

The idea of standing before God is a daunting one. We read in the Torah that even Moses could not see God directly, so overwhelming would the experience have been. And yet each of us is called at the High Holydays to stand before God in repentance. If we take this task seriously we understand ourselves to be facing the ultimate judge, who knows all and before whom nothing can be hidden. Our usual evasions and self-justifications should not matter before the Almighty.

And yet how many of us truly face God and ourselves at the High Holydays? How many of us leave the services having truly taken advantage of the opportunity that is provided to us, for self-reflection, self-renewal and self-improvement? How many of us keep those promises we make as we contemplate the words of the prayers and listen to the stirring music?

For many of us it is (relatively) easy to critique ourselves. Indeed as Jews we are remarkably good at self-criticism! But taking the leap from examining our faults to fixing them is more daunting. Recognizing what we have done wrong is one thing. Having the resolve to make different choices in the future is quite another.

In the Torah portion for Yom Kippur, we read of the people standing before God ready to receive covenant just as we stand before God in judgment at the High Holydays. We are told: "This commandment which I command you this day is not concealed from you, nor is it far away...Rather it is very close to you. It is in your mouth and in your heart so that you may fulfill it."

In reading this passage on Yom Kippur we are reminded that true change is also not concealed from us or far away. If we keep the words of the High Holyday prayers in our mouths and in our actions every day, then we remind ourselves of the resolve we had on Yom Kippur. And as we continue to do so, these words become part of who we are and enter our hearts, staying with us in our daily lives.

In the words of the Torah portion, true change "is not in heaven" or "beyond the sea." May each of us keep our goal of being a better person in the words we speak and in our deeds as we begin this New Year and make those changes real in our lives.

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