

Rabbi Judy Schindler
Yom Kippur Drash
Mayim Chayim - Living Waters
Yom Kippur 5781

It is great to be with you, my Temple Beth El Family for this healing service.

Whether morning dew, cooling rains, streaming tears, or the salt water of the Mediterranean, my favorite sea, water brings renewal and healing.

That is why my Yom Kippur custom includes immersion in the *mayim chayim*, the living waters of a mikvah – the ritual bath. In the warm waters I release the year gone by. I let go of my disappointments and pain, my flaws and failings, and I emerge with a renewed commitment to becoming my balanced and best self.

The Jewish Year of 5780, 2020 unfolded in ways none of us had planned. Our calendars have been rendered practically useless... my appointment calendar was not at all what I had planned. I usually anticipate the arrival of the High Holidays by taking note of the waxing and then waning of the new moon of Elul. But this year, I anticipated the arrival of Yom Kippur counting down remaining radiation treatments, the last of which was just three days ago, on Friday.

Can I get an amen?

While I usually look to the shofar's blast as the ultimate conclusion to these days of awe, the ringing of the bell in the hallway of the Levine Cancer Institute would be a similar goal to what became the daily center of my days.

I will soon go to the mikvah and mark my transition from treatment for to a survivor of breast cancer.

I rarely have spoken those words aloud and if you did not know it is because I revealed this information to only a few people. But even in your not knowing, you have been a blessing.

My very personal journey to healing is, thank God, almost behind me. I am grateful beyond measure with the outcome and I am blessed to have all that I need. Particularly my husband who channeled his own anxiety during my tests, surgery and treatments into cooking – including making bagels and ice cream from scratch. While I ACCEPT WITH AN OPEN HEART YOUR PRAYERS FOR HEALING AND MORE THAN THAT, I AM ALL SET ...I truly HAVE ALL I NEED.

In Judaism, when we offer the *mi shebeirach* prayer for healing, we add the *mother's* name like Isaac son of Sarah. The Jewish sages say that this custom is meant to ward off the evil eye, but I say... Judy, the daughter of Rhea says, it is because the Hebrew word *rachamim*, compassion, comes from the root *rechem* meaning womb. The matriarchs can inspire our path to wholeness. Hannah, Hagar, and Miriam all teach of the healing power of water present in their lives, in our lives, in my life.

And Hannah wept. The Biblical Hannah, about whom we read on Rosh Hashanah, went to the Temple and she cried.

The Talmud teaches that with the Destruction of Temple, the gates of prayer leading directly to God were closed. An intermediary angel now carries our prayers Godward. But the holy gates of tears, Rabbi Elazar tells us, are always open. The gates of tears are always open.

In our tradition, tears hold redemptive and healing power. In my trepidation, tears marked my transition from despair to determination.

Modern science, too, teaches that a good cry makes a difference. "Tears," Dr. Stephen Sideroff, of UCLA reports "activate the parasympathetic nervous system and restore the body to a state of balance."

And Hannah prayed. Hannah wanted a child in a world where having children reflected blessings and one's value. But she wasn't able to carry a child. She went to the Temple and poured out her pained soul to God.

The Priest, watching Hannah's lips moving with no words coming forth, mistook her for a drunk. But she set him straight and thus Hannah became a model for authentic prayer.

In battling an illness, physicians rely on statistics as they select one's course of treatment. Yet prayer is the place where statistics, science, and spirituality meet.

"Prayer cannot bring water to parched fields, or mend a broken bridge, or rebuild a ruined city;" a mid-20th century Rabbi Ferdinand Isserman taught, "but prayer can water an arid soul, mend a broken heart, and rebuild a weakened will."

Spontaneous heartfelt even wordless prayers can be offered anytime...anywhere - in our homes and on our walks, in medical waiting rooms and inside the MRI machine. My...how I have prayed.

And Hagar's eyes were opened to the wellspring before her.

No story helped me through my medical saga more than the wellspring that Hagar saw in her most desperate moment. In Genesis, Hagar and her son, Ishmael, were cast out into the scorching wilderness with only a meager portion of water and bread. When their resources ran dry, Hagar laid down her son to die and stood at a distance so she would not bear the pain of witnessing him breathe his last breath. She cried out and God opened her eyes to the wellspring, the wellspring that was always there.

Even in our darkest moments – whether sudden unemployment or depleted savings, or the emotional or physical toll of a pandemic that won't let up its hold upon the world – the Holy One places well-springs before our eyes.

COVID-19 has turned our lives upside down and it feels like we have to face our trials alone. But we are never alone – not in the silence of our homes or God forbid when walking through hospital corridors. We simply need to open our eyes to see the wellsprings.

I did - - I did, and here is what I saw...

The wellsprings of friendships - old and new. Tap into friends from the past. Did you know that there is a Jewish prayer to say when you haven't seen a friend or spoken to a friend for more than a year? "Blessed are You O God, sovereign of the universe who resurrects the dead?" The friendships that once sustained us can sustain us still.

And we can make new friends today. In Zoom rooms, in grocery stores, even in radiation waiting rooms, we can be inspired by those whom we meet.

There are wellsprings of experienced doctors and nurses - medical or psychological practitioners who have seen the course that lies before us that looks, sounds, and feels so scary.

Wellsprings of compassionate staff who are the healing hands who bring treatments.

Wellsprings of nature - winds and rain, sun and fog. Reb Nachman prescribes a daily walk of prayer in nature and I concur. The natural world is a sanctuary.

The wellspring of our siddur - Buy a traditional prayer book and open any page. We have 2000 years of words to help us along our way. I never went anywhere without it. Our liturgy gave voice to my gratitude, my fears, my healing, my doubt, and my faith.

Our most important wellspring? It is our God-given strength which is far greater than we ever knew. These last six months this truth has been revealed to all of us and in these last 3 months I have called upon my own reserves of strength.

Hagar names that well-spring "*Be'er Lachai Roi*, The Wellspring of the Living One Who Sees Me." Anyone who truly sees us can be that wellspring and we can serve as that wellspring that truly sees and supports the other.

And Miriam danced. She celebrated the parting of the powerful and dangerous waters of the Sea of Reeds by taking a timbrel in her hand and leading the women around her in music and dance. So must we celebrate the moments in which the waters of challenge even temporarily recede. We cannot wait for COVID to pass to celebrate, we have to celebrate whenever and wherever the opportunity arises.

We heal by celebrating life -- Shabbat and a new week; the bagel at the break fast; the birth of a congregant; the repairing of a relationship; the healing of our bodies; the softening of grief; the beauty of transforming nature, the discovery of strength, and seeing a well spring we did not know was before us. To all of these we say *l'chaim*, to life. To all of life...in its beauty and best, in its frailty and challenges. We live fully and fill our wine cups to overflowing. Standing before you on this day of atonement, my cup of blessing surely overflows.

And Hannah wept. And Hagar opened her eyes to see the wells before her. And Miriam danced.

I weep as I anticipate my doctors giving me a new name: Rabbi Judy Schindler, cancer survivor. I will, with eyes wide open, enter the waters of the *mayim chayim* - the living waters of the mikvah - to mark that transition. Sometime during the conclusion of this service, you can copy the link in the chat box and later send a word of blessing for me as I enter the waters or share words of blessing for all those who are in need of healing. I will share these words back with you so that you can bless others through this time of unfathomable global pain. With your words of blessing, you can be a wellspring for others and together we can dance to the other side.

PAUSE

Close your eyes. I recite this blessing of healing for you and for me.

*God of Hannah,
who saw tears roll down her face and provided solace,*

*God of Hagar,
who opened her eyes to see the wellspring before her,
help us in our moments of despair to open our eyes to see the wellsprings before us,*

*God of Miriam,
who led our people in song as dangerous waters parted
and who merited the creation of wells in the desert,
help us to celebrate the minutes and the days and the lives that we have.*

*May this year of 5781 bring waters of healing to all of us.
Replenishing rains, purifying waters
that wash away germs keeping all those we encounter safe,
sustaining streams of friendship
wellsprings of prayer.*

*May our words of kindness and compassion flow forth from our mouths to heal others,
And may the words of others wash away our fears strengthening our faith.*

*May healing come to each one of you,
healing of body, healing of soul,
and may healing come to all.*

Amen.

Cantor Mary Thomas: And Moses prayed these five words

Ana eyl refah na lah... O God please heal her.

And we pray these words.

Ana eyl r'fah na lah... ana eyl r'fah na loh...

O God please heal him. O God, please heal her.

Many thanks to Rabbi Elka Abramson for being my mentor as I struggled to find the words to share.