



Torah Reflections for Rosh Hashanah

It is the Jewish New Year. It's the time for reflection and formulating our hopes and dreams for the coming seasons. It seems as if the entire world is focused on all that is good. Sometimes in illness we can enjoy others taking pleasure in what we cannot, and seeing them relishing the holiday does give us relief. Sometimes the smell of food we cannot eat gives us pleasure when we see others devouring New Year treats.

And yet, for others of us struggling with illness or caring for someone who is sick, there seems no room for dashed hopes, shattered dreams, and all that comes when disease erodes the body, challenges the spirit, and scrapes against even the best of relationships. Even hearing people say "Happy New Year" can seem deafening. Some of us bear it through, some of us pretend to smile; some of us can't wait for it all to go away.

Being sick is like being in a foreign country without a tour guide. And just as no one can ever see an entire country's every corner, we can never fully know the terrain of our own illness, no matter how long we have been suffering. And so one New Year may be happy and yet the next miserable.

Jewish tradition teaches that Rosh HaShanah, the new year, is also the anniversary of the world's creation. Creation can mean so many things. One way to understand creation is that God created the world, set all the parts into motion, and we now have free will to determine our own course. It is as if creation is a fixed sequence of actions that now move of their own volition.

And so too, sometimes we feel as if our life of illness is created as a motion that cannot be stopped. The movement of our spirit may seem fixed, and yet if a country is too vast to know entirely, surely our inner terrain is even more expansive. And so we may need to explore anew what moves inside us. Illness may claim a body, but it cannot contaminate a spirit. Illness may cause our physical creation to creak, slur, and falter in walking, speech or gait. But, our spirits are always a part of the terrain of illness.

It is truly the ways we explore the terrain of our spirit that bring us the nourishment, even in the midst of physical limits, that allows us to move beyond the confines of our body. A diseased cell cannot prevent praying, a defective heart pumping cannot prevent feeling your spirit flutter, and a compromised organ cannot prevent your soul from exploring inner terrain.

The Jewish holiday cycle is set. No matter how you feel, the various holidays come and go. This New Year may not be what you want for your self or others. But here it is. It is not a matter of making the best of it. It is a matter of doing what you can with it. Even the seemingly smallest amount of spiritual reflection is good enough. After all, what is an insight but a quick yet clarifying moment that leaves a lasting mark?

May this New Year be filled with even the smallest moments that stir your soul.

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