

As the commentator in our Machzor points out, the Torah and Haftarah messages seemingly conflict with one another. Our Torah reader willchant, “In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall practice self-denial; and you shall do no manner of work, neither the citizen nor the alien who resides among you.<sup>30</sup> For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before the Lord.” This establishes the foundational values of our Yom Kippur ritual. Today, we seek cleanliness and purity through the rigor of denial.

Yet Isaiah, in today’s Haftarah portion, pithily remarks, “Is such the fast I desire, a day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush and lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast,?” Today is not a day of self-flagellation. We gather to examine ourselves deeply, compassionately, and with an aim towards wholeness.

Isaiah tells us, “unlock the fetters of the wickedness, and untie the cords of the yoke to let the oppressed go free;”

I am no expert on justice. I taught last year at Success Preparatory Academy, an urban charter school in Mid City New Orleans. On the rare days when my head buoyed above water, I felt deeply fortunateto know my students’ quick love, big smiles and snappy wit. But it is difficult to name the yoke of class and race that will inhibit my students from accessing the social services I have. Every day I am aware that because I’m white, because I’m a man, and because I’m financially stable, my thoughts, actions and inactions further this country’s fragmentation.

It’s hard to hold the shocking privilege disparity between my students and me. This discomfort sits on the horizon:my privilege. I greet this discomfort today with Isaiah’s words: to untie the cords of the yoke to let the oppressed go free. . .

Isaiah calls for an end to racism, sexism and economic inequality. I do not fast for Hashem’s recognition, but to uncover within me the fetters and cords which perpetuate whiteness and racism, misogyny and poverty. I fast to own my privileges, and pray I hold my surfacing transgressions in compassion and humility.