

When I was a child I was completely obsessed with watching my grandfather, of blessed memory, peel apples. He would take a small paring knife and slowly run it around and around the apple until what had been one piece of fruit became two—a naked apple ready to eat, and one perfect bouncy spiral peel, removed in one whole piece. To me this whole process was pure magic. I thought my grandfather was the most incredible person in the world—I made him peel apples over and over again.

There is an idea in Jewish tradition that time isn't completely linear nor completely cyclical either. Rather, we can think of Jewish time as a spiral, much like that apple peel my grandfather used to entertain me with. Thinking of time as a spiral implies growth: while we are constantly coming back to a similar place, we are also moving forward. We never come back to exactly the same place you started, we grow and change even as we return.

Year after year, as we gather for holidays and community rituals, we find ourselves coming back around to a place that feels so familiar. We are held by what is consistent—familiar songs, community traditions, but also know we are never in exactly the same place as we were the year before. The constants can even put an exclamation point on all that has changed since the last time we were here—we notice the new babies who have been born and new community members joining for the first time. We feel the pain of those we have lost who were at our side last year. Living in Jewish time through rituals like the one we're doing right now helps us hold the truth that we are one small part of something continuous as we move from one year to the next, and the truth that change is always happening.

I remember one particular moment of feeling unsettled by the ways in which time can feel like a spiral. It was some years ago when I was visiting my grandparents' friend Anna Ornstein at her apartment in Brookline. Well, "Friend" isn't really the right word to describe the relationship between Anna and her husband Paul, and my grandparents, Lusie and Steve aka the famous apple peeler. Steve and Paul had grown up together in the shtetl in Hungary and The Hornstein and Ornstein families had been close friends going back generations. After surviving the Holocaust, Paul and Steve found each other, and after that point they stuck together. Steve, Paul, Anna and Lusie all went to medical school together in Germany after the war, and eventually immigrated to Cincinnati Ohio where they lived two houses away from each other and raised their families together.

Whenever I visit with Anna she tells me stories. Sometimes they're stories from before the war or from her time in Auschwitz. But most of the time they are stories about Anna and Paul and my grandparents as young people figuring out how to rebuild their lives together after their communities were destroyed. These are stories of resilience and of the power of deep friendship and community. The particular day I have in mind she wanted to talk about politics. It was during the 2016 republican primaries and you couldn't turn on the TV without seeing then candidate Donald Trump. Nobody was taking him very seriously yet. Nobody except for Anna that is. She was upset—"he's going to win," she told me with certainty. The way people were responding to him and the easy, hateful answers he gave to their very real problems felt familiar to her. "Everyone thought Hitler was an idiot too," she tagged on at the end. In that moment

deep down in my kishkes I knew I had to take him and the strain of politics gaining steam through his campaign more seriously too.

There have been so many moments in the years since where I have had the feeling that history is repeating itself. I felt it seeing new far right movements gain a foothold here and across the world. I felt it seeing children separated from their families at the border much like my grandparents were separated from their families. I felt it at each new report of another unarmed black person dying at the hands of the police. And I felt it earlier this summer when in echos of fifty years ago, people were forced to make plans to travel across state borders to get an abortion. It is so easy to feel powerless in these moments—like we are caught in a cycle, almost like there are forces beyond our control dooming us to keep repeating injustices that should only exist in the past. Like we are not only stuck, we are slipping backwards.

At the same time, we are in a moment of flux and global uncertainty. While many of the big problems we face feel old, how many times in the last few years of pandemic, climate disaster and war have we pointed to the world around us and called these times “unprecedented.” As I feel the ground moving underneath us, I can’t shake the feeling that we’re only at the beginning of a long period of tumult and uncertainty, and acting with our full humanity will only keep feeling harder and riskier.

So here we are in this time of both repetition and immense change. How do we move through this moment? How do we move towards the better world we want to build? Where can we learn from the truth of repetition and create new possibilities through the truth of change?

At the end of my visit with Anna, she looked at me with an intense urgency and shared a message that she has continued to repeat to me almost every time I’ve talked to her in the six and a half years since. “Your grandmother Lusia’s story is the most important one for people to hear right now. We need to make sure it gets told.” My grandmother was from a city called Lvov, now in the Ukraine—I’m sure you’ve heard about it as its been in the news a lot lately. Lvov had 100,000 Jews before the war. My grandmother was one of very few who survived. After she saw the total destruction of her community, she escaped Lvov on false papers and ended up in Warsaw. She could have stayed in hiding, but instead she made the choice to join with Jewish and non-Jewish youth in the underground and fought the Nazis in the Warsaw Partisan Uprising of 1944.

I don’t know what factored into her decision to fight and to resist even with all the risks that came with it. But I do know she was able to make the hard and necessary choice to be human in a world that dehumanized her, the choice to have agency when so many were trying to take her agency from her. I of course always ask myself if I would have had the capacity and courage to make the same choice if I was in her situation. It’s an impossible question to answer, but because she did, I know I always have that choice available to me too. Because when we make the choice to be human, even and especially when it’s hard, we get to help the people that come after us make that choice too. That’s what it means to be the inheritors of a lineage, a link in the

chain of people who have committed their lives to the work of justice, one small part of a larger multigenerational project.

At BWC we have the gift of being part of a lineage of people choosing to be human too. We often draw inspiration from our community's roots in the world of radical Yiddishkeit and hold ourselves accountable to carrying forward our founders' vision for a just world. Outside of BWC's direct lineage, we can draw from a Jewish history full of so many stories of people making the choice to do what needed to be done in hard moments. The Jewish peoples' legacy is one of resistance to many Empires. In one of my favorite revolutionary Jewish stories, Moroccan Jews joined with their neighbors to fight for Moroccan independence from French Colonial Rule. These Jews reject the Vichy regime's vision of assimilation in favor of radical national liberation politics. They took the more difficult path rather than the safer one. But, like my grandmother and the Workers Circles' founders chose to do, they took the path that led them into deeper relationships of solidarity with those around them, the path towards liberation.

Each of us, no matter where we come from, have stories like these—because in every time and place, no matter how difficult, people have chosen the harder and more meaningful path. How much more strength we have in this room when we think of all the lineages of resistance, Jewish and non-Jewish, we bring to our community's collective table Diving into whatever legacy we see ourselves as inheritors of—it could be from families, from our movements for justice or from a different lineage we feel ourselves a part of, connects us to our own ability to take the harder and more liberatory road.

But when we only look to the past, or idealize it too much, there is so much we miss. We know whoever our ancestors were, they made mistakes along the way. They were complex, imperfect human beings just like we all are. Being in their lineage means learning from those mistakes so we can make better ones, and so that those who come after us can make even better ones.

We can also miss the possibility in our own particular moment in time. Our work is to root in the lineages that formed us, *and at the same time* imagine a just world that has never existed before. Living in the apple spiral of Jewish reminds us we are not actually stuck in a cycle, even though it feels like it sometimes. We are also moving forward. Change is not only possible it is totally inevitable.

As James Baldwin once wrote:

“Nothing is fixed,
forever and forever and forever,
it is not fixed;
the earth is always shifting,
the light is always changing,
the sea does not cease to grind down rock.
Generations do not cease to be born,

and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have. The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us. The moment we cease to hold each other, the moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.”

Because the earth is always shifting we are not a moment we have ever been in before. New movements for justice are forming, new generations are coming into their own and finding their own ways to stand up against exploitation and inequality, relationships of solidarity that never existed before are forming every day. We never come back to exactly the same place we started, we grow and change even as we return.

And as Baldwin writes, we need to hold each other and believe in each other through it all. We can't learn the lessons from the past and we can't find the possibilities in the flux all on our own. That is what communities like ours exist for. They exist to hold us accountable for being the ones who like our ancestors make the choice to stay human. And they exist to be a shelter in the storm of change. As we enter into a new year, let us continue to draw from our many ancestral stories of solidarity, justice, hope, connection. Let us act as the courageous inheritors of a legacy so that we too can make choices that spiral us upwards into a shenere un besere velt—a better and more beautiful world.

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last time we were here—we notice the new babies who have been born, new community members joining for the first time and how the kids around us are totally different than they were a year ago. We feel the pain of those we have lost who were at our side last year. Living in Jewish time through rituals like the one we're doing right now helps us hold the truth that we are one small part of something continuous as we move from one year to the next, and the truth that change is the only real constant and that it happens all the time.

I remember one particular moment of feeling unsettled by the ways in which time can feel like a spiral. It was some years ago when I was visiting Anna Ornstein at her apartment in Brookline—across the street from the BWC office. Anna's late husband Paul Ornstein had been friends with my grandfather, Steve Hornstein aka the famous apple peeler, his entire life. They had grown up together in the shtetl in Hungary and The Hornstein and Ornstein families had been close friends going back generations. After surviving the Holocaust Paul and Steve returned to their small Hungarian town. The story goes that Paul heard some Jews were gathering in the town's synagogue. The first person he saw there was Steven, his best friend. After that point they stuck together. Steven, Paul, Paul's high school sweetheart Anna who had also survived and my grandmother Lusia all went to medical school together in Germany after the war, and eventually immigrated to Cincinnati Ohio where they lived two houses away from each other and raised their families together.

Anna is the only one of that original foursome still alive and one of the things I love most about living in Boston is that I get to spend time with her. Whenever I visit with Anna she tells me stories. Sometimes they're stories from before the war or from her time in Auschwitz. But most of the time they are stories about Anna and Paul and my grandparents as young people figuring out how to rebuild their lives together after their communities were destroyed. These are stories of resilience and of the power of deep friendship and community. The particular day I have in mind she wanted to talk about politics. It was during the 2016 republican primaries and you couldn't turn on the TV without seeing then candidate Donald Trump. Nobody was taking him very seriously yet. Nobody except for Anna that is. She was upset—"he's going to win," she told me with certainty. The way people were responding to him and the easy, hateful answers he gave to their very real problems felt familiar to her. "Everyone thought Hitler was an idiot too," she tagged on at the end. In that moment deep down in my kishkes I knew I had to take him and the strain of politics gaining steam through his campaign more seriously too.

There have been so many moments in the years since where I have had the feeling that history is repeating itself. I felt it seeing new far right movements gain a foothold here and across the world. I felt it seeing children separated from their families at the border much like my grandparents were separated from their families. I felt it at each new report of another unarmed black person dying at the hands of the police. And I felt it earlier this summer when in echos of fifty years ago, people were forced to make plans to travel across state borders to get an abortion. It is so easy to feel powerless in these moments—like we are caught in a cycle, like there are forces beyond our control dooming us to keep repeating injustices that should only exist in the past, like we are not only stuck, we are slipping backwards.

At the end of my visit with Anna, she looked at me with an intense urgency and shared a message that she has continued to repeat to me almost every time I've talked to her in the six and a half years since. "Your grandmother Luscia's story is the most important one for people to hear right now. We need to make sure it gets told." My grandmother was from a city called Lvov, now in the Ukraine—I'm sure you've heard about it as it's been in the news a lot lately. Lvov had 100,000 Jews before the war. My grandmother was one of very few who survived. After she saw the total destruction of her community, she escaped Lvov on false papers and ended up in Warsaw. She could have stayed in hiding, but instead she made the choice to join with Jewish and non-Jewish youth in the underground and fought the Nazis in the Warsaw Partisan Uprising of 1944.

I don't know what factored into her decision to fight and to resist even with all the risks that came with it. But I do know she was able to make the hard and necessary choice to be human in a world that dehumanized her, the choice to have agency when so many were trying to take her agency from her. I of course always ask myself if I would have had the capacity and courage to make the same choice if I was in her situation. It's an impossible question to answer, but because she did and passed on her story to me, I know I always have that choice available to me too. Because when we make the choice to be human, even and especially when it's hard, we get to help the people that come after us make that choice too. That's what it means to be the inheritors of a lineage, a link in the chain of people who have committed their lives to the work of justice, one small part of a larger multigenerational project.

At BWC we have the gift of being part of a lineage of people choosing to be human too. We often draw inspiration from our community's radical ancestors and hold ourselves accountable to their vision for a just world. They created this community to take care of each other and hold each other accountable to living out their values in their own difficult times. Outside of BWC's direct lineage, one thing I love about being Jewish is that Jewish history is full of so many stories of people making the choice to do what needed to be done in hard moments. Our legacy is one of resistance to many Empires. In one of my favorite revolutionary Jewish stories, Moroccan Jews joined with their neighbors to fight for Moroccan independence from French Colonial Rule. When France fell to Germany in 1940, Vichy rule brought anti-Semitic legislation to the majority of North African Jews. Many rejected France's vision of assimilation—an option available to them—in favor of radical national liberation politics. These Jewish ancestors took the more difficult path rather than the safer one. But, like my grandmother chose to do, they took the path that led them into deeper relationship with those around them, and the path that allowed them to build a better world. Each of us, no matter what lineage or lineages we come from, have stories like these—because in every time and place no matter how difficult people have chosen the harder

and more meaningful path. How much more strength we have in this room when we think of all the lineages of resistance, Jewish and non-Jewish, we bring to our collective table. (encourage people to dig into own histories)

But we don't want drawing strength and inspiration from our lineage to be about trying to replicate the past. Part of our work is to hold both a commitment and accountability to the lineages that formed us while also imagining and building towards a just world that has never existed before.

"For nothing is fixed,
forever and forever and forever,
it is not fixed;
the earth is always shifting,
the light is always changing,
the sea does not cease to grind down rock.
Generations do not cease to be born,
and we are responsible to them because we are the only witnesses they have.
The sea rises, the light fails, lovers cling to each other, and children cling to us.
The moment we cease to hold each other,
the moment we break faith with one another,
the sea engulfs us and the light goes out."

- James Baldwin

The wisdom of Jewish time tells us we are not actually stuck in cycle, even though it feels like it sometimes. We are able to learn from similar moments and carve a different path along the spiral of time. Our ancestors were complex, imperfect human beings just like we are. They made mistakes and had gaps in their understanding that we notice more clearly now. Being in their lineage means learning from them so we can make better mistakes today, and so that those who come after us can make even better ones.

There is no doubt in this moment in history we have our work cut out for us. I know I don't need to tell any of you how many massive problems we face in this moment of global uncertainty. As I feel the ground moving underneath us, I can't shake the feeling that we're only at the beginning of a long period of tumult and uncertainty, and acting with our full humanity will only keep feeling harder and riskier.

But as I look around I see so many people making the choice to continue walking along the harder path towards justice and liberation that those that came before them have laid. I see Indigenous communities blockading pipelines, Black people organizing their communities against police repression, Palestinians fighting for justice against all odds. I see a labor

movement invigorated by a new generation standing up against exploitation and inequality. New relationships of solidarity that haven't existed before are being built every day. No matter what forces we are up against, we always have the ability worthy descendants to those who have come before us, and worthy ancestors to all those who will come after us.

(Add in a few sentences to tie it together—strength of own legacy? bring back to apple?) As we enter into a new year, let us continue to draw from our many ancestral stories of solidarity, justice, hope, connection. Let us act as the courageous inheritors of a legacy so that we too can make choices that spiral us upwards into a shenere un besere velt—a better and more beautiful world.

- Lusia's story
- WC story
 - Great grandfather Max
- Morocco
- Movement stories

None of these people accepted anything as inevitable.

We can look around and see so many people bringing the struggles of our collective ancestors into our time and making that choice over and over again.

- Indigenous elders blockading pipelines in the freezing cold, Black people organizing their communities against police repression, and more
- New wave of unionization

In that choice—we see something new begin to form. Change isn't just a possibility its an inevitability.

Taking the struggles of the past and bringing them into today.

Being part of a lineage allows us to be purposeful about how we do that so we can stay human in times when doing so is not what we're supposed to do and make better mistakes

Building on those lineages means being part of and helping create new movements of solidarity. Allow us to make better mistakes.

Anna oral history

- Along for the ride—whichever stories she feels like telling somehow are the ones you need to hear
 - Most often these are stories of she and Paul and my grandparents right after the war in the refugee camp—when they were young and were learning how to rebuild. stories of resilience, of the power of healing through relationship.
- In the winter of 2016 she had a different kind of story for me: Trump
 - At that point it was still a crowded field and nobody thought he had a shot. Hes; going to win. “We all thought Hitler was an idiot too.”
 - Story she thought I and the world needed to hear: Lucia’s story. Escaped and became Partisen fighter in Warsaw. Jews and non-Jews risking everything to be human in a moment where doing so took tremendous sacrifice.
- Cycle

Our story is a collective of people choosing to be humans no matter what

- Lucia’s story—not the only one in our history
- Ex of Morocco
- Workers Circle
 - Lucky that’s part of my direct lineage but is also our community’s lineage
- Each of us no matter what lineage or lineages we come from have these stories. How much more strength we have in this room when we think of how many lineages of resistance we each bring.
- Not to romanticize—complexities and things we think are wrong: Gives the ability to make better mistakes

Coming around again—Shana, Shana, Shone

Being part of a lineage is about holding both the repetition and the change

- Paradox: Holding both a commitment to the lineage that formed us, and the desire to see and represent the world anew.

- Big problems to face in this moment of global uncertainty:
- Feel’s the ground moving underneath us. Can’t shake that the choice to act on our values will continue to be more and more challenging.
- Luckily we have examples and we have each other to care for each other and we imagine being in a different place than our ancestors too
- One where we are in solidarity with everyone else making that choice with us.
- Let us come back around to the stories of solidarity, justice, hope, connection and let us act as the inheritors of their legacy, always spiraling upwards into a besere velt.

Indigenous elders blockading pipelines in the freezing cold, Black people organizing their communities against police repression, and more

Living in 2022 means navigating constant uncertainty and grappling with a shifting world full of pain and injustice. But it is also a time of real possibility. The beauty of being part of a community like this one is that we can keep each other focused on our shared vision of the world we want to build and remind each other that there *is* a better place---we will get from here to there by continuing to stick together ---something BWC has modeled so beautifully through all of the tumult of the past few years.

Individual story or experience linked into this river of history. Humble descendent. Speaks against individualism--relief from the idea that I as an individual have to lead in this way. One small part. Decentering of whiteness and white people--humility. Humble descendents of those who have come before us--accountability to continue what our ancestors started.

It was hard in the months and years following that conversation to feel anything other than the inevitability that history was repeating itself. In the last six years we've seen right wing white supremacist and anti-democratic movements gain steam here and around the world. We've seen immigrant children separated from their families at the border. We've watched as reproductive rights that so many fought so hard for were stripped away. What do we do with the heartbreaking feeling that we are stuck in a loop--slipping backwards and farther away from the better world we work so hard to build?