



## ***Elul in the Time of Covid***

I don't know any Olympic athletes who showed up without spending countless hours preparing for the "big moment" of their lives. I know very few students who show up at an exam expecting an "A" grade without studying. Few go on important trips without planning the itinerary in advance. I could go on. But my point is, if a moment in time is important, then we should invest our time in preparing for that moment.

*So why should High Holy Days be any different?*

Most Jews know that the High Holydays are meant to be transformative. We attend for many reasons—to hear the Cantor and choir sing majestic melodies that touch the soul; to hear the rabbi deliver sermons that inspire; to see friends we haven't seen in many months. And we hope and pray that our lives will be changed for the better. But most Jews, simply "show up" at services and wait for something to happen to them. However, the reality is that the profound nature of this sacred time is in the process leading up to the High Holy Days themselves.

Jewish tradition understands that to get the most out of the High Holy Days requires that we invest time prior to the Holydays in examining our lives. The month of Elul began on what fell on August 9<sup>th</sup> in the secular calendar. The start of Elul begins a month-long daily process of introspection and reflection. In a traditional synagogue the daily services would conclude with the blowing of the shofar. (And guess what? -- in the non-traditional world, you can actually get a shofar APP which will wake you up each morning!)

The sound of the shofar is meant to raise us out of our stupor and slumber. Too many go through life not fully awake or self-aware. We have our daily routines that give predictability to our lives. But the routine can also serve to prevent us from growing and moving outside our comfort zone. We find strength in our relationships, but too many allow relationships to be on auto pilot. When it comes to our lives, often we don't make changes unless something extraordinary pushes us to make the change. A divorce, a doctor's order, a health scare, etc. But, none of us is perfect. If we want to improve, and we want to make the most of these Holydays, then we should understand and accept that we need to put the time and effort into the process. While "showing up" is important, being present is really only the "period" after a long sentence. We need to get busy writing the story of our lives.

I would like to give you several questions to think about and ideally to journal about during the weeks leading up the High Holy Days. Perhaps these questions will spur you to introspection and change. Even if you don't journal, but merely spend some time thinking about these questions, this process will enhance your experience this year.

So here goes!

1. *Who am I?*
2. *Who do I want to become?*
3. *During this Time of Corona what lessons have I learned? And how will they change my life?*
4. *Who and what is most important to me? And how do I show this in my daily actions?*
5. *If I were to write an ethical will to be read upon my death, what would I want to say to my family and friends?*

These questions should get you started. In putting thoughts into action, remember the immortal words of Rabbi Hillel, "If not now, when?"