

We are again approaching the Days of Awe.

This year, as we prepare to hear the haunting question of “Who shall live and who shall die?” we are perhaps more aware than ever of the vulnerability of our lives.

As uncomfortable as that awareness is, this is the time of year when traditionally, we acknowledge the frailty of the human experience, and transcend our own powerlessness through community and common humanity. As we admit our errors, we also face the reality, no matter what errors we have committed or avoided, life, death, safety, predictability are largely out of our individual hands.

It's not such a stretch this year. But the formula for facing those realities remains the same: our liturgy reminds us, *U't'shuvah, u't'filah, u'tzedakah ma'avirin et roa hagezerah*.

Literally, *teshuvah*, return, repentance; *Tefilah*, prayer, devotion, *Tzedakah*, from the word *tzedeq*, righteous giving, temper or transform the evil of the decree.

The Talmudic quote for this idea, in Masechet Rosh Hashanah, page 16b, originally states in the name of Rabbi Yitzchak, that these three behaviors **tear up** an evil decree entirely; which is to say, they can prevent bad things from happening to us.

The rabbis who came along later to edit the machzor evidently realized that the reality of the world, in which harm befalls the righteous, the generous, the pious, did not support that claim. So *m'karin* - tear up, was changed to *ma'avirin*, transform. Our liturgy today does not claim, as Rabbi Yitzchak did, that our righteousness, intention and transformation can entirely avert an evil fate – but it can transform how we experience it.

And that is why we gather in community, even when we must do it virtually. Whatever evil may yet befall us, whether brought on by our own action or inaction, or entirely out of our hands, let us remember to examine our own deeds, asking, “how can I do better, going forward?” Let us connect with each other and with the ancient language of longing of our ancestors. Let us remember to give what we can. We and our fate, may yet be transformed.