

Week One: Charting Your Course - Identifying Unfinished Business

In *This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared*, Alan Lew recommends that we begin Elul by identifying topics of "unfinished business" in our lives, to give us something to work on during Elul this year. The answers will be unique to every person.

Here is an exercise to get you started. With a pen and paper nearby, sit and close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Think of each full breath as a luxury to enjoy. As thoughts come up that pull your focus from your breathing, jot them down. Don't get into a lengthy journal-type entry right now, just jot a few words to remind you of the topic when you come back to the list after this exercise. Return to your breath.

Allow your body to relax, but don't worry about "doing it right," if you find this tedious, or can't quite relax.

After you have a few topics written down, examine what you have written. Which topic feels most uncomfortable to you, or most pressing in your life right now? Or imagine: if today was your last day on earth, which topic would you be most upset to leave unfinished? That topic might be the best place to start.

Next, think about what kind of an issue you are working with. During the High Holy Days, we often use the framework of **three relationship types**: those with

1. God
2. other people, and
3. ourselves.

Our work during Elul helps us make amends in each of these areas of our lives. So consider, is your focus on the strained relationship you have with a parent, sibling or friend? Is it about your job, or a dream deferred? Is it something more abstract like loneliness or emptiness? How are one or more of the three relationships implicated in the topic you have chosen?

Here is your task: what is something YOU can do to improve this situation? It might be easy to get caught in thinking about how someone else has upset you, or how unfair a situation may be, but for now, find one thing you have control over, and consider doing it.

As a follow-up, write about this issue, your idea for improvement, or how it felt to act on that idea. If you're comfortable doing so, share this with someone you trust and ask for their thoughts. We'll work on this more next week when we focus on, **Relationships & Acting "As If"**.

Further Reading: Alan Lew, *This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared*.