

**“FIVE SACRED SPACES”  
Part Five  
“Congregation Temple Sinai  
of New Orleans, LA”**

**The Memorial Address 5770  
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My dear friends,

There is a fascinating prayer composed by the ancient Sages and recorded in Midrash Rabba based on the Biblical Book of Numbers.

(Dear God, give us) neither Your honey  
nor Your sting!

That's a peculiar prayer isn't it? But what I believe the Rabbinic Sages meant was:

“please do not curse us and please do not bless us – just  
let things be dear God – just let things be!”

Goethe echoed the spirit of that ancient prayer when in a well known line from Faust, he wrote:

“Make this moment last.”

As now we gather in this, the fifth of “The Five Sacred Spaces” we need no background or historical details as were necessary with the preceding four Sacred Spaces which we visited –

The Ha-Ari Synagogue of Tsefat  
The Ostia Antica Synagogue of Italy  
The Great Synagogue of Rome  
and The Dohany Street Synagogue of Budapest

This is our home! A few of you actually remember when our congregation moved to this sanctuary from its first Temple building on Carondelet Street in 1927. Some of you have recollected how these wondrous stained glassed windows had not been installed by the time of the dedication service and were yet two or three years from completion. But all in all, the grandeur of this magnificent Sacred Space remains largely unchanged since the day it was proudly dedicated eighty two years ago.

How many prayers during these four score and two years have centered on the fervent plea –

Dear God, Make this moment last!

Could you even guess? Thousands, often including your parents and grandparents, and great grandparents, you and your children and children's children, have ascended to this altar, standing under this magnificent Ner Tamid, the only one in America fashioned by the Tiffany Studio, and been Consecrated on entering Jewish religious education.

And then a decade later, as adolescents, you have stood before this Holy Ark as Confirmands with the Rabbi's hands lifted above you asking God's choicest blessings

upon you. The picture gallery freezes that proud and sacred moment in perpetuity. And your dear ones, proudly seated in the pews and witnessing those tender moments prayed.

Neither Your honey, nor Your sting –  
Dear God, just let things be.

Here in our Sacred Space, family members celebrating milestone birthdays or wedding anniversaries have savored the blessing of longevity and celebrated abiding love. They and their dearest friends gathered around them and the generations of their families have joined, no doubt in a prayer amounting to:

Dear God, Make this moment last!

Fearless of the vulnerabilities of life that surely lie ahead, countless brides and grooms have assembled with their dearest family and beloved friends and stood here, often under magnificent wedding canopies, and delighted together in celebrating love through the unforgettable and precious ritual of sacred marriage, Kiddushin.

And although, the words are not included in the vows or exchange of rings, or even the seven wedding berachot found in the Rabbi's manual, one can almost hear the quiet plea:

Make this moment last, dear God.

Similarly, in the fullness of the years, proud parents of newborns, holding their beautiful babies near and bestowing upon them the names of departed dear ones as an act of immortality, whisper the silent prayer over the tender head of their baby!

Make this moment last!

And glowing with well deserved pride and joy, more and more of you find yourselves the parents and grandparents of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, wondering to yourselves how in the world the years have passed by so quickly as to bring your child to the threshold of young adulthood. At such times of sanctity and of celebration as I look over at the parents and grand parents, I am well aware that they too are thinking:

Make this moment last.

As we age, we come to wish to be **unremarkable** patients of our doctors. No news is good news! We pray for boring mail. We seek neither the honey nor the sting, no surprises please – just let things continue to be!

The Prayer Books remind us that our mortality is:

the tax we pay for the privilege of love, thought,  
creative work – the toll on the bridge of being....

Rabbi Harold Kushner shakes us from our illusions of security when he reminds us that:

Asking the universe to treat you better because you are moral is like expecting the bull not to charge because you are a vegetarian.

To live is to risk! And as we cling to life's gifts we best know that the time will come when, however reluctantly, we lose the one or the ones we desperately cherished, and the moment we prayed would last forever, simply, (and ever so painfully) does not.

Do you think it's true that very few of us were wise enough, when we had the chance, to make the most of the moment when it was ours? I fear that preoccupied with petty concerns, or put off by insignificant differences or what we today call "issues," we were indifferent to love, clueless, out of touch with the central reality of our existence and that is its brevity; the moment does not last.

Our awareness of death ought to awaken us to life's preciousness and also to its fragility. I know I have shared it with you before but I know of no better illustration of this lesson than Emily in Thornton Wilder's great play, "Our Town".

Offered the opportunity to return to earth for a given moment in her life, you'll remember that Emily chose her sixteenth birthday to re-live. But she was amazed and deeply disturbed by how unaware everyone was of their surroundings and of the treasured moment that was theirs to embrace. As Emily looks at them, at her dear ones, they **are too busy** with nothing and fail to appreciate and enjoy the wonder of the day.

Enough of this re-living of her life, Emily begs the All-Knowing Stage Manager. She is ready to return to her grave with these words of tender farewell:

Oh earth you are far too wonderful  
for anyone to realize you.

Then, turning to the stage manager, she asks:

Tell me, does anyone on earth ever  
realize life while he lives it...  
every, every minute?

His answer is in the negative. We do not.

Do you remember Gilda Radner? In her book, *It's Always Something*, written while she was suffering from cancer. Gilda characterized life as a "delicious ambiguity."

"I wanted a perfect ending" she wrote  
"Now I've learned, the hard way, that some  
poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't  
have a clear beginning, middle and end...  
Life is about **not** knowing, having to change,

taking the moment and making the best of it  
without knowing what's going to happen next.”

So those rabbis centuries ago they did know a thing or two about the nature of our lives didn't they. That prayer in the Midrash, “Neither Your honey nor Your sting!” underscored their reminder for you and for me that there is no life made purely with honey. Every life is accompanied by the sting. And our presence here is surely proof of it!

Let me close with two realities on which I urge you to hold tightly as a source of comfort. Yes, we know all too well about the sting, and having lost our dear ones, we are **also** profoundly aware that:

without knowing grief, we could never know  
pleasure when it comes our way.

**and**

Without feeling misery, we could never  
know what comfort genuinely feels like.

That's the first reality.

Here is the second reality upon which to meditate.

It has been said that there are really three deaths.  
The **first** is when the body ceases to function.  
The **second** is when the body is consigned  
to the grave...But the **third** is that moment,  
sometime in the future, when your name is  
spoken for the last time.

You see the ones you come to honor and remember today are not dead to us! Every name on the tablets upon these walls is called out loud one time during the year on the Sabbath following the anniversary of their death. Their names are still spoken!

And you, you are here at this sacred moment to whisper your dear ones' precious names in your heart and at your very soul. In so doing, we the living truly honor and acknowledge our debt to those whose love we still cherish and can never fully repay. And once again do we not pray:

Dearest God and Creator;  
Make this moment last!

Amen!