

Many Futures, One Beckons
Rosh Hashanah 5771
Rabbi Zoë Klein

In a galaxy,

[Click: hurtling stars]

Not far away,
The spacecraft Rosh Hashanah
Has made contact with a pod
Of Temple Isaiah families.
Rebel thoughts keep corrupting
The minds of the voyagers...
What's for lunch?
Is that my cell phone vibrating under my chair?
What is the rabbi going to talk about?
Can she read my mind?
Did I feed the pets?
Should I tell the person in front of me
That his kippah fell off about an hour ago?
What would Moses do?
... When all of a sudden,
Time and space start to fold,
And you, the voyagers,
Step out of the known universe
And into a fifth dimension,
Beyond which was ever known to man,
A dimension,
As vast as space
And as timeless as infinity.
An area called,

[Click: Shofar Zone title]

The Shofar Zone...

[Click: exit Shofar Zone title but keep stars hurtling]

And suddenly,
Now is then is there is here
tomorrow is yesteryear
once is forever
and forget Bed-and-Bath
because we're going *beyond*.

[Click: Black screen]

You are
At the very creation of the world,
You are stepping out of the craft
Into a future that doesn't yet exist,
That is being born this very instant.

We are a work-of-art.
Which our ancestors lovingly sketched us out.
God is the great Animator,
breathing into us motion,
spirit, mystery,
but we are our own colorists,
by our own hands,
we color our days happy,
or gloomy,
joyful
or remorseful.
We choose to dip our brush into
the palate of the past,
or the promising pinks and golds
of tomorrow's sunrise.

Over the Days of Awe
We think about our past a lot,
We think about the things we've done wrong,
We say we're sorry...
We do all of these things
Not so that we can live in the past,
But in order to make it possible
To choose a new and better future.

Some people
make decisions based on the past,
In fact, most of us
make decisions based on the past...

But *it is possible*
To make decisions based on the *future*.

Let me give you an example.
I'm in school, and I have a teacher,
And the teacher asks us to raise our hand

[Click: Children hands 1]

if we have a question or a comment.

Then, the teacher calls on everyone but me!
Now maybe he didn't see me,
Even though I'm sitting in the front row.
Some people have that kind of split vision,
Like a rabbit,
Where they can see to the sides and behind,
But not right in front of them.

But the next day in class, same thing!

“Does anyone have a question or a comment?”

[Click: Children hands 2]

Again, the teacher seems to be
Purposely ignoring me!
I have to say, it is starting to really hurt my feelings.
And make me pretty mad as well.
Maybe he just wanted to give certain students a chance.

The next day:

“Does anyone have a question or a comment?”

[Click: Children hands 3]

This time, I’m the *only* one
who has a question or a comment,
He *has to* call on me!

“Well, if nobody has a question or a comment,
We’ll go on to the next chapter.”

Now, based on the past,
I am at this point, pretty angry.
I can feel it rising up in my neck.
I’m also pretty hurt,
My eyes are filling with tears.
If I act based on these feelings,
My future might look something like this:

[Click: Mean teacher]

[Bang podium.]

“What kind of a terrible teacher are you!
Can’t you see me right here with my hand up?
Why are you constantly ignoring me?
What is wrong with you!”

Okay, freeze.
Based on this decision,
What does the future hold?
Well, it doesn’t look great.
Because even if I’m right,
Even if I was mistreated,
My tone only gets me into one future,
And that is a fight.

Just because I know that I’m right
Doesn’t mean that I want to choose
Unhappiness for my future.
This teacher is not someone I won’t see again,
I have to learn in his class all year.
I might want to ask this teacher
To write a recommendation for me one day
When I go to a new school.

My future would be better if I found a way
To rise above my hurt,
To master my anger,
And turn this teacher into my greatest ally.

[Click: black screen]

That, friends, is the greatest challenge in life.
And you might not realize
That it is *thrilling*.
It is an extraordinary game we get to play,
Better than any Wii entertainment,

Or virtual reality,
This is *actual* reality.
You think it only happens in the films
Where an absolute enemy
Becomes an absolute ally?

Executive coaches teach it to their clients:
The art of getting the people who at first
want to see you fail
To do anything to help you succeed.

Make no mistake my friends,
They are out there.
Dragons.

[Click: Dragon 1 (lifting the knife, cutting the rope)]

People who will frighten you, bully you,
Be stumbling blocks of negativity.
But rather than despise them
For holding you back,
Recognize the marvelous adventure,
You've been invited to enter,
The challenge to transform that person
Into your fiercest supporter.
From dragon,

[AUTOMATIC START: Dragon 2 (flying)]

To the wind beneath your wings.

After class I go to the teacher.

“Yes, Joey?” he asks.

“It’s Zoë, um, I wanted to let you know

[Click: Dragon 3 (Hiccup touches dragon’s nose)]

That I would really like to succeed in your class.
The material means something to me,
And I don’t take the opportunity to learn for granted.
I like this subject.
I think you have a lot to offer me as a teacher.
But I’m having trouble figuring out
How to succeed in your class.”¹

[Click: Dragon 4 (Hiccup and dragon smile)]
Keep this last frame on...

Maybe the teacher had decided already
That I was a bad student.
Maybe I reminded the teacher of someone
Who had let him down.
Maybe I remind the teacher of himself.
It doesn’t matter,
Because all *that* is based on *his* past,
And what is most important *for me*
Is to choose what future I want to have *with* him.

[Click: Black screen]

You will encounter dragons.

Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote:

“Expecting the universe to make exceptions for you because you are a good person is like expecting a bull not to charge because you are a vegetarian.”

¹ How to Train Your Dragon, smiles <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHUhygdAZIw> 1:48 – 1:50

And sometimes, believe it or not,
You will be the dragon to someone else.

The future is real.

[Click: Sign-posts]

And there isn't just one.

[Click: One path]

At every moment
There are many futures

[Click: Many paths]

From which to choose.
Many different futures.

But there is one future
Which is talked about in "Process Theology"
That is called "The *Lure*."

[Click: Highlighted path]

This is the future
From which God is beckoning.
This is the path
That leads to the most wholeness,
The healthiest choice,
The choice that steps closest to godliness.

But usually, we have trouble recognizing it.

I have a beach ball.

The rabbi has a beach ball
On the bima on Rosh Hashanah.
There are a few interesting futures
This could lead to.

One future
Could be that I throw the beach ball
into the congregation.
Already,
Some of you may be tensing
for that future to unfold.
Another future
Is that I could toss the beach ball
Over to the choir.
I could just put the beach ball down
And let it fade into the past
As an unnecessary prop.

Then there are the futures
that no one could have anticipated...
and maybe we can find “the Lure of God” there...
See if you can identify the Lure...

[Start: Beach Ball Video]

I could take the beach ball shoe-shopping.
I could deliver a sermon to the beach ball.
I could march with the beach ball in a Fourth of July parade,
There are any number of futures I could choose,
Some are absurd,
Some are fun,
Some are silly,
I could dress the beach ball like Cantor Kent,
I could play catch,
But all the while,

With all of the choices laid out before you,
It is *the lure* you should be looking for,
The future from which godliness is beckoning,
The decision that will bring more holiness to the world,
 I could paint the beach ball's portrait,
I could work out at the gym with the beach ball,
 I could give the beach ball a make-over,
 You can be as creative as you want with your future...
 The whole purpose of wiping the slate clean
 Is to create something with it later.
I could add blush to the beach ball,
 Play volleyball with the beach ball,
I could enjoy a siesta with the beach ball.
 I could try to catch the beach ball on a windy day,
And then there are, of course, bad futures we could choose,
Futures that could make us and others a little ill,
Think about where you are right now in your life,
Think about all the futures laid out before you...
 I could take the beach ball to the ocean...
 Think about the futures laid before you and
 Then think about the lure...
 What path is beckoning you toward righteousness,
 Toward wholeness,
 Toward peace.
 Sometimes that's the difficult choice,
 Yes,
 Sometimes that's the hardest one.
 You know this season is about forgiveness,
 But you may not want to forgive!
 To choose that future would require some courage.
 Maybe there are futures you can't even imagine!
I could enter the beach ball in a hermit crab race.
 But there is the one future,
 The one that draws its bow across our soul
 So we vibrate inside,

The one from which God beckons,
The lure,
The beautiful mysterious lure,
And we have to sharpen our vision to recognize it.

[Click: Black screen]

At every moment,
There are any number of possible futures.
When you base your thinking only on the past,
You get locked into
Choosing the same future over and over,
When the possibilities are endless.

You had a job.
You were unhappy in your job.
You lost your job.
Now is the time to ask:
What are the futures that excite me?
What is the divine lure
Calling me forward,
Like the Israelites in the midst of the Red Sea?
They were afraid,
They were scared,
But they kept going forward.

You disagree with your best friend,
your parent,
your spouse,
your boss,
your sibling,
You can proceed into that argument
With all your sharpest words,
An arsenal of weapons drawn from the past.
Or you can pause

And think about what you want your future to look like.

The disagreement can lead to:

[Click: Arguing father and child]

1. A future in which people remain angry for many days, and this argument is probably repeated in some form or another over and over.

[Click: Whipped cream and stars]

2. An intergalactic whipped cream war.

[Click: Heart]

3. A future where people learn about each other's concerns and fears, discovering the love that is at the heart. A future where people sit down and take turns calmly explaining their understanding of the situation, and instead of striving to *win*, what everyone strives for is *clarity*.

Make decisions based on your future,
Not on your past.

What if the world thought this way?
What if the world thought
About what kind of future we want to create
For immigrants and their children...
What if when we built deep sea oil rigs
We looked at all the futures:
Making a lot of money,
Becoming rich and powerful,
Safeguarding the environment
And putting in the measures
That would protect everyone
In case of a spill...
If we tried to identify the divine lure,
And made decisions from there?

At times you will make the wrong choice,
And in that sense, God is like a GPS system.
God doesn't get mad that you made a different choice.
God just recalibrates your route
From where you are now.
You went straight when you were supposed to go left?
"Recalibrating.
At the next stop sign,
Make a right,
Followed by a right,
Followed by a right."
Like [the GPS], God persistently
invites us, lures us
...to make the best choice.²

Next time you have a decision,
Whether you are fighting a dragon,
Thinking about what to eat,
Deciding on a career,
Choosing which store to shop in,
Or playing with a beach ball,
Think about lots of futures,
From the practical to the absurd,
And try to identify the *divine lure*,
The choice that leads to more peace,
That is ethical and not self-serving,
That is healthy and not detrimental,
That is about strengthening relationships
And not tearing them down.
Try to pick the future that leads
To delicious hugs,
To wellness,
To less fear,

² Rabbi Brad Artson

To joy,
To satisfaction,
To a sense of pride
And goodness.

[Click: Wanted poster]

R: “Mom, the Temple is collecting toys
To give to the needy.
They especially need beach balls.”

K: “Can we donate ours?”
[Give to children. Hug]