
Filter Fish

Alexandra Goldstein

My family and I are sitting in synagogue
On Yom Kippur, the only time we
Would be there, realistically,
Because after my Bat Mitzvah we
Stopped coming to the Conservative Synagogue of Westport

Except for celebrating the High Holidays,
A hiatus about which I feel vaguely bad,
Though perhaps I should heed advice from the
Red Hot Chili Peppers when they suggest taking “the guilt they try and give
you and

Puking it in the nearest bin.”
But instead of puking I’d really prefer to feel more
Emotionally and spiritually connected to these days,
Seeing as they are the most sacred moments of the year and the rabbi
Usually gives an insightfully beautiful sermon about morality or ethics,

After which a large group of congregants clears out and goes home to
Dream about food, because we can’t eat on Yom Kippur,
We fast to repent for our sins, so images of bagels and lox and matzah ball
soup

And filter fish, otherwise known by the general public as “gefilte fish,”
Float through our hungry heads.

After the Torah and Haftorah services are finished,
During which the bravest, biggest show-offs of our synagogue
Read from the Hebrew texts, the rabbi gives his
Sermon, and it’s as insightfully beautiful as I expected it to be,

But then it ends,
And as the Torah is still out on the *bimah*, crowned with all its glory
Everyone realizes that it's lunchtime.

Men in suits and high-heeled ladies in Gucci with blow-outs and French manicures
(Synagogue being a place to see and be seen)
Stand abruptly and turn their heads in the other direction

To ignore the written scroll. Instead, they focus on ushering their kids,
Little girls picking wedgies caused by twisted white tights and little boys tossing
their
Yarmulkes in the air, out the door.

And the rabbi says gently, ashamed of the
Exodus, "Please, if you must exit now, do so quietly,"
And he says this at the microphone-equipped *bimah*,

So he knows and everyone knows
That everyone can hear him, and he says it sadly,
His voice tainted with a bit of
"You-kids-shouldn't-have-broken-into-Dad's-liquor-cabinet"

Disappointment, because
We owe it him, to ourselves, to our religion,
To sit up straight, open the *Machzor*, and stay awhile
Instead of being so preoccupied that we dash out of synagogue

As if it's a doctor's office, or the supermarket, or some other place
To which we make curt, cordial trips out of obligation.
And the fact is, this is the day of repentance,

But doesn't interrupting the rabbi sort of
Push us back a few steps in the whole
"Forgiveness" process?
We should be reflecting on our past year, the times we

Angrily hung up on our significant others,
Or chuckled under our breath at people who trip on the street,
Or took obnoxiously long, hot showers, or forgot to recycle,

Though no one really wants to hear about
Global warming anymore. It's become
Much too fashionable and trendy to be "green,"
So that the real life tree-hugging new-age hippies
Look like posers, what with their hemp and their

Birkenstocks and their dirty hair,
To the point where we can't decipher the real
Tree-hugging new-age hippies from the
Random chicks who decided one day, out of the blue, to recycle.

So seeing as it is Yom Kippur,
And we can't even go home to actually eat,
Instead we leave temple to nap and loll around the house and
Watch T.V. and pray that a

Red Lobster commercial doesn't come on,
Because that would be
The temptress that would
Convince us that starting the New Year

Not on an empty stomach as God suggests,
But with a buttery lobster and some steamers
Wouldn't be the worst thing in the world.
As the rabbi's sermon begins to wind down,

And people start coughing and shuffling their feet,
My mom puts a hand on my arm as if to say,
"Ready to go?"
And I feel a crushing, vomit-inducing sense of remorse;

"Out, damn'd spot!" proclaimed Lady Macbeth in a
Guilty stupor so parallel to mine
That I turn to my mom and say, "Let's stay 10 more minutes,"

Because I can't bear to feel the rabbi's eyes on the back of my skull;
I imagine they are quite hurt and sorrowful,
Because we are being pretty sucky Jews,
And the worst part of all is that no matter what I say or do,

I know I won't even be back in synagogue until next year.
So he is begging us to be quiet and I feel overwhelmingly awful,
Because of course with hundreds of people trying to leave,

Scraping back their chairs and fumbling with their purses, the rabbi begins to
speak
Louder, the microphone squeaks, and the noise levels start to rise
Faster than they would at a Red Hot Chili Pepper's concert

Full of teenagers and adults alike,
All screaming until their voices sound like scrapes
And thrashing themselves about like those
Big-bosomed Evangelical women who personally experience

The mighty power of Jesus Christ in their bodies, except that
Instead of Christ, these concert tee-wearing,
Pot-smoking, beer-drinking adults and teens
Are experiencing, quite fervently, with all their hearts,
The mighty power of the equally godlike Anthony Kiedis.

Alex Goldstein is a freshman in the College of Arts & Sciences from Westport, Connecticut, who loves the Red Hot Chili Peppers, long hot showers, and filter fish (and lobster). She plans on staying in synagogue long after the rabbi's sermon next Yom Kippur due to her ubiquitous Jewish guilt.