

“Please Take This Quick Survey About...Your Life”

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The new moon is in the sky which means we are now into Elul, the month before Rosh Hashanah when we are supposed to take stock of our lives, figure out how and when we've sinned and go about making amends.

These days, we're asked to give our feedback about everything: our pest control service, packaging or how much we enjoyed that root canal. So it can feel like we're busy evaluating everything all the time. But the more time you spend evaluating these sorts of commercial/physical things the less time you'll spend really taking stock of what's truly going on in your life. So here's a practical guide.

Survey

1. On a scale of 1-10, how often did you sin this year? [Hint: if you answered anything lower than a 5 you're either a saint or a liar. We all sin. All the time. Remember that gossip ranks as worse than murder in Talmud. Did you go even a single day of the year without gossiping?]
2. On a scale of 1-10, how severely did you sin this year? [Hint: the big four are adultery, idolatry, murder and gossip.]
3. Against whom did you sin more, people or God? [Hint: sins against people are gossip, hurting another's feelings, cheating them in business, that sort of thing. Sins against God would be things like eating non-kosher food (there goes the city of New Orleans, sorry!), working on Shabbat, etc.]
4. What good deeds have you done to atone for those sins? [Hint: kindness, honoring parents, bringing peace between people, Talmud study, charity, prayer and repentance will get you the win.]
5. Now total up your negative column [degrees/amounts of sins] against your positive column [good deeds] and see where you stand.

Dear God, that was painful! I'm awash in a sea of red ink. If I want to make it through those gates on the High Holidays, I'm going to have to swim for it.

That's what the month of Elul is for...to see the sea of red ink and do the work of swimming out of it to the land of life and righteousness.

May you have a good, albeit strenuous, month of Elul and may you reach the promised land of balanced accounts and a clear conscience!