

Yom Kippur 5777
Afternoon Service Opening Iyyun
Rabbi Dusty Klass

A few years back, a friend and I decided to hike Half Dome, a challenging peak in Yosemite National Park. The park website suggests allotting 10-12 hours to the hike, so we begin before dawn, weighed down with provisions.

We hiked and hiked, steadily gaining elevation all morning. 400 feet from the summit, we had climbed 4,500 feet of elevation over eight miles.

Those last 400 feet were the kicker, though. A veritable wall of stone rose up in front of us. To complete the hike, to make it to the top of Half Dome, we were to grab hold of two cable lines sunk deep into the rock face and pull ourselves up and over the top.

No climbing gear, just hiking boots and a pair of gloves to better hold on to the cable.

We were so close, and yet so far.

I was petrified - exhausted from the hike, not the biggest fan of heights, no upper-body strength. We were miles from the nearest hospital, and if I went down....[shudder] there were so many ways this could go wrong.

We sit here today, in the final hours of Yom Kippur.
We have prayed and prayed, steadily gaining elevation in our own way.

We are so close and yet so far.

As we move into our services of remembrance and healing, as we run toward the gates, ever closing, we might even be scared.

Grief and mourning and pain are hard, and require so much energy, and we are exhausted.
But we are also strong, and resilient.

I almost chose not to do it. I almost sat it out and let my friend climb the last bit without me. But in the end, I pulled myself up those last 400 feet of cable and over the top to the flat summit of Half Dome.

And the view alone was worth it all.

The gates are closing, and we only have 400 feet left.
They may well be the hardest 400 feet of the day.
But we are here together, to lift each other up and move each other forward.
We are here to remember, and to repent, and to recover.

Let's climb.