

Introduction

I guess I'm supposed to list my titles and qualifications for creating this workbook. But I don't have any in particular.

Like many people, I've just been really touched by Rabbeinu Bachya ben Yosef ibn Paquda's *Chovot Halevavot* (*Duties of the Heart*) and the Chesbon Hanefesh contained within. Not much is known about Rabbeinu Bachya, except that he was a dayan in Spain and published his transformative book in Arabic in 1040. (Later, Yehudah ibn Tibbon translated it into Hebrew sometime between 1161-1180.) Regardless, tzaddikim and other great rabbanim throughout the generations recognized and lauded the profound wisdom and effectiveness contained in *Chovot Halevavot*.

Yet a complaint many people in our generation voice about classic mussar books is: "But they don't really tell you *how* to do it."

The thing is, they *do* tell you, but many people in our generation understandably struggle to figure this out. (I struggled with this myself.) So I wanted to make his Cheshbon Hanefesh (often translated as "self-accounting," but literally means a "soul-accounting" or a "soul-calculation") more accessible to the modern self-accounter.

It took me a while to understand where the "accounting" was within Rabbeinu Bachya's recommended cheshbonos because a lot of them (though not all of them) consisted of appreciation and gratitude and basically counting your blessings—and not what I considered a conventional accounting of one's actions, both good and bad, in order to do teshuvah and improve one's character.

Much later, I realized that following Rabbeinu Bachya's directions to contemplate all the different kindnesses and favors bestowed on you by Hashem does indeed lead to self-transformation and character improvement.

Then I thought that maybe his guide could be condensed into a workbook. It can, apparently, but I still passionately recommend that you use this in conjunction with the *Cheshbon Hanefesh* chapter within *Chovot Halevavot*. This workbook certainly does not display the vast wisdom evident within the original source. Also, some of the suggestions will make more sense when you see that they are actually Rabbeinu Bachya's suggestions and not mine.

Furthermore, following his suggestions about what to contemplate can actually lead you to a more fulfilling session of self-accounting—a much longer, more intense, and more beneficial cheshbon than you would get by filling out this workbook.

Having said that, you can still use this workbook without the original source.

Listing the favors Hashem has done for you always bestows a positive impact on your soul and your personal growth. It's just better to read Rabbeinu Bachya's original thoughts on the whole matter.

You don't even necessarily need to write them down. Many of these exercises can even be done in your head as you're falling asleep. Falling asleep while in a state of teshuvah is a wonderful *segulah* for sweet sleep.

Finally, some of these exercises seem repetitive—but that repetition is in Rabbeinu Bachya's original *Cheshbon Hanefesh*. Apparently, *chesbon hanefesh* calls for constantly recalling Hashem's kindnesses to us. In other words? Repeated gratitude.

Because Rabbeinu Bachya was writing for his time, each *chesbon* can be pretty intense. Not all of the *chesbonot* are so intense, but quite a few are. Also, I often chose the number 20 when filling out gratitude or blessings because I heard Rav Shalom Arush recommend writing down a daily list of 20 things to be grateful for to a couple suffering from infertility. I decided to try it myself and even though I didn't remember to do it every single day, I ended up giving birth to a healthy baby after 5 years of secondary infertility. (And no, I'm not Breslov.)

How to Use this Cheshbon Hanefesh Workbook

Basically, you use this workbook in whatever way works for you. Everyone's *nefesh* is different with its own path to teshuvah and to reach individual potential.

Rabbeinu Bachya himself stated that each person's *chesbon hanefesh* is different and needs to be performed according to each person's individual abilities.

Accordingly, some of these *chesbonot* are pretty intense, and some people may choose to skip them.

So, for example, it doesn't seem to matter whether you make these accountings in the order they appear. Meaning, if you feel like doing *Chesbon #17* after *Chesbon #2* (or vice-versa), then go right ahead.

This also means that if all you can manage to do is fill in just one line of a section in the middle of the workbook, then that's fine. It doesn't even matter if most of the workbook ends up blank! You still will have provided powerful shining merits for both yourself and for all of Am Yisrael, in addition to impacting your soul—even if you don't perceive the powerful spiritual effect that even a miniscule step of *chesbon hanefesh* has had on you.

In contrast, you can also write more than suggested or do the same *chesbon* 2 or 3 times (though you will need to provide your own paper). You can even write in your own journal rather than writing in this workbook, if that suits you better.

The Power of Teshuvah and Other Spiritual Efforts

Spiritual efforts and results are vastly different than material efforts and results.

For example, if you invest everything you have in earning another dollar or in guarding your diamond watch, and you either don't earn that dollar or you lose that watch...well, then it's lost. All the effort was for naught.

But in the spiritual realm, our efforts result in profound good of unimaginable proportions even if we don't see—and even if we don't at all *sense*—this powerful result. Furthermore, any good you do *always* stays with you. It permanently imprints onto your soul and remains in your Heavenly Account forevermore. Any bad actions you could ever commit (*chas v'shalom*, may Hashem guard us all from sin!) can never erase the good you have done.

Conversely, any bad stuff you do *can* be erased—via sincere teshuvah, tzedakah, making amends, committing yourself to rebuild whatever you have broken, and other types of rectifications.

Even just thinking a good thought unleashes powerful positive ramifications.

So just do whatever you can with a happy heart and no toxic shame.



Note #1: You may need crayons, colored pencils, colored markers, or paints and even a whole separate piece of paper or canvas for Cheshbon #21.

Note #2: A glossary of Hebrew terms appears in the back.

Recommended English translations:

Rabbi David Haberman's translation published through Feldheim:

<http://www.feldheim.com/duties-of-the-heart-chovos-ha-levavos.html>

Rabbi Yosef Sebag's online translation, which comes in several different formats (PDF, text, html, epub) and includes several commentaries for further elucidation:

<http://www.dafyomireview.com/article.php?docid=384>

Hatzlacha rabbah!

Gratitude Owed to Hashem as Your Rescuer and Benefactor

Imagine that your mother abandoned you as an infant and left you lying on a sidewalk wrapped in only a blanket. Fortunately, a passerby spotted you and his heart went out to you. He gathered you up in his arms and took you to his home to care for you until adulthood.

How much gratitude would you feel toward this benefactor?

In much the same way, Hashem has also provided you with all your needs since even before you were born.

Keeping the above metaphor in mind, list 20 ways in which Hashem has cared for you and provided for you.

Suggestions: He provided you with parents, milk or formula, clothing, diapers, changed your diapers, you received a variety of food, you were taught to read.....

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____
- 6) _____
- 7) _____
- 8) _____
- 9) _____
- 10) _____

- 11) _____
- 12) _____
- 13) _____
- 14) _____
- 15) _____
- 16) _____
- 17) _____
- 18) _____
- 19) _____
- 20) _____

Now, while in this state of gratitude, list 3 things you know Hashem wants you to do and how you can improve your performance of these 3 things:

Suggestions: Say "Modeh Ani" with more enthusiasm, say "Shehakol" with more kavanah, apologize to someone—and do so with a genuine sense of healthy accountability...

1) I want to _____ with _____.

2) I want to _____ with _____.

3) I want to _____ with _____.

And next time you find yourself about to perform these acts, try your best to remember to do them with the improvements you listed here. Even remembering only once is still a huge step over never remembering at all.

Gratitude Owed to Hashem for Your Physical Body

Rabbeinu Bachya lists 7 favors Hashem performed for you in your very creation and asks you to contemplate them.

Based on that list of favors, feel free to read the following out loud with as much conviction and appreciation as you can muster:

- 1) Thank You for the composition of my body (i.e., your body isn't arranged randomly, your head isn't sticking out of your shoulder, your hands aren't where your feet should be, etc.)
- 2) Thank You for the completeness of my form (i.e., you don't lack a nose)
- 3) Thank You for the completeness of my essence.
- 4) Thank You for the structure of my limbs.
- 5) Thank You for bringing me forth from my mother's womb.
- 6) Thank You for having provided me with nourishment within the womb.
- 7) Thank You for having provided me with nourishment after my birth, nourishment which was ideally suited to me and which was in perfect proportion to my needs.

Think about how it would be if an unborn baby did not receive automatic nourishment within its environment.

And what if a person's body parts didn't connect properly or were in the wrong places? For example, what if the thigh bone didn't connect to the knee socket?

Now, list 20 body parts for which you feel grateful to Hashem for providing you:

Suggestions: toes, elbows, my heart that beats without any help from me, opposable thumbs, bones, muscles, ear drums...

- 1) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 2) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 3) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 4) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 5) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 6) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 7) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 8) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 9) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 10) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 11) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 12) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 13) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 14) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 15) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 16) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 17) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 18) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 19) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____
- 20) Thank You, Hashem, for my _____

Gratitude Owed to Hashem for Your Intellect

Imagine you completely lacked any intelligence or comprehension, similar to that of an animal. (I know it's actually impossible to imagine, but just try your best.) For example, even a very smart animal like an elephant cannot figure out how to escape from a zoo. Many dogs instinctively chase cars as they would chase after another animal invading its territory, despite how such behavior endangers the dog and means nothing to the car or its driver. Now imagine that someone came along, saw you in that pitiful state, and somehow provided you with basic intelligence and comprehension. How grateful you would be to receive such gifts without even having requested them?

Now, list 20 faculties of discernment and intelligence for which you can thank Hashem:

Suggestions: the ability to see color and to differentiate between different colors, the ability to differentiate between dry and wet, to understand a joke (even the most sophisticated computer cannot do that!), the ability to read, to spell, to add or subtract, to reason, to recognize and analyze conflicting options...

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

6) _____

7) _____

8) _____

9) _____

10) _____

11) _____

12) _____

13) _____

14) _____

15) _____

16) _____

17) _____

18) _____

19) _____

20) _____

Gratitude Owed to Hashem for the Torah

Imagine you just learned of the amazing truth and reward of Torah (like how even the greatest pleasure in This World is a mere one-sixtieth of even the smallest pleasure in Olam Haba; the pleasures of Olam Haba are eternal while even the most powerful pleasures of This World are still so short-lived...)—but you couldn't have any part in it. Now let's say that someone came along and helped you obtain a part in Torah and its reward. Imagine how grateful you would feel...

This is essentially what Hashem has done for you.

Now, list 20 mitzvot you appreciate and why:

Note: It's okay if some of your reasons are superficial. The main thing is to feel genuine gratitude toward Hashem. Conversely, you can also use part of this list to challenge yourself to appreciate some of the more seemingly mundane or hard-to-sense-the-spiritual-connection mitzvot, like avoiding shatnez or refraining from borer on Shabbat.

You can also write the same mitzvah twice if you think of more than one reason for appreciating it.

Suggestions: fasting—because it makes me aware of how much time I actually spending in eating and food preparation; muktzeh—because it enhances the atmosphere of Shabbat; new clothes for chag—because I love getting a new outfit and feeling it's a mitzvah!

Mitzvah

Why?

- | | |
|----------|-------|
| 1) _____ | _____ |
| 2) _____ | _____ |
| 3) _____ | _____ |
| 4) _____ | _____ |
| 5) _____ | _____ |
| 6) _____ | _____ |
| 7) _____ | _____ |

- 8) _____
- 9) _____
- 10) _____
- 11) _____
- 12) _____
- 13) _____
- 14) _____
- 15) _____
- 16) _____
- 17) _____
- 18) _____
- 19) _____
- 20) _____

Your Obligation to Resist being Superficial

Imagine you received a personal letter addressed to you from a great leader, such as a king, a president, or a prime minister. (This is hard in our time, when leaders don't command the respect they once did and many royals seem more like silly decorations than powerful respectable people. So just do you best.) Now imagine that there is a sentence or even just a word you find impossible to understand. Wouldn't you make serious efforts to figure out the unclear part of the letter? Can you imagine yourself making phone calls, sending faxes and emails, and even meeting with people who you think are likely to know what the great leader wanted to tell you?

If that's what you would do for a great leader, then all the more so, that's what you should do for Hashem and His Torah, which is like a personal message addressed to every Jew.

And yes, while there are many aspects of Torah (like Para Adumah) beyond human understanding, we can still delve into other aspects to increase our understanding and appreciation according to our ability.

So with that in mind, is there some mitzvah or other part of Torah that you either do by rote or just never really understood? And rather than addressing that lack of understanding, did you just push it aside?

Write it down here:

Now, list the ways in which you could increase your understanding of that mitzvah or aspect:

Suggestions: Could you make a study of what the commentaries say about a particular incident in the Torah? Could make a sentence-by-sentence study of Shaar Habechinah/Gate of Understanding in Chovot Levavot?

Or perhaps a line-by-line study of Shaar Hasimchah/Gate of Joy in Orchot Tzaddikim, even if it's spread out over an entire month? Could you read Garden of Emuna? Is there a local class or a shiur on Torahanytime.com that addresses your issue? Do you have a friend, relative, rebbetzin, rav, neighbor, or teacher who could shed more light on this issue? Could you take some time to process it through—at least a little—on your own by talking it out with Hashem or writing it out in a journal?



Your Obligation to Obey Hashem out of a Sense of Gratitude

Imagine the following:

- What if Mercury, the planet closest to the Sun, decided to switch places with Earth? (We would all overheat into extinction.)
- What if even one of the oceans decided to ignore its coastal boundaries “just this once”? (Tons of water would flood inland, destroying countless lives, land, and property.)
- What if a person’s heart or lungs decided to take the morning off?
- What if a person’s intestines decided the straighten themselves out or start shimmying “just this one time”?

We’ve all heard of people whose limbs and organs don’t do what they should.

- The pancreas in diabetics doesn’t produce insulin properly.
- The gut of those suffering from celiac doesn’t process gluten properly.
- Tourette’s Syndrome causes a person to blurt out unwanted words or causes one’s limbs to behave in undesirable and embarrassing ways.
- Blind people have eyes that don’t function as they should.

With that in mind, please list 20 aspects of your body or environment that work just right:

(Feel free to get creative with this!)

Suggestions: the ground (it doesn’t regularly and randomly heave or crack), the bones and joints in your feet (you don’t need to consciously will each part of your foot to walk in the most efficient manner)...

- 1) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 2) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 3) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!

- 4) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 5) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 6) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 7) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 8) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 9) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 10) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 11) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 12) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 13) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 14) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 15) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 16) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 17) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 18) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 19) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!
- 20) Thank You, Hashem, that _____ works just right!

Now that you've visualized the tremendous value and kindness of Hashem preventing different aspects of nature and your body to abandon their assigned roles, you're now more aware of the value and kindness of a human being resisting the urge to abandon the mitzvot assigned to you by Hashem.

With this in mind, can you think of one mitzvah—no matter how seemingly minor—that you could try doing just right (to the best of your individual ability, of course)?

Write it here: _____

How could you do it?

Suggestions: making sure your skirts are really long enough, even when you sit down and even when the wind is blowing; finding at least one genuinely positive aspect in every person you meet...

Your Obligation to Serve Hashem out of Gratitude

Everyone needs to acknowledge Hashem's Mastery and Kingship over all. We have been lovingly chosen as Hashem's cherished servants. And even if it doesn't always feel like it, this role is a tremendous privilege which ideally leads to eternal bliss. As much as possible, our service to Hashem should be carried out in a state of joy and gratitude. So try to think of 100 things for which to thank Hashem.

- Try to include at least one thing that doesn't feel good and is even very bitter.
- Try to include 10 mitzvot

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

6) _____

7) _____

8) _____

9) _____

10) _____

11) _____

12) _____

13) _____

14) _____

15) _____

16) _____

17) _____

18) _____

19) _____

20) _____

21) _____

22) _____

23) _____

24) _____

25) _____

26) _____

27) _____

28) _____

29) _____

30) _____

31) _____

32) _____

33) _____

34) _____

35) _____

36) _____

37) _____

38) _____

39) _____

40) _____

41) _____

42) _____

- 43) _____
- 44) _____
- 45) _____
- 46) _____
- 47) _____
- 48) _____
- 49) _____
- 50) _____
- 51) _____
- 52) _____
- 53) _____
- 54) _____
- 55) _____
- 56) _____
- 57) _____
- 58) _____
- 59) _____
- 60) _____
- 61) _____
- 62) _____
- 63) _____
- 64) _____
- 65) _____
- 66) _____
- 67) _____
- 68) _____
- 69) _____
- 70) _____
- 71) _____

- 72) _____
- 73) _____
- 74) _____
- 75) _____
- 76) _____
- 77) _____
- 78) _____
- 79) _____
- 80) _____
- 81) _____
- 82) _____
- 83) _____
- 84) _____
- 85) _____
- 86) _____
- 87) _____
- 88) _____
- 89) _____
- 90) _____
- 91) _____
- 92) _____
- 93) _____
- 94) _____
- 95) _____
- 96) _____
- 97) _____
- 98) _____
- 99) _____
- 100) _____

Your Obligation to Serve Hashem with Gratitude and Sincerity

Rabbeinu Bachya points out that in human relationships, one friend is sometimes just going through the motions of friendship without any real love or fondness in his or her heart. Such a person may send you an invitation only out of a sense of obligation or may lend you money with a condescending attitude or do you a favor with lots of sighing and a sour face as if helping you out in your time of need is *such* a burden.

When this happens, you likely feel angry and resentful, preferring to forgo the simcha, the loan, or the favor rather than suffer the “kindnesses” of your “friend” who only goes through the motions.

How much more so does this apply to our relationship with Hashem!

So first, pick something on which you can make a bracha right now:

Suggestions: a cup of water, an apple, a flower, a fragrance, a new outfit...

Now, write down 5 things about the object for which you are grateful:

Suggestions: this apple needn't be cooked before eating, flowers aren't scentless and often have healing properties, Hashem created bees with the instinct to pollinate flowers and fruit blossoms, which then produce the flower or fruit, cloves possess healing properties...

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

Now, with a deep feeling of pleasure and appreciation, make a heartfelt bracha...and really enjoy the sensation.

Your Responsibility to Perform Mitzvot with Enthusiasm

We often praise Hashem in mouth only. But really, it's our heart that counts.

So write now, take a moment to list 10 praises you personally feel toward Hashem.

(Feel free to borrow phrases from the siddur or Tanach, or to come up with your own based on your own feelings and experiences.)

Suggestions: "I keep stumbling in a particular area, yet Hashem keeps giving second and even eighty-ninth chances!" Or Hashem still keeps giving you things, like a decent home, clothes, and a car—so you could write down that Hashem is "Patient" and "Generous" and "Forgiving" and "A Loving, Indulgent Father." When borrowing praises from the siddur or Tehillim, try to pick praises that really resonate with you—or conversely, try to really resonate with the praises you pick.

1) _____

6) _____

2) _____

7) _____

3) _____

8) _____

4) _____

9) _____

5) _____

10) _____

When you get the chance, take a full moment to look over your list and really experience the praises you chose. Then daven or say a bracha while experiencing those feelings of love, appreciation, and closeness.

Now, choose one mitzvah that you do with your body:

Suggestions: putting on your shoes right foot first, netilat yadayim, giving tzedakah, covering your hair, sukkah, lulav, tzitzit, mezuzah, cooking for Shabbat or chag...

Next time you carry out that mitzvah, try to perform it for one full minute as if an important and beloved king were standing right in front of you, lovingly watching you do it.

Remembering the Attention Hashem Lavishes on You

Intellectually, we know that Hashem is always with us, sees everything we do, and knows every fleeting thought we entertain.

So write down 5 times or situations in which you tend to drift into denial or forget about Hashem's Presence and Awareness:

Suggestions: sending a tweet, updating Facebook, surfing, making a cute yet sarcastic comment, business negotiations, doing something—no matter how subtle—just to stick it to the other person, playing video games, speaking with a friend even when the conversations veers into avak lashon hara...

1) _____

3) _____

2) _____

4) _____

Now, write down 20 things Hashem is doing for you at that very moment you have denied or forgotten Him:

Suggestions: you're still breathing, heart still beating, Sun still functioning, world still turning, eyes still seeing, you were not struck with lightning or tzaraat...

1) _____

11) _____

2) _____

12) _____

3) _____

13) _____

4) _____

14) _____

5) _____

15) _____

6) _____

16) _____

7) _____

17) _____

8) _____

18) _____

9) _____

19) _____

10) _____

20) _____

An Accounting of Your Gifts and How You Use Them

List 10 gifts Hashem gave you:

Suggestions: eyesight, money (even if it's not enough), a flair for style, intelligence...

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1) _____ | 6) _____ |
| 2) _____ | 7) _____ |
| 3) _____ | 8) _____ |
| 4) _____ | 9) _____ |
| 5) _____ | 10) _____ |

Now, list 10 ways you aren't using these gifts properly:

Suggestions: (eyesight) looking at improper images or focusing on the flaws of others, (money) buying not-completely-kosher novels, (fashionable flair) dressing flamboyantly, (intelligence) making others feel like garbage...

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1) _____ | 6) _____ |
| 2) _____ | 7) _____ |
| 3) _____ | 8) _____ |
| 4) _____ | 9) _____ |
| 5) _____ | 10) _____ |

Now, list 10 ways in which you can improve your use of this gift:

Suggestions: guard your eyes, focus on the good in others, give tzedakah or buy better books, make tsnius look classy and admirable...

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1) _____ | 6) _____ |
| 2) _____ | 7) _____ |
| 3) _____ | 8) _____ |
| 4) _____ | 9) _____ |
| 5) _____ | 10) _____ |

Redirecting Your Pursuit of the Physical World

It's easy to get caught up in materialistic and worldly matters.

So list 10 ways in which you get excited about, invest in, or experience enthusiasm for material or worldly matters:

Suggestions: Check stocks first thing in the morning, check email or other social media several times each hour; surf for the latest news more than once a day and when there's no pressing need; invest a great deal of time and money in finding just the "right" hair-covering, outfit, suit, or car (if a cheaper or less time-consuming option could also do the trick); listen to non-Torah podcasts (even if it's not that Leftist slop, chas v'shalom)...

1) _____

6) _____

2) _____

7) _____

3) _____

8) _____

4) _____

9) _____

5) _____

10) _____

Now, list 10 ways you can take that zeal, enthusiasm, attention, or investment and apply it to spiritual pursuits:

Suggestions: Make sure you understand that Gemara really well, say Modeh Ani with a lot of enthusiasm first thing in the morning, focus on getting a chessed done with the utmost sensitivity, focus on getting the tsnius of an outfit "just right"...

1) _____

6) _____

2) _____

7) _____

3) _____

8) _____

4) _____

9) _____

5) _____

10) _____

Your Obligation to Avoid Wasting Time

True humility is not pretending that you possess low intelligence when you're actually very bright, or pretending your exquisitely made and celebrated challahs are just "meh," or pretending that you aren't one of the top students in your yeshivah or seminary when you actually are.

True humility means you recognize your talents, skills, and positive attributes as gifts from Hashem for the express purpose of utilizing them in His Service.

This means that even if you *are* better than everyone else, you cannot take *any* credit for it. None. Your superiority is solely from Hashem and therefore, nothing in which to take pride. Not only that, your greater talents, skills, attributes, understanding, and strengths mean that your responsibility is also greater.

So write down 10 talents skills or attributes you possess and how you can use them for spiritual pursuits (feel free to write the same one twice for 2 uses):

Suggestions: I can use my ability to win in negotiations to inspire others to increase their mitzvah observance, I can use my IQ to help others understand things, I can use my ability to see weakness and vulnerability to build others and help them feel good about themselves...

- 1) I can use _____ to _____.
- 2) I can use _____ to _____.
- 3) I can use _____ to _____.
- 4) I can use _____ to _____.
- 5) I can use _____ to _____.
- 6) I can use _____ to _____.
- 7) I can use _____ to _____.
- 8) I can use _____ to _____.
- 9) I can use _____ to _____.
- 10) I can use _____ to _____.

Using Gratitude to Prevent a Spider Web

Think of someone whom you love very much and who also loves you. How much love, closeness, and devotion do you feel for that person?

Now, what if that person was a powerful official or leader who could get you anything he or she wanted for you? How grateful and overwhelmed by their attention would you feel?

A similar dynamic plays out in our relationship with Hashem.

Furthermore, how would you feel toward someone who once saved your parent's life or rescued your parents from financial ruin?

Again, a similar dynamic exists within our relationship with Hashem.

Using this analogy, Rabbeinu Bachya describes a spider that gradually spins a web over an entire house. At first, the inhabitants may not even notice the thin silky strands. In fact, the occasional strand they notice glistening in the sunlight may even look pretty. Yet if the web is not brushed away and if the spider is allowed to keep spinning, eventually the delicate glistening threads will be woven into a dull thick covering, which will block all sunlight and trap the inhabitants inside.

This is the work of the Yetzer Hara in your heart.

At first, the strands it weaves are delicate and transparent. They don't block you from seeing the Truth. But if you don't brush away those strands, the Yetzer Hara grows stronger until the light of the Truth in your own mind cannot reach you and the thick weave is difficult to remove.

With that in mind, list 10 ways in which you feel blocked and then ask Hashem to help you remove each blockage:

Suggestions: a need to nag or rebuke others (when you know that Hashem is running things and therefore you don't need to; tefillah is much more effective than nagging or criticizing), hard to concentrate on davening and brachos, the preference for reading novels or news to reading any kind of Jewish book, eat too much, work too much, feeling good when you insult or confuse others...

- 1) I tend to_____. Please uproot it from me, Hashem!
- 2) I tend to_____. Please uproot it from me, Hashem!
- 3) I tend to_____. Please uproot it from me, Hashem!
- 4) I tend to_____. Please uproot it from me, Hashem!
- 5) I tend to_____. Please uproot it from me, Hashem!
- 6) I tend to_____. Please uproot it from me, Hashem!
- 7) I tend to_____. Please uproot it from me, Hashem!
- 8) I tend to_____. Please uproot it from me, Hashem!
- 9) I tend to_____. Please uproot it from me, Hashem!
- 10) I tend to_____. Please uproot it from me, Hashem!

How to Prepare for Your Ultimate Journey

Rabbeinu Bachya states the truth we all know, but try to forget:

We won't live forever.

He compares life to a journey—a journey to a faraway resting place.

He advises us to prepare provisions (mitzvot and good deeds) for the journey and to find good travelling companions.

So with that in mind, name 2 middot you'd like to shape up for the "journey":

1) _____ 2) _____

Name 1 thing you can do for each middah to get it up to par:

Suggestions: Fear—read Shaar Hada'agah/Gate of Worry in Orchot Tzaddikim, working on talking to Hashem as if He's right near you (and He really is) next time you feel fear. Anger—realize that everything is from Hashem and for your own good, accept upon yourself to say "thank you" even through gritted teeth) next time something aggravating occurs. Depression—write down or state 20 things for which you're grateful to Hashem.

1) _____ 2) _____

Now, name 2 desires you have which stunt your spiritual growth:

Suggestions: a desire for food, wasting time, interacting with the opposite gender, beautifying yourself past the boundaries of tsnius (can also apply to men), smoking, drinking, texting, Facebooking, drugs (including prescription medication)...

1) _____ 2) _____

Take a moment to close your eyes and ask Hashem with as much emotion and passion as you can muster to please uproot these base desires right now.

You can even write it down if it's helpful:

Suggestion: Hashem...PLEASE!!! I beg You to uproot every last craving I have for _____ RIGHT NOW! I HATE THIS TAAVA! HELP! PLEASE!!!

Remember, these base desires do not reflect on the real YOU—meaning, they do not reflect on your actual soul.

All base desires are built into the human personality for our own good. Hashem put them there (either within your nature or He caused you to develop it via certain experiences in life) because it is good for you to deal with it and rectify it as much as you can. We add merits to ourselves and to the entire world with every baby-step we take to resist our baser desires.

As Rav Levi Yitzchack Bender explained:

“The moment such a pure thought sparkles in the mind, one moment of regret and longing for good... Immediately in a moment, one is already separated good from evil. Already, a good precious moment is counted toward your merit. Even a single instant is not insignificant—it is even very important.”

[Words of Faith, Volume I, pg. 280-281]

And as Rabbeinu Bachya himself said about the possession of any base desire:

“How universal it is!”

Rav Yisrael Levi in his *Tov Halevavon* commentary adds to Rabbeinu Bachya’s words:

“It applies to virtually every person.”

Having bad desires doesn’t make you different than anyone else.

It’s how you deal with them that matters.

Asking for Hashem's Help

Note: You'll likely need crayons, colored pencils, colored pens, or even a whole separate sheet of paper or canvas if you prefer to use acrylics or water paints. You can even use pieces of fabric or yarn, or cut and paste images from magazines.

Rabbeinu Bachya compares working on your middot to tending a tree.

A person can invest a tremendous amount in planting a tree and getting it off to a good start by using quality fertilizer, proper pruning, and an abundance of good-quality water...it still won't produce fruits unless the person continues to tend the land surrounding the tree and to supervise the tree by checking its leaves and bark, and examining whether adjustments need to be made.

Likewise, you can work on your middot, but will not see real fruits unless you make Hashem a part of your work through tefillah and pouring out your heart and thoughts to Hashem.

So, on the following page (or on a separate paper or canvas), feel free to draw a picture of whatever kind of tree you feel you are. (This is purely symbolic, so don't be afraid to draw blue leaves or golden tulips or silver almonds.)

Then on the next blank page, draw a picture of whatever tree you would like to be.

(Again, this is a creative symbolic exercise, so feel free to let your mind run with it using whatever materials or colors you feel like using.)

Note: It's best to do the following in conversation with Hashem.

After you've finished both trees, take a look at them.

What does the first tree tell you about yourself?

For example, are you feeling depleted, out of balance, or did you find hidden beauty within?

What does the second tree tell you about yourself and who you want to be?

Can you make this into a tefillah asking Hashem to help you become the person represented by the second tree?