

HIGH HOLY DAY HIDE AND SEEK

Revealing Your True Self

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IT'S FASCINATING TO watch the way people hide. From the bima (stage) in the sanctuary I can see lots of people hiding. Most of it is in the way they hold themselves and what that behavior communicates.

I don't mean to make you feel uncomfortable; or am I deliberately watching for this. It's just that hiding is something we all do, for many different reasons and often without knowing we are doing it. Some of us do not really want to be seen by other people, and some of us do not really want to be seen by G-d.

Perhaps we have something we don't want them to see, something we are embarrassed about. Maybe we are afraid of being judged. Hiding becomes the natural response to the tension of not wanting to be seen, but having little control over who sees you and when... That is part of why we work so hard to make our synagogue and community safe. So people can feel comfortable being seen for who they are. Because they are welcomed, loved and not judged.

As a teacher, one of the clearest examples I recall is that of a student who does not make eye-contact. Staring at the desk or out the window, this sensitive one does not wish to indicate to the teacher they want to be called on. It's an adolescent survival technique at its best. They are hoping the teacher does not catch their eye. Rather, in a sea of heads and eyes, as the teacher glances over them the child has entirely blended in with the crowd. To be honest, even as an adult, this is my preferred stance in prayer. Although, as I've developed in



my spiritual practice, my approach has matured. Instead of averting G-d's gaze entirely, I cover my own eyes with my tallit (prayer shawl).

As I bring my tallit up and over my head, letting it drape over my brow, I notice that it also blocks out my peripheral vision, creating a view where I can only see the white space in-front of me. My tallit becomes an awning for my face, shading me from G-d's light. It's fascinating, even though I think people can't see, I know they really can.

Maybe that's the point. Maybe that's where we realize that for all our efforts, we can't really hide. This routine of the student who looks away, hoping nobody notices, has gotten old. Even if we have not communicated it directly, people have gotten a whiff of what we've been feeling. It may be surprising, but the more we hold on to what we've done, thinking nobody understands, the heavier our load becomes to bear. Inevitably our character buckles under that weight, demonstrating to everyone the way we limp.

And G-d? G-d doesn't need to see it, because G-d understands our feelings inherently. If only we would accept this.

We can block out G-d's rays for as long as we want. But we'll never uncover our truest selves, or pull them out from hiding, unless we draw back the shades and use G-d's light.

I wonder about all the times we hide during the regular course of the year because we don't want to be noticed. We don't want to be seen or confronted. I wonder why people are willing to hide such beauty, and willing to forgo an honest experience because they are afraid of how they will be perceived...

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur provide us with an opportunity to reveal our truest selves, safely and confidently. From the moment humanity was created, G-d has been warmly calling out to us, "Where are you?". Many of us will dress our best because we know that people will be noticing what we wear. But during a time of self-examination and renewal we just need to answer the call with, Hineini – Here I am. ✨
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