



Temple Rodef Shalom

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Erev Rosh Hashanah 5780/2019

Soul Searching - *Cheshbon Hanefesh*

Intro: Little River Band – Soul Searching

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TrhIARI17lo>

Soul searching, looking for myself
Soul searching, Lord, I need a little help...

How else but by looking inward can we assess our actions and attitudes, and account for our words and our thoughts?

During the month of Elul, preceding Rosh Hashanah, we are supposed to begin to engage in a process called “*cheshbon hanefesh*,” accounting for our souls. Even though Elul has passed, it’s not too late!

In modern Hebrew, the word *cheshbon* means “bill” or “accounting”. In a restaurant we’d say, “*cheshbon b’vakasha*” – “bill please.” But doing an accounting of our soul requires focused inward reflection, deep and honest. We’re looking to create personal transformation.

Cheshbon hanefesh is not for beating ourselves up. Be clear about this – on the High Holy Days we are not judging our worth as individuals, we are judging our behavior as individuals.

Coffee Shop Rabbi, an online Rabbi blogger, explains *cheshbon hanefesh* in the question, “What does my life add up to right now?” She asks us to balance the questions -

- In what ways have I made the world better? In what ways have I made it worse?
- How do I affect the lives of others? Are their lives easier or harder because of my behavior?

Let’s take stock and engage in *cheshbon hanefesh* through a light meditation examining ten questions.

Rabbi Natan of Nemerov, an 18th century scholar taught, “Know and believe that every day, at any time, at any moment, you can renew yourself and become a brand new being.

So let us begin:

Induction

Find a comfortable position in your chair. Feet on the floor if possible. Put your service booklet down and let it rest in your laps. Take a nice deep, quiet breath, hold it for a moment, and then slowly exhale. Allow any tension to melt away as you continue to relax.

Relax your body. Let go of all worries and concerns for the moment. Let it go... Allow yourself to be fully present to this sacred community, in this sacred space... Breathe deeply again and let all stress and tension out slowly with the breath. Allow outside noises and random thoughts to happen; just simply acknowledge them and return your focus to my voice.

Continue to breathe slowly and gently as you bring your awareness to the top of your head. Sense or imagine a feeling of relaxation beginning to spread down from the top of your scalp.... feel the muscles in your forehead and temples relax. Allow your eye muscles to release. Let your cheeks and jaw soften and let go of all tension.

Now let this peaceful feeling flow down into your neck and deep into the muscles in your shoulders...soothing them...releasing them. This peaceful feeling flows down from your shoulders and into your arms - your upper arms...your forearms...your hands...relaxing and soothing...all the way to the tips of your fingers. As your body relaxes, your mind relaxes, and your thoughts seem to become lighter.

Feel that your entire upper body has become loose and relaxed. Now feel your hips relax as the peaceful feeling starts to work its way through your lower body. Feel all these large, strong muscle groups becoming looser and more relaxed with each passing moment. Breathe relaxation into them.

Soothing feelings of relaxation flow down through your knees, and into your calves. Your ankles relax. Now your feet relax. Feel your feet rooted to the earth... Allow your entire lower body to relax completely, and allow any remaining tension from anywhere in your body to flow out through the tips of your toes. You are comfortable, peaceful, relaxed.

Imagine as best you can that you are in a safe and special place for self-reflection. Maybe it's your room, maybe it's a place in nature like the beach or a forest by a stream. See and hear and sense that place as fully as possible. Allow yourself fully relaxed in that place.

Now it's time to go on an inner journey, as you reflect on your actions and inactions through these ten questions. We'll take a moment after each question for you dig deep and examine your actions and feelings, look at your personal ledger – where you step up and where you don't:

1. What needs to change in my life?
2. How can I do a better job loving myself?
3. How can I do a better job loving others?
4. What do I need to forgive myself for?
5. Who else do I need to forgive?
6. What is a memory of this past year that I recall fondly? What is it about that memory that is important to me?
7. What is a memory of this past year that makes me sad? What is it about that memory that is important to me?
8. What is something special that I bring to the world?
9. What do I want to do more of in this coming year to step up in my personal life?
10. What do I want to do in this coming year to make to the world a better place?

Take a deep breath and give yourself an inner hug for working on these challenging questions. Remember these thoughts and sincerely bring them into your prayers for this High Holy Day period.

As I count down slowly from 5, begin to find yourself back in this sacred and loving community....

I hope that by engaging in the process of *Cheshbon Hanefesh* that you will discover what is most important and meaningful in your life; where you excel or where you need to step up and make a difference.

If you'd like a copy of these questions so that you can continue this reflective practice at home, I encourage you to send me an email, which you can find through the Temple website.

May this 10-day period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur be one that is filled with meaningful reflection and personal renewal and growth.

Kein y'hi ratzon, May this be God's will.