



## Embracing “What’s Next?”

Please note: Though this piece was written with directors of Jewish education in mind, it can be adapted for use by anyone contemplating next steps after a long career.

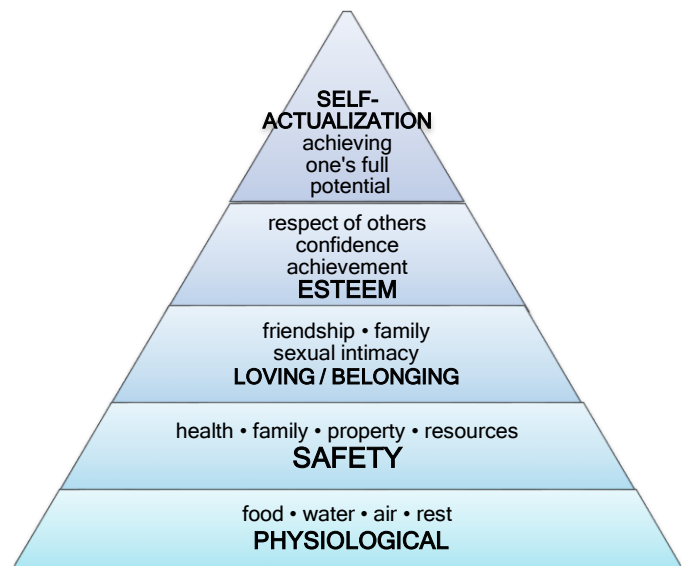
Engaging in professional development opportunities can increase skills and provide new insights at any stage of one’s career. As you anticipate next steps beyond a meaningful career, it is helpful to work with intention to consider the possibilities for a thriving, adventurous next chapter. This self-paced, thought-provoking guide provides a pathway for personal development and reflection.

The goals of this guide are:

- Reflect on the wisdom you have gained thus far in your life
- Consider the values that will guide decisions at a time of transition
- Use Jewish wisdom to frame thinking about opportunities as you move forward

Changes and transitions are a natural part of life—childhood to middle school; high school to college; profession; family; friendship; retirement; *sage-ing*. During younger stages, we typically travel with minimal awareness of the transitions and the choices. As we mature, life’s second half offers opportunities to navigate life’s opportunities and challenges with a sense of vibrancy and adventure, and an awareness of the possibilities that lie before us. Two *bechirot* (choice points) typically involve retirement and aging.

You may recall psychologist Abraham Maslow’s five-stage model describing the human hierarchy of needs (1943). This model proposes that with fulfillment of basic needs—physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem—comes the freedom to develop toward self-actualization. This “*being*” stage involves the desire to seek personal potential, peak experiences, and evolve toward our best selves. Traveling the second half of life, many of us aspire toward self-actualization, seeking greater awareness of life’s joys, passions, meanings, and interconnections.





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Transitions can be seen as the human inner process of adjusting to change (Bridges, 2009). Transitions consist of three phases—an ending, the wilderness zone in between, and the new beginning—and may be accompanied by a range of emotional responses.

These emotions, from discomfort and loss to joy and gratitude, vary greatly depending on perception and reactions to the change.

Similarly, Jewish practice is filled with transitions and *bechirot*. Each year we begin the Torah cycle anew with *Beresheet*, offering awareness of creation, possibilities for re-creation, and reminding us of life’s ongoing transformations and possibilities. Consider the question God asked Adam and Eve in this chapter and Moses later in Torah:

“Ayeka?” – Where are you?

*“Where are you?” God calls out to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. “Ayeka?” The pair has hidden in the bushes after eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil in defiance of God’s one restriction. But God knows where they are located. His [God’s] question is spiritual, not geographic: “Why are you hiding from me?” It is the first challenge to the human view of self-sufficiency in Western religious tradition.” (Jewish Educators, Rabbi Rachel Cowan & Dr. Linda Thal, *Wise Aging*, 2015)*



**In the days and weeks ahead, take time to reflect and record your thoughts on the following self-inquiries in the accompanying *journal*:**

- How can I use my wisdom and experience to explore the next adventures in my life?
- What are the most important lessons I have learned?
- What do I hope others would say they have learned from me?
- Whom and what resources are available as I contemplate next steps toward a thriving retirement/next life phase and aging wisely?





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In his book, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi asks:

*At what age do we become sages? To answer this question, we first need to make a distinction between “elders” and the “elderly.” Elders go through a process of conscious and deliberate growth, becoming sages who are capable of guiding their families and communities with hard-earned wisdom. (Schachter-Shalomi and Miller, *From Age-ing to Sage-ing, A Revolutionary Approach to Growing Older* 1995, p.16)*

### Self-Inquiries:

- What do I value most?
- What do I want to learn more about?
- How do I engage in conscious and deliberate growth in my own life?
- How do I remain connected to my inner vitality and life’s possibilities?
- How can I share my wisdom and understandings with others?
- How can I continue to engage with the Jewish community when I’m no longer in a leadership role?



Our stories matter. What are the stories of your life? In their book, *Wise Aging*, Jewish educators, Rabbi Rachel Cowan and Dr. Linda Thal (2015), write:

*Life review can help us see that in spite of its surprising turns and twists, it is all one story...With these insights, we can make choices to build lives of greater satisfaction in the years ahead. (2015).*

### Self-Inquiries:

- How can I awaken to grow more fully present to my past, my present, and the possibilities in my future?
- How do I re-create myself, personally and as an educational leader in my community, at this point in my life?
- What is one intention (*kavanah*) and action I can begin this week?





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How can you wake up to adventures and possibilities as you create your next chapter?

### ***Modeh Ani—I thank you***

The *Modeh Ani* prayer is traditionally the first thing that a person says after waking up in the morning. The individual thanks God for being able to wake up, and the words are a way to acknowledge the potential of each day. Having God restore your soul each day gives you the opportunity to make every day a day filled with purpose and meaning.

### **How can you wake up to adventures and possibilities as you create your next chapter?**

In contrast to the broader self-inquires in this resource, these simple journal prompts offer a quick practice for reflecting on the day. Self-reflection is a powerful tool for awareness, contemplation and making choices for action. Creating a habit of journaling, even for a few moments, is one path towards waking up life’s insights, inner guidance, adventures, and possibilities.

During the next week, set aside time to answer the following journal prompts:

- Date:
- Today I learned;
- Today I wish I’d learned:
- Today I shared this teaching:
- I could have done this to make it a better day:



### ***Hineini—Here I Am***

The word *Hineini* means more than just “Here I am.” The word connotes readiness, that one is present for those who are calling. When God calls to Avraham the first time, Avraham responds, “*Hineini*”; Avraham is ready to heed God’s call whatever it might be. When God calls to Moshe, Moshe responds “*Hineini*,” ready to hear what God has to say even though he has some reservations about what is said. Even God demonstrates a willingness to respond when the people call (e.g. Isaiah 58:9). Reflecting on how we are leading meaningful lives can help us be more present to the calls of our own souls.

As you venture forth what calls do you hear? What more might you need to be ready to answer *Hineini*?



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