

5 Writing/Introspection Prompts for the High Holy Day Season

(Adapted from the work of Dave Ursillo

<https://daveursillo.com/7-mindful-writing-prompts/>)

Many of us may not be familiar with writing meditations and journaling. For newcomers and veterans, here are some tips for how best to engage with the writing prompts below:

- Don't worry about grammar or spelling, just get thoughts into words on a page
- Be open, honest and authentic with the knowledge that no one else is going to read it
- Write by hand in cursive or short-hand if possible, although typing fast into a word processor can work as well (if you avoid editing)
- Write a lot – as much as you can in the available time.

Remember that for writing meditations, you are training yourself to focus on a writing task, **accepting that you may lose focus**, and then returning to focus.

In addition to the meditative benefits of exercising your ability to focus, a side benefit will be creating output, clarifying your thinking and being reflective and productive.

Additionally, if you are more comfortable reflecting on these themes rather than writing, do that! This is meant to be an opportunity for personal growth and exploration no matter how you choose to actualize it.

While there are five options for writing prompts below, please do not feel the need to do all of them. Pick the one/s that speak to you and see where it takes you. We hope you will find them as meaningful as we have.

Prompt #1: Your Story

“What story have I been living lately? What is my ‘story of the moment’?”

One of the themes of Rosh Hashannah is a focus on “Hayom/Today.” As we live in this moment, it is easy to long for the past or hope for the future. What gets lost in that process is how we are doing today? Therefore...

Answer One or All of the Following:

1. What is the story that you've been living lately?
2. Is it a story of struggle, or hope? A story of perseverance, or overcoming? A story of expansion, growth, and new frontiers? Or a story of steadiness and survival amid rapid changes?
3. How would you describe your “story of the moment,” and why?

Explore your “story of the moment” for at least 5 to 7 sentences.

When you finish, go a bit further by analyzing your reflection:

- Is this the story that you *want* to be living right now? Why or why not?
- If not, can you possibly change the story by choosing to reinterpret events, circumstances, and what’s happening right now?
- Can you find a silver lining or sense of meaning or purpose by shifting your perspective?
- Is there a new story you can tell in place of the story you’ve been telling?
- Or, do you need to make some significant changes to your life in order to change the story, itself?

Prompt #2: The Yizkor Prompt

“I dedicate the remainder of my day to the memory of _____ {a person, event, time of my life}. And, in doing so, it reminds me _____.”

When we remember someone who has passed away, we say that their memory should be for a blessing. The way that we make sure that their memory not only endures, but endures as a blessing, is by telling their story and being inspired by their life.

Begin by recalling a memory of a person, event, time in your life that taught you something meaningful.

- What memory comes to mind, first?
- Is it a difficult memory to reflect upon, or an inspiring one?
- What lessons did you learn from this person / during this time in your life?
- How do those lessons

Evoked the memory to reconnect to the lesson or lessons. And dedicate the remainder of your day to that memory. For example:

- What was a lesson that a teacher taught you when you messed up?
- How did a friend inspire you to better yourself?
- How did your parents inspire your own parenting?

Dedicate the remainder of your day to the memory of a person, place, thing, lesson, or time in your life that has taught you something important: something that you need to remember on days like this, in particular.

Prompt #3: On Giving Gratitude

“Today, I am most grateful for _____ because _____.”

Reflecting on what you’re grateful for is consistently shown to be one of the most reliable ways to increase your overall wellbeing and satisfaction with life. It is a great way to begin a new year.

Your prompt is to simply list 5 things that you’re grateful for, *and* to describe why and how you are grateful for it, in 1 to 3 sentences, for each item.

Your list might start really broad, general and mundane:

- I’m grateful to be alive.
- I’m grateful for clean air.
- I’m grateful for water to drink.

(Make sure you actually use the word *grateful* or *thankful*, too!)

From there, you may get more specific:

- I’m thankful for my right to express myself freely.
- I’m grateful for two legs that hold me upright.
- I’m thankful for my best friend.

Go deeper. Get personal, and maybe a little vulnerable, too.

Describe why and how you’re grateful for each item. This is the actual magic of any gratitude exercise: not just listing what you’re grateful for, but connecting to awareness for why you’re grateful for it. So, don’t skimp now! Get specific, and detailed.

Keep up this practice daily for a few weeks, and you may be surprised just how effective it is!

Prompt #4: On What You Can Change Today

“By the time my head hits the pillow tonight, I intend to feel like I really _____.”

The High Holy Days are about returning to the best and truest version of ourselves. It is about determining meaningful changes that we wish to make in the new year. The task in this writing prompt is to start with today. What do you want to commit yourself to today? In other words...

What are you hoping to feel by the end of this day?

Guide the rest of today with intentional energy and direction.

By the time you go to bed tonight, what do you want to feel like you really put out there, feel proud of, won't have a regret about, or feel fulfilled by?

Try not to focus on the exact outcome or result of your day. This prompt is instead all about focusing on the intentions of your actions, words, and thoughts. It's a metric for *guiding* your day. Outcomes and results are probably beyond your control, anyway. And expectations have a way of breeding resentments and disappointment.

What do you intend to lead your day with? Follow that energy.

Express a few ways that you can specifically align your deeds, words, and thoughts to that guiding light.

Prompt #5: Letter to an Ancestor

Set a timer for 10–20 minutes. At the top of the page write "Letter to [Ancestor]". This letter could be addressed to a grandparent or great-grandparent, or even someone from many generations back who you have never met. Write them a letter about your life and current situation.

The letter could take many forms, for instance:

A personal introduction of who you are, your current life situation, goals and aspirations.

A chronological family history since their time.

An expression of gratitude for shared genetics, personality traits, characteristics, heirlooms, or for hardships and challenges they faced or other things which you may be proud of or thankful for.

Your mind will wander, and when you realize that you are thinking about anything other than the letter to an ancestor, return your focus to the writing meditation. Continue until the timer goes off.

We hope that these prompts will provide for an even more meaningful High Holy Day season. After all, these personal explorations are at the heart of what these holidays are all about.