

HESHBON HANEFESH HESHBON HANEFESH

The month of *Elul* and, in particular, the 10 Days of Awe from *Rosh Hashanah* through *Yom Kippur* (*Yamim Nora'im*), call us to look within, look

back and look ahead. In this transitional time we are to acknowledge where and how we have fallen short so that we can change and enter the new year with a clean slate and a commitment to change. This personal accounting is called a *heshbon hanefesh* – an accounting of the soul. Introspection begins the process of change or repentance, in Hebrew, *teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* calls us to look closely at ourselves, seek out others and make amends. It challenges us to forgive, even as we seek forgiveness. While often difficult, the results can be transformative. *Teshuvah* calls us to:

1. examine our past acts and words & feel regret
2. correct situations & relationships
3. change our behavior now and move forward

As we live in three realms, there are three realms in which we are to do *teshuvah*:

with ourselves

with others

with God.

We consider all three areas as we engage in self-reflection and take a spiritual accounting, taking the steps of *teshuvah*.

1 LOOKING BACK:

BEIN ADAM L'CHAVERO – BETWEEN OURSELVES AND OTHERS

RELATIONSHIPS

Consider your relationships. How could you take responsibility for improving and enriching your bonds and interactions in the coming year?

spouse

parents

siblings

grandparents

other family

friends

co-workers

BEIN ADAM L'ATZMO - WITH OURSELVES

Each of us is created in God's image. This is a crucial reminder as we consider how we nurture and protect our bodies, minds and souls – how we have done so, and how we'd like to challenge and care for ourselves in the coming year.

RESPECT FOR BODY

How have you cared for your body in the past year (e.g. eating, exercise, sleep, medical care, appearance, personal time)? What could you do?

RESPECT FOR MIND

In what ways have you challenged your mind this year, through reading, learning, sharing ideas, or increasing knowledge? Explored an aspect of Jewish learning/doing that's intrigued you? Taken a class or seminar *lishma* – for its own sake?

What goals can you set for the year ahead?

RESPECT FOR SOUL

In what ways have you cared for your soul in the past year? Neglected your soul? Taken time for thinking and reflection? Given ritual and prayer places in your calendar? Read for the sake of enjoyment? Engaged in creative or cultural pursuits?

And in the new year....?

BEIN ADAM L'CHAVERO U'VEIN ADAM L'MAKOM - WITH OTHERS, WITH GOD

TIKKUN OLAM (REPAIR OF THE WORLD)

What concrete steps have you taken to be involved in helping other people, directly, sharing your time and talent (e.g. through tutoring, visiting the sick or elderly, feeding....)? How have you given *tzedakah*, resources to those in need (e.g. lunches, toys, clothing, money)?

How have you opened the door to *gemilut hasadim* (acts of loving kindness) through the cycles of our lives and holidays (rejoicing w/bride & groom, consoling mourners, welcoming a baby into the covenant)?

JEWISHLY

In what ways did you explore your relationship with God this year – prayer, ritual, affirming or wrestling with personal belief?

What new Jewish understanding or knowledge have you pursued actively in the past year? What Jewishly related theater, film or arts have you seen?

What stereotypical, ambivalent or negative actions or reactions toward Judaism, Jews or Jewish current events or Israel did you perpetuate this year without thinking? On what subjects did you give opinions without knowledge – areas you could learn more about?

What holidays did you celebrate? Which ones did you think about but not get around to celebrating, at all or in a way that you might have liked? How could you add to the meaning and joy of your holiday celebrations?

How did you celebrate or affirm your Jewish identity/Jewishness during the past year?

#2 FIXING & MAKING AMENDS

Review your responses. Consider those places where you have “missed the mark” in your relationships with yourself, God and others. Making amends is the next step in *teshuvah*. Think honestly about real ways to change behavior, apologize, make amends, start afresh.

- ▶ Remember that for transgressions against other people, we must approach others directly for forgiveness. It’s up to us to initiate – to apologize and to change our own behavior.
- ▶ In our relationships with God, we pursue *teshuvah* independently, though there is always guidance available.
- ▶ With ourselves, we must forgive the past errors or omissions and then move forward.

Now, to move forward and begin making change. Begin outlining a plan for the new year. First, what specific steps can you take between now and *Yom Kippur* to begin?

Second, decide what you can and will do in the new year. Begin outlining a plan. There are 10 Days of Repentance from *Rosh Hashanah* through *Yom Kippur*. Try listing 10 steps, small or large, or goals.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

#3 RESOLVING TO ACT DIFFERENTLY

You have begun a difficult and important process, taking an honest accounting of yourself. This in itself is a significant first step – *kol hakavod!* Now, to continue that resolve into the new year. Consider the best ways for you to continue – perhaps make a personal timetable as a guide, or, think about who can help you stay energized and focused on making your plan happen. On *Rosh Hashanah* we celebrate the birth, the creation, of the world. We celebrate too our own new beginnings. You are moving toward wholeness and holiness in the new year.

HESHBON HANEFESH adapted by Rabbi Lisa S. Greene *Tikkun* magazine's High Holiday Supplement with valuable insights from Lynn Friedman.