

How To Prepare Spiritually for the High Holidays

Elul is the month traditionally used to prepare for High Holidays. We become introspective when images of family and days gone by are on our minds.

HHD's have the power to transform our lives. If we see these holidays as only an obligation to be fulfilled, we miss the inherent opportunity.

These are the overall themes of services to help you find deeper meaning in the strands of belief that are woven together in the High Holiday liturgy and practice.

The High Holidays are referred to as *Yamim Noraim* - the Days of Awe. What are we in awe of?

- The splendor and beauty of the leaves changing?
- Nora could also be translated as reverence - when Religion is observed more than any other time of year.
- Starts with Elul/Selichot - goes until the conclusion of the Harvest festival of Sukkot (Simchat Torah)

Sephardic Communities recite Selichot at the beginning of Elul for 40 days (Think Moses on Mt. Sinai!)

Ashkenazic Communities do Selichot services the Saturday night prior to Rosh Hashanah UNLESS it's less than 3-4 days before. (In 2021, we have Selichot 10 days before RH)

The themes of RH and YK:

1. There is an order to the way we are commanded to contemplate and recognize God's sovereignty.
2. Life is short and there are no guarantees that we will be here next year.
3. God 'remembers' us and metes out our judgment about how the next year will go (Unetaneh Tokef prayer)
4. We examine our lives, make reparations where necessary, repent, atone and forgive others.

Rosh Hashanah focuses on judgment - kingship and remembrance. RH focuses on human responsibility and Divine judgment.

Yom Kippur focuses on human failure and Divine forgiveness. We can sin, but atone and attain forgiveness. (Jonah Haftarah)

These commandments to observe this as a time of commemoration is found in Leviticus, a day of observing and 10 days later, of fasting and Atoning.

Judgment and forgiveness is connected by repentance (Teshuvah), Charity (tzedakah) and Prayer (tefillah) can temper a harsh decree. This is not to be confused with deterministic view of life. We don't believe in preordination. We have free choice. High Holidays is all about choosing to do teshuvah and return to the right path where we have veered.

Overview of Components of Holiday:

Rosh Hashanah Liturgy developed over centuries. No Hallel recited - Hallel is only for pilgrimage holidays which are temple centered. Later sages claim it was to not have too much joy on RH.

Rosh Hashanah is a serious holiday with an Erev service (Arvit), morning (Shacharit), Shofar and Torah service, Afternoon (Minhah) and Tashlich.

Shofar Service - hear the shofar blasts 3 separate times followed by *Areshet S'fateinu*.

Malchyot - kingship - We sing *Aleinu*

Zichronot - remembrance,

Shofarot - Shofar - revelation of Torah at Sinai AND Akedah - rams horn.

(Think coronation ceremony where King is praised with horns and pomp and circumstance.)

Yom Kippur - root word KPR - atonement. Lots of different ways we atone. Flogging, swinging a chicken or rooster/hen above your head, scape goat in Torah. Although there was great rabbinic opposition - custom still prevails in some communities.

Meal (festive but subdued) - Shir Ha Maalot (said on shabbat, holidays.) Then we light Yom Tov candles - holiday officially begins, say Shehecheyanu, light memorial candle for loved ones who are no longer with us.

Customary to give Tzedakah before the evening.

Have made amends to those we've harmed.

Forgive others, end bitterness and grudges.
Clean Slate.
Prepared to enter most sacred and holy day

Kol Nidre - All vows - for some - most important service of All HHD services. Israel - Secular Jews will stand outside a synagogue while it's being chanted, but not go inside! Prayer itself is controversial. Some groups interpreted it to mean that Jews cannot be trusted because we can annul vows once a year. But it's not about that. Legal formula, recited 3 times. That nulls vows made under pressure, incentive vows and erroneous VOWS.

Thirteen Attributes of God - Exodus formula reminding us that God is compassionate and forgiving.

Vidui - Communal Confession - elaborate formula uttered by High Priest and now for everyone to say so no one person is embarrassed.

Ashamnu - lesser confession.

Sukkot - which comes 5 days after Yom Kippur is a time of celebration - Yom simchateinu - a day of rejoicing. Once we are done with the affliction, we are commanded to rejoice and be happy.