

Socially Distanced High Holidays #1: Rosh HaShanah

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1. *Boomer ReJew-venation*, by Maureen Adler-Marks

When I was growing up, in New York, my favorite Rosh Hashanah ritual was the purchase of a new Jewish suit. Despite the threat of Indian summer heat, year after year I'd be in shul, sweltering in blue wool, dripping with sweat and pride; duped by seasonal change again.

In Los Angeles now, of course we're laid back. New clothing merely means a new black cotton T-shirt. The other day at Torah study, we discussed the controversy of Jewish jeans: Is it all right to wear denims and running shoes to services? "Whatever," shrugged the well-dressed rabbi, dapper in Armani. But with the growing influence of the ashram, and the recent adoption of meditation-style worship, it's only a matter of time until our clothing goes with the flow.

Maybe distancing is appropriate?

2. Talmud, Rosh HaShanah 18a

A mishnah taught: "On Rosh HaShanah, all who have entered this world pass before G-d like *bnei Maron*." What does "like *bnei Maron*" teach?

- In Babylon they explained: Like *bnei imrana* [sheep, which pass through a corridor one-by-one for tithing].
- Reish Lakish said: Like the [narrow] steps of *Beit Maron*.
- Rav Yehudah cited Shemuel: Like the soldiers of the House of David. [*maron* = "our master"]

3. Talmud, Berachot 31a

Rav Hemnuna said: How many mighty laws do we learn from the verses of Chanah!

- "Chanah spoke upon her heart" – we see that one who prays must focus his heart.
- "Only her lips moved" – we see that one who prays must form [words] with his lips.
- "Her voice was not heard" – we see that one may not elevate his voice in prayer.

4. Rabbi David ibn Avi Zimra (16th century Spain/Israel), Radvaz 6:2294

Even though I have agents of rage before Me, the silent voice of prayer and praise is beloved before Me.

5. Dr. Pat Croskerry, *Diagnostic Failure: A Cognitive and Affective Approach*, pp. 250-251

[P]erform a cognitive and affective autopsy, a form of cognitive and affective root cause analysis, as soon as possible after the event. The physician should perform this autopsy when well-rested and after having an adequate amount of sleep. There is usually a rapid decay of detail—especially when the event has been an unpleasant experience—and, therefore, it is important to go through a process of active recall of every possible aspect of the case, however trivial they might appear...

6. Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, *Positive Parenting*, pg. 236

When I entered his study, he was engrossed in a sefer, and I stood by respectfully silent, awaiting his recognition. After a few moments he looked up and said softly, "You played chess on Yom Tov?"

"Yes," I said. "Rabbi C. said it was allowed."

My father said nothing. He returned his gaze to the sefer, and slowly, barely perceptibly, shook his head in the negative. The message was clear: Even if technically not forbidden, it was not in the spirit of Rosh haShanah to play games. I felt terrible. I had desecrated the holy day.

I remained standing respectfully, waiting to be dismissed, digesting the reprimand I had received. Then my father looked up, with a twinkle in his eye, and said, "But you did checkmate him, didn't you?"

"Twice," I said, softly but happily.

7. Rabbi Natronai Gaon (9th century Babylon), Responsum #182

On the first day of Rosh HaShanah one may not fast, as it is biblical. But on the second day [of Rosh HaShanah] and on Shabbat there is no question, for these ten days are different from the rest of the year. Therefore, our early masters customarily fasted on those days, whether Shabbat or a weekday.

8. The Torah Reading of Rosh HaShanah

- Day 1: Sarah, Hagar, and Chanah
- Day 2: The Binding of Isaac

Down with Distancing!

9. Jerusalem Talmud, Rosh HaShanah 1:3

Rabbi Chama son of Rabbi Chanina, and Rabbi Hoshaya, one said: What nation is like this one? Normally, a man who knows he is being judged will wear black, cloak himself in black, and grow his beard, for he does not know how his verdict will emerge. But Israel is not like this; rather, they wear white, cloak themselves in white, trim their beards, and eat, drink and rejoice, knowing that Gd will perform miracles for them...

10. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (20th century USA), cited in Nefesh HaRav pg. 314

"And you shall rejoice before Hashem your Gd, you and your son and your daughter, etc." (Deuteronomy 16:11) It appears correct to say that the principle mandating joy is being in a position of "before Hashem".

11. Talmud, Berachot 7b

What is the meaning of the verse, "And I, my prayer to You, Gd, at a time of desire" – when is it a "time of desire"? When the community prays.

12. Talmud, Keritot 6b

Any fast which does not include some from the sinners of Israel is not a fast, for galbanum smells bad and yet the text lists it among the spices of incense. Abbaye deduced the lesson from the verse, "And His union, [then] He founded it upon earth."

13. Nechemiah 8:9-12

And Nechemiah, the governor, and Ezra the Kohen the *Sofer*, and the Levites who made the nation understand, told the entire nation, "Today is sacred to Hashem your Gd! Do not mourn and do not cry," for the entire nation cried when they heard the words of the Torah.

And he told them, "Go eat rich foods, and drink sweet drinks, and send portions to those who do not have any ready, for today is sacred for our Master. Be not sad, for joy in Gd is your strength." And the Levites silenced the nation, saying, "Be still, for today is sacred; be not sad." And the entire nation went to eat and drink and to send portions and to make a great rejoicing, for they understood that which had been told to them.

14. Mishnah Chullin 5:3 (83a)

At four annual times, one who sells an animal to another must inform him, "I sold her mother for slaughter" or "I sold her daughter for slaughter", and these are: The seventh day of Succot, the day before Pesach, the day before Shavuot, and the day before Rosh HaShanah. And per Rabbi Yosi haGlili, on Erev Yom Kippur in Galil.

15. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 8:5

Rabbi Simon said: When Hashem was going to create Adam, the angels formed groups. Some of them said he should not be created, some said he should be created... Chesed said he should be created for he performs acts of kindness, Truth said he should not be created for he is full of lies...

Review Questions

- Why is a "Day of Judgment" appropriate for distancing?
- What else makes Rosh HaShanah seem appropriate for distancing?
- What makes Rosh HaShanah seem like a day for gathering together?
- How can we use our prayers and meals to defy distancing, and what can we do as acts of kindness?