

(Abby Gore Graduation Student Perspective)

In the third chapter of Kohelet, we read the oft-quoted verses about there being a time for everything. There's a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to be silent and a time to speak, among others. Over the past few years as students, in our workplaces, and as humans, we have known these times and lived these experiences. Pertinent to our lives, Yehuda Amichai shares a different interpretation of the relationship between these life experiences in his poem A Man in His Life. He writes:

A man needs to love and to hate at the same moment,  
to laugh and cry with the same eyes,  
with the same hands to throw stones and to gather them,  
to make love in war and war in love.

And to hate and forgive and remember and forget,  
to arrange and confuse, to eat and to digest  
what history  
takes years and years to do.

Our experiences are intertwined. Our past is not isolated into neat boxes that carry a single emotion or purpose; rather, we bring our whole selves - our past, our present, and our future - into every new life adventure. We bring memories of joy we've known, mistakes we've made, lessons we've learned, heartache we've endured, and interactions that have shaped us. In our lives, we encounter polarities: two opposing forces that contrast each other, thus giving each other meaning.

A polarity from the beginning of our tradition is pe'ilut and menucha, activity and rest. The model that God established where God created, worked, and acted for six days and ceased on the seventh day of creation has influenced the calendar we live by as Jews individually and as K'lal Yisrael, including the structure of the week culminating with Shabbat. We learn in the Babylonian Talmud that "if you take on too much, you have taken on nothing." Rest protects us from reaching our breaking point. My fellow graduates and I are inspired by our traditions and teachings. We strive to act, to change our communities and world, to engage, to teach, and to learn. I invite us to pour energy too into the other end of the spectrum. How can we rest

meaningfully in ways that recharge us, heal us, and renew us to be our best selves as we engage in the work that calls and inspires us?

Another polarity we experience is shevirah and shleymut; brokenness and wholeness. Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk taught that “there is nothing more whole than a broken heart.” In 2024 we are well into our fourth year of living in a world altered by the pandemic. We live in heartbreak and fear over the Israel/Hamas war, and we encounter communal, societal, and global challenges daily. Our broken hearts mean that we care deeply and have potential to heal together and experience joy. On the HUC JDC Entwine trip to India last December, amidst pain as we looked at posters of the kidnapped hostages in the pews, I experienced so much wholeness as we sang in Indian sanctuaries, breathing life into these historic buildings and linking our Judaism to theirs across miles, millenia, and melodies. Experiencing brokenness gives deepened meaning to the moments that we feel whole, and our knowledge of wholeness helps us recognize when we are broken.

When we finish reading a book of Torah, we recite the words “chazak chazak v’nitchazek,” “be strong, be strong, and we will be strengthened.” Personal strength and the strength of the community are intertwined; the individual and the collective is a polarity. The collective informs and molds individuals, and individuals define and create the collective. Over these past few years, my peers and I have relied on each other and have worked in partnership with our professors to learn, grow, problem-solve, and envision the Jewish communal world we hope to pass down to the next generation. We have built each other up and uplifted each person’s skills and strengths to be strong as a cohort. This journey has also been deeply personal for each of us, navigating jobs, families, classes, and lifecycle events while some of us were hundreds of miles away from our classmates and physical campus.

As this part of our journey comes to a close and we continue on our paths, it is my hope for my fellow graduates that we exude strength individually and collectively, quietly and assertively, and when it’s easy and when it’s hard. May we fill our days with work and community that inspire us, and may we restore our souls with rest. May the brokenness in our world call us to action, and may we experience profound joy. Ken yehi ratzon.