

1...2...3... Uncovering Our Resilience for the New Year Rabbi Ariella Rosen, Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur 5778

I never met my great-grandmother, but grew up hearing stories about her as well as my other great-grandparents. She was far bigger in personality than her **4'8"** frame would suggest. Though I never got to know her, some of her influences on our family culture have remained, and there is **one story** in particular which always makes me smile. She used to suffer from terrible migraines. And apparently, one time when she was lying **flat on her back** in the dark in an attempt to find relief, her daughter, my grandmother, whispered in her ear that they were going out for a little while, to her favorite store, **Fortunoff's**. My great-grandmother paused for a moment, and said, **"Wait, I'll make 1,2,3."** She took a **deep breath**, counted 1...2...3... and got up and went to Fortunoff's with them. And now, even today in my family, when we need to launch our bodies into motion, we "make 1,2,3," count, and push ourselves up.

It is incredible what willpower- and perhaps the promise of a good sale- can do when it comes to pushing through a challenge. There are examples all over the place: marathoners and marines, so many who are determined to rebuild their homes in Houston, Florida, Puerto Rico and other parts of the Caribbean, those facing unimaginable loss right

now, embracing Option B (as has come to be popularized by Sheryl Sandberg in the wake of her own grief). For challenges from trivial to unimaginable, each of us at **our own pace** and **to the best of our own capacities**, we are wired to try to stand back up.

And it all starts with the decision to make 1,2,3. We have a biblical equivalent of that, you know, one that also comes at a moment when the characters involved might have preferred to lie on the couch in the dark.

A few chapters past the passages we read last week on Rosh Hashanah, we find that the narrative has come to a grinding halt. Abraham and Isaac have returned from the near-sacrifice on Mount Moriah, and soon after, we read, Sarah dies. After burying Sarah and mourning for her, it seems as if they don't know what to do next. They need to make sense of being a **family of 2**, and still have a job to do to begin to build a nation. Abraham decides to send his servant in search of a wife for Isaac, who finds Rebecca, who is pure motion, embodied. She runs, she hurries, to get water from the well for this servant, and again back and forth to the well to get water for his camels too. And this servant knows that she is the one who can guide Abraham and Isaac through their grief and enable them to rise up once again and persevere.

This is even more apparent when she gives her answer to the invitation to return with the servant and marry Isaac, to carry the story forward into the next generation. ***Elech***, she says, I will go. Torah commentator Rashi explains that this simple word, *elech*, was a statement of control. I will go of my own accord. You aren't making me, and you also can't stop me. I *want* to go.

Elech, is the biblical equivalent of **making 1,2,3**. I'll get up using my own strength. I'll rise, and I'll go. And so, with that one brave word, Rivkah became the 1,2,3 that Abraham and Isaac needed to push through their grief, and build a new story together.

There are some days, of course, where no amount of counting will help us gather enough strength to push ourselves up on our own. It's been a turbulent year, to be sure, for the Jewish people, for the American people, for the global community. Acts of vandalism, terrorism, racism, antisemitism, homophobia, transphobia, islamophobia, hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, should I go on?

It's been rough. And of course, each of us brings into this season our own reactions, grief, and questions from our experiences of this

past year. In times like these, the words of Somali-British poet Warsan Shire echo through my head:

*later that night
i held an **atlas** in my lap
ran my fingers across the **whole world**
and whispered
where does it hurt?*

*it answered
everywhere
everywhere
everywhere.*

Everywhere. It's all just so much. Too many places and too many people in need of bandages, comforting, love. Pounding in my head, like my great-grandmother's migraines, and pounding in my heart. There have been so many days when everything has just felt...broken. Days when I tried to get up from sitting in a dark place, with no amount of counting helping me find the strength to truly stand- and take a stand.

I've been feeling tiny, insignificant, useless, lately in the midst of all of this hurt, like a broken shard of pottery, as our Machzor tells us. At the end of the Unetaneh Tokef part of our service (in which we read the existential questions of who will live and who will die, who by fire

and who by water), we are meant to feel small, insignificant. And one of the images for humanity? *Mashul kecheres hanishbar*. We are compared to a broken vessel. But what does it really mean to say we are like shards of pottery? Are we really something that can never be fully repaired?

Maybe that shard embedded deep **within** us is the very thing that allows us to count to 3 and move forward through uncertainty. There is an account in Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition of how the world came to be. As a part of that narrative, some of the Divine light of creation, too intense to simply be released on the earth, was contained in vessels. But these vessels shattered under pressure, scattering fragments of light all over the earth. Our task, according to this telling, is to find these hidden pieces and gather them back together. Healing the world, then, is the task of collecting the light that we find. As physician and author Rachel Naomi Remen put it, “It’s not about healing the world by making a **huge difference**. It’s about healing the world that **touches** you, that’s **around** you.”

I’d like to suggest that when we hurt, when we allow ourselves to feel pain, grief, uncertainty...that pang is one of those shattered pieces of Divine light embedded deep within us poking us, piercing us, reminding us that our capacity to feel so deeply, to absorb so deeply, is

what makes us human, what makes us alive. It's what makes us capable of offering healing.

But we, as broken pieces of pottery, also have another job to do. We need to reassemble the puzzle, to make these vessels whole once again. But putting the pieces back together will **leave a mark**. And that mark is **essential**.

A memorable icebreaker from one summer I spent at camp was sharing "scar stories." We would take turns identifying scars somewhere on our bodies, telling the stories of how we got that scar. This one [left ring finger] is from breaking a glass while carelessly drying dishes as a teenager, using too much force because I was mad that my parents asked me to do the chore. This one [upper lip] was from running around the house in socks, leading to the inevitable slip and fall of a 4 year old.

When I see scars, I see stories. Of risks, of missteps, of times its bearers had to be brave. Theologian Nadia Bolz-Weber speaks of preaching from your scars, not from your wounds. Of course, some scars are much deeper, and perhaps not yet fully healed, resulting from stories we may not be ready to recall or tell. What all scars show, however, is our body's ability to heal itself, to patch up the cracks, still

leaving a mark so that we always remember where we've been broken. So let's share from that place, and connect with one another over the symbols of our resilience.

As Leonard Cohen penned, there's a crack in everything; that's how the light gets in. But it is also through the cracks that light is able to get out. It's how the spark within us, our own perseverance and determination can be unleashed on the world. It's how we make 1,2,3.

We need not assemble our sharp edges alone. Yes, there are times when we will want and need to make 1,2,3, to muster our own strength to rise up and say ***elech***, I will go, I will continue on. But in sharing our scars, we are also saying ***nelech***, WE will go. WE will walk together.

We do not need to step out of that dark room alone. And while we may feel isolated in times of pain, our fellow earthenware humans may have the sharp edges that fit our own, enabling us to rebuild ourselves, together. A few months ago, I had the privilege of hearing Deacon Arthur Miller of the archdiocese of Hartford pay tribute to my parents. And in speaking about their ability to support one another, he said words that have stayed with me. **If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.**

It's *elech*, and it's *nelech*. We need to dig deep for our **own** strength, and whatever may motivate each of us personally to count to 3 and move forward. But if we want to go far, we need to say *Nelech*. There is a reason why throughout this day of Yom Kippur we beat our chests, each of us as individuals, but reciting lists of deeds that WE have collectively done. AshamNU bagadNU. It's all in the plural, because no one should be left to do the work of this season alone. And in this time of **Yizkor**, we acknowledge and remember those who both in their living and in their passing have imprinted themselves upon us. And while we will each soon have our own words to say, we will end together with Kaddish, words that can only be said when in the presence of community, because this too we do **together**. Each of us may be broken shards, with the capacity both to cut and be cut, but together we can repair the cracks, letting light in, letting light out, and letting **us** know just how strong truly we are.