For Families with Younger Children

The High Holy Days

from Z(oom) to A(we)

5781

For Families with Younger Children
The 7 Weeks are a period of time, including the month of Elul, that ask each of us to reflect and look inwards in preparation for the High Holy Days. We examine every aspect of our lives, looking deeply into the corners neglected and perhaps avoided. These 7 weeks begin with Tisha B’Av (the 9th day of the month of Av) which marks the destruction of the First and Second Temples, as well as other acts of destruction and persecution; they end with Rosh Hashanah. From grief to growth and from loss to discovery. Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi taught that 49 days of these 7 weeks parallel the 49 days of the Counting of the Omer. During the Counting of the Omer we focus on seven qualities that we and God share: Chesed (Loving Kindness), Gevurah (Strength of Character), Tiferet (Glory), Netzach (Eternity), Hod (Splendor), Yesod (Foundation) and Malchut (Sovereignty). During the 7 Weeks from Tisha B’Av to Rosh Hashanah, we explore these middot (values) in reverse order - from Malchut to Chesed. This year, we will use these middot during the 7 Weeks and Elul to help us prepare for the High Holy Days ahead.
How To Use This Packet

The purpose of this journal is to stir insight and provide a forum for self-examination. Each week, a new page will be added to the packet with a new prompt. The following guidelines are suggestions, but the overall goal is most important to keep in mind: that these journal prompts prepare you for the challenge and opportunity of the Days of Awe. The weekly prompts are intended for introspection and reaction. We challenge you to find ways for introspection and reflection, perhaps making a practice of daily or weekly journaling. A daily practice during the 7 Weeks will help you to consider your life at this moment and where you want to be in the future.

Each week will have information about the middah, in addition to the journal prompts. These can take your mind wherever you want to go, but try to remain connected to the prompt in some way. Writing, like painting, dance, and other art forms is a way to express inner beliefs, feelings, and thoughts. The act of writing will bring subconscious and forgotten elements into your conscious mind. Use the artistic process to go deeper into the meaning of the text and its application to your life.
Malchut (Sovereignty)

Malchut, perhaps more well known as the Shekhinah or the Divine Presence, is the presence of God in all aspects of our lives. God is the string that binds us together, and in this first week where we begin to heal from brokenness, we open ourselves up to God’s presence, the Shekhinah, as we begin to ascend the ladder towards comfort, healing, and ultimately rebirth.

“One of the seven characteristics of a wise person is that they respond to first things first and to last things later.” - Pirkei Avot 5:10

Write a letter to God. Suggestions to get you started: Thank you for…. (or I am grateful for....) One way I am trying to be closer to you is..... (or one way I am trying to be a better person is...) I am sorry for... I hope you are proud of me when I...

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Yesod (Foundation)

Yesod is the foundation on which our connection to our community and to God is built. We find foundation in the texts that weave us together as a peoples, in the history and stories that we tell, and in laying the foundation for future generations. Yesod is in the groundwork that God laid out for us in the Torah, teaching the Israelites how to live as a free people. Yesod is also in the stories that our families told us about how each of our families came to be.

“First a person should put their house together, then their town, then the world.” - Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883)

Draw a picture of your family. Describe a way in which your family is special or unique. What about your family makes you most proud? How do you contribute to your family in a positive way?

Draw a picture of something in your community. How can you contribute to making your community a better place?
**Hod (Splendor or Humility)**

*Hod* is often used in contrast with *Netzach* (eternity) as two *middot* that balance each other out. *Hod* is the humility that helps to balance out the drive and competition that we feel from *netzach*.

“Humility is associated with spiritual perfection. When humility effects depression it is defective. When it is genuine, it inspires joy, courage, and inner dignity.” - Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935)

Think about a time you were part of a group or a team, working toward a larger goal. How did you balance your desire to perform well, or be in the spotlight, with the needs of the team and other team members as a whole? How do both splendor and humility play a role when you think about being part of something bigger than yourself?
Netzach (Eternity or Victory)

Netzach helps us discern what is of enduring importance in life. Netzach literally means “victory,” but the emotion involved is endurance, fortitude, ambition. Netzach is the driving force behind every ambition. Netzach is also connected to bitachon, "trust," in the sense of trusting in God so that you can recognize what is and isn’t within your power to overcome obstacles which stand in the way of being your best self.

“Do not imagine that character is determined at birth. We have been given free will. Any person can become as righteous as Moses or as wicked as Jereboam. We ourselves decide whether to make ourselves learned or ignorant, compassionate or cruel, generous or miserly. No one forces us; no one drags us along one path or the other. We ourselves, by our own volition, choose our own way.” - Maimonides

“Trust is peace of mind of the one who trusts. That one relies in their heart that the one they trust in will do what is good and proper for them on the matter they have trusted them with, according to their ability and their understanding of what will further their good.” - Bahya ibn Pakuda (Duties of the Heart, Fourth Treatise on Trust 1:1)

“Have enough courage to trust love one more time. And always one more time” – Maya Angelou

Prompt: Think about choices that you have made in the past. What is a choice that you are particularly proud of? What is a choice that you would make differently, if given a do over? What makes a choice easy or difficult? What Jewish values can you think about to help you make good choices?
**Tiferet (Glory)**

*Tiferet* is translated as beauty, harmony, and compassion. *Tiferet* has its own power, the power of compassion that goes far beyond love. Compassion is for strangers and people who may not deserve it. *Tiferet* is acting without ulterior motives. *Tiferet* is connected to *rachamim*, because it is the balance of *chesed* and *gevurah* – a focused compassion. A sense of holding a sacred space of relationship (*rechem* – womb) a place of safety, of true empathy with the soul of another.

“Anger will never disappear so long as thoughts of resentment are cherished in the mind. Anger will disappear just as soon as thoughts of resentment are forgotten.” - Buddha

"In everyone there is actually a part of his fellow man, and therefore a person would want his fellow’s happiness and honor as much as his own, because he really is himself, and that is why we were commanded ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’" - Rabbi Moshe Cordovero

"Compassion is the foundation of belief. For a person who isn't compassionate, even the belief in God is a kind of idolatry." - Rabbi Yisrael Salanter

**Prompt:** Think about a time you were caught knowingly breaking a rule at home or purposely misleading your parents. What were the consequences for doing so? While it may have felt only like punishment at the time, in what ways were your parents helping you by imposing a consequence and how will that help you to grow up to be a better person?
Gevurah (Strength)

Gevurah is strength of character. In practice it is the personal resolve to make necessary personal sacrifices without faltering. That is justice, discipline, restraint, awe. Gevurah is connected to yir’ah, in the sense of the soul’s need to restrain one’s innate urges, which happens through experiencing awe. Yir’ah guides us to acknowledge the greatness/might/strength that is beyond us; a means to an end (which is wisdom).

“If [a person] were able to survey at a glance all he has done in the course of his life, what would he feel? He would be terrified at the extent of his own power.” - Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

“The beginning of wisdom is the yir’ah of God; all who practice it gain sound understanding (sechel).” - Psalms 111:10

"Woe unto a person who is not aware of his defects, and who does not know what he must correct. But much worse off is the person who does not know his strengths, and who is therefore unaware of the tools he must work with to advance himself spiritually." - Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz

"A king had cups made of delicate glass. He said: 'If I pour hot water into them, they will expand and burst; if cold water, they will contract and shatter.' What did he do? He mixed hot and cold water, and poured it into them, and so they remained unbroken. Likewise, the Holy One said: 'If I create the world with the attribute of mercy alone, its sins will be too many; if with strength alone, how could the world be expected to endure? So I will create it with both strength and mercy, and may it endure!'" - Midrash Genesis Rabbah 12:15

Prompt: Having the inner strength to stand up for what is right or to do the right thing can be hard and can sometimes make us feel uncomfortable. Who are the people in your life that help you feel strong enough to have the courage of your convictions? How do they help you feel strong?

If you were to design a Superhero named Captain Gevurah, what would he or she look like? What special tools or assets would they possess to help them stand up for justice?
Chesed (Lovingkindness)

Chesed is lovingkindness: the ability to love others in a way that enables them to draw close to the Divine. Chesed is benevolence and the warmth and nurturing that comes with love. It’s a feeling in our hearts. It’s our first and most fundamental emotion. Chesed – ahavah (love) – bein adam lamakom, bein adam lachaveiro. Cultivating within our soul with the desire to embrace all of Creation and bestow upon it the goodness of our lives.

"Rabbi Simlai explained: The Torah begins with an act of loving-kindness and ends with an act of loving-kindness, as it says, 'God made for Adam and his wife garments of leather and clothed them' (Genesis 3:21). It ends with an act of loving-kindness, as it says, 'God buried Moses in the valley...' (Deuteronomy 34:6)." - Talmud, Sotah 14a

"A day should not pass without acts of loving-kindness, either with one’s body, money, or soul." - Rabbi Yeshiaah Horowitz

"If you make an effort to help everyone you meet, you will feel close to everyone. A stranger is someone you have not yet helped. Doing acts of kindness for everyone you can fill your world with friends and loved ones." - Rabbi Eliyahu Dressler

Prompt: When we think of chesed, we often think of kind things that we do for other people. What are ways in which we can practice loving kindness towards ourselves? Why is this important? Is it easier or harder than practicing loving kindness towards others? Why do you think this is?