

Hi everyone! For those of you who don't know me, my name is Rachael Kadish, and I have been a member of KB for the past eleven years. To start off my thoughts on Yom Kippur, I feel that the following haiku from the book Haikus for Jews is appropriate. It reads:

Yom Kippur - forgive  
me, God, for the Mercedes  
and all the lobsters.

Now, as Humanistic Jews, we may want to change the word "God" to something like "neighbor" or "friend" to make the poem more relevant to us, but no matter who is doing the forgiving, the main message of the haiku is still the same. To me, it represents "the easy way" to observe Yom Kippur. The speaker's desire for forgiveness is justified - it is reasonable to feel guilty about how we spend our money - but it does not require much thought or self-reflection to reach that point. In my opinion, the speaker's issue is among those that are on the surface, the ones that are easy to pinpoint and say "I'm sorry - next time I'll buy the Ford and donate the difference to charity." Please don't get me wrong - I have nothing against this kind of reflection and I think it is a great

starting point - but I also believe it should be the beginning of a journey of deep self-reflection. To me, the most important thing that Yom Kippur challenges us to do is to self-reflect, and to do it deeply and completely. I use the word challenge because this type of self-reflection is not easy. In fact, it is one of the most difficult things we can do. It is part of human nature to avoid searching for our flaws or to locate things we have done wrong or should have done differently or just should not have done at all. We do not like to admit when we have been wrong or have made mistakes, and it is difficult for us to say "I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

Interestingly, this is exactly what Yom Kippur is asking us to do - to look back on the past year, remember and think about these kinds of things, and to do what we can to make them right or avoid repeating them in the coming year. This type of self-reflection contradicts our natural way of being, but it is something that each of us must do.

So why is this type of self-reflection so important? My short answer is that it is essential to our growth and development as individuals. How can we even begin to attempt to correct our flaws, admit and fix our mistakes, and make goals for the future if we

don't take the time to look inside ourselves and analyze how we live our lives? We can't, at least certainly not to the best of our abilities. But with self-reflection, we can come to realizations, draw conclusions, create goals, and remember things that didn't go so well and decide what to do about them.

Self-reflection can also greatly affect our relationships with others. For example, self-reflection saved one of my most valued friendships. Two of my friends were being incredibly cruel to my best friend, and I didn't take sides for fear of losing any of our friendships. It took a lot of thorough self-reflection for me to realize that I was acting just as horribly as my two friends for not standing up for my best friend. Because of my self-reflection, I also decided that I needed to apologize to my best friend in the most sincere way possible if we were to save our friendship, and that I couldn't be friends with the two girls anymore if they were to continue with their behavior. Everything worked out okay in the end, but had it not been for self-reflection, I hate to think of what could have happened.

I would like to now pose a question to all of you that some of you may be thinking about already. If this self-reflection is so vital,

why are we only asked to do it during the high holidays? What about the rest of the year? This is something I have been wondering myself lately. When trying to think about the past year, I have felt mainly overwhelmed. So much has happened, a lot of which I may not remember clearly or completely or even may have forgotten about altogether. I could have been a bystander while someone was being bullied, hurt someone and not apologized for it, or fallen short of a goal I set for myself last Yom Kippur. There are an endless number of possibilities of what could have happened this past year, only I will not be able to reflect on many of them because they have become lost in my memory. Also, there are so many occurrences I do remember that I feel lost as to where to begin with self-reflection. I feel confident in saying that this is true for all of us. We can do the type of self-reflection that Yom Kippur calls for to a certain extent, but what it all boils down to is that it would be easier and more successful if we didn't have a whole year of time to think about.

This is where one of my more recent realizations comes in, which asks: Why not make the effort to practice this type of self-reflection on a regular basis? Whether it be daily, weekly, biweekly,

monthly, or whenever we remember to do it, we would have all of the occurrences of and our behaviors during the shorter stretch of time still fresh in our minds. With less to think about, we could focus on what these things and therefore reap the benefits of deep-self reflection more completely. Now, I'm not suggesting we sit down for an hour every time a new week rolls around and agonize over every negative thing that happened. I understand that not only do most of us not have time to do this, but that we also don't want to. What I am challenging us to do is to think about just one aspect of self-reflection, such as something changeable that we don't like about ourselves and ways we can change it. We should also remember to practice positive self-reflection, which is just as beneficial because we realize what actions, behaviors, and personality traits we like about ourselves and can enforce them in our daily lives. And reflecting doesn't have to interrupt everyday life: we can reflect during the commercials of a TV show, when we're somehow being transported from one place to another, just before going to bed, or during countless other situations. It really doesn't matter how, when, or where we reflect, as long as we are achieving what is truly important - to continuously remain conscious

of our being, make improvements to ourselves and our lives, and to steadily grow and develop into whatever our individual definition of "a better person" is. So the next time you find yourself relatively free of thought, I hope you remember these ideas and try them out to see just how wonderful of a person you can become.