

High Holiday Personal Prompts

The High Holidays are always a time of reflection. Below are several prompts that you can explore by yourself or with family and friends. You can use them as writing exercises or a check in on one's personal thoughts. These can be done before services or during. The goal is to touch on a variety of holiday themes and come out of the exercise more attuned to yourself and your feelings.

Adapted from Rabbi Sarit Horwitz by Rabbi Fine

Rosh Hashanah Day 1

Memory in Judaism

The Zichronot section of the Amidah is all about memory, specifically the way that God remembers. When God remembers, it's always paired with action. Answer the following: Why is memory an important part of your Jewish experience? What does memory and remembering mean to you?

God as King

In the Malchuyot section of the Amidah, we refer to God as King. In this paradigm, God is a Ruler and we are God's subjects. Answer the following: How might this be a meaningful theological framework for you? If Rosh Hashanah is the day of coronation for God, how does that enhance your celebration of the holiday?

Reflections on Prayer

The Haftarah on the first day of Rosh Hashanah is famous for the way that it describes Hannah praying. Hannah, a woman struggling with infertility who deeply wanted to have children, went to the shrine to pray. Her lips moved as she prayed silently but she did not make any noise. She is our model for silent, personal, devotional prayer. Answer the following: Do you feel more connected to God through verbal or silent prayer? Are prayers merely wishes? How do you approach and interact with God differently when you pray silently versus singing with a group?

Rosh Hashanah Day 2

Shofar as Symbol

The shofar is blown every morning leading up to Rosh Hashanah and of course, throughout the holidays. The third section of the Amidah is Shofarot (Shofars). The Shofar is seen as a symbol for waking up - it's a spiritual alarm clock that is meant to jolt us into doing the internal work of teshuvah, of repentance and return. Answer the following: What does the Shofar mean to you? What is your internal experience like when you hear the shofar?

Being God's Children

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, we read a haftarah that refers to us often as God's children. We refer to God as our Parent on many occasions throughout the High Holidays. Answer the following: What does it mean to you to think of yourself as one of God's children? How does it change your relationship with God, or the way that God is a part of your life?

Yom Kippur

What Does this Fast Mean?

The Haftarah for Yom Kippur is a harsh chastisement from the prophet Isaiah, indicating that the people are self righteous and not fasting for the right reasons. Isaiah 58:5-7 asks: “Is such the fast I desire, A day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush And lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, A day when the LORD is favorable? No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock the fetters of wickedness, And untie the cords of the yoke To let the oppressed go free; To break off every yoke. It is to share your bread with the hungry, And to take the wretched poor into your home; When you see the naked, to clothe him, And not to ignore your own kin.” Answer the following: what does it mean for you to fast on this day? What do you hope your fast instills in you?

Mourning During Pandemic

There’s a section of the traditional Yom Kippur liturgy called *Eleh Ezkerah* (“These I Remember”), also referred to as the Martyrology section. This part of liturgy goes through many historical times that Jews died *al kiddush hashem*, sanctifying God’s name (as martyrs). Answer the following: What has it been like to mourn during this pandemic? How has this pandemic affected the grieving process for you?

Image of Open Gates

In the Neila service, we stand, metaphorically, at The Gates. We plead with God to keep the gates open. We believe that every moment counts and that every moment we stand in front of them open is a moment that we can change. Answer the following: What does imagery mean for you? How do you incorporate it into your High Holiday experience?

