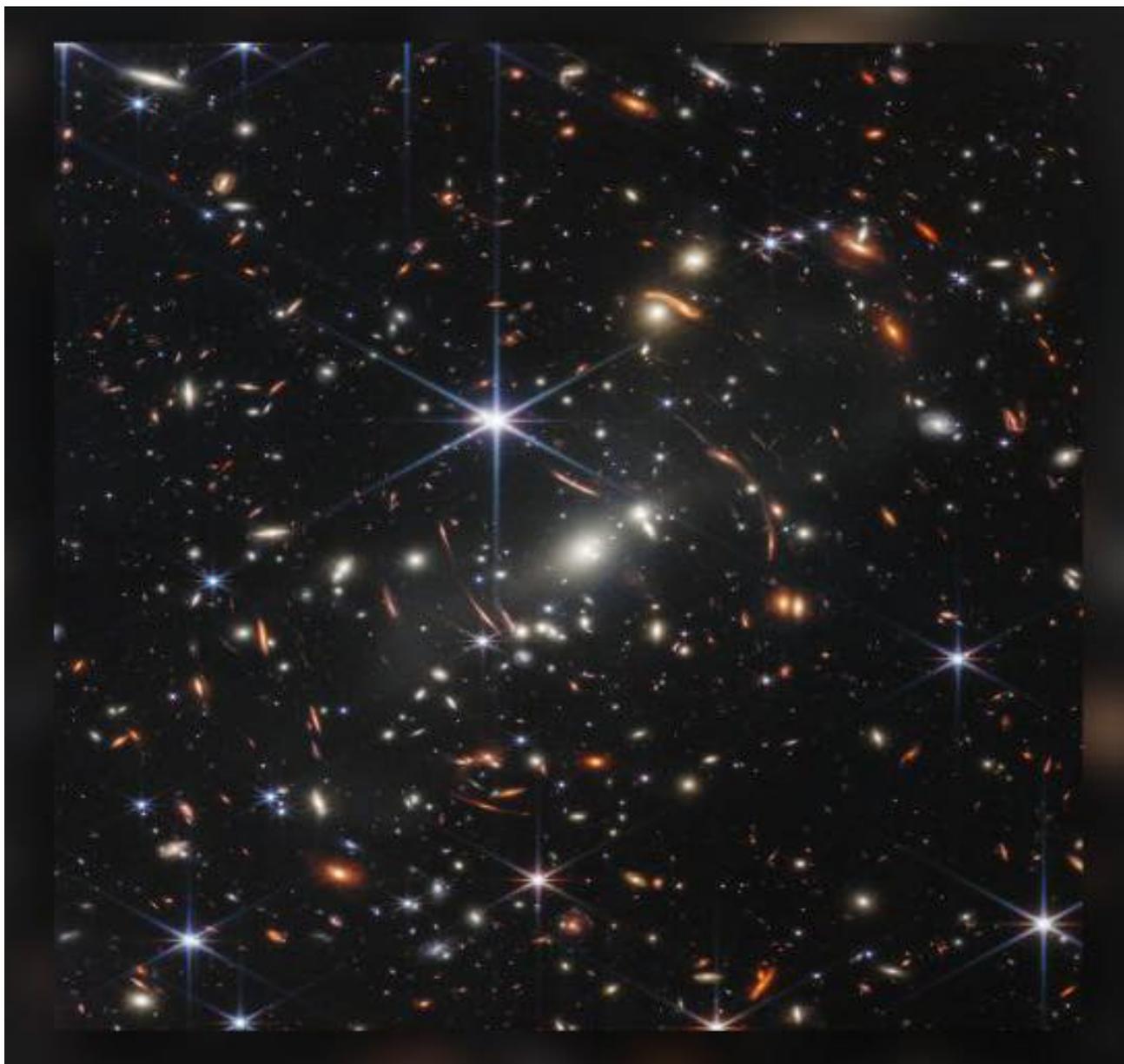


1 Rabbi Shawn Zevit

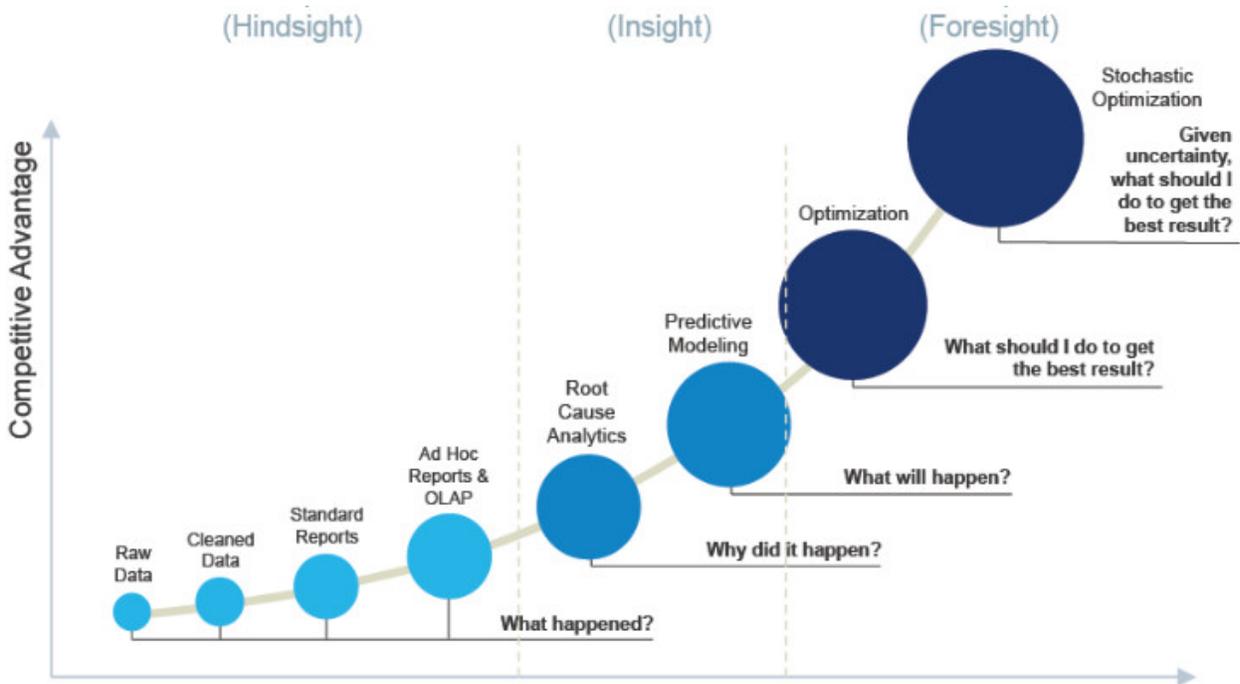
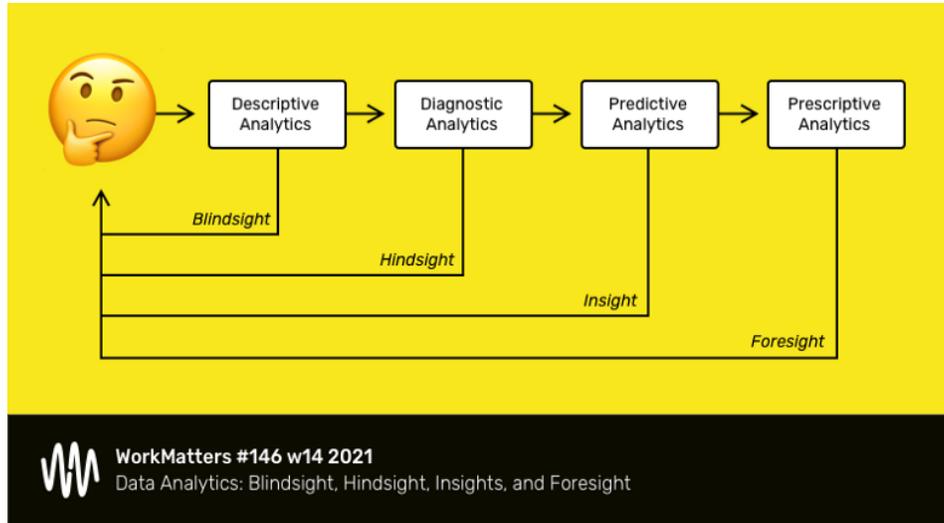
[Hindsight-Insight-Foresight: Judaism and the Long Path.](#)

Video: [Rosh Hashana Day 1 5783/2022](#)

Webb Telescope photo of the deepest universe we
have ever seen- from long ago



2 Rabbi Shawn Zevit



<https://medium.com/workmatters/data-analytics-blindsight-hindsight-insights-and-foresight-6818801b4442>

3 Rabbi Shawn Zevit

(Talmud, Ta'anit 23A) *“One day Choni Hama'agal (the circle maker) was walking along and saw a man planting a carob tree. Choni asked him, “How many years will it take until the tree bears fruit?” The man answered, “Not for seventy years.” Choni said to him, “Do you really believe you'll live another seventy years?” The man answered, “I found this world provided with carob trees, and as my ancestors planted them for me, so I too plant them for my descendants.”*

The Yamim Noraim–The Days of Awe in Covid and Ecologically impacted times–ask us to face the truth of our circumstance, strengthen relational bonds to live in solidarity with all beings, and explore, with resilience and sustainability for the long haul, our sense of meaning and purpose in this world.

In the past year, each of us has had multiple discoveries and losses, breakthroughs and disappointments, moments of isolation, and

4 Rabbi Shawn Zevit

meaningful connections. I am so grateful- this includes the increased possibility of our return to each other in person and increased access when that is not safe or possible. At the same time, none of us have remained unimpacted observers.

I have walked with many of you through your transitions and my own-the Covid journey, the loss and birth of loved ones, right up to dear Robin Leidner leaving this world only three days ago. I held my mother's had as she left the world on a date and time of her own accord under Canadian law, two weeks later, celebrating my step-daughter's thrice Covid postponed wedding to her beloved and last December, held my newest of three granddaughters, Nava, after her entry to the world. Both Simcha and I ducked Covid for two and half-years only to get the upgraded version in the last few months. Many of you could tell some version of these stories.

We all continue to pivot, navigating a return to in-person and on-line offerings, adapting to Rabbi

5 Rabbi Shawn Zevit

Yael's retiring from congregational life this past year after 28 years as one of our rabbis. There is a relentless call for ecological, racial and socio-economic justice issues, the unceasing tensions and violence in Israel and Palestine, and the devastating and continual war on and in Ukraine.

We all go through times when it feels like the ground is being pulled out from under us. What we relied on as steady and solid may change or even appear to vanish. In this era of global disruption, threats to our individual, social, and planetary safety abound, and at times life can feel overwhelming. Not only are loss and separation painful, but even positive changes can cause great stress. The words of Wendell Berry resonate in my soul so often these days:

*It may be that when we no longer know what to do
we have come to our real work,
and that when we no longer know which way to go
we have come to our real journey.*

The mind that is not baffled is not employed.

The impeded stream is the one that sings.

The phrases of “we were made for these times”, “getting back to a semblance of normalcy”, or the big Jewish bumper sticker, “gam zo l’tova” - it will all be for the good,” have lost their cache for me, if not become distractions.

As I wrote in my June Kol Shalom article, “while I still find inspiration in the idea that “we are made for these times,” it is no longer the full truth for me. More and more I experience that **these times are remaking us**, by how we meet and adapt to the constant change of circumstance, eruption of events

7 Rabbi Shawn Zevit

and pivot in the face of new tributaries of possibility and difficulty. It may only be years from now we will reflect on who we have individually and communally become, forged in the hot kiln of our times.”

This Rosh Hashanah Day, what our tradition calls “HaYom Harat Olam” - the Birthday of the Universe- or the Day Life’s Rebirth or Reboot- is a day that calls our attention to our ways of being. Returning to the Home of Our Souls and doing the work of forgiveness, reconciliation and reparations as needed.

Nu, so what of it? What are some of the possible approaches that might help us increase the percentage of our HH insights that turn from momentary thought bubbles to transformative action?

I have been asking myself, not only what, but who and how I want to be in what I do with how

8 Rabbi Shawn Zevit

every many years I am blessed to be able to serve with sacred purpose- while caring for my own well-being.

I want to quote my sister here, who texted me literally at the moment I wrote the line above, “perhaps your words this Rosh Hashanah need be less about the challenges of our existential crises and more about how we can continue to move forward and make meaning of and cope with all that we are facing.”

It was an article I read by an author whose name I now cannot recall, in the Jewish Forward over the summer, that started a chain of thought I bring to you today. Try it on- even as a thought exercise- as you reflect on who you have become, wish to be, and on our place in the world where past-present and future converge.

In the article, the writer implored Jewish clergy

to stop picking one-line Torah or Rabbinic quotes to explain, agitate or try to bring comfort in our times. They said, what we as a Jewish people and as humanity need now, is to draw on models of hard-earned long-term wisdom from our people's experience and those around us. What are examples and guidance from the generational experiences we have faced, where simple aphorisms or chronic anxious and reactive choices may alleviate situational challenges, though not take future or even collateral and systemic impact into consideration:

- 10 Generations (Bereysheet, twice over)
- Eheyeh asher Eheyeh- I am/was/will Be and how Moshe used it (immediate failures, long-term strategy and commitment, governance restructuring- even comparing Yitro and Devraim for insight).
- Sinai- all generations present at once
- 40 years, 42 stops- each with its name

meanings (and toward a Land of Promise and flowing with Possibility).

- 70 years of exile in Bavel- to return and rebuild the Beit HaMikdash
- Shoah
- L'dor v'dor liturgy and Aleynu "l'taken olam"

[https://www.ted.com/talks/ari wallach 3 ways to plan for the very long term?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/ari_wallach_3_ways_to_plan_for_the_very_long_term?language=en)

Long path: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-8fYhwrYzI>

This led me to a discussion with Lynn Iser and R. Mordechai Lievbling, two of long time members, in which we discussed a thematic approach to these HH, including some of what they will lift up based on Joanna Macy's work for us on the second Day and on Yom Kippur: We discussed Hindsight-Insight-Foresight parallel to our liturgies conception of YHVH Mekeh/Malakh/Yimloh-The Power of Life that is/was/will ever be.

This way of approaching personal and work life has become all the rage in the nonprofit and for-profit worlds. Taking from social work and training fields:

Richard Joelson (Social worker): *“One of the ways I discuss change with my clients is by defining three states of awareness: hindsight, insight, and foresight. In the process of trying to change, hindsight is often the first way in which a person becomes more self-aware. Looking back at a problematic choice or action taken provides a useful beginning in the effort to function differently. “Gee, I wish I had not done that,” or “I can’t believe I did the same dumb thing again,” are examples of hindsight that offer an opportunity to pay closer attention and work on problematic behaviors.*

Insight might occur in the process change. This occurs when a person becomes self-aware during the commission of a regrettable action or behavior. “There I go again,” is the phrase that often accompanies an insightful moment. The advantage of insight over hindsight is that insight may occur in time for a regrettable action or decision to be avoided.

Hindsight, by definition, is always after the fact. The final goal in promoting change is achieving the state of self-awareness; namely, foresight. Change may be best achieved when someone can look over the horizon and foresee an opportunity or situation where they can employ their collection of hindsights and insights and function in a way compatible with their therapeutic goals. This might be the operational definition of meaningful change

<https://trainingmag.com/20-20-vision-hindsight-insight-foresight/>

<https://www.thencp.com.au/blog-posts-ncp/the-difference-between-insight-foresight-and-hindsight>

One approach is gathering a groundswell type momentum across the globe: It is the notion of growing our consciousness, of developing an awareness of what's really happening and what's really important to us. Many such people are finding the need to "step back" from time to time instead of relentlessly just "stepping up," to reflect on what their purpose is. To (re-)establish the meaning behind what they're doing. And what's really happening around them that they can and can't influence. I've met a number of players and organisations recently focused on bringing "mindfulness" into the corporate playing field, with quite some remarkable and measurable results. The resulting benefit? A "slowing down before shooting" and enabling a greater awareness of purpose and what is going on "in the moment."

We can do this simply through finding the undisturbed space to create ten or even just five minutes of inwardly focused peace or quieting of the mind. That little breathing space gives us a chance to quieten the left-brain mind-chatter. Our big-picture right brain gets a chance to excel at what it does best – reflect and give creative insights. These are insights that we simply can't see or notice when we're running at 100 miles an hour. And instead of reflecting on the trainwreck (subtle or visible) in **hindsight** after the event, when all the "collateral" damage is already done (despite the growth in profits or bonus income it generated), we can actually leverage these **insights** very productively. How? Well, by mapping them into our professionally-developed risk management and governance processes, including the planning, budgeting, SWOT analysis etc; so we can build the necessary **foresight** into the initiatives which the

insights enabled; and we avoid the train-wreck hindsight in the first place.

No sooner had I begun mulling these experiences and frameworks of Jewish life, then up popped on my Facebook page, Ari Wallach, the son of a rabbi, a futurist and on the faculty at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. His Ted Talk on the "Long Path" has been viewed over 2.6 million times. In it he offers his own version of committing to a life that is more than a reaction to the past or living in the moment. He writes in his book "The Long Path", *"You can become the great ancestors the future needs you to be...the Long Path (SZ: l'dor v'dor) mindset works in part to help relieve our reactions to stressful moments by providing a way of seeing the world that cultivates future conscious thinking and behavior. Long Path lets us start thinking and feeling beyond our individual lifespans and to the impact we will have on future generations. And yes, that previous generations have had on us (sz: blessings, legacy and trauma).*

"P. 20...it takes an enormous amount of privilege to be able to think this way. Those who live on the margins, who are one illness or paycheck away from losing access to basic safety and

security or who are living in oppressed conditions are often too busy to think beyond their next meal or how to avoid impending abuse (SZ: or I would add prejudice and violence of any kind). The right decision is usually the one that gets them to the next day. But even those who have been historically excluded from influencing the future have done so time and time again- e.g. Rosa Parks).

Wallach goes on to explain his vision of Longpath living:

LONGPATH:

TRANSGENERATIONALITY OR L'DOR V'DOR- SINAI THINKING: A continual awareness of your place in the chain of being, where you reckon with your inherited history, find alignment with the present, and make adjustments to improve the future.

FUTURES THINKING- NOT ONLY A FUTURE THROUGH THE EXISTING AGRO, INDUSTRIAL, TECHNO LENS- FUTURE/GOD AS A VERB NOT A NOUN- how many different types of futures can you imagine?

TO WHAT END?- what is my ultimate goal, and how do my choices and actions align with my values? Our communal Statement of Principles? Civilization at large? WHAT HAPPENS AS A RESULT OF SOLVING THIS ISSUE, BEING SUCCESSFUL, ETC USING A PARTICULAR APPROACH (JVBDM, l'taken olam b'ma'clhut Shaddai, etc.)

Simultaneously, an article appeared in the August 7, 2002, NY Times by William MacAskill, a professor of philosophy at Oxford University and the author of [“What We Owe the Future,”](#) making a case for recently intensified “Long-termism” school of thought.

Imagine living the life of every human being who has ever existed – in order of birth.

Your first life begins about 300,000 years ago in Africa. After living that life and dying, you travel back in time to be reincarnated as the second-ever person, born slightly later than the first, then the third-ever person, and so on.

One hundred billion (or so) lives later, you are the youngest person alive today. Your life has lasted somewhere in the ballpark of four trillion years. You have spent approximately 10 percent of it as a hunter-gatherer and 60 percent as a farmer, a full 20 percent raising children, and over 1 percent suffering from malaria or smallpox. You spent 1.5 billion years having sex and 250 million giving birth.

That's your life so far – from the birth of Homo sapiens until the present.

But now imagine that you live all future lives, too. Your life, we hope, would be just beginning. Even if humanity lasts only as long as the typical mammal species (about one million years), and even if the world population falls to a tenth of its current size, 99.5 percent of your life would still be ahead of you. On the scale of a typical human life, you in the present would be just a few months old. The future is big.

I offer this thought experiment because morality, at its core, is about putting ourselves in others' shoes and treating their interests as we do our own. When we do this at the full scale of human history, the future – where almost everyone lives and where almost all potential for joy and misery lies – comes to the fore.

If you knew you were going to live all these future lives, what would you hope we do in the present? How much carbon dioxide would you want us to emit into the atmosphere? How careful would you want us to be with new technologies that could destroy, or permanently derail, your future? How much attention would you want us to give to the impact of today's actions on the long term?

These are some of the questions that motivate longtermism: the idea that positively influencing the long-term future is a key moral priority of our time.

Longtermism is about taking seriously just how big the future could be and how high the stakes are in shaping it. If humanity survives to even a fraction of its potential life span, then, strange as it may seem, we are the ancients: we live at the very beginning of history, in its most distant past. What we do now will affect untold numbers of future people. We need to act wisely.

17 Rabbi Shawn Zevit

To be alive at such a time is both an exceptional opportunity and a profound responsibility: We can be pivotal in steering the future onto a better trajectory. There's no better time for a movement to stand up, not just for our generation or even our children's generation, but for all the generations yet to come.

*EXERCISE: IN ROOM AND IN 3-4 PERSON
BREAKOUTS: REFLECT ON WHAT LIFE MIGHT BE
IN HOLDING THE LONG PATH VIEW, ON HOLDING
HINDSIGHT, INSIGHT AND FORESIGHT TOGETHER
ON A DAILY BASIS- WHAT CALLS YOU THIS ROSH
HASHANAH TO PAY ATTENTION TO?*

Many of you have known me long enough to recognize I find Holiness and Divine direction in the love, caring and compassionate action and connection of any one moment, in the playground and parking lot, the sanctuary and the sea, as well as the march of city hall and Harrisburg. (e.g.s of this practice)

With the board's support I am working with a few others, and building on our recent Strategic

Learning process, staff think tank and major five-year campaign ending that has led us to this point in time- we will study and where needed to renew our own communal purpose to both affirm where we are and also reflect the future coming our way- more than that in the weeks ahead.

In the words of Sasha Newman, who will stand here as a bar mitzvah speaking of Bereysheet in just a few weeks and was recently quoted in our Kol Shalom newsletter, “You can’t just relax and go to sleep. You have to keep Shabbat in mind throughout the week so you have energy for it...A lot of people don’t grow after their b’nai mitzvah; they say, ‘Thank God it’s over.’ I definitely want to grow.”

My prayer for us all, is that we all bring a longer-term, Is/Was/Will be lens to life and continue to grow this year. I pray we experience and leave these Awesome Days with renewed commitment to caring for each other and tikkun in our larger communities and the precious planet we are part of

with altered, if not alternative consciousness and commitment with yesterday, today and tomorrow as our allies for health and helpful choice and change.

The opening to a LongPath- a shulchan aruch (the long table) is not a cool new concept- for us Jewishly, it is a reclaiming of a thread that has woven itself through our entire history as a religious peoplehood. It is a way of informing the entirety of life from the everyday to the elevated sacred moment.

Our ancient liturgy will reinforce these ideas again and again. Every Yah Melekh - Malakh - Yimlokh- The Cosmic Constant is/was/will be across space and time. The three states of consciousness present/past/future at the Musaf Shofar service both days of Rosh Hashanah. The seeds for elevated consciousness and just and compassionate action are waiting for the water of our souls to lift these concepts from the page into our very being. Shannah Tovah U'Mitukah.