

I like the Fall. It's my birthday, it's the start of the school year, it's Rosh Hashanah -- a time of new beginnings, looking ahead to what is possible. It's also a time to look back. This past year has been one of intense learning for me. Some of you know that I started an anti-racism study group at Bnai Keshet. I wanted to learn what I could do, and what our synagogue could do, to resist the insidious effects of racism in our homes and our communities. Asking the question and seeking answers was extremely valuable, even though I am left with even more questions and challenges.

That's the paradox of learning -- the more you learn, the more you realize you have left to learn. And it can be daunting. So it's good to take stock of progress, and acknowledge how far you've come.

I believe I've come a long way. A few years ago, at a professional development workshop I attended, we needed to tell our 1-minute "story of self". My story surprised some of my fellow participants, though it might not surprise those who've known me since I was a little girl: I said that my life has been about gradually learning to not be a jerk.

That story has truth to it. But this coming year, reflecting on the theme of “btselem elohim,” one thing that I want to learn more about is how to be less hard on myself. I know, intellectually, that being a working mom in this time and place is a recipe for feeling perpetually inadequate. And I want to find out, in depth, how loving and forgiving myself, being kind to myself, can let me be kinder to others.

Lest you think this is a turn toward indulgent navel-gazing at the expense of serious action, let me share what author James Baldwin wrote in *The New Yorker*, in 1962:

White people...have quite enough to do in learning how to accept and love themselves and each other, and when they have achieved this -- which will not be tomorrow and may very well be never -- the Negro problem will no longer exist, for it will no longer be needed.

I am not sure what Baldwin meant, or even if it's true. But consider also the Buddhist teaching of Jack Kornfield:

“Compassion for ourselves gives rise to the power to transform resentment into forgiveness, hatred into friendliness, and fear into

respect for all beings. It allows us to extend warmth, sensitivity, and openness to the sorrows around us in a truthful and genuine way.”

But this year, I want to learn a little bit more, in my heart, that I am “btselem elohim” -- I am a reflection of the divine image. My many mistakes, my missteps, my weakness, my failures -- none of them deserve my wrath. I am worthy of love. We all are. And only love, beginning with love for ourselves, can help us all shine.

L'shanah tovah.