

Hanhagot: Spiritual Directives for the Ten Days of Repentance

By Reb Moshe Waldoks

Zachor. Remember.

You owe yourself the time to do something for yourself in these Ten Days of Reflection.

These are only suggestions. Do as many as you are comfortable with. But do try to do something. Examine what you have chosen to do and why other suggestions do not resonate with you. The key to all of this is remaining in the moment, the present, with a higher state of consciousness (kavana) no matter what you choose to do. There is a very good chance that collectively we will get to all of these suggestions. That's the power of community.

Please do these privately and do not discuss them with anyone outside of immediate family. As far as I can tell there are no adverse side-effects for any suggestion on the list. Plan ahead as much as possible so that activities are not rushed and the burden for meals and other creature functions are shared as much as possible.

Stop caffeine intake as soon as possible until after Yom Kippur.

Refrain from eating nuts during the week.

Eat a lot of carrots. In Ashkenazi tradition these are called mehren, which also connote growth and fecundity.

Take a walk every day until Yom Kippur (for at least 20 minutes). Walk meditatively if possible, being conscious of the way your body moves, how it takes steps, etc. While you are walking, keep your eye out for schach, evergreens for your sukkah roof.

Read the Book of Jonah (found in the prayer book or the Bible - it's very short) and be prepared to ask at least one question about it.

Study the first paragraph of the Shma three times every day: in the morning, at twilight, and before going to bed.

Wrap yourself in a tallit every day and recite the Shma as if it were the last one you would ever say. (You might want to shout, so consider doing this at a time when you won't wake the neighbors.) If you are a tefillin wearer, use them this week for this exercise. Women who have never worn a tallit or tefillin may appreciate the opportunity of doing this privately. Tefillin are not worn on Shabbat.

Try to sit down, still, with feet on the ground for at least five minutes everyday between now and Yom Kippur. Notice your natural breathing patterns. Take a few deep breaths. Try

a positive visioning exercise, perhaps a vision of an ideal Jewish community you would want your children to live in.

Many of us will have the opportunity of a full work week during these Days of Reflection. Try to bring at least one moment of teshuvah into your work environment. (Teshuvah can be translated as responsiveness and responsibility.) Bring apples and honey to the office. (Try to avoid getting honey in your Apple or MacIntosh.)

Suggestions for Shabbat Shuvah (October 6/7): If possible, invite best friends for Friday night meal. Share in the tasks. Use this Shabbat to consider if you are happy with the way Shabbat feels in your house. Remember to bring up any proposals for consideration at family meeting. Give yourself some extended time alone on Shabbat just for yourself. This will require family negotiation. It will be worth it. Think of at least one book you have read that you would recommend as a must-read.

The night before Erev Yom Kippur, start carbo-loading. Do last-minute errands to insure that Erev Yom Kippur can be made to feel present for you. Remember this is a modified Shabbat.

Erev Yom Kippur morning is time for shloggin kapores. Arrange a short family meeting (no longer than twenty minutes) and have everyone do a final review of outstanding grievances. Everyone gets a turn to talk. Everyone gets a chance to apologize. Apportion tzedakah for each member of your family to a cause, or causes, your family cares about. Write these amounts and causes down on a sheet of paper.

Redeem the list before Sukkot. Pass the sheet around and have every member of the family say: Zeh kaparati. It is my kavanah that my acts of returning (teshuvah), my reflection (tefilah), and my right actions (tzedakah) will give me, and all those I love, the capacity to enjoy all the sweetness this year will bring and to endure all of the negative things that will be in my way in the coming year shetechadesh alenu shana tovah umevurachat, may this year be renewed with blessing.

Erev Yom Kippur afternoon (before the meal before the fast): Go to the mikveh or take a very long hot, fantastic, shower. A proper kavanah is the four letter name YHVH as you go from washing the lower part of the body to the top. Consider shampooing last, keeping a vision of keter or crown in mind.

The seudah mafseket, the almost Shabbasdike meal (don't say kiddush, do say motzi over challah) before Kol Nidre: try to avoid very spicy foods. Carbo-loading continues. Don't wear your whites yet.

Wear white clothes on Yom Kippur. If you've ever wanted to walk into a store and ask for a kittel, now's your chance. It might not work at Bloomingdale's, but who knows? You'll do better at the Israel Book Shop on Harvard Street. By the way, a kittel can also be an oversized white shirt or blouse (preferably without pockets) over white tennis slacks. Use your imagination.

No leather on Yom Kippur. Especially if you are into leather. Avoid heavy makeup and perfumes. Avoid shaving (some of you will be comfortable not shaving from Friday afternoon on.) Avoid carrying more than your driver's license and keys if possible.

Bring a torah book (in English) with you to shul on Yom Kippur. This will provide you an alternative to shmoozing and provide you with privacy.

Prepare a note with the names of those you are saying Yizkor for on Yom Kippur and try to identify at least one attribute of these individuals that you have integrated into your being. Let all those in your immediate family know who these names are as you light the yahrzeit glass before coming to Kol Nidre.

Have your family discuss which of the remaining grandparents, or other relative, will be subjected to an extensive video interview in the coming year. Who will prepare the questions, ask them, when and where will you do it, etc.?

If you're a grandparent, try to find out what your grandchildren are about.

Sometime during the Ten Days of Awe (Aseret Yemei Teshuvah), sit for a period of at least one-half hour and start writing your ethical will.

Make that phone call you've been delaying for so long. Even if it's overseas.

Reb Moshe is the spiritual leader of Temple Beth Zion in Brookline, an independent, non-denominational congregation. Special thanks to the late Rabbi Richard J. Israel for his inspiration.