

FIND YOUR WAY HOME

A Reflective Journal for Elul

B'NAI
JESHURUN



FIND YOUR WAY HOME

A Reflective Journal for Elul

Week 1: Our Intrinsic Essence	<u>2</u>
Week 2: Review and Repair	<u>6</u>
Week 3: Crossing the Distance	<u>10</u>
Week 4: Transformative Foundation	<u>13</u>
Week 5: Letting In and Letting Go	<u>18</u>
Supplement for Tishrei: Entering the Holy of Holies	<u>22</u>

As we enter the month of Elul, a time of reflection and introspection in the weeks leading up to the Yamim Nora'im (High Holy Days), we will explore many opportunities for deep spiritual work. There will be opportunities for prayer, learning, and ritual; practicing mindfulness and lifting our voices in devotional song. However the essential work of *heshbon hanefesh* (accounting of the soul) and teshuvah (repentance) is at the core of this month's spiritual journey.

To guide us through these weeks of spiritual preparation for the Yamim Nora'im, we are excited to share *Finding Your Way Home: A Reflective Journal for Elul*. Inside you will find weekly sections for the weeks of Elul, each reflecting a different way in which we might understand the very nature of teshuvah. These different understandings, in turn, reframe the spiritual work itself. The final section of this journal guides us as we move into Tishrei, as the spiritual work moves from the personal to the communal. You will find questions and prompts for personal investigation, Jewish and secular texts for study and discussion, questions and activities for children and families, and links to online resources.

While the questions, prompts, and study texts in this journal have been assembled for anyone to journey through on their own, we invite you to connect with a hevruta (study partner), family member, a few friends, or even a small group to explore and learn together. May these study materials and opportunities for personal investigation provide the foundation for a meaningful Elul, leading toward a truly transformative Yamim Nora'im.

Guide

For each week of Elul, you'll find the following sections:

-  **Opening Up:** Get the conversation started
-  **Going Deeper:** Explore and get rooted in the texts at the core of these concepts
-  **For Children and Families:** Engage in this process with questions especially geared for children and family conversations
-  **Another Level:** Find alternative access points to the themes of Elul
-  **Looking Inward:** Spend private moments in reflection and internal investigation

Our Intrinsic Essence

Monday, August 9–Sunday, August 15

1 Elul–7 Elul

In many teachings throughout the canon of our tradition, we find a variety of metaphors for an intrinsic goodness in all humankind. This is what the Sefat Emet¹ calls a netzotzah kedoshah (spark of holiness), or for Rabbi Naḥman of Breslov², a nekudah tovah (point of goodness).

? Opening Up

Where do you see sparks of holiness in the world? In our community? In yourself?

! Going Deeper

Using the space below, compare and contrast the following two sources from the Sefat Emet and Rav Kook. How do they each relate to God and the concept of teshuvah? To this idea of “sparks of holiness?” Which of these sources resonates more deeply with you?

Sefat Emet, Likkutim Yekarim #83, Shekalim 5655

This is a fundamental principle: in everything in creation, there exists sparks of holiness. No thing, nothing is devoid of these sparks, even trees and stones. And, also in every human deed, even in a sin that one might commit, there is a spark from the original shattering.

What is the spark of the sin? It is teshuvah. At the moment that we do teshuvah for a particular sin, we raise up the sparks that are in it to the supernal world.

This is what "bearing sin" means (Exodus 34:7): God bears the sin and lifts it upward. And so also, we find (Gen 4:13) "my sin is too great to bear:" it is made great, when through my teshuvah, I raise up and elevate it to the supernal world.

זה כלל גדול: בכל מה שיש בעולם יש נצוצות
קדושה, אין דבר ריק מהניצוצין אפילו עצים
ואבנים,
אפילו המעשים שאדם עושה, אפילו עבירה
שאדם עושה, יש בו ניצוצות מהשבירה.

ומה היא הניצוצות מהשבירה? היא התשובה.
בשעה שעושה תשובה על העבירה מעלה
הניצוצות
שהיה בה לעולם העליון.

וזה שכתוב: (שמות ל"ד ז') "נושא עון" – פירוש
נושא ומעלה העון למעלה. וזהו (בראשית ד' י"ג):
"גדול עוני מנשוא" – פירוש, להרימו ולהעלותו
לעולם העליון.

In what way do these metaphors of "reconnecting" and "uncovering" share the same idea? In what way are they distinct? How might these approaches affect your own spiritual work during Elul?

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook³, Orot Hateshuvah 15:10

When we forget the essence of our own soul... everything becomes confused and in doubt. The primary teshuvah, that which immediately lights the darkness, is when a person returns to themselves, to the root of their soul—then they will immediately return to God, to the soul of all souls.

כששוכחים את מהות הנשמה העצמית,
כשמסיחים דעה מלהסתכל בתוכיות החיים
הפנימיים של עצמו, הכל נעשה מעורבב ומסופק.
והתשובה הראשית, שהיא מאירה את המחשכים
מיד, היא שישוב האדם אל עצמו, אל שורש
נשמתו, ומיד ישוב אל , האלהים, אל נשמת כל
הנשמות.

For Children and Families



Draw a picture of what makes you unique (adults should feel free to do this exercise as well!). **Scan or click the QR code** to see the Metropolitan Museum of Art's archive of 2021 Pre-K to 12th grade students' artwork, and explore what over 150 children of all ages see when they try to capture their essence and the essence of the world around them.

What makes you special?

What is a unique skill that you have learned that can help others?

How have you changed in the last year?

Another Level

“Song of Myself” by Walt Whitman

The past and present wilt—have filled them, emptied them,

And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.

Listener up there! what have you to confide to me?

Look in my face while I snuff the sidle of evening,

(Talk honestly, no one else hears you, and I stay only a minute longer.)

Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,

(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

I concentrate toward them that are nigh, I wait on the door slab.

Who has done his day's work? who will soonest be through with his supper? Who wishes to walk with me?

Will you speak before I am gone? will you prove already too late?

Do you identify with the speaker of this poem? With the listener? Take a moment and write the “song of yourself.” Where are you at this moment? Where were you last year? Reflect on any growth or change that led you to this time. Where would you like to be this time next year?

Looking Inward

Do you believe you have a unique netzotzah kedoshah (spark of holiness) or nekudah tovah (point of goodness)? How do you connect to this part of yourself?

Notes

1. Sefat Emet: Sefat Emet is the collection of the teachings of the Hasidic master Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter of Ger (1847-1905).
2. Rabbi Nahman of Breslov (1772-1810), a great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, is the founder of the Breslov Hasidic movement.
3. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), was the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of British Mandatory Palestine in the Land of Israel. He is considered to be one of the fathers of religious Zionism. Orot Hateshuva is his seminal work on repentance.

Review and Repair

Monday, August 16–Sunday, August 22

8 Elul–14 Elul

The great 12th-century sage Rabbi Moses Maimonides teaches that as we engage in the work of teshuvah, there are several specific steps we must undertake: helping us to acknowledge the ways that we have caused harm, take responsibility for the harm we've caused, and transform our deeds for the future. The work, therefore, is about transforming our actions themselves.

? Opening Up

What is a regret that you have from this past year? How might you have acted differently?

! Going Deeper

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Teshuvah, 2:2, 9

How does one do teshuvah? The transgressor stops doing the transgression and removes it from their thoughts. They resolve to not do it again in the future. They regret [that which they did] in the past. They verbally express their wrongdoings to God and make a verbal resolution for the future. Regarding wrongdoings against another: one must reimburse whatever they owe and ask the other person's forgiveness.

ומה היא התשובה. הוא שיעזב החוטא חטאו ויסירו ממחשבתו ויגמר בלבו שלא יעשהו עוד... וכן יתנחם על שעבר... וצריה להתודות בשפתיו ולומר ענינות אלו שגמר בלבו... אבל עברות שבין אדם לחברו... אינו נמחל לו לעולם עד שיתן לחברו מה שהוא חייב לו וירצהו... ולשאל ממנו שימחל לו.

Maimonides identifies five steps one must complete in order to engage in teshuvah. How do these steps make sense for you in the work of teshuvah? How does the order help/hinder the work of teshuvah? Is there a step missing that you would like to add?

Rebbe Nahman of Breslov, Likutei Etzot, Teshuvah, 25

If one merits to feel truly the pain of one's mistakes, after having circumcised the husk of your heart such that one's heart truly feels the extent of that pain, upset and remorseful, one will return with true teshuvah.

Then all hearts will feel the “droplets” which they have emitted, their (figurative) children, who have been abandoned in a strange place, God forbid. All [hearts] will be circumcised and will feel where they (the results of their choices) have landed, and a great ruckus will be raised amidst them, waking them all to teshuvah.

אם יזכה שירגיש באמת כאב חטאיו, דהינו בשימול ערלת לבבו, עד שירגיש לבבו באמת גדל כאבו, ויצטער ויתחרט וישוב בתשובה באמת, אזי ירגישו גם כל הלבבות של כל הטפות שנמשכו ממנו, הן בניו ממש, הן אותם שנמשכו למקום אחר חס ושלום. כלם יהיה נמול ערלת לבבם וירגישו היכן הם מטלים, ויהיה נעשה רעש גדול ביניהם ויתעוררו לתשובה כלם.

What does it mean to “merit to feel pain”?

Is pain the only motivator to do teshuvah? Is remorse a necessary starting point, or can one begin the process without feeling remorse?

For Children and Families

Scan or click the QR code and take some time to explore the Pedagogy of Partnerships resource on teshuvah from the Hadar Institute. After completing the first exercise on pages 2–4, talk together as a family:



What makes a good apology?

To whom do I need to apologize? (With whom do I need to make amends?)

What can you do when you make a mistake?

What is something that you want to do better this year—at home, at school, in your community?

Another Level

For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf by Ntozake Shange

“one thing I don’t need
is any more apologies
i got sorry greetin me at my front door
you can keep yrs
i don’t know what to do wit em
they don’t open doors
or bring the sun back
they don’t make me happy
or get a mornin paper
didn’t nobody stop usin my tears to wash cars
cuz a sorry.”

Are there times when an apology may be inappropriate?

How do we ensure our making amends serves to repair the relationship rather than only our own conscience?

 **Looking Inward**

Think of your deepest break with someone who had been close to you. A relationship that was frayed and deeply damaged because of actions that you regret. Write a letter to this person (whether or not you send it). Consider the ways that you might have acted differently. Lift up the actions you regret. Ask forgiveness. Seek to repair this relationship.

Crossing the Distance

Monday, August 23–Sunday, August 29

15 Elul–21 Elul

Hasidic thought teaches that sin is a result of becoming distant—or even in exile—from God. In fact the word תשובה (teshuvah) can even be read as 'תשוב ה' (return to God). During the month of Elul and the Yamim Nora'im, we engage in the process of drawing closer to God once again. We turn our focus toward cultivating a spiritual life of connection and allow positive changes to flow from there.

? Opening Up

Can you think of a moment when you felt deeply connected to God, the Divine, or a sense of one-ness in the world?

! Going Deeper

Return: Daily Inspiration for the Days of Awe, Dr. Erica Brown

Rabbi Levi observed: “Great is repentance, for it reaches up to the Throne of Glory, as it is said: ‘Return O Israel, unto Adonai, your God, for you have stumbled in your sin’ (Hosea 14:2).” Rabbi Levi took the verse literally. We return to the Lord. When we return, we create access to God. The remoteness that results from sin is abolished, leaving only intimacy with God. *Reach higher.*

What does it feel like to return? What are the obstacles on your path to intimacy with the Divine? What are the distractions?

How else might we read this verse?

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah 7:6

Great, indeed, is repentance for it brings a person to the Shekinah, even as it is said: "Return, O Israel, unto Adonai your God" (Hosea, 14. 2)... Repentance brings near the far apart. Just yesterday this sinner was hateful to the presence of God, scorned, ostracized and abominate, and today they are beloved, desirable, companionable and a friend.

גְּדוּלַּת תְּשׁוּבָה שֶׁמְקַרְבֶּת אֶת הָאָדָם לְשִׁכְיִנָּה שְׁנֹאֲמַר (הוֹשֵׁעַ יד ב) "שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ" ...
הַתְּשׁוּבָה מְקַרְבֶּת אֶת הָרְחוּקִים. אָמַשׁ הָיָה זֶה שְׁנֹאוֹי לְפָנַי הַמָּקוֹם מִשְׂקָץ וּמְרַחֵק וְתוֹעֵבָה. וְהַיּוֹם הוּא
אֶהוּב וְנִחְמָד קְרוֹב וְיָדִיד.

In the past, how has the work of teshuvah made you feel more connected to God?
As you prepare for the work of teshuvah, what distant aspects of your experience (relationships, understandings, perspectives) do you hope to bring closer?

For Children and Families

Talk together as a family:

What words would you use to describe God?

What questions would you ask God?

Draw a picture of how God makes you feel.

Another Level

“I thank You God for most this amazing” by E. E. Cummings

I thank You God for most this amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes
(I who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun’s birthday; this is the birth
day of life and love and wings; and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)
how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any—lifted from the no
of all nothing—human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?
(now the ears of my ear awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

Looking Inward

When have you felt most close to God’s presence?

What obstacles have stood in the way? External or internal obstacles?

How might you recommit yourself to spiritual practice this year?

Transformative Foundation

Monday, August 31—Sunday, September 5

22 Elul–28 Elul

As we engage in the spiritual work of this season, we are invited to consider the impact of teshuvah beyond ourselves and our relationships: How can our personal teshuvah lead to the change we seek in the world? And how can we, as a society, make amends?

? Opening Up

What are some of the ways that we have fallen short as a local, national, and global society? What could teshuvah look like on that level?

! Going Deeper

Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer¹ 3:2

Before the world was created, the Holy Blessed One—with the One's Name alone—existed, and the thought arose in the Blessed One to create the world. God began to trace (the foundations of) the world before Godself, but it would not stand. They told a parable, To what is the matter like? To a king who wishes to build a palace for himself. If he had not traced in the earth its foundations, its exits and its entrances, he could not begin to build. Likewise the Holy Blessed One was tracing (the plans of) the world before Godself, but it did not remain standing until the Blessed One created repentance.

עד שלא נברא העולם, היה הקדוש ברוך הוא ושמו הגדול בלבד, ועלה במחשבה לברוא את העולם, והיה מחריט את העולם לפניו ולא היה עומד. משלו משל למה הדבר דומה, למלך שהוא רוצה לבנות פלטרים שלו, אם אינו מחריט בארץ יסודותיו ומובאיו ומוצאיו, אינו מתחיל לבנות, כך הקדוש ברוך הוא החריט לפניו את העולם ולא היה עומד עד שברא את התשובה.

What does it mean that the earth is built on foundations of repentance?

What mechanisms for reevaluating and changing course are built into our society, and how can we most effectively use them?

How does *our* teshuvah keep the world standing, as this midrash suggests?

Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 86a

תְּנִיא, הָיָה רַבִּי מֵאִיר אֹמֵר: גְּדוֹלָה תְּשׁוּבָה, שֶׁבִּשְׂבִיל יַחִיד שֶׁעָשָׂה תְּשׁוּבָה — מוֹחֲלִין לְכָל הָעוֹלָם בּוֹלוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "אֲרַפָּא מִשׁוֹבְתָם אוֹהֵיבִים נִדְבָה כִּי שָׁב אִפִּי מִמֶּנּוּ." "מֵהֶם" לֹא נֶאֱמַר, אֶלָּא "מִמֶּנּוּ".

It was taught in a baraita that Rabbi Meir would say: Great is repentance because the entire world is forgiven on account of one individual who repents, as it is stated: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for My anger has turned away from that individual" (Hosea 14:5). It does not say: From them (i.e., from the sinners), but...from that individual. Because the individual repented, everyone will be healed.

How do you understand the idea that one person's teshuvah can heal the world?

Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 54b

Anyone who is able to protest against the transgressions of one's household and does not, is punished for the actions of the members of the household; anyone who is able to protest against the transgressions of one's townspeople and does not, is punished for the transgressions of the townspeople; anyone who is able to protest against the transgressions of the entire world and does not is punished for the transgressions of the entire world.

כָּל מִי שְׂאֵפְשֵׁר לְמַחֹת לְאַנְשֵׁי בֵּיתוֹ וְלֹא מִיָּהָה — נִתְפָּס עַל אַנְשֵׁי בֵּיתוֹ. בְּאַנְשֵׁי עִירוֹ — נִתְפָּס עַל אַנְשֵׁי עִירוֹ. בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם כּוֹלוֹ — נִתְפָּס עַל כָּל הָעוֹלָם כּוֹלוֹ.

How do you understand the idea that we are responsible for the wrongs committed by others when we are able to speak up against them but fail to do so? How does this type of teshuvah create the foundation of the world, as well?

This text invites us to not only consider not only the ways that we can make change in ourselves but also the ways that we can give voice to the changes we seek around us when there is injustice in our midst. How have you given voice in moments like these?

For Children and Families

Discuss together as a family:

How do your own actions and the choices you make impact the behavior of those around you? In your family, school, and community?

What changes would you like to see in the world? What can you do differently to improve the world?

Another Level

Scan or click the QR codes to explore the full text of these prayers for the collective healing of our society, modeled after the Al Het confessional from the Yom Kippur liturgy.

“For the sins we have committed through conscious and unconscious racial bias.
For the sins we have committed through hardening our hearts to the need for change.
For the sins of colluding with racism both openly and secretly. For the sins we have committed through uttering racist words.
For the sins we have committed through acts of racial micro-aggression.
For the sins we have committed through insisting on urgency and perfectionism as a measure of human value...”—*A Communal Al Chet the Sins of Racism*, Yavilah McCoy



View the full Al Het here

“Eternal God, You created earth and heavens with mercy, and blew the breath of life into animals and humans. We were created amidst a world of wholeness, a world called “very good,” pure and beautiful, but now your many works are being erased by us from the book of life.

Not by our righteousness do we plead our prayers before You, Holy One of All, for we have sinned, we have despoiled, we have destroyed...” - *Confession for the Earth*, Rabbi Katy Z. Allen.



View the full Al Het here

What type of Al Het do we need at this particular moment?

Looking Inward

Where do you wish you had taken action this year?

What commitments do you want to make for justice work in the upcoming year?

What do you think our society as a whole must atone for? What do we need to repair?



Want to be part of BJ's efforts in environmental justice, racial justice, support for refugees and immigrants, addressing homelessness and food insecurity, and more? **Scan or click the QR code** to get involved with Panim: Social Action and Social Justice at BJ! Contact Kiana Davis to learn more at kdavis@bj.org.

Notes

1. Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer ("Chapters of Rabbi Eliezer") is a midrash that retells and expands upon the stories of the Torah, from the creation of the world through the story of Miriam's leprosy. It incorporates discussion on topics like redemption, Messiah, and calculating the end of days. Traditionally considered to have been authored by Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus in the time period of the Mishnah (the first and second centuries CE), the work was likely edited in the 8th or 9th century.

Letting In and Letting Go

Monday, September 6–Wednesday, September 15

1 Tishrei–9 Tishrei

Throughout Elul, we put great emphasis on the inward work of reflection and the outward work of seeking forgiveness bein adam *lemakom* (between a person and God) and bein adam *leha'vero* (between a person and their fellow). However, this is also a time to cultivate our ability to forgive and let go of our anger or sadness towards others. Perhaps even more importantly, it is a time for us to look inward and forgive ourselves.

? Opening Up

What is the point of accepting forgiveness?

! Going Deeper

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah¹, Hilkhhot Teshuvah 2:10

One must not show themselves cruel by not accepting an apology; they should be easily pacified, and provoked with difficulty. When an offender asks their forgiveness, they should forgive wholeheartedly and with a willing spirit. Even if they have caused much trouble wrongfully, they must not avenge themselves, they must not bear a grudge. This is the way of the stock of Israel and their upright hearts.

אָסוּר לְאָדָם לְהִיּוֹת אַכְזָרִי וְלֹא יִתְפַּיֵּס אֶלָּא יְהֵא נוֹחַ לְרִצּוֹת וְקָשָׁה לְכַעַס וּבִשְׂעָה שְׂמִיכָשׁ מִמְּנוֹ הַחוּטָא
לְמַחַל מוֹחַל בְּלֵב שָׁלֵם וּבְנִפְשׁ חֲפִצָּה. וְאִפְלוּ הֵצִיר לוֹ וְחָטָא לוֹ הֲרִיבָה לֹא יִקָּם וְלֹא יִטָּר. וְזֶהוּ דְרָבָם שֶׁל זֵרַע
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלִבָּם הִנְכוּז. אֲבָל הָעוֹבְדֵי בּוֹכָבִים עָרְלֵי לֵב אֵינָן כֵּן אֶלָּא (וְעִבְרָתוֹ) [וְעִבְרָתוֹ] שְׂמֵרָה נֶצַח.

This text indicates that not accepting an apology is "cruel," no matter how hurtful the wrong committed against the offended was. Do you agree? What makes an apology difficult to accept?

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhoh Tesuvah 2:11

One who committed a sin against a friend, and the friend died before they asked for forgiveness, should **bring ten adults at the grave** and there say: "I have sinned against Adonai, God of Israel and against this person (naming them), and I have done against them such and such (naming the sins). If they were indebted to them, they should return the money to the heirs; if they knew not of the heirs, they should leave the amount with the tribunal, when after their confession should be delivered.

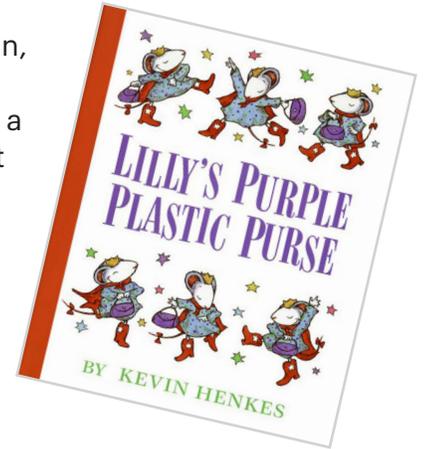
הַחוּטֵא לְחַבְרוֹ וּמֵת חֶבְרוֹ קָדָם שְׂיִבְקֶשׁ מִחֵילָה מִבֵּי אֶדָם וּמֵעֲמִידָן עַל קִבְרוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר בְּפָנֵיהֶם חֲטָאתִי לַה' אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלִפְלוֹנֵי זֶה שָׁכַף וְכָף עָשִׂיתִי לוֹ. וְאִם הָיָה חַיֵּב לוֹ מִמֹּן יַחְזִירוּ לַיּוֹרְשִׁים. לֹא הָיָה יוֹדֵעַ לוֹ יוֹרְשֵׁינָנוּ בְּבֵית דִּין וַיִּתְּנֶהָ.

What value, if any, does the person who committed the sin have to bring people—a full quorum—with him when he goes to apologize, not even to a person's face, but to their grave? What value does the community gain from being there at the grave? Think about the last character, God, who is being "called" to the grave site. What value is there, if any, in having God there?

For Children And Families



Scan or click the QR code to watch Rabbi Anne Ebersman, Mike Witman, and Emma Miller in a dramatic reading of Kevin Henkes' children's book, *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*, a story about what happens when our feelings get the best of us and how we can show someone we're sorry.



What did Lilly do to apologize?

Have you ever apologized to someone but you didn't really mean it? Did they still feel better?

What are the components of a good apology?

Another Level

An Embodied Practice for Letting Go

Find a comfortable seated posture on a chair or on the floor. If it's available to you, cross your legs and rest your hands palm up on your knees. If sitting is not comfortable, feel free to lie on your back with your knees bent, arms extended along the sides of your body with your palms up.

Breathe in deeply, then hold the breath for up to five counts. Open your mouth for your exhale, making the sound an audible sigh. Notice how your body moves as you exhale—where is there a release in your muscles, a natural letting go?

Imagine yourself letting go of any anger or sadness you may feel towards others (or yourself) as you breathe out. Repeat as many times as you like.

Looking Inward

What am I holding onto that I want to let go of in the new year?

Who do I need to forgive before the new year?

What role do grudges and/or anger play in my life?

Are there circumstances under which you might consider not granting forgiveness?

Notes

The Mishneh Torah (“Repetition of the Torah”), also referred to as Yad HaHazakah (“The Strong Hand”) is a monumental legal code and one of the most organized, comprehensive, and influential works of Jewish law. [From Sefaria] Mishneh Torah was authored by Maimonides and compiled between 1170-1180.

Supplement for Tishrei: Entering the Holy of Holies

As we move from the personal spiritual work of the season into the communal, we are mindful of Seder Ha-Avodah on Yom Kippur, as we ritually reenact when the High Priest would approach God in the Holy of Holies, begging forgiveness for the people's sins. In Ishai Ribo's beautiful interpretation of this part of our liturgy, he invites us to recall all of God's kindnesses and miracles at the same time.

Going Deeper

“Seder Ha-Avodah” by Ishai Ribo



Scan or click the QR code to listen

את המרירות, החטא
את הבושה, את הפספוס
את ההפסד

והכהנים והעם העומדים בעזרה
בשהיו שומעים את שם ה' המפרש
יוצא מפי פהן גדול
היו כורעים משתחוים ונופלים על פניהם
ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד

פסע למקום שפסע
פניו לקדש אחוריו להיכל
בלא רבב היו שוים פיו ומעשיו
בא ממקום שהוא בא
והלך למקום שהלך
פשט בגדי לבן
לבש בגדי זהב

נכנס למקום שנכנס
ועמד במקום שעמד
רחץ ידיו רגליו
טבל עלה ונסתפג
בא ממקום שהוא בא
והלך למקום שהלך
פשט בגדי החל
לבש בגדי לבן

וכך היה אומר
אנא ה' פפר לחטאים לעוונות ולפשעים
שחטאתי לפניך אני וביתי
ואם אדם היה יכול לזכור
את הפגמים את החסרונות
את כל הפשעים את כל העוונות
בטח כך היה מונה
אחת אחת ואחת אחת ושתיים
אחת ושלוש אחת וארבע אחת וחמש
ישר היה מתיאש
כי לא יכול היה לשאת

יֵצֵא מִמְּקוֹם שֶׁיָּצָא
וְרָעַד בְּמִקְוֹם שֶׁעָמַד
פָּשַׁט בְּגָדֵי זָהָב
לָבַשׁ בְּגָדֵי עֶצְמוֹ

וְכָל הָעַם וְהַכֹּהֲנִים
הָיוּ מְלֹוִים אוֹתוֹ לְבֵיתוֹ
וְיֹוֹם טוֹב לְאוֹהֲבָיו
כִּי נִסְלַח לְכָל עֲדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֲשֶׁר־י הָעַם שֶׁכָּבָה לוֹ
אֲשֶׁר־י הָעַם שֶׁה' אֶלְקֵינוּ...

כִּי אֵלֶּה הַנִּמְתָּח בְּדַרְי מֵעֵלָה מֵרְאָה כֹּהֵן
כְּבָרְקִים הַיּוֹצֵאִים מִזִּיּוֹ הַחַיּוֹת מֵרְאָה כֹּהֵן
כְּדַמּוֹת הַקִּשָּׁת בְּתוֹךְ הָעֵנָן מֵרְאָה כֹּהֵן
כְּחֶסֶד הַנִּתֵּן עַל פְּנֵי חֲתָן מֵרְאָה כֹּהֵן

He would enter into the place where he had entered
And stand on the place on which he had stood
Wash his hands and his feet
Immerse himself, come up and dry himself
Come from the place from whence he came
And go unto the place to which he went
Strip off his mundane clothes
Put on white garments

And thus he would say
Please, O God, forgive the sins, the wrongdoings
and the transgressions
which I have sinned before You, I and my house
And if one could remember
the flaws, the shortcomings
All the transgressions, all the wrongdoings
Thus he would surely count;
One, one and one, one and two
One and three, one and four, one and five
He would give up right away

וְכִּי הָיָה אוֹמֵר
אֲנֵא ה', כִּפֹּר לַחַטָּאִים לְעוֹנוֹת וּלְפִשְׁעִים
שֶׁחָטֵאתִי לְפָנֶיךָ אֲנִי וּבֵיתִי
וְאִם אָדָם הָיָה יָכוֹל לְזָכֹר
אֶת הַחֲסָדִים אֶת הַטּוֹבוֹת
אֶת כָּל הַרְחָמִים אֶת כָּל הַיְשׁוּעוֹת

בְּטַח כִּי הָיָה מוֹנֶה
אֶחָת אֶחָת וְאֶחָת אֶחָת וּשְׁתֵּי
אֶחָת מֵאֶלֶף אֶלְפִים וְרַב רַבִּי רַבּוֹת
נְסִים נִפְלְאוֹת
שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ עִמָּנוּ
יָמִים וְלֵילוֹת

Because he wouldn't be able to bear
the bitterness, the sin
The shame, the missed opportunity
The loss

And the priests and the people standing in the courtyard
when they would hear God's name explicated
coming out of the high priest's mouth
would bend their knees, bow down and fall on
their faces
"Blessed be the name of God's glorious kingdom
for ever and ever!"

He would step unto the place where he had stepped
His face turned to the holiness, his back to the Sanctuary
Sinlessly, his mouth and deeds are at one
He would come from the place from whence he came
And go unto the place to which he went

Strip off white garments
Put on golden garments

And thus he would say
Please, O God, forgive the sins, the wrongdoings
and the transgressions
which I have sinned before You, I and my house
And if one could remember
the graces, the favors
All the mercies, all the salvations

Thus he would surely count;
One, one and one, one and two
One of the thousand thousand, thousands of
thousands and myriad myriads
of miracles and wonders
which You have done for us
days and nights

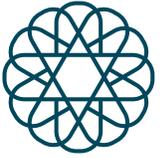
He would come out of the place where he had
came out of
And tremble on the place on which he had stood
Strip off golden garments
Put on his own clothes

And all the people and the priests
would accompany him to his house
and a day of festivity for his friends
for all the congregation of the children of Israel
shall be forgiven
Happy is the people that is in such a case
Yea, happy are the people whose God is Adonai...

Even as the expanded canopy of heaven, was the
countenance of the priest
As the lightning that proceedeth from the splendor
of the angels, was the countenance of the priest
As the appearance of the bow, in the midst of the
cloud, was the countenance of the priest
As the amiable tenderness depicted on the face
of the bridegroom, was the countenance of the
priest

Does the song help you to understand the rhythm of the ritual? Imagine being an ancient Israelite, watching from below as the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies. What do you feel?

During the synagogue service, some people fully prostrate (bend the knees, bow, and lie flat on the floor) every time the prayer leader pronounces the ineffable name of God and adds, “Barukh shem kevod malkhuto le’olam va-ed” (“Praised is the name of the One whose glorious sovereignty will be forever and ever”). Take out a yoga mat, towel, or blanket and try fully prostrating (or doing Child’s Pose) whenever this part of the song comes up. How does it feel to add in this physical component?



Find Your Way Home: A Reflective Journal for Elul was developed by
Dani Kogan, Manager of Programs and Innovation, Center for Prayer and Spirituality
Grace Gleason, Marshall T. Meyer Rabbinic Fellow

Rabbis:
J. Rolando Matalon
Felicia L. Sol
Rebecca Weintraub

Hazzan:
Ari Priven
Executive Director:
Colin A. Weil

Community House
270 West 89th Street
New York, NY
10024-1705

Tel: (212) 787-7600
Fax: (212) 496-7600
Online: www.bj.org

B'NAI
B'RITH
JESHURUN