

Rabbi Cohen is not happy. The families of Beit Ahava V'Chesed have not prayed with sincerity. When they arrived back for Ne'ilah, the closing service of Yom Kippur, they found this letter on their chairs. I know what you're thinking: it's not really in keeping with the law or the spirit of Yom Kippur to write and photocopy an angry letter in the middle of the day. Rabbi Cohen has been annoyed at the congregation for quite some time; the letter was written before the holiday began at sundown last night.



BEIT AHAVAH V'CHESED

בית אהבה וחסד

This House is Filled with Love and Kindness

Dear Ahava V'Chesed Members,

I'm disappointed in you. There's no other way to say it. Still, these holy days are all about change and starting fresh, so I want to share with you where you missed the mark in hopes that you will reflect and change.

When the Hebrew month of Elul -the time we use to prepare for the High Holy Days- began, I thought members of the congregation would spend time thinking about how they had hurt one another and to apologize. I know that didn't happen because I got phone calls; more than one person thought they deserved an apology because someone scraped the icing with the picture of the b'nai mitzvah twins off the top of the cake before they had a chance to see it last May.

Elul ended, and Tishrei began. On the very first day of the month we celebrated Rosh Hashanah as a community. To celebrate, we eat apples and honey, but not in the sanctuary. I didn't think you needed a reminder that the High Holy Day prayer book, or Machzor, isn't a napkin, but I found pages stuck together. And it was clear that someone was listening to the baseball game when the shofar was blown; the Shofar Squad sounded great, but no one has ever yelled, "Go, go, go!" before.

At Taschlich instead of throwing bread into the water to symbolically cast away our sins, the children threw whatever they could find: rocks, trash, Dr. Fishman's medical bag. And the lake wasn't their only target; one first grader got hit in the head with a stethoscope.

On Shabbat Shuva, the Shabbat of Return which occurs between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, not one of you returned to synagogue.

And now it's ten days later. I've spoken to some of you before about wearing synagogue-appropriate clothes. Though many people wear white on Yom Kippur to symbolize purity, a bathrobe from the Hilton is not what our ancestors had in mind. Not to mention that during the traditional afternoon reading of the biblical book of Jonah, a group of teenagers spit water as if it were coming from a whale. And I understand that you're hungry, but to those who bring candy bars each year and sniff them longingly, I would say, as Cantor Feldman chanted from the book Isaiah this morning, "Is this the fast I want?"

So, even though I'm annoyed, I also believe you can change. Maybe you just need more time, I've locked the shofar in the tzedakah box in the lobby; it was empty anyway. Spend some time reflecting and learning about the meaning of the holiday. Then you'll be able to unlock the box. We can hear the tekiah gedolah from the shofar, recite a quick havdalah, and bite into those candy bars.

With hopes for a better year ahead,

Rabbi Cohen

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