

For the past three years, my wife Ashley and I have lived in Rego Park, Queens. In just one week, we will be moving into Manhattan. Needless to say we are very excited to be in the city, and we simply cannot wait. However, as those amongst who have ever moved in NYC know, there are quite a number of steps and boxes to check. First we had to find the apartment, then we had to find the movers, then we had to decide if we were going to pack up ourselves or pay someone to do it.

We decided that regardless of all the craziness of the High Holiday's and Ashley starting a new school year, we were going to pack ourselves. For three years, we collected furniture, artwork, papers, clothes, etc. It is astounding to me how full of our "stuff" our 1-bedroom apartment is. In every corner or on every piece of paper is another memory of our life together. It took us three years to build a home, but in the span of a week, we have packed everything up and hidden it from sight.

Think about how crazy this is – it took us a very long time to make our home feel like a home. But in mere days, or moments, it is all gone. Our home is barren, our walls are no longer full of art or memories or photographs – instead there are holes and shadows where the sun stained the wall around a picture. Glimpses of what memories used to be there; shadows of a home.

As I was sitting on my couch, looking around at this barren wasteland that used to be my home, I was suddenly struck by this sense of loss. It was so quick, so sudden that it went from a home to a room. I have only ever experienced this sensation once before, and it was when I broke the trust of a dear friend. Trust between friends takes years, sometimes a lifetime to create but in an instance can be gone; like a balloon that is tied around a young child's wrist, which a slight loosening of the knot, the balloon can float away forever.

When I was a teenager, I had a close friend who confided something personal to me. And I learned the hard way that some secrets are meant to be kept. I couldn't wait to share this juicy nugget with another friend, and it eventually found its way back. Obviously I immediately went to apologize and say how sorry I was, but the relationship never found its way back to where it was. We spent many years as close as brothers, but with one mistake that relationship would never be the same.

Trust is the bedrock of what makes relationships work. It is the fundamental process of love and intimacy. When trust goes, what goes with it are safety, security, respect, love and friendship, replaced by anger, insecurity, anxiety, fear, the aggrieved person becomes like the police. Life becomes laced with arguments, large and small, about what is really going on, rather than taking what is said at face value. When trust has been lost, what can we do to get it back – if anything?

The story of the binding of Isaac is a story about trust; it reminds us how powerful and yet fragile trust can be. It challenges us to think about whether faith and trust have a place into our lives. For years Abraham and Sarah waited for the child God has promised. At long last Isaac is born and when he grows up, God tells Abraham: "Take your son, and offer him as a sacrifice at the place that I will show you." Who can read this story without asking, "What was God thinking? What was Abraham thinking? How could Isaac go along with his father's actions?"

It seems to me that the Akeidah is a test of trust. God begins to fulfill His promise and then he tells Abraham to kill the very child who was supposed to be the fulfillment of God's promise. Does

Abraham trust God enough to believe that God won't make him go through with it? Does Isaac trust his father enough to believe that his father will do what's in his best interests? And does God believe that Abraham's trust is absolute?

The Bible does not give us too many details about the relationship of Isaac and Abraham after the episode of the Akeidah. Yet, if we follow it we can see that trust has clearly been broken between father and son. Isaac and Abraham no longer speak after the Akeidah. A once solid relationship is shattered as a result of God's testing of Abraham's trust. Though I am not a parent, I can imagine that the greatest promise a father can make to his child is that he will protect him – no matter what. Abraham broke that promise when was willing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. When we break promises, we risk losing the trust of those we have hurt.

Tonight, we are all gathered together to wrestle with the promises that we have broken this past year. Tonight, there are among us many who carry a deep burden of shame, because they see themselves as having failed, as Jews, as parents, as adults. Tonight, there are among us many whose inner life and outer life don't match and don't mesh. Tonight, there are among us those who are hiding secrets. They carry a past they cannot confess and a present they cannot face. Tonight, there are among us those whose identity and values and commitments are unsure and unstable. They don't know where they belong. Tonight, there are among us those who bear awful regret and remorse. Tonight, there are among us those who are lost, adrift in life, with no map and no direction.

Tonight, we pray for a new beginning – to wipe the slate clean. Professor Lenny Levin writes, "One way of defining our being human is that we are the only creature who makes promises. And yet it is also all-too-characteristic of us that we fail to deliver on our promises—to ourselves and others. In doing so, we fail at the thing that defines our humanity. We are overextended, having promised far more than we ever can deliver. By saying Kol Nidrei we declare moral bankruptcy; in order to go on, we must wipe the slate clean and start over."

The sages teach that one lesson of the High Holy Days is not that we have to be perfect, but that we are, and can continue to be, very good. It is enough that we continually strive to achieve our potential in whatever we do. Human beings are not perfect, we make mistakes all of the time. It is our recognition of this, to admit that we have erred; that we have faltered that makes us human. It is also our capacity to forgive those that have erred, that makes us human.

Who among us is so perfect that they have never made a mistake? They have never had any reason to ask for forgiveness. Alexander Pope wrote, "To err is human, to forgive is divine." Though I agree with Pope in the sense that God forgives, I must disagree because I believe that men also have the ability to forgive. Though there are some times when one cannot forgive. I doubt that Isaac was ever able to forgive his father Abraham for what he has done. Yet we have other examples in the Bible where forgiveness happens, even when we think it is impossible. I think specifically of Isaac's children, Esau forgiving his brother Jacob.

Tonight, we stand before the open Ark and beg for God's forgiveness. We pray that we will be able to rebuild the trust that we have broken between us and the Divine. The Psalmist writes, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid." But what are we to do when it is God who we are afraid of?

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Levine taught the *Unataneh Tokef* prayer to our community. The language of the liturgy can inspire fear. The language imagines God as judge and king,

sitting in the divine court on the divine throne of justice, reviewing our deeds. On a table before God lies a large book with many pages, as many pages as there are people in the world. Each of us has a page dedicated just to us. Written on that page, by our own hand, in our own writing, are all the things we have done during the past year. God considers those things, weighs the good against the bad, and then, as the prayers declare, decides “who shall live and who shall die.” This is frightening for many of us to hear because it means that we do not have any control over our fate.

For thousands of years, men have struggled to control their fate. We have waged wars over territory; have invented countless killing machines to protect ourselves from each other. We have invented medicines and robots to do jobs for us so that we will not put ourselves in harm. We have tried to subvert the fact that we are going to die by focusing on protecting ourselves from it. Yet, it seems as though the world is in just as much turmoil as a result of such a belief. What if we focused our energy on rebuilding relationships and trust between each other instead of protecting ourselves from a fate we cannot escape?