

INTERPRETIVE LITURGY FOR SHABBAT

NOTE: The prayers, poems, meditations and commentary in this collection were composed by members of West End Synagogue, A Reconstructionist Congregation in New York City, for use in synagogue services. The pieces may be used during religious services by other congregations, provided that West End Synagogue and the individual authors, who own the copyright to their work, are cited. Any other usage requires permission from the individual authors, who can be contacted through West End Synagogue

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**Sponsored by the Ritual Committee of
West End Synagogue**

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, members of West End Synagogue have written a number of prayers, poems and interpretive readings for use in Shabbat services, something that is perhaps unique among congregations of all denominations. This collection of more than 100 innovative liturgical compositions is intended to make them available for regular use during West End's services, by individual members of the congregation and by the larger community. It is also hoped that it will inspire other WES members to express in their own words their personal interpretations of, or responses to, traditional prayers.

As an aid to the creative process, we have included in this introduction section three pieces presenting different perspectives on how to approach the writing of innovative liturgy. They are not intended as limitations, but as stimuli to creative thinking.

Mel Scult illustrates the method of converting an essay into a prayer that was used by Mordecai Kaplan, founder of the Reconstructionist movement;

Andrea Bardfeld, who compiled this collection at the request of the WES Ritual Committee, describes the essence of what make a liturgical composition a prayer, rather than simply a religious poem.

Mark Nazimova presents a systematic way to reconstruct a traditional prayer or ceremony and develop new meanings for our liturgical heritage;

Note that the numbers immediately under the prayer names on many pages in this document reference the Kol HaNeshamah Shabbat prayer book (The Reconstructionist Press). The original of each reconstructed prayer can be found on the indicated page.

This is not a static document. As new prayers, poems and commentaries are created by WES members, they will be added to it.

Non-WES members may reproduce selections only with the permission of their authors, who can be contacted through the synagogue office at: liturgy@westendsynagogue.org. Comments, questions or other inquiries about the WES Innovative Liturgy Project should be sent to the same address, and will be appropriately forwarded.

West End Synagogue Ritual Committee, 2007

WRITING NEW PRAYERS

Very early on, Kaplan suggested that the way to write new prayers was to take an essay dealing with religious or theological matters and turn it into a poem. He mentioned this suggestion to Louis Finkelstein in the early twenties but did not take his own advice until the early forties. In 1942, Kaplan was working on his prayer book and turned to a number of writers, some famous some unknown, to use in writing supplementary prayers. In that summer he created a prayer out of an essay by Abraham Joshua Heschel, who was not yet known at all and only recently arrived in this country. The prayer is entitled “The Pious Man” and can be found in Kaplan’s prayer book published in 1945. For those of you who want to read further on Heschel and Kaplan and on this prayer, I published an essay in the journal *Conservative Judaism* Summer 2002 entitled “Kaplan’s Heschel”. That article contains the text of the Kaplan Heschel prayer.

In 1942, Kaplan also created a prayer based on an essay by Ralph Waldo Emerson. The essay Kaplan used as a basis for this prayer is Emerson’s “Divinity School Address of 1838”. In the case of both Emerson and Heschel, Kaplan relied heavily on the language of the original but changed it when it suited him, rearranged the lines and even inserted a few lines of his own.

So for those of you who want to follow Kaplan’s example, I recommend this route. It is not easy but may be productive. If you make it clear that your poem is adapted from the essay and not just taken from it, you will be safe in terms of creating your own prayer.

The Kaplan Emerson prayer may be found in the Additional Prayers section of this Prayer Book.

Mel Scult

SUGGESTIONS FOR WRITING A PRAYER

A prayer – rather than (just) a reading or a poem – should convey a sense of spirituality or a connection to or recognition of something that is greater than oneself. It might also indicate an awareness of the holiness of Shabbat or the holiday being celebrated.

Among the ways to achieve this are:

Some recognition of or interaction with the “Force For Good” or your conception of the divine aspect of reality

This can range from summoning the best in oneself to addressing God (or your name for the divine)

An expression of awe, gratitude, thanks, hope, challenge, longing, or even anger or despair

A recognition of the miracles of life, the wonders of nature, the beauty of the world

A wish for betterment – of oneself, the community, the world, using words such as: Let there be or May we have – (strength, courage, patience, peace etc.)

A statement of our connection to all other peoples and to the universe as an interactive, inter-related whole, with shared responsibility for creating a better place to dwell and to leave for our children and their children.

Mention of our (Jewish) past – our ancestors, our God – and an integration of this past into our religious world of today.

Andrea Bardfeld

SUGGESTIONS FOR RECONSTRUCTING LITURGY

How do we continue the millennia-old practice of developing new meanings from our liturgical inheritance? One way is to reconstruct a prayer or ceremony. A basic approach is to first ask yourself:

What about the prayer or ceremony works for me? Which aspects of it engage me? Its literal meaning? Its underlying message? Its use of language? Its imagery? Its form? The personal associations it brings to mind? Its history?

What about the prayer or ceremony doesn't work for me? Which aspects, if any, seem problematic? Its literal meaning? Its underlying message? Its use of language? Its imagery? Its form? The personal associations it brings to mind? Its history?

How To Begin

Some people begin their project of reconstructing liturgy by diving right in, writing from inspiration; others begin by first studying their subject. When you're ready to study, there are resources at the end of this piece that you can use to learn more about the liturgy with which you're working.

When you're ready to write, consider starting with those aspects of the prayer or ceremony that work for you, and build on them. Your initial reactions, and your reflections on your reactions, can be a good place to start. Take what engages you and run with it.

Consider changing or transforming those aspects that *don't* work for you. Think about their deeper meaning; you might transform them using what you think are more appropriate metaphors, language, or form. If you can, consider changing things in a way that retains an echo of the original work.

For example, if a prayer's meaning seems appropriate (e.g., Shabbat is a holy time in which we can renew ourselves), but the language and structure the prayer uses are archaic and no longer resonate for you (e.g., references to angels, and a responsive format), you could recast the meaning using new imagery and in a new structure.

Alternatively, if the underlying message seems valuable (e.g., behave ethically), but the literal meaning undermines that value for you (e.g., follow the laws of the Torah or God will destroy your crops), then re-express the underlying message (behave ethically) in a new way. Because you want to maintain continuity with the original prayer, try using some of its images, forms, terms, and/or structure; for example, you might use the same structure as the original, or you might use terms and images that are found in, or inspired by, the original.

In all cases, consider making use of images, metaphors, historical references, themes, terms, and quotations from our tradition. You might take them from the Bible, Talmud, other prayers, holiday ceremonies, midrash, history, this week's parsha, or your favorite Jewish novel. They can bring extra resonance to your work, connecting it to the ongoing conversation across time and space that is Judaism.

Guidelines: Striking a Balance

While you're working on your project, there are some general guidelines that can help you strike a balance between creativity and respect for the tradition. Each time you reconstruct something, you may find that you balance the two in a different way.

When you work with prayers and ceremonies, you can:

Change language.

Change names.

Change format.

Change structure.

Change meaning.

You should:

Understand the prayer/ceremony's traditional meanings, language, and form.

(You can learn more about these using the resources listed at the end of this piece.)

Retain some aspect of the original, to avoid changing everything at the same time.

Remember that what you hold in your hands has been handed down *l'dor v'dor*, from generation to generation. What you hold in your hands is a valuable inheritance. If you chose to work with it, you should do so carefully and with respect, before passing it on to the next generation.

The Paradox

West End Executive Director Lila Pahl has said that, when she performs a certain ritual, she has a sense that "this is what those who came before me did." Here's the paradox: if we change too much too quickly, we break the golden thread of continuity that connects us, and the ritual is no longer recognizable as "what those who came before me did." But too little change can make ritual irrelevant or even irresponsible, so that many of us stop practicing it.

Change can be good. But if we change too much too quickly, we break the link to Jews who came before us, and break the link to other Jews around us. Something that was recognizable as a version of a particular ritual becomes unrecognizable. And something that felt like a Jewish ritual might stop feeling Jewish.

It's instructive to hear what Mordecai Kaplan wrote about reconstructing ritual: "To reconstruct means to reaffirm, reachieve, reestablish. ... Where deviation [from tradition] is necessary, two considerations should be kept in mind: One, an effort should be made to find a way of retaining at least some part or element of the traditional practice; the other, some new practice should be instituted that might serve as a substitute for the one that cannot be observed." [*Questions Jews Ask*, pp. 236 – 7, 239.

The Bottom Line

However you change things, the bottom line is that:

What you write should work for you.

What you write needs to be something that is appropriate for the place in the service in which it's going to be used.

What you write needs to work for the congregation.

This *does not* mean that you are limited to writing in accordance with some set of beliefs that you do not share. Rather, it means that certain standards play a role in shaping what you write. For example, using obscenity is almost always inappropriate. Likewise, using extremely obscure language that fails to reach most of the congregation is counterproductive.

If you have questions, or would like help, we encourage you to speak to the person who commissioned you to reconstruct the prayer or ceremony, or to the rabbi.

Resources

Many resources are available to learn about a prayer or ceremony's meaning, language, and form; its origin; how its context and meaning may have changed over time; etc.

The resources below, a fraction of what's available, are a place to start. Most are available in the public library and in Jewish and secular bookstores. Some are also in the synagogue's library and/or the rabbi's library.

My People's Prayer Book, edited by Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman. An excellent resource for learning about the meaning and development of most prayers. Each volume covers a different part of the service.

In addition, the first 26 pages of the first volume provide an excellent brief introduction to the spirit, history, and structure of Jewish prayer and the Jewish service in general. It's a great place to start learning.

Encyclopedia Judaica. Comprehensive and concise, if a bit dry. The first edition is available in the synagogue library; the updated second edition (published in 2007) is available at some libraries (e.g., the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Library on 42nd St.).

Siddurim. Different prayer books provide different translations, shedding additional light on a prayer's manifold meanings. Some also offer commentary. Here are a few to consider:

Kol Haneshemah, the Reconstructionist series of siddurim.

Or Hadash, the Conservative siddur Sim Shalom with commentary added.

Mishkan T'filah, the new Reform siddur.

Artscroll, an Orthodox series of siddurim.

Entering Jewish Prayer, by Reuven Hammer. Covers Shabbat, daily, and festival services (from a Conservative perspective perspective).

Entering the High Holy Days, by Reuven Hammer. Covers Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur services (from a Conservative perspective).

If you want to learn about the development of a prayer in more depth, consider the following:

Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History, by Ismar Elbogen. A classic reference work.

The Canonization of the Synagogue Service, by Lawrence A. Hoffman. Focuses on how the service took on its current appearance in the resolution of ideological/theological disputes between the eighth and eleventh centuries. A fascinating and detailed account.

From Ideology to Liturgy: Reconstructionist Worship and American Liberal Judaism, by Eric Caplan. Examines the interplay of issues and people that produced several generations of Reconstructionist prayer books, and compares the result to Reform, Conservative, and Renewal liturgies. (Some of the personalities were/are West End members.)

Mark Nazimova

KAVANOT **ON** **WEST END SYNAGOGUE**

MISSION STATEMENT

WEST END SYNAGOGUE

Our mission is to develop, nurture and transmit a Reconstructionist approach to Judaism by building an intellectually challenging, spiritually vibrant and mutually supportive community.

BARHU

**BLESSINGS FOR
OUR RECONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACH**

Blessed the love that joins us;
The spirit, the shared intention
that creates community.

Blessed our traditions;
The God of our ancestors,
steeped in holiness and ceremony.
The ark, sheltering Torahs
which teach, challenge, demand interpretation.

Blessed our Reconstructionist theology;
Nourishing the holy flame within -
Urging each toward creative understanding,
Opening paths to participation.

Grounded in our ancient tradition,
Let these paths lead us to
Learning,
New traditions,
and the
Increasing appreciation of, and thankfulness for
The beauty, the holiness that surround us.

Andrea Bardfeld

ON INTELLECTUALLY CHALLENGING

In our charge to build an intellectually challenging community, we must face one of the great difficulties of talmud torah: the setting aside of sechel in favor of our middot -- a willingness to forego the great gift of our human intellect in favor of our emotional instincts. Torah makes us think many things; but how does it make us feel? Do we respond to the stories and the teaching with love, or anger? Humility, or pride? Compassion, or a heightened demand on ourselves or others? When struggling with Torah as literature, are we aware of its teachings about the human condition? When wrestling with Torah as teaching, are we conscious of how those moral lessons guide the arc of our own life-narratives? We should remember that as we are all Yisrael, wrestling with the Divine, we are also always Ya'acov, at our own heels in a constant struggle to realize ourselves.

Joshua Greenberg

ON SPIRITUAL VIBRANCY

The musician draws the bow across the string. The vibration of the string passes through the bridge of the instrument and into its sound post. The sound post, pressed against the inside chamber of the body, causes the body to resonate. The other strings, the ones which the bow did not touch, begin to vibrate as well. They call this phenomenon "sympathetic vibration". Spiritual vibrancy can be found in the resonance of all that lives, for the bow is always moving across the strings. Even in stillness there is movement, and where there is movement, there is vibration and resonance, from one body to the next. When we listen for it, we can sense the vibrations in ourselves, and we can sympathetically vibrate to the resonance of others, and on, and on. Listening for this resonance, we begin to experience a heightened sense of awareness; listening for this resonance, we become spiritually vibrant.

David Friedman

ON MUTUAL SUPPORT

As they were growing up, how many times did I note how my kids did so much better with one another when one was lying on the floor bleeding (so to speak). Although there were some fine points in interpersonal relationships that needed work, early on they did get the

essence of “mutually supportive”. West End gets it also. It isn’t just a phrase in our Mission Statement. We’ve succeeded in establishing a mutually supportive ethos here. Not to say that, like my kids, we don’t occasionally have our small contretemps with each other. But essentially West End “gets” mutually supportive.

All synagogues have some form of Bikkur Cholim, a group committed to lending emotional or even physical support to those members who are in particular need. Which is good. But how many have had a Psalms Project! Some years ago, when our little rabbi – small but mighty – she who would be the one to comfort us – fell victim to cancer, and at an age when one should not expect to think about health issues – well, what to do? We said psalms. We reconstructed some of them. We argued with others. Some we loved “as is.” So, for many months, until that phase of our rabbi’s treatment was complete, every single day each of the one hundred and fifty Psalms was recited by at least one West End member. And our rabbi healed. And who knows how many others of us were shielded beneath the resonance of those same recitations. And we went onward – mutually supportive. Perhaps West End’s finest hour.

So we’ll continue to go on together in some form of mutually supportive “psalming” while negotiating life’s rough seas, on those days when the high waves don’t just part for us.

Jane Weprin-Menzi

SHABBAT EVENING

DUSK DEEPENS

2

RECEIVING SHABBAT

Dusk

deepens.

The frenetic pace of creation
is stilled...

May you

open your eyes to wonder

open your body to rest

open your mind to peace.

And may you, in your renewed innocence

sail on this halcyon Shabbat sea,

'till dusk returns.

Mark Nazimova

PSALM 96

24

Sing to the Lord
and all the earth sings
a new song,
day after day
chimes His name,
blesses Her.

Drum and tambourine and voice
breathe their mysteries, and the new song within us
flattens the cruel stones of ancient gods,
flashes like lightning among the heavens
that the Lord makes,
His glory sparkling love among the nations,
Her wondrous deeds healing the people.

Bow to the Lord
and the trees of the forest
shout for joy, the sea and all within it thunder.
Sing to the Lord a new song.
Her waves, His leaves
will seed a new justice
will celebrate a new harvest.

Helen Papell

PSALM 98

32

O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things.
His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.

he LORD has made known his victory;
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.

He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and
sing praises.

Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody.
With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the
LORD.

the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it.

Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy
at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

Esther Heyman

PSALM 92

48

A SONG FOR SHABBAT

How good it is to sing praises in God's name
To declare loving kindness in the morning
And faithfulness by night!

These were the words sung
By Adam and Eve after the first night
When darkness descended
Without warning or explanation
When they felt certainties
Slipping away and fearfulness
Encroaching on their dreams

But in the morning dawn broke
And in gratitude they sang
This song in amazement
As they awoke to find
They were in the garden
On the first Sabbath day

Soon they would learn
The full glories of God's garden

And the work to be done—
The trimming back of wild
Thoughts that mistake
Another's silence for abandonment;
The pruning of the myth
That we do not have a choice;
The weeding of overgrown
Traditions that need to be plucked—
All this they would learn;
But for now a day of rest

Let this be my song for Shabbat:
May the righteous flourish like a palm tree
Grow like a cedar of Lebanon
In the house of God
We shall flourish
We shall bear fruit
Even in old age
Always vigorous and sturdy
As we sing:
To seek godliness is just
Let it be my rock
Let me do no wrong.

Shira Niamh Brisman

GOD IN NATURE

Oh my God! *Baruch attah adonay...*
(Walked in, dropped bags, it was automatic).
Glanced out the window. Oh my God!
The perfect glowing sun has just slipped away,
painting the sky in pink, orange and purple lights.
Feeling blessed, blessing in return.
Day mixes into evening, light into darkness. *Ma'ariv aravim...*
A moment that is timeless, a beauty beyond words.
The majesty of the moment contains the words of the Creator,
Asher bidvaro ma'ariv haravim.
Projected across the snowy roofs on the other side of the street,
Dramatic accent to the budding greens of spring.
Washed in the steamy heat of summer,
Reflected in the mirror of the changing leaves of fall,
Blessed by this daily gift of renewal, we bless the Creator in return.
Baruch attah adonay hama'ariv aravim.

Margie Schulman

GOD IN NATURE

What of the cardinal's song, piercing winter's crystal air, red coat flashing by,
Or colors of sycamore bark on city trees,
Or stands of white birch glistening in an Adirondack forest?

What of a few brave redbuds, fuchsia starbursts in a leafless Kansas woods,
Or pinky white-apple blossoms, lilacs heady with scent, or majestic irises drinking late spring
rain?

What of the taste of the first asparagus stalk or strawberry, then later, the heft, warmth and
flavor of a tomato on its way from vine to mouth?

What of water in summer heat, speckling pavement hissing from a garden hose or blasting
from a hydrant.
Or the scent of sunshine lingering on sheets swinging in the breeze?

What of the colors of fall, leaves swirling, horse chestnuts and acorns tumbling to ground,
Squirrels collecting, woodpeckers drilling, swallows diving into cloudless blue?

God, whatever you are, thank you for the gifts of the earth: everyday, in every season, with
every sense.

Helen Stein

TZITZIT

72

THE BOUNDLESS ONE *told Moses: Speak to the Israelites – tell them to make themselves tzitzit upon the corners of their clothes, throughout their generations.*

Numbers 15:37-41

May the fringed *tallisim* that we wear today, which once signified free men, and on women now declares both equal stature and multi-hued individuality,

Continue to tie us to the generations of Jews who wore *tzitzit* before us,
to our traditions and to the Jewish community;

Envelop each of us in a protective mantle, head-shrouded and inner-focused,
floating in tradition or connected, with shawl to neighbor's shoulder;

Celebrate passage from childhood to *minyan* member, non-Jew to tribe.

May the strings and knots of the *tzitzit*, that once represented commandedness,
today represent our choice
to participate,
to perform mitzvot,
to search out ways of expressing Judaism that tie past to present and tradition to
knowledge.

Andrea Bardfeld

EMET VE'EMUNAH

74

GE'ULAH REDEMPTION

The Israelites walked into the Reed Sea
one foot at a time.

(What were they thinking about
as the water rose
up their legs
chilling their hearts
advancing toward their open mouths?)

We continue to walk
here, now.
One foot at a time.
(On our better days, forward.)

Alone
I
cannot reach the far shore
without drowning.

Somehow I don't go under.
The person to my right
holds me up.
Something I cannot see
holds him up.

Blessed is the SOURCE of HELP
so often unexpected.
I step forward.
The sea is vast.

Blessed are You, GRACIOUS ONE, for your miracles that greet us every day.

Baruch Atah Adonai, al nisecha shebechol yom imanu.

Mark Nazamova

REDEMPTION

An aluminum can may be redeemed for a nickel or a dime. A grocery coupon may be redeemed for a discount of a quarter or even a dollar. But on Shabbat, we can redeem something even more valuable, ourselves. Each Shabbat, we have the opportunity to reflect and then redeem something that made us imperfect. And in the six days that follow, we can work towards taking “home” something better and improving our lives and those around us. The lines that follow begin with a focus on the world and narrow down to a focus on ourselves. Select one attribute that strikes a chord with you or create your own line. By taking one step forward, we make the world a better place and ourselves as well. This is the path of redemption.

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my faithlessness for belief,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my darkness for light,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my doubt with confidence,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my prejudice for tolerance,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my ignorance with knowledge,

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my banality for creativity,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my competitiveness for cooperation,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my distrust for trust,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my hatefulness with love,

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my anger for understanding,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my cruelty with kindness,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my hostility for peacefulness,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my violence for acts of kindness,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my discord for harmony,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my animosity for goodwill,

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my greed for generosity,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my miserliness with charity,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my haughtiness for modesty,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my arrogance for humility,

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my impatience for serenity,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my indifference for caring,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my disrespect with obedience,

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my pity for respect,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my contempt for esteem,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my slothfulness for productivity,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my selfishness for selflessness,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my pettiness for generosity,

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my conflict for peace,

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my weakness for strength,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my wickedness with righteousness,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my hatred for love,

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my despair for hope.
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my selfishness for worldliness,
On this Shabbat, may I help make the world a better place, and
On this Shabbat, may I study Torah and become a better person.

Harvey Kaufman

EVENING PRAYER

At the end of each day, may we remember

To look back and appreciate

Instances we stayed with a difficult task and made progress

Occasions we were patient with ourselves, and those when we found patience for others

Times someone treated us with generosity or love.

To examine interactions that didn't go as we had hoped –

Seeking avenues to personal closeness or problem resolution,
Determining to make amends where we caused hurt or offense.

To Put To Bed The Cares Of The Day,

So as to sleep peacefully,
Knowing the day was well spent,
Hoping for additional opportunities to inch closer to the person each would like to be.

May we awaken refreshed, and with a sense of possibility and courage.

May we see that every challenge offers a chance to reach out or accomplish –
Each another opportunity to spend the day well.

May we never give up hope; never abandon the search for the strength to overcome.

May we never become immune to the miracles – small and large – that make life wonderful.

Andrea Bardfeld

PLACES OF HOLINESS, PLACES OF PEACE

After the night of exile in *Mitzrayim*,
the awakening to divine presence in the *Mishkan*.
After the darkness of Yerushalayim's siege,
the dawn of Yavneh's flowering.

Guide us from darkness to dawn,
from insecurity to serenity in an uncertain world.

God—*HaMakom*—is the place of holiness;
God is everywhere,
so everywhere can be made holy.
Shalom is the peace of wholeness;
to recognize God everywhere is
to sense the holiness hidden in the world's fragments,
to feel commanded to join the fragments back together into a whole,
into peace.

Teach us to frame the world in Your *Mishkan*, that we might encounter divine presence everywhere.
Cover our sleep within Your *sukkah* of peace, that we might awake to wholeness every morning.

Spread over all of us the shelter of Your peace and an awareness of Your presence.

<i>HaMakom</i>	One of the names of God, meaning The Place
<i>Mitzrayim</i>	Egypt
<i>sukkah</i>	Shelter, booth
<i>Yerushalayim</i>	Jerusalem
<i>Yavneh</i>	The town established by the early Rabbis as a safe haven when Jerusalem was under siege, so
	that Rabbinic Judaism could continue developing as the Second Temple (and Temple-centered Judaism) was about to be destroyed by the Romans.

Mark Nazimova

INTRODUCTION TO THE AMIDAH

88

As work-week cares fade to Shabbat peace,
task-focus to Seventh-Day sanctity and grandeur;
let us participate actively in this candle-lit transition -

Using the silence of the Amidah
to bridge to a prayerful state

Finding renewal in the ancient themes;
reverence, thanks, hope for peace

Or, meditating,
let each open the door between mind and soul;
searching for the path to heightened self-awareness, greater understanding,
increased compassion.

Andrea Bardfeld

DIVINE POWER

Atah gibor l'olam Adonay, ray Lehoshiyah

Overwhelmed by the awesome power and mystery of the universe, we seek help to overcome our innate weaknesses. Science has chipped away at the vast unknown that pervades our world but much remains that is still beyond our understanding. We feel the wind in our faces and move through the rain and snow that swirls about us. But we are barely able to predict them and cannot control them. The living are sustained by marvels of medicine, perhaps divinely inspired but accomplished through much time and effort. Captives are freed after human intervention and life persists despite incredible odds. Our existence is rooted in life and death but they are still beyond our comprehension. We seek salvation but know not its source or dimension. We are mere humans, seeking support beyond ourselves.

Stan Samuels

DIVINE POWER

Each week the world is reborn
even when I'm too preoccupied to notice.

Each day I'm one step from turning,
inches from *t'shuvah*,
but I'm looking the other way.

Each hour the oppressive chain of cause and effect which binds me
weakens as it quietly fissures and cracks
unheard as I bend my ear to the clamor of the street.

Each minute, though hidden from me, is an opportunity
to be birthed
out of the womb of my past
into a better future.

Praised be God
Who makes renewal possible.

Mark Nazimova

KEDUSHAT HASHEM

94

HALLOWING GOD'S NAME

Holy, a spirit of generosity and kindness.
May we always be grateful for its presence.

Holy, the moment of gratitude
The recognition of beauty
The search for the best in each.
Let us sanctify that search,
and each small step achieved toward Godliness

Andrea Bardfeld

KEDUSHAT HAYOM

96

THE DAYS HOLINESS

Sabe'enu mituveha

Samechenu bishu'atecha

Vetaher libenu le'ovdeha de'emet

Whether we step forth to greet it
Or wait inside for it to arrive
It's bound to come every week.

If we are daydreamers—
Living in worlds we imagine—
It comes like the breaking of a spell
Awakening us to the smells and sounds that surround.

Or maybe we are engagers—
Rapt with attention to details—
Then it is a letting go
A receiving of the mysteries that lie beyond.

Whatever it is
Let it come to us
Not with the shuddering force of revelation—
Not the thundering bolt that shakes the very foundation of the house
Let it come quietly
Like taking down from the attic and unwrapping
Something within ourselves that's been hidden there all along.

May we be blessed with the courage to turn our prayers into actions

Shira Niamh Brisman

HODA'AH

100

THANKS

Why is there something
rather than nothing?

Why do I exist, able to pose the question?

I did not earn this.

Bounty beyond measure.

Why is there something
rather than nothing?

Awe.

Why do I exist, able to pose the question?

Amazement.

I did not earn this.

Gratitude.

The feast of life

is before us

inviting

me to partake of it.

To whom/what/ever set the table:

Thank you.

Mark Nazimova

BIRKAT HASHALOM

104

BLESSING FOR PEACE

We cannot undo what has been done to us
nor what we have done to others
for time's arrow flies in one direction only.
So let peace come
to the rubble of history in which we stand.
Let peace come
to the hill on which the Temple used to sit.
Let peace come
to the pit from which the Twin Towers used to rise.
Let peace come
to our souls
surrounded by the ghosts of friends
of family
of lovers
and of ancestors.
Let peace come
to the ghosts of Afghans
of Koreans, North and South
of Irish, Protestant and Catholic
of Cherokee
of Romans
of Palestinians and of Israelis.
Let the rubble grow no higher.
Let peace come.

Barukh atah Adonai she'mazkir otanu lirdof shalom.

Blessed are You, COMPASSIONATE ONE, who reminds us to seek peace.

Mark Nazimova

YARZEIT READINGS

130

CANDLES

And there you are in my arms
in a dress with ruffles,
grinning with just two teeth
as everyone sings to you,
and that's you with handfuls of wrapping paper,
your face smeared with frosting,
and look at you there, showing your doll
how to cut the cake,
and it seems impossible that it's been four years
of me lighting candles you'll never see,
flickering dimly in their fireproof glass,
on the day you were born too soon,
on the day you should have been born,
on the day of remembering
all the birthdays I wanted you to have.

AT SEVENTY

A MEDITATION ON PSALM 90

*“The days of our years are threescore years and ten.
And if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength
but labor and sorrow, for it is soon cut off, and we fly away...”*

*“May the favor of the Lord our God be upon us
and establish for us the work of our hands.
Yes, the work of our hands – may it endure.”*

Psalm 90:10, 17

Our life begins in the warm darkness of our mother’s womb.
We enter the light, first finding family, then friends, later lovers.
Sometimes pleasure, sometimes pain;
Often lost, sometimes found.
Music, art, books, babies;
Work to do, a life to live.

Together, we walk along the shore of the endless Sea,
leaving footprints behind us in the sand,
hoping they will be deep enough to last a while
before disappearing into the ever-rising tide of forgotten memories.

Or alone on its smooth surface, we pull ourselves forward, stroke by stroke,
searching hopefully for meaning in the eternal fog of time.
Looking back, we sometimes glimpse some of the swirls and eddies created by our passage,
But mostly we do not know the full impact that our actions have on the lives of others.

Time passes. Daylight and darkness, daylight and darkness.
Slowly at first, then fast, and faster.

It ends too soon.
Parents go. Siblings, lovers, friends depart.
We’re lucky if our deepest love is with us to the end.

At last we too leave the light, returning to the colder darkness
of our other mother, Earth.

Some imagine we will once again find those long-lost loves.
Others think that we return to live another life; and then another.
But the truth is, we do not know what awaits us there.

No matter. Our life – not long enough, it’s true – is a blessing
for which we can only be grateful.
Perhaps eternally. Perhaps not.

*“...Establish for us the work of our hands.
Yes, the work of our hands – may it endure.”*

Donald Menzi

SHABBAT MORNING

SHIREI SHAHAR

146

**MORNING SONGS
THE BIRDS OF DAWN**

When we first wake up, we don't know much,
but the birds do: sparrow, rooster, peacock,
each can tell the difference between night and morning,
between when we dream our lives and live them.
Their chirps and trills can move us toward noticing
how breathing and not breathing are both part of our days,
and how the light of this world, filtered through our waking,
becomes the song we all know how to sing.

Nancie S. Martin

BIRCHOT HASHAHAR

152

MORNING BLESSINGS

On Waking Up:

How blessed it is to be restored by a good night's sleep and to awaken, refreshed, to face a new day.

The Birds of Dawn:

How simple yet wondrous are the rooster's crow and the sparrow's flight, greeting the light of dawn.

The Earth Upon the Waters:

We marvel at the continents, floating on moving plates, and dividing the seas and oceans.

The Lamp:

Blessed is light and the miracle of vision.

Clothing the naked:

We are thankful for clothes, giving us warmth and protection.

Freeing the Captives:

Grateful are those who were captives and are now free and those who have always enjoyed freedom.

Raising the Humble:

Blessed are those who help to raise the humble and meet the needs of the less fortunate.

Making Firm a Person's Steps:

Blessed is the firmness of our steps on the path of righteousness.

Meeting One's Needs:

How grateful are we whose own needs are met and are able to help the less fortunate.

Girding Israel With Strength:

We are thankful for the survival of the Jewish people and the creation of the state of Israel.

The Splendor of Israel:

We appreciate the great things that Israel has achieved.

In the Image of God:

How blessed are we with the strength and weakness of being human.

Being Free:

How thankful are we for the freedom to act for our own good and that of others.

Being of Israel:

We accept, with courage, the mixed blessing of being part of the people Israel.

Strength to the Weary:

We are grateful for the renewal that permits us to continue our work despite our weariness.

The Marvel of Life:

How incredible and wondrous is the gift of life for us and for all living things.

The Soul:

Consciousness is still beyond our understanding and the soul exceeds our comprehension. But whatever they are — different or the same — we are grateful for them.

The Breath of Life:

We breathe and we live. It is the miracle within us. We are thankful for the breath of life that sustains us.

Torah:

We are grateful for the wisdom and the heritage of the Torah, for all it meant to our forbears and all that it still means today.

Stan Samuels

ELOHAY NESHAMAH

165

I can feel you. The separation is palpable as you carefully place me on the edge.
You have set me down in the shadow of your watchfulness, my essence pristine.
Your presence wraps itself around me, encircles me with its protectiveness as I alight for only a moment.
I take my place.
I breathe and it is a solitary experience, each inhalation an isolated event as my body takes and then gives back.
I can hear the whispers, the disquieting rumbles to which I abandon myself as I am caught up in the wave of humanity.
The soul you have given me floats as it brushes lightly against the others.
I am not disquieted nor do I falter as I am drawn by the pull of generations.
And, when you have willed it, my soul will soar, gracefully folding itself back into the eternal stream of life.
And I will be a memory.

Joanne Feltman

ANOTHER DAY

I awake from sleep and breathe the air, in and out.

I open my eyes and give thanks:

To be alive,

To be awake,

To be aware, of myself and the world.

These are miracles of living,

Miracles of being human;

Of being in the image of our ancestors

And the God they worshiped.

My soul is refreshed.

My soul?

My innermost self,

My mind,

My personality:

That which distinguishes me from all other creatures,

From all other humans.

I am awake: to face the rising sun,

To face a new day,

To face myself and the world,

Ready for Tikkun olam.

Stan Samuels

ELOHAY NESHAMAH

“Elohay neshamah shenatata bi tehorah hi”

Many of us feel deep ambivalence about this prayer – the kind of positive-negative, love-hate relationship that we have with many other parts of the liturgy.

Let’s start with the negatives.

The English translation of the prayer (p. 164) is “My God, the soul you gave to me is pure...” The problem is, many of us don’t believe a single word of it.

We could start with *Elohay* - “My God” – but any discussion of “*Elohay*” and its meaning in a Reconstructionist context would be a whole topic just by itself, and deserves to be addressed on its own, so I’ll just skip over it this time.

Then comes *neshamah shenatata bi* – “the soul that you gave me...”

The traditional view, both Jewish and non-Jewish, is that the soul is “enclothed” within the body, just as our bodies are enclothed within our outer garments. In other words, the soul is our “inner self” – everything about us that is not our physical body.

We describe our inner self as having many different aspects. We speak, for example, of the “conscious” and the “unconscious” mind. We also speak of our instincts, our emotions and our intellect as three distinctly different aspects of our inner selves. Hebrew uses the terms *nefesh*, *ruach* and *neshamah* in the same way to represent different aspects of the soul. Traditionally the *nefesh*, *ruach* and *neshamah* were believed to be centered in different parts of the body: the *nefesh* in the liver, the *ruach* in the heart and the *neshamah* in the brain.

Today we know that the different aspects of the mind – instinct, feelings and intellect – are, in fact, related to three different parts of the brain, but we still don’t know how the physical and the mental – the body and the soul – work together. It is still one of the great mysteries of science. As a result, when we want to talk about the dynamics of our inner selves – our soul – we are forced to fall back on the traditional pre-scientific language of analogy, metaphor, and poetic imagery.

And, unlike the belief expressed in *Elohay neshamah*, one of the few things that all the different religious traditions agree on is that our souls are not “pure.”

Jewish tradition, for example, speaks of two conflicting forces within everyone - the *yetzer ha tov* and the *yetzer ha ra* – the inclination to do good and the inclination to do evil. Our challenge as ethical beings is to resist the temptations of our *yetzer ha ra* and follow the urgings of our *yetzer ha tov*.

In another tradition – I don’t remember which – the master tells his disciple, “I have within me two beasts – a tiger and a wild boar – who fight each other every day.” “Which one will win, master?” asks the disciple, to which the master replies, “The one that I feed.” In this view, our conflicting impulses to do good or to do evil are either strengthened or weakened by the choices we make and the deeds that we do every day of our life.

The same thought is expressed by Thich Nat Hahn, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk who teaches about what he calls “mindfulness.” The mind, he says – we could also say the soul – is like a garden in which many different kinds of seeds are planted. The seeds correspond to all the different potentials of human character and personality. There are seeds of anger and seeds of calmness. Seeds of arrogance and seeds of modesty. Seeds of hatred and seeds of love. “Which seeds will grow and flourish and which will remain dormant?” he asks. The seeds that are nourished and will grow are those that we “water” every day by our choices and our actions. When we express our love and concern for others, we water the seeds of love and kindness, nourishing those aspects both in ourselves and in others. When we “lose it” and let ourselves become angry and shout at our children or at someone who has “made us mad,” we water the seeds of anger, reinforcing and strengthening the unhealthy aspect – what we Jews call the *yetzer ha ra* – not only in ourselves, but also in the people we are shouting at.

This teaching is not about the “purity” of our souls, it’s about their potential for good or evil – and about our responsibility for nourishing the potential for good. It is about taking time to think about – to be mindful of – the consequences of our choices, our actions, and our interactions not just on the outer world but on our inner selves. And not just on our own inner selves, but on the souls of the people with whom we come in contact every day.

If I were going to re-write the *Elohay neshamah* prayer to “say what we really mean” – a phrase you hear a lot in West End – it would go something like this:

“To Whom it May Concern:

I think that my inner self – my instincts, emotions, and intelligence – may still have some room for improvement. I hope that by my conscious choices and mindful actions I am able to nourish and strengthen the best aspects, and minimize those that are less desirable, both in my own self and in the people around me.

Tentatively yours.”

Unfortunately, you could never sing that. And that is reason enough for us not to try to re-write “*Elohay neshamah*...” but to leave it just as it is. Whenever I hear our rabbi and cantor singing “*Elohai neshamah she natata bi tehorah hi....*” toward the beginning of the Shabbat morning service – their voices perfectly matched, with the two melodic lines weaving in and out of each other – it “touches my soul,” if one can still use that

expression. The melody for this prayer is now deeply embedded somewhere in the back corners of my mind, and I often hear it in my head or find myself humming it.

And that is the wonderful thing about the music in our services. It adds an emotional dimension to the words that we say, making it possible for us to sing ancient words that we would never just say, and helping us to maintain our personal links to our people's past.

So now, whatever you may think about God or the purity of our souls – whether you believe in them or not – let us turn to page 165, join together and sing it like we really mean it – loudly, with energy, with enthusiasm, and with love.

“Elohay neshamah shenatata bi tehorah hi.”

Donald Menzi

OUR GOD

Our God and God of our ancestors —

We think of you,
Search for you,
Transform you, informed by a modern lens.

Our God of creation, of renewal -

We experience you in our grown children's support and understanding,
Our little ones' searching questions,
The tiny perfection of a baby,
The birth of an idea.

Our God of "Thou Shalt" —

We access our conscience,
Review values,
Our actions influenced by Torah and our history.

Our God of miracles —

We see you in glorious sunsets,
The magnificent detail of a butterfly, a snowflake,
Unexpectedly wondrous conclusions, illuminating new paths.

Our God of tradition —

We study you, interpret you, and accept but do not accept,
Finally transforming our Eternal One to fit updated understanding, current need -
Creating ways to pray to God as metaphor.

Our Biblical God who responds, sets limits, punishes —

We find your attributes in friends and community who offer caring, insight, occasional anger.
Deny your retributive hand in catastrophes, seeking worldly explanations.
In relinquishing expectations of Fair, embracing the notion that life simply Is,
We turn inward, looking for - nourishing spirituality.

In our finite world, ever aware of circumscribed choices,

May we appreciate the small steps, cherish the daily, enjoy all positive change.
May we have the courage to navigate the crises and the disasters -
The strength to survive the heartbreaks.
May we continue to search for ways to relate, to experience and to cherish the godly.

Andrea Bardfeld

PSALM 92

208

A SONG FOR SHABBAT

How good it is to sing praises in God's name
To declare loving kindness in the morning
And faithfulness by night!

These were the words sung
By Adam and Eve after the first night
When darkness descended
Without warning or explanation
When they felt certainties
Slipping away and fearfulness
Encroaching on their dreams

But in the morning dawn broke
And in gratitude they sang
This song in amazement
As they awoke to find
They were in the garden
On the first Sabbath day

Soon they would learn
The full glories of God's garden

And the work to be done—
The trimming back of wild
Thoughts that mistake
Another's silence for abandonment;
The pruning of the myth
That we do not have a choice;
The weeding of overgrown
Traditions that need to be plucked—
All this they would learn;
But for now a day of rest

Let this be my song for Shabbat:
May the righteous flourish like a palm tree
Grow like a cedar of Lebanon
In the house of God
We shall flourish
We shall bear fruit
Even in old age
Always vigorous and sturdy
As we sing:
To seek godliness is just
Let it be my rock
Let me do no wrong.

Shira Niamh Brisman

PSALM 148

228

Hallelu-Yah! Praise God!

Praise the Source from the heavens;
from infinity surpassing imagination.
Praise, all you souls,
Praise, all bringers of Godliness!
Praise, sun and moon,
Praise, all bright stars!
Praise, from infinity beyond the infinite!

Your very existence praises the Source
whose energy sparked all life.
Your endurance praises the Order
whose intricate simplicity sustains the universe.

Praise the Source from the earth and the sea;
from the infinity of commonplace miracles –
All strange underwater creatures,
The ocean depths,
Fire and hail, snow and smoke,
The driving force of storm winds,
All mountains and hills,
All fruit trees and cedars,
All wild and tamed beasts,
Creeping things and winged birds,
All peoples of the earth,
Exalted or oppressed,
Men and women alike,
Old and young together --
Your very existence praises the Source of Creation,
The Force beyond naming,
The Source of the splendor of Heaven and Earth.

The glorious Life-Force exalts all you seekers,
All who strive to draw close to the Source,
Among the people of Israel
And all who dwell on Earth.

Hallelu-Yah! Praise God!

Kate M. Sherman

CALL TO PRAYER

They built a mighty idol: of silver jewels and gold, And when it was all ready to it their prayers they told.

* * *

In the time of our ancestors there were many gods,
And many names for the One God.
But the God to whom our ancestors prayed
Was beyond naming.
God could not be depicted in an idol, or a statue, or an icon.
But the grandeur of God could be seen in a starry sky.
The majesty of God was evident in a sunset.
The power of God could be felt in an earthquake.
And the wonder of God could be perceived in a newborn baby.
But the mystery of God was all pervasive.

And now we see galaxies, trillions of light-years apart;
Life, written in molecules; Intelligence created from inert wafers of sand;
Man unraveling the secrets of the universe;
And the mystery of God is all-pervasive.

Stan Samuels

BARHU

Blessed the love that joins us;
The spirit, the shared intention
that creates community.

Blessed our traditions;
The God of our ancestors,
steeped in holiness and ceremony.
The ark, sheltering torahs
which teach, challenge, demand interpretation.

Blessed our Reconstructionist theology;
Nourishing the holy flame within -
Urging each toward creative understanding,
Opening paths to participation.

Grounded in our ancient tradition,
Let these paths lead us to
Learning,
New traditions,
and the
Increasing appreciation of, and thankfulness for
The beauty, the holiness that surround us.

Andrea Bardfeld

BARHU

A POEM ON SPIRITUALITY
in the name of
Andre Comte-Sponville

We are inside
at the very heart of being
The very heart of the mystery
a spirituality of immanence: it is all there, and it is what we call the universe

Is it finite or infinite?
We cannot know....not even the physicists
No way of knowing if our universe is the All

But we do have an experience of immanence and immensity

We are in the ALL
...and whether finite or not
It surpasses us in every direction

It envelops, contains and exceeds us

We are inside of it
...it is an exhaustible, indefinite immanence
whose limits are undefined and inaccessible

We are inside it...we live within the unfathomable.

Anyone can experience this by looking up at the night sky.
All you need is a bit of concentration and silence.

You can see billions of miles away with the naked eye.

I can barely see the ground beneath my feet and yet,
far better than in broad daylight
I can see the unfathomable that contains me.

But what worries me

Is not the universe – the apparent or actual limitlessness of space, eternity, silence
....no
What worries me is everything --- everything --- that is, except the All
which I find soothing

Virtually all my worries are egotistical
or at least egocentric ones

I fear only for myself and for those I love

This is why the faraway reassures me
It puts my anxieties in perspective

When I contemplate immensity
the ego seems laughable by comparison
It makes my egocentricity, thus my worries,
a little less intense, a little less powerful

Occasionally it even manages to obliterate them for a few seconds.

What a relief, when the ego gets out of the way
and nothing remains but the All

.

Nothing remains but the enormous *thereness* of being, nature and the universe

With no one left at this particular instant, in this particular body
to worry.....about....anything

[Adapted. The language is the author's but the poem is by Barbara Gish
Sculd]

Barbara Gish Sculd

GOD OF NATURE

What of the cardinal's song, piercing winter's crystal air, red coat flashing by,
Or colors of sycamore bark on city trees,
Or stands of white birch glistening in an Adirondack forest?

What of a few brave redbuds, fuchsia starbursts in a leafless Kansas woods,
Or pinky white-apple blossoms, lilacs heady with scent, or majestic irises drinking late spring
rain?

What of the taste of the first asparagus stalk or strawberry, then later, the heft, warmth and
flavor of a tomato on its way from vine to mouth?

What of water in summer heat, speckling pavement hissing from a garden hose or blasting
from a hydrant.
Or the scent of sunshine lingering on sheets swinging in the breeze?

What of the colors of fall, leaves swirling, horse chestnuts and acorns tumbling to ground,
Squirrels collecting, woodpeckers drilling, swallows diving into cloudless blue?

God, whatever you are, thank you for the gifts of the earth: everyday, in every season, with
every sense.

Helen Stein

EL ADON A MEDITATION

El Adon is a hymn that praises creator, creation, and the world of created things. It was written by an early post-Talmudic mystic who begins with an awe-filled description of the attributes of a mysterious creator. The hymn continues by praising the world of light visible to the mystic's unaided eyes: the luminous stars, the sun, the moon and the planets; the universe known at his time, subject to the will of the creator.

Creation and creator were mysteries to the hymnist. He could describe what he saw, the world of created things, but he could only give exalted human attributes to the creator. Modern humans have augmented eyes that enable them to look at the world of created things from electrons to galaxies of galaxies. But, as with the mystic, for modern humans the creation of the universe and the nature of a creator remain the central mysteries of existence that human reasoning and science seem incapable of penetrating.

In this hymn the mystic blessed and praised God as creator of the lights: the stars that fill all space, the sun and moon that govern day and night, the planets, all of which circle his world in joyous dance. His creator is described, in part, as being of the substance of light, of radiance, of that which he imbued his creation.

We, today, see the same universe but in greater detail. We see that we belong to a galaxy of several hundred billion stars, that there are galaxies of stars beyond our own, that there are galaxies of galaxies. We see that the visible universe is bathed in a radiation that seems to be the remnant of an immense explosive beginning that caused the universe to expand and sent the galaxies rushing away from each other. We see that stars are born, live and die, and we believe that in their death throes are created the atoms from which we are made. We believe that when stars like ours die they become white dwarfs about the size of the earth that eventually cool and become dim, but that when more massive stars die they explode and become black holes.

We draw inferences from what we see, as did the mystics. The mystics were bolder and inferred God. We acknowledge the mystery of the existence of God, but limit our inferences. Even they are shocking and surprising and give us a sense of the strangeness and wonder of creation. We infer that less than ten percent of the stuff of the universe is made of the atoms and radiation that we can measure and that we believe that we understand. The rest is dark matter that we can neither measure nor understand. We infer the existence of subatomic particles that are invisible to our instruments, such as quarks and gluons. We now infer that the universe will expand forever, but, decade by decade, our inferences have changed.

For us, today, understanding keeps evolving but the sense of the mystery and surprise of creation keeps evolving as well. We are true descendants of the hymnist of El Adon.

Alan Oppenheim

AHAVAH RABAH

272

Let us strive to understand, to see, to hear, to learn. to teach, to keep, to do and to uphold with love and gratitude all the wisdom and compassion that our Torah reveals to us. Let us make the Torah's teachings real by our deeds and pass its teachings on to future generations.

May our people, in spite of all the traumas we have experienced, always be a people teaching and doing justice. May we always be a generous people, filled with love and compassion.

Marty Silberberg

THE SOUND OF ONE

We tell each other to listen to the Name we cannot say,
but the Name is ours, and together, with all our might,
we make it what we hear, bigger than all of us.
Starting with a syllable from the librarians of our minds,
ending with a consonant resonant of the past,
we are loud now, our voices – deep, bright, breathy, flat –
rising in six words, each of them an act of creation,
bringing into being the sound of one.

Nancie S. Martin

HEAR, OH ISRAEL

Hear, oh Israel
Hear, oh humans, our family:
Revel in every second, minute, hour
with every extension of your body
give thanks (were our mouths
filled with song as
water fills the sea)
to the Incomprehensible
(and our tongues abounding
with praise like mighty waves)
Live your lifetimes as thanks for their miracles
let every mitochondrion,
every eyelash and fingernail,
every cell sing with praise and adoration
of the One
(we could not possibly thank You
sufficiently, Blessor and Blessed,
for all the wonders
—this life—
which You have given, unconditionally,
as Your gift of love to us.)
With all of your wholeness
with revelations and exultation,
with awe and wonder every second,
give gratitude, glory and love
to the Eternal
for this
the greatest gift of the seconds, minutes, hours,
days, weeks, months and years
and do not let a single one go by unheeded and
uncelebrated.

Arielle Derby

BETWEEN THE LINES

And you must love The One, your God,

Love what is Godly: love justice, and kindness, and bonds of fellowship.
with your whole heart,

With our emotions, our intellect, and our spirit.
with every breath,

Because we never know how many more breaths we have; and as we say these words, we remember those who died before we reached this moment, but who are still with us, because they helped each one of us become who we are, and helped all of us together reach this place.
with all you have.

With everything we bring here—our confusion and our understanding; our ignorance and our knowledge. Our cynicism and our curiosity; our doubts and our faith.

Take these words that I command you now to heart.

Take this teaching that we have received seriously; and take our hearts seriously. Let each of us interpret the words through our heart and mind, and let our heart and mind be informed by the words.

Teach them intently to your children.

Teach our children. Show them the path. But don't just talk; listen, too, as our children teach us.

Speak them when you sit inside your house

The houses we live in, pray in, play in, learn in, and labor in.
or walk upon the road,

The road here: from our homes a few blocks away, and on the East Side, and in the Village, and in the Bronx, and Queens, and Brooklyn; the roads from Germany, from Poland, from Latvia, and from Shanghai; and the other roads that we've traveled to get here—from Orthodoxy and Reform, from non-observance and from observance of other faiths.

when you lie down and when you rise.

When we lie down and rest from our labors on Shabbat; and when we rise to the occasion the rest of the week to build a welcoming, loving, spiritual, and stimulating West End community.

And bind them as a sign upon your hand,

That when we reach out our hands in greeting to our neighbors, we show them our values.
and keep them visible before your eyes.
So that, through all the difficulties of our lives, we stay focused on what's most important.

Inscribe them upon the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

That our gates should always be open to all who want to come, learn, pray, play, and work together to create a Godly life.

Mark Nazimova

TZITZIT

284

THE BOUNDLESS ONE *told Moses: Speak to the Israelites – tell them to make themselves tzitzit upon the corners of their clothes, throughout their generations.*

Numbers 15:37-41

May the fringed *tallisim* that we wear today, which once signified free men, and on women now declares both equal stature and multi-hued individuality,

Continue to tie us to the generations of Jews who wore *tzitzit* before us,
to our traditions and to the Jewish community;

Envelop each of us in a protective mantle, head-shrouded and inner-focused,
floating in tradition or connected, with shawl to neighbor's shoulder;

Celebrate passage from childhood to *minyan* member, non-Jew to tribe.
May the strings and knots of the *tzitzit*, that once represented commandedness,
today represent our choice
to participate,
to perform mitzvot,
to search out ways of expressing Judaism that tie past to present and tradition to
knowledge.

Andrea Bardfeld

EMET VE'EMUNAH

286

REDEMPTION (GE'ULAH)

The Israelites walked into the Reed Sea
one foot at a time.
(What were they thinking about
as the water rose
up their legs
chilling their hearts
advancing toward their open mouths?)

We continue to walk
here, now.
One foot at a time.
(On our better days, forward.)

Alone
I
cannot reach the far shore
without drowning.

Somehow I don't go under.
The person to my right
holds me up.
Something I cannot see
holds him up.

Blessed is the SOURCE of HELP
so often unexpected.
I step forward.
The sea is vast.

Blessed are You, GRACIOUS ONE, for your miracles that greet us every day.

Baruch Atah Adonai, al nisecha shebechol yom imanu.

Mark Nazimova

REDEMPTION (GE'ULAH)

An aluminum can may be redeemed for a nickel or a dime. A grocery coupon may be redeemed for a discount of a quarter or even a dollar. But on Shabbat, we can redeem something even more valuable, ourselves. Each Shabbat, we have the opportunity to reflect and then redeem something that made us imperfect. And in the six days that follow, we can work towards taking “home” something better and improving our lives and those around us. The lines that follow begin with a focus on the world and narrow down to a focus on ourselves. Select one attribute that strikes a chord with you or create your own line. By taking one step forward, we make the world a better place and ourselves as well. This is the path of redemption.

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my faithlessness for belief,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my darkness for light,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my doubt with confidence,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my prejudice for tolerance,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my ignorance with knowledge,

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my banality for creativity,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my competitiveness for cooperation,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my distrust for trust,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my hatefulness with love,

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my anger for understanding,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my cruelty with kindness,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my hostility for peacefulness,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my violence for acts of kindness,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my discord for harmony,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my animosity for goodwill,

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my greed for generosity,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my miserliness with charity,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my haughtiness for modesty,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my arrogance for humility,

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my impatience for serenity,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my indifference for caring,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my disrespect with obedience.

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my pity for respect,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my contempt for esteem,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my slothfulness for productivity,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my selfishness for selflessness,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my pettiness for generosity,

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my conflict for peace,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my weakness for strength,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my wickedness with righteousness,
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my hatred for love,

On this Shabbat, may I redeem my despair for hope.
On this Shabbat, may I redeem my selfishness for worldliness,
On this Shabbat, may I help make the world a better place, and
On this Shabbat, may I study Torah and become a better person.

Harvey Kaufman

○ SHMA AND BLESSINGS

246 - 291

THE TRANSNATURAL GOD IN PRAYER

Note: All page numbers reference the Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vehagim prayer book.

Kaplan believed that the divine works through nature and human beings. He neither identified God with things in the world (natural) nor did he consider God to be beyond or detached from the world (supernatural).

Therefore, Kaplan's theology came to be called "transnatural."

In this view, there is more to the universe than the sum of its parts. In organic interrelationship of all its processes, there are divine powers that truly exist apart from the empirically verifiable phenomena of nature. They are manifest, for example, in human self-consciousness. It takes faith in God to believe that the world is structured in a way that gives significance to the human quest for salvation. A transnaturalist, however, believes that God works *through* us rather than *upon* us. Thus, our sense of responsibility to bring divinity into the world is sustained by the faith that there is a power at the source of human endeavors.

Rebecca T. Alpert & Jack J. Staub, *Exploring Judaism, A Reconstructionist Approach* (1985, 2000, p. 28-29)

To the *Barkhu*, p. 246

Yotzer—Nature, Creation, Light

Recall a morning that reminds of you of the awesomeness of creation.
Climbing Masada at dawn: Sitting down to breakfast feeling the light stream in;
Lying in bed in the morning enjoying the special silence in the country.
Today we celebrate the creation of creation.
Take a minute or two then turn to p.272

Ahava Rabba—Love, Torah, Teaching

Think of those whose love and wisdom have taught you.
Bring them to mind, a parent, a teacher, a colleague, a friend.
Think of a book that has influenced your life.
Today we acknowledge what has brought us closer to the Power that makes for
learning, loving, and teaching.
Take a minute or two.
Turn to page 273 & chant:
Ahava rabba ahavtanu
Then to the *hatima* (conclusion) p. 274
Then the Shema p. 276

V'ahavta et Adonai elohekha

Loving life and its mysterious source with all our heart and all our spirit, all our senses and strength, we take upon ourselves these promises: to care for the earth and those who live upon it, to pursue justice and peace, to love kindness and compassion. We will teach this to our children throughout the passage of the day—as we dwell in our homes and as we go on our journeys, from the time we rise until the time we fall asleep. And may our actions be faithful to our words that our children’s children may live to know: Truth and kindness have embraced, peace and justice have kissed and are one.

Marcia Falk, *The Book of Blessings*

Tzitzit—So that you remember

Pick out a Jewish memory, perhaps from your childhood, perhaps one involving WES, perhaps one involving a family member.

Bring to mind a particularly powerful Jewish moment: a Seder, a recitation of *Kol Nidre*, a baby naming.

If you have not already done so, pick up your *tzitzit*.

Hold those memories as we chant on p. 285

Mi Chamoha—Redemption

Bring to mind a particularly difficult situation that you have come through.

Remember a time where the journey into the unknown was less perilous than the place from which you came.

Don’t take it for granted.

Express your thanks you made to the other side
as we sing *tehilot l’el elyon* on p. 291.

Rabbi Avi Winokur
(adapted)

INTRODUCTION TO THE AMIDAH

292

As work-week cares fade to Shabbat peace,
task-focus to Seventh-Day sanctity and grandeur;
let us participate actively in the transition -

Using the silence of the Amidah
to bridge to a prayerful state

Finding renewal in the ancient themes;
 reverence, thanks, hope for peace

Or, meditating,
let each open the door between mind and soul;
searching for the path to heightened self-awareness, greater understanding,
increased compassion.

Andrea Bardfeld

AVOT V'IMOT

294

I stand on the shoulders of family
of friends, of teachers, of strangers
who themselves stand on the shoulders
of people who stood on shoulders...

each generation of shoulders
a rung on Jacob's ladder
reaching me up toward
Heaven
just beyond my grasp

Mark Nazimova

DIVINE POWER

Atah Gibor L'olam Adonay, rav Lehoshiyah

Overwhelmed by the awesome power and mystery of the universe, we seek help to overcome our innate weaknesses. Science has chipped away at the vast unknown that pervades our world but much remains that is still beyond our understanding. We feel the wind in our faces and move through the rain and snow that swirls about us. But we are barely able to predict them and cannot control them. The living are sustained by marvels of medicine, perhaps divinely inspired but accomplished through much time and effort. Captives are freed after human intervention and life persists despite incredible odds. Our existence is rooted in life and death but they are still beyond our comprehension. We seek salvation but know not its source or dimension. We are mere humans, seeking support beyond ourselves.

Stan Samuels

KEDUSHAT HASHEM

300

HALLOWING GOD'S NAME

Kadosh Kadosh Kadosh, Adonay tzevaot m'loh kol ha'aretz kevodo

Holy, Holy, Holy

A spirit of generosity and kindness.

May we always be grateful for its presence.

Holy the moment of gratitude

The recognition of beauty

The search for the best in each.

Let us sanctify that search,

and each small step achieved toward Godliness

Andrea Bardfeld

KEDUSHAT HAYOM

306

THE DAY'S HOLINESS

Sabe'enu mituveha

Samechenu bishu'atecha

Vetaher liu le'ovdeha de'emet

Whether we step forth to greet it
Or wait inside for it to arrive
It's bound to come every week.

If we are daydreamers—
Living in worlds we imagine—
It comes like the breaking of a spell
Awakening us to the smells and sounds that surround.

Or maybe we are engagers—
Rapt with attention to details—
Then it is a letting go
A receiving of the mysteries that lie beyond.

Whatever it is
Let it come to us
Not with the shuddering force of revelation—
Not the thundering bolt that shakes the very foundation of the house
Let it come quietly
Like taking down from the attic and unwrapping
Something within ourselves that's been hidden there all along.

May we be blessed with the courage to turn our prayers into actions

Shira Niamh Brisman

HODA'AH

314

GRATITUDE

Why is there something
rather than nothing?

Why do I exist, able to pose the question?
I did not earn this.
Bounty beyond measure.

Why is there something
rather than nothing?
Awe.

Why do I exist, able to pose the question?
Amazement.
I did not earn this.
Gratitude.

The feast of life
is before us
inviting
me to partake of it.
To whom/what/ever set the table:
Thank you.

Mark Nazimova

BIRKAT HASHALOM

318

BLESSINGS FOR PEACE

**We look to the God of our ancestors, adapting the threefold priestly blessing of old:
May we be blessed and protected. May we be favored with good fortune. May we all
be blessed with peace.**

Ken yehi ratzon

May we be blessed through stem cell research with cures for some of the most serious ills
that plague us.

Ken yehi ratzon

May we be blessed with lives of wholeness and happiness that are filled with helping hands,
shared smiles, heartfelt hugs, and the joys of dreams made real.

Ken yehi ratzon

May we be blessed by peace in the world, and the eradication of poverty.

Ken yehi ratzon

May we be blessed with the courage to turn our prayers into actions

Ken yehi ratzon

May we be blessed to find our way.

Ken yehi ratzon

*Innovative Service Task Force
February 2005*

BIRKAT HASHALOM

BLESSING FOR PEACE

We cannot undo what has been done to us
nor what we have done to others
for time's arrow flies in one direction only.
So let peace come
to the rubble of history in which we stand.
Let peace come
to the hill on which the Temple used to sit.
Let peace come
to the pit from which the Twin Towers used to rise.
Let peace come
to our souls
surrounded by the ghosts of friends
of family
of lovers
and of ancestors.
Let peace come
to the ghosts of Afghans
of Koreans, North and South
of Irish, Protestant and Catholic
of Cherokee
of Romans
of Palestinians and of Israelis.
Let the rubble grow no higher.
Let peace come.

Barukh atah Adonai she'mazkir otanu lirdof shalom.

Blessed are You, COMPASSIONATE ONE, who reminds us to seek peace.

Mark Nazimova

PSALM 116

366

I pray to God, however God is manifested, He or She or It.
If God hears my pleas and listens to me when I call,
Or if there is only a symbolic deaf ear turned to me, it matters little
For my prayer is also symbolic.

I am mortal and have lived my life, knowing that death is inevitable.
When my life has been threatened I too have called upon God.

God has been described as gracious, beneficent and compassionate;
The protector of the simple and savior of those who suffer.
I cannot vouch for those qualities, though I have been witness for
more than threescore and ten years.
Be at rest O my soul, for God has been good to me.

I have been delivered from death, my eyes from tears and
my feet from stumbling.
I still walk in the land of the living.
Though at times I have spoken rashly, seeing only the evil
in the world,

I have been granted many bounties and must properly give thanks
for them.
I raise my cup of wine and acknowledge a higher power that we call God.
I give thanks for all that I have received.

The untimely death of God's faithful ones shakes the world of the
casual observer.
I am a servant of God, and the son of servants of God though the
cords that have bound me are looser than they were.

I give thanks to the God of my ancestors for my life and my world,
despite their imperfections.
I give honor to God for all that we know and all that we can never know.

Halleluyah

Stan Samuels

HATZI KADDISH

404

Reader:

I find within me a glowing ember – hold a magnifying glass to it, encouraging it to flicker.

I feed the divine sparks with caring thoughts and concerned deeds, desiring a kinder world - knowing I can help make it so.

Congregation:

Let us stoke our flames, fanning them with good will and humane acts, joining together in the light they give to work for a more just world.

Clear-seeing in the intense illumination, emboldened by the warmth of community, let us plan our days — prioritizing to focus on what is envisioned, helping to bring intention to actuality.

May our holy efforts be blessed, praised and glorified, held in honor and revered; an inspiration to others.

May the world that we leave be more peaceful, more caring, more attuned to the suffering of the poor and the needy, the ill and the desperate.

May our children and grandchildren follow in our footsteps, striving to bring the world closer to the godly Eden our ancestors imagined.

And let us say, Amen

Andrea Bardfeld

TEFILAH LAKEHILAH

416

PRAYER FOR THE COMMUNITY

Blessed is our congregation.

It offers welcome, warmth and support to all who enter its sanctuary,

Inspiration and encouragement to its members and its member committees.

May it continue to thrive;

Rich in its tradition,

Thoughtful in its search for an empowering and inspired Judaism,

Creative in its solutions.

May our city be enhanced by our presence.

And may the Force For Good in each inspire us to lead -

Joining with others to care for our world,

Protecting and enriching it for ourselves and for future generations.

May we be blessed by peace in the world, and the eradication of poverty.

Andrea Bardfeld

SEDER BIRKAT HAHODESH

424

BLESSING OF THE NEW MONTH

May we be renewed this month for goodness and for blessing. May we enjoy long life, a life of peace, a life of goodness, a life of blessing, a life of nourishment and sustenance. May it be a life of bodily health, a life in which is found awe for the divine, a life in which we have a love of Torah and godliness, a life free of disgrace and shame, a life of happiness and honor, a life of integrity and discernment, intelligence and knowledge, a life in which our heart's petitions are fulfilled for goodness. Amen.

May the spirit that redeemed our ancestors from servitude to freedom, continue to redeem us, and speedily unite our dispersed kin from the four corners of the earth. Let all Israel be committed to one another. Amen.

The beginning of the month of _____ will fall upon
_____ [the day of the week]. May it come to us and to all Israel for
goodness.

Let this month be renewed for us and for all who dwell on earth, for life and for peace, for joy and for happiness, for salvation and for rest. And let us say: Amen.

Marty Silberberg

PSALM 145

428

Let us celebrate and bless God and God's creation today and for ever and ever.

Let each generation praise God to the next and speak of the glorious honor of God's power and wondrous works.

And while some people will speak of God's terrible acts, we will speak of God's goodness.

We will remember and speak of God's great goodness, and sing of God's righteousness.

God is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger but of great memory.

God shows goodness to all; and God's mercies prevail.

Our universe is an everlasting one, and God's presence will endure throughout all generations.

God upholds all that may fall, and raises up all that are humble.

All eyes look towards God and God responds with kindness.

With an open hand, God satisfies the desires of all living things.

God is righteous in all ways, and holy in all works.

God is close to all who call, and especially to all that call in truth.

God will listen to those that are in fear; God will hear their cry and save them.

God will sustain all who show love, and God's love will change wickedness to kindness.

Let us speak with praise of God. Let all bless God and God's creation for ever and ever.

Andrea Brecker

READINGS FOR YARZEIT

450

CANDLES

And there you are in my arms
in a dress with ruffles,
grinning with just two teeth
as everyone sings to you,
and that's you with handfuls of wrapping paper,
your face smeared with frosting,
and look at you there, showing your doll
how to cut the cake,
and it seems impossible that it's been four years
of me lighting candles you'll never see,
flickering dimly in their fireproof glass,
on the day you were born too soon,
on the day you should have been born,
on the day of remembering
all the birthdays I wanted you to have.

Nancie S. Martin

AT SEVENTY

A MEDITATION ON PSALM 90

*“The days of our years are threescore years and ten.
And if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength
but labor and sorrow, for it is soon cut off, and we fly away...”*

*“May the favor of the Lord our God be upon us
and establish for us the work of our hands.
Yes, the work of our hands – may it endure.”*

Psalm 90:10, 17

Our life begins in the warm darkness of our mother’s womb.
We enter the light, first finding family, then friends, later lovers.
Sometimes pleasure, sometimes pain;
Often lost, sometimes found.
Music, art, books, babies;
Work to do, a life to live.

Together, we walk along the shore of the endless Sea,
leaving footprints behind us in the sand,
hoping they will be deep enough to last a while
before disappearing into the ever-rising tide of forgotten memories.

Or alone on its smooth surface, we pull ourselves forward, stroke by stroke,
searching hopefully for meaning in the eternal fog of time.
Looking back, we sometimes glimpse some of the swirls and eddies created by our passage,
But mostly we do not know the full impact that our actions have on the lives of others.

Time passes. Daylight and darkness, daylight and darkness.
Slowly at first, then fast, and faster.

It ends too soon.
Parents go. Siblings, lovers, friends depart.
We’re lucky if our deepest love is with us to the end.

At last we too leave the light, returning to the colder darkness
of our other mother, Earth

Some imagine we will once again find those long-lost loves.
Others think that we return to live another life; and then another.
But the truth is, we do not know what awaits us there.

No matter. Our life – not long enough, it's true – is a blessing
for which we can only be grateful.
Perhaps eternally. Perhaps not.

*“...Establish for us the work of our hands.
Yes, the work of our hands – may it endure.”*

Donald Menzi

ADDITIONAL KAVANOT

NEEDED - PROPHETS FOR OUR DAY

He who makes me aware that I am an infinite soul heartens me.
He who gives me to myself lifts me.
He who shows God in me fortifies me.
He who hides God from me destroys the reason for my being.
The divine prophets, bards and lawgivers are friends of my virtue, of my intellect,
of my strength.
Noble provocations go out from them, inviting me to resist evil.
But let us not speak of revelations as something long ago given and done.
Only by coming to the God in ourselves can we grow forevermore.
Let us not say that the age of inspiration is past, that the Bible is closed.
Let us learn to believe in the soul of man, and not merely in men departed.
The need was never greater of new revelations than now.
The faith of man has suffered universal decay.
The heart moans, because it is bereaved of consolation and hope and grandeur.
We feel defrauded and disconsolate.
Our religion has become spectral.
It has lost its grasp on the affection of the good and on the fear of the bad.
What greater calamity can befall a nation than the loss of worship?
Then all things go to decay.
Genius leaves the Temple.
Literature becomes frivolous.
Science is cold.
The eye of youth is not lighted by hope of a better world.
Society lives for trifles
In the soul let redemption be sought.
Let the keepers of religion show us that God is, not was.
That He speaketh, not spoke.
And thus cheer our fainting hearts with new hope and new revelation.

*Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan
in the name of
Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Note: Rabbi Kaplan [1881-1983] used to say that if you would compose a prayer, begin with an essay. So one day in the summer of '42 he composed this prayer based on Ralph W. Emerson's Divinity School Address. The language is Emerson's but the prayer is Kaplan's. He intended to put it into his Sabbath prayerbook as an additional reading. The prayer is found in his journal.

Mel Scult.

THE LAWS OF THE SOUL

The laws of the soul execute themselves.
They are not subject to circumstance.
In the soul of man there is a justice whose retributions are instant and entire.
He who does a good deed is instantly ennobled.
He who does a mean deed is by that action itself contracted.
He who puts off impurity thereby puts on purity.
If a man is at heart just, the safety and the majesty of God do enter into him.
If a man dissemble or deceive he deceives himself and goes out of acquaintance with his own being.
The man who reverences himself comes to himself.
Character is always known.
Thefts never enrich.
Alms never impoverish.
Murder will speak out of stone walls.
The least admixture of a lie, the least taint of vanity will instantly vitiate the effect.
But speak the truth, and all nature and all spirits help you with unexpected furtherance
Speak the truth and all things alive or brute are vouchers.
As we are, so we associate.
The good by affinity seek the good.
The vile by affinity, the vile.
Thus of their own volition souls proceed to heaven or to hell.
These truths point to the sublime creed that the world is the product of but one will, one mind,
That one mind is everywhere active, in each ray of the star, in each wavelet of the pool.
So much benevolence as a man hath, so much of life hath he.
He who seeks good ends is strong by the whole strength of God.
For all good proceeds out of the same spirit variously named love, justice, temperance, just
as the ocean receives different names on the several shores which it washes.

*Mordecai M. Kaplan
in the name of
Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Note: Rabbi Kaplan used to say that if you would compose a prayer, begin with an essay. So one day in the summer of '42 he composed this prayer based on Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Compensation". The language is Emerson's but the prayer is Kaplan's.

Mel Scult

THESE QUIET MOMENTS

These quiet moments of Shabbat open my soul.
Blessed with this week of life,
I give thanks to God
Who has created and sustained us.

For all the good I have known during the
days that have passed, I am very grateful.
For the opportunities to study and to
rejoice and to share with friends, I am thankful.

I know I have not always responded with my best effort,
but often, I did earnestly try. I have tried
to give my family love and devotion, and I pray
that I may grow more loving as the years pass.

Even as I regret my weakness, I rejoice in
my accomplishments.

Let those minor achievements, O God, lead to
many others. May I be blessed on each Shabbat
with the sense of having grown in goodness and compassion.

There have been times when I endeavored
to help those in need; Now I ask only that
I may be able to do yet more, for the need is so great.

Let my actions testify to my worth as Your
partner in creation; More and more let me find my
life's meaning in working with others to bless our
lives by making this a better world.

Rabbi Lawrence M. Pinsker

THE ROLE OF THE HAZZAN

The Bible describes the human being as having two aspects – physical and spiritual – an outward, visible body and an inner, invisible soul. Kabbalah describes the written Torah in similar terms. To the kabbalist, the “body” of the written Torah is made up of the 22 Hebrew letters that are physically penned in ink on the parchment of the Torah scroll. The “soul” of Torah consists of those aspects of the text that are not actually written down – the vowels telling us how the text is actually pronounced and the cantillation marks that give us the melodies to which the Torah is to be chanted or sung. Just as the human being is only fully alive when its body is united with its soul as one, so the written Torah only comes to life when the letters – inert, lifeless ink on parchment – are sung or read aloud. It is the task of the Hazzan to unite the visible with invisible aspects of Torah – the outward and physical with the inward and spiritual – bringing it to life for us to learn from and to enjoy.

Donald Menzi

GRACE BEFORE MEALS

We are thankful for the meal we are about to eat.

We are aware that our sustenance depends on the sacrifice of animals and plants.

May we fulfill our human potential, so that we may be worthy of this sacrifice.

Andrea Bardfeld

Note: I wrote this prayer when my children were small. We said it every night before dinner, all the years they were growing up. It has been used by others in the WES community before dinner on Friday nights.

BREATHING AND BELIEVING

The barrier breaks and the mother urges her child from the womb.
The infant unknowingly hungers to be filled by a newfound life.
The air courses through the universe finding its way into empty spaces.
The breathing begins.
There is nothing to think about.
Air in. Air out.
Breath is everywhere and nowhere it's ever been before.
Even in sleep the breath slinks past lips, cooling tongues as molecules of air slide down passages.
Empty spaces swell and the air is expelled in waves so that the cycle can begin again.
Breathe in. Breathe out.
An internal, portable mantra.
Breathe in a moment. Breathe out yesterday.
Breathe in a smile. Breathe out tomorrow.
Breathe in the smell of your grandparents' house. Breathe out last night's fight with your brother.
Breathe in the memory of the last time you saw the moon rise. Breathe out worrying about the work on your desk.
Breathe in joy. Breathe out sadness.
Breathe in gratitude. Breathe out resentment.
Breathe in acceptance. Breathe out denial.
Breathe in love. Breathe out hate.
Breathe in forgiveness. Breathe out blame.
Breathe in generosity. Breathe out judgment.
Breathe in faith. Breathe out fear.
Keep breathing.
Keep listening.
The answers are in the breath.
God speaks back if we listen.
Until the end of our days when the air no longer seeks us out, when the universe is ready to move on to new empty spaces,
God will be waiting for us, with each breath, always ready to hear when we are ready to listen.

Joanne Feltman

THE SECRET

I'm only half ready for you, Lord;
divided from myself, but seeking wholeness.

I know the secret lies in plain sight within me, but
I'm half afraid to look for it with open eyes,
for fear that I might find it.

“Seek simplicity,” you say, “The Whole can be found
in the smallest of its parts.”
So when I find the single seed from which the
Universe springs anew each day,
I'll call it by your Name, and know that it was in my hand
all along.

Donald Menzi

BEING PART OF THE UNIVERSE

Let us begin by remembering that the spiritual always points toward the unity of things not their division. Judaism tries to help us to work from a higher perspective. To recite our prayers is to see ourselves as an integral part of all that is and not to see ourselves as the measure of all things. The egotistical, self-centered part of our mind, "the evil urge" if you will, always leads us to experience our separateness from the natural world. When we see ourselves as part of creation, born primarily to tend the Garden and nurture it than we will be acting out of our higher selves.

The declaration of belief in one God is in part a call to reintegrate ourselves into the fabric of the natural world and to do our part to preserve the universe out of which we come.

Mel Scult

A word from Nahman of Bratslav. " The world was created only for the sake of the choice and the choosing one. We as masters of choice should say; The whole world has been created for my sake. Therefore, I shall take care at every time and in every place to redeem the world and fill its want."

MIXED BLESSINGS OF BELONGING

A hard day. An overflowing mailbox.
Messages on the machine.
One needs to talk. One needs to vent.
Is everything ok? Long, deep breath.
One has a triumph to report. Excited. Shallow breath.
One's news is not so good. Sigh.
Breathe in unison. Breathe in love.

Sharing our present. Sharing our future.
One remembers. One forgets. One recalls it differently.

Sharing our past.
The stories from before we even knew each other.

Sharing a history.
Belonging to family. Belonging to friends.
Don't forget the meeting tomorrow.
We need volunteers. Can you fill in on Saturday?
Want to study, want to learn a new skill. But it's scary.
We're here with support. Breathe together.

Congratulations. We're here to celebrate.

Condolences. We're here to help.

Sharing mixed blessings but always feeling blessed.
Stories filtered through the telling and re-telling.

Sharing a heritage from before there was history.

Belonging to our community. Belonging to all Jewish community.

Margie Schulman

BELIEVING

Can one believe in miracles
And not believe in God?
How do you define a miracle?
What do you mean by God?

Behold the cycle of the moon
Gives rise to romance, awe and fear.
Trees and earthquakes,
Tides and snow,
We understand yet do not know.

Pi and M C square,
Chlorophyll and DNA
All were there to be revealed.
The human brain, the human mind:
Extensions of concepts divine

Extremes of time and space
Exceed our understanding.
Gamma rays and galaxies,
Viruses and black holes
Toy with our intellect.

Our ancestors
Called an eclipse a miracle.
And fire.
And spring.
And survival.
And they are aren't they?

Stan Samuels

THE SWEAT OF THEIR BACKS

They toil by the sweat of their backs.
Not driven by the pain of bloody welts
But by the pain of poverty,
The pain of hunger,
And the pain of illness.
Long hours at multiple jobs,
At the bottom of the ladder,
Their climb blocked by missing rungs:
Language, learning and — sometimes — legality.
Hidden in the shadows,
Trying to provide for themselves and their families.
Trying to follow up the ladder
That *our* parents and grandparents climbed,
Trying to create a better life for their children
As our forebears did for us.
May our eyes never be blind to their misfortune
Nor our ears deaf to their cries.
As we remember when we were slaves in Egypt,
So let us also remember when we were poor immigrants.
And let us help those struggling
To climb the ladder as
others helped us.

Stan Samuels

CREATION

We are here, children of our ancestors,
Fashioned from the DNA chains
Our parents bequeathed us.
The offspring of Adam and Eve,
Molded from inanimate earth
In an instant of divine creation
Or assembled from atoms and molecules
By trial and error
Over thousands of millions of years.
Is our creation any less miraculous
If it took a million weeks
Instead of only one?
It was always easier to conceive of our Creator
In our own image
As a timeless being dwelling among the stars.
One can pray to Michelangelo's grandfatherly God,
Even to a burning bush.
But how do we speak to an incorporeal entity,
Dimensionless yet spread across all space-time?
How do we view good and evil, history and myth?
How do we address our prayers,
Give thanks,
Or ask favors?
Our tradition and our reality
Seem contradictory and incompatible.
The world of our ancestors was simple.
Ours appears incomprehensible.
We need to pray for guidance
And understanding,
To Whom?
To What?

Stan Samuels

IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning.
In the *very* beginning,
Before there was WHEN or WHERE,
Before there was WHO or WHAT
To even contemplate HOW or WHY.
Before there were thoughts or thinking,
Knowledge or knowing;
Before place or time,
Matter or energy,
There was the infinite void
Incubating the future,
Creating reality.

Stan Samuels

MIRACLES

There is much I do not know -
No doubt it always will be so.
Things occur I can't explain -
That are beyond my human brain.
Events unnat'ral, rare and odd,
Intrusions of the hand of God?
Is some Captain at the helm
That steers nature's godly realm?
That I clearly do not know
But admit it could be so.

Stan Samuels

TO A NEBULOUS FORCE

I cannot pray to a nebulous force
Nor worship a carving of stone.
Knowing no God in human form,
I stand here quite alone.

To what then do I pray and why?
Lost in doubt and fears,
Clutching on a well-worn book
Stained with countless tears?

In truth, I pray but to myself,
Or maybe not at all,
Setting my anxiety
To an ancient call.

Stan Samuels

LIGHT

(WHAT IT MEANS TO ME)

Not a mean meaning

Light – incandescent, florescent

Light – warm, glow

Light – brilliant, beam

Light – unburdened, unencumbered

Light – dawn, end of darkness

Idiomatically lovely

See the light – aha!

Alight – set for a spell

Make light – not so serious

Bring to light – reveal, teach

Light on one's feet – wondrous

Light at the end of tunnel – hope

Light, so meaningful and yet so horrible to spell.

Jerry Saltzman

THE LIGHT

I am fragile.
My body is a padded, brittle scaffold
With soft tissues hanging from it.
Covered by my flag of age, that must be protected
Even from sunlight.
I live, alert to pain: my ever-present warning.
But where am I
In this oddly designed assemblage of molecules?
Oh it's all me, of course and I am in here somewhere.
But when anabolism stops
And respiration becomes expiration,
Where will I be then?
A switch is thrown. A light goes out.
Out where?

Stan Samuels

THE BRIDE, UNVEILED (LIGHT)

When we lift the bride's veil, her countenance glows

As if lit by all the candles in the world, kindled by our joy.

Our light has come, and we become one with her:

We arise. We shine.

Nancie S. Martin

TORAH/HAFTARAH

INTRODUCTION TO TORAH

In our collective memories, our ancestors stood at the foot of Sinai and experienced a historic encounter with the Divine. They were united in spirit, mind and heart. Today we come together as one people, Klal Yisrael, and seek to re-establish an experience with the Divine as we study and embrace the values of the Torah. Today we seek to be infused, infused with the spirit of G_dliness, hope and optimism. Our world is increasingly filled with hatred, cynicism and violence. The forces of destruction are once again at Israel's door, while the rest of the world either stands idly by or silently wishes for the victory of our foes. But let us not be overcome with despair and blind hatred. Let us not be overcome by the seeming ubiquity of evil doers. By our continuing revelation we have a plan for overcoming despair and building the messianic age with G_d. Today we read and study the Torah, to keep it in touch, to remind us of what we should be doing. What do we need to do to renew the Revelation in our lives to edge us closer to the Messianic age? But perhaps instead of revelation, search is better description, for a search entails a relentless and toiling process. After the revelation at Sinai, the Mishkan was built. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin explained that the Mishkan served as a prototype of how each Jew should turn himself/herself into a personal Mishkan, a place where Hashem's presence can dwell, where we can all continue to experience the revelation at Sinai. Let us today, continue the processing of building our Mishkans.

Tom Sullivan

MI SHEBEIRACH

(To be sung to Debbie Friedman's melody)

Mi she-beirach avoteinu

We pray as our fathers did for those whose health is broken

May they receive the blessing

Of *refuah shleimah*

The renewal of body

The renewal of spirit

And let us say — A-men

Mi she-beirach imoteinu

We pray as our mothers did with those in pain or suffering

May we find ways to touch them

With *refuah shleimah*

To comfort the lonely

To send them a blessing

And let them hear us say A-men

Jeanne Anderson

HAFTARAH BLESSINGS

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BLESSING BEFORE HAFTARAH

Blessed are you, Holy Spark that dwells within, who stirs us to speak truth and repair the world, who shows us 70 faces of truth, who gives us the strength and wisdom to fulfill the hopes of our ancestors. Blessed are you Giver of Language, who takes pleasure in the Torah, and in Moses, servant of God, defender of Israel, and in prophets of truth and justice.

Lee Klinger

BLESSING BEFORE HAFTARAH

In gratitude for the wisdom of our ancient prophets and to our generations of ancestors who transmitted that wisdom to us, we are now going to listen together to one of our prophets. Blessed be the continuity and the innovations of our tradition in the past and in the future.

Isaac Zieman

KAVANOT ON TORAH PORTIONS

SARAI AND THE FIRST TALLIT

Abimelech said to Sarai “I have given a
thousand pieces of silver. . .it shall serve
you as a covering for the eyes” — Genesis 20:16

Moon, you wander daylight hours
a beggar
sandal laces untied

subject as I am to a king: Abraham sells me
as sister, God delays my baby,
Abimelech throws silver coins in the sand

and commands that before sunrise,
barefoot
I carry them away.

Moon, on this night you hold a cloak
of blue light around you.
I must swallow pain but you

breathe in and like a dolphin
spray a blue-white Sabbath cloth
upon the dunes. Moon, give me one thread

to conquer the cruel silver pieces
and weave a tallit
and defy my journey this desolate night.

Helen Papell
Genesis 20:16 - Vayyera

WHEN SARAH LAUGHED

Imagine how ridiculous it must have seemed:
ninety years old and happy in your tent
when some angel announces it's finally time.
Of course you'd laugh: all those years of adventure,
of consorting with kings and dancing with danger
and now this, after the bondswoman's already spread her legs –
you can hear your own heart beating as you offer the stranger more olives
but you have to laugh to think your breasts might swell again, to think
that after all the fear and magnificence, a son could chortle in your arms.

Nancie S. Martin
Genesis 21.1-22.24 - Vayyera

TURNING

Turning points.
Unexpected events
Challenging our perception of ourselves.
Do we hide, run, confront?

Confrontation,
Often leading to results difficult to live with.
Are there options on how to respond?
Is there time to consider?

If I were in that palace garden,
Would I have set forth to better understand the world,
 or stayed behind the protective walls of home?
Would I have tried to stop the Egyptian aggressor,
 or retreated to safety?

I have met many of the challenges of my life with courage
 and determination,
And have explored many of the world's far flung communities with joy.
But the hardest – the most complex issues - have taken me
 the better part of a lifetime to deal with.
I glory in my increased understanding and growth, but remain frustrated
 that it has taken me so long and that I still have so far to go.
The successes have indeed been turning points,
Resulting in markedly improved relationships – often with those most dear.

May increased understanding and personal growth always be a goal.
May challenges be seen as opportunities rather than barriers.
May we be tolerant of ourselves as we strive to subdue our inner demons.

Living in New York, a city known for its callous non-intervention
 (even when 911 enables a request for aid without personal risk),
May we find ways to be an active, caring part of the community –
 bringing succor to those in need, support where it is required.

Andrea Bardfeld
Exodus - Shemot

THE HANDS OF WOMEN

First we heard they'd want the gold we'd been given, and we were ready.
Then they took our rings off our fingers to melt in the fire
and asked us to dance. We swayed, hot in the desert night,
wondering what was being worshipped.
It was only when they asked for our tinkling belts that we knew.
We give from our wombs, from our hearts;
we leave our homes and wake each morning to our children's cries
and all we ask, our ringless hands stretched toward the sky,
is for something, anything to believe in.

Nancie S. Martin
Exodus - Ki Tissa

THE TABERNACLE

There are so many specifics about how it must be built,
about the calyx of the lampstand
and the shape of the almond blossoms
and the faces of the cherubim,
but the most important thing is what's in it
and what it takes for us to make it
and how it must be carried:
like something created from everything we have to give.

Nancie S. Martin
Terumah, Leviticus

CUCUMBERS AND MELONS

All that water within their skins
and the cool texture against the tongue
and seeds, hundreds of them, like teardrops –
we had them daily then in their season,
a reward from the vines for our punishment.
I remember gorging myself on casaba one night,
my hands and face dripping with fragrant juice
rolling down my neck and arms in the heat,
a gift from the earth instead of the sky.

Nancie S. Martin

Numbers 8.1-12.16 Be-ha'alotekha

JACOB'S DREAM

Night was drawing near. For miles he had walked,
Formed new patterns of trodden earth with gentle footfall
Till he stopped, exhausted, searching for breath.
Though he could not know, the earth did know
That he was exactly halfway
Between Beer-Sheba and Haran.
Though he did not know, the angels knew
That he had paused to rest between forgetting
(The smell of his brother's fields, the gaze
Of his father's blind eyes, the joints
Of his mother's hands) and learning
(The smell of his uncle's house, the gaze
Of the weak-eyed woman, the long fingers
Of his beloved's hands).

That night he dreamt of a ladder, firmly planted in cool earth,
Extending up only to disappear.
On one side the angels climbed towards heaven
To pluck from the stars a glint of their sparkle.
On the other side the angels descended
To deliver the sparkle
As dew to the earth.

Just before dawn he awoke to find
The ladder gone.
But the stars still twittered in the sky
And the dew still glistened in the grass
And he knew then
And he was renewed then
By the thought. (*How small is the divide between
Heaven and earth*).
He pressed his knees down into the ground,
Sunk his fingers between the blades of
Grass, and arched his back and neck and face to the skies.
Thus poised--between the stars and the dew--
He blessed this place
Before setting on his path anew.

Shira Niamh Brisman

Note: Written for West End Synagogue on its twentieth anniversary.

• ADDITIONAL PSALMS

PSALM 12

Help, O Lord!

*Help yourself.
I will help you
and you will share the glory.*

For the faithful are no more;
the loyal have vanished from among men.

*The faithful and the loyal are still here.
Seek them out.*

Men speak lies to one another;
their speech is smooth;
they talk with duplicity.
May the Lord cut off all flattering lips,
every tongue that speaks arrogance.

*Pay attention to what they say and we
won't need such extreme measures.*

They say, "By our tongues we shall prevail;
with lips such as ours, who can be our master?"

*See, they even tell you what they are doing.
Listen and be warned.*

"Because of the groans of the plundered poor and needy,
I will now act," says the Lord.
"I will give help," he affirms to him.

*You must help the plundered poor and the needy,
that is your task and why you are here.
Imperfect humans prey upon the helpless.
Imperfect humans must protect them.*

The words of the Lord are pure words,
silver purged in an earthen crucible,
refined sevenfold.

The crucible of time allows humans to seek godliness within.

You, O Lord will keep them,
guarding each from this age evermore.
On every side the wicked roam
when baseness is exalted among men.

*This age is like any other.
The godly must always guard against the wicked.*

Alan Oppenheim

PSALM 13

Source of All Life, how long will I feel isolated and alone --
removed from all that is godly?

How long will I be troubled and full of sadness?

How long will everything seem to go against me?

I want to believe in you, to know you are out there.

Give me the courage to see clearly.

Keep me from giving in to despair.

Help me banish self-destructive thoughts
that threaten to defeat me.

I know my strength comes from you.

My spirits will rise as I acknowledge the Source of All Life.

I will express my gratitude for all that is good in my life

Eva Miodownik Oppenheim

PSALM 56

Sustain her, O West End,
For worries pursue her.
Many days they may oppress her,
Tho' many friends support her all day long.
None are her adversaries, we speak as one.

When she is fearful she can marshal her strength
From our community, whose spirit will lift her.
In prayer she trusts, is less afraid,
Encouraged by mortals' efforts.

All day long we offer hope in her affairs;
We wish only good for her.
We convene and devise for her welfare;
We are in touch with her wishes, hoping for her health and

Dispelling thoughts of fear.
We are people in community prayer.

We are well aware of her tribulations;
Keep her fears in our consciousness and in our hearts.
The enemy – despair – will retreat when we pray.

This I know – we join forces for her
In earnest care and affection.
On godliness we rely;
In godliness we trust
And it lessens our fear.
When together we strive
It is to collective goodness that we pledge our efforts.

We render thanks to modern medical science,
Which is saving her from danger, and we will
prevent her feet from stumbling
So that she can continue to be with us in the light of life.

Harriet Schnur

PSALM 61

Hear my cry, O God, listen to my prayer;
from the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint.

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I,
for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.

Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings!

(Selah)

For you, O God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear
your name.

Prolong the life of Yael and Tamara; may their years endure to all generations!
May they be enthroned forever before God; appoint steadfast love and faithfulness to watch
over them.

So will I ever sing praises to your name, as I perform my vows day after day.

Karen Kolodney

PSALM 101

Original

I will sing of steadfast love and justice;
To you, O LORD, I will make music.
I will ponder the way that is blameless.

Oh, when will you come to me?
I will walk with integrity of heart within
my house; I will not set before my eyes
anything that is worthless.

I hate the work of those who fall away; it
shall not cling to me.

A perverse heart shall be far from me;
I will know nothing of evil.

Whoever slanders his neighbor I will
destroy.
Whoever has a haughty look and an
arrogant heart I will not endure.

I will look with favor on the faithful in
the land, that they may dwell with me;
he who walks in the way that is
blameless shall minister to me.

No one who practices deceit shall dwell
in my house; no one who utters lies shall
continue before my eyes.

Morning by morning I will destroy all the
wicked in the land, cutting off all the
evildoers from the city of the LORD.

Reconstructed

I will sing of steadfast love and justice.
For all I will make music.
I will search for the path that is blameless.

Oh, I will search within my heart for the
divine,
I will keep integrity within my house.

I will surround myself with the worthwhile
I will sing to those who seem to fall away.

I will sing to their perverse heart;
I will fiercely whisper down their evil.

I will love the slanderer.
I will love the haughty; I will love the
arrogant.
They will turn; their evil will not endure.

I will embrace the deceitful;
I will stifle their lies against my breast.

Day by day I will expunge wickedness,
Leaving purged souls to take up my song.

Day by day all humankind will dwell in
sacredness

Jane Weprin-Menzi

PSALM 102

The prayer of one voicing her pain and asking for healing.

LORD, I am hurting, voicing my pain that you might hear.

I rely on you to be mindful and attentive – to answer my calling in this time when I really need to believe, to be strong.

Days vanish in a fog of worry and pain – I am young and each day means a lifetime for me, and for my young family. A day not walking in our neighborhood, not dancing with my husband, not buying flowers at the market, not pointing out a turtle in the pond to my daughter.

I am nauseated, I am hot, I am cold. I have no appetite.

The poisons that I know are defeating troublesome cells my body still fights. My hair is gone, my energy ebbs.

I am like a bird in Central Park in December, left behind by his brothers, shivering on the lake, restless on a branch.

I lie awake, tossing, like a lone sparrow on the roof.

Every day, a villain trapped within me fights me, curses me, blackens my day.

I eat ashes like bread, mingle my drink with tears.

One might think you lifted me up just to cast me down.

My days are like a lengthening shadow; my leaves fall on the hills and sidewalks by the river.

But I know that the best within me, the best within us, can beat any darkness, any sickness, any malice.

It is time to heal myself, my friends and loved ones gather around me, as does Adonai, to begin a time of regeneration.

My life is worth fighting for, my people are worth living for.

As I am fighting darkness, the world is fighting darkness, that we might all rise to the light toward our day of glory.

When my body has recovered and our people have recovered, from past hurts, from past wrongs, and come together for a day of rejoicing. My leaves again grow green and strong.

For you have heard our pleas, and helped us to heal ourselves.

Let this be written for my daughter's daughters and sons. Be proud of your heritage and strong and mighty in your own being:

"The LORD healed our grandmother, our rebbe, and our people,

Attending to her pain, attending to our divisiveness, healing the scars on our homeland."

Adonai will bring peace to New York, to Crown Heights, to Cincinnati, to Americans, to the Middle East, to Jerusalem, to Haiti, to South Africa, to Iraq, to all places where the Lord's people suffer from terror, violence, hunger, disease, and pain.

When all peoples and kingdoms gather, thankful, for peace, for health, for understanding, respect, and love.

God did not shatter my strength, but gave me the fortitude to regain my life.

My prayers to overcome my afflictions were answered. The love of my people, my family, and my God are steadfast.

Of old you laid the earth's foundations; the heavens are the work of your hands.

People change, the world changes, but your strength and the courage of our people remain.

As time goes on, we change,

but you are the same, your years have no end.

May our children and our people live on, in health, in happiness, and in peace..

Beth Davidson

PSALM 128

Hurricanes, blizzards, earthquakes, tornados. The forces of the universe come from the Creator. And the ability to lead a moral life from our own godly nature.

Happiness comes to those who commit themselves to care for the natural world and live a moral life.

They will enjoy a nurturing family and a comforting community.

May you find your way to personal fulfillment and may you share in the success of the Jewish people and all the peoples of the world.

Margie Schulman

PRAYERS FOR PEACE

BIRKAT HASHALOM BLESSING FOR PEACE

We cannot undo what has been done to us
nor what we have done to others
for time's arrow flies in one direction only.
So let peace come
to the rubble of history in which we stand.
Let peace come
to the hill on which the Temple used to sit.
Let peace come
to the pit from which the Twin Towers used to rise.
Let peace come
to our souls
surrounded by the ghosts of friends
of family
of lovers
and of ancestors.
Let peace come
to the ghosts of Afghans
of Koreans, North and South
of Irish, Protestant and Catholic
of Cherokee
of Romans
of Palestinians and of Israelis.
Let the rubble grow no higher.
Let peace come.

Barukh atah Adonai she'mazkir otanu lirdof shalom.

Blessed are You, COMPASSIONATE ONE, who reminds us to seek peace.

Mark Nazimova

MAY WE REMEMBER PEACE

May we remember that there is no *Mashiach*.
And that each of us is one.
That our next smile may tip the balance of the world.
That *Eliyahu* is sleeping on the corner.

May our next kind word be the pebble in the pond that ripples across the sea.

May we remember that the *Mashiach* is a warrior fighting for *Tikkun Olam*.
That injustice thrives where passivity prevails.
That the Power that Makes for Peace is powerless without peace-makers.

May we be disciples of Aaron Hakohen, loving shalom and pursuing shalom.

May we remember *HaMitzvah: Veyahavta lereacha kamocha* / Love your neighbor as yourself.
And the three things: *Din, Emet, V'Shalom* / Justice, Truth, and Peace.
May we remember never to forget.

May we not treat others as we would not want to be treated.
And may we remember to study the commentary, and that study leads to action.

May we remember the beauty of a candle in the dark.
And the defiance of a candle in the wind.
That the world was created for each of us alone.
And that each of us is dust and ashes.

May we hear the cries of strangers in strange lands echoing in the still small voice within.

May we remember that it is not our responsibility to complete the work.
And that neither are we free to neglect it.

May we remember that there is no Mashiach.
And that each of us is one.

Joshua Greenberg

PRAYER FOR PEACE

All:

In times of strife
We pray for peace,
In times of war
We pray for peace.
We pray for an end to the fears that divide us.

Rabbi / Leader:

In prayer, we implore, we express a wish. We pray to the Source, and we wish for peace. We look to the heavens, and we pray for peace.

May we remember that we are part of the Source, and the Source is a part of each of us. As we pray to the Source, let us find within us the spark of peace, and the courage to transcend our fears. Let us not only pray and wait, let us also work for peace, let us make manifest the power of the Source.

All:

In times of strife
May we work for peace,
In times of war
May we work for peace.

Irna Gadd

MY FIG TREE

Under my fig tree the sunlight filters through the five-lobed leaves
and the grapes from the vine are sweet.

But I cannot sit there now.

In the desert that surrounds us the winds are howling,
the swords clang together over and over,
and lions and lambs alike are slaughtered.

I long for my fig tree. I think of its leaves like a shield of tender hands
as I stand here, shivering with fear,
trying to explain what a ploughshare is.

Sing: Lo yisa goy el goy cherev, lo yilmedu od milchama...

Nancie S. Martin

LET US PRAY

(To be read responsively)

Let us pray for peace with our hands, hearts,
minds and deeds

Let us pursue compromise and reconciliation
as true indicators of victory

Let us stop counting dead bodies and
count healthy minds and sound bodies instead

Let us use our voting power to reach out
to the other with respect and friendship

Let us enjoy the diversity of our human garden
as we do the diversity of our botanical gardens

Let us refuse to follow the corrupted powerful
into the hell of war

Let us learn to give peace a try
even though that takes courage

Let us pursue justice in every context
and be a model to all

Let us propose, protest, argue and debate;
Let us accept our obligation

Let us put our knowledge of history aside
and be enduringly hopeful

Marty Silberberg

BITTER WATER

"Meet the thirsty with water...
greet the fugitives with bread" -Isaiah 21:14

Outside my shul in winter, a garden
of bare maple twigs that shimmer frost
like the fingers of a child without gloves
in New York

and bare earth where food had blossomed
in a Garden of Eden
the summer in Sudan before
the raiders came.

Meet the thirsty with water,
greet the fugitives with bread.

Inside my shul, near the steps
of the Sanctuary, where long ago
Levite singers chanted prayers for peace,

a box with a sign "Bring cans of food,"
a book with photos of children
smiling.

Meet the thirsty with water,
greet the fugitives with bread.

Refugees from war and hunger fight
like famished gulls on Rosh Hashana
when we wrap our sins in bread

and throw them into a river. Moses,
in our wilderness
find for us again
the tree that sweetens bitter water.

Meet the thirsty with water,
greet the fugitive with bread.

Helen Papell

WHY NOT?

Will there ever be a time
Without Cain smiting Abel
Or Dinah weeping in shame?
Will the children of Ishmael and Yitzkhak
Ever lay down their swords
And acknowledge their kinship?
Or the descendants of Jacob
Fighting for endless generations
Over ceremonial trivia
And mental inflexibility ever stop?
Will they ever pause
And look up
And realize
That they are all praying
To the same God?
Their words may be different —
But if God could and can
Accept and understand
Aramaic and Hebrew and Arabic,
Then why not Latin and English
And Sanskrit and Chinese
And German and Spanish
And all the others?
Why not?

Stan Samuels

PRAYER FOR PEACE

Let night drop its velvet cloth over every city, town, village and hamlet of the world.

Let it rest softly on every house, hut, shack, villa, hovel, palace and tent.

Let sleep come to the weary, the watcher, the hunter, the hunted, the driven and the forsaken.

Let all the little angers of our lives in every corner of the earth dissolve.

Let dreams of peace and love fill the night's imaginings of every sleeper.

Let the soft fresh breath of morning wake the world with promise and renewed hope.

Let the sun's warmth fill the hearts of all awakened sleepers with joy, gratitude, forgiveness and love.

Eva Miodownik Oppenheim

A JEWISH PRAYER FOR DARFUR

Merciful Creator, please give us the strength to move our hearts to action.

Every day we give thanks to You for our redemption from Egypt, for our freedom as individuals and as a nation. I feel blessed that I have the freedom to work, to study, and to enjoy time with family and friends.

But across the ocean, in a refugee camp in Darfur, I have a sister who is not so fortunate. She is short and fiery like me, she loves dancing like me, and telling stories to children. Her skin is darker than mine, her language different, but we are sisters.

God, my sister is afraid for her life; afraid for her body; afraid for her children. She cries out to You on behalf of her people. She utters her own version of the Amidah – “*Sh'ma Koleinu*, Hear our voice, Lord our God, pity us, save us, accept our prayers with compassion and kindness.” She prays with every fiber of her being.

But she and I both know that You will not, cannot, act alone.

Source of compassion, let my sister's cry pierce our hearts like the wailing sound of the shofar. And once our hearts have been opened, help us move from prayer to action; let our action stir others to act as well.

God of Memory, help us to remember our sisters and brothers in Darfur even when it is easier to turn away. Let us hear the echo of their prayers deep within us.

Blessed Redeemer, who liberated our ancestors from Egyptian bondage, help us to take up the mantle of Moses, Aaron and Miriam, and do all that we can to help liberate the people of Darfur, so that they may enter the promised land of freedom, dignity, and hope.

Margie Klein

PRAYER FOR PEACE

Reader

My heart aches -
Dreadful pictures,
Horrific stories.
Each pile of rubble, each maimed body
a life waylaid.
Each death no statistic,
but an unfillable – an unjustifiable loss.

God of my forbearers, where are you?
So many awful deeds in the name of religion!
The miracles, the glorious sunrises, the perfect births,
will not suffice. I cannot say Dayenu.

I survey my small world,
My safe surroundings,
My wonderful family.
My gratitude is endless,
Yet I can not rest.

STOP! I want to say, standing at the crossroads of the World,
Extending my arms – palms forward
As I do with my small granddaughter,
in response to the traffic light hand.
But most drivers and pedestrians obey laws,
And the engines of destruction would not take head.

Congregation

We must raise our voices in pain and indignation,
Find ways to reach appropriate leaders with our urgency.

Reader

There must be a change in priorities –
Humanity kindness, sanity
Not power, land, oil.

Safety for sure,
But safety for all.

Congregation

Let us pray that the days of violent conflict are numbered,
That peace,
for the United States, for Israel, for the World,
Will soon arrive.

Andrea Bardfeld

PEACE

Oh precious source of wisdom
Enable us to see the futility of our past ways,
We who are forever mouthing the words of peace
Even as we demonize the enemy,
plant the landmines,
set the engines of war humming.
Oh source of truth and insight
Inspire us to unmask our primordial and toxic delusions:
That *we* are the children of God; that *they* are the whores of Babylon,
.
Oh divine source of compassion
Enable us to see beyond our superficial differences
To the one heart and soul that exists in all men
To the longings and fears that animate us all.
May we have the courage to face a great and simple truth:
Where there is no justice.....there will be no peace
May we find the will to go beyond our prayers for peace
To strive ceaselessly until all men have their share of the earth's bounty
Until all men have the dignity that is their birthright.
And then we will be known as peacemakers and the days of our life will be blessed.

Amen

Barbara Gish-Scult

BROTHERHOOD

Since the beginning
Since the first human parent
Smiled more broadly
At one son
And the other tasted bile.
Since the first mother —
Or father —
Chose one son
Over the other
And a hand curled
Around a rock
And the potential of rage
Became the kinetics of violence —
It has been in our tribal memory,
Memorialized in our sacred texts
And marked on us
For all posterity —
Brother against brother,
Hatred above love.

But must this troglodyte mindset endure?
Maiming for a slur
And killing for a slight?
Are we to remain
One step above the beasts?
Or can we be
One step below the angels?
Surely mankind can.
Indeed it must!
And hopefully it will
Move from brotherhood
To peace among nations
In our lifetimes

Stan Samuels

SERMON

Goodness

Extension of the root word Good

Good

What we are exhorted to be.

Eliminate an o and what's left is God.

God

Who ever or whatever suits you.

Omit the g and transpose the od to Do

Do

Unto others

As

You would have them

Do unto you.

It's all of a piece.

Peace.

Amen

Ellie Chernick

A SIMPLE PRAYER

Sometimes I awake from a nightmare relieved that it's just a dream, but as I read the paper, watch the nightly news.....it's not a dream. It's a day in - day out nightmare. It's real. PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE.....I need a world where hatred diminishes, then disappears. I need a world where gentleness and tenderness increase and prevail
I need a world where no one must fear the other and nations don't threaten to make other nations vanish. I feel alone and afraid. Help me be a mensch. Help me to help others to make that more gentle world.

Harold Mindess

(congregation could sing: Lo Yisa Goy etc. - upbeat)

MEMORIALIZING CATASTROPHIC EVENTS IN UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

A cool day in November, a Friday, 1989.
After soccer, my friends and I,
Clumps of earth and grass in our cleats,
Climb into my father's station wagon. He drives the usual route
Down backroads, and we play GHOST—our favorite car game—
Building a word together by adding letters, and trying, by adding letters,
Not to let the word end. I start with the letter "C." The word I've imagined
Becomes something else as my friends add letters—a product
Of all our private thoughts, predicted by no one, belonging to all.
Around and around we keep playing, as my friends one by one
Disappear down their driveways, until it is just my father and me,
Adding letters, building words. He is about to turn down our street
But instead slows off the road onto the shoulder—Beneath the tires
Leaves and twigs respond in autumn crackle. My father takes the newspaper that lies
Between us on the seat, holds it in front of me, and says,
Look at this. And I do. In the photograph I see the long stretch of a wall.
On top of it people dancing. *Remember this,* he says.
A solid strip of white. The twisting, moving bodies.
The words: East Germany Opens Frontier to the West.
Someday your children will ask you, he says. *You must tell them about this day.*

Inside the car all images are crisp: the sharp angle of the dashboard,
The black printed words, the pinkened rims beneath my father's eyes.
I am eleven years old in a moment larger than myself.
And these events, which I do not understand, are products of
Thousands and thousands of people, doing and moving,
Like players on a soccer field, or dancers on a wall,
Featureless, in a world beyond me, active and alive,
Which I, unprepared, must struggle to describe.

It's a clear Tuesday in September. The morning, 2001.
In the kitchen, still barefoot, I sip coffee and listen
To the whistling of the men building new apartments—
A little taller each week—across the yard. A sudden sound:
A clashing shatter. I run to the window to look out:
Perhaps one of the men has fallen! But all I see are faces staring
At something behind me, above. I life the window, step outside,
Hoist myself up the rusted fire escape to the rooftop where I stand.
One tower burns. Another joins. From black gashes flames flick and sputter.
I try to imagine the lives of people I do not know.
Try to conjure details of moments where I have not been:
Scribbled thoughts on Post-It notes; words whispered in earnest
In a darkened room; The calling of a name as one enters, after work, coming home.
I want to find faces for these fragments. Want to know the features
Of all I have not met. What can I do but imagine intimacies?
Isn't this something? An act of grace?

The air quivers. The smoke persists in solemn march.
One by one people gather on the rooftop beside me. One by one they add
To the silence. One tower sighs and falls. The other follows.
The smoke keeps moving on.
All I see is blackness but I know what lies beyond:
A simple stretch of that same blue sky. A little wider now.

These are the words I speak. Because I am here. Because I can.
They are all I have to offer. The only forms I find.
As I say them into the receiver, on a Tuesday night in September,
I think I can see my father, miles away, in his chair.
I think I can hear the uncomposed clang of the windchimes
Swaying softly above the porch where he sits, and listens to my voice.

Shira Niamh Brisman

MANHATTAN DUST

(for Stephen)

On my windowsill a screen
covered with gray and black dust
September 11 travelers
in fire-wind flight

from the World Trade terror
ninety blocks downtown.
I didn't want to wash away
the dust, all that remained
of humans

trying to go home.
I left the screen on my windowsill
hoped the dust would fall away
drift to their families
north, south, somewhere

but since September 11
all over Manhattan people cough winds
of jet fuel, asbestos, unknown dust
that screamed into the lungs of men
who breathed without masks
in their hurry to rescue strangers.

When I began to cough
I dropped the screen into a sink.
My fingers would not press a water faucet
wash the dust into a sewer.
Shall I dig a grave in Riverside Park

next to a wild place where dandelions grow?
chant Kaddish, prayer for the dead,
ask the seeds tiny as dust
to carry the travelers home
east, west, everywhere?

Helen Papell

AFTER THE HURRICANE

Our Creator,
how awesome are Your works,
how humbling the power of winds and waves,
testifying to the truth:
we depend upon You,
we rely upon each other.

How overwhelming the strength of storms
reminding us of our place in Creation:
to partner with You,
to protect our fragile planet,
to care for our brothers and sisters.

Source of Healing, Source of Hope,
we pray for family and friends,
we pray for neighbors we do not know,
we pray for the stranger --
for all who have lost homes and loved ones.

We pray for those who dwell in darkness and despair,
who yet are buffeted by wind and wave.
We pray for those who reach out
through waters, darkness, and cold,
who labor to save, to restore, to rebuild.
We pray for all those who manifest your love,
who practice what we pray.

May they feel safe,
sheltered in Your love and in ours,
strengthened by our prayers and support.
May they know they are never alone.
May they find renewed sources of strength
to rebuild hopes and dreams.

May we witness the warnings in the winds,
hear the cry of rising waters:
Wake up! Open your eyes!
In the silence after the storm,
may we hear the whisper in your still, small voice:
open your hands in generosity,
soften your hardened hearts with love.

With Your help,
may we lift those who are fallen,
heal the broken-hearted,
dispel darkness and despair
with light and hope.

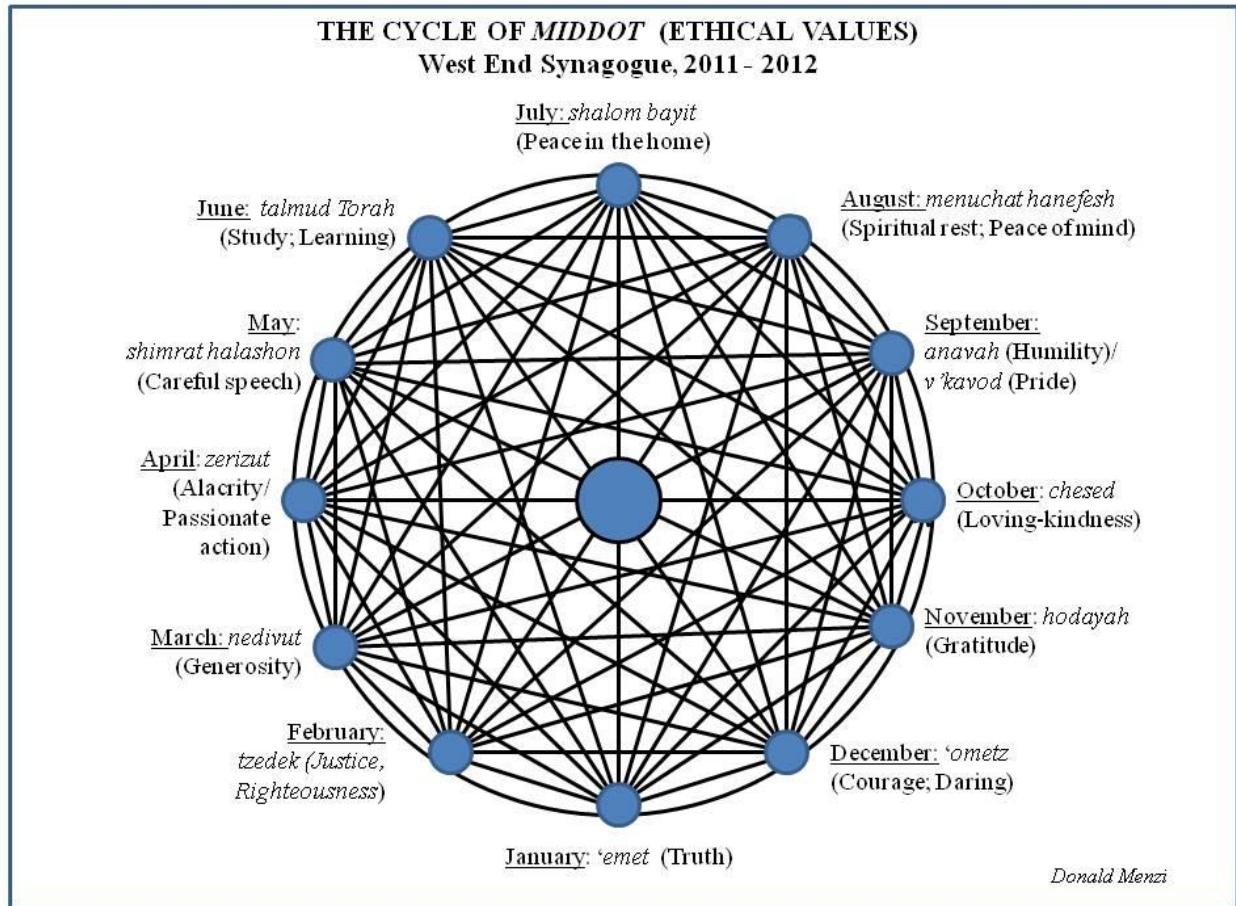
With Your help,
may we save this storm-tossed ark
which holds us all.

Rabbi Marc Margolius

WRITINGS ON MIDDOT

MIDDOT 2011-2012

CYCLE OF MIDDOT



COURAGE

The goal is clear – at least its outline,
But the path difficult, marked by potholes.

Determination and patience are required;
Two steps forward one step back, or perhaps three.

I remind myself that the journey itself is progress,
All experiences along the way available for examination,
reflection, learning.

The courage is not for the extreme
enter the burning building, smother the grenade effort,
But the everyday take-a-deep-breath activity -
repair the relationship, confront the problem,
deal with the illness.

Sometimes a fellow traveler indicates understanding -
A shared intimacy, a smile.

But most often, the trip must be made alone.

Occasionally, status is reviewed.
The road ahead remains long
The path travelled also long.

I have grown
and would not go back.
There have been many mistakes
And the product is far from perfect,
but progress is clear.

So;
I summon the energy, the determination, the courage
and turn toward the future,
better equipped now for the journey.
I pray that new adventures will be enriching,
And that my strength will not fail.

Andrea Bardfeld

TRUTH WHAT IS TRUTH?

The ginkgo trees in the little park below my window do not argue about truth.
For them it is moonlight, wind through bare branches,
a whoosh of buses passing in the dark.

Zen poets sought truth beside still waters, calmly contemplating
their own deaths through cloudless dawns
under blue mountains—breathing in, breathing out.

Is truth a lamp shining in one direction
or a lighthouse beam sweeping over the horizon,
illuminating the vast landscape that spreads before us?

The search for truth is a human endeavor.
Gandhi proclaimed the fundamental truth of all religions.
Truth, he said, is self-sustained.

Heschel and King embraced unconditional love, a passion for compassion.
Some find it in constancy of character, sincerity in action,
loyalty in love—just being kind.

In a fractured world, truth may free us—or put us in chains.
Perhaps it's in the need to know each other's pain,
to reach across a chasm and talk together from our hearts.

Eva Miodownik Oppenheim

JUSTACE

As it is written in Isaiah Chapter 33 verses 5 and 6

*He who dwells on high,
He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness.
He will be the permanence of your times,
Abundance of salvation, wisdom and knowledge,
The fear of the Lord is His treasure. (The Revised Standard Version)*

But Justice, representing God, does not always rule in Zion
or elsewhere.
Law-creators and dispensers of justice have
insufficient devotion to righteousness, wisdom, knowledge.

Much progress has been made across the centuries, but
Police are still affected by race and ethnicity
Judges and juries still influenced by upbringing and culture
The rights of women still ignored
Children still sold as sex-slaves.
Still, uncontrollable dictators rule.
And in this country, a desire for power, money, re-election
too often overrides good governance.

May we continue to progress toward an even-handed justice:
Laws created for the benefit of all
Officials elected by and reflecting the wishes of the people
Secure communities allowing and protecting development.

May kindness, generosity and thoughtfulness
Influence our actions in our neighborhoods
As we strive for more widespread opportunity.

And in our homes, may we teach our children
by example,
Treating them fairly, but with love and understanding -
Responding to the world as we would have them respond
as they grow toward adulthood.

Andrea Bardfeld

GENEROSITY

Generosity is giving to others with pleasure
The amount matters not
The thank you matters less
It's the warm feeling within that counts

To be generous to others
One must be generous to oneself
Extending to self-acceptance
and allowing life's pleasures to be savored

Each of us has something to give
Even those without money
Acts of kindness, empathy, time for service
All count, without credit being the goal

The gratitude of the receiver for getting
Provides him with the possibility of giving in turn
Expanding the gifts and gratification into eternity
It's his warm feeling within that counts

Aunt Golda was such a person in my life.
She gave me the gift of loving opera that endures
She showed me the sights of New York City
I had the prettiest clothes from the finest stores

All of this my Aunt Golda gave to me with genuine affection
By her example, I learned what caring meant
Without anything expected in return
Except my pleasure for her generosity

She knew my parents were unable to provide these gifts
She made me feel good and confident
In turn, I give to others unable to get what they need
Extending generosity to perpetuity

Shirley C. Samuels

GENEROSITY

Generosity

The best compliment you can receive
Is when someone tells you,
You are generous

Unfortunately,
Taking credit for your own generosity
Feels wrong
Like you are undoing the actions
Taken in service of another
It's like boasting
Of your pretty smile
Or your kind nature;
Your natural openness,
Or your capacity to be a good listener

Generosity is delicate
If it is toyed with too much,
The giver taking an undue sense of achievement from it
And the receiver expecting more than she should,
We have nothing left to do
But to wait
Wait for something so pure
Something that is the foundation of human connection
To turn rancid

But Generosity is strong:
The network of human interaction
Is made up of generous twists and turns;
Doing the dishes for your mother
Giving someone a gift,
Handing change to a homeless man
Or picking up a fallen wallet.

Generosity can be the way we express gratitude
It can be the way the divine works through us.
Generosity demands we look beyond the concerns of our own ego
And listen closely to the needs of another.

Every night when I lay down to sleep
I pray the words of the *siddur*
“Please forgive any who may have done harm to me
Whether willingly or inadvertently
Or by design
Let no one suffer punishment on my account”

What do those words mean?
It means I must be ready
And willing
To put down the burden of a grudge;
To be generous in my capacity
To let go

When I wake up in the morning
I try to think of the things I am thankful for
(Most of the time)
That means recognizing what someone else has done for me
To understand how generous
Those I am surrounded by are

Generosity
Generosity
The best compliment you can receive
Is when someone tells you
You are generous

Jennifer Ferentz

PASSIONATE ACTION (THE CONSCIENTIOUS CONSUMER)

We often hear news of global climate change—of impending disaster, and words that pass along a clear message of how the world is soon to end unless changes are made right now. Maybe the first time we hear this news, we feel compelled to alter fate, but with increased repetition, the effect is, unfortunately, extremely immobilizing. In planning to write this piece about passionate action, I found myself running into a lot of trouble. “I have no more passion,” I moaned, “I always have so much schoolwork to do and the passion is burned out of me.” Forcing myself to write became focusing myself to write—the passion came back. I was mobilized once again. My feelings about fixing the environment came back; I realized that these issues are still very important to me. For years, I’ve planned on a career in environmental studies. When I finish all of this dumb high school work, I know exactly what kind of action I’ll do: one very important type of passionate action is becoming conscientious in our way of living in the world, not just to make a positive impact, but to live happily.

We live in America, the consumer capital of the world. As much as this fact can simply make us disillusioned with the whole system and want to stay as disconnected as possible and denounce the evils of capitalism, living in a consumer society is not only a bad thing. We, the consumers, have some real power, because ultimately, we control the complex interactions that govern the production of everything that we use. Everything in our society is interconnected, and it is for this reason that each thing we do can ultimately have an effect on something larger. If we work towards being conscientious consumers, we can overcome this feeling of being overwhelmed with the problems of the world and instead help to fix them.

As Rabbi Arthur Waskow writes of the ten plagues of Passover, “When a society acts idolatrous, when corporations act like Pharaoh by ignoring the common good in order to maximize their own power, nature itself rebels: the rivers turn to blood, frogs and vermin infest the earth, thick clouds of smoke blot out the sun and the moon, ultimately human beings die. Indeed, the whole plague cycle in Exodus could be understood as a growing series of eco-disasters.” By changing our patterns of consumption, we can begin to control corporations and prevent further disasters from occurring.

Little things matter: we can start small, to mobilize ourselves. For example, we may buy eggs from the super market; the ones with the colorful label that we’re used to. Usually we don’t think beyond the one action we consider to directly involve us—the purchase of the eggs at the register. But what goes into making these eggs? Sickly chickens living out their short lives in cages, the labor of underpaid and overworked employees with no insurance operating in disgusting conditions, smog from combusted gasoline used to transport the eggs from miles and miles away. It’s up to us to make the choice and buy the local organic eggs instead, supporting small farmers from our own state, free-range hens milling about, no big factories involved. We can buy bottled drinks and decide that it isn’t worth the wait to find a recycle bin, or we can wait and make sure to perform proper disposal. Recycling really isn’t that complicated, if only we would dedicate a few minutes to learn how to do it correctly.

We can even bring around our own bottles, eliminating the need for disposal in the first place. The small efforts we need to make to stay in the loop and really work toward the

greater good are completely worth it. If we buy products made with the least pain expended by the humans, plants, and animals involved, then those are the products that will be offered, more and more often. It is up to us to fix the problems at hand, through conscientious consumption. With our pledge to carry out this passionate action, we can start to repair the world.

Marya Friedman

PASSIONATE ACTION

PASSIONATE ACTION starts with BEREISHEIT. In the beginning God created the world, as we read in Genesis.

In beginning PASSIONATE ACTION we can create a mitzvah starting with three small verbs.

First we SEE. But who is we? **We** — is anyone here who — SEES a need, a problem, a situation demanding positive change. Then we **FEEL** — we become PASSIONATE showing strong feeling. This feeling is marked by caring, fervor, belief we can make a difference.

But how do we turn feeling into ACTION? We **DO**. We DO, we plan, we organize to transform feeling into tangible ACTION, doing something to achieve an aim.

Look at PASSIONATE ACTIONS our own members have taken.

The Social Action Committee launched the Thousand Turkey Drive for Thanksgiving

Harriet Bograd helps African Jews develop cottage industries like Fair Trade coffee and embroidered challah covers.

Richard and Roberta Katz solicit surplus food from West Side restaurants to feed homeless members of Concrete Justice, a group is learning acting skills to perform their life stories.

Stan and Shirley Samuels connect us with Project Ezra for Kosher food collections to feed elderly Jews on the Lower East Side.

Henry Saltzman coordinates the Kesher project to help unemployed WES members.

Irene Kopley volunteers to provide job leads and counseling. I offer free career counseling to Kesher members. Helene Bass-Wichelhaus provides free consultations for referral to a low-cost clinic.

Moshe Sayer joined the Occupy Wall Street movement and helped manage its kitchen.

Ken Klein introduced us to the Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing where I presented three job search/resume workshops for homeless people ready to work. Many more WES members are also taking PASSIONATE ACTION. WES is a caring and aware community.

So I urge you: make a difference with PASSIONATE ACTIONS of your own. Remember Bereisheit.

It starts with SEE, FEEL, and DO.

Ruth Shapiro

GUARDING THE TONGUE

Until I tried to guard my speech
I never knew how hard it would be.

I never knew how self-centered I am,
how insensitive I can be, and
how much I miss out on.

I never knew what another person might have said,
what might happen to my understanding,
what might become possible from words unsaid.

Until I tried to guard my speech
I never knew the joy of having just the right word fall from my tongue,
the discovery that listening would allow me to see and appreciate
that there is actually a whole world outside of me and my ideas.

I never knew that I usually wait for others to stop talking so I can talk,
that even while others talk I am talking nonstop inside, and that
that inner talking is not my friend.

If all I do is talk, talk, talk, how can I hear anything else?

But all this I did not know until I tried to guard my speech.

Satu Ferentz

STUDY

We begin to learn
Before we are born:
First the pulse of the mother's womb
Then soft filtered sounds,
Some pleasant, some not.
In time, other senses join in:
Soft and warm,
Sweet or sour,
Hot or cold,
Wet or dry
Large or small.

And then that wondrous day
When we first perceive letters and words:
The magical key to growing up.
We learn and we read and we write,
We study and soak up knowledge.
And we grow and we think and we question
And we start to doubt.

If God made the world in six days,
Six thousand years ago,
How did the dinosaurs die off sixty-five million years ago?
If we are not the chosen people,
Can earth be the chosen planet among a hundred billion galaxies?

We are People of the Book,
So were Einstein and Freud
And thousands of others
Whose belief in The Book
Was diluted by their study of other books.
Does too much study cause too much doubt?
Must we wall off our minds like our Haredi cousins?
Or shed our traditions and lose our identity?
No! We must each tread our own, very personal and thoughtful path;
With our backs heavily laden with tradition
And our minds wide open.
And go wherever the journey leads

Stan Samuels

SOME THOUGHTS ON PEACE AT HOME

Shalom b'bayit
It falters
 when we correct their grammar
Gasps for breath
 when we say "It's for your own good"
Goes on life support
 when we say "I told you so"

Shalom b'bayit
It gets off the ground when we
 turn off Masterpiece Theater
to help them find their glasses (keys,...cell phone....whatever.)
 without the merest hint of a whimper.

It gains steam when we let them "get away with murder"
 overlooking their provocative and passive aggressive behaviors
which would be cause for a blistering counter-attack
 from souls less generous than ours.

It positively flourishes when we bring home their favorite pizza
 thin crust, extra cheese
Even though we see this as dire proof
 of an unconscious death wish
Handing it over without visibly cringing
 as if it were a bowl of whole grains oats topped with flax seeds.

And finally,
like a self replicating gene, a meme, or some such new-fangled thing,
the shalom in your bayit, so dense and pervasive
 seeps out under the front door
 like a benign virus
 softening and tenderizing all that is on its path

Providing once and for An unequivocal answer to an ancient question,

Yes, yes.....there is balm in Gilead!
 There is a physician there!.

Barbara Gish-Scult

GENTLE SPIRIT

SPIRITUAL REST

Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.
(Viktor E. Frankl)

When my mind is jumpy, reflexive,
reacting immediately to the worlds around me and within me,
I never experience a space between stimulus / response.
Which is to say – I'm not aware *of* my feelings;
rather, I *am* my feelings.
And sometimes those feelings
drive me helter-skelter.

After practicing stilling my mind
within a few weeks
I begin to have that space in my life
that Frankl wrote about:

the space, the moment,
in which I am aware that I *have* a feeling,
but I am not necessarily *the* feeling;
the space between stimulus and response;
the space to choose what to do
with the feeling I have.

Out of such spaces
can composure grow.

Menuchat hanefesh
may mean equanimity,
but literally it's
"restful soul."

Perhaps to experience it, it helps to invert it.
The space between stimulus and response,
once found,
is like a pause
between musical notes:
a soulful rest.

Mark Nazimova

MIDDOT 2013

CLEANLINESS

Images abound
of sparkling floors,
 fresh laundry,
 sweet smelling linen

But enough of aesthetics and sensual pleasures
Let's proceed to life and death issues

Even more than we lean towards clean.....
 we shun its opposite
 Dirt.....filth.....schmutz

We flinch at these words
 our noses crinkle
 our stomachs turn
We recoil, crying out: "yuck!" "feh," "ugh."

As Amos Elon's grandmother knew so well*
Where there is dirtthere are germs
 Where there are germs there is vermin,
 disease, food poisoning
 and yes, very possibly.....death!

Hyperbole you think? Think again
Better yet.....google the CDC**

But enough of the lowly realm of the literal
We are concerned here with higher things than the body

So let's fasten our intellectual seatbelts
Let us leap forth into the metaphorical

Just as we are physically felled by microbes
 invisible to the naked eye,
So we are spiritually weakened. --
 by the continuous accretions of small stains
 ...layers of dust.....barely detectable
 insidiously causing:
 dinginess of the soul

Can any earthly cleaning agent

bleach out the stains on our character
remove the layers of dust
blurring our spiritual vision

Who knows how much schmutz lurks in our innermost being?

Who knows if there is a cleaning agent for the soul
rivaling the magic of oxybleach for the laundry?

The rabbi knows

But first.....this bears repeating.....BUT FIRST:

WE.....HAVE.....TO.....SEE.....THE.....STAINS

Ah, there's the rub!

Barbara Gish-Scult

*Amos Oz wrote an essay about his grandmother's
paranoid fear of germs

**Center for Disease Control

SEDER

Orderliness.

What a boring word. Not an exciting quality to be known for:

” Oh yes, she is really orderly”.

How do you approach understanding this value without feeling pushed to obey? Or falling asleep?

But... there IS an order to this world, to the way it works:

Day follows night; the moon waxes and wanes; seasons change and come again.

Why, then, is my life so messy?

There are levels of messy, granted.

The clothes may not make it back to the closet all the time,

But at least they are not on the floor anymore, these days.

Now the sweaters and gently-worn shirts get draped, layer by layer, on the back of a chair. I call it my silent valet.

To understand about order, I look at the disorder in my life. Order is a close relative to cleanliness. I see that it does not pay to delay the inevitable. As a matter of course, the bed gets made and dishes washed, but while writing this piece, I ended up cleaning a bit more of my apartment- it just gets worse if you don't.

Or , you pay someone else to do it.

But why do it? Because when things are in order, I feel good- not as in: I feel like a good girl. No (well maybe a little)- but actually, my life feels less cluttered and I feel freer. I find I can think more clearly. Decisions come more easily. I don't waffle back and forth so much.

Inner and outer are connected and influence each other. Take any level you wish. That is where the more subtle truth lies about order for me.

I make no claim in unraveling the order of the cosmos- it is best left to the poets.

This much is clear to me:

Order is simple.

When I was in massage school, trying very hard to comprehend the ways of zen, my Shiatsu teacher said: "If you want your Shiatsu to improve, wash your floors".

It sounded indirect, but compelling. It took years to digest. However, I offer it now

Because it could be perfect advice for anyone, Just fill in the blanks for yourself.

Orderliness. Not exciting, but important.

Satu Ferentz

EQUANIMITY

Like water off a mallard's back
Or dew upon a leaf,
Let nature's hazards flow away
And leave you with relief.

Such verbal fluff on greeting cards
May fill some peoples needs
But most of us lack Teflon skin
And require stronger deeds.

Prayer may help a little.
A response would aid much more.
We must rely upon ourselves
To have a winning score.

For us to have tranquility
And float above the storm
We really have to cultivate
A psyche cool yet warm.

We try to ride the ups and downs,
Keeping our composure,
With a calm demeanor outward,
Limiting exposure.

That is so easy to be said;
We all have lived through it.
From time to time we do succeed,
Otherwise we rue it.

So trial and error is the way.
(I have none that is stronger.)
Just work and try because we know
Vict'ry may take longer.

Stan Samuels

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once found,
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between musical notes:
a soulful rest.

Mark Nazimova

TRUST

A baby, fist firmly encircling a much larger finger,
looks into eyes with perfect trust –
knowing needs will be met,
hugs plentiful.

Yet with the passage of time trust is much less certain,
harder to achieve.

Hurt by life
walls go up, high or higher.
Barriers created stand in the way
of meaningful relationships.

trust –
fragile as a spiders web
as easily pierced,
but possible to nurture over time –
each strand woven and attached carefully, deliberately.

Even well established walls-so-high can be breeched.
Push a ladder close,
peek over, remove a brick.

Relationships to be cherished,
one or a few in a lifetime – most fortunate,
worth the risk.

Hard won bonds with
children, grandchildren, friends.
Memories lived and left.

May the forces that whisper improvement
continue to urge us on.
May our courage not fail
as we reach toward better selves, more meaningful lives.

May our efforts, as our arms encompass ever-wider circles,
improve our own lives, and the (many) others we touch.

Andrea Bardfeld

SECOND BECOMING FRUGAL

I am not cheap
I'm frugal
Mama was cheap
I'm not !

I am not materialistic
I'm frugal
Papa was materialistic
I'm not !

Mama bought shoddy clothes
And cheap out-of-date food
Papa spent without care
With little money to spare.

Papa bought new things
Mama spent little
Shouting matches loomed constantly
Each parent claiming veracity.

Escaping from the fray
Wanting all needs fulfilled
Dreaming of marrying wealth
With positive mental health.

The dream vanished
As many do
Reality held sway
Frugality the way.

Two married students
Two part-time jobs
A child and little to spend
The car a VW bug to tend.

Two married students
Two part-time jobs
A child and little to spend
The car a VW bug to tend.

Contentment found
Shopping with care
Culture entertainment deals
Companionship potluck meals.

Picnics on the lawn
Camping vacations
Walking for leisure
Skating for pleasure.
Savoring the joys of life

With family and friendships
The calm of falling snow
Watching the ocean flow.

Feelings of accomplishment
Love of work above money
Volunteering with joy
By tutoring a boy.

Lessons learned
Practiced still
Poverty long gone
Frugality goes on.

Shirley C. Samuels

MIDDOT 2014

PATIENCE

SALVANUT

It's easy to forget how quickly everything
turns: the world and the ballerina, the
silence of morning, the cruelty of despair

It's easy to forget how very quickly
the chick hatches and the heart breaks,
and the baby's wail becomes a belly laugh.

The call from the lover away at war
is not a stove-pot filled with water;
neither is the end of mourning set
by clockwork or another sunrise.

The caterpillar knows of waiting,
and the son of the man in surgery,
and the anxious actress who waits

on you with coffee and dessert and
a hope that the glass she shattered
at your feet isn't her only big break.

The bear in winter knows of waiting,
and the Master of Suspense, and
the percussionist during an adagio.

But it's easy to forget how quickly everything
turns: the world and the ballerina, and the
hateful storm into the promise of the rainbow.

Joshua Greenberg

ON SALVANUT MEDITATION 2

i remember a time when
moments fit eternities with
vast emptiness for doing,

before yesterday was last year
and tomorrow had already past.
so many vessels, silently smashed,

the work of the world is six days
for One only when partners must,
unequal, sweep construction dust.

now eternity seems too long with
out t i m e e n o u g h to mend
broken hearts or fractured futures.

when i was young, i would close
a book to think on what might
come next, and then wait to turn

off the light so i could savor the
words on the cover, struggling
to find the meaning hidden there...

now grief hovers, an uninvited guest
smelling of motor oil and wanting
to muse about the stock market,

as late at night, i lose the light
and turn on television, struggling
to find distraction from the day.

there is hope in regret -- that
pain is a refuge for the quiet
possibility of what Tomorrow is.

Joshua Greenberg

PATIENCE

Waiting.....

For the weather to warm
 baby to take a first step
 fever to break.

So many hours, days, months spent waiting,
 hurrying time
The quality of time spent
 working toward a goal.

Expressing love and support
 for yourself, a child, a neighb

or, a colleague –
 waiting calmly, with understanding.

Or persevering toward a hoped-for conclusion;
 short-term, requiring focus and attention
or long-term,
 where a final result – often years away –
 asks for ingenuity,
 political savvy, staying power, talent.

We revere Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela for
 their vision and determination
 as they fought to move their nations
 toward equality and peace - a lengthy, difficult process.

Our personal battles loom large,
 demand foresight, patience, perseverance –
 the work of a life-time.
 Breaking a destructive family cycle
 improving relations with dear ones
 conquering or surviving illness
 as we strive to accept imposed limitations
 dealing with personal demons.

May we find the strength
 to nurture the patience
 to overcome the obstacles,
 to chart a productive path,
 to creatively support our cherished ones
as we reach for and work toward our goals.

Andrea Bardfeld

HESED

ACTS OF LOVING KINDNESS

No hymnals sung by angelic choristers
in my Heaven
Where, out there, somewhere... is a never ending sphere of
Eternal Bliss
no stress, want, duress

2

Imagine a place devoid of conflict
No discussions about Being and/or Becoming.
Dare not contradict the nature of good and evil
all to no avail.
Out there, all is good as it justly should....
In that other place can the so called "Elect" denizens fathom
what is the good?
In a sphere of no ambiguities,
only civilities and the Everlasting Boredom of placid Eternity.

3

One time I did see "Heaven" in a revelatory dream
I was standing in the midst of a maelstrom of people,
although the multitude was strangely calm.
Were they true Believers, or Doubters too?
Their faces were devoid of any expression.
Were we all there to determine what Grace is?
Were we here -up there- for some momentous lesson?

A susurrus enveloped me, an ambient wimple of a cloud caressed.
A stentorian voice pierced the silence
Was it the voice of the
Bat Kol?

This voice blessed the multitude in many languages
and I recognized the words

<u>Chesed</u>	acts of loving kindness
<u>Chesed</u>	acts of loving kindness
<u>Chesed</u>	acts of loving kindness

I awoke and contemplated the meaning of this strange dream.
Was some stalking revenant telling me to tear into the narrative
to enlighten me to what it might mean.
This experience reminded me of an exegetical class in Biblical history.
Perhaps my inherent skepticism forced me to parse the words
not the numinous gleamings.
Was it all a mystery?

4

An epiphany - I realized the simplest words and thoughts mask the most arcane meanings.
What can be more basic than to pursue Chesed - acts of loving kindness?
To remove the veil of blindness which separates us - one from the "Others,"
whomever they might be.
Given to all to discourse, to refute, to experience, to act upon the meaning of Chesed in this
World's vast mirror.
And so the oneiric glimpse of Heaven is here, not up there,
somewhere - not there - given to all of us.

<u>Chesed</u>	acts of loving kindness
<u>Chesed</u>	acts of loving kindness
<u>Chesed</u>	acts of loving kindness

Leila B. Alexander

ON HESED MEDITATION

I don't long for
your love, your
adoration
of all that makes me sing
my own praises.

I don't seek
your celebration, your
approval
of all that makes me dance
in public just for fun.

I don't pine after
your prizes, your
accolades
for all that makes me smile
with the pride of self-respect.

I ache for your acceptance
of my weakness
and my wandering,
crave the comfort
in your knowledge
of my flawed humanity,
heave for the healing
words you whisper
while you embrace my disgrace.

You may like me for my goodness,
but
(Gd knows)
you must love me
for my shame.

Joshua Greenberg

ON HESED MEDITATION 2

If Love were the same as Compassion,
it would have more Saving Simplicity;
it would command Comfort and Might,
Power and Nerve, if love didn't stop at
the Edge of Victory and Loneliness --
there would be Another Oh! in love, and
I would be in it, but only toward the end.

If Love were the same as Compassion
there would be no abuse of substances
or children; people would trade smiles
for smirks and barter peace with pride --
and the world would know that Gd=Love
is not enough, that the arms of mighty
nations are most powerful when opened.

If Love were the same as Compassion
the Children of Man and Life would keep
their brothers company and think better
of animals that sense our secret pain --
and on flags around the world the heart
would conquer moons & stars & crosses;
if Love were the same as Compassion.

Joshua Greenberg

COMPASSION

Start with Latin for **compassion** from the dictionary called Oxford.
Then move on to **compassion** which we all can put forward.
Compassion in Hebrew is **chesed**
But it only becomes real with action bless – ed.
So start now. Bring compassion to life
With sympathy and concern for those facing strife,
misfortune and trouble, with complications rife.
Choose situations that touch your soul and life.
Think of Roberta and Richard Katz who collected unused restaurant food
to feed West Siders whose hunger was rude.
Think of Harriet Bograd who helped an untechy member
buy a new computer to become an online contender.
Add Barbara Gish Scult who chairs the Social Action Committee
For West Side causes positively viewed
And Ruth Shapiro whose job search workshop for the homeless
Produced hope, jobs, and confidence boundless.
Not to mention people like Susan Schorr, Ken Klein,
Michelle Lewin and countless others who seek no mention
But practice compassion with tangible results.
So today I welcome new compassionate people
To enjoy great satisfaction from taking concerned action.

Ruth Shapiro

SILENCE
SHMIRAT HALASHON
Guarding the tongue

Is it better to say the wrong thing
Or just say nothing at all?
And how do you know the right thing
When there is no cue card or script?
So you muffle the words that fill your mind
And void the facial clues.
You sit and emulate the sphinx
Though wisdom is a ruse.

Stan Samuels

GUARDING THE TONGUE MEDITATION ON SHMIRAT LASHON

I studied freshman English with Peter
Murphy who taught us Hemingway's
terse prose and decreed to us his law
over the art of language: choose your
words, finite as heartbeats, with care.

And I've studied the ancient teaching
of the rabbis, who detailed the ritual
slaughter for 70 bulls, on the lethality
of language: words, irretrievably cast,
are feather-weapons of triple murder.

Forgetting, I hold my tongue gleaming,
the sword of a golden *torero*, to strike
swiftly, shallowly, pridefully, repeatedly
at a provoked, majestic creature, in a
cruel pursuit of so vainglorious victory.

Weakened, the earth drunk now with
a wine of wounds, I finally relent over
my victim and, like the roar all around
or the bloody roses, fall far too late to
a merciless, piercing, eternal silence.

Joshua Greenberg

TRUST

Abraham went forth to a land he did not know,
trusting the extravagant promise of a God
with whom he had no prior history,
a paradigmatic act of trust.

And we too,
though not on a par with Abraham,
Ulysses, or even Huckleberry Finn,
must go forth.

Like it or not we too must go forth
at first to kindergarten,
followed by an endless series of going forths.

It is an inviolable law of nature.....to evolve,
to grow...and keep on growing.
Mother Nature abhors couch potatoes.

To flaunt this law
is to place your genetic endowments
in serious jeopardy.
(that is, to risk becoming extinct)

I have no doubt it is trust
that allows amoebas to divide,
bees to leave the hive\
and salmon to make the daunting trip upstream

Trust is the engine driving us forward.
Trust is hardwired.....unquenchable...
and will not be denied,

Except....of course when it is betrayed,
violated and utterly abused by egotists,
narcissists, sociopaths and other unsavory types
that populate our otherwise benign universe.

Was it Oliver Cromwell who said
“trust in God”
but keep your gunpowder dry”?

It was certainly Jesus who said
“Lay not up your treasures
where moths and rust do corrupt.”

The message is clear.
Trust must be managed,

doled out in small doses,
dispensed with vigilance.

It has a checkered history.

To trust is to risk betrayal
which is as common as dirt,
and like clothing...comes in all sizes
small, medium, large and extra extra large.

Judas did it with a kiss in the Garden of Gethsemane

Bernie Madoff did it with a ponzi scheme
at his faux Louis XIV desk
in the Lipstick building.

“Et tu Brute” could be the motto of us all.

Of course it's the small daily betrayals
that do us in in the end.

The “thank you” withheld,
the guilt trip not deserved,
the cold shoulder instead of a smile.

Butas the Buddhists say....to hell with all that.
Let's transcend the petty wounds to pride and self love.
and fling ourselves, incautiously,
into the love intoxicated cosmos of Walt Whitman,
the full catastrophe of Zorba the Greek.

Let's go forth....and risk betrayal,
opt for trust over cynicism,
vulnerability over self protection

And when we are betrayed at times as we will surely be,
let us have the grace
to utter a benign sigh
and paraphrase Emily Dickinson.

less than we chide ourselves,
for entertaining plastic goods
upon our silver shelves

Barbara Gish Scult

TRUST ON BITACHON MEDITATION

Trust is the home of our mothers,
first built far away in distant lands
where kings were gods, and gods
the work of so many men's hands.

One framed hers with the sticks
of a husband who smashed staid
stone faces, leaving its walls open
to wanderers that the wind made
She died, perhaps childless, never
meeting the daughter-in-law who
shaped hers from the gentle fabric
compassion but chose one of two.

Her nieces warred of worn, need-
ful jealousies, conceived rivalries,
and conjured theirs between each
other in the husband they pleased.

Until Hannah, in a desperate piety,
asked the Name in a bold petition
to be granted a son, and anointed
the kings who birthed holy nations.

Joshua Greenberg

ON BITACHON MEDITATION 2

We met at the crossroads to new understanding:
I would wear the face of the underprivileged and
She would shelter the cause of the exile. Many
joined, many moaned, and many made jokes of
us from the windows of passing caravans where
children laughed about my clothes and women
snickered at Her tallis wrapped like a schmata.
rust

There was a great heaving of disbelief when the
water rushed over our pursuers like a stampede
of angels. Songs and symphonies were not yet
distraction enough to counter the trauma in our
relief from that massacre. Such beautiful horses.

I looked past the people and saw a light shining
from a distant mountain, where the blue of the
sky turned to fire and fear turned to a new kind
of promise -- that laws were not made by men,
but among them; and gold is no standard at all.

I turned to Her, realizing, my tears forming like so
many raindrops after drought & famine & rivers of
blood; I turned to Her, holding my head up in my
weariness, with the ache of labor and the visions
of my lost little boy tossed into the abyss; I turned
to Her, weeping joy, and took her hand--to my lips.

Joshua Greenberg

FAITH

Reading Scult on Kaplan,
pondering the several definitions of God –

immanent,
transnatural,
transcendental

philosophically useful I find, conceptually interesting,
but leading to a remote, intellectualized Deity.

My God
lives within me, walks beside me.
Her name is Courage,
Strength,
or again Patience.
She helps me chide myself
for anger, for resentment.
Beside me, she is called Wonder, Compassion, Empathy -
noticing,
urging me to appreciate the miracles,
experience the pain.

I seek “only” aid in bettering myself,
encouragement when at risk of failing.

Perhaps She is my better self,
a friend worth having.

We pray “Adonai Elohainu, Adonai Ehad”.
Could our One God be the
the need for, the ideal of,
the work toward betterment?

Perhaps not so different from Kaplan, as I understand him.

Andrea Bardfeld

FAITH

On the green pillow
in the darkened room
I sit on the ground.
IT comes to me once
my eyes close, when I breathe in
deeply, then out, in again.
IT tingles under my skin,
surrounds me, a silk tent.
My friend, I call silently.
Where have you been?
In fact, I know you're here
in the hush and the din,
but I've been too busy
too noisy to pay attention.
Invisible Soft Handed One,
You appear in my grandson's tush,
In the face of my son,
In my daughter, a kissing mother now,
In my husband, as he chauffeurs me
around town.
In my friends' smiles that warm
my synagogue seat before I sit down.
IT fills my well,
the void I used to feel.
In the snap of the wind,
in the sweat staining
my workout shirt.
In the infinitesimal orchid bud,
third time in bloom.
IT compels me to do, to give,
To hope, to say YES.
IT is with me at all times.
Even in pain, even in death.
IT is central as stone.
My hold on this
is blind and loud.
but gets lazy,
so quickly forgets.
But when I confront IT
on that green cushion
or anywhere I go
What a welcome I get!
Heaven is my home

Judith Edelstein

FAITH EMUNAH MEDITATION

The sun is late this morning.

I've waited by the waves with
their cold thunder rhythm
and soft silence
guarding the dawn

for hours in anticipation
of the horizon's labor pains.

She screams fire into the cobalt
nothingness
that has trapped longing
and levity and
loneliness

for centuries before and
does not relent now for my sake.

I imagine a sail offshore
sending sentries paddling
to the beach where I sit
with bottles of
messages I will never
answer, and rags soaked
in kerosene and fear.

I need a light, but
the sun is late this morning.

The clouds are heavy with rain
or snow. The seagulls have gone.
There are no dogs chasing after

their humans -- just a rib-boned
mangey hound, skulking
like a jackal at the edge of the sea.

There is eternity in those depths.
The green surf, murky and raging,
mirrors my mind like tarnished glass.
I am dependent on the dawn, but
the sun is late this morning.

Soon I know (I hope) I will
have sight of my hands again
where I clench the memories

of my accomplishments and
my raison d'être alone with
smashed clam shells and silt.

I remember smiling, what
it was like to taste joy
in each breath and to
trust in tomorrow.

I grip the sand like a ladder
dangling from Heaven, a
trapeze artist or a yellow-
tailed fish waiting for a net
as I breathe in the space
between high and low tide.

The shadow of the water's edge
circles like a harlot's seduction
-- the price I will pay is
holiness and sanctity and love.

If only I could see more clearly, but
the sun

is late
this morning.

Joshua Greenberg

FAITH

Faith is Trust and Belief merged into one,
While securely surrounding the mind.
Guiding one's life it blocks critical thought,
And ideas of an unwelcome kind.

Guarded well by a wall of tradition,
And resistant to a nascent view,
It hinders studying our history
Or our learning of anything new.

We must lower that wall of tradition
And expose ourselves to new learning.
Let our minds be expanded through knowledge
And follow a flame ever burning.

Our beliefs have matured through the ages,
We must see and continue today.
Let our faith become something we build on,
Not a hindrance that limits our way.

Stan Samuels

ORDERLINESS IT DEPENDS

Like most things, the worth of orderliness depends.

In the wilderness, God called upon the Israelites to establish order.

Count the able bodied men, name them by clan and tribe, assign them place, duties, standards. Give them purpose and connection. Count the firstborn, levy taxes, pay the priests. Create a community to defend, protect, endure.

Through the ages, orderliness has been the consort of dictators, hierarchies and bureaucracies, the steel ramrod of armies poised to strike, reducing nations and tribes to a wilderness of bones and ashes.

In my own small world, I skip between order and wilderness, needing both. I pay the taxes, delete the emails and lock the doors. I fill the larder and feed the cat. Then, in my thoughts and dreams, I find my own wilderness.

And there I play.

Helen Stein

ORDERLINESS

A HAIKU

Orderliness
Is it a blessing
Or a curse?

Priorities
Removing the mess
Can Relax

All in its place
Everything is found
Done quickly

Through out old stuff
Make room for the new
A blessing

When chaos comes
Comfort no more there
Order gone

Others disorder
Perfect world upset
No control

People mock us
Call us obsessive
Disturbing

If we attempt
To clear disorder
Complaints come

Should we tune out
Are we the problem
Dilemma?

Work on changing
Our expectations
Without pain

Some find comfort
Surrounded by mess
Let them be

If we obsess
With our disorder
Clear it up

Enjoy our choice
Of orderliness
Savor it!

Shirley C. Samuels

JUSTICE

Justice should not be meted in anger
For justice should not be revenge
A world of an eye for an eye
Would be a world of the blind.
We certainly cannot forget
And often cannot forgive.
The facts must be collected,
Then properly weighed in court.
Along with mitigations,
According to the law.
Quickly but not in haste,
The innocent duly acquitted.
And punishment given when due
That's how it all should work
And might in a heavenly court
But humans aren't angels
And injustice sometimes rules.

Stan Samuels

ATTENTIVENESS

LISTEN OH LISTEN

My eyes squint as the misty raindrops explode on clear walls of plastic
Which I forget are not my eyes
The aromatic smell of nothingness wafts up my nostrils
Carried by the very same raindrops
A sweet, succulent narcotic pulses and courses through my veins
The grey sky, like a protective womb, wraps around me, keeping me safe
And the world is full of molecules that exist because I am here
And I am one
I am one
Where are you?... I am here
I am here... Where are you?
The tree blows brown wet leaves- I know them from some time before
On wet cobblestones like these, whose blackened sheen holds history prisoner
The smell of rain dampened suede
The pounding of a father's heart against the palms of little girl hands, held securely on his back
But I know I heard those smells
And I know I heard the sky as it opened up to bare its soul to all who would dare to look
And the universe is full of suffocating expansiveness that exists because I exist now
And you are here because I exist
You exist because I am here
Who are you?... I am you
I am you... Who are you?
The sky is vast- the heavens are dark and inviting
It sings out to me like the sea- It calls to me- pulling at my arms
It lifts my hands
Unweights my spirit to reach at the sound of soundlessness
A woman pleas for help, a child cries, a dog squeals, a man begs, the dumpster crashes,
The tree blows, a father's heart pounds against a child's hand, blood pulse

And molecules attract, repel, and resonate- Raindrops give themselves over to puddle
Can you hear it with your eyes? Can you hear it with your heart?
Can you hear it with your soul?
Can you?

Listen...
We are here
We are here
Open your eyes
And listen
OH LISTEN

Marion Mackles

ATTENTIVENESS

Look up
at the sky.
Electric yellow by day,
Small night light
Set on tingles of bright white
Smile at the light.

Feel
its color
creep up your sleeve
wrap your shoulders,
cashmere warm or
edge of knife chill.
Caress it.

Touch
The air swirling around you,
Cotton candy on a stick.
Oozing in summer,
Biting in winter.
Embrace it.

Smell
The garbage, dog-doo,
The urine soaked one,
The flowers, the trees,
Garlic frying in olive oil.
Rub your nose in it.

Taste
The center of your heart,
Relish the water, the blood,
The bone, the fat.
Savor sugar, sour, salt.
Tongue all of it.

Stop.
Breathe in.
Touch.
Look.
Listen.

Rabbi Judith Edelstein

BOUNDARIES

In the geography of my mind, fear has whelped walls
My own Great Wall of separation at 12 months,
A Watt's Dyke of homesickness at 6,
The Wailing Wall of depression at 16,
A Separation barrier of heartbreak at 25,
A brief Jericho of terror: cancer at 57.
Walls of stone, barbed wire, shards of glass that read KEEP OUT.

In the geography of my mind, boundaries have grown coequal with wisdom.
Delicate structures, they are tethered by rope and strands of silk, velvet and embroidery
floss.
Structures that breathe and sway like tents, changing and enduring.
Blue and mauve and airy for spontaneity and intimacy.
Deep green and purple, secured to the earth for discipline, work and solitude.
Tents that invite and convey dignity, respect and love.

Helen Stein

BOUNDARIES A PONDERANCE

Boundaries of the soul, boundaries of the heart, boundaries of intellect, of character, of passion...

The force of a chemical, electrical, or magnetic bond
The permeability of a cellular membrane
The spaciousness and limitations of the womb
Atmospheric pressure
The force and the pull of gravity
An explosion that we do not remember- but it remembers us
A synaptic cleft over which a neurotransmitter must take a leap of faith
The arid, dry suffocating heat of a sandy desert
The rough terrain and insistence of a whipping wind on a mountain top
The thick bramble and maddening shouts of the impenetrable woods
The depths of an ocean where we are bumped once as a warning
 before being swallowed up alive
The desire to look past one's eyes and meet another's soul
Fear that it might be your own
You may love your enemy
You may give up self-loathing
You may forgive yourself whether you are forgiven or not
Forgive someone whether they accept it or not
Fear- the strongest of boundaries, the mortar for the bricks of hate
Why be fearful? We all will share the same boundaries in eternity
There is an explosion that remembers us
Replaying as light bounces between two mirrors and the clock ticks ad infinitum
Be strong in your passion, be thirsty for light, be loving in your touch
And never forget the power of an open mind and a compassionate heart
There is no light in a black hole- and no way out

Marion Mackles

COMMON DECENCY

Before there were middot and commandments,
Before there was righteousness and piety,
Before sin and punishment,
 There was common decency.

Even among baboons.

Baboons grooming baboons!
Chimps sharing a banana!

What imperatives of decency have been encoded
 in the depths of our genome.
What ethical necessities written
 into the very heart of being.

Refusing to be outdone by baboons
 We humans aspired to ever higher levels of civility,
Excelled at "thank you"....."you're welcome".....I'm sorry,"
Developed an uncanny ability
 to feel each other's pain.

There are times though when being decent is more serious
Than blowing the whistle on a friend
 cheating at Mah Jongg.

There are times when it means taking your life in your hands.
When speaking inconvenient truths
 offends really scary people.
Do the decent thing and you could end up in the witness protection program.
 living in a small Balkan country
 with inferior plumbing.

But an encouraging word to the risk averse.

No need to put your head on the chopping block.
 You can always just share a banana.
It's not likely to get you killed
 And will surely make the world a better place.

And since reciprocity is a basic law of nature,
 You will end up with a lot more bananas.

Barbara Gish Scult

COMMON DECENCY THE WAY OF THE LAND

I don't know when it came to be - sometime before the time of remembrance
Now rich cool soil tickles my digits and caresses my every move
Pushing, nudging, rolling and uncurling me toward a new beginning
Something unknown- a light that warms and dares me to open
A new soil of nothingness whose gentle breath sways and lures me to unfurl
Thank you for keeping me safe, for food, shelter and the space to grow

Since the time before remembrance your ancestors moaned and laid
Their weary heads down and returned what we had given and they had taken
And one day you shall do the same for our ancestors
It is the way of the land

Out, I elongate- expanding and extending
Exposing myself to the force of mystery
Above me- shimmering against the still blue - a green leaf tiled canopy
Like sirens, whisper sweet songs leading me forever upwards to the heavens
Dangling the sun on a string - taunting me with a taste that I so desperately crave
Excuse me, if you please, would you allow me to share in your light - I am thirsty

I will teach you what was taught to me, and in time, you shall share it with another
You must bend, bow, never lose sight of your desire- search, seek out and find your own
light
One day I will fall to feed the soil like our ancestors before us - and you shall know the sky
It is the way of the land

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN- PLEASE STAND CLEAR OF THE CLOSING DOORS
THE NEXT STOP IS...
Excuse me, would you like a seat?
Oh thank you! I don't think I could have stood much longer
My pleasure...
It's the way of the land

Marion Mackles

COURAGE

THE NAMELESS KNIGHT

The night is cold and dark
In the stillness there is a loud silence
Filling my body with the chill of fear
The unknown rests behind closed eyelids

A hollowness beckons a warm breath to enter
Then roll out like the tide
Fueled by an energy that is foreign to me
But comforting- lulling me into existence

Open your eyes and let me in
The silver moon beam pries open heavy lids
No I am afraid- You are not warm and do not fill me
With golden pinks, joyous oranges, and caressing skies

My child clear your vision- I light the evening sky with silver beams
Reflect the deceiving colors of the day so you can truly see
My ancestry is yours, we share the same beginning
And will one day swirl together in an old forgotten cosmic dance

An eye lid flutters, silver lashes glowing
Moon light impregnates the emptiness
Returning the warmth siphoned off by fear
The hollowness gives way to strength with each new breath

How courageous is the moon to light the dark alone
To closed eyes without a word of thanks
How brave of you to trust the moon
To be there in the unknown

Marion Mackles

DECISIVENESS

NACHSON BEN AMINADAV

Roiling seas, angry waves
Mountains of white foam
On the shore B'nai Israel wept
before the fearsome task
fording the water
on their way home.
Home to a land that was only a dream
A fable long forgotten.
Perhaps a tale told by an elderly
grandparent
some one
who sat by the fire and lulled a
little one to sleep
when the arduous days' work was done.

Perhaps they crooned the august names
of half forgotten ancestors long ago
The wanderers--Abraham, Isaac and Jacob-
-
Whose sturdy feet had trod
endless journeys through
fabled land
Through never-ending hillocks of sand
to forge their claim to the
One with the Ineffable name--
their God

Having shuffled off the bonds of Egyptian
servitude
through miracles and signs
their once Jubilant and thankful mood
Was overcome by horror and awe
As they stood at the shore
of the Sea of Reeds
Waiting to be relieved--
Perhaps other Miracle might occur
They stood still--too fearful to go forward
too reluctant to turn back

Within their ranks there was a rustle a
stir of silent motions--

While Moses their leader beseeched God--
suddenly - a Shout-
a cry rang out-
"Follow me" someone cried
as he leapt into the foaming tide-
the roaring and crackling, and hissing
ceased
and all was still
When Israel crossed the river wide
and fell to rejoicing and singing on the
other side.

On that day--a new Hero was made
his name is remembered in legend and song
Nachshon ben Aminadav
with rhythmic beat strong
Nachshon, Elder of the Tribe of Judah
Will remain
In song and fable a source of
Fame.

Leila Alexander

DECISIVENESS

GHOSTS OF A MIRRORED PALACE

To reach, to grab, to pull, to want, to push away
To hold, to speak, to wish, to grasp
To forgive, to love, to hate, to succeed
To prosper, to learn, to blame, to do
To live, to bury, to lose, to gain, to regret,
To let go...

On the stairs, I knew
I hesitated in mid-sentence
You said, "Well goodnight then"
I decided not to say, "I love you"
Now today is yesterday is a million decades ago
You will never know I loved you- doesn't matter now

On the phone, remember?
I hung up without hesitation
I decided it should be you who should apologize
Or maybe you hung up before I could decide
Now a million decades ago is yesterday
You will never know how sorry I was- doesn't matter now

When did I make the choice?
To forget to take the time to hesitate
As I watched the bag zip over a stiffened shell
Of now forgotten memories
Why was that the moment to choose to be decisive?
Now it is all today and I am haunted by millions of decades of yesterdays

When was it
That deliberation became hesitation
And hesitation became deliberate
And indecision masqueraded as decisiveness
And decades of todays turned to millions of yesterdays
And what didn't matter...matters

To reach, to hold, to forgive, to prosper, to live, to move on...
It is time, without hesitation
No stairs, no phone, no reflections, through reflections, in reflections
Time for deliberation is over
Prometheus' chains have vaporized into the fog
It is time to decide to let go and live for today

Marion Mackles

EQUANITMITY

A quiet surface - unruffled as a glassy lake,
only an occasional bubble indicating activity beneath.

Yet there is turmoil in the depths –
anguish at difficult choices
anger as a plan goes wrong
pain from feeling inadequate
A tsunami brewing.

Focus on the flow of days,
The wonder of the journey –
beauty of the scenery
(colors)
grandeur of the whole

grow, change while
drifting with the bubbling stream or moving purposefully
toward outlet or end point.

Perspective is all.
Pain diminishes
new experiences enrich old
solutions are found
clarity replaces befuddlement
patience eases one through the worst times.

Equinity will come if one can keep the boat upright,
aimed in the right direction

values, priorities intact,
a focus on the flow, the experience –
an acute ear trained toward signals and
an appreciation of,
an openness toward the help of others.

Andrea Bardfeld

EQUANIMITY

MY FRIENDS, IF YOU PLEASE, I NOW INTRODUCE TO YOU...THE DRAGON

The lights burn bright as the curtain floats up with great velocity and importance
The deep bang of the drum sounding the impending doom- the dutiful town crier
Clanking of tin and wood vying for the space where our heart generates its own
vernacular

The painted face of the fierce dragon gracefully jumps, spins, and turns, banging fists
What has hurt and angered you so- to chase after the flowing silk and clashing cymbals
I am told that the Earth is square and Heaven round- Earth flat square... Heaven round
Heaven round sits on top of Earth below

The sun rises over soot covered landscapes of mystical mountain formations
Man-made citadels of brick, glass, and neon lights blend and compete with what was
The harsh screech of aluminum garage doors on cinderblock and concrete changes to a
moan

Shirtless men smoking in piles of old tire rubble and discarded plastic, laugh in the heat
A thin female figure with silken toddler wrapped around her leg cajoles sizzles from a
wok

Heat pressing against ribs making it hard to suck the air- tears fall from burning eyes
Is that your wrath? What if you knew they were tears of despair?
Earth is round and Heaven square- Heaven square teeters on top of round desperate
Earth

Soothing water of moonlit skies across the world washes off the thick white face paint
The mask fades and melts away, exposing all that is and all that was- a faceless face
The dragon that chases silk- the rounded square Earth and its squarely circular Heaven
The skin peels- there is no good or evil
Beneath the façade, the sinew, and veins where the dragon lives and flows through the
blood
Beats a heart that knows truth

Marion Mackles

SLOWNESS TO ANGER

Slowness to anger,
remote to a child,
Can prevent actions
quite violent and wild.

When violence abounds
in home and on street.
Slowness to anger's
a difficult feat.

For a child, hit
by parent or brother
The injured soul
will beat up another.

Angry behavior
without reflection
Grows much worse,
like a rampant infection.

Think Cain and Abel;
there's a moral there.
Untempered anger
a trait to repair.

Well managed,
anger can be constructive.
Otherwise
it can be quite destructive.

Start with the young,
in their homes and in schools,
Providing guidance
and giving them tools.

For problemed adults
it isn't too late
To slow down their anger,
temper their hate.

For growth to proceed
when anger is just
Slowness to anger
decreases mistrust.

You have to relax
and think it all through
Look at your choices
and what you can do.

Learn to assert
with positive action,
Uncontrolled anger
will have no traction.

.
Let's choose the option
of talking it out,
Better than hitting,
without any doubt.

Sit back, calm down
take long, slow deep breaths
Relaxing thoughts
can reframe all your threats.

To child or adult
once more do I say
Slow down your anger;
find ways to delay.

Shirley C. Samuels

SLOW TO ANGER THE WHOLE THING'S ABOUT SOUP!

Chicken Soup- It Cures What Ails You

It's all in the same pot
Parts that you cannot bear to smell
Or eat
Things that repulse you
and some that comfort

The water boils
It has to- it is what you have been waiting for
At last you will have your way- get what you want
But if you let it boil for too long
The soup will evaporate, the flavorful bouquet will burn
The meat will overcook- harden, like an unforgiving heart

The angry bubbles thrash the contents around
Turn it down to a simmer- but not for too long
Or the results will be just as devastating as if you let it burn
Constantly skimming the relentless assault of grey scum
The soup's revenge
You know the final outcome can go either way

Finally it's done...Maybe...Your choice- you turn off the flame
It beckons to you to take a sip- but you know it is a game you will not play
You have been there before and been burned
Frustrated, you gently remove the fat
Soothe it with a gentle slow breath from pursed lips
Then down it flows, you breathe a sigh of calm relief

You can let it boil and burn
You can let it simmer until the contents turn to mush
Rendering it inedible
You control the flame, you control the dial
It is yours to destroy
Or yours to enjoy, love and use to heal

It is your choice
How and what you swallow
And how it came to be

Marion Mackles

