



A Companion for the Days of Awe

Reflection & Return
for Parents and Caregivers

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Still Inside the Story: A Note to the Reader

There are years when we find ourselves in the sanctuary. The melodies are familiar, the pages of the machzor turn easily in our hands, and we feel part of something ancient. And there are years when we are not.

Sometimes we're in the hallway with a child who can't sit still. Sometimes we're in classrooms, kitchens, or hospital rooms. We tend to others—feeding, soothing, teaching, caring—while our own prayers sit quietly beside us. Even in the sanctuary, we may feel far away inside.

This companion is for the caregivers, the parents, the educators—for those whose spiritual lives unfold in the margins. It's for anyone who can't hear every note of Kol Nidrei, who misses the sermon, who lights candles with a baby on their hip or prays silently while holding someone's hand.

You are not outside the story. Your work—however unseen—is sacred. This, too, is avodat kodesh. You carry the season in your body and breath, your actions and your love. A few years ago, I spent Yom Kippur at my son's hospital bedside. There was no fasting, no white clothing, no Ne'ilah. I held his hand and sang softly. My prayer became breath. That year, "inscribed in the Book of Life" meant something different—and deeply real. The heart of these days does not live only in a machzor. It lives wherever we make space for it—with intention, reflection, and love.

This guide is here to meet you where you are. It offers moments of reflection, gentle prompts for return, and reminders that the heart of these days lives not only in the synagogue, but also in the quiet holiness of daily care. Let this be your sanctuary. Let this be enough.

**With blessings for strength, growth,
and joy in the new year ahead,**

Rabbi Yali



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A PARENT'S REFLECTION FOR THE DAYS OF AWE

There is so much that no one sees.

The meltdown at the grocery store you soothed. The lunch that was packed even after a sleepless night. The way you stayed up waiting for the teenager who slammed the door. The whispered apology after you lost your temper. The quick breath you took to hold it together, for just five more minutes. There are entire worlds inside your parenting that no one claps for. No holiday honors them. No one writes them in a ledger. But they happened. You lived them. You carried people through them. That matters.

The High Holidays ask us to return—beyond returning to synagogue or to God. They ask us to return to the truth of our lives and to look gently at who we've been. They ask us to hold up the year and say: This was mine. I was here. This section is a place for you to do that. To pause long enough to notice what this year really held—not in headlines or holidays but in the fiber of your days.

Unetaneh Tokef takes my breath away. "Who shall live and who shall die... who by fire and who by water...." As a parent, it can feel like a liturgical spiral—naming, one by one, all the ways life can break. My mind is already skilled at imagining danger, rehearsing loss, bracing for what I hope will never come. To hear these words is to feel the fragility of life pressed against the deepest hope that our children, our families, ourselves, will be written for life.

Caregiving stretches us in every direction. It is exhausting. It is also holy. When we let it, caregiving can become one of the most powerful spiritual practices we take on. It asks everything of us. It holds the potential to shape us into more awake, more compassionate, more whole versions of ourselves.

These days of return are not only about what happens in shul. They are also about what happens in quiet moments—when we soothe a child, repair something we regret, or pause to take a breath before we respond. Those moments matter. They, too, are gates.

This is not a performance review. It is not a self-improvement worksheet. It is a sacred space.





A PARENT'S REFLECTION

Taking the Time to Check-In

Feet on the ground. Hands resting. Take a breath in and release it. In the midst of exhaustion, caretaking, and constant tending to others, you've carved out a moment for yourself. That is sacred. Let yourself feel the depth of that choice—not as indulgence, but as devotion. You are tending to the sacred within you, too.

REFLECTION

Parenting is not glamorous, but it is holy. The Torah teaches: God carried us "as a parent carries a child." Each act of patience, comfort, and care reflects that same love. I gave more than I thought I could.

- What moments do I remember most?
- Where did my energy go?
- What invisible labor did I carry?
- When did I feel most at home in my role? Most lost?

GROWING FORWARD

Teshuvah is not about becoming someone else. It is returning to the goodness already within you.

- What do I want to feel more of next year?
- What would it look like to be 10% kinder to myself?
- What would true rest feel like?

LET JOY SPEAK

Some memories don't hurt. Some make us laugh just thinking about them.

- When did I laugh so hard I couldn't stop?
- When did I look at my child and feel something like awe?
- When did I notice them show kindness to someone else, and realize the lessons are taking root?
- When did I catch myself doing a good job — choosing patience, offering comfort, creating joy?
- What do I want to remember ten years from now — a moment that almost slipped past?

BLESSING

May you be remembered for the love you gave quietly, the care no one clapped for, the days you didn't know how you'd make it through—and did. You are not invisible. You are not alone. You are inside the story. And you are already returning.





PARENTING IN PARTNERSHIP

A Teshuvah Check-In for Raising Children Together



The work of parenting is sacred. It's also relentless.

Between bedtime routines and school drop-offs, emotional storms and shared joys, the intensity of caregiving often leaves very little room for reflection—especially together. The Days of Awe invite us to pause. To check in not just with ourselves, but with the person beside us in this holy work.

This is not about blame or fixing. It's about return.

Return to your values. Return to each other.

Return to the version of partnership you long to inhabit.

This section offers a quiet space to reflect on how you've grown together—and where you might begin again.

How to Use This Practice

- Set aside 20–30 minutes of quiet time together.
- Begin by reading the opening aloud
- Each partner reflects independently using the prompts below.
- Then, take turns sharing responses, listening without interrupting.

You don't need to write everything down. You can sit with these questions, jot brief notes, or reflect in silence. Just take a few minutes before sharing aloud.

LOOKING BACK ON WHERE WE'VE BEEN

- What is one moment from this past year that made you proud of how we parented together?
- What was a hard moment that lingers?
- When did I feel closest to you in this work?
- When did I feel most alone?

LOOKING INWARD: HOW I SHOWED UP

- What am I grateful for in how you showed up this year?
- Where do I wish I had offered you more support?
- What did I learn about myself as a parent and a partner?

LOOKING FORWARD: WHERE WANT TO GROW

- What do I hope our children feel from us in the year ahead?
- Where do we need more softness—or structure?
- What's one way I want to show up for you more intentionally?





A CAREGIVER'S RETURN

Carving Out A Moment For Those Who Are Holding Others



There are kinds of care that no one sees. Refilling prescriptions. Calling insurance companies. Soothing the child who cannot express pain. Feeding someone who once fed you. Carrying fear silently so someone else doesn't have to.

There are moments that feel thankless. Repetitive. Depleting. Moments where you question whether you're doing enough—or whether you have anything left to give. This section is for you.

Not because it will fix the overwhelm. Not because it will lighten the load. But because it's possible that no one has yet said: This is holy work.

Take a few minutes with these questions. You can write, speak aloud, or simply sit with them quietly. There is no performance here. Just gentle reflection.

Not all mitzvot come with ritual. Some come with repetition.

Not all sacred acts are sung aloud. Some are whispered through cracked lips in the dark of night.

Caring for others—especially when it is ongoing, intensive, or invisible—is an act of profound spiritual strength. You are not missing the season's purpose. You are embodying it.

WHAT HAVE I BEEN CARRYING?

- What have I held this year—physically, emotionally, logistically?
- Who have I been responsible for, and what have I offered them?
- What have I held that no one else knows about?

WHERE HAVE I FELT MOST ALONE?

- When did I most long for someone to notice what I was doing?
- Where do I feel resentment or fatigue that hasn't had a place to land?
- What have I stopped asking for, because it felt easier not to hope?

WHERE HAS GRACE SHOWN UP?

- Was there a moment this year that reminded me why I keep showing up?
- When did I feel even a flicker of connection, relief, or joy?
- What softness or insight came from a place I didn't expect?

WHERE DO I NEED TO BE REPLENISHED?

- What am I still grieving that no one has acknowledged?
- What part of me feels worn thin or forgotten?
- What do I need to say out loud before I can begin the year again?

