

Socially Distanced High Holidays #2: Yom Kippur

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Two challenging sources

1. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 9:5

They found recorded in Rabbi Meir's teachings: "Behold, it was very good (Genesis 1:31)" – 'behold it was good' is Death.

2. Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, *Learning to Like Yourself*, <https://www.aish.com/sp/pg/48891172.html>

One of the obstacles in the path toward spirituality is the reluctance among many people to consciously reflect upon themselves. The reason for this became apparent to me when I attended a health spa to treat my chronic low back pain. I wanted to avoid potent painkillers for I am all too aware of the high risk of addiction. When my position as the Director of Psychiatry at a busy mental health hospital brought me to a point of burnout, I decided to "get away from it all" in the peace and quiet of a mineral spa.

On the first day at the spa, I was placed in a whirlpool bath in a small cubicle. It was nothing less than paradise. I relaxed in the warm water, whose whirling streams gently relaxed my whole body. I was at peace and there was nothing to disturb that peace. After about five or six very enjoyable minutes, I emerged from the whirlpool, telling the attendant how relaxing the experience had been. To my astonishment he said, "You can't get out yet, sir. The treatment here requires that you stay in the whirlpool for 25 minutes."

I returned to the tub, but not to an enjoyable experience. Every minute lasted for a painful eternity and after five minutes I could no longer take it. On my second exodus, the attendant informed me that unless I completed the requisite 25 minutes, I could not continue to the next phase of treatment. Not wishing to have spent my money in vain, I returned for 15 minutes of absolute torture.

A Time for Reunion

3. Talmud, Taanit 30b

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: "There were never good days for Israel like the fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur." I understand Yom Kippur – it is the day of forgiveness, the day the second tablets were given. But what happened on the fifteenth of Av?

4. Rabbi Moses Maimonides (12th century Egypt), Laws of Repentance 3:4

One must see himself, all year, as though he were half-meritorious and half-guilty, and as though the entire world were half-meritorious and half-guilty, such that committing one sin would weigh down himself and the entire world for guilt and cause his destruction, and committing one mitzvah would weigh down himself and the entire world for merit and cause his and their salvation and rescue, as Proverbs 10:25 says, "A righteous person is the foundation of the world." This refers to someone who weighted the whole world for merit, and saved it. And because of this, all Israel is accustomed to increase tzedakah and good deeds and to be involved in mitzvot from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur, beyond the rest of the year, and all of them customarily rise at night during these ten days to pray in the synagogues, pleading and self-humbling until the dawn of the day.

5. Leviticus 16:17

...And he would atone for himself, and for his family, and for the entire nation of Israel.

6. Leviticus 16:30

For on this day He will atone upon you, to purify you; from all of your sins, you shall be purified before Gd.

A Day to Be Alone

7. Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, *Learning to Like Yourself*, <https://www.aish.com/sp/pg/48891172.html>

After a bit of self-analysis, the answer became apparent. We are adept at diversion, at amusing ourselves one way or another, but many of us are unable to truly relax. We entertain ourselves by reading, watching television, playing golf

or cards, chatting with someone, listening to the stereo or CD or many other activities. But to be entertained is to be diverted, for that is what all these activities are: diversions. By focusing our attention on these activities, we divert our attention from everything, including ourselves. When all diversions are eliminated, we are left alone with ourselves, forced into direct contact with our own personalities and the personality flaws that trouble us, and this is where the difficulty lies.

I realized that when left alone in the cubicle in the spa there was no one to talk to, nothing to listen to, nothing to read, nothing to watch, nothing to do. I had been left totally alone, in absolute communion with myself. It is a common experience that when one is left alone in a room with someone one dislikes, it can be a very unpleasant experience, and one can hardly wait to get away.

This realization raised the question: what was there about myself I did not like? Why could I not tolerate being in my own presence?

8. Leviticus 16:17

And no one could be in the Tent of Meeting when [the high priest] entered to atone in the sanctuary, until he left. And he would atone for himself, and for his family, and for the entire nation of Israel.

9. Talmud, Berachot 24b

In the community one may not pray aloud, for that would distract others.

10. Talmud, Sotah 32b

Why did the Sages enact silent prayer? So as to avoid embarrassing transgressors, for the Torah did not provide distinct places for the sin offering and burnt offering.

11. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan *Meditation and the Bible* *Meditation and Kabbalah*

12. Genesis 24:63

And Isaac went out to speak in the field, before evening...

13. Mishnah, Berachot 5:1

One may arise to pray only in solemnity. The early pious ones would wait an hour and then pray, to focus their hearts on Gd.

14. Rabbi Yaakov "Baal haTurim" (13th-14th c. Germany, Spain), Tur Orach Chaim 98

This is what pious people and people of great deeds would do, secluding themselves and focusing on their prayer to the point where they removed materialism from themselves and their intellectual powers grew, reaching a level close to prophecy.

15. Rabbi Yitzchak Luria (Ari z"l, 16th century Israel), cited by Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, Biur Halachah 571:2

All that you find regarding self-flagellation, etc., was only mentioned for someone who does not work in Torah. One whose career is Torah, and who possesses wisdom and awe of Gd, will not weaken himself and cease his learning. But for one day each week, he should distance himself from others and seclude himself with his Creator, and connect his thoughts to Him as though already standing before Him on the Day of Judgment. And he should speak to Gd as a servant addresses his master, or a child addresses his parent.

16. Rabbi Yeshayah Horowitz (Sh"lah, 16th-17th c. Prague, Israel), Commentary to Yoma, Perek Ner Mitzvah 90

And according to a person's abilities, he should separate and seclude himself one day each week, or one day out of fifteen, or one day each month. No less.