

Hello everyone! I would like to thank you all again for coming to the 2010 MeFTY Rosh Hashanah Teen Service. I hope you are all having a good holiday so far.

As was said at the beginning of the service, our theme on this Rosh Hashanah is mental, physical, and spiritual balance. Balance is essential to a happy, successful life. If one aspect of our lives is heavier than another, then our lives are out of order and chaotic. In a universe that is always leaning toward chaos, finding and maintaining a balance in life is the key to living well.

Every morning, I wake up at 6:20. I am at school by 7:10, in class by 7:25. When the bell rings at the end of the school day at 2:15, I head to soccer practice until 5. After soccer, depending on the day, I go to a dance lesson, a MeFTY meeting, or my dad's house to work on college applications. I finally return home around 7:30 or 8 to eat dinner and start homework. I am in bed by 12:15 and asleep by 12:30. Five days a week I go through this routine.

If any of you are like me you are completely over-scheduled. You have little or no time for yourself, and you feel as if you are living your life for other people, trying to accomplish what others expect of you. We are becoming burned out because we have no time to relax and reflect. You say, "So what? There's nothing I can do about it, that's just the way life works." And therein is where the problem lies. The lack of balance in our lives today is leading people away from personal growth.

Personal growth stems from reflection: if we are not able to take a step back and view our lives objectively, how are we supposed to mature into young adults capable of not only being able to endure seemingly impossible amounts of work and stress, but also capable of making human connections and, most importantly, enjoying the work we do, the product, and the process? And now you look at your life. You have accomplished so many great things already, and you're barely even young adults. You have made your parents, teachers, coaches proud, and you've probably made yourself proud along the way. You think you've done everything right.

But take a closer look: does what you have accomplished mean anything to you? Are you working hard for yourself, or are you working to meet other people's standards? This is where balance comes in. You must find a way to continue to accomplish your goals while keeping yourself focused and happy, making sure that you are working for yourself, too, not just others.

In Judaism, there are three parts of yourself that must be balanced: the body, the mind, and the soul. You cannot nourish one without nourishing the other two equally if you wish to be balanced. For example, as students, we nourish our mind every day at school for seven hours. That's a lot of brain food, right? The scales are tipped too far toward the mind. We nourish our bodies as well, either participating in athletics, a gym class, or working out at the JCC. The scales begin to balance out, but they are still tipped too far toward the mind and body. For many of us, the scale never tips toward the soul. After all, it is the easiest part to forget to nourish: no one is there to make us reflect and meditate on our actions. We grow mentally and physically every day, but our spiritual growth tends to be stunted from lack of nurture.

Work is expected in school and being healthy is the only way we are able to juggle our schedules. But no one asks you whether or not you've nourished your soul lately because it is a personal process. That's why we must take it upon ourselves to set aside a certain amount of time once a day to sit down and just think. We must restore our hectic lives to balance by reflecting and meditating on our day's actions.

Today is the perfect day to begin again the process of nourishing your soul. Rosh Hashanah is all about new beginnings. It is the new year. Ask yourself if you are balanced: most likely, the answer is no. Don't be discouraged. You can begin today to reflect on the past year. If that's too much, you can start small and reflect on yesterday, or even this morning. No matter what, though, take some time, even five minutes, to sit quietly and reflect. Take these ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and think about all the ways in which you will be able to balance yourself and grow mentally, physically, and spiritually in the coming year.

Thank you, and shana tova!