

Rabbi Adam Grossman
Temple Israel
“Self Examinations”
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Over the past few weeks, schools around Memphis and the country have begun to welcome back students. With school comes going to class, learning various subjects, and of course, the dreaded finals. How many of us remember what it was like to prepare for finals? There were those who studied consistently throughout a course, those who procrastinated until the evening before then cramming all through the night, and of course, those who did not open a book throughout course. Yet, no matter how well or poorly we studied, the test only examines our ability to take a test. To really assess a student’s comprehension a teacher or professor utilizes a variety of evaluations – how is a student prepared each day for class, how does a student use the new knowledge, how deeply does a student explore the subject matter?

In my Bible class at HUC in Israel, our professor, Dr. Yossi Leshem, scheduled our final as every other professor and each of us studied accordingly. At the time of the final, the class showed up with our number two pencils in hand, and he stated calmly, “over the semester, I have noticed each your preparation and your continued improvement. I can you assess you based on this knowledge or you can take the final and your assessment will be judged solely on it.” To Dr. Leshem our preparation rather than the examination was most important aspect to gain from his class. In a similar vain, while Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are commonly known as the big two, our yearly examinations do not begin at Rosh Hashanah, but rather right now in this month of Elul.

The final two words of our Torah portion, Ki Tetze, this week is a slogan for this preparation. *Lo tishkach*, “do not forget!” During the month of Elul, we are challenged to not forget - this past year or our preparation for introspection. We are instructed to do an intense evaluation -- studying the aspects of ourselves to determine what we truly liked and disliked, confronting our actions to see what we did selfishly and unselfishly, and asking questions like how did I improve and how did I regress.

Similar to the preparation for exams in school, many of us touch only on the key concepts found on our spiritual surface instead of delving deep into our subconscious. We fail to remember that the evaluation occurring at this time does not only include self-examination, but also the evaluation by our peers, our family, our community and God. Questions like how do our peers see us, how does our family see with us, how does the community see us, and how does God see us - all play a role in the betterment of self.

So as we get ready for Rosh Hashanah in the coming weeks, let us begin to shape God's greatest work – our self -- by returning to the words from our Torah *Lo tishkach*, “do not forget.” Do not forget to ask the deep questions concerning our relationship to our self, to God and to our community. Do not forget to recognize our improvements and relish our accomplishments. Do not forget to question what we still need to improve upon in our continued connection to our self, our family, our community and our God. *Lo tishkach* – do not forget, so when we come to Rosh Hashanah we are open to personal betterment and ready for change.