

JEWISH NEW YEAR MINDFULNESS WALK: A SELF-GUIDED PRACTICE

*Inspired by Yom Kippur liturgy
and traditional mindfulness meditation*



Welcome

What is a Mindfulness Walk?

Welcome to this Jewish New Year Mindfulness Walk! This is a self-guided walking reflection that can help ground us in who we are and who we want to be. The guide is meant to be brought along on a walk of your choosing and offers prompts based on our surroundings and pieces of liturgy (while the guide will quote passages which speak to or about God, the prompts will not be theologically focused). This walk can be done anywhere outside, anytime during the holiday season, for any duration of time. Block off some time, silence your phone, and put on some comfortable shoes. Let us reflect.

Structure

This practice is structured on a refrain in the Yom Kippur liturgy:

**Teshuva (return/repentance), Tefilah (prayer),
Tzedakah (charity)**

These three efforts are understood to bring about positive change in the year to come. Today, we will use a liberal interpretation of these pillars of the season:

Tefilah/Prayer: *Mindfulness—What do we notice in the physical work we are a part of?*

Teshuva/Return: *Who are we now and where would we like to be?*

Tzedakah/Charity: *What are concrete steps we can take in the direction we would like to go?*

We will begin walking slowly, interspersed with pauses in which we will use cues from the world around us and pieces of liturgy to explore these questions.

Tefilah/Prayer/Mindfulness

Beginning: Breath

Begin to walk at a comfortable pace. As you fall into a rhythm, take three slow and deep breaths, filling your chest and belly with air.

Let go of the deep breaths and continue to breathe and walk naturally. Pay attention to the feeling of your breath: *how is each inhalation and exhalation different? How does your breathing cooperate with your steps?*

Moment of text

Throughout the Yom Kippur liturgy (among many other Jewish texts,) the term *הַרְוֵנוּ אֶפְרַיִם* “*haron af*” is used to mean “rage.” The literal understanding of this phrase is more akin to “burning breath:” the visceral, physical sensation we have when we are angry.

What does your breath feel like now? What might that say about you in this moment?

Pause: Senses

As you continue walking or take a brief pause, let go of your focus on breath (but please continue breathing!). Notice your senses:

What do you see? Architectural features, plants you may not have noticed before, an interesting reflection?

What do you hear? People, vehicles, insects?

What do you feel? The breeze, your clothes, and shoes, the cold or hot?

What do you smell? A nearby restaurant, pine needles, gasoline, freshly mowed grass?

What do you taste? Leftover lunch, your mint toothpaste?

Pause: Time

Bring your walk to a pause when you reach the next tree. What are the markers of time that are around you? Consider: the seasonal indicators of the tree, the flow of pedestrian (or other) traffic, the position of the sun in the sky, the temperature.

Moment of text

The Jewish High Holiday season is full of diverse ways of marking of time. The holidays mark yearly cycles: Rosh Hashanah is the New Year, based on a lunar-solar calendar. Sukkot celebrates the fall harvest. Yom Kippur marks a renewal of our relationships through reconnection and forgiveness.

On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the liturgy repeats the refrain “הַיּוֹם” “Hayom” “today.” The unit of a day takes on heightened meaning.

There are also markers of each hour: some communities sing the following poem on the night of Yom Kippur, asking God to respond to their prayers according to specific parts of the day:

יְעֹלָה תְחִנּוּתֵנוּ מֵעֶרֶב. וַיָּבֹא שׁוֹעֲתֵנוּ מִבֶּקֶר. וַיִּרְאֶה רְנוּתֵנוּ עַד עֶרֶב...

May our supplication ascend from the evening, and may our cry come from the morning, and may our song appear till evening...

As you continue walking, ask: *what is this season in your life? What do you want it to be?*

Teshuva/Return/ Introspection

Pause: Relationships

When you reach a natural pause in your walk (a bench, a comfortable rock, a section of pavement where you can stand without blocking passersby), take a moment to notice the ways that the things around you physically interact with each other. See if you can articulate several interactions.

Moment of text

One particularly poignant moment of the Yom Kippur liturgy expresses some of the many ways a person could understand the God/human relationship:

בִּי אָנֹכִי עַמְּךָ וְאַתָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ. אָנֹכִי בְנֵיךָ וְאַתָּה אָבִינוּ: אָנֹכִי עַבְדֶּיךָ וְאַתָּה אֲדֹנָינוּ. אָנֹכִי קְהֵלְךָ וְאַתָּה חֲלֻקְנוּ: אָנֹכִי נִחְלָתְךָ וְאַתָּה גֹרְלָנוּ. אָנֹכִי צֹאנְךָ וְאַתָּה רוֹעֵנוּ: אָנֹכִי כְרֶמְךָ וְאַתָּה גֹטְרָנוּ. אָנֹכִי פְעֻלָּתְךָ וְאַתָּה יוֹצְרָנוּ: אָנֹכִי רַעֲיָתְךָ וְאַתָּה דֹדְנוּ. אָנֹכִי סִגְלָתְךָ וְאַתָּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ. אָנֹכִי עַמְּךָ וְאַתָּה מְלַכְנוּ: אָנֹכִי מַאֲמִירֶיךָ וְאַתָּה מַאֲמִירָנוּ:

For we are Your people; and You are our God. We are Your children; and You are our Father. We are Your servants; and You are our Master. We are Your congregation; and You are our Portion. We are Your inheritance; and You are our Destiny. We are Your flock; and You are our Shepherd. We are Your vineyard; and You are our Keeper. We are Your work; and You are our Creator. We are Your dear ones, and You are our Beloved. We are Your treasure; and You are our God. We are Your people; and You are our King. We are Your distinguished ones; and You are our Distinction.

This is also a moment to consider the many ways we are in relationship with the other people in our lives. As you continue your walk, ask:

What are some of your roles in your relationships?

Which roles feel more natural?

Which are more of a stretch?

Is there a particular role in which you want to grow?

Pause: Brokenness

As you walk, notice the physical things that are broken on your way: cracks in the sidewalk, broken branches, torn paper. How does the brokenness impact what is around it? Perhaps there are weeds growing out of the crack or the paper clogs a drain.

What is broken in your life?

What is generative about that brokenness and what is destructive?

Our society is broken in many ways. Focus on an area of societal brokenness that is meaningful to you and ask these same questions:

What is generative about that brokenness and what is destructive?

Pause: Maintenance

Find something(s) along your way that is, surprisingly, not broken. *What contributed to its maintenance?*

Thankfully, we all have aspects of our lives that are not broken. *What areas of our lives do not need to change or grow? How can you maintain those parts of your life?*

Tzedakah/Charity/Action

Pause: What are you taking with you?

We now begin to transition out of our practice. As you make your way back to where you started or to your destination, notice what has changed in your body since you started: *Do you feel more energized? Do your feet or back ache? Are you thirsty, sunburned, mosquito bitten, or cold? Does your heart-rate feel more even?*

As you notice the physical differences, think about some of the ideas you have considered on this walk. Choose one or two of those ideas you want to take with you.

Pause: Action

As you carry those one or two ideas, commit to one concrete way you can act on those ideas.

Moment of text

During the evening of Yom Kippur, many sing the following poem which uses metaphors of craftspeople to describe ways that God influences human lives:

כי הנה כּהֶמֶר בִּיַד הַיּוֹצֵר. בְּרִצּוֹתוֹ מְרַחֵב וּבְרִצּוֹתוֹ מְקַצֵּר. כֵּן אֲנִיחֵנוּ בְּיַדְךָ הַקּוֹדֵשׁ
נוֹצֵר. לְבִרְיַת הַבֵּט וְאֵל תִּפְּנֹן לַיֹּצֵר:

Like clay in the hands of the potter, if he wills, he can expand it, if he wills, he can contract it; so too are we in Your hand, Preserver of kindness Heed the covenant and not the accuser!

כי הנה כָּאֶבֶן בְּיַד הַמְּסַמֵּת. בְּרִצּוֹתוֹ אוֹחֵז וּבְרִצּוֹתוֹ מְכַתֵּת. כֵּן אֲנִיחֵנוּ בְּיַדְךָ מְסִיחַ
וּמְמוֹתֵת. לְבִרְיַת הַבֵּט וְאֵל תִּפְּנֹן לַיֹּצֵר:

Like stone in the hand of the mason, if he wills, he holds it [in position], if he wills, he smashes it; so too are we in Your hands, Causer of life and death. Heed the covenant and not the accuser!

כי הנה כְּגִרְזֵן בְּיַד הַחֹרֵשׁ. בְּרִצּוֹתוֹ דֹּבֵק לְאוֹר וּבְרִצּוֹתוֹ פְּרֵשׁ. כֵּן אֲנִיחֵנוּ בְּיַדְךָ תּוֹמֵךְ
עֲנֵי וְרֵשׁ. לְבִרְיַת הַבֵּט וְאֵל תִּפְּנֹן לַיֹּצֵר...

Like iron in the hand of the smith, if he wills, he puts it to the fire, if he wills, he removes it; so too are we in Your hand, Supporter of the poor and destitute Heed the covenant and not the accuser...

In what areas of your life do you have the power to enact the change you want to see, like the potter, mason, and smith? In what areas do you lack the power to act?

Closing: Breath

We will close our practice as we began: once you reach your destination, take three slow and deep breaths, filling your chest and belly with air.

Let go of the deep breaths and continue to breathe naturally. Pay attention to the feeling of your breath: *how is each inhalation and exhalation different?*

May you have a sweet year!

Thank you for participating in this walk! We hope you have a sweet year full of joy and light.



SCAN QR CODE OR

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for a Spotify playlist in honor of the New Year, featuring some of the liturgy quoted here and songs in an assortment of genres focusing on forgiveness and renewal.