

Remembering 9/11 on Rosh Hashanah

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It was the first Rosh Hashanah after 9/11. The first. I say that now, but at the time it seemed like the world was ending, so it was just Rosh Hashanah after the unthinkable happened 20 miles from my home in Millburn, NJ.

Planes exploded. Towers came down. Thousands of people died in New York City. A local and national and global catastrophic event happened. In my adult lifetime. Like the Holocaust had happened to the generation before me. I was confused, horrified, terrorized, terrified. But I was also the mother of young children and I wanted them to feel safe. So, I buried my own emotions and I read all the parenting advice I could find. I did what I needed to do. I mommed up.

A few days later, Josh, the children and I went to my mother's house – my mother, a Holocaust survivor – for Rosh Hashanah. I maintained the posture that we were safe. We had our festive meals. We went to shul. We greeted old friends and wished each other Shanah Tovah.

We walked into the service and went through the *matbeyah*. And then, the Cantor began to chant the *Hineni* prayer to ask for an audience with God. *Hineni* is the word with which believers respond to God when God calls to them in the text of the Torah. God asks: are you there? are you there? And the Torah gives us a coded response: *Hineni*. It goes beyond "yes." It means: I'm present. Count on me. God, I'm all in. I AM HERE.

The *Hineni* prayer begins with the Hebrew for something like this: Here I am, impoverished in deeds and merit, the lowest of the low. Yet, here I am. I come before You, God, to plead on behalf of Your people Israel, God. I am here. Here I am. Please God. Hear me. Hear us.

That Rosh Hashanah, in September of 2001, the Cantor, who has a mesmerizing and angelic voice, a voice that announces wisdom, devotion, and a yeshiva education – the Cantor, a New Yorker – opened his mouth to chant *Hineni*, and he cried. He just cried. And so did I. I was finally transported to a place of authenticity. And I was finally ready to enter the days of awe and express my true heart's prayers.