

YK 5779 - what are we going to deal with in the next 25 hours?

Maybe some of us will be dealing with things like -

Hunger

Prayer

Uncomfortable pews

An aching body

Long stretches of time in shul

Loads of words

The year ahead of us

Memories

Regret

Yearning

Beauty

Thirst

Questions, like:

Am I good enough?

Am I Jewish enough?

Feelings like:

I'm bored

This isn't what I remember from Shul when I was little

I'm scared

I'm sad

I wish I was somewhere else

Some of these things can be solved - If the pew isn't comfortable, take a chair from the edge of the room (behind the curtain), and find a good place to sit.

Too many words? Go outside for a while and look around at the city passing by, relax your eyes, ears, thoughts. And then come back in, ready to do some more work, because Yom Kippur is work.

When the rabbis decided prayer would take over as our form of worship after sacrifice was no longer possible, or wanted, they called it "Avoda She'Balev" - the work of our heart. And although this "Avodah" is regarded as worship, worship could also be experienced as work. Instead of bringing an

animal as sacrifice, we bring our body-spirit-soul, opening ourselves up to a most meticulous examination with our own eyes, in the eyes of Adonai. Avoda She'Balev is understood as something spiritual - we used to sacrifice flesh and blood, and now we use words.

But prayer is not a clean and orderly thing - This Avodah, work, happens through our body. And our body and soul are one, which is why the ancient directions for Yom Kippur practice relate to the body - We don't eat or drink, we don't wear leather shoes, we don't engage in sexual relations, we don't bath and don't use oils/creams on our body. This is the law of the day - not the Torah portion we should read, and neither the amount of prayers we should say.

Yom Kippur is about noticing every ache and pain and pleasure in our body - and so, in our spirit and our soul.

I will talk some more about this tomorrow before the afternoon Mincha service, but would like to share something now, at the beginning of our day of work.

Some Jewish traditions describe the soul as having 3 layers (this is only figurative, not actual) -

1. Our **Neshama**, the inner part of our being, which is forever pure and can not be hurt.
2. Our **Ruach**, which is the spirit of life in us
3. Our **Nefesh**, which is the so- called "outer part" of our soul - holding the realm of our emotions and traits (am I generous or stingy? Full of pride or humility). This is the part of ourselves we work on during Yom Kippur. [Alan Morinis]

And although we might imagine all three of these as existing on a different plane from our aching muscles, in ancient Hebrew, there was one plane of being.

Or, if I'm more accurate *Nefesh* was understood as something we can see and touch -

רק חזק לבלתי אכל הדם כי הדם הוא הנפש ולא תאכל הנפש עם הבשר: לא תאכלנו על הארץ תשפכונו כמים:

לא תאכלנו למען יטב לך ולבניך אחריך כי תעשה הישר בעיני יהוה:

*“But make sure that you do not partake of the blood; **for the blood is the life**, and you must not consume the life with the flesh. You must not partake of it; you must pour it out on the ground like water: you must not partake of it, in order that it may go well with you and with your descendants to come, for you will be doing what is right in the sight of Adonai” (Deuteronomy/D’varim 12:23-25)*

Our blood was our *Nefesh*, and our *Nefesh* was our Life force - much like the *Ruach* in later thinking. By being commanded on YK ועיניתם את נפשותיכם, we are called to do some intense work with Nefesh - which not only **resides** in our body but **is** our body.

This can be difficult and scary to deal with, especially in our society which tore apart the connections between the body and the spirit realm. How do we deal, for instance with physical illness and hurt, when this means a part of my spirit-Soul is hurt?

I suggest Yom Kippur is offering us a return (T'shuvah) to a reality in which none of these divisions exist. In this reality, I cannot abuse or hurt my body and think **other** parts of my soul will go unscathed. In this reality, touching someone inappropriately, ignoring cries for help and shelter, wasting the land, defiling our water - all these are causing actual harm to the Ruach and Nefesh of people and life around us.

We are not hurting our body, we are not fasting and abstaining in order to better our soul. We are doing all these things in order to better **feel** our soul, our Nefesh.

No eating or drinking so as to notice our sense of taste, and our relationship to water.

No leather shoes to notice our dependence on the animal world

No sexual relations to remember how important human touch is for our wellbeing

No bathing to remember our personal, small, daily routines of taking care of ourselves

No comforting oils and creams to recognize that pleasure and comfort are important for our soul.

We are not depriving ourselves of food, drink, sex, sleep on YK to gain an out-of-body experience, and so connect in a better way with our soul. We are doing this because our body is **part** of our soul and must not be forgotten when we're at the hard work of worship. Not on Yom Kippur and not during the rest of the year.

*Rabbi Gila Caine (5779)*