

## **Why Do You Come to Pray on the High Holy Days?**

### *Erev Rosh Hashanah Reflections*

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It is an honor to have been asked to address why I come to pray on the High Holy Days.

This question should be prefaced by first addressing why I come to Synagogue on the High Holy Days.

According to the 2013 Pew Research study, some 40% of adult American Jews seldom, if ever, attend services – including on the High Holy Days. That means there will be approximately 1.7 million American Jews wandering around over the next 10 days, unconnected to our heritage, to our faith or to the vital glue that holds our peoplehood together – namely our Synagogues, Temples and Chavurim (Chavurot?).

So Reggie and I come to Synagogue – to this one almost exclusively – for every Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, as well as to other services during the year, as we have since 1979. Why? Because, to quote the Geico commercials, it's what you do.

It's what you do if you believe, as I do, that a Jew has an obligation to support a Synagogue in whatever ways one can – be it with money, time or some combination of the two. Without Synagogues, it wouldn't be long before Judaism – with all its teachings, beauty, richness and, yes, contradictions – would fade away.

Frankly, I worry that's already happening, perhaps reflected, in part, by the long and cumbersome full name of our Synagogue.

Now comes the hard part. Do I come to pray? Being perfectly candid, I don't think I actually pray, assuming you agree with the glib description of praying as some combination of saying out loud or silently to God: "Please, please, please or thank you, thank you, thank you."

But during services I read the text in our machzors or siddurim, follow the Torah reading as best I can, in both Hebrew and English, listen to Rabbi Brown probing old and new ideas, enjoy Cantor Becker's warm and lush musicianship and think about my family, my friends, myself and the world around me. I come to pray to take time out from the usual routine to focus on my unequivocal hopes for good to prevail now, or soon or someday.

As an old-timer here at Scarsdale Synagogue, I want to say welcome to any of you here this Rosh Hashanah eve for the first time. My hope is that when the next 38 years go by, you'll look back with well-earned pride at sustaining and improving this special place, however you can, for future generations of Jews to embrace and preserve.

Shana tovah to all, and thank you again for the opportunity to say a few words.