CLOCKS AND CLOUDS: NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY

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Karl Popper, the great philosopher of science, teaches the difference between two types of problems.

"To understand a clock, you need only to take it apart. It is mechanical; you could remove each small part and study it … by studying the pieces you can understand how it works. In fact, it is predictable by design. If it breaks, you can find the problem and fix it." **Clock problems are easily fixable; there is an organized structure, an established pattern, and all you have to do is fit the pieces in place.**

"Cloud type problems, on the other hand, are complex and dynamic. You cannot take apart a cloud the same way you can take apart a clock. Clouds are unpredictable and constantly changing. Since you cannot break it down and look at each piece, you have to study it as a whole … You have to look beyond the cloud to understand the weather patterns [and other] factors that created the clouds in the first lace."

"In a time of uncertainty, we should be led by that which anchors us."

Right now, we're in uncharted territory, battling our way through a global pandemic. It's a "cloud" problem, not an easy challenge to break down into parts and solve. The pandemic and its aftermath are something we are going to be struggling with for a long time. Perhaps we can learn from our ancestors and leadership in the desert — the Jews wandering in the desert in many ways represents the situation we find ourselves in now.

In the desert, Moses asks his brother-in-law Hobab to accompany the Jewish people to Israel. There isn't a clear reason why; perhaps it's the general joy and generosity of the moment that spurs Moses to invite him. Hobab replies that he won't go; he will return to his own land. But Moses asks him again to come, and we begin to understand there is a reason behind the request. Moses tells Hobab that he wants him to come because *"al kein yadata chanoteinu bamidbar"* — Hobab knows how to camp in the wilderness. Unlike Moses, who thrives in an orderly world, Hobab is experienced in the ways of the wilderness; he knows how to thrive in uncertainty — to address cloud problems — and Moses wants him to serve as a guide.

However, Hobab refuses to guide the Israelites through the wilderness, and **Moses ultimately sends the Ark of the Covenant in front to lead them through the desert. Not a person, but the Ark of the Covenant, which holds our tablets — our law, our structure, our compass.** Moses realized that in a time of uncertainty, we should be led by that which anchors us. That which endures, which traveled with us to the promised land and turned into a magnificent Temple. That which, years later, turned into study halls and synagogues. The enduring impact of the Ark itself has turned into the center of our Jewish life.

Today, we again find ourselves in a time of overwhelming uncertainty. But while our synagogues and communal spaces were shuttered, we once again turned to that which anchors us. We moved our prayers and communal gatherings online. We found new ways to connect to Judaism and to each other. **As we grapple with this enormous cloud problem, we must count on clear eyes and innovation, grounded in the tradition we love, to guide the way and lead us through.**