



Temple Rodef Shalom

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Self-Reflection vs Self-Criticism

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQQp5kW8hAQ>

Does this sound familiar? Confession time, it is the High Holy Days after all... How many of you are critical of yourselves in similar ways? We all do it. No one can beat us up better than we can beat up ourselves.

*Al cheit shechatanu l'faneinu* – for the sin we have committed... against ourselves – by lying to ourselves, by not accepting ourselves as we are, by inaction due to fear, by harboring anger and resentment, by covering up our vulnerability, by holding an unrealistic ideal of who we should be or how we should be, and then, feeling bad about ourselves because of it. We can be so judgmental and hard on ourselves.

There's a wonderful Vlog on YouTube by Xandria Ooi, a Malaysian writer, TV host and motivational speaker. She wisely defines the difference between reflection and criticism. She explains that reflection is to see who we truly are without judgement or blame. When we accept ourselves, flaws and all, we are loving ourselves. We need to be kind, gentle and encouraging.

When we are critical and blame ourselves, we are punishing ourselves. All criticism is destructive. When we are self-critical, self-preservation kicks in and we become defensive against our own desire to change. There is no place in self-reflection for beating ourselves up.

As an example, think about how we relate to young children. We love and accept them. We see them as imperfect, with room to grow. We are kind, gentle and encouraging without blame. Don't you deserve the same? We are imperfect with room to grow. Choose self-love over self-criticism.

Why take time for self-reflection?

Self-reflection with love can help us to see ourselves clearly.

Self-reflection can help us manage our weaknesses.

Self-reflection can lead to more thoughtful actions.

Self-reflection can lead to deeper relationships and better living – with others, with the world around us, and with God.

So when does self-reflection happen in your life? Is it once a year on the High Holy Days? Here's the catch, at least for me – I can't remember what I had for lunch yesterday, let alone the

myriad of interactions I've had with people over the past year. Was I selfish, neglectful, or not giving enough? Probably so at one time or another, but to actually remember and learn from the circumstances where I have stepped up or missed stepping up is not very realistic.

The answer to bringing meaningful self-reflection to our lives is simple, and yet many seem to be resistant: Make self-reflection a regular part of your life.

There are so many opportunities to reflect. One, is at the end of each day, by just quieting yourself for a few moments and thinking about the day. You can enhance the experience through meditation or journaling: What did I do well? Where could I have done better?

Judaism provides a weekly structure for self-reflection, Shabbat... A day specifically designed for rest and reflection – ahhh. How many of us actually use Shabbat in that way? No one said Shabbat has to be all or nothing! Imagine taking just an hour, even 20 minutes, to let go of the lists of things we need to get done, to unplug, and take a meaningful look at the week that passed. Shabbat reflection allows us to reconnect with our values and look at our relationships and our connection with the world. Ask yourself some simple questions: What did you do well this past week? Where did you make a difference? Where could you have stepped up or deepened a relationship?

So on this Rosh Hashanah, what change do you want to make in your life? With regular self-reflection, without the guilt, you can make that change.

As Michael Jackson declared:

I'm gonna make a change,  
For once I'm my life, it's gonna feel real good,  
Gonna make a difference  
Gonna make it right

Make a plan for periodic, loving self-reflection, and you will find ways to make a change in yourself and in the world.

I'll conclude with an affirmation, taught to me by Liora, my teacher of meditation and spirituality. Repeat each line after me: [ea 2x]

I am a work in progress  
I am where I am in my process  
Where I am in my process is perfect

May your time of self-reflection during this 10-day period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur be productive and loving.

Kein y'hi ratzon – may this be God's will.