

**Jill Crimmings**  
**Capstone Curriculum**

**Title:** Who Are You? Who Do You Want To Become? How Can Judaism Guide You Along the Way?

**Short description:**

This unit serves as an invitation to a congregation to initiate a process of *cheshbon hanefesh* during the High Holy Days. In the weeks leading up to Rosh Hashanah, the leadership of a congregation will invite congregants to participate in a special *tashlich* session and service to begin a process of *cheshbon hanefesh*. At the *tashlich* session, participants will break into intimate groups of 10-12 individuals in order to guide one another throughout the year. In between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, participants will fill out personal inventory forms about the way they relate to themselves, their community and the world. The small groups will come together on Yom Kippur and Sukkot to identify individual and communal goals for the year. After these meetings, the participants will schedule additional monthly sessions to learn and grow. Throughout the process, participants will also have the opportunity to respond to questions and share their comments about this process with the larger community in an online forum.

**Mission of Organization:**

To serve as a guide for individuals as they integrate Jewish tradition and teachings into the way they live their day-to-day lives.

**Priority Goals:**

- Members of a congregation will participate in a process of individual reflection and growth in the midst of the High Holy Days and beyond.
- Members of a congregation will create an intimate community that will guide and support them through a process of change. The group will explore how Jewish texts can guide the way they relate to themselves, to their intimate community and the greater world.

**Age group:** Adults

**Organizational Setting:**

Designed for a synagogue community but can be adapted for other communities. There are three scripted lesson plans to initiate the process in a communal setting. Following these sessions, small groups will set up and facilitate their own monthly meetings. Participants will also have the opportunity to interact with the greater community in an online forum.

**Rationale for Unit:**

We each live in constant dialogue with ourselves, with our communities and with the greater world. We strive to perfect these relationships in different ways and each fall short at different times and in different ways. The first step toward improving each of these areas of our lives involves taking an accounting of our current state of being. Only after we take an account of our current state, can we start to move forward to improving

the way we relate in this world. Jewish tradition not only asks us to go through this process, but also can serve as a guide us through a process of reflection, determination, and action.

Jewish communities throughout the generations have sought ways to go through a process of self-reflection in order to improve their relationship with themselves, their community and the world. Each generation addressed the challenges unique to their own time and used technological advances to make change. The process of *cheshbon hanefesh* that Rabbi Mendel developed is no longer realistic for modern Jews. The process has yet to be adapted in a meaningful and organized way that addresses the needs of our contemporary age. We can use the wisdom of the tradition that exists to guide us toward recreating a process in a way that is relevant to the way we relate to ourselves, to our intimate community and to the world. This curriculum reclaims and reinvents what this process might look like in the Jewish world today.

It is appropriate to begin the process during the *tashlich service* on Rosh Hashanah because this service functions as the gateway to the ten days of awe. Alan Lew, author of This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared, writes about these days:

*For ten days the gates are open and the world is fluid. We are finally awake, if only in fits and starts, if only to toss and turn. For ten days, transformation is within our grasp. For ten days, we can imagine ourselves not as fixed and immutable beings, but rather as a limitless field upon which qualities and impulses rise up and fall away again like waves on the sea... ... For ten days, the field of mind is like a painting by Kandinsky. Energy and form float in that field, and we have the sense that we can shape our lives by choosing where to invest our focus and intention, by choosing which forms to follow and which to let go.<sup>1</sup>*



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<sup>1</sup> Lew, Alan. This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared. Little, Brown and Company. Boston, NY, London. 2003. Pages 151-152

<sup>2</sup> Kandinsky, Wassily. "Composition VII". Oil on Canvas. 1913.  
<http://www.wassilykandinsky.net/work-36.php>

We must take advantage of the opportunity of this sacred season of change. The High Holy Day season makes us feel vulnerable as we stand before God. We recognize that life is fragile, precious and unpredictable. We understand that there are things we have control over, and many more that we don't. This season is both humbling and moving, screaming out to us to look within, to be truly honest about who we are and who we want to become. It is the perfect season to begin a serious process of change before God.

The second reason to begin the process on Rosh Hashanah is because of the potential to reach the most people in a congregation. We have the eyes and ears of a higher percentage of our congregants on Rosh Hashanah than we do at any other time of the year. We must take advantage of this opportunity to offer a meaningful unit of study that is relevant to people's lives at that moment. For this reason, individuals will be invited to address questions related to themes that they just explored during services. The *tashlich* session and service enables participants to transition from reflecting and praying to sharing and doing.

There are multiple learning components to this curriculum that attempt to address the different needs of our diverse community. *Cheshbon hanefesh* must be both an individual and a communal process. For that reason, the curriculum has an individual component, where individuals continually assess the way they relate to themselves, their communities and the world. There is also a small group component that enables participants to explore intimate questions in a safe environment. These communities will enable participants to share personal experiences and learn and explore Jewish text and tradition.

### **Enduring Understanding**

Participating in *cheshbon hanefesh* can lead to a self-awareness that enables an individual to improve one's relationship with oneself, one's community and the world.

### **Essential Questions**

- How is *cheshbon hanefesh* an avenue toward self-awareness?
- How can communal reflection help an individual engage in a process of *cheshbon hanefesh*?
- How can *cheshbon hanefesh* lead one toward improving their relationship with his or her community, him or herself, and the world?

### **Noticing Targets**

**Know:** Define *cheshbon hanefesh* and describe how the concept has evolved over the course of Jewish history and why.

- **Prompt:** What does the phrase *cheshbon hanefesh* mean and how and why did Rabbi Mendel develop the process in the way he did?

**Do:** Go through a reflective process of *cheshbon hanefesh* and make concrete steps toward healing oneself, one's community and the world.

- **Prompt:** Identify the way you currently treat yourself, your community and your world. Identify concrete actions you can take toward healing each of these aspects of your life.

**Believe:** Expresses a sense of responsibility for oneself and the value of self-awareness.

- **Prompt:** What did it feel like to go through a process of self-reflection? What responsibility do we have for taking care of the world, our communities, and ourselves?

**Belong:** Develop a relationship with others by going through a self-reflective process. Develop a sense of being a link in a greater chain of Jewish tradition.

- **Prompt:** Describe what it was like to go through a journey of *cheshbon hanefesh* with an intimate community? What did it feel like to share and reflect with the greater community through an online forum? What did you learn about yourself as a voice in a chain of Jewish tradition?

### **Assessment: What will I take as evidence?**

The curriculum asks participants to go through a process of individual and communal growth. For this reason, I will accept evidence of understanding on a number of different levels. First, I will accept an individual's commitment to participate in the process as evidence that they are seeking personal growth or change. Participation is voluntary, so simply choosing to participate expresses a commitment to change. Additionally, if groups continue to meet beyond the Sukkot session, I will take this as evidence that they feel a sense of belonging in their community and are growing by being part of the group. Throughout the three big group sessions, I will accept different kinds of evidence. Since we are not asking people to share their personal inventory forms, I will accept verbal evidence that individuals completed the personal inventory forms and are committed to growth. I am looking for comments that show that participants learned something about who they are and who they hope to become. I am also looking for comments that reflect an understanding of how the different Jewish texts can guide us toward growth today. I am also looking for feedback from each small group liaison about how the group is going and what participants are getting out of being part of the group. I will ask this person to provide feedback about whether participants are sharing and growing. I will also take any reflections that people contribute to the online conversation as evidence. Finally, I will take any informal conversations I have with participants during or after the sessions about what they are experiencing as evidence of understanding.

## Lesson 1: Tashlich: What is Cheshbon Hanefesh?

### Lesson Overview

This is the first of three large group sessions intended to initiate a yearlong process of *cheshbon hanefesh*. This session is a special *tashlich* session/service that can be adapted according to the needs of your community. The more advertising you can do for this session in advance the better. There is an invitation that can go out in the mail and handed out during Rosh Hashanah services. It would also be great to include *iyunim* about the unit or deliver a sermon about topics related to *cheshbon hanefesh*.

This lesson will introduce how the concept of *cheshbon hanefesh* evolved and explain what participants will experience and achieve throughout the process. The lesson is intended to introduce the concept of *cheshbon hanefesh* and explain how and why it is a relevant and worthwhile endeavor. Participants will break up into small groups that will serve as their *cheshbon hanefesh* community throughout the year. They will also participate in a *tashlich* service to ritually begin the process.

### Enduring Understanding

Participating in *cheshbon hanefesh* can lead to a self-awareness that enables an individual to improve one's relationship with oneself, one's community and the world.

### Core Concept

*Cheshbon hanefesh* is an individual process that involves uncovering that which was previously hidden or ignored. It is also a communal process that involves sharing, learning, and pushing one another to develop the way we relate to our community, our world and ourselves. *Tashlich* enables us to cast away our inhibitions and fears so that we can begin this process with an open heart, mind and soul.

### Essential Questions

- How is *cheshbon hanefesh* a relevant endeavor worth participating in?
- How does *cheshbon hanefesh* enable me to become aware?
- How does *cheshbon hanefesh* lead me toward healing my community, my world and myself?
- How does *tashlich* enable me to begin the process of *cheshbon hanefesh* with a clean slate?

### Performance Tasks

- Participants will reflect on the relevance of *cheshbon hanefesh* as a worthy endeavor.
- Participants will identify and share previous experiences with *cheshbon hanefesh*.
- Participants will commit to going through an individual process of self-reflection.
- Participants will commit to sharing their journey and working to create change with an intimate community.
- Participants will participate in a *tashlich* service.

### Evidence of Understanding

- Participants will ask clarifying questions and be able to articulate what *cheshbon hanefesh* and how it originated in their own words.
- Participants will share openly with those around them.
- Participants will commit to going home to download and complete the inventory forms.
- Participants will commit to meeting with their group throughout the year and sharing responsibilities of hosting and participating.
- Participants will participate in a *tashlich* service.

### Activities (One hour session/service)

- I. Introduction: Connection between *tashlich* and *cheshbon hanefesh*. (5 minutes)
  - a. Make sure everyone has the chance to make a nametag as they come in. Thank all participants for taking the leap to participate in an intimate and challenging process.
  - b. The *tashlich* service gives us the opportunity to symbolically send off or cast away our sins in order that we begin the New Year with a clean slate. *Cheshbon hanefesh* asks us to look deep into our souls and uncover that which was previously hidden or ignored. This is a powerful yet scary and challenging task. This service of *tashlich* gives us the freedom to start anew. To cast away our inhibitions and fears and acknowledge that God is giving us this opportunity to start again, and to look into our hearts without fear or shame. I want to spend our time together talking a little bit about where this concept of *cheshbon hanefesh* comes from and how it developed over the years. After that, I want to explain how we can adapt this tradition to fit our community. We will have the opportunity today to get started with this important work, breaking up into groups that will guide us through the process. After we get to know one another we will then come back as a community for a short *tashlich* service, symbolically casting our sins into the water so that we each can go off and enter this process with an open heart, soul and mind.
- II. What is *cheshbon hanefesh*? How did it develop? (10 minutes)
  - a. Leader should use the provided sheet to relate important information (Do not read straight from sheet and adapt accordingly.)
  - b. Take time for questions.
- III. How does the process work? Guidelines for Participation (10 minutes)
  - a. Leader should use the provided sheet to relate important information (Do not read straight from sheet and adapt accordingly.)
  - b. Take time for questions.
- IV. Break into groups (20 minutes)
  - a. Before you split into groups, give directions for what you are about to do. Give instructions about breaking up and what will happen when groups disperse. Distribute binders and give brief overview of contents by directing everyone to look at table of contents. Direct participants to page ten for the small group activity.

- b. Each leader can decide the best way to split up his or her community. You may make the decision to create completely random groups, you may want to let your community break themselves into groups, or you may decide to be intentional about how you break up the groups. One option is to divide your community by stage of life. This way, groups will be able to focus on issues that are relevant to the majority of the group. You can create signs around the room that ask participants to self-identify according to the following groups: In college; post-college/young adulthood; married with young children; school-aged children; teenage children; adult children/career focused; single/mid-adulthood/career focused; retired. I recommend keeping spouses together, but otherwise ask people to work with those who they don't know as well.
      - i. Once participants self-identify into these categories, you can create small groups of 8-12 participant each.
    - c. Groups meet and follow page ten their binders.
      - i. The leader can decide to either participate in a group or float from group to group.
- V. Come back as a community for *tashlich* (15 minutes)
  - a. Follow the provided service on appendix page 29, or add relevant *cheshbon hanefesh* ideas to your standard service.

## Set Up

Depending on the size of your community and building, you can decide where you want to hold this session. Some communities may be able to do the session at the place where they will hold the *tashlich* service. Others may have to do the session before and then invite people to continue to your *tashlich* location. You will need space for the group to sit as one large community during the introduction and you will also need space for groups to break up into their small groups. If possible, you can do the large group activity in a communal space and then have the groups break up into different spaces in the building, like religious school classrooms.

## Materials

- Nametags/markers
- Pencils for small groups
- Binders for each participant

## **Lesson 2: Yom Kippur Afternoon: From Reflection to Consideration**

### **Lesson Overview**

Leading up to this lesson, participants will complete the three inventory forms asking them to evaluate their current relationship with themselves, their communities and the world. Additionally, group liaisons will send the leader an email with a list of the participants in their group. The leader will then compile these lists to keep track of the entire group. Each liaison will remind the group via e-mail or phone about this session and to bring their binders.

This lesson will explore connections between Yom Kippur and *cheshbon hanefesh*, focusing on how Yom Kippur asks us to move from reflection to consideration. Participants will break into small groups to study texts that ask what role God plays in the process of *cheshbon hanefesh*. They will also identify areas of strengths and areas of weakness and consider how they might use their strengths to address their weaknesses.

### **Enduring Understanding**

Participating in *cheshbon hanefesh* can lead to a self-awareness that enables an individual to improve one's relationship with oneself, one's community and the world.

### **Core Concept**

Yom Kippur offers the opportunity to consider our capacity to grow and change in this world. It asks us to consider questions related to free will, as individual souls in relationship with God. This process of considering our potential for growth is best accomplished in the intimacy of a safe community of supportive individuals who care for one another.

### **Essential Questions**

- How does Yom Kippur help us consider which areas of our life need attention?
- How does Yom Kippur help us recognize our potential for growth and change?
- How can a safe space enable learning and growth?

### **Performance Tasks**

- Participants will study and discuss how part of the Yom Kippur liturgy relates to *cheshbon hanefesh*.
- Participants will formulate their own opinions about what constitutes a transgression against God and what constitutes a transgression against other humans.
- Participants will consider what areas of their life need attention and where there is potential for growth.
- Participants will listen and share with their small group.

### **Evidence of Understanding**

- Participants will articulate a connection between Yom Kippur and *cheshbon hanefesh*.



- Participants will share their opinions about what constitutes a transgression against God and what constitutes a transgression against other humans.
- Participants will identify personal areas of strength and weakness and consider how they can build on their strengths in their daily lives.
- Participants will share with the group and listen respectfully.

## Activities

### I. Introduction: (5-10 minutes)

- Join together in a large group and make sure everyone has a chance to make a nametag. Welcome everyone back and thank the group for their willingness to participate in this process. Share that we will soon break up to spend the afternoon learning and growing with our *cheshbon hanefesh* groups.
- I want to express the power of going through this process in the final hours before *ne'ilah*, before the gates close, and we go forth toward the New Year. There is a sense of urgency. We call out to God, begging for more time, exposing ourselves more than perhaps any other time of the year. Over the past ten days, each one of you went through the experience of exposing yourself before God. You engaged in serious, honest reflection. It was challenging, but hopefully meaningful, and definitely essential. It is now time to move forward from these reflections. To move from reflection to consideration, asking ourselves what power we have before God to tip the scales in our favor.
- Ask participants to turn to the *unetaneh tokef* meditation in their binders. Read the blessing together to conclude before breaking into groups.
- Break into groups. There may be people who did not come to the *tashlich* service who would like to participate. There also may be some who have decided to drop out. I recommend that you ask those people to stay behind and come to you. Use the compiled lists to place people in appropriate groups. Be sure to add their name and contact information and to give these participants binders if they don't have them already.

### II. *Cheshbon hanefesh* small groups (60 minutes)

- For this session, the group liaison will serve as a facilitator, making sure the group spends the appropriate time on each activity.
- Text study. (25 minutes)
  - Facilitator should ask the group to break into *chevruta* to study the texts and discuss the guiding questions. (15-20 minutes)
  - Come back as a group to discuss. How might these texts guide our process of *cheshbon hanefesh*? (5-10 minutes)
- Reviewing Inventories: From Reflecting to Considering (30 minutes)
  - Ask participants to look through their inventory forms and identify five statements from each form that reflect an area of weakness where they would like to improve and five statements from each form that reflect an area of strength. They they can circle and mark the statements, with an 'S for strength' and a 'W for weakness.'

- ii. Ask participants to look through these statements and choose one area of strength and one area of weakness that they would like to improve. Ask them to fill out the journal prompt.
  - iii. Break into two smaller groups and ask each participant to share what they wrote.
  - iv. Ask participants to try to be more conscious of their thoughts and actions during the next week. Encourage the group to record instances when they made a conscious choice to think or act in a certain way because of this process. There is paper in the back of each binder for journaling. Participants are also invited to respond online, to share comments with the entire community.
- d. Logistics (5 minutes)
  - i. Next session: Sukkot
  - ii. You can decide how you want this to work. It might be nice to assign each small group to a different day/time slot to have dinner or tea/coffee in the synagogue Sukkah for their session.
    - 1. Ask for a volunteer to facilitate the next session
  - iii. The liaison should e-mail the leader any information regarding schedule and rotation. The liaison should also inform the leader who will facilitate the Sukkot lesson.

### **Set Up**

Depending on the size of your community and building, you can decide where you want to hold this session. You will need space for the group to sit as one large community during the introduction and you will also need space for groups to break up into their small groups. If possible, you can do the large group activity in a communal space and then have the groups break up into different spaces in the building, like religious school classrooms.

### **Materials**

Nametags/markers/Pencils  
Binders

## Lesson 3: Sukkot: From Consideration to Action

### Lesson Overview

Leading up to this session the leader (you) should be in touch with each small group liaison, as well as the facilitator for the upcoming session. For this lesson, small groups might have to sign up for different times to meet so that each group can hold the session in the synagogue's *sukkah*. You should also have an updated list of who is in each group and all the contact information. Since each group is meeting at different times you can decide whether you want to come to part or all of each group's sessions. It might be nice for you to lead the beginning of the session and lead the group through the Sukkot rituals. After this, you can decide whether you want to lead or allow a designated facilitator to lead the session.

For this lesson, small groups will join together in the Sukkah to engage in the rituals of the holiday and explore the connection between Sukkot and *cheshbon hanefesh*. They will engage in a team building exercise to help move from a group of individuals to a community. The group will identify what issues are important to each participant, as well as the group as a whole. They will begin to make a transition from considering how to address individual weaknesses to developing steps for communal change.

### Enduring Understanding

Participating in *cheshbon hanefesh* can lead to a self-awareness that enables an individual to improve one's relationship with oneself, one's community and the world.

### Core Concept

*Cheshbon hanefesh* is a process that involves continual reflection, consideration and action. Sukkot marks the transition in the Jewish calendar from individual soul searching to communal response and action. It is the perfect opportunity for small groups to examine their communal strengths and weaknesses and develop communal goals to address them.

### Essential Questions

- How does Sukkot mark the transition from individual soul searching to communal response and action?
- How can I identify which individual strengths and interests I can contribute to the group?
- How can I add my voice to the development of a communal *brit*?

### Performance Tasks

- Participants will discover a connection between Sukkot and *cheshbon hanefesh*.
- Participants will participate in rituals for dwelling in a Sukkah.
- Participants will engage in a team building exercise with their small group.
- Participants will identify what strengths and interests they can share with the group.
- Participants will discover each other's strengths and interests.
- Participants will develop a *brit*, or a covenant, of communal goals for the year.

### Evidence of Understanding

- Participants will articulate the connection between Sukkot and *cheshbon hanefesh* in their own words.
- Participants will share reflections about what they gained from the team building exercise.
- Participants will share openly and make contributions to the group *brit*.
- Participants will listen respectfully and acknowledge other's ideas and opinions.
- Participants will agreeably commit to the group *brit*.
- Participants will volunteer to contribute and facilitate future group sessions.

### Activities

#### I. Ritual for dwelling in Sukkah (10-15 minutes)

- a. Group Leader or small group facilitator can lead the group through the ritual.
- b. You may want to make space during or after the ritual to allow individuals to share any insights they gained over the last five days by being conscious of their strengths or weaknesses.
- c. Give everyone a chance to shake the *lulav* and *etrog*.

#### II. Team building activity

##### a. Team building exercise (10-15 minutes)

- i. Everyone stands up out of their seats and creates a line in an open space (in or outside of the Sukkah, depending on size). The facilitator should distribute blindfolds to each participant. After everyone is blindfolded the facilitator asks everyone to hold out his or her hands. Then, the facilitator places a piece of a long string/rope in each person's hands to hold. Tell the group that their task is to create a perfect square. Go!
- ii. After the group thinks they have completed the activity, the facilitator asks the group to take off the blindfolds. Ask the following questions:
  1. What did you notice/learn?
  2. Was this challenging?
  3. How did it feel to participate in this activity?
  4. Why is this an appropriate activity on Sukkot?
  5. How can this activity help our group go through the process of *cheshbon hanefesh* together?

#### III. Create a group inventory (20-30 minutes)

- a. Ask each participant to look back at their personal inventory forms: Last session you identified five statements that reflect an area of strength and five statements that reflect an area of weakness where you would like to improve. Copy those statements onto the chart in your binder. Take some time to fill out the rest of the chart individually.
- b. Have someone record every person's themes with a marker on a large piece of paper or flip pad so that everyone can see. Do not differentiate between themes that reflect strengths or themes that reflect weaknesses.

Put a check mark each time someone repeats a theme. Ask the group the following questions:

- i. What is interesting about this list?
- ii. What does this list tell us about our community? (Are we similar, different, etc)
- c. As a group, identify the 12 most popular themes. Combine similar themes but try to find a way to include at least some elements of each theme, if possible. These 12 themes will serve as the basis for the group's learning in the year to come.
- d. Ask the group to create goals/rules/guidelines for the upcoming sessions. Make sure that everyone has the opportunity to contribute ideas. You can use the big pieces of paper to write ideas. Once you have a consensus you can write the goals and guidelines on the group *brit*. Ask all participants to sign *brit*.

#### IV. Plan for future sessions (10 minutes)

- a. Ask individuals to look at the list and identify 2 or 3 themes they feel comfortable teaching. You can ask people if they prefer to lead alone or with a partner. I would avoid having more than 2 people facilitate a session. I would also encourage people to work with someone other than their spouse. If the sessions are led in pairs, that means each person will lead two or three times a year, depending on the size of the group.
- b. You can decide if you want to ask participants to host the sessions they are facilitating at their home or if you want to offer synagogue space. You may also want to ask participants to host who are not facilitating and groups if they prefer to have the sessions with coffee and tea or meals.
- c. Assure all participants that they will not have to plan the session on their own. The leader will help provide basic Jewish texts that address your themes. Additionally, facilitators are invited to meet with the leader while planning their session. Facilitators should infuse each lesson with a combination of Jewish text and their own personal experiences. Encourage participants to be creative and not be afraid to take risks.
- d. Share that throughout the year, participants will be asked to fill out the inventory forms again to identify how they are progressing in different areas.
- e. Participants are also invited to participate in the online blog, responding to different questions with the larger community.
- f. Use the Brit to determine the dates, themes and facilitator(s) for future sessions. All participants should record the information and the group liaison should turn it in to you, the leader.

#### Set Up

If possible, set up chairs in a circle inside the synagogue Sukkah. If the Sukkah is large, set the chairs around a table in the middle. If this is not possible, hold the ritual in the Sukkah and then move to a classroom for the remainder of the session. You will need an open space to do the team building exercise.

## **Materials**

- Binders
- Flip pad/markers
- Lulav/Etrog
- Food/drinks
- String or rope – one per group (cut into long pieces)
- Blindfolds – enough for each participant. (Bandanas/cloths. Can ask participants to bring a long sleeve shirt if you don't have)

## **Beyond Lesson 3: Monthly Small Group Sessions**

As groups go out to meet on their own, the group liaison should be in touch with you about group is progressing.

You may want to compile an appendix of text materials and protocols as you meet with facilitators. Ideally, each facilitator will bring his or her own materials and expertise to the sessions as well. Periodically, throughout the year, you may want to ask participants to fill out the same inventory forms again. Hopefully, throughout the year, participants will notice a change in their thoughts and behaviors. You may also decide that you want to bring the large group together at different points of the year as well. Additionally, participants will be invited to respond to online blog posts about the process and their experience.

Who Are You?

Who Do You Want To Become?

How Can Judaism Guide You Along the Way?

# **An Invitation to participate in the process of Cheshbon Hanefesh (an accounting of the soul)**

When? The process begins with a special Tashlich session and service following the Rosh Hashanah morning service.

What? Cheshbon hanefesh, an accounting of the soul, is a process of honest self-reflection for the purpose of creating change.

Why? Each one of us can improve the way we relate to ourselves, our community and the world.

How? A combination of individual reflection and communal learning and exploration.

For more information about *Cheshbon Hanefesh* visit:  
[www.cheshbon-hanefesh.blogspot.com](http://www.cheshbon-hanefesh.blogspot.com)

# ***Cheshbon Hanefesh* Participant Binders**

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## What is *Cheshbon Hanefesh*?

### *Cheshbon*

The Hebrew word *cheshbon* comes from the root *chet/shin/bet*. The word, in this form, means to **take an accounting, or calculation**. In Modern Hebrew, the word *cheshbon* is translated as: a calculation, mathematics, and a bill or check. Biblical references of *cheshbon* can be found throughout the book of Ecclesiastes with the translation, “the reason of things.” An example can be found Ecclesiastes 7:25, “I put my mind to studying, exploring, and seeking wisdom and the reason of things...”<sup>1</sup>

### *Nefesh*

The Hebrew word *nefesh* is one of the most difficult and contentious Hebrew words to define and translate. Some of the most popular translations include, “soul, spirit, life, living, being, and person.” The first biblical use of the word is found in Genesis 1:20. The term ‘*nefesh chayah*’ is used to refer to living creatures. This usage indicates that the word *nefesh* is not limited to human beings.<sup>2</sup> Some understand *nefesh* to mean soul or spirit, in opposition to *guf*, or the physical body. Others, however, believe the word includes all aspects of a person’s being, including the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual.

### History of *Cheshbon Hanefesh*

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Levin, otherwise known as Rabbi Mendel of Satanov, wrote the first, and only published work about the process of *cheshbon hanefesh*. He wrote the text in 1812 and it was published in 1845. Rabbi Mendel was part of the Mussar tradition, a popular movement in 19<sup>th</sup> century Lithuania that focused on recovering the emotional or spiritual elements of Judaism. Mussar emphasizes discipline, focus and intention as a means to serve God. It is not surprising that this piece of literature came from a movement seeking to help individuals develop a personal connection to God through practice and discipline.

In his introduction, Rabbi Mendel provides a history of the development of the process of *cheshbon hanefesh*, starting with the biblical period. He suggests that our earliest biblical ancestors did not need *cheshbon hanefesh* because they had *yirat Hashem*, or fear and awe of God. Later generations of the Mishnah and Talmud lost this sense of *yirat Hashem*, and compensated by emphasizing the importance of character traits in the literature they produced. Later generations lost more *yira*, and could not get by with the literature of the Mishnah and Talmud alone. It is at this time that we see the earliest practices of the process of *cheshbon hanefesh*. According to Rabbi Mendel, the earliest process of *cheshbon hanefesh* consisted of thinking about one’s sins for an hour a day.

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<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes 7:25. JPS translation.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:20. JPS translation.

Later, this turned into recording and one's sins throughout the day, reflecting on them before bed and revisiting them upon waking in the morning. Eventually, people became so involved with the process of recording sins that it took up the majority of one's waking hours. Individuals were so focused on recording and recounting their sins that they no longer had time to serve God and perform *mitzvot*. Rabbi Mendel noticed this challenge and decided to develop a structured process appropriate for his generation. He called his step-by-step guide *Cheshbon Hanefesh*.<sup>3</sup>

Rabbi Mendel differentiates between what he calls the 'intellectual human spirit' and 'the animal spirit' in order to describe the process of *cheshbon hanefesh* in his time.<sup>4</sup> Mendel describes that the 'animal spirit' is "swayed and moved by the sudden gusts of the winds of desire and pain – instincts which are implanted in it from its formation."<sup>5</sup> The human intellectual spirit, on the other hand, has the responsibility to "teach [it] ethical behavior and develop positive character traits."<sup>6</sup> In this way, Rabbi Mendel defines soul (animal spirit), not in opposition to the physical body, but rather in opposition to the intellectual mind. According to his theory, the intellectual human spirit has the capacity to control the physical urges and desires of the animal spirit, creating harmony between how one thinks and how one acts. Without this harmony, one can easily fall into the trap of breaking commandments or performing commandments with ill intentions. *Cheshbon hanefesh* is a necessary process that can help an individual develop character traits to avoid sins and perform *mitzvot*. It can also help an individual bridge the gap between action and the intention that goes behind the action.

Rabbi Mendel develops a process of *cheshbon hanefesh* according to what he understands about the capabilities and the fallibilities of the human mind over the animal spirit. He acknowledges the challenges of identifying and overcoming one's weaknesses and develops a rigid plan that requires dedication and discipline. The plan, or regimen, is based off of four methods that must be addressed simultaneously: "dealing with the desire before the animal spirit is aware of it, accumulating traces of strength so as to combine them, intensifying these traces, and stimulating the spirit so as to strengthen the response."<sup>7</sup> In other words, he hopes to combat the animal spirit on multiple fronts, helping an individual build the strength to prevent, and also combat habitual unwanted behavior. For Mendel, the process is not something that can be done over a period of 10 days, but rather one that requires daily commitment over the course of a year and beyond. He creates a cycle through which individuals address one (of thirteen) identified character traits every week for 13 weeks. The person then repeats the process four times, allowing for appropriate periods of rest throughout. At first, individuals might have to make a point of putting themselves in situations where they can address the weekly trait. In addition to focusing on one trait a week, individuals should monitor and revisit all other

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<sup>3</sup> Cheshbon Ha-Nefesh. Rabbi Mendel of Satanov. Forward by Rabbi Yitzchok Isaac Sher of Slobodka. Published in 1845. Reprinted with forward and translation 1995. Feldheim Publishers. Jerusalem and New York. Pages 43-45.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Page 37.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Page 29.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Page 37.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Page 103.

traits. In order to do this, Rabbi Mendel provides a chart, which individuals can use to document their daily sins in the different categories. Eventually, individuals will recognize which traits need more attention and can adjust their regimen appropriately.<sup>8</sup> By the fourth cycle, an individual may find that they have succeeded in overcoming a number of traits. At this time, that individual should focus his or her energy on the traits that still need work. The 13 different character traits are: equanimity, toleration, order, decisiveness, cleanliness, humility, righteousness, frugality, zeal, silence, calmness, truth, and separation. See next document for an example of Mendel's chart.<sup>9</sup>

Mendel acknowledges that the process will be different for each person. At times it will be slow, and other times fast, and there will be many challenges along the way. He encourages his reader to persist, promising success and a reward for following his regimen. Mendel says, "eventually you will be able to replace all of the original traits with new ones...testimony to the purity of your heart and the triumph of your intellectual spirit over the animal spirit. The entire purpose of your creation was this. At this point you will be able to serve God without interference."<sup>10</sup> This statement reflects the confidence Rabbi Mendel had in this regimen. He not only believed that individuals will find success, but also asserted that they will receive divine reward for their work.

Unfortunately, we do not know how popular this process was in Rabbi Mendel's time. What we do know is that there has been very little subsequent literature produced on the topic of *cheshbon hanefesh*. Rabbi Mendel's book, reprinted in 1995, continues to be the only published work on the topic.

### ***Cheshbon Hanefesh* today**

Today, *cheshbon hanefesh* functions, at best, in the context of the High Holy Day season. The reprinting of Rabbi Mendel's book in 1995 inspired some individuals and communities to embrace the concept, and apply it in a modern context. Today, however, the concept has not been embraced or adapted in any formal curricular setting. There are a number of articles and *divrei Torah* on the topic, encouraging individuals to go through a process of introspection during the month of Elul. The concept is typically connected to the High Holy Days, despite the fact that Rabbi Mendel does not make this connection. The phrase itself is not used in the *machzor* or in popular High Holy Day literature. There is no entry for *cheshbon hanefesh* in either version of Encyclopedia Judaica. There is no entry on [www.myjewishlearning.com](http://www.myjewishlearning.com) or [www.jewfaq.org](http://www.jewfaq.org), two of the most popular liberal websites for those seeking to learn more about Judaism. The only mention of *cheshbon hanefesh* on Wikipedia is in relation to Rabbi Mendel's book. Though searches on [www.aish.com](http://www.aish.com) and [www.chabad.org](http://www.chabad.org) retrieved a few hits, they were insignificant in comparison to other topics with similar themes. For example, there were six articles that contained the phrase "*cheshbon hanefesh*" and 705 for "*teshuvah*."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, a Google search of *cheshbon hanefesh* reveals that there are some individuals engaging in the topic

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Page 59-63.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Page 185.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Page 61.

<sup>11</sup> [www.aish.com](http://www.aish.com)

today, most of whom are building or relying on Rabbi Mendel's guidebook. This is surprising, given the potential effect the process may have on people's lives. It makes us question whether the concept of *cheshbon hanefesh* has disappeared from the radar of contemporary Jewry, or whether it has been replaced or integrated by other concepts, like *teshuvah*.

As we transition toward thinking about what a process of *cheshbon hanefesh* looks like today, we must identify how the Jewish world has evolved since Rabbi Mendel's time and determine what that means for the way we approach the topic through a modern Jewish lens. We must determine how we will address and adapt the problematic aspects of Rabbi Mendel's approach while maintaining the spirit of his work.

One problematic aspect of Rabbi Mendel's work is his assertion that a person's character traits *can* be changed and *need* to be changed. He consistently uses language like "replace" or "corrected," assuming that something is wrong that should and can be corrected if a person works hard enough.<sup>12</sup> Today, we have a much more nuanced understanding of the development of character traits. Our society is much more sympathetic to the idea that individuals have different strengths and weaknesses, as well as unique personality types. Though there are many arguments about the role of nature verses nurture, a general understanding exists that at least some part of our character is determined by our genetic makeup and thus cannot be changed. Though we may succeed in developing our character, we will never achieve the type of perfection of which Rabbi Mendel speaks. A second problematic aspect of Rabbi Mendel's work is the suggestion that we should dwell solely on our weaknesses in order to overcome them. Today, many believe that we should utilize our strengths as a way to overcome our weaknesses. Third, Rabbi Mendel's process is primarily individual. Though he discusses opportunities to work with individuals throughout the process, he does not lay out a framework for how to use one's community for support and assistance. Today, many believe that an intimate community of individuals can help foster growth. A tight-knit community can inspire, share, teach, and support and must be an integral and intentional aspect of this type of process. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that we are operating in a very different Jewish world. Rabbi Mendel was speaking to a community of individuals who were concerned about performing all the *mitzvot* for the purpose of serving God. Today, we must acknowledge that many Jews in our community are not operating through this framework. This process must be relevant for Jews who are seeking to serve God by developing their character, as well as Jews who are seeking to improve their lives in a Jewish way and hope to develop a better understanding of God's role in their life.

Though there are currently very few Jews going through a process of *cheshbon hanefesh*, the concept is being addressed in different ways. I hope to compile these different efforts in a structured format, and recreate the sacred tradition of *cheshbon hanefesh* in a way that speaks to the lives of liberal Jews. I hope to explore the relationship we all have to ourselves, to our intimate community, and to our global world by asking the following questions: Who am I? Who do I want to become? And how can Judaism guide me along

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Page 73.

the way? I hope that you will join me in recreating this tradition and experiencing a process of spiritual growth and transformation during these Days of Awe, and beyond.

### **Why participate in Cheshbon Hanefesh?**

We each live in constant dialogue with ourselves, with our communities and with the greater world. We strive to perfect these relationships in different ways and each fall short at different times and in different ways. The first step toward improving each of these areas of our lives involves taking an accounting of our current state of being. Only after we take an account of our current state, can we start to move forward to improving the way we relate in this world. Jewish tradition not only asks us to go through this process, but also can serve as a guide us through a process of reflection, determination, and action.

Jewish communities throughout the generations have sought ways to go through a process of self-reflection in order to improve their relationship with themselves, their community and the world. Each generation addressed the challenges unique to their own time and used technological advances to make change. The process of *cheshbon hanefesh* that Rabbi Mendel developed is no longer realistic for modern Jews. The process has yet to be adapted in a meaningful and organized way that addresses the needs of our contemporary age. We can use the wisdom of the tradition that exists to guide us toward recreating a process in a way that is relevant to the way we relate to ourselves, to our intimate community and to the world. This curriculum reclaims and reinvents what this process might look like in the Jewish world today.

It is appropriate to begin the process during the *tashlich service* on Rosh Hashanah because this service functions as the gateway to the ten days of awe. Alan Lew, author of This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared, writes about these days:

*For ten days the gates are open and the world is fluid. We are finally awake, if only in fits and starts, if only to toss and turn. For ten days, transformation is within our grasp. For ten days, we can imagine ourselves not as fixed and immutable beings, but rather as a limitless field upon which qualities and impulses rise up and fall away again like waves on the sea... ... For ten days, the field of mind is like a painting by Kandinsky. Energy and form float in that field, and we have the sense that we can shape our lives by choosing where to invest our focus and intention, by choosing which forms to follow and which to let go.*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lew, Alan. This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared. Little, Brown and Company. Boston, NY, London. 2003. Pages 151-152



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We must take advantage of the opportunity of this sacred season of change. The High Holy Day season makes us feel vulnerable as we stand before God. We recognize that life is fragile, precious and unpredictable. We understand that there are things we have control over, and many more that we don't. This season is both humbling and moving, screaming out to us to look within, to be truly honest about who we are and who we want to become. It is the perfect season to begin a serious process of change before God.

There are multiple learning components to this curriculum that attempt to address the different needs of our diverse community. *Cheshbon hanefesh* must be both an individual and a communal process. For that reason, the curriculum has an individual component, where individuals continually assess the way they relate to themselves, their communities and the world. There is also a small group component that enables participants to explore intimate questions in a safe environment. These communities will enable participants to share personal experiences and learn and explore Jewish text and tradition.

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<sup>14</sup> Kandinsky, Wassily. "Composition VII". Oil on Canvas. 1913.  
<http://www.wassilykandinsky.net/work-36.php>

## How Does The Process Work?

We will join together as a large community three times during the High Holy Day season to kick off what will be a yearlong process of change.

### **Lesson 1: *Tashlich*: What is *Cheshbon Hanefesh*?**

Participants will meet for a special *tashlich* session and service where we will learn more about what *cheshbon hanefesh* is and why it is relevant and necessary in our lives.

Participants will break up into small groups that will serve as our *cheshbon hanefesh* communities throughout the year.

### **In between Lesson 1 and 2: Inventory Forms: Reflection**

There are three inventory forms that ask participants to honestly evaluate the way you relate to yourself, your community and the world. Each participant will fill out these forms individually and independently. We acknowledge that everyone is at a different stage in life, and that certain questions will be more relevant than others. These forms will guide the learning and discussions small groups do throughout the year. Though individuals will not be asked to share their responses directly, they will be asked to identify themes and share these themes in a small group setting.

### **Lesson 2: Yom Kippur Afternoon: From Reflection to Consideration**

Small groups will meet to explore connections between Yom Kippur and the process of *cheshbon hanefesh*. Participants will get to know others in their group, and begin an initial conversation about what each person gained from filling out the inventory forms.

### **Lesson 3: Sukkot: From Consideration to Action**

Small groups will meet to explore connections between Sukkot and *cheshbon hanefesh*. Participants will identify individual interests and work together to create a communal *brit* of shared goals for the year to come.

### **Beyond Lesson 3**

Small groups will meet once a month to explore different themes relevant to the entire group. Each individual will have the opportunity to facilitate two or three sessions on his or her own, or with a partner. Participants will receive resources and support from the synagogue leadership to develop his or her sessions. Each session should explore the theme through the lens of our sacred Jewish tradition. Facilitators are encouraged to incorporate their own experiences and expertise.

### **Online Component**

In addition to learning with your small group; you may also choose to be in communication with your larger community. Participants are invited to respond to different prompt questions in an online blog format.

## Guidelines for Participation

- *Cheshbon hanefesh* is an optional process that begins with you. Nobody can force you to participate and only you can decide whether you are ready and willing to make an honest and open commitment to change. We acknowledge that we are all at different stages in our life and sometimes we are ready to go through this process and sometimes we are not.
- We are committed to creating a safe space for you to learn and grow. This means that participation in a *cheshbon hanefesh* group hinges on a confidential commitment to respect.

We are all really looking forward to going on this journey with you. We want to learn with and from you and are open to your own suggestions and ideas for how to continue this journey of *cheshbon hanefesh* in the year to come!



## **Tashlich Session Small Group Activity**

*Welcome to your cheshbon hanefesh small group! Look around. You will likely see some familiar faces as well as some new faces. As the year goes on, we hope you will develop relationships with one another through this important process of cheshbon hanefesh. Thank you all for your willingness to open yourself up to the possibility of change!*

### **Introductions**

Take a moment to introduce yourself to one another. Share:

- Your name
- One hobby, passion or talent
- What is/will be/was your profession?
- Who are the important people in your life?

### **Activity**

The process of *cheshbon hanefesh* is about uncovering both our strengths and our weaknesses for the purpose of growth. Take one or two minutes to reflect on a time when you first recognized a strength, talent, or passion. Feel free to write down your thoughts if you would like. When everyone is ready, take some time to share with one another:

1. How did you become aware of this strength?
2. What actions did you take after acknowledging this strength?
3. How did the important people in your life respond to your actions?

### **Logistics**

Next sessions:

- Yom Kippur afternoon (complete inventory forms before this session!)
- Sukkot

After these two sessions, you will plan monthly sessions according to your own convenience. We ask each member to host one session in his or her home and also to facilitate two sessions with a partner. The group should designate one individual to serve as the group liaison. This person will be in charge of helping the group organize meetings and will also be in touch with the leader in order to communicate information and distribute any additional materials. Take some time to discuss who in your group will serve as liaison. Before returning to the group the liaison should collect everybody's information (phone and e-mail). This person is responsible for e-mailing the leader a list of the participants.

### **Food For Thought**

If you have time, discuss the following meditation. Do you agree or disagree and why?

*Every human being has merits and faults. The righteous person has more merits than faults, the wicked one more faults than merits. The average person is (more or less) evenly balanced between the two.*<sup>15</sup>

**Cheshbon Hanefesh Inventory**  
**How Do I Relate To and Treat Myself?**

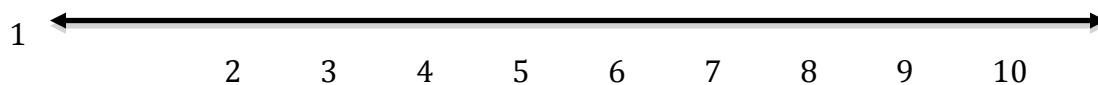
*If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And if I am for myself, what am I?  
And if not now, when? (Pirkei Avot 1:14)*

Please place yourself on the following scale, with 1 being the lowest or least frequent and 10 being the highest, or most frequent. This inventory is for your own growth. You will not be asked to share your responses beyond the degree to which you feel comfortable.

A. I have a regular exercise practice.



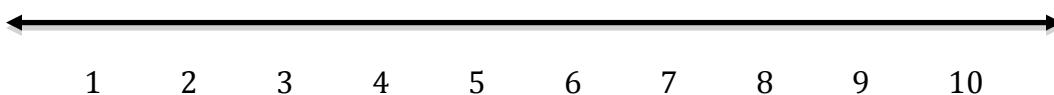
B. I maintain a healthy and balanced diet.



C. I get enough sleep.



D. I listen to my body when I am sick, in pain, stressed or overworked.



E. I care about the way I look and present myself.



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<sup>15</sup> Maimonides. Gates of Repentance. Page 11

2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

F. I am confident in my work or field.



G. I do the best I am capable of at work.



H. I push myself to grow in the workplace.



I. I have high expectations for myself, both in the workplace and in my personal life.



J. I feel as though I am meeting the expectations I have set for myself, both in the workplace and in my personal life.



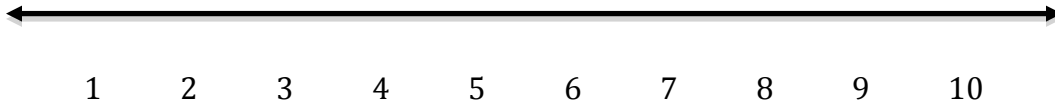
K. I find my work personally fulfilling.



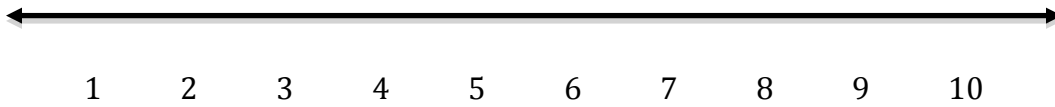
L. I know what my passions and hobbies are.



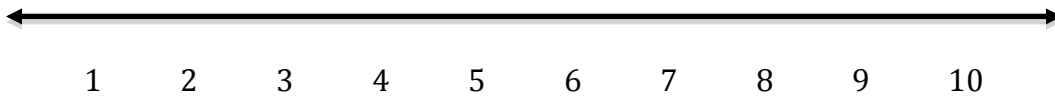
M. I make time to enjoy my passions and hobbies.



N. I push myself to grow and develop my passions and hobbies.



O. I enjoy reading and learning new things that are not related to my work.



P. I make time to read and learn things that are not related to my work.



Q. I am financially stable.



R. I spend an appropriate amount of money on necessities (food, housing, clothes, insurance).



S. I spend an appropriate amount of money on luxuries.



T. I am satisfied with how much money I set aside for the future.



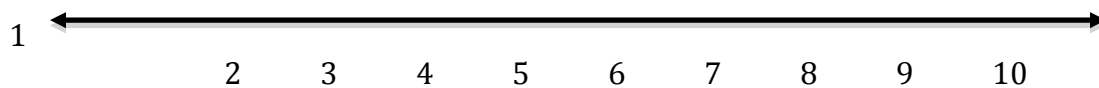
U. I am able to organize and manage a reasonable schedule.



V. I give myself appropriate time for self-reflection and personal growth.



W. I feel like I am in a relationship with God.



X. I have a spiritual practice.



Y. I yearn for a relationship with God and/or a spiritual practice.



Z. I make time to develop a relationship with God and/or a spiritual practice.

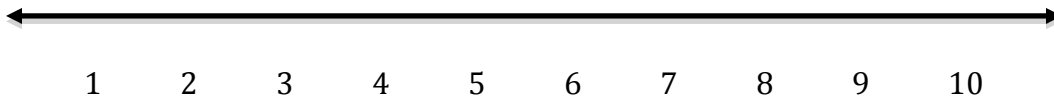


**Cheshbon Hanefesh Inventory**  
**How Do I Relate To And Treat My Intimate Community?**

*"That which is hateful to you do not to another. That is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary. Now go and study." – Rabbi Hillel (B. Talmud Shabbat 31A)*

Please place yourself on the following scale, with 1 being the lowest or least frequent, and 10 being the highest or most frequent. This inventory is for your own growth. You will not be asked to share your responses beyond the degree to which you feel comfortable.

A. I can be myself around my family and closest friends.



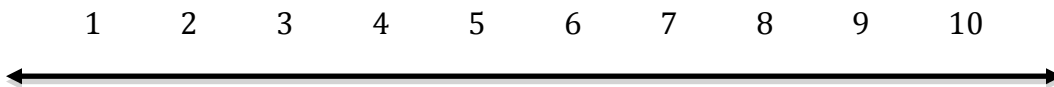
B. I am able to say no to my friends and family.



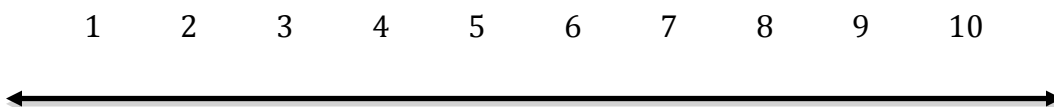
C. I am satisfied with the amount of time I spend with my family.



D. I am satisfied with the amount of time I spend with my friends.



E. I take care of my friends and family when they are sick or in need.



F. I celebrate my friend's accomplishments and joys.



G. I am genuinely happy for my friend's accomplishments.



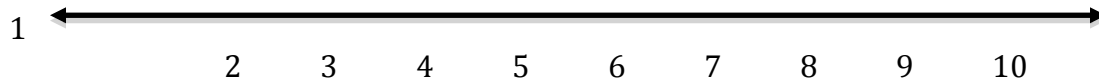
H. I share my accomplishments with my friends and family.



I. I care about what other people think about me.



J. I avoid gossip and slander.



K. I am able to find an appropriate balance between doing what is best for me and doing what is best for others.




L. I am a good listener.



M. I follow through on the promises I make to friends and family.



N. I ask for help when I need it.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

O. I like and respect the people I work with.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

P. I show respect to the people I work with.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Q. I collaborate well with others on group assignments.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

R. I know when to speak up and when to listen.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10


S. I am honest with my family about how much money I spend.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



T. I feel comfortable providing for others financially.

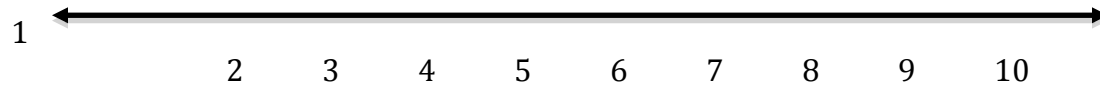
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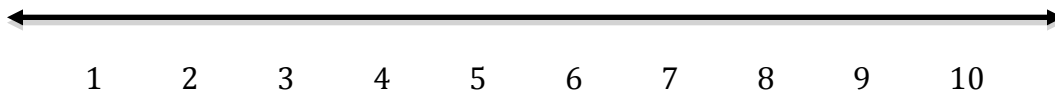
2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



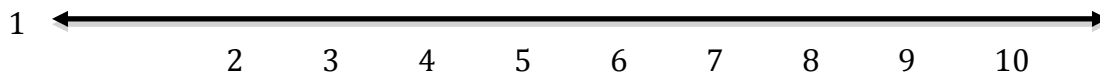
U. I feel comfortable allowing others to provide for me financially.



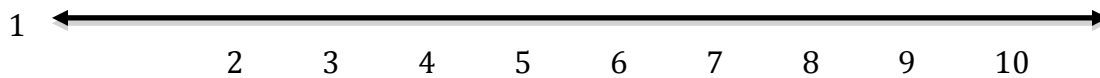
V. I have people in my life with whom I learn with.



W. I have people in my life who push me to grow and learn.



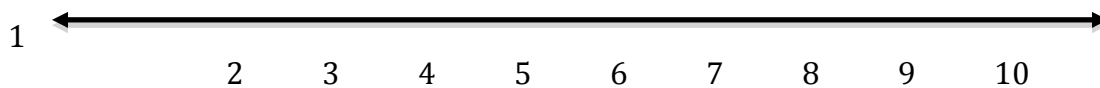
X. I push those I care about to grow and learn.



Y. I am in dialogue with others about spiritual matters.



Z. I am part of a spiritual community.

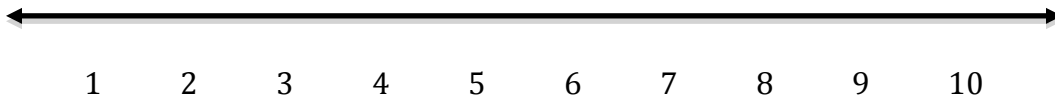


**Cheshbon Hanefesh Inventory**  
**How Do I Relate To And Treat The World**

*It is not your duty to complete the work. Neither are you free to desist from it.*  
(Pirkei Avot 2:16)

Please place yourself on the following scale, with 1 being the lowest or least frequent, and 10 being the highest or most frequent. This inventory is for your own growth. You will not be asked to share your responses beyond the degree to which you feel comfortable.

A. I am knowledgeable about what is going on in the world.



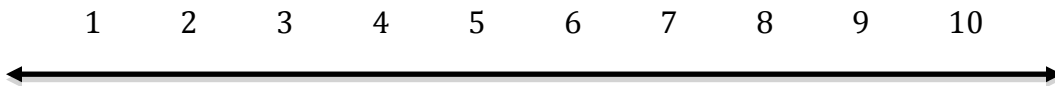
B. I am satisfied with the amount of time I dedicate to learning about current events.



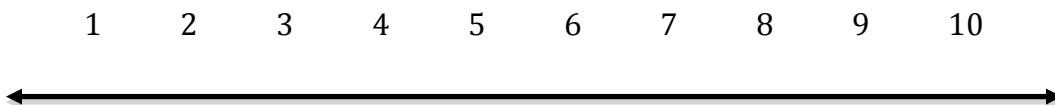
C. I have strong opinions and ideas about how to make the world a better place.



D. I talk about my opinions on how to make the world a better place with my friends and family.



E. I feel like I am part of a community that works together to create change in the world.



F. I give to strangers who directly ask me for help.



G. I acknowledge strangers who directly ask me for help with a smile or words.



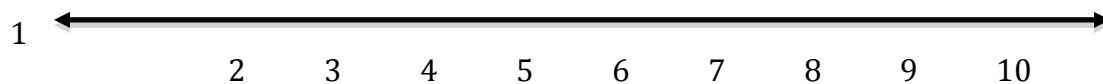
H. I am conscious of the social inequalities that exist in my own society and the greater world.



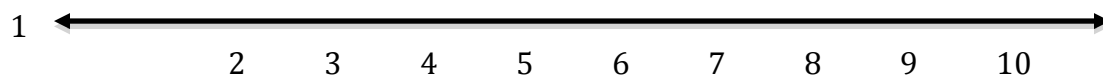
I. I take active steps to advocate for the oppressed or disadvantaged members of society.



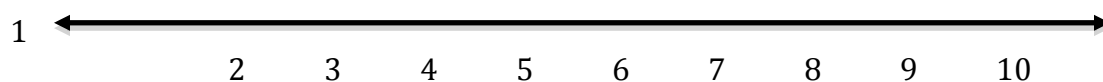
J. I am satisfied with the amount I do and/or give to those in need.




K. I treat those I meet for the first time equally and fairly.



L. I work hard to overcome my own personal stereotypes.




M. I work hard to overcome stereotypes held by those in my workplace or community.




1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

N. I seek out opportunities to learn from those who are different from me.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

O. I am conscious of my carbon footprint.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

P. I purchase products that are good for the environment.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Q. I purchase products that were made in ethical working conditions.



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

R. I feel a sense of personal responsibility to protect animals.



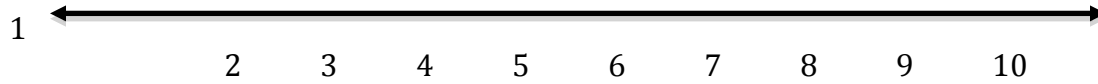
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

S. I feel connected to the greater Jewish world.

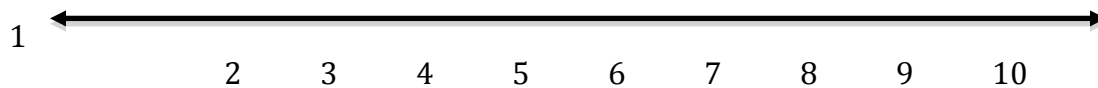


1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

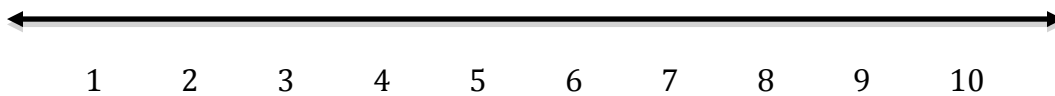
T. I feel at home in Israel.



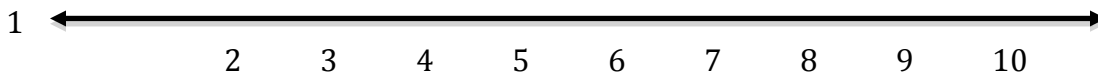
U. I feel a responsibility to support Jews in need and Jewish organizations.



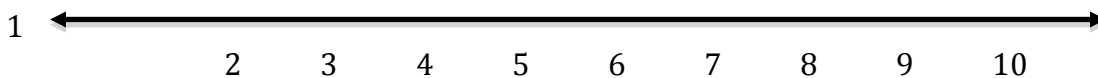
V. I am satisfied with the effort I make to develop an ongoing relationship or connection to Israel.



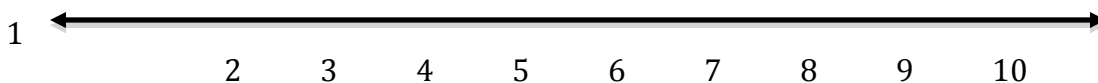
W. I have the right to certain freedoms and services.



X. Every human being has the right to these same freedoms and services.



Y. I have the responsibility to give back to my local and national government for providing these rights.



Z. I am satisfied with the extent to which I give back to my local and national government.



## Yom Kippur Breakout Session Text Study

### Mishnah Yoma 8:9

*Ki bayom hazeh y'kaper aleichem l'taher etchem mikol chatoteichem lifnei Adonai titharu.* For on this Day of Atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before the Lord (Lev 16:30).<sup>16</sup>

Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah expounded on this verse, saying:  
For transgressions against God, the Day of Atonement atones; but for transgressions of one human being against another, the Day of Atonement does not atone until they have made peace with one another.

### Guiding Questions

1. What issue from the Leviticus verse is Rabbi Eleazar addressing? What are his concerns and why do you think he came to this conclusion?
2. What do you think qualifies as a transgression against God? What about a transgression against other humans?
3. Consider the statements in the inventory forms you filled out. Do these statements reflect potential transgressions against God, humans, or both? Why?

### Midrash Leviticus Rabbah 34:3

One time, when Hillel the Elder concluded his studies, one of his disciples asked him: Master, where are you bound?

He answered: To perform a religious duty.

What, they asked, is this religious duty?

He said to them: To wash in the bathhouse

They said: Is this a religious duty?

Yes, he replied; if the statues of kings, which are erected in theatres and circuses, are scoured and washed by the man who is appointed to look after them, and who thereby obtains his maintenance through them. Even more, he is exalted in the company of the great of the kingdom. How much more I, who have been created in the Image and Likeness; as it is written, "human beings were made in the image of God." (Gen 9:6)

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<sup>16</sup> JPS translation

### Guiding Questions

1. What does this text say? What is the message?
2. According to the teaching behind this text, why should individuals go through a process of *cheshbon hanefesh*?
3. How does this text change the way you think about *cheshbon hanefesh*?
4. What role does God play for you as you think about changing the way you relate to yourself, your community, and the world?

### Yom Kippur Breakout Session Journal Prompt

*You should not look at all the bad things in your life and say, "Now I will improve myself." Rather, you should look at your positive traits and dwell upon your goodness. From there you can say, "Now I will prove myself."<sup>17</sup> -Nachman of Bratslav*

1. Choose one statement that reflects an area where you excel.
2. How often do you interact in this area in your day-to-day life? Provide specific examples.
3. Consider how you might find more opportunities to interact in this area daily.
4. Choose one statement that reflects an area of weakness that you would like to improve.
5. How often do you interact in this area in your day-to-day life? Provide specific examples.
6. Consider how you might find more opportunities to interact in this area daily.

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<sup>17</sup> Rosen, Harriet and Rabbi Richard Address, Marcia Hochman, Rabbi Lisa Izes. *Becoming a Kehillat Chesed: Creating and Sustaining a Caring Congregation*. URJ Press. New York. 2004. Page 39

7. Consider how can you your strength to help you improve in the area where you struggle.

<b>Statements that reflect areas where I would like to improve</b>	<b>Statements that reflect areas where currently excel</b>

**Sukkot Session  
Chart for Identifying Interests**



<b>Themes that encapsulate these statements</b>	<b>Themes that encapsulate these statements</b>

Sukkot Session

Small Group Brit

Group goals and guidelines

Agreed to by:

SESSION DATES	THEME	FACILITATOR (S)
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October:		
November:		
December:		
January:		
February:		
March:		
April:		
May:		
June:		
July:		
August:		

# APPENDIX

## Rabbi Mendel's sample chart

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### SAMPLE CHART WEEK I - EQUANIMITY

*Rise above events that are Inconsequential — both bad and good —  
for they are not worth disturbing your equanimity.*

TRAITS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Equanimity							
Toleration							
Order							
Decisiveness							
Clarity							

שבוע א': מנוחת הנפש

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שבוע א' — מנוחת הנפש: התגבר על מארעות פחותי  
הערך, רעות או טובות, שאינם כדאי לבלבל מנוחת נפשך.

רמזים	א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז
מנוחה							
סבלנות							
סדר							
הרצות							
נקיות							
ענוה							
צדק							

## Tashlich Service

We gather together at this *tashlich* service to ask God to forgive us for our sins and allow us to begin this new year with an open heart, an open mind and an open soul.

We stand here before you and pray that you will give us the strength to look deep within our souls, to recognize our merits and also our sins. We symbolically cast away that which inhibits us to move forward toward this year of growth.

Micah 7:18–20

מִי־אֵל כְּמוֹךָ יְיָ אֵל עֶזְרָא וְעֹשֶׂה לְשִׂאֲרֵי־נַחֲלָתוֹ לֹא־הִחְזִיק לְעַד אָפּוּ כִי־חָפֵץ חֶסֶד  
הוּא: יָשׁוּב יִרְחַמֵּנוּ וְיִכַּבֵּשׁ עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ וְתִשְׁלִיךְ בְּמַצְלוֹת יְיָ כָּל־חַטָּאתָם: תִּתֵּן אֱמֶת לַיַּעֲקֹב  
חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְתָּינוּ מִיָּמֵי קֶדֶם

Who is a God like You, forgiving iniquity and remitting transgression; who has not

maintained His wrath forever against the remnant of His own people, because He loves graciousness! He will take us back in love; He will cover up our iniquities, You will hurl all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will keep faith with Jacob, loyalty to Abraham, as you promised on oath to our fathers in days gone by. (JPS translation)

Glory to those who hope!  
For the future is theirs;  
Those who stand unflinching against the mountain  
Shall gain its summit.

So hopes the river, running to the sea,  
To fulfill its dreams in the crash of waters.  
So longs the tree, branching skyward  
At last to touch the palm of sun.

Therefore we love dawn as a promise of day,  
The nightingale's love-song as a longing for birth,  
The flowing of streams as the beat of dreams made real,  
Streams cutting channels for rivers of the future  
and never growing weary.

And all who join hands, trusting creation –  
These are the companions of hope.  
Forge, then, the vision of days to come:  
As the waves shape the rocky shore,  
As the smith moulds white-hot steel at will,  
Form dreams of faithfulness.  
Desolation will not leave the desert  
Until it leaves the heart.<sup>18</sup>

–David Rokeach

### **\* Tashlich Meditation \***

I stand at this bank with a heavy heart. With this act of *tashlich*, of casting away, I free myself of the great burden that rests on my shoulders. I cleanse myself of the

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18 David Rokeach. Gates of Repentance. Pages 13-14.

past and look forward to the future.

May the road ahead bring me comfort.

I pray, O God, that I may find guidance and strength with you. Walk beside me, and be my partner as I strive to be holy. May the *Shechinah*, God's nurturing presence, enshroud me with a blessing of peace, and may I come to be source of blessing for the ones I love.<sup>19</sup>

\* \*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁחַיֵּינוּ וְקִיָּמנוּ וְהִנֵּי עָנוּ לְזֶמֶן הַזֶּה

*Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam shechecheyanu, v'kiy'manu, v'higianu lazman hazeh*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, for giving us life, for sustaining us, and for enabling us to reach this season. May we all go forward with the strength, humility, compassion and determination to change our lives, our communities and

#### MORNING SERVICE

#### ונתנה תקף

On Rosh Hashanah we reflect,  
On Yom Kippur we consider:  
Who shall live for the sake of others,  
Who, dying, shall leave a heritage of life.

*Who shall burn with the fires of greed,  
Who shall drown in the waters of despair.*

Whose hunger shall be for the good,  
Who shall thirst for justice and right.

*Whose tongue shall be a thrusting sword,  
Whose words shall make for peace.*

Who shall be plagued by fear of the world,  
Who shall strangle for lack of friends.

*Who shall rest at the end of day,  
Who lie sleepless on a bed of pain.*

Who shall go forth in the quest for truth,

*Who shall be locked in the prison of self.*

Who shall be serene in every storm,  
Who shall be troubled by the passing breeze.

## Dwelling in the Sukkah

On Rosh Hashanah we began a process of reflection, looking inward to discover our merits and our shortcomings. We thought honestly about the way we relate to ourselves, to our community and to the world. On Yom Kippur we considered what it means to hold some of these character traits as we stand before God on this awesome day. We considered how we might build on our strengths in the future to develop a more well-rounded character. Five days later, the Jewish calendar asks us to join together once again. This time, instead of standing next to one another as individual souls before God, we sit facing each other as one community. We dwell, we invite others in, and we look out and up to the world beyond. One individual cannot build a *sukkah* alone. It requires teamwork, communication, and trust. As we dwell together today, we offer a blessing to God, asking for the strength to grow together.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לישב בסוכה

*Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu  
leishev basukkah.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who hallows us with mitzvot,  
commanding us to dwell in the Sukkah.

\*\*

May the One whose spirit is with us in every righteous deed,  
Be with all work for the good of humanity  
And bear the burdens of others,  
And who give bread to the hungry,  
Who clothe the naked,  
And take the friendless into their homes.  
May the work of their hands endure,  
And may the seed they sow bring abundant harvest.<sup>20</sup>

## Waving the Lulav

Face east while reciting the blessing. Hold the *lulav* in the right hand and the *etrog*  
face-down in the left hand. Shake the *lulav* in the following order: ahead, right,  
behind you, left, up, down.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצונו על נטילת לולב.

*Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav,  
v'tzivanu  
al n'tilat lulav*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who hallows us with mitzvot,  
commanding us to take up the lulav

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.



*Baruch Ata Adonai Eloheinu melech ha'olam, shehecheyanu, v'kiy'manu v'higianu  
lazman hazeh*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of all, who has kept us alive,  
sustained us, and brought us to this season

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