

Are You Ready for Yom Tov?

We all have ADHD, Anxiety, and Depression. It is only frequency and intensity that separates those struggling with symptoms of these disorders in a non-clinical and undiagnosable way, and those who are clinically diagnosed. In other words, how much do these symptoms “disorder” your life, a lot and it becomes a “disorder”, less, and it is part of the normal ups and downs of life. Hashem created us with these feelings, which can at times be used productively, and at other times have to be overcome. For people struggling with these symptoms less intensely and less frequently, routine and habit can play a large role in helping us plow through these more difficult days or weeks. Routine helps us balance family time with alone time, and sets us up for an overall expected schedule. Yom Tov provides a break from our routine and regular schedule. Is that helpful?

On the one hand, a break from our routine allows us time to reflect on all the goodness we have in our lives that we may otherwise take for granted during the regular day to day of our busy schedules. It gives us a chance to better connect with Hashem, through unique mitzvos, davening, and learning. We can spend quality time with friends and family, strengthening these important family bonds.

However, it can also disrupt the flow we have going and create additional stress. Our regular schedules provide natural healthy breaks from family members, and Yom Tov can turn into a time when we feel like we are packed too tightly together without adequate personal space. The preparation for Yom Tov has its own set of stressors, and when we finally get there, relaxation time might be few and far between. Our daily habits helping us maintain sedarim, household chores, healthy eating/exercise, and more, are generally non-existent. Distraction, worries, and sadness can creep up on us and we don't have our routine and schedule to help us get through it. How then can we better our chances for a refreshing, healthy, and happy Yom Tov, as it is meant to be?

Preparation. We all know and accept that throughout the year we must prepare for our meetings, jobs, appointments, meal times, exercise time, and even relaxation or alone time. If we don't prepare, these responsibilities are usually not performed well. One cannot compare family meal time that is prepared for in advance, with food prep, kitchen prep, scheduling prep, and mental prep (enough little kids in the house can throw off all the preparation in the world, but it will still always be better than if there had been no prep). A seder with a chavrusa, working with patients and clients, completing our daily responsibilities, etc. all go more smoothly with adequate preparation. So how can we prepare for Yom Tov and the challenges it presents?

While Yom Tov is a break from our “regular” schedules, it provides its own set of schedules that can be counted on. There is shul and meals at generally designated times throughout the day. Then of course there is plenty of down-time. The key is to plan ahead to make the most of this down-time. Setting up times for learning, activities, playdates for children with friends, and alone time, can be very helpful. This means actually writing down a basic schedule or schedules for multiple members of the household. Going for a walk is underrated. Especially after a large meal or nap, going for a walk, even in less than ideal weather, can be mentally and physically restorative. Making time to visit neighbors, friends, or family in the neighborhood who are not staying with you, can be a nice change of scenery. Even guests can create a checklist of healthy things they want to do each day of Yom Tov and fit these into their hosts' meal schedules. These suggestions are simply meant to spark ideas in your own minds that can work for you and your families (except for walking, that works for everyone!).

Rabbi Yaakov Schwartz, Menahel at TA, mentioned a wonderful practice he witnessed. It takes some time and preparation, but it can make a big difference. Imagine your home as a Yom Tov hotel program. An unimaginable amount of preparation goes into these programs. On erev Yom Tov hand out a previously prepared program brochure with davening times, meal times, (menu items? have fun with it!), sleeping arrangements, and scheduled learning times and activities. Included in this program can be some basic expectations or rules for the house. One example may be, couches are meant for sitting, no jumping please! This can be done with a house filled with family and guests, or with one's immediate family. Either way this can be a fun way to set the tone for Yom Tov, and avoid some of the anticipated stressors that can come up. It can be helpful to mentally prepare for the sight of children still jumping on the couches and how you would prefer your response to be – stay calm and maintain your focus on the opportunities of the Yom Tov and family time. Go for a walk if necessary :)

It is always important to remember that a crucial part of any plan is to expect the unexpected. We are not perfect, and our plans will not be perfect. Go with the flow. If a part of the plan needs to get adjusted or skipped, that is more than fine, that IS part of the plan. All the prepared schedules are subject to change (you can write that in the fine print of your plan) but having a basic program can spell the difference between a stressful and a happy, Chag Sameiach and Gut Yom Tov.