

High Holiday Repentance Workbook 2019

by Michael Lerner

To acknowledge our own screw-ups is an important first step. But the High Holidays are not about getting ourselves to feel guilty, but rather engaging in a process of change. If we don't make those changes internally and in our communities and in our society, all the breast-beating and self-criticism become an empty ritual.

In many situations and relationships, you are not the only part of the problem—but for the sake of this process, it is your part that you are to focus on, not the part contributed by your partner, spouse, parents, children, friends, etc. Begin to work on your part during these ten days of repentance/teshuvah!

On these days, our focus is not on what others did to us, but on what we ourselves did to lessen our connection to our highest possible selves and to our highest manifestation of the God-energy of the universe!

What is spiritually out of alignment in my relationships with...

PROBLEM

WHAT YOU CONTRIBUTE TO IT

Parents

- 1.
- 2.

Spouse or Partner

- 1.
- 2.

Friends

- 1.
- 2.

Children

- 1.
- 2.

How spiritually nourishing is your work?

What have been the problems you've faced here? Have you had good relationships with co-workers? Have you felt fulfilled in your work? Have you been involved in collective efforts to change the workplace, or the union, or tried to organize, or have you felt powerless and unable to envision changing anything? If you were in a supervisory position, did you treat your supervisees with the respect that they deserve? Did you discharge anger from work by punishing yourself (e.g., through alcohol or drugs) or by dumping on friends or lovers—or did you express that anger at the appropriate targets or through collective action? Have you taken any of the steps to fight for a "new bottom line" at work? See www.spiritualprogressives.org for ideas on how to do this.

PROBLEM

WHAT YOU CONTRIBUTE TO IT

Relationship to co-workers.

Relationship to supervisors or supervisees.

- How healthy were your coping mechanisms for stress at work?
- Did you inappropriately blame yourself, or dump anger inappropriately on others?
- What kind of political action did you take in relationship to work?

**Did you care for your body this
past year? If not, what didn't you
do that you should have done?**

Eating

Exercise

Vacations

Clothing, Appearance, and Self-Presentation

Quiet Time or Meditation

- Are you taking enough time to nourish your soul?
- Did you care for your soul this past year? If not, what didn't you do that you should have done? In what ways did you care for your soul this past year?
- In what ways did you neglect your soul? Did your soul give you any messages that you ignored? What were they?
- Did you take time to read books that would have expanded your awareness of spiritual life? If not, what do you want to read this next year? Did you give yourself alone time for meditation, for prayer, or for walks in nature?
- Did you take the time to read other books that would have given you pleasure and joy? If not, what do you want to read this next year?
- What courses (evening schools in liberal arts or a new profession, art programs, Hebrew, Jewish studies, studying a new musical instrument, learning about another culture or philosophical tradition) did you take to expand your horizons? What would you like to take this next year?
- What pleasures did you give to yourself this year? Which do you want to expand or initiate this coming year? Did you allow yourself to go to art exhibits, plays, musical concerts, poetry readings, discussion groups, community political action activities, or other events that would have given you pleasure? What do you want to do in this regard in the next year?
- In what ways did you explore your relationship with God or however you wish to name the spiritual dimension of consciousness this past year? In what ways did you ignore that dimension of life? Did you read any books, attend lectures or courses, or dedicate time to exploring the spiritual dimension of your life? Would you be willing to read (or reread) *The Left Hand of God*, *Spirit Matters*, *The Politics of Meaning*, *Jewish Renewal*, *Embracing Israel/Palestine*, or other spiritually enlivening books, and make a commitment now to doing so in the course of this coming year?

Tikkun Olam

Repairing and Healing Our World

- Are you giving real energy to tikkun olam, to healing and repairing the world?
- Which of our society's political, economic, or social institutions have destructive consequences to the environment, social justice, or our capacity to be loving and compassionate human beings? Have you challenged any of them in the public arena?
- What concrete steps have you taken to be involved? What will you personally do to change the status quo? Will you support the Global Marshall Plan or the Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (both can be read at www.spiritualprogressives.org)? Another option is to urge Israel and the United States to back full membership for Palestine in the UN in a resolution that would also support Israel's right to exist in security within recognized borders as a Jewish state that gives full equality in every respect to the religious, national, and ethnic minorities living there (the same that we ask of Palestinians). If not, what will you actually do, or what campaigns or projects will you support with your money and/or your time?
- In 2020 we face elections that will have significant impact on the future environmental sustainability of our world—what actions are you planning to take to help shape the outcome?
- If you haven't been involved, what were the reasons you gave yourself? Which of those reasons presupposed a "surplus powerlessness" (a way in which you were actually assuming yourself less able to initiate things or take leadership than is "objectively" true)? In what ways did you buy the message that "they will never listen," or, "I can never get things to happen," or, "I'm not powerful enough to start something so I'll wait for someone else—like President Obama—to do it," or, "Other people are not together enough, or too immoral, or too passive, so there's no point in me trying to mobilize them," or other similar messages? Would you be willing to start a study group with friends to read about a positive vision of a transformed world, for example Rabbi Lerner's book *Revolutionary Love*, Arthur Waskow and Phyllis Berman's *Freedom Journey*, Ana Levy-Lyons' *No Other Gods*, and Peter Gable's *The Desire for Mutual Recognition*?
- If you tried to be involved, and had hassles or disappointments with other people in the process, what were those and what part did you have in making or sustaining them? What did you do to confront the problems directly? Would you be open to working with the Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP), Tikkun, Beyt Tikkun, the One Campaign, the School of the Americas Watch, 350.org, the B'Tselem (Israeli Human Rights Organization), J Street, Jewish Voice for Peace, Pax Christi, Zen Peacemakers, Evangelicals for Social Action, UUA, Baptist Peace Fellowship, or some other national organization doing work with ideals in which you can believe, and which one will you commit to now and actually stick with that commitment?
- Did you help build a connection to Judaism and the Jewish world or to whatever spiritual tradition or discipline makes sense to you?

- How much did you seek to deepen your knowledge of Judaism, Jewish history, Jewish texts, or the culture of the Jewish people or of Israel? Or of whatever other religious tradition or spiritual discipline speaks to you? What opportunities were there and what were the reasons you gave yourself for why this year wasn't the right time? Will you make time for this in this New Year?
- Did you allow yourself to take twenty-five hours out of your busy schedule each week to observe Shabbat or some similar weekly spiritual practice in a traditional way? Did you meditate, pray, say the prayer of forgiveness before going to sleep, or some other spiritual practice? How fulfilling or spiritually deep did you allow it to be? If it wasn't, what explanations did you give yourself for why it wasn't working? What could you personally do to make that spiritual practice or some other spiritual practice work for you on a daily or at least a weekly basis?