

Okay, so there is a lot that we must do. But how to carve out the space to do it? I don't just mean the time in our schedules. I mean the mental space between the denial that our government offers, the insistence that nothing is wrong, and the despair that threatens when we think realistically about what the science tells us, about what is already lost and what is too late to save.

In short, how do we make a space for the hope—not an optimism that everything will be fine, but a hope that our collective efforts might have some significance?

For that, we need to get both smaller and larger in our perspective.

We need to get small in the sense that what every faith tradition offers is the reminder that there is more to the great mystery than we can fathom. No matter how accurate our models and projections are, no matter how good the science, there are factors that we are not considering, and so our future is always uncertain.

When we feel like we're looking at a future of certain doom, that is important to remember.

But we must also understand history on multiple scales. Let me give two examples of what I mean. The first is ancient and mythical: My own tradition holds that over 3000 years ago, my ancestors spent 400 years as slaves in Egypt. 400 years is a long time; 20 generations. For those born into the final generation of slaves, slavery would have been the only past they knew, the only past that any of their living ancestors remembered, and the only future imaginable for their descendants. And Pharaoh was killing the Hebrew baby boys. What could possibly be the point of producing another generation?

But a brave woman, Yocheved, had both the faith and the humility – in the sense of knowledge that there is a larger perspective than what we can see—to have a baby boy anyway. His name was Moses, and he led the people to freedom. And we are commanded to remember both the agony of slavery, and the sudden shock of redemption—and to understand that those possibilities are always with us.

For a more contemporary example of the kind of multifaceted perspective we need, I want to turn back to the 1980s and early 1990s. This was when the AIDS epidemic was in the process of killing one in every ten out-gay men in the country. If someone had said then, "Why should I work for gay rights when my community is dying around me? No matter what strides we make, it will be too late for my lovers and friends," they would have been telling the truth. And if we want to have an honest conversation about the struggle for LGBTQ rights in this country, we need to acknowledge and mourn the tens and hundreds of thousands of people who died of AIDS in part because of government inaction, indifference and negligence. (Sound familiar?)

But also, that mourning does not negate how vastly different a landscape it is to be LGBTQ in America today, and that is thanks to a movement that flourished both despite and in response to the deaths of those people. And so, were the efforts of the movement worth it?

Now, we are in a moment when so much is already lost. Our efforts tonight will be too late to save some species, to save some people from climate related death. They will not prevent the extreme weather events of next year, or the year after.

But no matter what we will need to mourn next year, we must keep building the movement, keep contributing the energy and passion, the organizing and the money that we can, because no matter how bad next year and the

year after are, they will not be the last years of human history. And our efforts will influence how human society and the planet functions decades and centuries from now.

This is the essence of faith – to understand that our obligations come not from the promise of an immediate or even ultimately visible payoff – but to trust that our efforts will be worthwhile somewhere down the line that we may never see.

As Rabbi Nachman of Breslov wrote 200 years ago, “If you believe humans have the power to destroy, then believe that humans have the power to fix.”

In that spirit, I invite you to sing with me.

*We are the change; we are the rising sun. We are the ones we’ve been waiting for, and we are dawning.*