

Some thoughts for the High Holidays. I take no responsibility for this rabbi's ideas. I have similar suggestions, and might have written some additional things, such as: "if you need to, take a break, take a walk outside, sit down and meditate or think about your life, friends, family, work..."

But don't wander too far away from the service for too long, because we may need you....

Rabbi Halfon sent us this column written by Rabbi Dan Wolpe, the Rabbi of a New York Synagogue, as his message for this week.

Let's talk about High Holiday Services.

They are long.

They are not only in Hebrew, a lot of the prayers are in difficult Hebrew.

For many of us, they are boring.

My colleague and friend, Rabbi David Steinhardt, is fond of saying that he feels sorry for people who only come to synagogue on the High Holidays because it is like deciding to take up jogging and starting with the Boston Marathon. Personally, if someone is only going to come to synagogue twice a year, I'd prefer that they come on two Shabbatot, rather than on the High Holidays.

Why? Because I want your time in the synagogue to have meaning. And spirituality is like any skill--the more one exercises it, the better one gets at it. And it's easier, if your spirituality muscles have atrophied, to exercise them on Shabbat than on Yom Kippur.

Don't get me wrong--The High Holidays are deeply and profoundly meaningful--if you know what's going on. But to start with them, to use another metaphor, is like taking calculus before you've been taught arithmetic.

Whatever services you choose to come to, high holiday or Shabbat, I do have some helpful hints to help make your synagogue experience deeper, more profound and ultimately, more worthwhile.

First of all, when you read the prayers, READ AT YOUR OWN PACE. Do not care where the synagogue is in the prayer book and if the rabbi or whoever is leading the prayer asks you to turn the page, TAKE IT AS A SUGGESTION, NOT A COMMANDMENT. It is better for you to have truly prayed one prayer and

leave the synagogue feeling like your time meant something, then to keep up with everyone but have had a hollow experience.

Read in the language you understand. There is a REASON why there are translations in the books. You are under NO obligation to read in Hebrew.

While you are reading at your own pace, ask the following questions:

- 1) What does this prayer mean to me, to who I am today? For the prayers don't change, but WE do. And a prayer that might mean one thing in one moment of our life, could have a totally different meaning in another moment of our lives.

- 2) How does this prayer connect me to God? Even if--maybe especially if--you are agnostic or an atheist, this is an important question. What about this prayer is supposed to help me connect to the Divine?

- 3) How does this prayer connect me to the Jewish people and to the world around me? Our prayers are supposed to inspire action for when we leave the synagogue. If I pray for peace, but do not work for peace, I have not prayed. I pray for health, and refuse to get vaccinated or wear a mask, I have not prayed.

- 4) What are the values inherent in this prayer and do I live up to them? And do I agree with them?

I promise that if you follow these tips, your prayer experience will be richer, more profound and more meaningful. Good luck.

Rabbi Dan Wolpe is the rabbi of the Flushing Fresh Meadows Jewish Center, a noted educator and a produced and published playwright. Please feel free to share/comment on any of his posts.