



Where Do We Grow From Here?

As we approach the Jewish New Year, we are encouraged to take some time to reflect on the year that is concluding, and look with anticipation to the year that is about to begin.

I was with my family in the US a few weeks ago, spending some quality time with my children and with my parents, and I stumbled across some old pamphlets from the Riverdale Temple in my parents' house. They were published collections of sermons from Rabbi Shulman, the founder and beloved Rabbi of the synagogue where my mother was raised, and with whom my grandfather was very close. I never met my grandfather (for whom I am named), and I was excited to gain insight into how he may have viewed the world through his rabbi's teachings.

In one of his sermons for the High Holidays, Rabbi Shulman taught that the most appropriate question at this time of year should not be, "Where do we go from here?" Rather, we should be asking, "Where do we **grow** from here?" He quotes an obscure poem from Mary Dickerson Bangham:

Growing

"Mother, do you still grow?"

I let the measuring rod
Slip closer to my child's head—
Three foot two—
"Do I still grow?"
Do I still—grow!

This afternoon I suffered
From unkind words,
But smiled.
Last year I would have been
Quite proud
Of making sharp retort.

Last week I set aside
My own desires
For others'.
Last year I would have cried,
"I'll have my way:
Let others yield to me."

Last month I found some beauty
In a soul once scorned,
And told it to another.

Do I still grow?
Yes, child,
But oh! so slowly!

I was surprised by how struck I was by this poem.



I love that Mary is giving us a window into a constant process of self-reflection and awareness. She tells us of three moments: this afternoon, last week and last month. Mary understands that growth is a process that is ongoing and even constant, but we must be engaged with it. When we pay attention, we can see it all the time. Just like with our young children who are constantly growing and learning. We may mark the growth of our children (and grandchildren!) on the doorframe or wall in their room--but where do we see our own continued growth? How do we acknowledge it? What is the measuring stick? Our growth though, does not happen automatically, or merely as a result of a proper diet.

This time of year in the Jewish calendar includes the last moments of the year. They are a call for self-reflection and awareness. We look back at the year that is ending and ask forgiveness for our shortcomings, resolving ourselves to make a valiant effort to improve in the coming year. This is the time that prepares us to hear the shofar and to awaken; to take stock and recall the things that are truly important and valuable in life. How much have we grown in this past year? What have we become since last Rosh Hashanah? Rabbi Shulman's question challenges us to not only look backwards, rather this time must include a careful exploration of what is coming: **Where do we grow from here?**

My blessing for each of us is that when we reflect on all of the growth that we have done, we can be proud of what we have achieved, and we can begin to draw the map of what we are continuing to become. May we have clarity and identify those places that might require more attention in the coming year.

We are still growing! Slowly, but still growing and becoming!

May we all have a fantastic and sweet year of health, discovery and growth. Let us make sure that we help each other see where they are growing as well--not only our children!

May we be blessed also to participate in the growth of Nesiya in the coming year.

Shana tova um'tuka.

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