

Yom Kippur 5777

The last school day before Yom Kippur always filled me with dread. I can remember my mother sitting down to write a note to my teachers, explaining why I would be absent for yet another Jewish holiday. And I would take the note with me, bring it to school, and give it to my teachers.

To a person, my teachers were always kind and considerate about missing school for the holidays. I always had at least a few Jewish classmates, and we were treated with respect and decency. But that never stopped the teachers from giving us work to do for the day we would miss.

And so I would come home, the house smelling good with the foods for the holiday cooking, and think to myself: some deal I have. I get to miss school (yay!) but have to spend the day in the synagogue, fasting, and when I get home, I have a stack of work to do.

Usually I could avoid the homework before Kol Nidre—but by the time we got home from Yom Kippur services the next day, it was back to the books. I remember arguing with my mother one year—to no avail—that I should be able to just celebrate the holiday and not have to worry about the homework. My mother thought otherwise.

After a day of dealing with sins and shortcomings, I would sit down to math or social studies and wonder how those subjects were connected to what I had witnessed at Synagogue earlier in the day. One year my mother said quite simply, “Daniel, Yom Kippur is about looking back *and* looking ahead. Quit complaining! You have the opportunity to start right away on a new path.”

How right she was—how lucky I was to have that kind of mother—and how I would love to hear that message one more time from her voice. Yom Kippur calls us to look back and look ahead. And then, as my mom reminded me, we have to return quickly to our pursuits and put those prayers into action.