

Jewish Youth Face Sin the Teenage Way

For Jewish youth, a lakeside holiday ceremony and Yom Kippur's call to confession inevitably confront issues in their lives like gossip, procrastination, disrespect and the use of cell phones.

By [Todd Svano](#) for Mendota Heights Patch, an affiliate of *The Huffington Post*



If Jewish youth like 18-year-old Ari Feldman of Mendota Heights say “awesome” this week, they may really mean it.

The sweet wishes of last week’s Rosh Hashana new year gives way to a self-reflective “10 Days of Awe” this week, ending with Yom Kippur starting sundown Friday, a holy judgment deadline that has some teens thinking.

To aid youth and adults in making a spiritual inventory of misdeeds from

the previous year—in a season similar to the Christian Lent—observant families itemize sins with breadcrumbs or stones thrown into lakes and use a reminder list that corresponds to letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

The ABCs of Atonement

If they were to create their own list, teens could include A—addiction to procrastination, B—broken promises, and C-cussing, they say.

Feldman, a youth leader at [Beth Jacob Congregation](#), said a “teen version” of an inventory of misdeeds should address a number of typical teenage bad habits: “I didn’t text my friend back when I told them I would. I gossiped about my friend’s break up to his ex-girlfriend. And not being nice to freshmen. Changing that would be pretty difficult.”

“We’re addicted to procrastination. Kids are more driven than they’d like to admit.” Always playing catch-up, they can never get to “real living,” he said.

Teens would also do well to reflect on the “addicting drama” of Facebook, he said.

“Everyone can think of at least one thing they’re not so proud of,” said Ethan Meirovitz, 13, of Golden Valley.

“Society’s standards for kids have changed,” added Meirovitz. “Youth used to say Ma’am or Sir, follow what adults say, and go to their own church or house of worship every Sabbath.

But today kids are not wearing appropriate clothing, they're cussing at their parents, and they're not being respectful."

Ethan doesn't entirely exempt himself from that indictment, he said. "I'm trying to cut down on being disrespectful. My parents put a roof over our heads. They work hard all day while we're at school not only to pay for my education so I can have a successful life, but to put food on the table and so I can have a bed to sleep on.

"They provide not only necessities, but luxuries like a cell phone and computer. They have those things at school, so I could survive without them, but I'm grateful that they love me enough they supply me with these things."

A Fresh Start

One of Ethan's most enjoyable holiday experiences was observing "Tashlich" and tossing crackers representing sins into Brownie Lake in St. Louis Park with his peers one year. After confessing sins, the observant affirm the words of Micah 7:19: "You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."

"I definitely feel there's a huge weight taken off my shoulders after I do the Tashlich walk. The coolest thing was when we threw the crackers into the lake, a huge school of fish came and demolished the crackers. Better for them to have our sins than us," he said smiling.

Since Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement and final reckoning before the Book of Life (including the names of the forgiven) is sealed, even many non-observant Jews of all ages take this holiest soul-searching week seriously, repairing failed relationships and fasting.

New Perspective

Feldman has gained new perspective through the often-wrenching withdrawal from a "technologically-reliant" life during the holiday, he said. But it has not always been easy to live without a cell phone or doing the laundry or homework on the holidays.

During his freshman year, when Yom Kippur fell on a weekday, he missed a total of eight days of school despite protests to his mother.

"It made for a very stressful first quarter and I was really angry about it because I felt it was going to set me back," he said.

But as a senior, "I'm gaining appreciation for why it's important. Teenagers are famous for imposing their will on everybody and everything around them," he said. "But it's good to have some commitments you can't break. Now I'm not constantly putting myself first. It's humbling."

If you never have to sacrifice for anything or anyone, he said, you may think you're the center of the universe. "Not being allowed to always do anything I want gives me appreciation for the times I do get to do what I want."