

## The Sublime Paradox by Raphael Cushnir

It's New Year's Eve, 1988. I'm traveling alone off the coast of Belize. After spending the day snorkeling, I've come down with a terrible infection. Racked with chills, barely coherent, I stumble across town to rouse the lone nurse from her holiday dinner. Grudgingly, she gives me some antibiotics, and I take to bed.

That night was perhaps the most important of my life. Twisted up in the sheets, raging with fever, I thought I was going to die. In those supposed last moments, I considered my life with deathbed candor. Having failed to make it as a Hollywood screenwriter after almost a decade of trying, I'd privately become convinced that my lack of success was well deserved. I believed that, deep inside, there was something wrong with me - a fatal flaw, an indefinable shortcoming.

Whenever that belief had arisen before, I'd fought it with all the resistance I could summon. Now, instead, I dove straight into wave after wave of enveloping hopelessness. It was excruciating, but there was also great relief in giving up the struggle. Maybe it was the semi-delirium that finally melted my defenses - I'll never know. But when dawn broke and I was still breathing, the darkness inside me was lighter, too.

In the months and years that followed, I experienced both a personal and professional rebirth. I learned that letting go isn't about closing doors, but opening them. With each door that opens within, we become more vulnerable. And the more vulnerable we become, in a sublime paradox, the more God graces us with spiritual power.

Sometimes the only way to overcome something, even if it's really unpleasant, is to go all the way through it. Raphael Cushnir discovered this about an illness and his life at the same time. After finding the antibiotics, he knew that he had to retreat to bed, take the medication and do whatever it took to get better. But while he lay in bed afraid he was dying, he found out life required that same kind of perseverance. He had tried in the past to ignore his doubts about himself and his profession. He tried to push those doubts away and just keep moving forward, hoping to miraculously find the right path.

But he found as he lay in bed unable to do anything else, just giving himself over to the doubts and the fears, to all his beliefs about his inadequacies that eventually he was able to see more clearly how to pursue his dream in a way that would work.

All of us have doubts and fears. All of us have inadequacies. The more we ignore them, the more they rule our lives and the less we can feel the successes that we have. As Cushnir says the more we become vulnerable, the more our vulnerability becomes a bridge between us and our true power as a person.

As we prepare ourselves for the High Holidays, we can focus on uncovering our vulnerabilities, our doubts, fears and inadequacies. The more we uncover them and look at them clearly, the less they rule our lives and the more our lives are in our hands. And this is what the High Holidays are all about.

Shabbat Shalom.