

40 Days to Becoming Your Best: Jewish Pathways to Wholeness

Translating the words of the High Holy Day prayerbook into personal meaning is akin to brewing a cup of tea. Licking raw tea leaves is not particularly satisfying. An uplifting cup of tea requires combining tealeaves with hot water, a vessel, and time. Likewise, the dried ink on the page, received communal wisdom, needs brewing: our personal experience (the hot water), a vessel (focused attention), and time, enabling full-bodied experience and transformative insight. The key theme of the High Holy Days is how to become our best. We seek to cultivate qualities of character that will allow us to feel more united from within and more readily capable of reaching out lovingly. Ten times during Yom Kippur, as an example, we recite the Al Chet prayer while tapping on our heart as we recite a list of human shortcomings, particularly those focused on callousness and misuse of the tongue. Becoming aware of the power of guarding our tongue is a first step in becoming our best, but it takes more. Only by combining a potential benefit with will, coupled with imagination and immediate rewards, does improvement proceed.

Consider what motivates you to exercise? Researchers have found that we exercise more for the immediate gain of increased energy, than the larger goal of safeguarding our health. Riding, walking, or going to the gym with a buddy helps immensely in staying consistent, because of the immediate satisfaction of enjoyable company and accountability. By exercising regularly, we do improve endurance, enhance calm, and gain the benefits of greater wellbeing.

On Yom Kippur, we as a community will commence a 40-day journey of personal growth, entitled “40 Days to Becoming Your Best: Jewish Pathways to Wholeness.” I will dedicate each of my High Holiday sermons to a facet of the communal study. Havrutah is the Aramaic word for buddy or study partner, for sacred text was learned through discussions. The goal of our CBI campaign is for friends to meet five times, once a week, for one hour in their home, Starbucks, or spaces that we will make available at CBI. Your partners need not be members of our synagogue or even Jewish. A group should be sized so that each person can comfortably speak. Becoming a host is easy and rewarding. We will give you the materials to enable conversations on how Jewish wisdom is relevant to your personal wholeness. You will gain much in the bigger scope of your life by having five satisfying conversations in a small group. For hosts, we will have a celebration of Friday night dinner at CBI on October 30th.

Each participant in a small group will receive a copy of my book, *Increasing Wholeness: Jewish Wisdom and Guided Meditations* (donated by book angels, Joe and Barbara Baim). Participants will also receive “*Becoming: A Growthbook*,” containing a daily quote with reflections and materials to supplement the reading. The host will receive specific guidance on how to make the hour long visit meaningful. My hope is to build on the communal uplift of High Holidays into fostering relationships, increasing wholeness from within, and enhancing how we reach out lovingly. The premise of “*Becoming Your Best*” is that much of your wisdom is already within you but takes both a pause to reflect and intuit, and is elicited by group conversation to become more accessible, motivational, and enduring.

Please go to our website (cbi18.org) to learn more and sign up as a host. Join our Facebook Group page (*Becoming Your Best*), which will allow for sharing reactions to the daily quotes. Let me wish you and your family a New Year of sustained goodness and health and increased wholeness and joy.