

SEASONS OF BROTHERHOOD

A High Holiday Guide for Men
Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur & Sukkot



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A HIGH HOLIDAY GUIDE FOR MEN

Rabbi Noam Raucher, MA.Ed. - Executive Director, FJMC International

Introductions and Guidance

He hadn't really looked at himself in a long time—just enough to shave, adjust a collar, or glance in a window as he passed by. But one morning, for reasons he couldn't explain, he paused in front of the mirror. The reflection staring back was blurry, like the glass itself was fogged—or maybe it was him. He could see the shape of his face, the outline of his life, but not the details. Not the fullness. It felt like looking at someone he used to know. So he stayed there a moment longer. Then, quietly, over the days that followed, he began to come back to himself—not all at once, but step by step. A phone call he'd been avoiding. An apology he finally offered. A truth he spoke out loud. With each act of return, the image became clearer, more whole. And one morning, standing again in front of the glass, he saw himself—not the man he had been, but the one he had always hoped he could become—and whispered, *"I remember you."*

The Blurry Mirror We All Face. This isn't just a story. It's a reflection—pun intended—of what happens to many men over time. Careers, families, expectations, and routines pile up. We lose track of who we are beneath the roles we play. We get used to moving through the day without really checking in with ourselves. Self-reflection becomes a luxury, something optional—until the mirror goes too blurry to ignore.



Jewish tradition, especially during this time of year, insists that self-reflection is not a luxury. It's a necessity. In fact, an obligation. The High Holy Days call us not just to atone, but to return—to recalibrate, to get honest, to come back to ourselves and to what truly matters. The rabbis teach that we see ourselves as a blurry reflection in a mirror, but with each act of teshuvah—each honest step inward—we draw closer, and the image sharpens.

For men in particular, self-reflection can be a radical act. Many of us were raised to measure ourselves by performance, output, or stoicism. But self-reflection asks something deeper: not what you've done, but who you've become. And from that, it offers:

- **Clarity** — about what matters most and where your energy is going.
- **Integrity** — the ability to align your values with your actions.
- **Connection** — to your relationships, your community, your purpose.
- **Resilience** — by identifying areas of growth, healing, and strength.

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(Introduction continued..) And perhaps most powerfully, it gives you the chance to change the story while you're still living it.

You don't need to wait for a life crisis or a holiday to take a long look in the mirror. But if you're looking for a sign, consider this the sign. Carve out ten minutes. Sit in silence. Write a page. Speak honestly with a friend. Do one thing today that brings you closer to the man you want to be. You don't need to become someone else—you just need to return to yourself.

And maybe, just maybe, you'll find yourself looking in the mirror one morning soon, smiling at a face you haven't seen in a while, and saying, "There you are. I remember you."

A Word of Guidance

We put this packet together with you in mind. However you choose to use it—in a quiet moment alone, with a few trusted friends, or in a larger men's group setting—know that it's yours to explore in whatever way feels right.

Inside, you'll find:

- Prompts for personal journaling
- Scripts for guided meditations
- Introspective and supportive games to play with friends
- Stories and exercises that help you reflect on the journey from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur—and into the joy and openness of Sukkot

Each piece was created with care, rooted in Jewish tradition and in the belief that men thrive when we take time to reflect, reconnect, and recommit to the kind of life we want to lead.

So use what speaks to you. Skip what doesn't. Come back to it often. And most of all, remember: this isn't about fixing yourself—it's about finding yourself again.

Shana Tova u'Metukah - May you have a sweet and meaningful new year!

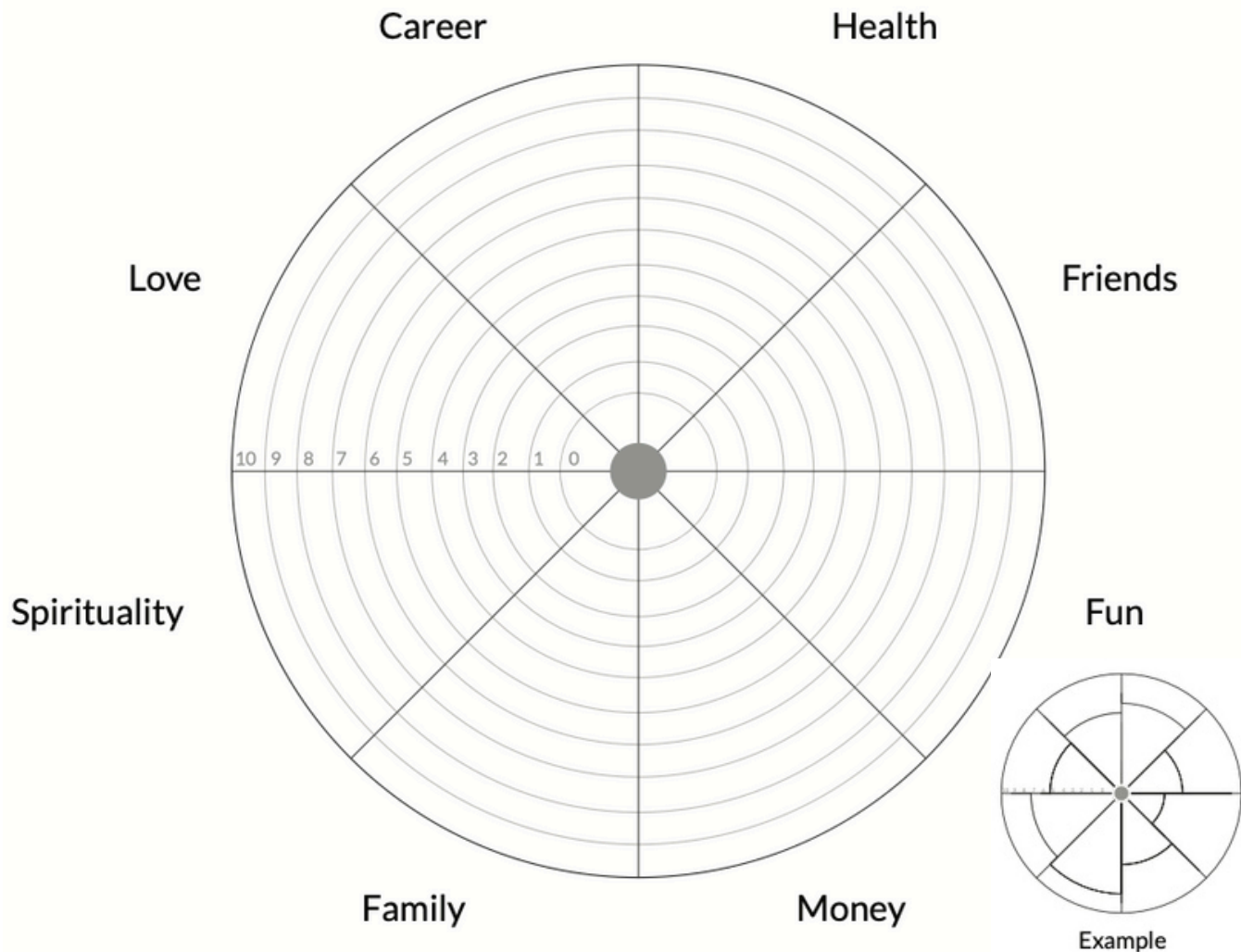
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A Personal Reflection Through the Wheel of Life



Follow the following instructions to fill in your Wheel of Life.

- Think about each category and assign a score to it based on the level of satisfaction you derive from that category. Each sector has been broken into ten sections, the outermost being level 10 (highest) and the section closest to the center being level 1 (lowest)—color or shade the sector up to the level of satisfaction that you identified in the above step.
- (Using a unique color for each sector can make your Wheel of Life more visually pleasing and fun to work on) E.g., If you rate your health a 6 out of 10, you'll color six sections in the Health sector. Repeat the above step for all the sectors.
- Once all the sectors of the circle are shaded depending on their satisfaction, review the whole image and ask yourself why the wheel looks this way and if there is anything you want to do about it.

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The Jewish season of *teshuvah*—return, reflection, and renewal—asks each of us to journey inward before we reach outward. As Psalm 27 reminds us, “*Your face, God, I seek.*” Traditionally recited each day from the start of *Elul* through the end of *Sukkot*, this verse is more than poetic—it’s an invitation. It’s a reminder that behind all our striving and surviving, there is a deeper face we are meant to seek: the face of truth, of accountability, of the sacred—and ultimately, our own.

A teaching from Midrash (Jewish lore) echoes this path, linking *teshuvah* not only to returning to God, but to returning to our truest self. Though the original source is not easily accessible, its essence lives on in generations of Jewish teaching: that the work of this season is not about perfection, but presence. It’s about facing who we’ve become, who we’re becoming, and who we’re still meant to be.



The following ten questions are offered as a map for that journey. They begin with the self, but they do not end there. Like the ripple from a single drop of water, each question moves outward—into your relationships, your responsibilities, your communities, and the world you help shape.

You don’t need to answer them all at once. You don’t even need to have the answers. What matters is that you seek. That you face yourself. That you begin.

1. What kind of man am I becoming—and who am I becoming that man for? *In a world that rewards domination and spectacle, who is shaping you? Are you becoming the kind of man your children admire? Your partner trusts? Your ancestors would recognize?*

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2. How do I define strength—and do I live according to that definition? *Is my strength in my control or in my care? In how much I hold back, or how much I reach out? In what I conquer—or in what I protect, nurture, and heal?*

3. When do I feel most alone—and what do I do with that loneliness? *Do I retreat, numb, distract, or pretend? Or do I risk vulnerability, reach for connection, and name what hurts out loud?*

4. How do I show up in my home—and how do I want to be remembered there? Beyond provision and presence, am I sharing the invisible labor? Am I teaching my children how to apologize? How to repair? How to cry and laugh and clean the damn dishes?

5. What pain am I carrying that is no longer mine alone to bear? *Do I believe I must hold it all by myself? Am I ready to let others help carry the load, or at least witness it?*

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6. What does it mean to be a Jewish man in this moment—and what does my Judaism demand of me now? *Is it ritual without ethics? Loyalty without inquiry? Or is it a commitment to dignity, humility, justice, and moral courage?*

7. What conversations am I avoiding—and at what cost? *With my kids, my partner, my friends, my community? What truth is too uncomfortable, too shameful, too exhausting to name—and how might naming it set me free?*

8. Where do I place my anger—and who ends up paying the price for it? *Do I aim it where it belongs: at injustice, at corruption, at silence in the face of suffering? Or do I misplace it—on my children, my coworkers, myself?*

9. What kind of world am I helping build with my choices, habits, and silences? *Am I consuming more than I give? Am I voting my values? Am I acting like someone who believes the world can still be redeemed?*

10. Who are my people—and how do we hold each other accountable, loved, and seen? *Do I have a circle that calls me in, not just out? Do I offer other men a place to bring their whole selves? Do I?*

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“If-You-Dare” Feedback Questions from Friends

For men seeking the raw, unvarnished truth from the people who know you best

Engage at your own risk—but remember: *pain-free feedback rarely sparks real change. Ask bravely, receive graciously, and decide which insights to transform into action during these Ten Days of Return.*

Approach wisely with these guidelines in mind:

1. Ask for permission first.
2. Listen—don’t defend. Jot notes; save clarifications for later.
3. Thank them. Even if it stings, their honesty is a gift.

1. When do you most enjoy being around me, and when do you least enjoy it? *Push for concrete examples—situations, moods, or behaviors.*

2. What’s one pattern you see me repeat that holds me back (and that I might be blind to)? *Ask how they’ve noticed it over time.*

3. On a scale of 1-10, how emotionally available am I to you? *Follow-up: “What would move that number one point higher?”*

4. How do I handle conflict—fight, flight, freeze, or something else? *Invite them to recall the last disagreement you shared.*

5. What do you trust me with most, and what would make you hesitate to rely on me? *Aim for specific tasks, responsibilities, or secrets.*

6. If you could delete one habit of mine with a magic wand, what would disappear? *Probe why that habit bothers them and how it affects the relationship.*

7. What’s a strength of mine I underestimate or don’t deploy enough? *Look for talents you consider “no big deal” but others value.*

8. When have I disappointed you, and what did you need from me instead? *Listen for unmet expectations you never realized existed.*

9. If you had to describe my presence in three words, what would they be—and why? *Encourages both praise and critique in a memorable snapshot.*

10. Fast-forward one year: what positive change in me would most surprise and delight you? *Turns critique into a growth target you can act on.*

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“Man in the Mirror”

A Game of Reflective Truth and Brotherhood

OVERVIEW:

This game is designed for men who want to see themselves more clearly through the eyes of the people who know them best—their friends. Over the course of the Ten Days of Repentance (Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur), players take turns asking and answering 10 powerful questions that promote truth-telling, humility, growth, and accountability.

HOW TO PLAY:

- Form a group of 2–4 men. (Can be done in person or over video call.)
- Choose a time to meet for 60–90 minutes during the Ten Days.
- Bring pen and paper (or a journal) and agree to ground rules: Be honest. Be kind. No fixing, defending, or interrupting.

Step 1: Draw the Mirror (15–20 minutes total)

Each player takes a turn in the "Mirror Seat" while the others take on the role of Reflectors.

- The man in the Mirror Seat selects 3–5 of the questions from the “If-You-Dare” list. (see previous page)
- The other players answer each question honestly and kindly, giving personal examples when possible.
- The man in the Mirror Seat just listens—no debate, no clarifying, just thank them.

Step 2: Spot the Themes (5–10 minutes per person)

After feedback is shared, the man in the Mirror Seat reflects back:

- What patterns or surprises did I hear?
- What stung? What inspired me?
- What one thing do I want to take action on in the next 30 days?

The others can affirm, challenge gently, or offer support.

Step 3: Make a Pact (10 minutes as a group)

Each player completes these two sentences:

- “In the next 30 days, I commit to...” (a specific behavior, conversation, or change)
- “I ask you to hold me accountable by...” (how and when they want reminders and/or support)

You can agree to follow-up by text, group check-ins, or a scheduled reunion.

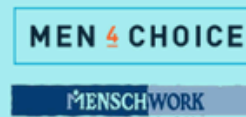
INTERNATIONAL MEN'S DAY 16 - 19 NOVEMBER 2025 GATHERING

Across the Jewish world and beyond, men are being called to show up—for themselves, for each other, and for those whose voices have been overlooked. Be a part of a FREE, ONLINE event exploring what it means to be a Jewish man today

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Bontsha the Silent By I.L Peretz

This is the story of “Bontsha the Silent” by Isaac Leib Peretz, retold here in shortened form. As you read, let it challenge you. Imagine your own life inside the silence of Bontsha. Notice where you recognize yourself in his story. Afterward, sit with the questions at the end of the story.

In Life...

On earth, the death of Bontsha the Silent made no impression. Ask anyone: Who was Bontsha? How did he live? How did he die? No one knew. He passed through life like a shadow.

At his birth no one raised a glass of wine. At his confirmation, no speech was made. He was like a grain of sand on the shore—indistinguishable, invisible, swept by the wind. Even the board that marked his grave was soon gone.

He lived in loneliness and died in loneliness. Had there been a pause in the endless human racket, someone might have noticed his bowed head, his trembling lips, his shoulders bent under invisible loads. Even unburdened, he walked as if already searching for his grave.

In silence he was born, in silence he lived, in silence he died. But in Paradise, it was different. ...

In Death...

The day Bontsha died, the heavens erupted. The Messiah’s trumpet proclaimed: *“Bontsha the Silent is dead!”* Angels with radiant wings rushed to spread the news. At the gate of heaven, Abraham stretched out his arms, smiling: *“Peace be with you!”*

A golden throne was prepared, a jeweled crown brought for his head. Saints muttered: *“Why such honors? He has not yet stood trial!”* But the angels replied: the trial would be a formality. *“Do you know whom you’re dealing with? Bontsha the Silent!”*

Encircled by singing angels and embraced by Abraham, Bontsha trembled. Surely this was a mistake—or a dream that would dissolve, leaving him once again in misery on earth. He dared not move or even lift an eyelash. ...

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Bontsha the Silent (continued)

The Court of Heaven

At last Bontsha was led into the court of Heaven. His name was called in a pure angelic voice: *“Bontsha the Silent!”* The sound was like music, yet he could hardly believe it meant him.

The defending angel spoke: *“He never complained—not against God, not against man. His sufferings were greater than Job’s. He had no friend, no education, no new clothes, no freedom. He was silent even when his drunken father dragged him out by the hair and threw him into the frozen night.”*

He begged only with his eyes. On his first night in the city, he was jailed without reason. Released, he carried crushing loads as a porter, death at every step, yet he remained silent.

Once, he stopped runaway horses and saved a wealthy philanthropist’s life. Out of gratitude, the man made him a coachman, married him off, and gave him a child to raise. But soon the benefactor went bankrupt, leaving Bontsha unpaid. His wife abandoned him, leaving the child behind. Years later, that same child threw him out of the house.

Still Bontsha said nothing. The philanthropist regained his fortune, hired another coachman, and ran over Bontsha in the street. Even then, in the hospital abandoned and penniless, he never cried out. He died as he lived—in silence. Never a protest against man or God.”

Bontsha trembled, fearing what the prosecuting angel might reveal. But when the prosecutor rose, his voice faltered. *“Gentlemen—”* he began, then stopped. Finally, softly, they said: *“He was always silent—and now I too will be silent.”*

The court hushed. Then the Judge’s voice, tender and loving, filled the hall: *“Bontsha, my child, my heart’s child. You suffered in silence. Every part of your body bore wounds; every part of your soul bled. You could have cried out and shaken the world—but you never did. On earth your silence was ignored. Here it is understood. Here you will be rewarded—not with one corner of heaven, but with everything. Whatever you desire is yours.”*

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Bontsha the Silent (continued)

For the first time, Bontsha raised his eyes, blinded by light. *“Really?”* he asked. *“Really!”* replied the Judge and the angels. *“Truly, everything is mine?”* Bontsha continued. *“Truly. Choose whatever you wish—it will be yours.”*

And then, for the first time, Bontsha smiled. *“Well then,”* he said, *“what I would like, Your Excellency... is to have, every morning for breakfast, a hot roll with fresh butter.”*

A silence heavier than any before fell on the hall. The Judge lowered their head in shame. The angels bowed theirs. For this meekness—this unending meekness—was what earth had created.

At last, the silence was broken by the loud, bitter laugh of the prosecutor.

THE END

Four Questions for Bontsha and Me

1. Where in my life have I accepted suffering in silence rather than speaking out, and what has that silence cost me—and those around me?
2. If I were suddenly given everything—if heaven itself told me to choose whatever I desired—would I be able to imagine more than “a roll with butter”?
3. What do I most long for but feel too small, too undeserving, or too afraid to ask for?
4. Paul Simon sang, “Silence, like a cancer, grows.” What does that image say to you?



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More Questions for Bontsha and Me



1..If I were to die today, what parts of my life would remain unspoken — the truths I never voiced, the pain I never named, the love I never expressed?

2. What am I waiting to say that cannot wait any longer — to my children, my parents, my partner, my community, or to God?

3. If my story were retold in heaven, would it be marked by my silence, or by the times I dared to speak out with courage and conviction?

4. Like Bontsha, am I in danger of asking too little of life — settling for a “roll with butter” when my soul longs for more? What would it mean to honor my mortality by asking boldly, now, while I am alive?

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Hiking, Sports, Discussions, Bonfires, Fitness,
Comfy Beds, Good Vibes & More!

**Rest, &
Reflect, &
Return Home
Refreshed!**

***Open to men
in the Jewish
community
ages 21-65**



**Space is limited! Click
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*Open to men of cisgender and transgender experience, as well as to those nonbinary or genderqueer individuals who resonate with the idea of masculinity and brotherhood.



Questions? Contact Noam Raucher at NRaucher@FJMC.org

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Sukkot: Dwelling in What Matters

Sukkot asks us to step outside—of our homes, our comfort zones, and our illusions of permanence. For seven days, we dwell in a fragile, temporary shelter. Not just to remember our ancestors' journey through the wilderness, but to confront our own: What are we building? What are we chasing? Who are we becoming?

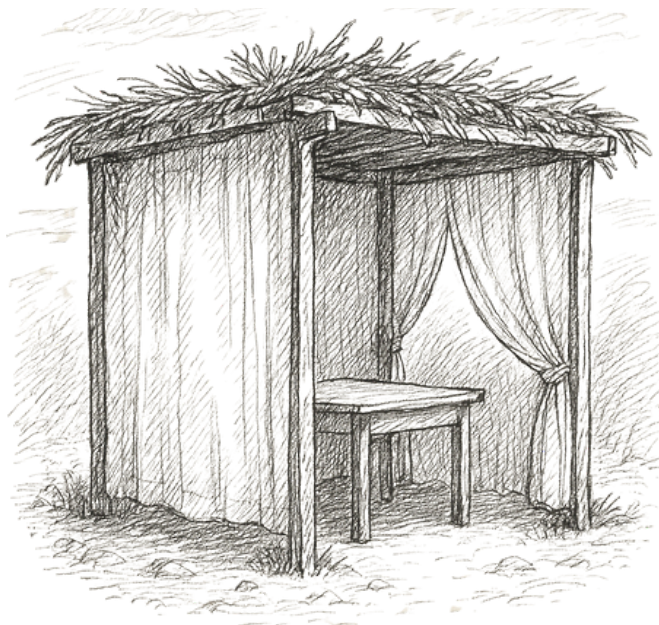
In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl wrote:

"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

This is the essence of Sukkot—and the work of men striving toward purpose. We are not promised comfort or control. But we are given the opportunity to respond with courage, generosity, and meaning.

The four activities in this part of the guide are meant to help you move from happiness to meaning, from reaction to reflection, from disconnection to responsibility. They are invitations—whether you're sitting alone in a sukkah, speaking with a friend, or gathering in brotherhood—to return to the deeper parts of yourself. Because joy is sacred. But meaning is freedom

Ask yourself: *If my life were a sukkah—what would it shelter? What would it welcome in? What would it protect? What would it let go of?*



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Sukkot: Dwelling in What Matters

Purpose: To use the impermanence of the sukkah to reflect on the difference between chasing happiness and cultivating meaning.

Instructions: Sit quietly in your sukkah, preferably at dusk or when you can see the sky. Use the following prompts to journal your thoughts.



1. What parts of my life are designed just to make me feel good—momentary pleasure, comfort, ease—and what parts are designed to challenge me, build me, give me purpose?

2. Where do I lean too much towards happiness-seeking at the expense of meaning or responsibility?

3. In my relationships, my work, my faith—where do I already see meaningfulness that transcends mere happiness? And what might I be avoiding because it's harder but more meaningful?

Response commitment: Choose one small thing you'll do tomorrow that leans into meaning rather than just feeling good. Maybe it's a tough conversation, serving someone in need, or creating something with lasting value.

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Sukkot: A Personal Meditation with the Lulav & Etrog

Purpose: To turn the ritual of waving the four species (lulav, etrog, hadas, aravah) into a daily embodied meditation that helps a man reflect on:

- The fragile happiness we often chase,
- The deeper meaning we long for,
- The parts of himself that are thriving, struggling, or needing repair.



Instructions: Hold the Bundle with Care

- Feel the texture of the *lulav* (palm), the *hadas* (myrtle), the *aravah* (willow), and the *etrog* (citron). Each species symbolizes different parts of the human body and soul—some firm, some fragrant, some soft and fleeting.

Meditate on This Question (2–3 minutes):

- “*Am I living for happiness—or am I living for meaning?*”
- Breathe into that question. Let your mind rest there. Let your body feel the weight and tension of it.

Daily Waving with Personal Meaning (10 minutes):

Wave the lulav and etrog in the six directions—east, south, west, north, up, and down. As you do and consider the following questions.

1. **East (Forward):** What am I moving toward this year that offers true meaning—not just gratification?
2. **South (Right):** Where do I offer love and generosity easily—and where do I hold back?
3. **West (Behind):** What have I left unresolved that needs healing or revisiting?
4. **North (Left):** Where do I need to be stronger or more boundaried—even if it costs comfort?
5. **Up (Heavenward):** Where am I seeking connection beyond myself? What’s my responsibility to something greater?
6. **Down (Earthward):** What grounds me? What humbles me? What anchors me when joy fades?

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Sukkot: Shelter and Sacrifice (1:1 Conversations)

Purpose: To foster a meaningful exchange between two men around vulnerability, responsibility, and choosing to live for something greater than oneself.

Quote of the Day: *“Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how.'”* (Viktor E. Frankl, Man’s Search for Meaning)



How to Do It (Approx. 60 minutes):

1. Meet in a sukkah (or outdoors)

- Sit in a simple, open space. Let the temporary nature of the sukkah (or the image of it) symbolize the fragility of life and the strength found in purpose.

2. Read the quote aloud (above)

- Let the words land without commentary for at least 30 seconds.

3. 1:1 Q&A - Each man speaks for 3–5 minutes uninterrupted. Listener simply holds the space. Alternate answering these prompts:

- What is your "why" right now? What are you living for that gives you strength—even when life feels uncertain or difficult?
- Where in your life do you feel the tension between comfort and purpose?
- If your life were a sukkah, what would it shelter? What would it open to the elements? What would it let go of?
- Where are you choosing meaning—even when it’s hard or unrecognized?

4. Close with a Commitment

Each man states:

- “This week, I will choose meaning over comfort by...”
- Schedule a check-in after Sukkot to revisit those commitments.

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Sukkot: Men of the Open Roof (Small Group)

Purpose: To create a shared experience among men that nurtures reflection, courage, and a recommitment to lives of integrity and meaning.

Quote of the Day: *“The more one forgets himself—by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself.”*
(Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*)



How to Do It (Approx. 60–90 minutes):

1. Meet in a sukkah (or outdoors) and welcome everyone

2. Read the quote aloud (10 minutes)

- Let the words land without commentary for at least 30 seconds then discuss.

3. Triad Sharing - listen, affirm, or ask one gentle clarifying question (20 minutes)

- *Where in my life do I give myself to a cause, relationship, or responsibility that helps me forget myself in the best way?*
- *Where have I mistaken busyness or success for meaning?*
- *What part of my life needs more vulnerability, more purpose, or more sacrifice?*

4. Etrog Ritual – “A Fruit That Holds Our Why” (30 minutes)

- **Leader explains:** *The etrog is the heart of the lulav bundle. It's fragrant, beautiful, and whole—qualities the tradition associates with a person of integrity: someone who studies and acts, someone who leads with both wisdom and purpose. In Viktor Frankl's words: ‘**Those who have a why to live, can bear with almost any how.**’ Each of us has shared something of our inner sukkah—what we hold, what we shelter, and what gives our life meaning. Now we place those commitments into a shared symbol, the etrog—fragile, beautiful, and powerful.”*
- **Each man** holds the etrog and speaks: *“My why is...”* or *“I live for...”*

5. Conclusion:

- **Group wraps** their arms around one another and sings Psalm 133:

הֵיטֵב מֵה טוֹב וּמֵה נְעִים שְׂכֵבֵת אֶחָיִם גַּם יַחַד
Hinnē ma ṭov uma šhevet āḥim gam yaḥad
How good it is when brothers sit together

***Have a sweet and
meaningful new year!***

from,



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שנה טובה!

