

Supplemental Readings for Etz Chayim Yom

Kippur 5780 Services

On Yom Kippur we heard various selected readings written by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, an American Orthodox Rabbi now living in Israel & affiliated with Aish HaTorah.

He is a writer, lecturer, and author of more than 25 books.

See Wikipedia and Google for his books and writings. Rabbi Listfield has followed Rabbi Pliskin and has collected many samples of his writings. The supplemental readings that we heard are not all from a single book or published reference writing, but were written by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, over his career.

1) The Futility of Worry

Oftentimes the calamities that people worry about never occur.

Imagine: If you constantly worry about potential disasters, even if your life will work out perfectly in all respects, you will still live a life of suffering. Such suffering is entirely self-caused and unnecessary. Whenever you catch yourself worrying about a potential negative event, ask yourself, "How do I know for sure this will occur?"

2) Define your problems clearly

Every problem can be looked at in many ways. Your perspective will either make a solution easier to find or make it more difficult. The Sages say: "The question of a wise person is half a response." That is, the very way that the wise person formulates the question points us in the direction of a solution.

Whenever you are in a dilemma or in the middle of a problem, think about the best way to phrase your question. This applies not only when you ask your question to someone else, but even when you pose a question to yourself.

3) Our Potential for Self-Improvement

The Chazon Ish (20th century Israel) described the level a person is potentially capable of attaining if he has a long term goal for self-improvement: "If a person constantly strives to improve his character traits, it is possible he will eventually reach a level that he no longer gets angry, will not feel hatred or resentment, will not take revenge nor bear a grudge, will not have ambitions of seeking honor, and will not desire mundane pleasures."

Today, view every person you find difficult as your partner in character development. View every encounter as an opportunity to develop your positive qualities.

4) Trial and Error

The greatest teacher in the world is known as: "Trial and error." This has given more people more wisdom than any other teacher possibly could. "There is no greater wise person than someone with experience."

What does it mean to have experience? It means that one has learned from trial and error. If everyone would get it right the first time, experience would not be needed.

Having the courage to try -- even though you might make a mistake -- enables you to learn from trial and error. This is a valuable reframe. Instead of becoming overly frustrated or discouraged when you make a mistake, realize that you are now becoming wiser.

5) Correct without being Critical

Do not be directly critical of others because this will usually cause them to be defensive. People who do things that are wrong often rationalize that what they have done isn't really wrong. Even the toughest criminals, such as the worst murderers, don't like to admit having done something wrong!

There is a major difference between being critical, and having a positive influence on others by saying things with compassion and true caring. When you sound critical, the person on the receiving end is likely to deny your words, which will be perceived as an attack. And then you won't accomplish anything.

6) Wish the best for others

I know an individual who has the ability to help others see what is good about themselves. I asked him, "What thoughts go through your mind when you meet someone?"

"I always mentally bless people with success in what is important to them," he replied.

When you wish people success in your mind -- even though others don't know what you are thinking -- you radiate positive energy. King Solomon wrote: "As water reflects a face back to face, so one's heart is reflected back to him by another" (Proverbs 27:19). When your heart and mind generate positive energy, others feel good about themselves and about you.

7) The sky's the limit

Many people needlessly limit themselves in important ways. They don't fully develop their character traits, feel more joyful, accomplish more, do more good in the world, study and know more, or have a greater positive influence on more people.

With positive self-conversations, recognizing self-imposed limitations can greatly enhance one's life. This can lead to inspiring and joy-creating self-talk.

"If I am needlessly limiting myself now, that means I can choose to be more and do more and know more and accomplish more! This is tremendously motivating. This thought will give me greater drive and energy. I can experience great joy because I have more abilities and potential than I had realized!"

8) Seeing Each Other's Pain

When people are in emotional pain, they tend to speak and act in ways that sound angry and aggressive. And if you, too, are in emotional pain, you are likely to speak to the other person in ways that he will perceive as angry and aggressive. Each person adds to the emotional pain of the other, and the distress of everyone involved keeps increasing.

When you are calm, it's easier to see the emotional pain of others. That is when you can build up your attribute of compassion. The goal is to have so much compassion that even when you personally are experiencing emotional pain, you are able to be sensitive to the emotional pain of the person with whom you are interacting.

Coming from a place of compassion you will be able to address the thoughts and feelings of the other person in a way that alleviates his distress. Then he is more likely to speak and act more sensibly and reasonably towards you.