

**Plague, repentance, and boys throwing blocks**  
**By Alison S. Lebowhl**

It is 5778 and we list our sins.

Betrayal, carelessness, deceit. Hatred, ignorance, jealousy. Misuse of power, name-calling, wasted opportunity.

I love a good list.

We list the ways in which we may die this year. Fire or water, beast or sword, earthquake or plague. We list the diverging futures that may lie before us. Peace or pursuit, serenity or torment, debasement or exaltation.

We list our divine requests. Destruction of our enemies, release from famine and pestilence, the filling of our storehouses with abundance. Also: forgiveness of all sins, healing of the sick, inscription in the book of life. We begin each request by naming the divine. Our father, our king. My rock, my redeemer. Our mother, our compassionate one. You who brings storms and who shelters us from storms.

These are grand themes, and I do love the grandeur of these holidays -- the beauty of the language and the rawness of the prayers; the way everything about them is designed to wake you up.

Still, I'm not personally dealing with a lot of swords or plagues at this moment.

So when Judith Heilizer noted on Rosh Hashanah that we list the small sins because they can have great impact, I listened. I listened when she talked about the small failures of empathy and the ways in which parents betray their children with these failures daily.

Yes, I thought.

It was later that week that our seven-year-old, George, came off the soccer field after being pushed down, hard.

"It's not fair," he said, head down, fists clenched.

I made some noises of sympathy and then talked about being a good sport, and how he could respond to someone else being a bad sport.

He said, "It should have been a foul."

And then I got quiet and nuzzled him a little and gave him some water. And then he announced that he was ready to go back on the field.

At Rosh Hashanah, Judith said we cannot take on the task of saving the world, not alone, not every day. But we can be kind to the people around us.

Like I said, I love the grandeur and beauty of these holiday prayers. But I have in mind some smaller, less dignified ones.

My father, my king, help me find joy in playing our ten-year-old, Theo's, favorite board game, the one that takes an hour just to get set up.

My rock, my redeemer, help me find pleasure in walking the six blocks home from school with George when he asks to rest under the tree on the corner near school, and on the steps by the church, and again on the stone wall at the corner near home.

My mother, my compassionate one, help me stay calm when George throws a block at Theo's head or when Theo rips up George's art project.

My storm, my shelter, help me remember that they are vulnerable. Help me remember that they are in my care.