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Revealing Our Superhuman Strength

Yom Kippur Morning Family Service 5783 - October 5, 2022

I love superheroes. I love Captain America, Black Widow, Ironman, Wonder Woman. Any superheroes you love that I'm missing?

Of all these superheroes, this year, I really love Spider-Man.

Once *Spider-Man: No Way Home* arrived at Disney Plus this past spring, it is possible I may have been the first one in Los Angeles to watch it. I will give no spoilers. My favorite part actually comes straight from the preview:

At the beginning of the movie, Spider-Man's archnemesis Mysterio takes a video of himself on his phone, uploads it to Instagram Live, Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, so everyone can see it - and says: "Do you want to know who the real Spider-Man is? The real Spider-Man is... Peter Parker!"

I could not believe it. 60 seconds into this movie, and Peter had seemingly lost everything. Everyone now knows who Spider-Man is. I understand why Peter was surprised, maybe even scared--he didn't know what would happen to his family, and he didn't know what would happen to himself.

It can be hard to share your true self.

To me, Spider-Man breathes the true essence of Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is all about self-reflection. When I rewatch that opening scene, I imagine Spider-Man asking himself: "Who is the real me?," "How do I want to live?," and "How can I do better next time?" These questions are perfect for Yom Kippur.

We can also ask ourselves these questions: "Who is the real me?," "How do I want to live?," and "How can I do better next time?" Also, to add a question, "what does it look like for us to reveal our true selves?" These questions help us heal and grow into the people we want to be.

We can answer these questions through the meaning of the Hebrew for "Yom Kippur:" a day of atonement. Today is an entire day dedicated to atoning, dedicated to thinking about the ways that we have done wrong in this past year. And so, Yom Kippur is a day to reflect on our past year.

We can even sit and think for a moment. If you feel comfortable, I invite you to take a breath, rest your gaze at your feet, or close your eyes, and think:

- Of everything that you did last year, how did you excel?
- What did you do well?
- Where did you succeed?

At the same time...

- What is something that happened last year that you are not so proud of?
- What is something that you could have done better if you were given a second chance?
- What is something you said to someone that you wish you could take back?

One of the hardest parts of Yom Kippur is sitting with ourselves--both the good stuff, and the stuff that we want to change--just sitting with it. Once we jump back into our lives tomorrow, it is upon us to change. We can do this by reflecting specifically on one thing that happened last year that you want to do better next year. One of the most thoughtful rabbis in the past one-thousand years offers step-by-step instructions for how we can apologize to those whom we have wronged. Here are the four steps:

1. Stop the behavior- you can't apologize for having done something, or said something, if you're still doing it or saying it!
2. Stop thinking about the behavior- stopping the behavior is not enough--you must stop thinking about the behavior in its entirety.
3. Tell yourself that you will try not to make that mistake again--this is just like an apology to yourself. Practice the apology, and see how it feels.
4. And finally, you must apologize to the person whom you have wronged.¹

After all the reflecting, this final step allows us to actually apologize. And when we apologize, we reveal our true selves, our true identities, including the good parts and our flaws, to the world.

One of my favorite Yom Kippur teachings is that it is *never* too late to change. Today, we are given this golden opportunity to reflect on who we want to be. No one can make decisions for us--unless of course our parent tells us when it's time for bed... then we probably should listen to them--but as for decisions about how we can live our lives filled with kindness and forgiveness... Those are up to us.

When Peter Parker's true identity was revealed at the beginning of Spider-Man, he was frightened and surprised. Showing our true selves can be scary at times, but that does *not* mean it's a bad thing. Quite the contrary, I believe revealing our true selves, reflecting on our pasts, and apologizing to people we have wronged *actually* offers us the most protective essence our universe has to offer us: growth. It can mean revealing our true superhuman strength! Revealing our true selves, and that includes all our flaws, means making amends with people in our lives whom have been hurt. Showing our flaws can help others because it can help us grow in relationships with our friends and families. Uncovering our flaws can also foster the beautiful inherent blessings that we are, and we can be, in this world.

On this Yom Kippur, may we become superheroes--may we become like Captain America, Black Widow, Ironman, Wonder Woman, and Spider-Man--showing our superhuman strength and growing into the people we yearn to be by honoring and apologizing for our actions. We will become better people because of it.

¹ *Hilkhhot Teshuvah* 2:2, Rambam