



What to Wear... And Other Good Advice For The High Holidays

A Rosh Hashanah story based on a Midrash of Rabbi Meir

By

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As the summer came to a close, Nachum was very excited about the upcoming Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur holidays.



In years past he remembered being excited about seeing his family and friends, the food and celebrations that he had—

But this year was different.

This year he went shopping with his mom and bought a new suit for Rosh Hashanah—



It was black with pin stripes and had a monochrome shirt and tie—



He thought he looked SO COOL in the new outfit!

He couldn't wait for the High Holiday services so that he could wear the new outfit and show it off to his friends.

Finally the month of Tishre arrived and Rosh Hashanah was here.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think it means that your prayers come from your heart and not just your lips?
2. Why do you think it is important to focus on the meaning of the prayers?
3. Why couldn't Nachum focus on the prayers in the beginning of the story?
2. What will you try to think about on this Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur?
3. How do you think Nachum felt at the end of the story? Have you ever felt like him?
4. What would you have done if you saw what Rabbi Meir did?
5. Do you think that Rabbi Meir was right to scare the congregation like that?
6. What would you have said to Nachum to try to help him focus on the service and not just on his clothes?
7. Why do you think that Nachum's mom smiled at the end of the story when Nachum took off his coat?

Nachum woke up early on the first day of Rosh Hashanah and quickly got dressed in his new suit.

After a quick bite and a lesson in necktie tying (something he had not yet mastered), Nachum and his mom were off to the Beit Kenneset—to the synagogue for services.

As Nachum and his mom walked they began to talk about the upcoming services.

"What are you looking forward to in services this year?" Nachum's mom asked.

"I can't wait for everyone to see my new suit today" Nachum said.
"Everyone is just going to think that I am SO cool!"



"It is a nice outfit, but..."
Nachum's mom was interrupted by Nachum.

"I am going to walk around and make sure that everyone sees me!"
Nachum continued.

Nachum's mom smiled uneasily and said,
"are you sure that is all that
you want to do in services today?"

"Why?"

What else should I be doing?

What could be as much fun as showing
off my new outfit?" Nachum
exclaimed.

Nachum's mom was happy that Nachum was
excited about his new outfit, but worried about
his reason for going to the service.

They walked in silence the rest of the way
to the synagogue, enjoying the cool Fall
morning.

Nachum and his mom arrived in services just as
the Shacharit, morning service, had begun and
they went over to their usual seats.

As they walked in Nachum noticed his friend
Jonathan was sitting with his dad on the other
side of the sanctuary and he waved over to him.

Nachum smiled to himself and thought
"I bet Jonathan will be SO jealous of my new
suit—I can't wait to go over and talk to him!"

Nachum looked around, then down at his new
outfit and then finally at the Machzor he was
holding in his lap.

He clenched the Machzor tight in his hands.

Then he stood up, took off the
sport coat that he was wearing—
it wasn't too comfortable
anyway—sat down, closed his
eyes and began to daven—to pray
with the cantor and the
congregation.



Nachum's mom looked at him as
he swayed in his seat, singing
the melodies of the prayers and
then she looked at the coat that
laid on the seat beside him.

The melodies of the service
somehow now seemed more
beautiful to her--



And she smiled and began to *daven* too.

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Story concept taken from midrash about Rabbi Meir of Apt who lived in
Europe during the 19th Century

If we only go through the motions, and speak the prayers with our voices and not our hearts and minds, then the Machzor has lost its meaning and we shouldn't pray at all."

"As we begin this new year,"

The rabbi continued,
"My bracha for you is that
the prayers you say from the Machzor
come from your hearts,
and not just your lips."

And with that, the rabbi returned to his seat and motioned to the cantor to continue the service.



But right before Nachum and Jonathan could meet up IT happened..

Right before the Barchu prayer, when the congregation is called together to pray...

Rabbi Meir approached the bimah and screamed:

"Let's do what the Machzor says—lets NOT say any of the prayers this year!"

And with that, he slammed close his Machzor, High Holiday prayer book, and ran out of the synagogue.



The congregation was shocked!

No one had ever seen anything like this before—especially from Rabbi Meir who was such a sweet and quiet person.

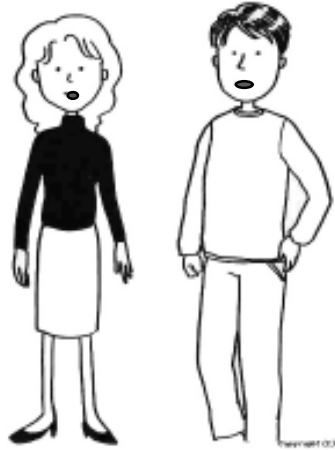
Could the services continue without him?

SHOULD the services
continue without him?

People began to cry:

What did Rabbi
Meir mean?

Did the Machzor really say
that they shouldn't pray?



What should they do?!

Throughout the congregation there was panic and concern. Nachum looked to his mom and said, "What is going on mommy? What is happening?"

Nachum wasn't sure what was happening, but he WAS sure that this would ruin his plans to show off his new suit to his friends—

How could he show everyone what he was wearing for the holidays if there were no services!

He became upset to, but not for the same reason as everyone else.

After what seemed to be hours, but was really only a few minutes, Rabbi Meir walked back into the synagogue and up onto the bimah.



A hush fell over the entire congregation.

"I guess you would like to know why I told you NOT to pray—especially on this holy day of Rosh Hashanah." Rabbi Meir said.

He continued

"The prayers in the High Holiday Machzor are one of the many ways we remind ourselves of the possibilities for the future.

They tell us ho to

Improve the relationships that we have,
The mitzvoth that we do and
How to improve ourselves from
last year"

*But—this only works if the
prayers we say come
from our hearts.*