

learn we have cancer and try to transform it into a blessing, make it do a kind of *teshuvah* (an act of repentance). We say, in the example of Abraham, “*Hineini—Here I am.*” (Or, as I hear it in the sacred words of “Rabbi Steveland Morris”—Stevie Wonder to most of you—“Here I am, signed, sealed, delivered, I’m yours.”) Cancer is not a mere test from God. It *is* God, because all creation, the light and the darkness, flow from the Holy Breath. And *anything* that comes from God can be turned toward blessing. But, too, we are Isaac. Right now I

am bound by cancer, and I wait on the altars of medicine. Before each radiation treatment, I lie flat on my back, the therapist binds my feet (so they don’t move), and I’m told to keep still, deathly still. Sometimes I recall this midrash on the Psalms: “God desires not sacrifices, but hope.” I do not expect to die on the altar of prostate cancer. I trust and hope that God will provide the ram.

WE CAN FIGHT FOR BLESSINGS
As Torah teaches, anything can be a gateway to the Holy. Think of Moses

gazing at a mere bush as it blazed, then realizing, as it wasn’t consumed, that he had come upon a portal to the Holy. Or of Jacob wrestling a Divine being from nightfall till daybreak, refusing to let go until he received its blessing. Cancer is the dark angel I’m grappling with (or, maybe, it’s waltzing). Like Jacob, I am refusing to let go of the angel until I have wrung from it every last blessing.

BE A SHABBAT CANDLE

The love, prayers, and kindness of my family, my friends, and my Temple Ner Tamid community have given me the courage to write on the realities of having prostate cancer.

When I started posting about how it felt to have cancer on the “Well” blog of *The New York Times* last November, I hoped to help a few people. Nearly 1,600 mostly grateful people around the world have since posted messages, sent emails, and called. In speaking, I gave them permission to speak and, unwittingly, helped create a community for those of us touched by cancer: patients, family, and friends, too. It’s yet another blessing granted by my dark angel.

A few friends and acquaintances have also told me their cancer tales. I tell them mine, all of us understanding that honest speech heals—along with tears and hugs and the ability to look each other in the eye. Like Jacob, who was renamed Israel after his struggle, my name, too, has changed. I have become “cancer blogger,” “cancer confidant,” and, I hope, “cancer survivor.”

Each one of us can be a Shabbat candle, kindling the souls of others. As the sages say, our souls are candles of God. We are made for *incandescence*.

CANCER IS AN ARK

Like the womb made of gopherwood and hope that carried Noah, his family, and the future of all creation forward, cancer is an ark. A new man has already emerged from this dark chrysalis. I am closer to my essential self. I love more fiercely. I have never been more thankful. I listen to others harder than before. I can watch the chickadees huddle in the snowy brush and feel sustained by God. My faith has deepened. □



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