



A Year of *Cheshbon HaNefesh*: Personal Meditations for Rosh Hashanah

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IsraelForever

To properly prepare ourselves to enter into the New Year, or any new beginning for that matter, we need to consciously deal with all that is old, stale, and outdated in our lives before we can fully move into the future. First we need to empty ourselves from the past, to fill ourselves with a new future.

We do this by engaging in a process referred to by the sages as *Cheshbon Ha’Nefesh* or “Accounting of the Soul”.

Cheshbon Ha’Nefesh occurs when we survey the past year, own up to each experience, and take responsibility for all that has transpired. It is only then, after we have gathered up and grabbed a hold of our past year in all its details, that we can really let it all go so that we can move forward into the promise of a new future. It is commonly understood that we cannot progress if we are stuck to our past, a full cup cannot be filled.

To truly begin anew, the old reality must be put to rest.

As Rosh Hashanah is approaching, we should do a complete review of the past year, and when Rosh Hashanah begins we can let it go and move on. A true *Cheshbon Ha’Nefesh* requires us to go through the year, month by month, to review, reclaim, and refine all of our past experiences. As we do this, there are a few helpful hints that we can keep in mind to organize and contextualize the details of this spiritual accounting.

Each month of the year has a particular energy, so while you go through the past year month by month, consider all the issues of the year that are related to the energy of that month. Awareness of each month’s energy/quality can serve to focus your reflection upon a particular month, as well as provide an archetypal perspective upon the many dimensions of a full year.

This means that if it's a time of thinking about relationships for example, corresponding to the month of Tevet, you can think about the relationships of that particular month, but also about all the relationships you had over the past year.

This is especially important for the final 12 days of the month of Elul, as each day corresponds to a particular month of the year. Elul comes at the end of the solar cycle, as counted by the Hebrew calendar, and before the new Solar year begins. So at the end of that cycle, for the final 12 days, we reflect upon and revisit the past year.

This is similar to the first month of the lunar cycle, as counted by the Hebrew calendar, the month of Nisan, wherein the first 12 days of the month correspond to the 12 upcoming months of the year. So at the beginning of the next cycle, for the first 12 days, we project and envision positivity and blessings for the upcoming year. We can see from these two transitional moments that every changing season (physically and spiritually), is a time to take account, to either look back upon the past, or to project into the future. Included below is a list of the Hebrew months, their corresponding qualities, and some suggested questions for reflection.

Editor's Note: In supplement to Rabbi Pinson's words, for each month we will also offer a way to reflect on the role of our history, heritage, and homeland in our lives.

To begin, gently close your eyes and review your past year, month by month, starting with last year's Tishrei and moving on from there.

TISHREI (SEP-OCT):

Resolutions and Commitments

As we start the year, we reflect on what promises we made to ourselves and others.

- What resolutions did you take upon yourself last year? What promises did you make? What goals did you set? Have you achieved them?
- What are your goals for the upcoming year? How do you plan on accomplishing them?

History, Heritage, Homeland: Israel inspiration is often a hard thing to commit to. It can be hard to find that inspiration on a regular basis, especially when you are far away or your surrounding environment tries to imply that supporting Israel is an unfavorable or even unwise thing to do.

- How did you want or try to strengthen your commitment to being ZionProud this past year?
- What can you do to renew your inspiration in this coming year?

Make it Real: Declare your commitment as a [VC!](#)

CHESHVAN (OCT-NOV):

Transformation

During this time the seasons change and turn from fall to winter, it gets colder and darker. Think about the transformations in your life that occurred last year.

- Which were your own doing and which were situational or circumstantial? How did you respond to the challenges of change?
- As situations are rarely or should not be static, what challenges or changes do you think you will face next year? What can you do to face or respond to them?

History, Heritage, Homeland: There are always going to be new challenges to face, new lies against the Jewish people and the Jewish State, and they can be hard to fight - especially when we realize that we believe them to be true.

- Did you experience or successfully combat any lies or unfounded attacks this year?
- How could you do more to fight the lies in the future?

Make it Real: Learn more about the lies and how to combat them with [Shifting Perspectives](#)

KISLEV (NOV-DEC):

Miracles

Think about the miracles in your life.

- What extraordinary events happened to you last year? Did you find a spouse, fall in love, land a dream job, or make a significant breakthrough? How did you handle these miracles and movements? Did you integrate them? Were you thankful for them as they occurred?
- How can you be more aware and appreciative of these moments that may happen to you in the upcoming year?

History, Heritage, Homeland: The existence of Israel is nothing short of a miracle. The wars fought and won, the fact that for the first time in human history a people returned - twice! - to a land they were exiled from, after centuries of longing. Israel has accomplished so much in such a short period, and continues to be on the forefront of international humanitarian aid, technological development, agricultural advances, and more.

- Where did you find your Israel inspiration?
- How can you continue to find it for yourself and others?

Make it Real: Explore the many facets of Israel inspiration on the [Israel Forever Blog](#)

TEVET (DEC-JAN):

Relationships

Think about your parents, siblings, spouse, children, friends, co-workers, even enemies.

- How were your relationships this past year? Did you improve your interpersonal relationships with others?
- Where did you fall short? Where were your successes?

History, Heritage, Homeland: Not only do we have connections on an individual level, but we can often feel connected on a national level - the sense of inner pride we get when learning that a popular celebrity is Jewish or Israeli, or the personal heartbreak we feel when a fellow Jew or Jewish community is attacked.

- How did you strengthen your relationship with the Jewish people? With Israel?
- How can you deepen those ties in the coming year?

Make it Real: Learn more about the importance of being [Stronger Together](#)

SHEVAT (JAN-FEB):

Eating

Eating is one of the primary appetites that we must work on to refine our character and live a truly conscious and spiritual life.

- How was your relationship to food this past year? Healthy? Obsessive? Disciplined? Neurotic?
- Were you able to let go and enjoy yourself when appropriate? Were you able to exert your will and define your boundaries when necessary?

History, Heritage, Homeland: There is a classic joke that almost all Jewish holidays can be summarized with "they tried to kill us, we won, let's eat." Food plays an important role in our traditions, celebrations, and culture. Even when we are far apart from our families or friends, certain flavors and dishes will instantly connect us. For some, there is no closer connection to Israel than cooking up the incredible foods that embody its cultural and gastronomic flavors.

- What foods and dishes felt most like "home" to you?
- How can you bring more connection into your kitchen?

Make it Real: Bring the taste of Israel into your home and heart by [Cooking Israel](#)

ADAR (FEB-MAR):

Joy

- What were the truly joyous moments of your past year? What made you laugh? What made you sing? What made you dance? What made you weep with joy?
- Did you grow or learn from the joy you experienced in the past year?

History, Heritage, Homeland: Sometimes it can be hard to connect emotionally from a distance. It can take bravery to declare yourself ZionProud and find that Israel inspiration and joy in your life.

- Did you feel it last year? When?
- How can you use your connection to your history, heritage, and homeland to add joy and meaning to your life next year?

Make it Real: Find your Israel joy today and every day with [Celebrating Israel](#)

NISAN (MAR-APR):

Redemption and Liberation

Think about the issues in your life that you were able to release yourself from this past year. This can be in the form of certain difficulties that you overcame, particular patterns or habits that you broke, or relationships you evolved from or evolved within.

- Do you feel truly free from them?
- If not, what else might you still need to do to more fully move on?

History, Heritage, Homeland: The story of Israel is one of repeated redemption and liberation, and return. Several times, from ancient times to the modern day, we have been forced to leave our homeland, but eventually came back. The story of Israel is one of a phoenix rising from the ashes, stronger and brighter than before.

- What stories from Israel's history can serve as a source of inspiration and redemption, on a personal or national level?
- How can you use Israel's past as an inspiration for the future?

Make it Real: Deepen your understanding of the power of our nation's belief and hope in redemption with [Holocaust and Hatikva](#)

IYYAR (APR-MAY):

Healing

Healing is being true to yourself on the deepest level. Remember that healing can happen on all levels of your being. Don't just confine this reflection to the physical realm. Go deep.

- What ailments or challenges did you experience over the past year?
- What did you do to help or hurt your own healing process?

History, Heritage, Homeland: Moving forward and healing from trauma or loss, physical or emotional is a hard process, and it's unfortunately one that all Israelis learn how to do at some point in their lives, on a personal or national level. One of the most amazing things about Israel is the nation's ability to heal. Even if someone doesn't know exactly what the other is going through, knowing someone is there and cares, that they are not alone can make a big difference.

- What can you learn from Israel's ability to cope and heal?
- How have you helped others heal in the past? How can you do so in the future?

Make it Real: Learn more about the ways Israel heals and copes with [Living Beyond Terror](#)

SIVAN (MAY-JUNE):

Torah

- What you have learned this year?
- Have you integrated those teachings? Did you truly "receive" the Torah this past year?
- How can you continue or increase your learning this coming year?

History, Heritage, Homeland: Some of the most important building blocks of our faith are our connection to G-d, our connection to the Torah, and our connection to the Promised Land, the Land of Israel.

- What did you learn specifically about our history, heritage and homeland this year?
- What would you like to learn more about?

Make it Real: Explore the ancient and eternal connection between our people and our homeland with [Shabbat Tzion](#)

TAMUZ (JUNE-JULY):

Destruction

It was during this month that the 'walls of the Temple' were breached. Although the Temple does not fully fall until the month of Av, we meditate on the process and beginnings of disintegration during the month of Tamuz. Think about all the losses you experienced in your past year.

- What have you lost? Whom have you lost?
- How you are dealing with these losses?

History, Heritage, Homeland: The longing to return to Israel and Jerusalem is a cornerstone of our faith. So many classic lines recall our love and longing: "If I forget Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its strength." "My heart is in the east, and I am at the ends of the west." Jews throughout history have kept a corner of their eastern wall unfinished as a reminder of the destruction of our Temple and our holy city. Even from a distance, we can still tap in to this connection.

- Have you felt this bond? What can you do to strengthen or deepen it?

Make it Real: Connect to our eternal capital with the [Jerusalem Cornerstone Project](#)

AV (JULY-AUG):

Reconciliation

Although most commonly characterized by the total destruction of both the first and second Temples, we choose to focus on the perennial question, "what next?" that follows complete collapse. This corresponds to the teaching that "the Moshiach will be born on Tisha B'Av", the day of complete destruction.

- What restorative steps did you pursue last year in broken areas of your life? How have you tried to repair or redeem aspects of yourself, your relationships, or the world?
- Have you volunteered your time or energy to people in need? Have you reached out to someone you have not been in contact with for a long time?
- How are these projects or processes going?

History, Heritage, Homeland: The feeling of reuniting after a long time apart is powerful. We may fight or disagree, but at the end of the day, we are one nation, one family, with one heart.

- How have you shown your solidarity this year? How can you continue to reach out to those who need aid and support in the future?

Make it Real: Reach out to those who could use extra support with [Letters of Friendship](#)

ELUL (AUG-SEP):

Soul Searching

Think about the times that you were really honest with yourself, and how it felt.

- Have you been truly honest with yourself this past year?
- Were you able to really look at your life and yourself deeply and critically? Were you able to judge yourself favorably and lovingly?
- How can you keep or grow the connection with the deeper parts of your self in the future?

History, Heritage, Homeland: We often can feel that we don't have a connection or play a role in the greater picture of our nation. But it is often the voice of the EveryJew, the individual person who is not necessarily the most exceptional or the most brave, that ends up being the most relatable. Every story is unique, valuable, and potentially even inspirational.

- How can you use your personal connection to your history, heritage, and homeland to inspire or deepen others' Israel connection?

Make it Real: *Share your unique Israel connection with our global community and become a [Guest Writer](#)*

Once you have gone through the year, owning up to and taking responsibility for all your mishaps and successes, now it is time to move into the more proactive consciousness of looking at the present as a gift of the eternal now — literally, a new beginning.

When we begin anew, and we can always begin again at any moment, we need to think that, in the words of the sage Rabbeinu Yonah, "The foundation of *teshuvah* [repentance or return], is considering today as the very day you were born, the first day of your life, and you have no demerits or merits."

Every moment is new. The *Ko'ach ha-Hitchadshut*, or 'Power of Renewal', is present within every moment of Creation.

There are no two moments alike.

Yet, at the same time, all the newness of the entire year flows from Rosh Hashanah.

Rosh Hashanah is the reservoir and wellspring of newness and initiation that ripples out to the rest of the year. Now is the time to activate and access that initiatory energy. This means that Rosh Hashanah brings down newness for the entire year.

Rosh Hashanah, which literally means 'Head of the Year', is not just a beginning or a starting line, but a head. And just as the head contains the consciousness of all that transpires in the body, so to Rosh Hashanah is that essential node through which all the vitality of an entire year travels.

Rosh Hashanah is the renewal of time, as well as the nerve center through which all directions of time flow.

On Rosh Hashanah, there is a total cosmic renewal, and by attuning ourselves to this awesome day, we can achieve a sense of renewed vitality on all levels of our being — a radical renewal in time, space, and soul-consciousness.

With blessings for a *K'tivah v'Chatimah Tovah*. May you be written and sealed for a good year.

Rav DovBer Pinson

The chagim are upon us and our soul-searching has begun. Just as we strive to establish meaningful connections through our personal reflection and observance, so, too, should our celebrations remind us of our origins as a people and our shared heritage in spite of distance, differences, and even doubt.

Explore
your
Israel connection
as we say
*Shanah
Tovah!*

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