

## Welcome to Your Personal Yom Kippur Meditation Walk

Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the Jewish year. It's not sad but it is solemn, and in most years, its traditions center around a full day of communal prayer, with long hours sitting in the synagogue.

This year is unlike any other. While we dearly miss being together at CABI, there is a silver lining: the pandemic reminds us that the heart of Yom Kippur is profoundly personal. We reflect upon how we can be a little wiser, a little kinder, a little better in this new year.

We created this walk to help. It will take you through many of the components of a Yom Kippur service—but in a new way, at your own pace. Choose a location for walking: a park, neighborhood, even your own backyard—wherever you find quiet space. You may walk with family or friends, or on your own. As with any pilgrimage, this is more about the journey than the destination, so gather the supplies you'll need, turn off your electronic devices, and walk with an open heart, stopping where and when it feels right.

**Supplies:** 3-foot segment of string, pen or pencil

## Stop Two: Opening Our Eyes

ברוך אתה יי פוקח עיוורים

*Baruch Atah Adonai pokei-ach ivrim*

Praised are You, Holy One, who opens the eyes of the blind

One of our morning blessings thanks God for opening the eyes of the blind. If relatively few people are actually blind, why do we all recite this prayer daily? Most of the Rabbis did not take this blessing literally. They note that there are many ways in which sighted people can be “blind”; we are often painfully unaware of what lies before—and within—us. The blessing is about the pursuit of wisdom and understanding, which begin with paying close attention to our outer and inner worlds. Our capacity to grow on this Yom Kippur depends upon our willingness to open our eyes and see both without and within.

### Exercise and Reflection:

- Sit down and close your eyes for sixty seconds. When you open them, what do you see that you didn't notice before?
- Think of something you became more aware of in the past year. How will might that awareness guide you in the coming year?

## Stop One: Starting Anew

מודה אני לפניך. . .

*Modeh/Modah ani l'fanechah. . . sh'heh-chezarta bi nishmati b'chemla*

I give thanks to You, who restored my soul in mercy. How great is your trust!

The Talmud teaches that sleep is 1/60<sup>th</sup> of death. So if going to bed is a little like dying, waking up is a daily experience of rebirth. Modeh/Modah Ani—customarily the first prayer we recite in the morning—is an offering of gratitude to the Holy One. It also reminds us that every day is an opportunity to start anew.

All the more so on Yom Kippur, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, when the gates of renewal and transformation open wider than any other day of the year.

### Reflection:

- What are you thankful for today? How can you acknowledge and offer up your gratitude?

## Stop Three: Opening Our Hands and Hearts

פותח את ידיך

*Potei-ach et yadechah*

Open your hand!

Psalm 145 thanks God, whose hand is open to nourish every living thing.

We, by contrast, often close our hands—and our hearts. So much of American culture promotes a mindset of scarcity rather than abundance. Our fear there will never be enough leads to stress and anxiety, brutal competition and misanthropy. If we wish to thrive—and help others do the same—let us keep opening ourselves to the possibility that we can create a just world, in which there is more than enough for everyone. As Rabbi Lawrence Kushner teaches: *If I hoard it, I lose it. If I give it away, I get it back.*

### Reflection:

- When did I open my hand and my heart in the past year?
- What do I need to let go of in order to move forward in the new year?

## Stop Four: Learning to Praise

כל הנשמה תהלל יה הללויה

*Kol ha-neshama t'halel Yah—Halleluyah!*

Let the soul of all that breathes praise the Holy One!

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel taught: “The primary purpose of prayer is not to make requests. The primary purpose is to praise, to chant, to sing.”

Similarly, a passage in our siddur proclaims: *We have not come into being to hate or to destroy. We have come into being to praise, to labor, to love.*

While Yom Kippur is widely known as a day for confessing our failings, it is also a time offer praise.

### Reflection:

- Learning to praise takes practice. Reflect on something marvelous in your life—a person, a creature, a place, a special blessing of any sort—and sing its praises.
- How might you express that praises?

## Stop Five: Creation’s Bounty

מה רבו מעשיך יי כולם בחכמה עשית

*Mah rabu ma’asechah Adonai, kulam b’chochmah asita*

How many are your works, Holy One—in wisdom, you have made them all!

When life feels small, it is good to remember each of us is part of a vast, wonderful creation that is constantly unfolding.

Jewish tradition teaches that on Yom Kippur, Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden and set out into the wider world, which is scary but also filled with grandeur. We share their journey.

### Exercise:

- Take your three-foot strand of string and draw it into a circle on the ground. Observe it for a few minutes, carefully examining all that lies within the circle: plants, animals, pebbles, seeds, leaves—whatever you can find.
- Recite the words from the blessing above, recognizing the bounty of the creation.

## Stop Six: A Great Love

אהבה רבה אהבתנו

*Ahavah rabah ahavtanu*

You have blessed us with great love

We often mistakenly think of Yom Kippur as a sad holiday. It's certainly an intense day, but ultimately it should be joyful. Indeed, the Mishnah teaches: *There were no times of greater happiness for the Jewish people than Yom Kippur*, for on this day young men and women would go out into the fields and kindle romantic partnerships. Yom Kippur was, above all, a day for love.

Yom Kippur is no longer about matchmaking, but it is still very much about love. The central themes of the day—forgiveness and reconciliation—are rooted in love. Much of our incentive to change comes from our desire to be better parents, children, siblings, partners and friends to our dear ones.

### Reflection:

- Think about a relationship you want to nurture or strengthen. Deep down, what qualities do you love and cherish in that person?

## Stop Eight: Into the Sea on Dry Land

ויבאו בני ישראל בתוך הים ביבשה

*V'yavo-u b'nai Yisrael b'toch ha-yam bayabasha*

*The Israelites went into the midst of the sea on dry ground*

In the Torah, this verse precedes *Mi Chamocha*, the song of liberation that has become part of our daily services. On a literal level, the passage is a paradox: How can one be *in the midst of the sea* and *on dry ground* at the same time?

Lawrence Kushner sees this as a metaphor for the Kabbalistic notion of “Holy Nothingness.” He writes: *In order for something to change from what it is into whatever it hopes to become, there must be a moment when it has stopped being what it was, yet before it has become what it hopes to become. For a split second, it is literally nothing. . . . You want that new and better you to emerge? Then you have to let go of the old you. You must be willing to walk into the sea on dry ground and risk it all.*

### Reflection:

- Recall a time you found yourself *in the midst of the sea on dry ground*. What helped you in that place? What helped you emerge from it?

## Stop Seven: Listen

שמע ישראל יי אלוהינו יי אחד

*Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheynu Adonai Echad*

Listen and take to heart, O Israel, the Holy One, our God, is One

If we want to experience holiness in the world, we begin by creating a receptive space within ourselves. If we seek to hear the great symphony of life, we must develop the ability to listen attentively, to both the sounds and the silent spaces between them.

Yom Kippur is a day to step out of ordinary routines, slow down, and listen.

### Exercise:

- Find a quiet place on your walk and sit or stand silently for a few minutes with your eyes closed. Listen carefully, to both the outside world and the stream of thoughts and feelings that arise within you.
- Then sing or say the Shema very slowly, intentionally pausing between each word to hear both the language and silences that punctuate it. How do you feel? What do you hear?

## Stop 9: Generation to Generation

ברוך אתה יי אלוהינו ואלוהי אבותינו ואמות

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheynu v'elohey avoteynu v'imoteynu*

Praised are You, God of our Fathers and Mothers

The opening blessing of the *Amidah* connects us with our ancestors. In *Avot v'Imahot*, we note that the Holy One remembers their lovingkindness, and ask that their merit be a source of inspiration to us.

Much of Yom Kippur is given over to honoring our personal and communal ancestors. On this sacred day, we feel the family ties that bind us from generation to generation. Some of those relationships are beautiful and blessed, others are more complicated. But all of them have shaped who we are.

### Reflection:

- Think about the forebears, living and dead, who have influenced you most strongly.
- How can you draw upon their legacy to live your own life more fully?

## Stop Ten: Who Shall Live and Who Shall Die

מי יחיה ומי ימות

*Mi y'chiyeh u'mi yamut*

Who shall live and who shall die. . .

Yom Kippur is traditionally understood as a dress rehearsal for our deaths. We confront our mortality so that we may learn to live better while we're still here.

On the day after his brother's death, Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, opened the newspaper and beheld his own obituary. It noted that he had made it possible to kill more people at one time than anyone had ever done before. Horrified and chastened, he vowed to change his life. We now think of him as the creator of the Nobel Prize, who dedicated his fortune to honoring people whose work benefits humanity.

### Reflection:

- Imagine reading your own obituary. What would it say? When you die, what do you want the world to remember about you?

## Stop Twelve: Our Failings

אשמנו, בגדנו, גזלנו, דברנו דופי. . .

*Ashamnu, Bagadnu, Gazalnu, Dibarnu Dofi. . .*

We have been **A**rrogant, **B**rutal, **C**areless, **D**estructive. . .

*Ashamnu*, the short communal confession of our misdeeds, is an acrostic, starting with *aleph*, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and ending with *tav*, the last. It suggests that the list of our failings runs “from A to Z.”

### Exercise:

Make a personal acrostic for *Ashamnu*, using the card provided

## Stop Eleven: Repentance, Prayer and Justice

ותשובה ותפלה וצדקה מעבירין את רע הגזרה

*U-teshuvah u-t'fillah u'tzedakah ma'avirin et roa ha-g'zera*

Repentance, prayer and righteousness temper judgment's severe decree

This passage follows a terrifying list of ways we might die in the new year. It is derived from the Talmud, but with a twist. The original quote says that prayer, repentance and justice *tear up* the negative decree. The liturgy makes a very different claim: those virtues will *temper its severity*.

The practices of repentance, prayer, and justice don't necessarily change what will happen to us; instead, they help us understand and endure life's trials with more grace and integrity. As Viktor Frankl noted: *Everything can be taken from a man but the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.*

### Reflection:

Think of a trial you have faced in your life. How have prayer, repentance and/or acts of justice—in any form—helped you find your way?

## Stop Thirteen: For Our Good Deeds

על חסד שחסדנו לפניך

*Al chesed sh'chasadnu l'fanechah*

For the good that we have brought into the world. . .

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook taught that just as there is a communal confession of our failings, so, too, there should be a *vidui la-tov*, a confession for the good deeds we have done over the past year. Our strengths are at least as meaningful as our shortcomings.

### Exercise

Make a personal acrostic of your good deeds, using the card provided

## Stop Fourteen: Waking the Heart

אני ישנה ולבי ער

*Ani y'sheinah v'libi eir*

I was asleep but my heart was awake

During the communal recitation of our misdeeds, many people have the custom of beating their breast. This is typically understood as a symbolic act of self-remonstration, a sign of our deep remorse for our shortcomings over the past year.

But there is another way to understand this act. We can think of our failures of empathy and justice as a sign of spiritual torpor—and our gentle breast beating as a means to rouse our slumbering hearts: Awaken! Open up! Get to work!

### Reflection:

- What do you want/need to awaken in your heart, to be the source of vision and change you strive to be?

## Stop Sixteen: Remembering Our Losses

זכור אלוהים נשמות יקירי שהלכו לעולמם

*Yikzor Elohim nishmot yakirai sh'halchu l'olamam*

Remember, Holy One, the souls of my dear ones who have died

### **Separation**

*Your absence has gone through me*

*Like thread through a needle.*

*Everything I do is stitched with its color.*

-W.S. Merwin

On Yom Kippur, we remember and mourn our loved ones who have died. We grieve our losses, pray for courage and healing, strive to make the pilgrimage from grief to gratitude.

### Reflection:

- For whom do you grieve today?
- What kinds of moments make you most aware of what you have lost?
- Where do you find strength in your memories?

## Stop Fifteen: Granting Forgiveness

ועל כולם אלוה סליחות סלח לנו מחל לנו כפר לנו

*V'al kulam Eloha selichot, s'lach lanu, m'chal lanu, kaper lanu*

For failings, Source of Mercy, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement

After we confess our failings, we ask the Holy One for forgiveness. But we cannot make this request with integrity unless we, ourselves, are prepared to do the work of forgiveness.

This can be very difficult. We tend to hold on to righteous anger and resentment. We fear that if we forgive, we make ourselves vulnerable to the possibility of being hurt again. And we worry that our forgiveness might be mistaken as a sign of weakness or a tacit acceptance of the unacceptable.

On Yom Kippur, we strive to overcome those obstacles. As Gandhi noted: *The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.*

### Reflection:

- What have you done that you need to extend forgiveness?

## Stop Seventeen: Open the Gates

פתחו לנו שערי צדק

*Pitchu lanu sha'arei tzedek*

Open the gates of righteousness for us;  
Open the gates, that we may enter and praise the Holy One:  
the gates of **a**ceptance and **a**tonement, **b**eauty and **c**reativity;  
the gates of **d**ignity, **e**mpathy, and **f**aith, of **g**enerosity and **h**ope;  
the gates of **i**nsight and **j**oy, **k**nowledge and **l**ove, **m**eaning and **n**obility;  
the gates of **o**penness, **p**atience, and the **q**uest for peace;  
the gates of **r**enewal, **s**ong, and **t**ranquility, of **u**nderstanding and **v**irtue  
the gates of **w**isdom and **w**onder; **e**xultation, **y**outh and old age;  
the gates of **Z**ion, renewed in our time.  
Open the gates; open them wide—show us the way to enter.

### Reflection:

- What are some of the gates that you have passed through in the past year?
- What gates would you like to enter in this new year?

## Stop Eighteen: Next Year in Jerusalem

לשנה הבאה בירושליים

*La-shanah ha-ba'ah b'Yerushalayim*

Next year in Jerusalem!

At the end of Yom Kippur, we proclaim, "Next year in Jerusalem!" For most of us, this is a metaphorical statement—we long for the world to embody the prophetic vision of Jerusalem as a place of justice and compassion, beauty and strength.

The Hebrew name of the city, *Yerushalayim*, means "city of peace." We pray that the new year brings peace to our homes, our communities, our nation and our world.

### Reflection:

- How can you be a seeker and supporter of peace in the coming year?

## Acrostic of My Shortcomings (*Ashamnu*)

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B \_\_\_\_\_  
C \_\_\_\_\_  
D \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Acrostic of My Good Deeds

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