

Heading mindfully into the High Holy Days



THE DOCTOR IS IN
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I absolutely love this time of year. The children head back to school, many lugging backpacks that weigh more than they do; ripe pomegranates dangle from the trees; and the temperatures are ever so slowly starting to decrease. No sooner do you start to get into a post-summer routine, than life then takes a turn, and there is that unmistakable feeling of the holidays in the air. Hopefully, this disruption will enable you to shift into a higher gear.

I will forever miss the beautiful fall foliage of the old country. Watching the leaves begin to change color while basking in the joy of having Sundays off – a day simply to relax and leisurely prep for the holidays – was a gift that went unappreciated. How do we contrast that lack of pressure (from which we Israelis could all very much benefit) to the holiday buildup here?

In Israel, while much more exhausting, life definitely has far greater meaning. Whether it's the beautiful Mediterranean on our doorstep, a discovery of an ancient biblical pottery shard, fruit trees everywhere, or cuttings of palm tree branches freely available for the taking, these joys are simply not experienced elsewhere. As the *shofar* awakens us from the laziness of the summer and we prepare for the holidays, we have the opportunity to embrace this precious time as one of renewal and new beginnings.

Unlike the quickly forgotten resolutions of the Gregorian New Year in January, I personally see the fall as my time for some serious soul-searching and introspection. On the eve of Yom Kippur, when I ask members of my family for forgiveness for anything that I may have done that offended them over the past year, I fully recognize that I personally have much work to do on myself in an attempt to become a better person.

Perhaps, if you haven't already begun, this too can be your time to begin in earnest to focus on yourself, your values, and your needs. What do you want for yourself and your loved ones as you head into the new year? What reflections do you have on your life, and what values can you impart to others as you embark on your own self-improvement project?

For any change to be lasting and truly effective, you'll have to care enough about what you hope to accomplish in order to take the small, manageable steps that will help you achieve your goals. It is not enough to simply want something. You will need to be willing to work at it. If indeed you are realistic and motivated, know what you hope to attain, and have concrete measurable goals in mind, you will indeed be successful.

HERE ARE a few of my own personal reflections. Feel free to adopt whatever will help you get started. Only you can decide what changes, big or small, you'd like to make in your life.

1) Define your goals by being clear and specific in the here and now.

What do you hope to achieve? To realize your goals, you must be able to visualize them and believe that they will happen. Pick three things you'd like to work on, and write them down. If you can't stop at the three most important ones, take the others and put them in a drawer for later.

2) Think about what you would like for yourself in 10 years.

How do you see yourself and how do you want to be "seen" by others? If others were to write your eulogy, would it reflect what you would want it to say? How would it differ? Is what you are currently focusing on in your life relevant, and will it still matter in 10 years? If not, is it small stuff? Is it time to let it go and

move on? If you can't move on, can you determine just why this is so – and get some help?

3) We often spend more time on the things that matter the least, and less time on those people or things that matter the most.

In what ways is this true for you, and what do you need to do to change this in your life? As you review the past 24 hours, week, and year, ask yourself what you would have done differently if you were given the opportunity to go back? Is it perhaps to say or not say something, to waste less time, to do something special with someone, or to have made different choices?

4) Success involves taking three steps forward, even when it's followed by two steps backward.

Failure comes only if you fail to evaluate your progress and fail to learn from your mistakes. What are your personal success stories? What are your general strengths? What do you like about yourself and would choose not to change? Be honest. What, on the other hand, would you now like to do differently?

5) Practice truly living in the moment, as you never know what tomorrow may bring.

The present is indeed a "present," and each and every moment will contribute greatly to the meaning you make of your life if you are able to be truly "present" in that moment. By taking the time to experience every single minute, you can deepen your appreciation for even the smallest things in life. Now is the time to decide how best to express that appreciation and gratitude to others.

6) Don't let fear control you, but make the choice instead to control your own fears.

This too must be a conscious choice, although in no way an easy one. It requires awareness and honesty. Step outside your comfort zone, try one thing that you would not ordinarily do, and then make sure to pat yourself on the back for your success in simply trying. Success breeds more success.

7) Be positive.

Find ways to appreciate your children, partner, family, and friends. Check out both your actions and your words to see if they reflect the values that you believe to be important. Remember, the more you like yourself, the easier it is to like others.

8) Find ways to decrease your stress.

Too much stress can make you physically unwell. Get in tune with your body and learn to treat it with the respect it deserves. Exercise, eat right, drink plenty of water, practice good sleep hygiene and, if possible, let go of everything that makes you feel heavy, unwell, or unhappy. Enjoy the quiet of an early morning, a beautiful sunrise or sunset as you work on elevating your mood.

9) Invest the time to understand someone else's point of view.

Learn how to listen not only with your ears but with your eyes and heart as well. Learn how to really communicate effectively with those you care about. Get help if you need to. It can make or break a relationship.

10) Make your goals happen by taking them seriously.

While it is tempting to put this work off, look at the three goals that you highlighted. Break them down into achievable steps. Remember, start small but start. If not now, then when? Plan for your starting moment in order to really make it happen. If you have not yet started to work on these issues or find yourself making excuses, remind yourself that today is a perfect time for some serious reflection.

Wishing you and your loved ones a year filled with much good health and happiness. ■

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PICK THREE things you'd like to work on and write them down. (Cathryn Lavery/Unsplash)