

Family Journaling

by Sherry Schoenwald

Journaling is a wonderful tool for processing and clarifying thoughts. Journaling together can be a great family project during the Ten Days of Awe. The purpose of such a project is to get everyone thinking on deeper levels in order to search out areas for *t'shuva*; areas where we may not normally think. Doing this as a family will spark some wonderful discussions. Any child who can write simply—even sounding out his own phonetic spelling—can do this activity.

The Hebrew words for this are *Cheshbon hanefesh*. Literally, it refers to an accounting or a look at one's soul; his assets as well as his liabilities. It is sure to reveal not only strengths and weaknesses, but also areas where we are not living up to the potential God gave us.

Each "journaler" in the family should be given a bound school journal. It can be decorated and personalized according to the delights of each person. It can be covered with white contact paper and then with wise sayings, Scripture verses, stickers, personal drawings, or just left plain.

Each evening of the Ten Days of Awe during the family Bible time, a thought-question is given to the whole group. Discuss it if necessary to make sure everyone understands the purpose and di-

rection he is intended to go, and then begin writing. A good length of time to write may only be 5 or 10 minutes, depending on the age levels of your children. You could go as long as 15 minutes. It is important to stop *before* everyone is finished. You should then encourage them to continue during their own personal time. During the 15 minutes of relative silence, you are sure to hear a few giggles, groans or sighs—which of course should spur others on.

If there is time, and the interest is high, you may do more than one question. The type of questions to ask are ones that make you think about taking an account of your life in areas of weakness, areas of strength, areas of sin, areas for growth, etc. Some possible suggestions are:

I like myself most when...

I like myself least when...

I have trouble accepting...

I am sometimes bothered/tormented by the thought of...

What I regret most is...

When I feel I'd rather be average than special, I...

I have sometimes avoided accepting responsibility by...

When someone provokes me or offends me, I...

When I do acts of kindness, I...

When it comes to truthfulness, I...

When I offend someone I...

When I see someone who has a need but it is someone I don't like, I feel...

What do you do when you feel badly toward someone?

What do you do when someone feels badly toward you?

How do you use your tongue? Speech?

Remember, journaling is not writing down the right answer, but looking for the true thoughts of your heart. So encourage everyone not to just give Sunday School answers, but to try to write out the feelings and thoughts that come to their minds.

These are just a few possible questions to get you started. Think about the needs of your own family, and include topics that may hit on areas of struggle or confusion. Journaling helps to sort out thoughts. It would be good to allow some personal time during the day for those who want to write more.

These Journals could be saved and added to from year to year. Hopefully there will be much testimony of God's grace in spiritual growth and maturity.



Awake you sleepers, from your sleep!
Rouse yourselves you slumberers,
out of your slumber!
Examine your deeds,
and turn to God in repentance.

—from Rambam's *Call to Repentance*