. Wishing you a year ahead of leadership which is full of strength from within and from those supporting us, compassion to ourselves as well as those around us, and reward in the knowledge we are part of building our community. The year 5780 brought us surprises and challenges that allowed us to be stretched and grow as leaders; may we continue this development in 5781, reflecting on the path behind us and also looking forward to the vision ahead.

A division of:



Special thanks to the consultants who collaborated to vision and create this resource:

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