

Each year, my grammar school took all 5th and 8th graders on a trip to New England. I have vivid memories of both of my trips, mostly bonding with my friends on the bus.

I remember visiting one of the many lighthouses along the Eastern shoreline, though I do not recall which. I remember waiting outside of this impressive structure to head up the stairs of the lighthouse. The staircase was narrow and only a handful of kids were let up and down at a time. When I finally made my way inside, I found that the staircase was a tightly wound spiral tracing the outer wall of the old lighthouse. We followed the curve around and around and around, looping back over the door where we entered, just at a higher elevation, as we climbed and climbed to get to see the view from the top. Step after step, we reached toward the apex.

Proverbs teaches us to “Remember the circular path you will take and all your ways will prosper.”

Time is not linear. Life is not linear. Time is a spiral staircase, it is a circular path that we travel year after year as if it were a lighthouse, towering into the heavens. We enter at the bottom when we are born and are taught what to expect over time, as we move through the cycles and seasons of the year. Holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries become our sign posts: We’ve made another revolution on our staircase. Aging upward, growing in wisdom and experience as we move, step by step.

In Judaism, we travel the circle of our calendar - holidays, torah - we are different each year, so we meet holidays and Torah differently - they are anchors, moorings in what otherwise would be hours and minutes without direction and purpose. It is as if we travel the lighthouse stairs and our fingers trace the cold, old stones - some are smoother because others have stopped there for a moment

for days such as this - for prayer, for pouring out our hearts, for awareness - and it transforms time from any other day - into Yoma - the day.

At this season of my life, I do a great deal of learning about the human condition through parenting two growing human beings. One of the most instructive lessons for me, personally, in this past year is simple - Kids do well if they can. Dr. Ross Greene, a clinical child psychologist and author of *Raising Human Beings*, among others, is clear - Kids do well if they can. No child desires to misbehave. No child wants to disappoint adults and loved ones or cause harm or chaos. If a child is having a challenge - as a parent - or as their loving adult, we must remind ourselves that "Kids do well if they can." So in a moment of challenge with one of my kids - or one of my students - I've finally learned to ask in a different way - if you aren't "doing well" - whatever that means in a given situation - what is holding you back? What is the stumbling block that you are facing? Is there something I can do to help so that you can thrive? What can I change about me or the environment or the circumstance, or is there a tool you need, so that you have a better chance of being a kid who "does well" rather than one who struggles?

The thing is, adults do well if they can, too. People do well if they can.

Each Yom Kippur, we offer the words of our communal confession - *Al cheit shechatanu l'fanecha* - for the sins we have committed against You - through losing self-control, through greed and exploitation, through an insincere apology, and on and on we list sins, the ways in which we have missed the mark.

We miss the mark because we are broken. We miss the mark because we are hurt. We miss the mark because we have not given ourselves the time to heal.

People do well - if they can. So if we aren't doing well, if we are missing the mark over and over again. If we need the same reminder year after year after year - we

must ask ourselves - what is holding us back? How do we *heal* our old wounds so that we might be more whole?

Our lives are filled with broken pieces that we have ploughed past in our relentless climbing of the stairs of the lighthouse. If we just push a bit more and put one foot in front of the other, things move into the background. Were we to go back down the stairs, we might find loose steps and boulders and all sorts of complicated grief, unacknowledged loss, and trauma. If we look backward, we would see the rubble we left behind at 16 or 34 or 55.

Perhaps we did not stop long enough along the way to heal our wounds? Perhaps once the acute illness or the event passed, we girded ourselves, as society demands, and just - moved forward? These broken places weaken the steps that continue up and now find that the lighthouse has become structurally unsound. And in that instability, there is more room to miss the mark as we claw our way upward without sure footing below. We act in ways that require repentance on Yom Kippur, and we do so not because we want to do poorly.

We do not desire to cause harm through our words; We do not desire to disrespect or mistreat one another and our world; We do not desire to have poor judgement or lose self-control; We do not desire to be greedy or arrogant.

People do well when they can. Kids do well when they can. And when we do not “do well”, we must always greet one another with compassion and curiosity, with love and a willingness to be helpful. Almost surely, there is a great crater of trauma or grief or sadness below where that person stands.

We miss the mark because we are not whole. Yom Kippur reminds us that wholeness is possible, that healing is possible, and that this year might be the time to face the burden that seemed impossible to address at this time last year.

Consider the circular path you will take and all your ways will prosper.

Thank goodness for that circular path. It brings us back again and again to a place where healing may be possible. Yom Kippur reminds us that wholeness is possible.

We take time now to pray for healing - healing for our world, our country, our community, our loved ones, and healing for ourselves. If you are joining us from home and you are comfortable where you are, speak the names of those you hold in your heart for healing at this time; breathe their names into the universe. For those who are here in the sanctuary, we will come to you so you can share the names of those for whom you pray today aloud. We will join together in the words of Mi Shebeirach in just a few moments.

---

Baruch Atah Adonai, rofei hecholim. Blessed are You God, who helps us to find healing and wholeness.