

INTERPRETIVE LITURGY --- FOR THE HIGH HOLIDAYS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	iii
EREV ROSH HASHANAH.....	1
CANDLE LIGHTING.....	2
MEDITATIONS ON ROSH HASHANAH.....	4
BIBLICAL READINGS FOR THE SHMA.....	11
MI CHAMOCHA.....	13
ROSH HASHANAH.....	14
PSUKEI D’ZIMRAH.....	15
NISHMAT KOL CHAI.....	16
BARCHU.....	19
YOTZER OR.....	26
MI CHAMOCHA.....	30
UNETANEH TOKEF.....	33
AVINU MALKEINU.....	38
TORAH HAFTARAH.....	60
PRAYER FOR PEACE.....	64
SHOFAR.....	66
MALCHUYOT.....	69
ZICHRONOT.....	83
SHOFAROT.....	93
EREV YOM KIPPUR.....	102
YOM KIPPUR CANDLE LIGHTING.....	103
PIYYUTIM FOR KOL NIDREI.....	105
MI CHAMOCHA.....	118
AMIDAH.....	128
KI HINEI KAMHOMER.....	130
SHMA KOLEINU.....	134

YOM KIPPUR DAY	137
AL CHET.....	138
TORAH/HAFTARAH.....	152
HAFTARAH – JONAH.....	161
Nazimova.....	161
Klein	171
YIZKOR.....	175
MARTYROLOGY	184
Saphier	184
Brisman.....	191
SHMA KOLEINU.....	195
AVODAH.....	204
Nazimova.....	206
Samuels.....	215
Bardfeld	223
NE’ILAH	234
Nazimova.....	234
P’TACH LANU SHA’AR.....	240

INTRODUCTION

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iii

Over the years, members of West End Synagogue have written a number of prayers, poems and interpretive readings for use in High Holiday services, something that is perhaps unique among congregations of all denominations. This collection of close to 100 innovative liturgical compositions is intended to make them available for regular use both in West End's services and by individual members of the congregation. 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 prayer book for the Days of Awe (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. Comments, questions or other inquiries about the WES Innovative Liturgy Project may be e-mailed to Andrea Bardfeld, abardfeld@gmail.com.

West End Synagogue Ritual Committee, 2007

A SUGGESTION FROM MORDECAI KAPLAN FOR 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 on the last two pages 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.

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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.
- 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 re-affirm, re-achieve, re-establish. ... 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.

Mark Nazimova

EREV ROSH HASHANAH

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KAVANAH FOR CANDLE LIGHTING

Rosh Hashanah. The start of the year. The head of the year—the mind of the year. A time when we reflect on the actions we’ve taken. Every year we join in this spiritual place to pray as a community, and yet for each person the service is completely personal. To each, it has its own meaning.

Only once a year do we gather in this place, on the high holidays; for me this high-ceilinged space, with the entire West End community gathered, is part of the holiday. For me, this has happened every year, since I was tiny. It was established before I knew what it meant, when I simply associated the holiday with apples and honey, the sounding of the shofar.

Each time we come together, there is more to reflect on. I am one year older; I have had more experiences; I have more to think about. As I get older, as I deal with adolescence—hours upon hours of work and study, and try to balance everything else that is meaningful to me, I begin to find myself; to discover my identity and what I truly value. As this happens, this holiday becomes of greater importance to me, because I am making more significant decisions in my life. As I understand more about my future, as I grow into a more complex person, I still have this place to come to, absent of worries of where I will attend college and which career path I will choose, but welcome to my thoughts of reflection on the years past. I feel a sense of renewal on Rosh Hashanah, and of purification on Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur, we always wear white. We are released from our sins, a clean slate.

Every year we join together to pray in the service that has been practiced by our ancestors for generations. Jewish ancestry, history and tradition coalesce into the feeling of the holiday, and are heard through the unique melodies, only sung once a year. The power of the prayers is not antiquated, despite changes in practice. The meaning of the prayers is not yellowed by the societal shifts that have occurred since they were written, but they are understood in a modern light. We hear the ancient words, of Samuel, of Isaiah. We perform the ceremonies that the Jewish people have practiced for thousands of years. And in addition, we hear the original writings of people from our congregation, who seek to tell us about how the holiday affects them. Each person does his own inner reflection of the year past, and ponders his hopes for the years to come.

That is what this holiday is to me. Hope. Renewal. T’shuvah, to turn, returning.

Marya Friedman

ROSH HASHANAH CANDLE LIGHTING

5785

Judaism places a high priority on time. There is everyday time, and there is holy time. Everyday we do our jobs, educate ourselves, and conduct our family and community lives. Holy time is different. As we begin Rosh Hashanah, we light candles to mark the boundary between the everyday and the holy day. It's like the moment you swipe your ticket to an event, going from outside the venue to inside. But a ticket is about entering a place. Candle lighting is about entering a period of time. As we light candles tonight, we enter our journey through the High Holy Days. Another year has gone by, and a new one begins. We cross the boundary from doing what we do in life, to a time of reflection about how we live our lives. The lit candles help us to create an atmosphere of solemnity and spirituality. During this journey we will listen to the blowing of the shofar as a wake up call to reflect on the path of our lives.

On a more personal note, this summer Shelley and I were blessed with the birth of our new grandson, Ezra. As I studied to prepare these holiday remarks, I read about Ezra the scribe and priest who led the Jewish people back from exile to Jerusalem. We are told that on the first day of the seventh month, just as today is the first day of the seventh month, Ezra read the Torah to the people. Then the people were told "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord." The candles we light tonight mark the beginning of Rosh Hashanah, as we return to reflect on our lives, and our paths going forward. May my new grandson Ezra grow to become a strong and wise example of his namesake, and may each of us be blessed with health and happiness in this new year, 5785.

Art Spar

ROSH HASHANAH TRANSITIONS

When I think about life's transitions, I usually consider those events that have caused major changes in my life – marriage, children, retirement, the limitations imposed by health issues. Rosh Hashanah is not that kind of transition. Unless careful attention is paid, the days following the High Holidays will be very similar to those that preceded them. The air may feel a little colder, Fall clothes may need to be unpacked, but life will continue as before.

I would like to suggest that our New Year can be used in two ways to enhance the coming year and, ultimately, with all our (past) Rosh Hashanahs stacked up behind us - our lives.

The first is to think of the days that precede Rosh Hashanah as a transition to the Days of Awe. The more carefully we prepare ourselves to become immersed in contemplation and self-examination during the High Holidays, the more we stand to benefit from the process.

The second is to consider the entire High Holiday period a moment for change. If we were to pick one thing – either within us or in our immediate world – and focus on changing it for the better, the High Holidays could be considered a transitional time. And if all the changes we have affected or participated in that were initiated during past High Holidays were taken together, the result would be quite impressive. Also, we would be much less likely to approach next year's Days of Awe thinking "Here I am again".

I use both approaches but – being introspective and self-evaluative by nature – relate more naturally to the second. In fact, I take stock during the Amidah each Shabbat. I find the encouragement and reminders I provide myself to be helpful, as I urge myself toward the next day, week or year.

In our complicated and difficult world, every opportunity for change, every chance to examine the possibilities and to move closer to the life we believe in - the life we truly would like to live, should be seized.

Andrea Bardfeld

THRESHOLD

The sun
relaxes into the horizon
releasing
colors to the clouds
with abandon
and delight.
Beneath it,
startled to attention
by autumn's first chill breeze,
a Red Oak
reevaluates its leaves and roots
pondering what to grow
and what to shed.
Tonight, for us
a threshold.
A moment
of Sabbath-ceasing, complete rest
but also
a crossing
from last year
into next,
from what I did with my life
to what I will make of my life
As Jacob crossing the river
a time of thoughtful approach
and anxious wrestling.

The new moon
a shard of mirror
to see ourselves.
A divine gift:
to change
our perspective
renew
our intention
wonder
about our lives.
On this anniversary of creation
we begin
re-creating ourselves
in a tabernacle
of ten days.

Mark Nazimova

ROSH HASHANAH

On most Jewish holidays, such as Sukkot, Purim, and Simchat Torah, we all gather to celebrate or remember a communal happening: the harvest, an important story in our history, or the love of the Torah. On Rosh Hashanah, we are still gathered together, but it is a deeply personal holiday. We pray for ourselves, and that we are inscribed in the book of life. We pray for happiness, and peace and health for our families and friends. We tell G-d in our prayers that we are sorry for things we have done in the past year that may not have been so holy. Having the time to focus on ourselves and reflect, is a good thing.

By looking back at the things you remember most from the past year, it makes you realize who you are as a person, and then you can put thought into the coming year, instead of just letting life happen to you. For me, the memories were as big as traveling with my aunts, and uncles and cousins and grandparents, through Israel, or as small as being able to stand up on a wakeboard for the first time.

Every Rosh Hashanah in the past, I went to services, but what I really looked forward to was hanging out with my cousins, and playing in the Gym downstairs. This year, I am becoming a Bat mitzvah, so I have decided to open myself up to the beauty of the service, and not ask my parents when I can leave. My wish for you is that everyone finds their own special moment. I wish the community, and my family and everyone in Israel a year of peace, a happy new year! Shanah Tovah oo metukah!

Dalia Wrocherinsky

TURNING

We spend all our lives trying to get
somewhere, to work or the store
or graduation, and we look back
only to remind ourselves
of where we need to be.
Sometimes we remember
not to go anywhere, but
the hardest place to travel
is inside, folding into ourselves,
seeing if where we're trying to get
is where we want to go,
spinning if we can
with our arms open wide,
letting the world rush by.

Nancie S. Martin

PRAYER FOR THE PRACTICAL

Not everyone has a chance to get ahead in our America.

What a sweet year it would be to see the reach of opportunity cast a wider net.

Grant wisdom to our leaders and decision makers. May their decisions be guided by more heart and less bottom line. Infuse our future with a greater sense of humanity.

In the New Year may we know less economic disparity.

May a living wage be realized so that a working family worries less and enjoys life more.

Let the food banks go out of business because they lack customers.

May the experience of living in a home that fosters good health and a sense of security be available to all regardless of economic status.

Medical advantages that technology has afforded us should be for the privileged many, not the privileged few.

A good education, the foundation for our future, may it too no longer be attained only by some, out of reach for others.

May the good fortune of having a loving family and friends be known by greater numbers.

May we all go forward with a renewed sense of goodness and godliness. And may our good intent be contagious.

Andrea Brecker

ON ROSH HASHANAH

A time to renew
A place to look back on what we've accomplished
What we've done
A time to relax and write
Or maybe just contemplate

Not just be happy
But be happy with yourself
Over what you did
Not just what you accomplished
But be proud of yourself

A sweet part of the year
An icon of hope and happiness
Is what Rosh Hashanah is

A time to be at peace
It's not a time to be alone
But a time to be with others
To be able to share with others
Say, "hey, this is what I did, what did you do?"

This is a time to not only look back on the good year
But to look forward and think
What a good year it will become

A time to be holy and pray
Not only for yourself
But also for others
To be at peace.

Edward Sherman

ROSH HASHANAH

Shana Tovah. My name is Cooper Sherman.

When the Israelites strode across the Red Sea, it might have been the scariest time of their lives. But crossing the Red Sea was only the first part. Losing their fear of the sea was the hardest part. It happens to everyone. There is a time in everyone's life when your life gets put on the line, and there is no escaping it. But that is not what you have to worry about. Sometimes, the event might only last 5 minutes, but the emotional process afterward can last months.

Earlier this year I was riding the waves at Bethany Beach in Delaware, with another friend of mine, and suddenly a huge rip current carried me out behind the breakers past where it was safe to swim. Luckily the life guards came out to save us. It was a quick and lucky 2 minutes.

But after that, I spent half the summer always looking at the water differently. I was just trying to stay safe instead of actually having fun. When an event like that happens, it is important to know that scary things happen to everyone, but the world is not an unsafe place.

As the new year comes, I do not want to throw away that event because when you throw away one thing, it takes away a lot of other fun activities from your life. But what I do want to let go of is not being able to have fun at the beach. Eventually, I was able to accomplish that.

If you find yourself still scared of past events, just give your mind a little time to recover, and then build up to your former self. Start trying to do a little bit more each day.

Whatever scares you, you can't avoid it. Because if you do, the event takes over your life. If anything like that has happened to you, Rosh Hashanah is an opportunity to think about what you want to throw out and what you want – and may need – to let go of.

Shana tovah.

Cooper Sherman

CHOOSE LIFE

There was a time - that may yet come again -
When our people were a model
For the nations of the earth,
A time when we and all people are blessed
With tranquil cities
And thriving farms
With an abundance of food of all kinds;
And babies are born with bright, healthy futures
In a wholesome environment.
And that time is possible now
Even if it never happened before.
Because now, more than ever,
We face a choice of life or death, good or evil.
Mankind has the power to end life on earth as we know it.
But our people can again be a model for all the nations
Serving and saving the environment,
Feeding the hungry,
Caring for the sick and the elderly and infirm,
Giving to the poor and supporting the weak,
Faithfully observing the commandments and ethics
Of our tradition.
Now, more than ever, we must choose life,
Not only for ourselves and our offspring
But for all humanity.

Stan Samuels

THERE WAS A TIME

They say there was a time when the world was idyllic
And some believe that it will come again.
When the riches of the earth produced bountiful crops
and no one starved.
And that time is possible now even if it never happened before.
That all people would live in peace with their neighbors,
Enjoying life and letting others do the same.
Noting skin color as much as eye color.
And that time may yet be possible,
If all people turn to each other as to God.
And choose life for themselves and for all mankind.

Stan Samuels

MI CHAMOCHA THE THINGS WE CARRIED

Pharaoh said, "Go". Moses said, "Run. Take nothing with you."

Together with the others, I ran, filled with confusion and fear, torn by ambivalence and unable to see or imagine any future.

There was the sea – boiling and swollen.

Moses said, "Follow me". Where are we going? Into the sea, to a most certain death? Is this freedom?

Enslaved and now free. Everything left behind.

I do not know what to do.

I am stuck. If I run into the sea, I will die. If I turn back, Pharaoh's soldiers will most certainly kill me.

What might the worst-case scenario make possible?

How many worst cases are the best cases?

I follow Moses into the sea.

We wander in the desert and I want to know where we are going.

My head is filled with hatred and resentment.

I blame Pharaoh. I blame all who followed his will and took pleasure in harming us and whipping us into submission.

I have no room for anything else in my heart.

I did not leave everything behind.

I am angry, very angry.

I see the land, its vastness, its expanse, its colors reflected in the changing sky.

I want to leave the past at the edge of this desert, not allow it to follow me into this new land, but I do not know how to stop looking back or how to turn away from what I want to forget as it recedes behind me.

I remember all that Moses taught us about the One, and I think about the burden of hate and resentment and of being saddled with those heavy blocks, fashioned from Egyptian clay, and I feel so tired and exhausted.

I do not want to be dominated by anger, so I grab it and hold it out in front of me - to look at it, see its various aspects in the refracted light.

What if the greatest mystery is that of the potential for human transformation and the possibilities for forgiveness?

I ready myself to cross over, to walk through or step into whatever comes next. Mine is the work of looking and turning, even if I do not yet know how. To know where I come from, where home has been and to turn toward home when it is time.

Joanne Feltman

ROSH HASHANAH

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**PSUKEI D'ZIMRAH
KI LE'OLAM HASDO**

On the days when my shoes
tie tangled knots of their own,
and the unwritten words of my work
curl together in twisted smiles;
I'm the tail end of the Doppler Shift,
the sound left by receding cars and
parting voices.

When all the cards are stacked
against me—

You hold up the mirror,
only for me to realize that I
am in fact
the dealer.

Ki le'Olam Hasdo.

Why wish for super powers
when I have healing powers?
Mundane magic,
no less amazing.
Even as my skin cells die
my hair grows,
curls with spring,
spring with blossoms and eggs,
hatching and catching and baseball with kids.
Scrapes on my knees
become stronger with time;
a run isn't done
till my chest voice is hoarse.
Climb a ladder for a slide,
fall out of control
for a dance to extol,
burn for the deepest glow,
Ki le'Olam Hasdo.

Marya Friedman

NISHMAT KOL CHAI

“Then the lord god formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living creature.”
Genesis 2

“The breath of all life” affirms a shared life force among all of God’s creations, a common breath that not only sustains physical life, but also serves to praise our single Creator.

If all humankind has a shared breath, how can we explain a fractured society - hate, bigotry worshipping of false idols and distinguishing fellow creatures as the other?

In this vein an exploration of Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave” is instructive. The allegory explores the nature of belief versus knowledge. Prisoners have lived their entire lives chained inside a cave only able to see what is in front of them. Behind the prisoners is light, with people carrying shadow puppets and other objects which cast shadows on the wall. The prisoners deem these shadows to be the only reality as they’ve known nothing else and have literally been brainwashed all of their lives and are unaware of anything beyond what the puppet masters have led them to believe.

Plato suggests that if a prisoner became free, he would see the light and realize that the shadows are fake and that there is a whole alternate world outside of the cave. He would see the outside world as so much more real than that in the cave and would return to free his fellow prisoners, however fear of harm and change would prevail and they would ultimately rather remain than abandon what they are convinced is the only reality.

This allegory was very prescient. Nowadays, we all live in a virtual cave with our only information coming second hand. We are bombarded and manipulated with fake news and conspiracy theories and live in a world with too much information about each other and no understanding and no privacy. Anyone with a handheld device knows what newspapers I read, what I watch on television and what I had for breakfast. Like the prisoners in the cave there is little opportunity to question our beliefs and prejudices.

Who is there today to open our eyes and shed light?

In biblical times there was God’s voice in the prophet Jeremiah railing against injustice, idolatry, social injustice and moral decay and predicting divine judgment.

Will we continue to kill the messenger and further alienate each other?

Civilizations have died because of such fracturing.

I would shout out to return to a free exchange of ideas in the classroom with a free press and houses of worship, and to quote the *Washington Post*, “democracy dies in darkness

Connie Goldfarb

NISHMAT KOL CHAI

Changing words into imagery was always easy for her.

Telling stories with a line of painted symbols. Broad strokes of an internal music of mixed metaphors on paper, to elicit dormant feelings, memories thoughts, or a sensory response into existence.

Seven years ago, she had written on the same topic. So many words, images cascading onto the paper- and now nothing. Sitting in the temple of words, a library, her last resort... the paper remains a blank.

WORDS . WORDS ! WORDS ?

A Journey (Nope). *A Dream* (No, No, and NO!!!).
She closes her eyes and visits remembrances of an odyssey...

A hawk overhead gliding just beneath white puffs of clouds. The sky so light and blue. The coolness blows through her hair as if it were feathers. She asks,

“Are you the words on the paper?”

A *screech* echoes through a flutter of wings.

She sits upon a large grey boulder- once cold to the touch, but now warmed by the heat emanating from her body. She asks,

“Are you the words on the paper?”

She presses her ear to the stone and listens to the noise made by the entombed nothingness that now courses through her body as she jolts upright and stares out into wilderness

She then asks a tree, whose leaves chime a century old song written and held deep in its core

Gracefully floating upward into the atmosphere before she can comprehend its meaning.
Feet wet with sand “Are you the words on paper?” she asks the ocean

Ae the powerful force of the tides rush in
followed by a gentle quietness as they slowly recede back, back, back.

Taking her breath away... No. Filling her with joy... NO!

Leaving her breathless with joy.

WORDS. WORDS! WORDS?

NISHMAT KOL CHAI THE BREATH OF LIFE

Maybe, there are no words

Just a white sheet of paper...

Marion Mackles

INTRODUCTION TO THE BARCHU
in loving memory of David Prager

Now is the moment where we turn our attention from our own lives to the larger community.

This is where we drop our limitations to join the larger tribe.

Prayer can lift us up beyond where we feel stuck,

And this is our moment where we greet the greatness of this day.

As we rise, let our prayers join those that are already in motion,

And then let the prayers of other congregations mix in as well.

And as the earth turns, our prayers will envelop the world.

Satu Ferentz

BARCHU

a meditative interpretation

Can you feel the shift?

Something now moves, within us, and around us:
We shift from the inner strains of personal introspection
To something bigger, more universal.

Now is the moment

When our solitary reflections begin to coalesce,
And merge like trickles rising together into a larger stream,
A flowing river of 'Conscious Community'.

As we rise, with whom do we stand?

Who joins us, to become part of something bigger?
Can we feel, perhaps, loved-ones past, shoulder to shoulder, with us?
Those who have stood by us
Those who have nurtured us, taught us, led us
Built us,...held us.
Can we even sense, perhaps, in this moment, the shadow of generations
That stood on this day, and rise with us now?

Or is it we who stand with them

We hear the Barchu and together we call out in response—
A clarion call to open the gates, to all who can hear
Like a horn, echoing in the mountains of Judeah:
And we become a Community, whose only boundary is the reach of our hearts.

And together
We rise.

David Prager

BARCHU

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF ONENESS

We come together today with all sincerity to touch the Divine. We seek a feeling of connection; to have new start. We have practiced self-reflection and sought forgiveness of those we have hurt in any way. And today we seek to be at one with the Divine and to know that the Divine is in our lives.

The question for me has always been how to reach a true understanding of this. As Reconstructionists, we are given the freedom to find whatever meaning of God is true for us. My hope is that, even for the most perplexed among us, we can find refuge in this freedom.

When I struggle I get my inspiration from going back to the Shema - to the word 'One', Echad, and expand it from there: One. God is One. If there is an all-pervasive something that supports all existence, then it has to be an unchanging-one—something- like a wheel which has an invisible still center around which the spokes turn; a mini-galaxy, if you will.

And if this something is pervasive everywhere, then that means each of us is, somehow, a part of that One. All of us are participating particles of this something which I, personally, feel comfortable calling Ruach HaOlam, the Spirit of the World.

Someone has said that we pray to praise, and to feel closer to this One. And we meditate to rest, and to feel this One closer to us: This One that IS us, our deepest part, beyond even the magnificent Mind...It is what allows the mind to work.

And yet, it is an open secret. We just have to drop all our claims to everything! Easier said than done. But we must try as best we can to become closer to this One, because only then can we live our lives as a gift.

To get a sense of what this means, let us sit together for a little while in quiet and stillness. We are used to the noise and activity, but there is a region of peace within us all. It is how we are all connected.

So now make an effort to sit up as straight as possible, physically or spiritually, so as to feel balanced, with the head drawn as if from above.

And now, without any expectation of results, let go of all concerns, all plans, regrets and all questions for the moment, because understanding comes in experience only. And so, fall deeply still:

and now gently return to an awareness of your surroundings and slowly open the eyes. Appreciate the peace and space you feel here now.

In the Vedantic tradition of meditation that I practice, all activities begin and end with the Sanskrit phrase:

”Om, Paramatmane namah, ” which means: ” To the Supreme Self, a bow”.

And so, the kavanah that I offer is, to hold that during the Barechu: To the Supreme Self, a bow.

Satu Ferentz

BARCHU

OUR CALL TO PRAYER

Barchu: our call to prayer
once summoned Jews to gather,
called them to the Temple in Jerusalem
repeated through centuries.

In Days of Awe
we gather again
engaging with each other
and with God,
remembering our past,
reflecting on our future.

Together as one
we hear and respond.
Each of us differing in
our prayer-understanding,
yet sharing a common history
as a people.

Over these Ten Days,
until sundown on Yom Kippur?
our rituals and words in this space
bind us as a single sacred community.

May we be open ,
embraced and embracing.
May we connect inward and outward
Reflecting honestly on
our shortcomings,
our achievements,
our humanity

Sharing liturgy and creative reflections.
May we be fearless in exploring our heritage,
our relationship to God
and to our fellow human.

May our journey together
infuse our lives with meaning.

Now, in this moment,
that seems distant and disparate.
May our own personal paths
direct us towards shared, sacred purposes:

May we work together
to support each other in joy and sorrow;
to mend this broken world;
to fight injustice
to preserve our planet
to pursue shalom within and beyond us.

Shirley C. Samuels

BARCHU PRAYER FOR THE WES 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

YOTZER OR

A sliver of light then the sky explodes, a rainbow of color.

A new day, new possibilities.

And on Rosh Hashanah?

It matters not whether there are clouds or sun.

The opportunities to start afresh,
or change direction proliferate.

If the path ahead seems murky
the way forward unclear

seek patience,

take time to evaluate

search for the best alternative.

Hard times can sometimes offer unexpected choices.

Andrea Bardfeld

LIGHT

Light, light. We have been given such abundant light.

See it there, in the sky: the sun's light cannot be owned or packaged by anyone.

It was made for all to share.

Less obvious, but equally untouchable is the divine spark that made each of us.

It also cannot be owned or packaged.

It is something we all share.

Light in all its forms allows us to see, appreciate, comprehend and aspire.

It lights the mind, fires the heart and yet, remains itself.

This light allows us to differentiate between the truth and untruth of our actions and thoughts.

More often than not, I forget, but sometimes, I do perceive that this light

which powers our inner and outer lives is, really, our birthright;

That this is an aspect of "Ehad"; that we are all aspects of this unlimited light.

Who can understand it? Must we? Some things are beyond words.

Light, light. We have been given such abundant light.

Satu Ferentz

YOTZER OR RENEWAL

Pause in the bustle of the moment.
A deep breath or two –
enough time to reevaluate.
Think through words, actions,
 framing them to be most helpful,
 least harmful.

Overcast pearly gray
or brilliant gold – orange tinged,
light signifies a new day
 offering chances and choices,
 possibilities and pot-holes.

Shared with others or observed alone,
Shabbat
a day of prayer and reflection,
 tradition and renewal.
Seize the chance –
examine, plan and adjust toward achieving goals.

Today
the end of the old year, the start of the new –
continue the process of review
 evaluating the past
 gathering insights
 building on conclusions,
resolving to do better.

If the year has been spent mindfully
 keeping hopes and aspirations in view,
 maintaining a check on baser inclinations,
the work is half done –
the achievements easier to hold.

As the gates close on Yom Kippur,
aim to move into tomorrow with
 a refined set of tools,
determined to make the most of opportunities,
to live a fuller and enriched year.

Andrea Bardfeld

WALLKILL MORNING YOTZER OR

Everything is sleeping in the hour before dawn.

The quiet is so deep:
I walk slowly so as not to disturb.

The slightest hint of light starts there,
Above the dark tree line,
And begins to bathe everything, ever so gently, with soft grays
As the stars slowly fade.

The space in the air feels so vast in this early morning hour:
I move gently through it so I feel its early morning embrace.

I watch and listen to this gorgeous, quiet awakenin
All my senses receive it:
The smell of earth and dew, the slight chill in the air;
The crickets sing in their rosebush.

The first bird song sounds and then the next,
And the light is coming up.

Dawn,
Light of Life,
Holy is this moment

Satu Ferentz

MI CHAMOCHA

Head of the year,
Between Shema and Amidah
At the doorway between past and future
Personal and communal,
Known and unknown,
Trust and fear,
Coming or going,
Stepping or standing?
Do you jump in with joy?
Hang on to what you know?
Celebrate possibility?
Or cling to what has been?
The process of acknowledgement,
Appreciation and wonder
Between gratitude and promise.
Mi Chamocha
Who is like unto you?

Jill Harkavy Friedman

KAVANAH FOR MI CHAMOCHA THE STORY OF A ROCK

The courage to dream
The hope that those dreams come true or melt away to expose new dreams
The courage to love
The hope that it will last through a future of the unknown and unforeseen
The courage to give way to your desires
The hope that you will not be consumed by them
The courage to close your eyes at night and put your trust in a world
that you have no power over
The hope that tomorrow the air will fill you, the light will lift you,
and life – life will start anew
The courage to open your eyes, get out of bed, and say
“Yes” to whatever is thrown in your path
The hope for the answers to questions that you had the courage to ask
The hope that you have the courage to hear the answer
Then – the courage
The courage to watch your loved ones walk out the door, disappearing into their future –
your past
The hope that they will return safely at the end of the day
The courage to dare to hope
The courage to let go
The hope that you’ve done the right thing
The courage to ask for forgiveness
The hope that you are heard
The courage to forgive
The hope, the hope, the hope...
Courage!

Marion Mackles

MI CHAMOCHA

Before them the Red Sea
Behind, the forces of Pharaoh ready to strike,
An impending sense of doom.
Nachshon, trembling, steps into the Red Sea
Which could swallow him up in an instant.
Unbelievably... the sea parts.

Did Nachshon step into the Red Sea to avoid guilt --
Guilt if he defied Moses, guilt if he acted cowardly?

We humans raised the feeling of guilt to dizzying heights,
Made a leap, a grand jete up the evolutionary ladder
As we proclaimed: *Tzedek, tzedek, tirdof!*
Justice, justice you shall pursue.
Increasing our capacity for guilt, exponentially.

Guilt, an existential alarm system,
A wake up call to how we have fallen short,
Summoning us to *teshuvah*, repentance.
Is it any wonder we thrill to stories of redemption?
Guilt, our greatest achievement
because redemption is our greatest need.

Our biblical and cultural stories cry out this message over and over:
The sinner repents
The prodigal son returns home,
The lost become found,
And the blind can see.

The cowardly lion becomes brave
The tin man discovers his heart,
The fool regains his wisdom.

Jacob, so flawed, dreams of wrestling with an angel.
Awakens a changed man and reconciles with his brother
A new name, a new beginning. An exalted act of *teshuvah*.

Oh merciful world that has such forgiveness in it.
Where the door is always open, hope for a truer life never foreclosed.

Barbara Gish-Scult

UNETANEH TOKEF

A long time ago, before I was even Jewish, I remember asking someone what the high holy days were all about. As I recall, he quoted the refrain from the *Unetaneh Tokef*, which we are about to sing: As our prayer book translates it on 351,

“On Rosh Hashanah all is written and revealed,
and on Yom Kippur, the course of every life is sealed.”

“But,” he went on, “between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, *teshuvah*, *tefilah* and *tzedkah* can still make a difference.”

I was appalled. The idea that our fate for the coming year is being determined right now, and that we have only a few hours to make it better, should be appalling to us all, but that seems to be what the words we are about to say mean.

Many people have, of course “reconstructed” these words. Last week Mark Nazimova sent around an email quoting a friend’s “modern” version of this, that all you computer mavens will understand.

“On Rosh Hashanah God reviews the contents of the great Hard Drive of life, deciding which records to update, and which to delete...and on Yom Kippur, those files are closed and backed up until next year.”

Thanks, Mark, but that is no improvement.

Over the years I have actually come to love singing the *Unataneh Tokef* every year. And I finally figured out a way that I could interpret it for myself so that even I could sing it with something like real conviction.. What I do is, I mentally add two phrases, sort of in parenthesis, that turn the meaning around 180 degrees for me. At the beginning I mentally insert the phrase “One might think that...” and later on, the phrase, “but in reality...”

One might think that it is predetermined “how many pass on, how many shall thrive; who shall live and who shall die;” and so on. But in reality it is our own actions, day in and day out, every day of the year, that decide what kind of a life we will have. This is the same thought that is expressed in the poem “Invictus,” which some of you will remember.

“It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul”

Of course the future is unpredictable, and many things that happen to us are out of our control. But in the end the question that we all face – and that is presented to us most starkly in the *Unataneh Tokef* – is whether our fate depends solely on what happens to us in life – good and bad – or on what we ourselves make from the materials that those experiences provide.

During the past year our rabbi, Yael has shown us all how this kind of courageously self-determined life can to be lived. And we all thank her for that.

Donald Menzi

A CHILDREN'S UNETANEH TOKEF

What a great mystery it is that all the events destined to occur in the dawning year are already written upon the stars:

Who will have good fortune, and who will have heartbreak,
Whose lives will be touched by the enormous waves, and whose lives will continue on safe ground,
Who will lose power, and who be graced with light,
Whose house will be demolished, and whose missed by inches,
Who will be lonely, and who find community.

To every child, it is painful to see other children lose their homes, their pets, their books, their clothes, their toys, their favorite stuffed animals and dolls, the ordinary rhythms of daily life, work and play.

To every child it is painful to see another child lose someone he loves deeply, to see her be hungry and thirsty, cold and tired, watching the flood waters rise.

They say that these events are already written, but that
A mighty shofar will sound, and a small, quiet voice be heard.

They say that it must all occur as it is written, but that
Teshuvah- re-turning
Tefilah- prayer
and tzedakah- doing right in the world,
Have the power to change our lives,
To transform the harsh decree.

*[insert refrain in Hebrew, English and transliterated Hebrew:
"berosh hashanah yikatevun..."*

What can that mean, when I know my small self cannot change the indifference of the vast, endless waves, or the cruelty of the bombs?

Can it mean that trying to feel the truth, listening inside, trying to do the right thing,
Transforms the decree?

If I give my baby brother the last cookie I badly wanted for myself,
If I accept my friend's apology when I have been so very, very angry,
If I give away a toy I've loved for years to someone who lost such a toy,
If I say, trembling, "I'm the one who threw the ball through the window glass!"

Do these things transform the decree?

If I always give away the last cookie to someone else so that people will think I am such a good person- and if this time I stop trying to look good and simply eat the cookie with pleasure,

If I accept my friend's apology and then, to my own surprise, hear myself say, "I'm sorry, too- the truth is, it wasn't all your fault."

If a child says this to a parent,

If a parent says this to a child,

Does this transform the decree?

[insert refrain in Hebrew, English and transliterated Hebrew]

If I blaze and challenge a group of children who are mocking a smaller one,
If I am sad because I did not have the courage to challenge a group of children who are mocking a smaller one, but I pick up her books and help her to her feet, resolving in me somewhere that someday, I will do more, and allowing myself to feel compassion for my own fear as well as hers,

Does this transform the decree?

If I give to charity not the money I won't miss, but the money I might miss...

If I send a box to a child in a relief effort not just to feel better, and then push it all away,
But letting myself feel what it might be like, now, for that child,

Do these things transform the decree?

[insert refrain in Hebrew, English and transliterated Hebrew]

If I let myself feel all the way down deep, how cruel I was to mock that child at school,
If I admit how nasty I have been,
If I allow myself to feel real sorrow for the hurt I have caused, and not settle for cheap words of apology,

If I go deeply underneath someone's words,
And hear the real meaning hidden in the tones of voice,

Does this transform the decree?

If the piercing pain of someone's cruelty in knocking me down opens my heart to the kindness of the one who lifts me up,

If I do the thing I fear, or forgive myself when I cannot,
If I channel my anger into doing right acts instead of letting that anger consume me,

Does that transform the decree, wash the world in different colors?
If the dam of my heart so breaks open with the vast unfairness of the world, that I endeavor
to make
small fair acts in my small life

To do the right thing, to do the just thing...

Does that transform the decree?

[insert refrain in Hebrew, English and transliterated Hebrew]

When the mighty Shofar is sounded, how do I hear the small quiet voice? How do I listen for
it?

Might I dive down and wrap myself in silence like a prayer shawl? Does that not transform
the decree?

To begin anew, to search my soul, to act for good in the world-
If, for this moment, it is the most important thing,
Does this transform the decree?

Listen...to the Shofar

Listen...to the sounds around me

Listen...to the sounds within me

Listen...to the stillness

Listen...

Julie Sandler-Friedman

INTERPRETIVE AVINU MALKEINU

There is a force that orders the universe, that is within each of us, that makes each of us human and unique: this force is Vastness. It is a human act to name, and a human need that leads us to imagine the Vastness in our image.

- Avinu Malkeinu.** This is the name we give to the Vastness.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** Because we name it, the Vastness seems more finite, less chaotic.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we deal with ourselves and with each other honestly and kindly so that we enhance the Vastness.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we manage ourselves wisely when we deal with our enemies.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we manage ourselves wisely when we deal with our friends.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we find ways to improve our lives and the lives of all those around us.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we earn respect, and deserve to be forgiven.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we respect and forgive others.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we find our way to health, to contentment, and to renewal.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we find sustenance in all realms of our lives.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we find strength in ourselves and in our People.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we learn to attend to our innermost selves, and to engage in meditative prayer.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we have a sense of our place in the ongoingness of generations.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we remember we are powerful amidst the Vastness.
- Avinu Malkenu.** May we remember we are but dust amidst the Vastness.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we find a way to face the Vastness and return from it inspired.

- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we always perceive the Vastness knowing it as ours.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we engage with ourselves and others with generosity of spirit, with openness of mind, and with openness of heart.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we imbue our lives with meaning.
- Avinu Malkeinu.** May we find for ourselves a new happy year.
- Avinu Malkeinu.**

Irna Gadd

AVINU MALKEINU PRAYER FOR THE HEALING OF THE JEWS

Avinu Malkeinu, our God, during this past year we have done the wrong thing too many times to be counted

Avinu Malkeinu, the One, You alone are our God but those of us who cannot agree have fragmented You into many, giving you attributes you never gave Yourself.

Avinu Malkeinu, our Light, help us to see that what divides us is really that which should bring us close—our love

Avinu Malkeinu, our General, give us the courage to band together to battle the horrors plaguing our world.

Avinu Malkeinu, our Composer, help us to write this new year as a year of harmony.

Avinu Malkeinu, our Fortress, help us to be strong against those who would speak angrily against us; help us not to speak angrily against each other.

Avinu Malkeinu, our Guard, strengthen our eyes and the eyes of the governments that protect us to be aware of the plans of others to harm us; give us the clarity not to harm each other; send strength and faith to the hearts of Israel that they may stand up against the flood of terror while still working without bitterness or malice to end it.

Avinu Malkeinu, the Compassionate, give us the love, wisdom, and resources to play our role in ending hunger, abuse, oppression, and destruction both in the Jewish communities and in all the communities of the world.

Avinu Malkeinu, the Merciful, forgive us as we are so very sorry. Help us to look more carefully at our action during this new year and to try and see the effects they will have. Most importantly, help us to love each other the way You love us. Help us to remember our history and to forgive and accept each other as we pray that You forgive and accept us.

Avinu Malkeinu, our Guide, we will not presume to say that in this coming year we will return ourselves completely to You and do no wrong, for we know that human nature is not so. But we ask You to be patient with us and to guide us, because we love You without end and we are trying and we will try.

Avinu Malkeinu, Our Healer, we know that our prayers are not enough, our actions must follow. But please, help us. Hold our hands and show us. Let us on these Holiest of Days make an agreement: You help us to heal our souls, and we will help You to heal the Jewish People, too long torn apart by intolerance, misunderstandings, stubbornness. Let us say it aloud before You, before the entire congregation. Last year we destroyed. This year we will rebuild. Our lives are only what we create out of them. Help us to create this year for good.

Avinu Malkeinu chaneinu ve'oneinu ki ain banu ma'asim Yom Kippur 1995, Aseb imanu tzedakah ve'chesed ve'boshieinu. Avinu Malkenu, the Infinite, Wonderful God to whom we can never offer enough praise, hear our prayers, although we are unworthy, and help us to redeem ourselves and our world.

Arielle Derby

MY ANCHOR, MY SOUL AN INTERPRETIVE AVINU MALKEINU

My Anchor, My Soul, I have deferred my willingness to know you.

My Anchor, My Soul, I have feigned deafness and ignored your voice.

My Anchor, My Soul, I have turned away from you as you fixed yourself in place,
Ready to hear.

Our Anchor, Our God, help us to understand

That self-respect can be infectious,

That when we look into the Book of Life we can see our own reflections, and

That it is our faith in you that secures us.

Our Creator, Our Soul, as it is with childbirth, help us to understand that the pain of
atonement is benevolent.

By your grace, you have gifted us the Torah and the opportunity and ability to walk its path
toward inner harmony and forgiveness.

My Anchor, My Soul, help me to understand my responsibility as I move toward the
brightness of Your love.

Joanne Feltman

AVINU MALKEINU

Source of All Life

We are mere atoms in the universe.

We have lost our way.

We have failed to live up to our own expectations.

We have not fulfilled our covenant in spite of our best intentions.

Source of All Life

We have forsaken reason for anger.

We choose conflict where we should embrace peace.

Time and again we have squandered the bounty of the earth.

We have remained silent while lives are wasted.

Source of all Life

Help us accept our responsibility for all humanity.

Help us see clearly when we are engulfed by confusion.

Help us find salvation through our own efforts.

Help us appreciate fully the great gift of our existence.

Source of All Life

Help us protect ourselves from our own misguided judgments.

Help us be wise stewards of our planet.

Help us be aware of the power of forces greater than ourselves.

Source of all Life

We need to find our way back.

We need to face our failures.

We need to seek redemption through our own deeds.

We need to seek healing and forgiveness by reaching out to others.

Source of all Life

We need the strength to act justly.

We need to find inner harmony by giving of ourselves.

We need to be humble and grateful before the vastness of the universe.

Eva and Alan Oppenheim

AVINU MALKEINU

Avinu Malkeinu
Primordial symbol
Of human dependence
And male dominance;
Keeper and Scribe
Of the mythic books
Of Life
And Redemption and Salvation.
We meet in our annual gathering
For confession and self-reflection.
Fully aware of our human weakness and deficiencies,
We reach out for Divine support.

Here, at West End Synagogue
We are weak.
In our separateness and disunity.
We seek a consensus of strength externally
That can only be found within ourselves.
Hope and fulfillment,
Help and healing
Are all within our being
And within our grasp.
We pray for a Divinity
To enhance our strengths
And erase our faults.

We seek elsewhere
The power and wonder
That lie within us,
Hidden from our perception
But within our abilities.
We look beyond us
For what we possess.
And ultimately,
Must look inside ourselves for
Avinu Malkeinu.

Stan Samuels

AVINU MALKEINU

My father was my king.

He was a big, gentle man.

He was a dentist, who said he had nothing to give but his time and his ability. He was beloved by his patients, by his hunting and fishing mates, and by his children and his nieces and nephews, for whom he always had time.

My older brother and younger sister and I knew his goals and ethics early in our lives. They started with “get up in the morning; wash your face; brush your teeth (after all, he was a dentist); and work for your local community. “ He was a living example of the spiritual value of tikkun olam we heard about yearly from the pulpit of our Reform Synagogue.

We knew when we had done wrong - and feared when he would know it, too. There were few repercussions for our wrong doings. There was a look of hurt and disappointment.

In our home we knew who set the standards and the rules. We also knew how much he valued the honor of his name; we knew that we reflected that honor or dishonor in the community which he taught us to respect and serve.

My father was our protector against the anti-semitism around us in the thirties and forties. He protected us by seeing that we had pride in being Jewish, although we were mostly “revolving door Jews: in on Rosh Hashanah, out on Yom Kippur, with Chanukah and Pesach thrown in. I loved being Jewish. I loved being part of the extended community that gathered on those Holidays.

Most of all, I loved going to services as a family.

What I remember most is standing next to my father during services as he hummed the music of Avinu Malkeinu along with the cantor. Often I would hold his hand and I swayed as he swayed. Mostly he hummed and I got lost in *his* music - not in the meaning of the prayer.

When I was old enough to understand what was being sung – and before I was old enough to question what was being said, all I knew was that this was the time I stood with my father and thought of what I had done in the year past, how I had or had not lived up to the standards he had set for my relationships with him and with others, our community and environment. I had no context to ask about God - but I did know about my father, my king and the standards he set.

My father died one May, six weeks before my first child, his first grandchild was born. He was 52. When I went to synagogue the next Yom Kippur, I had no one to hum with. And I walked out of the synagogue, not to return for many years.

When I next returned, it was as a Jewish feminist, questioning any thought of Avinu Malkeinu - a male God who ruled over me. But there was the music - and there was the memory of my father standing besides me, humming. I could stop arguing with God long enough to hum along with the cantor and cherish my memories.

I came to West End Synagogue five years ago. Susan Schorr, my first teacher besides our Rabbi, claimed I was a Reconstructionist long before then - but didn't know it. Here I learned about God as a force for good in the universe; a force which led me to set goals, reflect the spiritual values I had been taught, and work to make the world a better place. If I could not pray to that God, I could learn to meditate and ask that I learn if my life was in sync with that God and those goals.

What I also knew was that the music of Avinu Malkeinu connected me, again transported me, linked me to moments in my life. I began to realize that this was much more than a wonderful melody. It spoke to the heart of what these days are all about; - what are the lessons I learned from my father, who was my king.

The words of this prayer are still often challenging, disconcerting, even upsetting. They are loaded with multiple meanings, some of which are hard to accept. But mostly, when I pronounce Avinu Malkeinu I have the standard setter, the God of justice and righteousness, who establishes the norms by which we live, the fundamental spiritual values for a just society.

And so, I ask to be guided to live with the integrity to face myself in the mirror and be able to say that I lead a life based upon spiritual values, teachings and morals of justice and decency and that my actions will be consistent with these values - the same values learned from my father, my king

I ask for the strength to face adversity, the illness of my family - for which I have asked for prayers from the WES community throughout this entire year; issues of aging and loss of mobility and the freedom and self confidence that are so easily lost with disability. I do not ask God to solve these problems, to remove the pain or damage to my sense of myself; but when my personal batteries are low, I seek a boost in my spiritual resources and I am reminded that there is a source of assistance and I am not alone.

I cannot see God. But as I hum Avinu Malkeinu, I ask that I can live the lessons I was taught at my very beginnings; that I can reflect those values in how I live my life and so honor the name of my father who was my king.

L'shana Tova Tika Tevu

Sandy Warshaw

YOTZREINU, OZCINU OUR CREATOR, OUR STRENGTH

Yotzreinu, Ozcinu, Our Creator, Our Strength,
Z'chor et ha-Brit, Remember the Covenant-
Our yearnings of time, space and relationship made holy.

Dodenu, Shiomeinu, Our Beloved, Our Peace
Enrich our lives with Your Mitzvot and the sweetness of Torah.
Renew our faith in one another and the bounty of Your Ways.

Mageinu, Misgabbeinu Our Shield, Our Tower,
Engage our hearts with Your Presence, our hands with Your Will.
Fill our mouths with Your Song for the length of our days.

Gl'ulateinu, Tzureinu, Our Deliverance, Our Refuge,
Spread peace throughout Creation like the warmth of the sun.
Remove self-pity and cynicism, contempt and mistrust.

Mirapeinu, Shomreinu, Our Healer, Our Caretaker,
Restore our bodies and spirits, our vision and hope.
Calm our fears and our angers, our jealousies and lusts.

Ma'amireinu, Moshi'einu, Our Exalted One, Our Salvation,
Sow justice and mercy in our minds and our hearts.
Weave kindness and wisdom through all that we do.

Mirachemet al ha-Aretz, Mira.cha.met al ha-Briyot,
The One who has compassion on the land and on all living things,

Chayah la-Ad vi-Kayemet la-Netzach
Ma'avirah Afayilah u-Mivi'ah Or,
The One who lives forever and abides for eternity,
The One who brings darkness and The One who brings light,
Teach us forgiveness and patience, for ourselves and for You.

Yotzreinu, Ozcinu, Our Creator, Our Strength,
Z'chor et ha-Brit, Remember the Covenant
Our yearnings of time, space and relationship made holy.

Gila Gevirtz

AVINU MALKEINU

HOPE

Keeps us moving forward
Keeps us breathing
Keeps us hoping.

A blind hope
Keeps the winless team playing against the undefeated team.

A romantic hope
Keeps the man coming to the doorstep of a woman's apartment every other day.

A futuristic hope
Keeps the fresh college graduate working a tedious job twelve hours a day.

Hope paints the walls of the city streets.
Hope that the train will come in two minutes even though the sign says fifteen.
Hope that a missing person or dog or cat will somehow show up.
Hope that someone will give you a dollar when you so desperately need it.
Hope that you won't get a ticket for parking six, and not seven, feet away from a fire hydrant.

Hope perpetually surrounds us, like a silent usher helping us weave through the dark parts of a theater.
Or like a filter ten years ahead, where there are no longer homeless people, no longer anger and no longer hate.
It gives us a satisfaction.

Hope
Keeps the Jewish people together.

From the destroying of the temple to the Inquisition to the Holocaust.
Hope always leaves room for a better tomorrow.

Elam Boockvar-Klein

REFLECTIONS ON AVINU MALKEINU

Our father, our king – we have sinned before you!

So said our ancestors, in distant lands
Imagining a sovereign on a celestial throne
Compassionate and patient, forgiving yet stern,
The omniscient guarantor of divine justice
Whose existence promised that every unbearable tragedy
Had a purpose hidden behind some cosmic veil,
That the infinite final separation of death
Was just a temporary way station
On a shared path to eternity

How far have we traveled from those days
Of miracles, portents and prophecy?
And if that awesome king is no longer among us,
Where is the security of meaning he once bestowed?

So, if I occasionally wish for the return of that ancient king,
That I could address my prayers to him,
That the glory of his countenance would shine on me –
Well! – I have my reasons.

I wonder who the father in this prayer might be –
As if all fathers were the same.
Could it be the patriarch Abraham
Who so loved God that he exiled one son
And was willing to sacrifice another?

Or perhaps it was my father – who's been gone
For more than twenty-seven years now
Often I remember him as a much younger man
Than I am now – when I was a small boy
He would sing to me when I was frightened
And even though – or maybe because –
He couldn't carry a tune, his voice would
Dispel the shadows in all the dark places.
He could take away the tears from a skinned knee
By carefully examining and tending to the other one
Until my protestations that he had the wrong leg

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Made me forget the original hurt.
To an often bewildered child, he gave assurance
That everything could be made right –
That he could make it right,
That the world was indeed a safe place.

I would be happy to pray to a father God like that.

But, of course, as I grew older, my father lost
His magical ability to shield me – or himself –
From the tempests and tragedies of life
And wasn't this part of the bargain we all made
With life as we matured – as we surrendered
Our illusions of security, that we could insulate
Ourselves from the hazards, the havoc of life,
That it couldn't happen here or to us,
That every final decree could be reversed?
Isn't that what we headlong parted with
In the rush to maturity,
On the road to becoming ourselves?

And yet, for a day, for an hour, what would I give
To hear the off-key songs of my father
Reassuring me there was nothing to fear
Because he was with me?

But I am also a father.

And I treasured the time
When daughters' bad dreams in the middle of the night
Were excuses to tell my tales of lonely unicorns,
Or the little girl who invented pasta on a stick,
Or the hapless school principal of P.S. minus two –
The brief time when it seemed their mother and I were enough
To protect them from any real or imagined peril.

But now my daughters are grown – or nearly so –
And I have willingly – or wistfully – or inevitably
Given up the claim
That I have all the wisdom or experience to guide them
Through the murky currents that lie ahead

So, I sometimes ponder – now that I am reduced
In their eyes to fallible mortal status –
What part of the covenantal relationship
Of fatherhood still endures?
What promises continue to bind?

I hope that I'll always be there for them –

To share life's small intimacies,
To stand with them through their triumphs and defeats,
To remind them of where we came from

To urge them to have capacious dreams,
And to learn to hear their own unique voices,
And to learn that – at some level – none of us
Are all that special or unique – and that's fine.

To provide the safety net for them
To follow their passions to the ends of the earth
Because they know they can always come home

To share with them the radical amazement
And ultimate strangeness of our being here –
From amongst the great cosmic continuum –
In this crazy time and place
To join them in the work of repairing the world
Because the mysterious reason we're here –
If there is a reason – lies in our interconnectedness
And responsibility to each other

To give them space to parent the next generation
To be the next link in the unbroken chain
Each link carrying forward a sacred trust

To continue to love them unconditionally
So that when the time comes for leave taking –
As it will – we'll be holding hands.

I think I could direct a prayer to a father like that.
And if he doesn't reside
On some cloud shrouded mountain top,
Or in some holy of holies in a sacred temple

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Perhaps he (or she) can reside among us
If we only make room
Perhaps our community can be something like that
Perhaps that's what it could mean
To be a "sacred community"

And so in community I pray:

May we have the grace to forgive others
Who have wronged us or disappointed us –
Because, like us, they're only human

May we have the courage to forgive ourselves –
For with all our compromises and betrayals,
We each still carry a divine spark

May we have the wisdom to forgive God
Because in the midst of death, destruction and loss,
We still affirm that life is a transcendent gift.

And let us say Amen.

Ken Klein

AVINU MALKEINU AND HEALING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Avinu Malkeinu, Our Father Our King; these are the opening words and refrain of one of the most ancient pieces of Jewish liturgy recited on penitential and fast days. Its origin may be found in a Talmudic passage describing how, during a severe drought, only the prayer of Rabbi Akiva was answered when he made an impromptu supplication: “Our Father, Our King, we have no King beside You, Our Father, Our King, for Your own sake have mercy on us!” (Ta’an, 25b).

From early rabbinic times, as new disasters befell the Jewish people, an expanded litany developed and each additional petition used the same opening words. By employing the imagery of parent and child, this prayer raises the issue of the challenges we experience in our closest relationships – in our connections to our parents, to our children, and to our families.

In many of our sacred Bible stories, “dysfunctional family relationships” seem to be prominent; families are presented with warts and all. For example:

- In the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, Adam blames his wife for his eating the “Forbidden Fruit” of the Tree of Knowledge;
- Their son, Cain, slays his brother Abel in a fit of jealousy and then asks, “Am I my brother’s keeper?”
- Our forefather, Abraham, sends Hagar and her son, Ishmael, to virtually certain death in the wilderness at the request of Sarah. He is even willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac, in obedience to what he thinks is G-d’s demand; and
- Our ancestor, Jacob, outwits his brother Esau for the family birthright and for their father’s blessing through manipulation and trickery.

But other Biblical stories offer us a different model of family relationships. When Jacob returns to Canaan after 20 years to reunite with his estranged brother Esau, he heals their relationship by offering gifts and gentle words to his brother – and they embrace, weeping on each other’s shoulders. Through their reunion, communication is restored and the estrangement ended. And when Joseph ultimately decides to reveal his true identity to the brothers who, out of their own jealousy, years earlier had sold him into slavery, he transforms his suffering and theirs into something redemptive. Joseph and his brothers, too, embrace in tears.

We realize how different the scenario could have been. Through Jacob and Joseph's qualities of forgiveness, compassion and love, we are given a model of how we, ourselves, might heal our own broken and dysfunctional family relationships.

Martin Buber taught that all life is rooted in relationships. Rabbi Harold Kushner writes that "G-d's forgiveness is a description of our coming to feel acceptable in G-d's presence despite our mistakes, no longer condemned to carry the burden of past errors." As Reconstructionist Jews, we believe people are imbued with G-d-like qualities. We are able to be kind, merciful, compassionate and forgiving. We understand that by striving to be more fully human, we can become nearly divine.

Healing relationships in our families can be complicated and fraught with challenging emotions. But the time to heal these connections is now. On the brink of a New Year – each of us can take a step and make the phone call or write the card we have avoided out of pride or stubbornness. As we chant the words of *Avinu Malkeinu*, may we, like Jacob and Joseph, resolve to heal our most complicated and precious relationships – and by doing so, write and seal ourselves in the Book of Life.

Eileen Sobel

AVINU MALKEINU

1. **AVINU MALKEINU** taynlanu ometz oovinah; give us courage and wisdom to help create a new world in your image
2. **IMEYNU MALKATEINU** give us courage and wisdom to deny atrocities committed in your name
3. **AVINU MALKEINU** give us courage and wisdom to provide for all children what we wish for our own
4. **IMEYNU MALKATEINU** give us courage and wisdom to see technology as our servant not our master
5. **AVINU MALKEINU** give us courage and wisdom to help all workers enjoy the fruits of their labor
6. **IMEYNU MALKATEINU** give us courage and wisdom to remember your day of rest, get off the 24/7 treadmill and reestablish human contact
7. **AVINU MALKEINU** give us courage and wisdom to help create a world where a refrigerator box is a children's playhouse and not sleeping quarters for the homeless
8. **IMEYNU MALKATEINU** give us courage and wisdom to help people all over the world but not turn our backs on the neighbors outside of our door
9. **AVINU MALKEINU** give us inner courage and confidence to fulfill our needs and not depend on outer forces like the lottery
10. **IMEYNU MALKATEINU** give us courage and wisdom to base our decisions on literate thought and not sound bites
11. **AVINU MALKEINU** give us courage and wisdom to never again sacrifice our youth in pointless wars
12. **AVINU MALKEINU V IMEYNU MALKATEINU** give us courage and wisdom to light a thousand candles instead of cursing the darkness

Connie Goldfarb

HIGH HOLIDAYS 2024

This summer, I spent 7 days at a shamanic retreat in Bracciano, Italy. It was one of the most challenging and transformative experiences of my life.

We all dove deep into our shadows, our personal pain, baggage we'd carried around for years, even decades. Some of us shared trauma we'd buried long ago and never mentioned before. At times, I felt like I'd reached my physical and emotional limits, at one point bawling uncontrollably in a friend's arms.

Of course, there was celebration too, and it was all the sweeter because we'd journeyed through the pain of our shadows together.

During that week, I saw people openly grieving the suffering and loss of life in Gaza. I also saw the pain of Israelis, including a friend who had been called up into the IDF and experienced horrors for which I had no reference.

I saw the same community hold space for all of that pain. We did so because we were a sacred community and that is what sacred communities do.

Why did this work? Because we never asked, "Whose pain is worse?"

I am telling this story during the holiest week of the year because I'm heartbroken by the tension and even division this war has caused in the American-Jewish community and even here at West End.

At that retreat, a friend suggested I read Don Miguel Ruiz's "The Four Agreements." The book is rooted in Toltec wisdom. The first agreement:

"Be *impeccable* with your Word."

What does that mean? Ruiz points out that *impeccable* comes from the Latin for *without sin*. With the Day of Attonment nearing, that etymology stopped me in my tracks.

Specifically, he explains, speaking *without sin* means not using our words against *ourselves*. When we fail to speak impeccably, it may appear that we are hurting each other, but we're hurting ourselves more.

For instance, and this is a simplistic example, if I insult you, I'm certainly harming you. Ultimately, though, I'm harming myself more, as your anger will come back at me in ways that are extremely detrimental to my own well-being.

Of course, we're not the only community that has failed to speak *impeccably* about this war. As human beings, we are wired to respond to the pain that affects us most directly.

In my family, two relatives, both Jewish, stopped speaking to each other after the war began. One is a Zionist, and the other has a dear Palestinian friend with family in Gaza. They were both legitimately hurting and didn't hold space for each other's pain. The outcome was heartbreaking.

Did their rift help either cause? I would argue that it likely moved us a little further from peace, hurt the family, and hurt each of them by negating each other's pain.

In any conflict, pain exists on all sides; there is no need to measure it. What's essential is cultivating empathy for the suffering experienced by everyone involved. The notion of comparative pain is unproductive; asserting "I am hurting more than you" or dismissing someone else's suffering only deepens our divide.

Nearly all of us are reeling after this year. We're all feeling pain, and whether we align with one side, the other, both or neither, our pain is valid.

I'm not suggesting that we stop raising our voices in political matters. There are many issues requiring our attention and advocacy, including this one. Those debates often happen in the political realm.

Politics, though, are often ridged, with clear winners and losers. Our emotions aren't.

Disagreeing on the *remedy* for the situation shouldn't prevent us from holding space for each other's pain. To the contrary, sharing that pain may help us navigate a more-nuanced political path forward.

In this sacred community we share, if we speak with intention and kindness, we can strengthen our bonds and foster compassion for each other. Just imagine if communities around the world did this.

We have individuals in our community whose hearts ache for those in Gaza and the humanitarian tragedy unfolding there. We also have those with strong ties to Israel, including some of the hostages. All of us feel the impact of this situation, and our community can hold space for all that hurt.

It's not about choosing sides; it's about *staying* human amidst the horrors happening around us. Dismissing someone else's pain does not alleviate our own; it only deepens it.

As we move into this new year, 5785, keep your hearts open, be *impeccable* with your Word, and hold space for all the suffering in this room and around the world.

We are a sacred community, and this is what sacred communities do. If we hold space for each other, our celebration in this new year will be all the sweeter.

L'shana Tova.

Bill Snyder
September 19-October 3, 2024

IN THIS HOUR BEY ANA RACHITZ

[*Cantor*]

During this season of *malchuyot* when we celebrate the creation of the world,
On this day when we seek to re-create ourselves for the better,
In this hour as we acknowledge that which is greater than ourselves;

[*Rabbi*]

During this season of *zichronot* when we reflect on our lives and are called to account,
On this day when we remember our lapses and misdeeds,
In this hour as we recall the promise of our covenant, and seek to return—to do *tshuvah*;

[*Congregation*]

During this season of *shofarot* when we struggle with self-reflection and self-change,
On this day when we are shaken from complacency by the shofar's piercing blast,
In this hour as we commit to walking a path that will redeem us;

[*all rise; open ark*]

During this moment as we stand to receive words of wisdom, of law, and of sacred myth—

Oh God, open the depths of Torah to us during this season,
Open *us* to Torah's continuously-unfolding path on this day,
Open our hearts to Torah in this hour.

Through our listening, study, insight, and interpretation,
may we be filled with the spirit of Torah.

May our engagement with Torah help us to live better lives.
May it bring our yearnings for goodness, life, and true peace closer to fulfillment
this year.

Mark Nazimova

HANNAH AND SAMUEL PRAYER FOR TORAH READING DAY ONE

From her longing, barren Hannah prayed to God,
Was deemed worthy and conceived –
(Her child promised to the priest when weaned).
No doubt a miracle.

My Samuel,
Four years younger than his sister,
Born perfect, after a miscarriage and the death of a baby -
My own private miracle.

Childbirth is always a miracle,
‘Tho to those struggling to conceive,
It must seem common as ladybugs at dusk
Or a dandelion covered meadow – all others blessed with easy success.

We wrestle with our limitations,
Our sense of entitlement
Our jealousies.
We search out resources:
Inner courage, determination, perseverance,
Trained experts,
The web,
Perhaps a higher power.

We strive to accept;
Seeking to live fully,
Exploring new avenues of growth,
Glorying in the achievable,
Making our own miracles.

May our year be filled with miracles,
And may we notice and appreciate all of them.

Andrea Bardfeld

SARAH, STORYTELLER

“And Sarah laughed” – Genesis 18:12

In Sarah’s stories, the fertile soil
breathed out trees of figs

for humans to wear and eat,
breathed bees to suckle blossoms
and give sweet honey

but though she had eaten mandrakes
and slept on pillows of birthing rock,
no child of her breath came laughing.

On the day that Sarah sang
into a ram’s horn

the old stories of how the Ancient One
taught Adam and Eve to plant seeds
and milk goats,

visitors appeared
in Mamre, at the horizon
where trees meet sand.
The ram’s horn laughed a melody.

Sarah said Remember me also, Yah.
I need to laugh a child alive

or my breath and I will shrivel
like the barren sand,

and who will remember round hallah
flavored with pomegranate seeds,
who will dip apples in honey

dance joy with the bees
and sing a sweet New Year?

Helen Papell

THE RAM

MONOLOGUE FOR TORAH READING, DAY TWO

I hear the sound of two people walking up the side of the mountain. I am drawn closer, drawn mysteriously closer. There is a man and a boy. They share features, as father and son do. I watch as they ascend the mountain, the sound of pebbles moving under their shuffling feet, the rhythm of their march. The boy seems to strain under the weight of the wood he is carrying. The man has a strange vacancy in his eyes. They walk together silently, until the boy asks the man, his father, where the sacrificial lamb is. The father looks at him with a knowing, defeated sadness in his eyes and replies that God will provide it. I know that something is wrong. Normally I am afraid of people, especially those about to carry out sacrifices. But I follow behind them through the brush. I have the feeling that the father already *has* his offering. They get to the top of the mountain. The man then binds his son to the wood and lifts his sacrificial knife. He prepares to slay his son. I can't understand what he is doing. I feel sad for the boy, who, it appears, is to be killed by his senile father. Why is the father going to kill his son, his beloved son? I think about how the men I have seen are all so destructive, especially to those of my kind. How they burn us in order to connect, never thinking about the one being burned, or even what they become connected *to* through this activity, always only seeing their way, the one telling them that what they're doing is holy. Killing is not holy. Killing causes pain, suffering- there is enough pain and suffering already. I see the son in his innocence, looking terrified, staring at the stranger he thought he knew and loved. I am disgusted by the fear in this man, the cowardice which causes him to kill his son in order to please the One he believes in.

Then a wind rushes by, something warm, and flowing with moisture. A caress upon the cool morning. Something is here, something has been here. And the man lowers his knife. I know he is now not going to slay the boy. I try to walk forward a few steps, to better view the relief in the boy's face, but I cannot. I find that I am stuck in the brush. I try rearing back, to pull myself out of the thicket. But my horns, my horns are stuck. I am starting to get anxious, I try harder and harder to work myself free. And then the man turns to me. A pit of despair and fear sinks to the bottom of my stomach. And I know that I have become the one about to be sacrificed. Oh why did I follow these people, why did I trust that in the end I would survive? And where is the good in this man? Does he not understand that though his son now lives, he is destroying another life? Am I not another breathing organism with my life to live? I see the son look over at me, suddenly understanding. I see empathy etched in his smooth face. At least the boy, in his innocence, survives. But will he appreciate what I have done? I, who am being killed instead of him, I, who will be slaughtered upon the altar in his place? Why must there be anyone killed, what is the importance of this sacrifice? I look over at the boy, I try to put what I feel into my eyes: do remember, child, when you go from this place, that I am taking your fall. My horns have determined it all. Do understand, do realize, that my horns sound your redemption.

Marya Friedman

A PRAYER FOR PEACE

Close your eyes, silence your soul
let the sounds of your breath fill you up
feel yourself falling into a state of peace

Now pray, pray how ever you want, to who or whatever you desire
pray with the person sitting next to you, or pray by yourself

Pray for the strength it takes
to listen rather than to judge
to trust rather than to fear
to try again and again to make peace
even when peace eludes us
Ask for the vision we need
to be builders of the human community
rather than its destroyers
Pray for humanity to understand the fears and hopes of other people and to silence the
vengeance and intolerance in their hearts.

Pray for people all over the world
from Afghanistan and Iraq
to Palestine and Israel
from Egypt to Syria
Ask for them to stop just for a moment
and uncloud their eyes filled with hate
so they can forgive

Pray for the future generations of the world
to have the strength to come together
and not repeat our failures
Pray that they take care of the earth,
pray that they have the courage to admit when they are wrong
pray that they hold no judgments in their hearts.

Now pray for inner peace.
Feel every part of your soul
The love you have, the strength you posses.
Let go of your judgments of others, and replace them with love.
Let go of your anger and replace that with understanding.
Let your fears drift away from you and replace those fears with your strength.
Let the grudges we hold wash away and let the warmth of the sun heal us where ever we are
broken.

Accept yourself.
Only then can you accept the people around you
Only then can we move forward and create a more peaceful world
Now open your eyes.

Gayla Kornblum

EVERY DAY FAMILY “SHOFAR”

Today on Rosh Hashanah we hear the sound of the shofar and wake up to a new year and new understanding.

We wondered about the other days of the year: Are there everyday shofar sounds, everyday family awakenings?

We discovered that the family “shofar” wakes us from sleep in the morning and sounds with surprises all through the day.

There’s a “shofar” when the toaster pops up, when the cellphone rings, when the doorbell rings and it’s our neighbor ringing - needing some sugar.

It blows when in the morning news someone dies from violence or neglect.

There’s a “shofar” sound when after waiting and looking the bus finally comes or the subway comes and we happen to ride with a second cousin returning from an early golf game at Van Cortlandt Park.

In our family each of us almost every day has the surprise of success and disappointment and the shofar blows, a homework grade, a paper, an acceptance, a rejection.

In the afternoon “Mommy’s home!” “Daddy’s home!” “Elam’s home!” “Aaron’s home!” “Jesse’s back from watering plants in the hallway!” – five shofar blows.

Do we talk at every dinner about ours and others’ life challenges? Not always, but sometimes the talk goes in a surprising direction like the war in Afghanistan, a human relationship, the meaning of Rosh Hashanah – here is the family shofar sound.

There is a shofar blowing when the card or dice or computer game ends in an exact tie or a record-breaking score, or the Mets or Indians or Dodgers win a game.

This is how the family shofar wakes us from sleep and gives us surprises all through the day-today and everyday. We need to remember to notice.

Boockvar-Klein Family

ON FANFARE FOR THE COMMON MAN SHOFAR

When did I leave the land of my ancestors
When did the drumming sound of infinite hearts dissipate
Into a harmonic orchestra of confusion
When did the soft sway and crisp cracks of ocean waves
Stop comforting lost souls
When did the first pleading cry to leave a pure creation
Spiral up to the heavens and part my lips
I am told the story began on a snowy night in February
At Mount Sinai hospital in New York City
That is where I became a stranger in a strange new land
Sentenced to wander through decades
With a dagger of desire and lust embedded deep in my heart
To hear the cry and feel the knowing of the already known
For here in the void I wonder
Where my thoughts end and speech begins
And where speech ends and my thoughts begin
I listen and hear the cries of fear and the fear to cry
I listen and hear the cries of being heard
And the cries of the unheard and untouched
And who just can't, but can and can't, just can't
The cry of a newborn sears a hole
When will the hurt and hatred stop
When, When, When
When will the hurt and hatred stop
StopStopStop, StopStopStop, StopStopStop
When will the hurt and hatred stop
When, When, When, StopStopStop, StopStopStop, StopStopStop
WHEN
When will the time come when we look up and hear the cry
Not mine
Not yours
Not his, not hers, not theirs
Not ours
But humanity's

Because we are all strangers in a strange new land
Trying to hear the cry
...and that is our strength, our courage, our journey
Our calling

Marion Mackles

THE SHOFAR CALLS US

The shofar calls us, from 5700 years of history, and from today.
It calls us to awaken from our lethargy and torpor;
to see the world and ourselves with all our flaws
and to respond with a will to act.

The shofar's voice is a clarion call to battle, a cry against inertia and passivity.
It yields no languid melody.
Its staccato sound arouses and goads us to face ourselves and the world as they are,
to imagine them as we wish them to be, and to move: to act! to act!
To make ourselves and the world better in the year ahead.

The sound of the shofar slices through our evasions and excuses.
Its clarity and tone are the same today as for our ancestors,
using sound to give its message:
It demands that we mirror its tones with our own clarity of mind and judgment.

The voice of the shofar is passionate.
And we must internalize that passion, make it part of our nature.
Passion demands that we get off our physical and mental couches
and confront ourselves. To turn our lives around
and use our gaps and stresses for our betterment.
Passion demands that we be part of the action and not part of the scenery.

The shofar calls us to prayer and to *teshuvah*, repentance for our waywardness.
The shofar cries to us, beseeching us to make meaningful these days of self-reflection;
to see ourselves as an All-knowing Observer might, to weigh our lives as God might;
it calls us to a New Year and a new beginning, turning from our errant paths.

The shofar calls us to action
To see ourselves as we are
To see what needs to be changed
And to act.

Stan Samuels

MALCHUYOT

We are like children who have no idea that someone has made their world possible.

We possess our lives, our relationships, our problems, as if they were ours, ours to keep.

We don't accept that there are rules: Why can't there be only life, joy, and health?

Why is the world the way it is?

We want to understand.

How are we made in Your image?

You are beyond the mind, so how are we to understand that?

Some say there is nothing greater than the mind, but if that were so,

then how is it we know

we have a one?

You (I say 'you', but are You a "you"?),

I found You (or did You find me?) in the space before thought,

Or was it behind, perhaps above it?

It is a realm beyond sorrow, vast and holy.

I found myself within Your Presence, immense and Intelligent. Yes, beyond mind.

Adonai, You wait, patiently, for us to turn inside.

You wait for us to stop and discover that You've been there all along.

To do that, we must, even for one moment, surrender all claim to our possessions.

Then we get to see our world through the Eyes of the One who made it.

Satu H. Ferentz

MALCHUYOT SOVEREIGNTY'S COMMANDING CALL

Transcendence,
Immanence:
complementary masks of Divinity.

Immanence is so close, so intimate,
so...
unchallenging.
The still small voice within me
sounds remarkably like...
me.

Am I really able to call *myself* to account?

... to get past my desire for easy choices?
... to go beyond my self-deception?
... to
...transcend myself?

Hayom harat olam.
On this, the birthday of the world,
let me remember
I didn't create the world;
I was created into it.

On creation's ramshackle stage
flanked by heaven and abyss
I stumble in morality's drama —
forgetting my lines, missing my mark.
Distracted, I respond to Divinity's direction
only when I hear it resonating
from the mask
of transcendence.

That which creates the cosmos
can exercise sovereignty over it,
calling Its creatures to account

i, a creature,
if i respond to the call
can be
 re-created
 re-formed
can return — *t'shuvah* — to my better role.

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I respond to the call,
stretching to hit my mark.
Reaching out past my ethical weakness and bad faith,
my grasp falls
 just shy
 of Transcendence,
throwing me off balance,
robbing my stance of certainty.
With a toddler's awkward footing
opening the world to me in unfamiliar ways, I
hear, finally
the still small voice within

Mark Nazimova

MALCHUYOT

No doubt we have all received a call that captured our attention and triggered an immediate response. A call from someone we care about deeply, or someone that has information we want to hear.

“Your mother/father/husband/wife/daughter/son/doctor/lawyer is on the phone”

...But a call from God? Might we need tangible evidence to take that call seriously?

Alas, there are no physical, measurable dimensions to the Higher Power that summons us.

When no concrete proof exists to persuade us that this call must be heeded, why do we respond?

Perhaps it is the ethereal nature of a sovereign, absolute and truly untouchable power that appeals to us.

We are able to discern when another person is not intent on satisfying our wishes and we are sure to be disappointed.

A Holy One, however, with no traceable record of petitions granted or denied is a worthy partner to have in our trust, in our heart and by our side.

Andrea Brecker

MALCHUYOT

Every day we recite the *Shema, Kabbalat ol Malchut Shemayim*.

By announcing God's unity, we accept the yoke of God's Divine Sovereignty.

We acknowledge our responsibility to become God's partners in the work of creation.

We witness God's Majesty as chaos brings forth order, and we accept God's Sovereignty when we repair the world as order slips back toward chaos.

We see God's Glory in Nature's bounty, and we accept God's Sovereignty when we share our good fortune with others.

We see God's Presence in the kindness of others, and we accept God's Sovereignty with our own acts of loving kindness.

We know God's Power in the love of family and friends, and we accept God's Sovereignty by loving them unconditionally.

We undertake the obligation to do God's work by lifting up those who fall, healing those who are ill and comforting those who are bereft

We know that God is the Eternal and we are here but for a brief while, and we accept God's Sovereignty by using that time to improve this world for those who share it with us today and leaving it a better place for those who come after us.

Albert Slawsky

MALCHUYOT

WAKE UP!

The call of the shofar!

Malchuyot. Kingship. The divine.

But today, the shofar is silent.

The call must come from within.

WAKE UP!

In ancient times, the divine was all around us.

Obvious. Tangible. Visible.

We bathed in it.

Effortlessly.

Lazily.

We took it for granted.

That it would always be there.

But we were asleep.

So, gradually, like a mist that came over our eyes, the divine light was withdrawn from our view.

We could no longer see it, feel it from without.

Over time, we began to deny that it ever even existed.

There were stories, myths, tales, mere fantasies of primitive peoples.

WAKE UP!

As part of our spiritual evolution, the divine flame now has to come from within. No longer automatic. It requires our free will.

The divine wants a willing partner, not a sleeper.

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And the more we cultivate the flame , the stronger it burns.

The more we develop our spiritual sense, the greater our vision.

WAKE UP!

The divine cannot find us amidst the maelstrom of our chaotic, neurotic, frenetic thoughts and emotions.

We must quiet our minds and send up a beacon of light to shine through the mist, to be noticed, to be seen.

Our sincere aspiration to connect with the divine.

Not to change external circumstances, but to change the deepest parts of ourselves.

The uncompromising quest for transformation. Inner alchemy.

We call for help. And there is a response.

We are only met when we reach out.

Then our true higher selves can combine with the divine essence.

This combinessence enables us to step into the larger parts of ourselves, where:

There are no limits.

Barriers are non-existent.

Possibilities are open.

Courage abounds.

Will is engaged.

And life flows.

WAKE UP!

Malchuyot. Kingship. The divine.

The call must come from within.

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Time is short.

Today the shofar is silent.

Will you be silent too?

Will you remain asleep?

Stacey Adkins

MALCHUYOT

At Shabbat service we pray to God, our king. We chant the Shma, sing the Misheberach, reach out to touch the Torah. During Rosh Hashanah we chant the soulful Avinu Malkeinu, asking for compassion and forgiveness, to be sealed for another year. With these prayers we reaffirm our faith, our allegiance to God.

Does this fit in with the scientific approach to the world that I accept? Perhaps there is some contradiction but why can't the two coexist? The scientific appeals to my intellect. The rituals go beyond, to my feelings -- they're in my DNA -- they are part of my Jewish history.

I say these penetrating prayers – and I mean them – because I do believe there is some force that creates and gives purpose to our being and to the world. Perhaps God is that universal force, a force of nature that produces much of the natural beauty around us, and that may grant forgiveness. I would like to think that God hears my personal prayers whether said during services or silently in my mind. And when something good happens, especially if I have prayed for it, I say “Thank God,” and hope that is heard as well.

Should I change my means of communication? perhaps email or tweet? Of course not – no more than would I want us to change from using the shofar as our means of communicating very special messages. It is ancient but the shofar works – it holds the same spiritual meaning as it did centuries ago.

So, too, does the concept of God our King hold special meaning. If it is merely emotional and spiritual, for me that is enough. May we all continue to evolve and perhaps even create new traditions, but mainly continue to find comfort in the memories and existing traditions that are the link to our heritage.

L'shana tovah.

Edith Ewenstein

MALCHUYOT IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning.....there was Plato.
The beginning of the subversive thought,
“Am I seeing things the way they really are?”

Who wants to linger even for a moment in a state of false consciousness.

Frantic to see things as they really are
I strained to hear the sound of one hand clapping.

Alas...just the sound of a leak in the kitchen faucet.
All else having failed....I turned to scripture.

I turned to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
And all the members of our tribewho grasped way before Plato:
Indeed.....all is not what it seems to be.

Astounded....they watched the Red Sea part.
Awed....they heard of the burning bush that was not consumed.
Humbled..... they saw the pillars of fire in the desert.
Trembling....they grasped a deeper reality beyond appearances.

As Buber famously said. all religions are true in the beginning.
And this was the beginning

Alas, all beginnings have a middle and an end.
And this numinous experience faded
Somewhere between the desert and the Lower East Side

Alas we cannot will ourselves to have epiphanies.....or can we?
Can we imagine ourselves into an inter-galactic journey?
And zoom into the vast, eerie, endless silence of outer space.

Can we imagine.....a million galaxies and not one sign of life.
No breathing,... sighing..... singing.... laughing..... crying..... in any one of them
No grass growing.... No water flowing.....
Nada.

Can we imagine zooming back to planet Earth?
Rising at dawn..... beholding the light penetrating the darkness.
Hearing the silence give way to the sudden
Chirping, singing, roaring....of a thousand living things.

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Can we imagine ourselves back at the beginning?
That moment in time when all religions are true.

Barbara Gish-Scult

MALCHUYOT SOVEREIGNTY

Melekh haOlam:
Ruler of the cosmos
And all its laws —
Gravity, thermodynamics,
Biological evolution
(And too many more to list here).
Creator of galaxies and universes —
And the sun marking the day and
The moon setting the month.

While mankind, in its wonderment,
Sees and conjectures,
Observes and learns,
Postulates a Melekh haOlam
And tries to define Him or It.
But the ineffable cannot be defined
While mankind's ignorance is still cosmic.

We grope for understanding
But our capacities are barely awake.
Harken to the Shofar
Waken to its call.
Let us waken our minds to thinking and learning.
Let us waken our hearts to empathy and caring.
Let us waken all of ourselves to our world and its needs.
And let us say Amen.

Stan Samuels

MALCHUYOT KINGSHIP

During the Yamim Nora'im the idea of God's sovereignty is heightened in the prayers. God is the ruler, the king of kings.

The thought of a king to rule over me immediately conjures up feelings of rebellion, a chauvinistic idea as my daughter says, as if I'm to relinquish free thought. I remember not wanting to say: "Yes sir" to my commander in the army it felt wrong to my feminist heart, since after all:

I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.

And though my feelings didn't matter much in the army, I wanted to explore the idea of a king, Melech to bow and pray to: Whom do I appeal to when I stand here with my family and friends? Whom do I bend and even prostrate myself to, on the high holy days? Whom am I asked to love with all my heart, soul, mind and strength?

Our beautiful Shema prayer came to mind:

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one

Adonai ehad - God is one! Oneness, completeness,

In the kabalistic tradition, God's unity means that there is nothing independent of His essence, this unity is omnipresent, God is one before creation and is still one after creation

Spinoza viewed God and Nature as two names for the same reality; a single fundamental substance.

Emerson believed in a powerful God within himself and a mighty deity in every person, what he called the "still small voice within".

And so: if God is one are we a part of God? If God is omnipresent, is there God essence in everyone including myself? If we are a part of God, there must be a spark of divinity in all of us... wow

So maybe today,

I can pray to the part of me that is God like, the divinity in me and in others;

the loving, kind, generous, compassionate, patient, gentle essence in me.

Maybe today, I can bow to the light in you and the light within me

Maybe today, I can love and worship the kingship/malchuyot within me, the spark of divinity I carry with me always and perhaps I can prostrate myself to the power and mystery of this universe and our existence.

Nava Namda

ZICHRONOT

On these days, we pray for You to remember us with mercy and compassion.

We pray also for You to help us remember; for it is through our memories that we learn who we are and it is in others memories of us that we make our own lives matter.

Help us to remember what we have tried to do and failed.

Help us to remember that which we have done which we forget because we are ashamed.

Help us to remember so that we may learn from our mistakes.

Help us to remember the Divine within us that was created in Your image, that we may return to it and nurture it with acts of loving kindness.

Remind us of others as well

Help us to remember those who need us.

Help us to remember with compassion those who have hurt us, for they too were created in Your image.

Help us to remember the generations who have gone before without whose sacrifices we would not be standing before you today.

Help us to remember those who have blessed us with their unselfish love and generosity that we may follow their example.

We pray that You open our hearts to the loom of memory that weaves the random sequence of unconnected moments of our lives into the threads of a living tapestry.

Albert Slawsky

REMEMBERING

We're about to begin the Zichronot or "Remembering" section of the Rosh Hashnaah Mussaf service – page 635 for those who still have the strength to lift the book. The language here is based on the traditional Jewish image of a god, sitting on a glorious throne, remembering everything that everyone everywhere has ever said or done, from the beginning of time. Line 5, for example, says:

“Nothing is forgotten in the presence of your Throne of Glory, and nothing is hidden from before your eyes. You remember each completed act and each created being – none escapes your gaze.”

And turning to page 637, line 4 says:

“For the memory of every creature comes before you – each person's acts, each person's history, every deed — each step a mortal takes, each thought, each plan, each inclination, and each consequence.”

Notice that it's not just what we have actually done but also the consequences of all our actions – whatever happened as the end result of something that we said or did, even if we ourselves never gave a second thought to its ultimate end result.

We know from their other writings that the authors of the prayer book understood very well that the creator of the universe is unimaginable, far beyond the power of any words to describe. They used this imaginary picture of the all-knowing god as a metaphor to express their belief that in the infinite scheme of things everything is important; that nothing is really trivial, even if we think it is; that every word we say, every action that we take has consequences, so we should pay attention to whatever we say or do, always speaking with care and acting with generosity of spirit; because we may forget, but the Universe remembers.

However, we are also part of the universe, and the Bible says that we are made in the image of god, which means that our memories are important, too.

I recently heard someone quoted as saying that after you reach a certain age you begin to realize that what we are doing – and have been doing consciously or unconsciously all our lives – is creating memories; memories that we cherish from the life we have lived, and memories of us that will, we hope, be cherished by those who care enough to remember us.

And even when we begin to see the horizon of our lives approaching in the distance – the far distance, we hope, but getting closer – there is still time both to increase the number and improve the quality of those memories.

For example, something that I am doing for its own sake but which is also creating a very special set of memories is a weekly adventure with my 7-year old grandson, Val, when I pick him up after school every Monday and take him uptown for his music lesson with Misha Piatigorsky. As long as my memory holds out, I will recall with great pleasure, not just the lessons themselves but the one-on-one conversations that Val and I have on the way to and from them – serious conversations in which I learn as much from Val as I hope he learns from me – that is when we're not pretending that he's Tintin and I'm Captain Haddock.

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And I can only hope that 15 or 20 years from now, when Val remembers the lessons that he is learning from Misha about music and about life, that he will also remember the afternoons that we are spending together and that they will bring him at least something like the pleasure that I get from them now.

And then there's my absolutely most precious memory – June 27, 1999, - walking with Jane down the hill behind her son Michael's house between rows of family and friends toward the platform and the chuppah, to the tune of The Flatbush Waltz. It still makes me shiver, despite the fact that it was 96 degrees in the shade on that day.

Of course, none of us is perfect, and not all of our memories are so joyful. We've all said or done things that we now regret, hurt people that we loved or failed to do something that we should have done. Well, folks, this is the High Holy Day season, which is a good time for what we in government used to call "corrective action" – fixing whatever can still be fixed. And if it's too late to fix those things, at least we can remember what we have learned from them so that hopefully we won't make the same mistakes again. *Hallevai*.

Actually, any time is a good time to fix things – to remember to strengthen our bonds with our family, to deepen our relations with our friends, to improve our interactions with our community and with the larger world; to remember to have respect for other people's strengths and to have compassion for their weaknesses – and also to have respect and compassion for our own strengths and weaknesses.

Many of us are no longer comfortable using the imaginative metaphor that the authors of the prayer book used to depict the creator of the universe. But the truth that they were attempting to convey – the meaning behind their metaphor – that we should remember that all of our words and all of our actions are important, and that by speaking with care and paying attention both to our actions and to their consequences, we are creating good memories, both for ourselves and for those who care about us – that is a lesson that is still worth remembering.

Donald Menzi

PRAYER FOR PEACE PRAYER OF REMEMBRANCE

May the memory of those we love
open us to learning to seek, and re-seek, peace.

May the image of their radiant faces
Call us back to what is best in ourselves.
May the memory of their vigor
Renew us in our fatigued indifference.
May the memory of their bright optimism
Lift us up in our despair

May the memory of those who have inspired us,
the legacy of their bravery,
Help us when we fear losing our invisibility by speaking out.
May it let us choose to return to small actions- to sign the petition, make the phone call, write
the letter, donate the money, spread the word... dare a bit more.

May we remember that the chance those we mourn no longer have,
is the same chance we have still.
May they help us return to the urgent work at hand, and not become totally lost in our
Busy-ness and business
May we remember that, today, “never again” may manifest for any of us in just one
telephone call to Washington DC.

May we not fear our gut-level understanding of how rage and pain suddenly make
Destruction seem justified and inevitable.
Let us use that understanding as an ally

May we remember that our children,
with their infallible radar, watch and hear what we *do*,
Not what we tell them to do.

May we honor the best in our parents,
As it breathes in our body’s cells.

May the moment of remembrance stop our denial,
keep our looking inward from becoming simply a fancy way to prevent ourselves
from seeing, clearly and without veils, what is urgently calling from outside.
May we remember that working for peace within, facing our everyday inner wars, in no way
absolves us of the responsibility to work for peace without.
May we remember, too, that working in the world and marching in the street does never
absolve us of the responsibility to face the everyday wars within and between intimates.

May the reminder of a mother hunting for water for her thirsty baby in a detention camp
Galvanize us to make efforts for peace.

May the image of a prisoner of conscience held captive in a tiny cell
for daring to protest injustice, remind us to start again and try again

Moment of remembrance,
Remind us to put our struggles in perspective,
Bring our minds back to what matters most.

May the moment of remembering make possible that:
Tempers flaring in the subway
The sudden wrangle at home
The irritation in committee
The fight in the street,
The explosive anger between cars
Will remind us each how close we all are to what makes war.
May we remember that only a hair's breadth separates us from the fiery orange-red
Of that fury which knows no doubt.

May the memories of those we miss turn us from our inertia,
Give us hope in the midst of our burnt-out disappointment.

May the memory of those whose names we recite aloud,
Their youth, the bouquet of their nationalities, the far-flung geography of their homes,
Turn us again to action.

May we remember those who have fallen,
And do our work for peace with humility, and without self-righteousness.
May remembrance of the gentleness of those we loved,
remind us, in our wailing sadness, not to act from our hatred.

When we feel that our effort doesn't make the least bit of difference,
May their memory help us see that if we make the effort, and feel different,
then the effort has *already* made the least bit of difference.

May their memories allow us
Not to take for granted the quiet jewel of the daily round.
May the vibrant fact that we still have this gift of life
Inspire us to use it well.
May the plain truth that their work is continued now
Only by us, and by us alone, despite our frailties and whatever our strengths,
give us courage for the undertaking.

May we remember critical mass:
That sometimes, though not often, and not without effort,
Many small voices can become one voice- resonant, powerful, and booming.

Julie Sandler-Friedman

ZICHRONOT

I am honored on this RoshHashana to speak of the prayer Zichronot, the backbone of our Musaf service before the blowing of the Shofar.

Prayer for Memory

We as Jews are referred to as the People of the Book, the teller of stories memorialized in our Torah, our sacred text. Lest we forget, the Torah is read every year in community as it is the history of our people from the very beginning, the story of creation, through the perils of the long journey to our promised land. The Torah is our Book of Memory, the struggle of our people to realize the covenant with a g-d they could believe in and the building of their Mishkan, their sacred space and center of their prayer. What a Book of Memory -- exile from the Garden of Eden where they learned the secrets of life and death and the frailty of the human condition. What a Book of Memory, the struggle for freedom from enslavement, the struggle to find the land promised to them by g-d, the struggle to keep their faith in a g-d not easy to believe in. All this is a series of stories which over many years represents the communal memory of our people.

The Musaf service ends in the blowing of the shofar, a call from ancient times to awake us from the slumber of forgetting the history of our people. This prayer, Zichronot, also invites us into another Book of Memory, the memory of own personal lives. During these Days of Awe between RoshHashana and Yom Kippur, the gates of our memory are opened as we recall the past year. We must remember before the gates are closed: the good we did, the good we missed doing; the hurts we endured, the hurts we inflicted. In the words of Rebbe Nachmen of Bratslav: "Teach us to remember our days that we may grow in the heart/mind of wisdom."

Judith Friedman

ZICHRONOT (REMEMBERING)

I reflect this Rosh Hashanah
As I await the blowing of the Shofar
The symbol that recalls
Memories of my ancient people
And forgotten ancestors
So I may honor their deeds,
And faithfully practice
The values of being a Jew
And a human being.
Fulfilling these
Impacts my future
And that of many others.

Beyond remembering
And distorting my successes
I need to devote time
To honestly review my deeds
Both the good and the bad.
I must search through
The layers of my mind
Reflect on where I ignored
The promises I made last year
To myself and for society.

I want to be awakened by the Shofar
During these days of awe
To renew my intention
To remember to act
To practice the core ethical values of Judaism,
To treat my fellow humans with dignity
To help others to work with me
To save our God-given environment
To learn more
About the history of our people.
Let all these actions and memories
Be kept in mind by all of us
Throughout 5775!

Shirley C. Samuels

MY OMIE ZICHRONOT

Oma is the German for Grandma. We called our beloved grandmother “Omie.”

My Uncle Leo says the night after the Nazis arrived in the tiny German village of Frankenthal, they took my grandfather, our Opa. My fearless, frantic Omie managed somehow to obtain his release from jail by morning and then told her family, “We need to leave here.” She began the endless arrangements. A cousin in distant, cold Minnesota would sign an affidavit in support of the visa application.

The family went first to the bigger town of Mannheim, where as Jews they would be less visible, and then across the sea to this strange, new place- America. How did they all do it? Build a new business and new life starting from practically nothing?

The telegrams came in 1946, after a long, long silence, confirming all their worst fears. The family’s village of Gwozdziec in Poland had been burned to the ground, and those not killed in the fires were taken to concentration camps. Not a single person left alive. In the German town of Frankenthal, no Jews remained. How did she bear it? That very same year, her daughter Rosel dying in childbirth, and then the death of Opa, her husband, from what could only be called a broken heart? How did Omie survive it?

By the time my mother’s brood of six was born, such things were never discussed. We knew only that Omie worked six days a week running the family furniture store with her son, my Uncle Leo. She championed her wild grandchildren when it was suggested that we be quieter in the store, or that we might not need to jump on the beds. We casually accepted as our due her enormous, unconditional love, her pride in her American grandchildren, and her continual indulgence, even as we affectionately mocked her guttural, heavily accented English.

It was all simply ours by right: Omie’s weekly dinners with the chicken soup, the brisket or roast chicken, the dipping of challah into gravy, the rosettes carved out of radishes, the silver filigree kiddush cup.

Appreciation, though, of her strength, her resilience, her many physical ailments, her uncomplaining bearing up under back-breaking burdens? No, that only came later. Thinking back: visualizing Omie watching *Meet the Press* on television every single week with fierce concentration, and realizing she was listening to a bewildering new language that *she had only begun to learn as she approached the age of 50*.

Omie greeting customers in Polish, Yiddish, Ukrainian, Russian, English, and intently asking, for example in 1960, “and this man Kennedy, what do you think? He seems like a good man for the job, *yah?*” Omie voting, Omie watching the news, Omie worrying about her children, delighting in her 10 grandchildren. She went on. Working. Cooking. Lighting candles, celebrating the holidays.

Yet who knew what went on in the middle of the night, when she was alone?

Omie, how did you go through one of the worst betrayals in human history, and yet rebuild a life for your family, and find the wherewithal to participate in the political process in your adopted country without cynicism?

Her Hebrew name was Miriam. Her friends called her Marie. On her passport, it said Marya. Marya Melzer. Her memory is a blessing. May it be an inspiration.

Julie Sandler Friedman

SHOFAROT

The shofar calls -
 Tying us to our past,
 Awaking us to the possibilities of the present,
 Summoning us to future action.
It speaks of Revelation.

Revelation!
 Immediate understanding,
 Sudden recognition,
 New insights.

Or,

An uncovering –
 Each layer removed leading to greater appreciation.
 Greater appreciation urging further delving.
 Finally, the core revealed,
 Startling, Beautiful –
 Possibly painful.

But is it truly the core,
 or will further probing lead to further insights?
 That impenetrable “atom”
 yielding additional discoveries?

Each question leads to more questions.
 Each resolved, uncovers another mystery.
 As comprehension increases,
 so does the possibility for growth.

May our revealed truths lead to richer lives –
 Our enhanced insights to greater compassion,
 finer intimacies.
May our year be one of fulfillment and peace.
Let us make it so.

Andrea Bardfeld

SHOFAROT

10 weeks ago, I awoke at 1:30 in the morning to the sound of rain... inside our apartment. A freak plumbing accident in our upstairs neighbor's bathroom caused severe damage to our home, uprooted our family, and quickly defined the two halves of our summer.

...Antediluvian/Postdiluvian

Our nomadic journey began on my sister's living room floor at 4am with two children and our dog in tow and continued to posh accommodations in three separate suites at a Central Park South hotel *...evidently, even fancy hotels have leaks in the bathroom ceilings*, then on to our friends' apartment on 101st Street and finally to a furnished corporate rental on 60th Street while repairs began on our home.

We were tired parents, fulltime employees, Last-minute Travel Agents, Budding Insurance Experts, Junior Mold Scientists, Overwhelmed Project Managers and *...stressed*. Every conversation was dominated by making plans, updating the other on the day's progress or setbacks, expressing our frustration, and worrying about tomorrow. Our children also exhibited new behaviors: Tantrums, whininess and crying; Biting nails; Increased Sickness. *...Shoshana stopped sleeping through the night*

Every year, the West End Community gathers together to hear the sound of the shofar. These primitive blasts call us to "wake up" in the sacred days between our New Year and the Day of Atonement; to forgive others and ourselves for trespasses over the past year; to embrace how we intend to be in the year to come; to figuratively (or some believe literally) wipe our slates clean before judgment day.

Blowing shofar, this one time in our calendar is holy and special. Yet it is not our only chance to "wake up" in our lives.

- Micah is biting his nails...*Tekiah!*...Wake Up! The kid is stressed. He needs exercise induced endorphins and a parent to explain what is going on in language he can understand.
- Shoshana is waking up every few hours... *sh'varim-t'ruah!* Wake Up! She's out of her routine. Let's focus on a bedtime ritual that allows her to get to sleep.
- Micah dissolves into tantrums every night before bed... *Tekiah!* Wake Up! He's desperate for some parental attention. Let's focus the last hour of his day on playing games and reading books together.
- Our conversations end in arguments or tears. ... *Tekiah G'Dolah!* Wake Up! When's the last time we were alone together? Let's get a baby-sitter and go out on a date.

Flood or no flood, our daily lives are filled with virtual shofar blasts, opportunities to wake up to an unexpected reality and change course. Let the blasts of this year's shofar reverberate throughout our year to come. Let them resonate in every moment of our lives awaking us to opportunities for change as well as reasons to be thankful. May we be blessed to meet each of these moments as they are and respond with compassion, patience, loving kindness... *and a little humor.*

Eli Shapiro

SHOFAROT

With the mind
one can travel great distances
without leaving the chair.

With the ears
one can connect to something
that is happening far away.

The sound of the shofar
takes me from the mundane world
to a holy place.

It connects me to it
just by the sounding alone.

It reaches into me
and goes past my defenses
and simply takes me there.

The shofar's call
is both a reminder and a tonic.

I find it happens
without any effort on my part.

It is a mysterious gift,
this commandment to sound the shofar.
We have to make the effort
to ensure the commandment is fulfilled.
But then we get to have the blessing
That results from bathing in that sound.

I find myself both inspired and nourished
by this ancient, holy call.

I do not believe
I will ever understand it, really.

I just feel grateful for its power
to take me somewhere
I cannot go by myself.

SHOFAROT WHEN THE SHOFAR SOUNDS

For 28 days, for 2 and half hours,
It's been about yesterday,
last week, last month, last year.
I did, I didn't, I should have,
I shouldn't have
I could have ...

Then today...
Prayer, concentration,
meditation, low blood sugar --
Until that powerful, empowering sound
Fills the room, fills our spirits

Teki'ah --
Sit up, pay attention,
take in the energy,
put it back out

Shva'rim --
Focus on what is broken
renew our pledge to
reunite and repair

Teruah --
Now!
urgent,
immediate.
We each
and we all
must commit
to ourselves
to our communities
to the world.

Tekiah Gedolah --
Renewed, as the sound dies away, reborn back into the world to begin our work
again.

Marjorie Schulman

SHOFAROT

Revelation

At Sinai, the Shofar sounded and Moses said:

Fear not; for God has come that you may be in awe of him and not go astray.

What was this awesome revelation?

That there is a Divine order to the Universe
That we are not slaves, but partners with the Divine in perfecting the Universe
That we are not “as flies to wanton boys” but created in the image of the Divine

“Merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,
keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and
transgression and sin, but that will not clear the guilty”

But we are not divine.

We are imperfect and fall short

We are not always merciful and gracious
We are impatient, not long-suffering
We are not always truthful
We are distracted from purpose and obligation by short term desires
We forget that we are stewards, not owners, of Creation
We fail to forgive

Redemption

But the Divine offers unconditional love that can forgive without excusing

By recognizing our errors, by acknowledging our mistakes, by accepting responsibility for them, by making amends and by learning not to repeat them, we repent.

We make *teshuvah* and, by so doing, we can be redeemed.

Al Slawsky

SHOFAROT

There's an English grammar joke that says: "The Past, Present, and Future walked into a bar. It was tense."

Rosh HaShanah -- *Yom Teruah* -- is a tense day. And I don't just mean our great anticipation for hearing the shofar blown -- though I know that everyone here has been sitting once again this year with bated breath waiting to answer the call of that ancient animal horn.

Yom Teruah -- the Day of Sounding -- is, all at once, about the past, the present, and the future.

What have I done?

What am I doing?

What will I do?

For more than three thousand years, the blasts of the Shofar have been our great, collective answer to these questions.

The familiar *Tekiyah* blast is the wake-up call to the Present moment. "What am I doing?" *Tekiyah!* I am awakening to my best self so that I can see what matters most. It is the sounding of an alarm to get our attention, so that we might refocus our lives not on what is urgent (this is New York, after all -- everything is Urgent), but on what is, right now and Eternally, Important.

Then there is the wailing of *Shevarim* that reflects on the pain of the Past. It is the wordless answer to the question, "What have I done?" *Shevarim!* Three broken blasts that echo the cries of the heart, giving voice to the suffering and sadness that we all carry from our past mistakes.

Finally, there are the nine fractured bleats of *Teruah* that hint of the Future. But because the Future hasn't been written yet, it is not surprising that this final call has been interpreted in two opposite ways: representing both devastation, as the most shattered remains of our heart from which we must rebuild our lives, as well as exaltation, as the most simple and unrestrained peals of laughter that are the expression of our deepest, purest joy once we have given up the pain of the past that confines us. "What will I do?" *Teruah!* What happens next is up to us.

And only at the end of these blasts are we given a taste of the Infinite -- the great, extended sounding of *Tekiyah Gedolah* that is the coda of the Universe, summoning us back to that still, small voice within where the past, the present, and the future all exist together at once. Indeed, *Rosh HaShanah* is tense.

Joshua Greenberg

SHOFAROT REVELATION AND REDEPTION

For our forebears in the Days of Awe
Revelation was a theme:
Personal presence of the Divine
Was not just a daytime dream.

Their prayers could be deeply intimate
Their God was close as their sleeve,
A caring, personal, private God
Was what they could all believe.

We don't live in our ancestors' world
And what we believe has chang
The God that was is the God that is
Though beliefs have rearranged.

Today God is more distant,
Perhaps weekly in our mind
Not a physical presence
To which we now firmly bind.

We can say the same of Redemption:
Asking God to clean their slate
Our forebears sought forgiveness
To annul a well earned fate.

But we are internalizing God
With our conscience as our guide
Guilt and remorse, quite painful,
Then serve God deep inside.

Stan Samuels

EREV YOM KIPPUR

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102

ON FORGIVENESS

Here we are, gathered as a community
to light the Shabbat/Yom Tov candles:

a prelude to Kol Nidre and Yom Kippur,
that time of transformational soul-cleansing
following the acts of forgiveness
during the month of Elul and Rosh Hashanah.

As Jews, we have a structure to reflect on the past year
and to actively let go of behaviors and attitudes we regret.

The potential that allows us to move forward
in our quest to live the examined life (the truly Jewish life)
is our capacity to forgive ourselves and others.

During the month of Elul and the Yamim Noraim
we are engaged in the process of making amends –
reaching out to those whom we perceive as having wronged us
and also to apologize and ask for forgiveness.

“Tolerating” is not forgiving;
to forgive another requires a deep heartfelt expression of love
and the release of past anger.

We must remember, to be human is to be flawed.
A forgiving person refrains from using emotional energy
to gather grievances and allow them to fester;
forgiveness helps us find aspects of the other
that melts barriers and brings us closer together.

May we use the light of these sacred candles
to illuminate the dark corners of denial and false righteousness;
may we feel refreshed as we use these inspiring holidays
to expand and enrich our inner world.

Gladys Nussenbaum

KAVANAH FOR CANDLELIGHTS KOL NIDREI

We are surrounded by natural phenomena that move forward and forward only. We can get mesmerized watching these forward flows.

Rivers forever flow in one direction, quickly funneling towards a greater body of water.
Waves on the ocean smoothly flow forward until they crash into the soft, sandy shore.
The wind blows or howls, pushing ahead in whatever direction it forces itself.

But on this night, when a light is lit, it can light up our memory, giving us an opportunity to look backwards.

We so rarely find a time to look into the past, but we all find that time on one rare, but special, day of the year.
We stop. A light glows on our past year selves.
That day begins tonight.

On this day we remember.
And we try to shine light on the times when we could have done better.

We think about that time where we didn't give up a seat to an elderly person on the subway.
Or we raced to the front of a line, without regard to others.
We try to let go of that selfishness and enter into ourselves more kindness.

And we use this light to remember when we failed to hold the door for our neighbor, or talked back to our parents rather than thinking about what they were saying.
And we let go of the disrespect and try to obtain some patience.

We use this candlelight to help us brighten these dimmer self-moments and try to improve our kindness and generosity, even a little.

And then we ask for forgiveness and present our new, photoshopped selves. And pledge to make this photoshopped self into our genuine self during the next year and beyond.

Elam Boockvar-Klein

ON KOL NIDREI

Kol Nidrei.

Standing for the first few notes,
that powerful musical plea
Sending shivers down my spine...
wrapped in a tallit. For protection?

Only a year ago, goals were set:
plenty of time to work things out.
To be a better daughter, sibling,
friend, Jew, person.
Last year I promised mom and dad.
This year I can promise mom and honor dad's memory.

Kol Nidrei.

Last year I promised to do better at balancing
Work, family, fun,
being present for others and for myself
Working toward goals
focusing on what truly matters
standing up for what is right
fighting injustice without sacrificing
perspective and understanding.

Kol Nidrei.

Pencils down, folders closed.
Time is up for this year.
All that remains is to be judged,
evaluated, graded on a curve I hope.

Vows annulled.

Failure annulled. Guilt annulled.

Released
to try again.

Marjorie Schulman

KAVANAH FOR KOL NIDREI

Promises
come in all kinds of shapes and sizes.
They reassure, confirm, commit, motivate
sometimes
they frighten or even terrify us
as in, "I promise you'll be sorry."

They are made
in the most varied circumstances
dashing out of the house
under the *chuppah*
on one's hands and knees
in a hospital room.
Some are made gleefully
casually
tearfully
at a moment of grief
at a moment of deep exaltation
occasionally with a gun to one's head.

As a species
we are absolutely extravagant
in our promise making
they tumble out of us
are dragged out of us.
They are begged for,
insisted upon, legally required.
They demand to be taken seriously.

I promised I would never forget her birthday
I promised I would make her proud of me
and would be his little girl forever and ever.
I promised I would love honor and cherish
'till death do us part.
The range of promises is awesome.

The Bible is a repository of promises.
Starting with the most awesome promise:
Go forth from the land
and I will make of you a great people.
And for me
the most moving of all the biblical promises:
"Whither thou goest I will go,

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your people will be my people
and your God my God.”
Ruth’s promise to Naomi.
A transformative promise.
A promise that goes to
the very edge of human possibility.

Some of my promises collide with reality,
emitting a whiff of Greek tragedy.
My most heartfelt promises
are mocked by fate
battered by circumstance
undone by carelessness.

Greek tragedy aside,
I can’t help but notice
there are promises surely I could have kept
if only I had tried a little harder.
But what can you expect?
I had a migraine that day.
Was it my fault the car wouldn’t start?
Oh, no....I thought your birthday was in March.

Finally and most painfully I noticed
how much I had failed to notice
the many promises I failed to make.
the pleas for help I did not hear
but no less imperative for that.

Do I go too far
if I speak of promises to future generations?
The prophets would not think so.
A little overreach in this area
is not a bad thing.

I have to face it:
I lacked sufficient steadfastness and loyalty
for the smaller promises I made.
I lacked imagination
and sheer *chutzpah*
for the really transforming promises.

So as we pray to be released from our vows
I grieve over my broken promises
and the promises I failed to make
but I am heartened

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by the possibilities of *teshuvah*
I have another chance
and I WILL make the most of it.
I promise.

Barbara Gish-Scult

A YOM KIPPUR PRAYER

God of our ancestors,
Who believed in you even unto death.
Who passionately worshiped you
In song and dance,
While swaying and beating their breasts.
We have turned from you.
Our world has changed and we now understand
 many of the miracles that our ancestors did not.
Many do not pray out of belief but from tradition.
Repeating the prayers that our ancestors spoke
 even as they were martyred.
But our understandings and insights are different
The loving, merciful Worker-of-Miracles
That our ancestors pictured in their hearts and minds
Is very different from the God that we now envision.
God of our ancestors,
We need to be forgiven and pardoned;
We need to atone -
For we are but human, and you are the God of our fathers,
We are childlike, and we need a parent,
We are weak, and we need a protector,
We are not sheep, but neither are we the shepherds,
We are thinkers and you are our concept,
We are creators, and you are our creation,
We are explorers, and you are our ethical compass,
We are masters of this planet, and also its servants,
We are individuals, and we are a community,
We are independent, and we are mutually interdependent,
We are questioners, and we need answers,
We are faithful, and we need a source of faith,
We are strong-willed, stubborn and stiff-necked, and we have created a God in our own
image,
We need the omnipotent, omniscient, merciful and eternal God that our fathers believed in,
We need more wisdom and strength than we possess.
God of our ancestors, indeed we need to ask for forgiveness,
For we have not been what we are capable of being.
Some have not observed those teachings of the Torah
That we know are timely and relevant today.
We need to ask for forgiveness,
Not from a mythic personification but from ourselves,
 our loved ones and our fellow humans.
It is not God that we have sinned against but ourselves.

It is not the path of our ancestors from which we have strayed

But the path of our aspirations

For the kind of world that we would like our

Grandchildren to live in.

It is not sufficient to pray for forgiveness,

To pray for a better world.

We must work for it

For that is in our power alone.

Stan Samuels

FIDDLER WOMAN ON KOL NIDRE

A rain of moonlight
wings the fingers

of Fiddler Woman's left hand,
a bower bird weaving
fallen vows

of last year and next year.
It's Kol Nidre, night

to build a nest
where our ancestors promise
anything

to the swords of Crusaders,
the racks of Inquisitors.

God who weeps
when a mother watches her baby clubbed

before she is shot at Babi Yar
or chokes on Nazi gas,

forgive us for promising anything
that we might live,
guide Fiddler Woman's bow

over a trail to the birds
lost in their long wet wail
inside the fiddle

so they might sing at last
that the sky tomorrow
will be buttoned by sun.

Helen Papell

KOL NIDREI YOM KIPPUR ORISON

The hush of twilight: Kol Nidre.
I ask the perennial question: “Am I permitted to pray with you?”—
you, my fellow congregants?
What heavenly or earthly court would not grant any of us this honor?
The hush of silence and expectation
I glance around and sense for a moment we are one,
though we each follow our own mode of prayer.
Let us enter into a special convocation.
Let us seek that which most deeply affects us.

How do I address you, God of many words?
Was the world that we know called into being
by a glorious cacophony of sounds and bursts of colors and roiling rocks?
Was the command, “Let there be light,”
a whisper or silent thought that gave birth to language?
A roar before the portals of the world?
A word illuminating primeval darkness?

This year my thoughts, hopes, and fears are in Israel
(I have been blessed to see the Jewish state reborn).
May the Force that recalled Israel into being
be with her still among her enemies,
help to bring a lasting peace to that troubled corner of the universe.

I cannot pray to a personal deity.
I summon a force for good, for beauty, for love to help my people
and all people enjoy the universal blessing of peace
(will it ever be so?)

I think and pray softly within myself--
Need us, Oh God. Feel our anguish.
Heed our words, seek us as we seek You, a higher power for righteousness.
Help us to achieve peace, with or without your intervention.
Suffer as we do, become as one with your people.

This Yom Kippur, help us to find the power within ourselves
to work together, together, together,
for peace.
Amen.

Leila B. Alexander

KOL NIDREI FORGIVENESS

As the sun hangs low in the sky,
The trees surrender to crimson and umber before their long sleep
A hint of frost nips the air
And once again, as always, I turn, mostly unprepared
To confront myself,... the world, ... God
And begin the work of repentance and forgiveness.

And yet I feel not so much the need to be forgiven
As to forgive
To drain the bitterness, the harshness locked inside of me
To let it evaporate like smoke meeting air
Leaving my soul free to float, to soar,
To greet the new year believing in the possibility of change,
Of renewal.
And so I pray for the strength
To forgive

For the times I was so filled with my own craziness
That I failed to hear the voice of a friend in need
For the times I knew the right thing to do,
But lacking the courage to act, stood silently
For the times I could have expanded my horizons and grown in wisdom,
But instead clung to my facile preconceptions
For the times I spoke hurtful words,
Out of anger, or pride or thoughtlessness
For the times I was too timid to dream
For the times I could have brought more kindness
Into the world, but held back

And yet ...
The people I love are sure that I love them
I was mostly there when friends called
There was at least a smattering of good deeds

So, for the nth consecutive year
I forgive myself with a passing grade of "Needs improvement" –
And in the coming months, I'll try to do better.

Looking back, it seems to me, the world has not had a good year.

All the wars, all the hatred, all the despoliation of the earth,
All the skewed ideologies and twisted geopolitical theories justifying murder,
All the dead children whose lives have been reduced to mere statistics,
All the savagery which we hoped humanity had banished forever –

As a species claiming to be created in the image of God,
Can't we do better than this?
So, no – the world hasn't had a good year.

And yet,
This year couples fell in love for the first time
New babies came into the world and took their first steps,
Grandparents told grandchildren stories of long ago and far away
Lasting friendships flourished and deepened

Could it be that so many private events occurred,
Events that the world at large didn't take note of –
Maybe there were enough small miracles to redeem this difficult year.

So, world – I forgive you!
And I pray that next year all our hearts will turn to peace.

God, isn't there too much pain in the world?

I'm not thinking about all the cruelty we humans continually inflict on each other
No, I'm thinking about the parents dreaming of a child,
And then giving birth to a baby that won't survive the year
Or the adult children watching a parent slowly losing their identity, their dignity,
As they slide irreversibly step by step into dementia
Or of old people living in constant pain, with bodies ravaged by incurable disease,
Just praying for a pause or an end to their suffering

God, does your universe need all this?
Can't you / won't you do something?
Apologist philosophers tell us that pain is the price we humans pay
For your granting us free will

But does free will require quite this much pain?
Couldn't the grand edifice of creation still work with a little less suffering?

At night, standing on a balcony, when I look out past the lights of New York City,
Past the earth and nearby stars, past the stellar arms of our giant spiral galaxy,
And finally into a near-void filled with myriad points of light,
Each one a galaxy with billions of stars –
OK, God, I forgive You.
But, eternal, unchanging God, this year couldn't you change just a little?
I'm not asking for much – I know it doesn't work that way.
But this year, couldn't you resolve to do just 5% better?

Ken Klein

ON YOM KIPPUR

Without the babble of our voices
And the discord of speech,

We raise thoughts that we cannot express in words.
From our hearts,

From our minds
And the seat of our emotions.
On this most daunting of all days,
We scrutinize our past behavior
And examine the paths
We might choose in the year ahead.

We pray for forgiveness, wisdom, strength and guidance.

We pray, silently, to the God of our ancestors
And to the personal conception of God that each of us holds.

Even the non-believer prays,

For on this day especially,

There is no one who is not fearful of the future
Or without need of spirituality, guidance and support.

We are here — young and old,

Assembled yet alone —

Contemplating our lives
And our place in the world.
We do not have all the answers;

Perhaps we never will

But we will continue to pray and reflect,

In the tradition of our ancestors.

Stan Samuels

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THE UNBROKEN CHAIN FORGIVENESS

The new year has begun.
For days now we have practiced teshuva, making amends to those we have wronged,
but as fine grains swirl through a sieve, time is running out.
Tonight, the curtain parts one more time: one more chance for change.
Oaths, vows, prohibitions, and consecrations,
made in passion, panic, rage, or rash devotion, are void:
Vows and oaths between ourselves and God,
from the year now past and in the year to come.
Why should this be? Is passion not human, not repeatable?
Is forgiveness of self so simple?
Tonight we complete the chain:
Let others forgive us, let us forgive them.
Let us forgive ourselves, and may God forgive us too.
An unbroken chain, stretching from past to future, between and within.

Helen Stein

COURAGE 2021

A deep breath, then another.
Survey your surroundings
 choosing the most likely path.
Make sure the goal is clear -
Then that first step.

Many steps may be needed.
Patience will be required
 and courage.
But the goal, your goal,
 Is surely worth the fight.

In this time of Covid,
 we have had unusual challenges
 must plan to get through each day.
Much more isolation than we are accustomed to,
 distance from loved family,
 illness and sometimes death of friends..

Plans changed, travel canceled,
 vacations spent in front of the computer.
But most are still here, mourning losses,
 welcoming a New Year
 reviewing individual failings, vowing to do better.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur signal that life goes on
 the old year ends with apology,
 the gates open on a New Year.
Cleave to our wonderful community
 for support, inspiration, company.

Sing the ancient prayers
Listen to the kavanot old and new,
 and the drash updating our understanding of the texts.
May 5782 bring health to all, tranquility, an optimistic outlook,
 and resumption of life as we have known it.

Andrea Bardfeld

VULNERABILITY

Finding Our Way Together

October 11, 2024

5785

This Yom Kippur, I want to explore vulnerability through a personal journey. Ironically, by doing this I'm putting myself in a vulnerable position.

Two years ago, I was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, leading to two hospitalizations and a year and a half of chemotherapy. While I managed my diagnosis and treatments with strength, I often felt confused and isolated due to poor communication among my care team. A reduction in medication left me depressed.

At my lowest point, a member and friend, Dana Mindlin, asked, "Is there anything WES could do for you?" I hesitated, but eventually asked to speak with Rabbi Emily. When she called, I expressed my reluctance to talk, she responded, "You are beautiful in your vulnerability." Let me repeat that, to give you a moment to let that sink in. "You are beautiful in your vulnerability." She also added, "There are people who would never even allow themselves to feel that." Those statement transformed my perspective; vulnerability became a strength rather than a weakness.

Creating art places the artist in a vulnerable and uncertain position. Facing a blank piece of paper or canvas and contemplating how to transform nothing into something can be a daunting challenge.

This leads me to my art piece and print titled "Fragile." (on page 20). As a collage artist, I collect materials with texture, in this case I had selected materials that were fragile, like eggshells, snake skins and pinecone needles. I also added pieces of my hair before and after chemo. While creating, I realized these items reflected my vulnerability and represented rebirth. Just as a snake sheds its skin or an egg begins life, I lost my hair, but when it grew back, it did so in a surprising new way. I was on a healing path.

Good art comes from honesty, revealing who we truly are. Many say this series is my strongest work, which amazed me, but it just might be the case as it emerged from a deeply vulnerable place.

When I was considering writing this piece, and I don't believe things are merely coincidental, I was visiting my son Danny in Portland Oregon. In my Airbnb I found Brene Brown's book, *DARING GREATLY*, *she explains, and I quote*: "VULNERABILITY IS THE CORE OF ALL EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS. VULNERABILITY IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF LOVE, BELONGING, JOY, COURAGE, AND CREATIVITY. IT IS THE SOURCE OF HOPE, EMPATHY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND AUTHENTICITY. IF

WE WANT GREATER CLARITY IN OUR PURPOSE OR DEEPER OR MORE MEANINGFUL SPIRITUAL LIVES, VULNERABILITY IS THE PATH.”

It reminds us that shame and fear often accompany vulnerability, making us feel unworthy and afraid of judgment. “What will others think?” We’d rather hide our weaknesses or pretend they don’t exist.

The Torah opens with a story of vulnerability and shame: Adam’s response to God, “I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself” (Genesis 3:9-10). Adam and Eve’s choice to eat the apple symbolizes our freedom to embrace vulnerability or remain isolated.

In the coming year, 5785, let’s be brave. By being vulnerable, we set an example for others, fostering authenticity, better relationships, and a more peaceful world

Wendy Moss

MI CHAMOCHA

Mi Chamocha - the parting of the Red Sea.
As the Jews make their way through the parted sea,
It closes in behind them, leaving them to walk forward.
They walk into the future.
They may look back at the sea for a last glance at where they have come from, but they cannot go back.
The sea is time... they are walking through time.
Past... present... future.
This year, this past year, everyone has made mistakes. You, Me, And the rest of the world.
We cannot change the mistakes we have made.
We may sit here thinking back at what has taken place and wishing it never happened or happened differently.
We can't go back - just keep moving forward, learning, growing, trusting, moving on.
Mi Chamocha is life.
We wander through it. Sometimes we struggle to move past the things that have happened.
If we stay in the past, it would be like staying in the parted sea waiting for it to close in - overwhelming ourselves with what we could have done.
We must not forget the past, the parting of the Red Sea.
We must not stay in the past, a sea that's about to collapse back in.
We must move on, forward into a new land to start anew.
For this year, a year full of missed chances, we must use the past to make a better future.
We must journey through the passage, into forgiveness - a new blank page.
For this year, my wish for everyone, is to make it through the sea.
Not stay behind to drown in the past, but move on, create our own destiny.
I hope for us all to live the way of Mi Chamocha.

Francesca Harrison

MI CHAMOCHA DAYBREAK

Now the waters are almost calm again, only gentle waves, when
I look back.
The heavy, frightening darkness has dissolved.
It is daybreak.

First, the near silence, only the lapping of waves,
and the sound of people quietly panting for breath.
Then, slowly: the building clamor and din: bewilderment... and sheer wonder.

These old eyes of mine would think that what I have just seen was a dream,
were it not for the strange sight of The People Israel- men, women and children-
sobbing, laughing, and praying on the banks in awe, in fear, in gladness, and in gratitude.

I look around-
At the multitudes of people, the many hastily formed and oddly shaped motley bundles,
The madly hopping children- quivering with excitement
the mothers encircling them firmly in their arms
drawing them hard against themselves to still their small, trembling limbs-
the only they comfort they can offer,
for the mothers cannot explain what they themselves do not understand.
I hear wailing babies, people shouting, sheep bleating, cattle lowing...

I watched the blameless horses of Pharaoh's soldiers, the air sharp with the scent of their
fear,
their enormous eyes rolling, their shrieks vying with the
shrieking of the stalled chariot wheels.

I saw Pharaoh's captain, the one leading the charge of all Pharaoh's soldiers:
Sword raised, black brows drawn together, dark eyes burning with rage,
his teeth bared, his mouth contorted with hatred.
Oh, I am not sorry we outran him through walls of water on our right and on our left.
Still...he has a mother, and she will grieve.

I am so glad to be here, and so glad there will be no more lash!
And yet... I saw a young Egyptian horseman, just behind the leader and to his right,
merely a youth,
his face so like that of my nephew that they could have been brothers.
We locked eyes, his filled with terror and pleading, mine answering, crying out,
"I am bearing witness, young soldier, and I will grieve you!"
...as the waters closed over his head.
In my mind's eye, I see that young horseman still.
And there were hundreds like him...

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I look ahead, and I see dry desert.
Now, at daybreak, it is almost cool.
Soon, the sun will be high in the sky and the throbbing heat will arrive.
There will be thirst walking in this hot sand, under a broiling sun.
Yet, for the moment, strangely, I am no longer thirsty.
Is it possible? We drank no water this long time, only ran.
Well... if it is possible that the waters parted and stood in walls,
that there is a pillar of fire and one of cloud... then, it is possible that I am not thirsty.

I look back at the clear waters.
So much has been washed away.
as if we can- indeed, we must- begin again.
Somehow, all the wrongs of my long life rest more lightly.

I look around.
These little ones about me, I hope, will never know the lash we have left behind,
will have a different life than merely to gather more straw for more bricks,
longing for sundown.

I look ahead.
Something better there, perhaps, for my granddaughter,
than scurrying, with her lame leg and her staff, to outrun the lash,
the mocking laughter of the taskmasters as terrifying as their sudden, unreasoning fury.

What will the people be like in this new land where Moses brings us?
And will they befriend us?
What will it look like there?
What trees and plants and flowers will there be?
Will there be the peaches and pomegranates and other fruits
we but glimpsed in Pharaoh's gardens,
peeking through the gates when we delivered our heavy baskets to the palace?
Will there be shade under large willow trees? Olive trees? Mandrake and jasmine flowers?
Will they have lotus? Papyrus?
If they have flax in the land where we are going,
I could spin thread for linen robes of many colors-
I could find the plants to make dyes, I know it!

No...more likely,
I will never see the new land.
My children may. My grandchildren will.
Maybe something better for my granddaughter,
her kind heart and bright smile a light to us all.

Maybe something better for my niece's boy, my nephew,
who ran back to us on feet with wings when the waters parted,
swiftly and tenderly scooped up my granddaughter's slight body and her staff into his arms,
and, barely touching the ground as he ran,
carried her fearlessly between the walls of water to the far bank.
What will become of my brave boy?
Joshua relies on him heavily, and will ask much of him in the coming days.
Perhaps no more than I will my nephew ever see the new land.

I look around, I listen.
It is clear, some see only the hardships of our uncertain future,
Already, they are complaining and lost in worry.
The water stood in walls, and we are- miracle!- safe and free on dry land,
and they are lost in worry!
Others seem too drunk with the headiness of our sudden freedom to realize
how much we will all have to sacrifice, that we must rise to the many tasks that lie before us.
We will need to guard well our meager stores of food,
band together, stay in our formations- be responsible for one another ,
not lose ourselves in bickering, share our goods and our skills, and...
Shh, shh... Peace, old woman: one thing at a time.
We *will* need water, and the flat breads we brought with us *are* of small quantity, it is true.
The sun will soon be high in the sky.
Still, we are alive! And not slaves, we are free people! Unfathomable...

I look back.
The seas are even now, almost as still and peaceful as a pond.
Yet I see again the waters closing over the heads of Pharaoh's young soldiers.
I sense I will always see them, at night when I lie on my pallet.

Well, then...so be it. I will remember all of it. I will forget none of it,
neither the parting sea, nor the soldiers, nor the wailing babies,
nor the cries of terror, nor the cries of gratitude.
We are alive! We are here!
We will tell the story of these days to those too young to remember,
and they will tell it to their children.

I look around.
The men are singing songs of praise with Moses.
I hear a reed flute.
Look! The women are dancing with the prophetess, dancing as Miriam sings,
in the midst of the colors and the chaos.

As for me, I will prostrate these old bones on this firm, damp, blessedly solid ground,
and give thanks.

And then struggle to my feet, to stand as upright as a palm tree,
feeling the slight wind,
and the warmth of the sun beginning to climb in the lightening sky.

Then, I will look forward.
knowing that my next action will be something completely new,
not yet another brick under yet another lash,
even if the days ahead are *harder* than the days behind!

How... extraordinary... I feel suddenly as strong and quick as a young goat,
And for these tired old sinews, which have bent under so many burdens,
that is yet another miracle.

More burdens there will be, that is the one certainty.
But just now, right now,
Nothing, nothing
will stop me from tasting this moment,
like fresh rainwater upon my tongue.
Nothing, nothing will stop me from drawing breath
to feel
this fierce, *free*
joy.

Julie Sandler-Friedman

MI CHAMOCHA ON COURAGE

When we recite Mi Chamocha,
we recognize the courage it took
for one person to step out into the Sea.
We acknowledge
that hundreds of lives were riding
on the shoulders of that man.

That first step was a stride
towards freedom,
but also into the unknown.
That takes courage.

Courageous deeds
do not only appear in the Torah,
we see them in our everyday lives.
In fact, it takes courage to speak
in front of hundreds of people about courage.
What will they think of my words?
Is it good enough?
What if I make a mistake?
What will they say?

At school, courage is necessary.
It takes courage
to ask a question.
Will others think it's dumb?
Was it already answered?
It takes courage
to help other people with their work.
Will they trust what I say?
Is my advice good enough?

Sometimes, it even takes courage
when I am with my family.
I need courage
to talk about something bad that happened at school.
How will they react?
How will I be affected?

Even in everyday routine,
we need courage..
Often, we are doing something courageous
and we don't even realize it.
Or the people we see as courageous
don't see it that way.

Courage requires us
to face our own fears –
fear of failing ourselves, or others;
fear of being judged;
fear of saying the wrong thing;
fear of looking dumb.

We all have been courageous
at some point in our life.
We should recognize that.

And while Mi Chamocha
honors the lives that one man saved
with his courageous walk straight into the waters,
we also honor those
who are courageous in everyday life,
in small ways, and large.

Elam Boockvar-Klein

PURSUING THE TRANSNATURAL GOD IN PRAYER*

God, where shall I find you?
High and hidden is your place.

And where shall I not find you,
Whose presence fills all space.

AVOT – PEOPLEHOOD

We call to mind the lives of our ancient fathers and mothers, asking ourselves how we might be challenged and motivated by their examples.

Zochreinu L'chayim. We remember their lives and pray to be remembered by future generations. May our deeds be deeds of life.

Then our own hands will enter our names in the book of life.¹

We pray we might encounter the Power whose gift is our capacity to search for connections between our ancestors and ourselves.

GEVUROT – POWERS

We take time to ponder life and death as aspects of the mystery of being.

We pray we might encounter the Power whose gift is life and whose Presence is manifest in the mystery of being.

KEDUSHAT HASHEM – HOLINESS

We ask ourselves how we might perceive new dimensions of holiness in the world:

the animation of lifeless matter, the courage of those who conquer adversity, the health of those who overcome sickness, the hope of the future.²

* This *Amidah* is based on the article by Rabbi Richard Hirsh, *Spirituality and the Language of Prayer*, in “The Reconstructionist,” Spring 1994, and on the Musaf *Amidah Meditation* in *Siddur Hadesh Yameinu*, by Rabbi Ron Aigen of Reconstructionist Congregation Dorshei Emet in Montreal.

¹ Rabbi Jeremy Schwartz

² Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan, adapted

We pray we might encounter the Power whose gift is our capacity to search for the holiness and distinctiveness found in all things.

KEDUSHAT HAYOM – THE DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

We ask ourselves how we might deepen our awareness of sacred time.

We pray we might encounter the Power whose gift is our ability to pause, notice and bless the time we have, and make holy our entrance into the New Year

AVODAH – FULFILLMENT

We ask ourselves in what way we might link our destiny to the land and people of Israel.

We pray we might encounter the Power whose gift is our capacity to fulfill our dreams of Zion, and whose presence is manifest in the solidarity of Israel.

HODA'AH – GRATITUDE

We remember in this moment some of life's many blessings that would otherwise go unacknowledged.

We pray we might encounter the Power whose gift is our ability to discern the beauty around us and whose Presence we meet when we recognize the goodness that surrounds us.

SHALOM – PEACE

We ask ourselves by what deed we might bring a measure of peace into our world.

We pray we might encounter the Power whose gift is our desire to seek peace and pursue it, and whose Presence is manifest in understanding, harmony, and the pursuit of peace.

Longing to come near to you,
With all my heart I pray.

And going out to seek you,
You meet me on the way.

Rabbi Yael Ridberg

KI HINEI KAMHOMER

Emotions –
bigger, more powerful than can be easily contained;
anger, pain, love, loss, gratitude, bewilderment.

Feelings,
conscious or not, seek an outlet
searching for clarification, release.

Grandeur, beauty
demand expression,
inspiration born of need.
Considerate communication certainly
a divine impulse – beauty enhanced by sharing.

Now and then a prayer resonates, asking to be translated
to modern language,
accessible concepts.
Insights become words –
phrases whittled, shaped to essence.

Frequently my flute summons –
often I an audience of one.
Others turn to paint, wood, stone, clay,
acting, dance,
externalizing inner drama.

The best (or the worst) become clearer – reflected by others
or examined during introspection or prayer.

May we continue to search our surrounds,
our heart
for meaning.

May we continue to respond to and create beauty,
inspired by the best in us – the best in others.

Andrea Bardfeld

THE ARTIST AND THE DIVINE

Where does it come from—
the splash of crimson illuminating a painter's sky—
the metaphor that lifts a poet's vision —
the chords that strike a composer's theme—
the subtle curves a sculptor cuts in stone?

Is inspiration a dream,
a whim of the unconscious?
Or does a silent force open us,
an unnamable wand that taps
our brains, our hearts, our hands?

Genesis tells us there was darkness,
then a great power exploded light and life.
It is this mystery we embrace
with awe and love and gratitude;
it is the mystery of creation.

Eva Miodownik Oppenheim

KI HINEI KAMHOMER CREATION

Do Humans create?

Or do we mimic and copy

And find things
That were always there
Hidden by bias
And ignorance?

Michelangelo said that
David was always
In the block of marble
Waiting to be freed.

Humans are Inspired
By something beyond themselves
The ancients called it a muse
We call it Divine
Because it *is* beyond us.

Artists are inspired,
Inspired by small things and large;
Inspired to do something
To make something,
New and different

There are sights, sounds, thoughts
Around us
All the time
Awaiting an artist's inspiration.

Artists are inspired to notice
What others don't
The sounds around us
Led to music in all its forms
And song and dance.

it is a rare poet, on a brillig day
Who invents new words.
Most take those we have,
And shuffle them
To say old thoughts
In a new way

Humans are inspired
By something beyond themselves
Beyond their knowledge

Beyond their comprehension

And respond:
With a lump of clay
Or a block of stone,
Or a pen, or a brush.
And try to create.

Stan Samuels

SHMA KOLEINU

Early learning is eager and urgent —
Rapidly acquired skills, new understanding,
Many achievements.

Later, hopefully much later, a slide —
Sometimes slow, at others a plummet.
At the beginning, often un-noticed.

It is hard not to regret the losses,
But there are many joys:

A sense of accomplishment
A new feeling of having landed on one's feet
An inner calm.

The flowers still bloom wonderful colors
There are still magnificent sunsets
Good books and music offer company
Friends proffer caring and support

And the grandchildren share
ideas and love.

Let us strive for balance –
Cherishing what we have
as we mourn what is lost
Improving what we can,
Accepting what must be accepted.

Let us seek the blessings,
aiming to maximize this short life.
Let us strive to live each moment fully,
Knowing that – somehow - we will manage all that comes.

Andrea Bardfeld

SHEMA KOLEINU

At this sacred moment in time
we join our voices together
overcoming the strident, egocentric voices
of our everyday selves

At this sacred and fraught moment
in our lives
...is it ... could it be
we.....who are failing to hear.

Can it be that we who cry out
for mercy and forgiveness
have failed to be merciful and forgiving?

Can it be that we who yearn to be heard
have been oblivious to the pain
we have inflicted upon others,
deaf to the grief of those
whose worlds have come crashing down?

Yes.....worlds constantly come crashing down
with no outward sound.
Only silence.

Worlds come crashing down
in small endless ways.
Hearts break,
dreams turn to nightmares,
disappointments darken our days.

And yet...there is no sound. Only silence.

A silence expressed by Simon and Garfunkel: "The Sounds of Silence." Remember:

*"Hear my voice that I might teach you.
Take my arm that I might reach you.
But my words, like silent raindrops fell
And echoed in the wells of silence."*

A testament to our monumental failure
to hear, to comfort and care for each other.

Have we not heard the Torah's commandment:
"Love the stranger as yourself."

The stranger, who at this fraught moment in time,
is the one sitting next to us,
across from us, in back of us.

At this fraught moment in American and Jewish history
we are all strangers in a strange land.

Can we hear, can we embrace the stranger,
the one in our midst,
the one in a distant land?

Perhaps...just perhaps.....in hearing each other, we shall be heard.
Perhaps...in being merciful,
we shall receive mercy.

May we thus summon the power that makes for teshuvah.

"And then all that has divided us will merge ...
And then softness will come into a world that is hard and unkind ..."*

*"Merger Poem" by Judy Chicago

Barbara Gish-Scult

YOM KIPPUR DAY

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AL CHET

And for the sin that we have sinned before you of distancing ourselves from the hasids,
And for the sin that we have sinned before you of turning away from the beggar with disgust,
And for the sin that we have sinned before you of ignoring the pain of the Palestinians,
And for the sin that we have sinned before you of growing weary of Bosnia,
And for the sin that we have sinned before you of ignoring a neighbor's need
 because it is inconvenient,
And for the sin that we have sinned before you of saying "nothing can be done"
 when something can be done,
Aid for the sin that we have sinned before you of becoming annoyed
 when the bus stops to pick up someone in a wheelchair,
Aid for the sin that we have sinned before you of wasting what should be conserved,
And for the sin that we have sinned before you of pretending that the bounties of the Earth
 are free,
And for the sin that we have sinned before you of not listening to another
 because our own concerns are too pressing,
And for the sin that we have sinned before you of losing patience with an elderly relative,
And for the sin that we have sinned before you of repeating pieties
 that we do not in our hearts believe.

Alan Oppenheim

A VARIATION ON THE AL CHET

For the wrong we have done before you
by closing our minds and narrowing our hearts,
and for the wrong we have done before you
by harping on old wounds and petty grievances.
For the wrong we have done before you
by inflaming conflict with hurtful words,
and for the wrong we have done before you
by criticizing others for flaws we tolerate in ourselves.
For the wrong we have done before you
by our indifference and passivity,
and for the wrong we have done before you
through self-righteousness and deception.

Ve'al kulam elohai selihot, selah lanu. Mehal lanu. Kaper lanu.
For all this, God of forgiveness, please pardon us, forgive us, help us to atone.

For the wrong we have done before you
by belittling ourselves and others,
and for the wrong we have done before you
by inflating ourselves and others.
For the wrong we have done before you
by being quick to speak but slow to listen,
and for the wrong we have done before you
through timidity and stubbornness.
For the wrong we have done before you
by mistaking self-deprecation for humility and rigidity for conviction,
and for the wrong we have done before you
by masking our fears and hurt in anger and aggression.
For the wrong we have done before you
through cynicism and self-pity,
and for the wrong we have done before you
by spiteful acts and mean-spiritedness.

Ve'al kulam elohai selihot, selah lanu. Mehal lanu. Kaper lanu.
For all this, God of forgiveness, please pardon us, forgive us, help us to atone.

For the wrong we have done before you
by not pursuing peace and justice,
and for the wrong we have done before you
by saying too much and doing too little.
For the wrong we have done before you
by not questioning our beliefs and attitudes,

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and for the wrong we have done before you
by snuffing out new dreams and possibilities.

For the wrong we have done before you
by misusing our resources and authority,
and for the wrong we have done before you
through our insatiability and greed.
For the wrong we have done before you
through lecturing, nagging and sulking,
and for the wrong we have done before you
by withholding our forgiveness and love.

Ve'al kulam elohai selihot, selahh lanu. Mehal lanu. Kaper lanu.
For all this, God of forgiveness, please pardon us, forgive us, help us to atone.

Gila Gevirtz

AL CHET

My God, Supreme Judge of all,
I have turned my eyes inward
 and seen my spirit tainted with many wrongdoings.
Hear my prayer on this most Holy of days and take me back to You, repentant.
For truly You are a Merciful God who forgives wrongdoing.
I have been jealous without cause, not seeing how glorious it is to be me and have what I have.
I have been self-righteous, putting myself above others.
I have told when I promised not to tell.
I have handed over a quarter and felt righteous, and I have simply walked by,
 pretending not to see at all.
I have spoken harshly and sometimes cruelly to my younger siblings,
 assuming they'll forgive me—one day they may not.
I have sat day after day in comfortable middle-classness, feeling but not doing.
I have consciously hurt my parents and relatives by my words and actions.
I have held innumerable grudges, most of them stupid.
I have stared beauty in the face and not taken the time to really see and admire it.
I have walked through life with my eyes closed—not noticing, not paying attention,
 letting precious moments and events slip by without really ever seeing or marveling at them.
I have made the mistake of thinking that there is an "enough"
 in the acts of kindness and *tzedakah* one can do for others.
I have called myself "spiritual" but still said prayers by rote,
 not putting any thinking or feeling into them.
I have been selfish.
I have been short-tempered, sarcastic and cynical.
I have been contemptuous of anyone not as liberal as I am.
I have spoken when I should have kept silent. I have kept silent when I should have spoken.
I have been too quick to judge and too harsh in my judgments.
I have spoken badly of my teachers, but am I really a better student?
I have held high ideals, but not lived up to them.
I have abandoned dreams.
I have not had enough self-confidence, thinking, "I'm not good enough, I have no talent, I can't."
I have expected too much of others and myself.
I have wanted things, skills and knowledge, but not put in the effort to acquire them.
I have been too slow to say, "I'm sorry."
Ve'at kulam, Elohai selichot, selach lanu, mechal lanii, kaper lanu.

Arielle Derby

AL CHET

For the sin wherein we have sinned by

The lack of civility to those with whom we deal
Self-exaltation and the display of wealth
Failing to respect the wisdom of our elders
Disliking those who disagree with us and our opinions
Expressing opinions without knowledge
Blindly accepting the remarks of those who conduct
talk shows on TV and the radio
Failing to vote
Attempting to evade jury duty
Engaging in homophobia
Refusing to give a seat in a public conveyance to the
elderly or disabled
Failing to commend good work done by another:
Failing to pay social security and unemployment insurance taxes for a
household employee
Chiseling on income tax returns
Over-indulgence in alcoholic beverages
Using drugs
Driving while impaired
Refusing to yield positions of honor or importance to younger people
Indulging in myths and fantasy and ignoring reality
Failing continually to study
Failing to keep up with affairs of our communities, our nation and the world
Refusing to accept and assist people of color
Failing to aid the poor and homeless people of all ages and race
Failing adequately to aid the Jewish poor
Failing to respect, maintain and improve the environment
Failing to understand what being Jewish means
Ignoring the richness of our Jewish civilization
Failing to acknowledge the value of those who minister
to our religious and ritualistic needs
Failing adequately, within our means, to support our Synagogue
and related institutions
Stubbornness in resisting changes in rituals and religious observance
Refusing to welcome and accept the non-Jewish spouses
of devoted members of our community

and for all of these, may the Power that influences our lives,
forgive us and grant us a degree of atonement.

Benjamin William Mehlman

AL CHET

For the sin that we have sinned before You of working for peace in far-away places, but not in our homes, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, and our congregation;

And for the sin that we have sinned before You of forgetting an opponent's humanity and ignoring his justification;

For the sin that we have sinned before You of reacting to our problems by losing our temper, instead of taking a deep breath and asking what we can learn from the experience;

For the sin that we have sinned before You of having had opportunities to be spiritual in our daily life—to perform *mitzvot* in our workplace, to perform *mitzvot* when we walk outside or ride in the subway, to perform *mitzvot* with our neighbors or families at home—and ignoring these opportunities;

And for the sin that we have sinned before You of not creating more moments of Godliness in the world;

For the sin that we have sinned before You of spreading ourselves too thinly: of pursuing too many goals, and so achieving none of them;

And for the sin that we have sinned before You of letting the excellent become the enemy of the good: of never completing what we want to create because we won't accept anything less than perfection;

And for the sin of not accepting our real accomplishments and real limitations... of not accepting who we really are;

For the sin that we have sinned before You of not letting go long after something is gone, and then not recognizing and embracing the new gifts that You send our way;

And for the sin of not being grateful for the miracle of life;

For the sin that we have sinned before You of shrinking from new truth, of being content with half-truth, and of thinking we know all truth;³

the sin that we have sinned before You but do not remember, God of memory, make us mindful of it;

³ "shrinking from ... know all truth" adapted from Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan

For these sins, God of forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement.

V'ahl kulam elohai selichot selach lanu, mechal lanu, kaper lanu.

Mark Nazimova

THE HIDDEN THINGS AL CHET

When desire lives in a corner of you
like a mouse in a wall, afraid to peep out,
but growing strong on careless scraps thrown too close,
is it only trouble when it starts to show?
Nourished, it becomes bold, seeks out strangeness,
its willful heart beating wildly;
chastised, it opens itself like a dry land to rain.
The hidden things belong to God, you hear,
but you are the only one who can find them:
when your fist hits your chest, there is no echo,
only the sound of ten thousand wishes,
packed together, waiting for you
to let them see the light.

Nancie S. Martin

Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20 - Nitsavim

ASHAMNU WE HAVE SINNED

We have acted shamefully
And have behaved recklessly.
We have grasped false stories.
And derided others worries
We have harmed our loved-ones
While venting on cell phones.
We've been wrongfully zealous
And too halting with solace.
We have told harmful lies
And ignored painful cries.
We've caused too much distress
And laughed at others' stress.
We have often maligned,
Been not friendly or kind.
Too often sarcastic,
Offensive and caustic,
Prideful and malicious,
Vengeful and slanderous.
We have tempted
And teased
And been thoughtless indeed.

Stan Samuels

ASHAMNU LESS THAN DIVINE

Less than divine and crowned with glory and majesty,
Flickering sparks of life encircled by visceral membranes
Too porous to quarantine pride from humility,
Impulse from discipline, weakness from strength,
We are righteous *and* we have sinned.

We have sown seeds of peace and seeds of conflict.
We have pursued both justice and revenge.

We have used our words to disparage and to comfort.
We have partnered with tolerance, kindness, cowardice and envy.

We have sacrificed time, integrity, self-interest and love.
We have struggled with generosity and patience, anger and resentment.

We have been neglectful, faithful, respectful and scornful.
We have been merciful, quarrelsome, empathetic and indifferent.

Less than divine and crowned with glory and majesty,
All human potential flowing, swirling, surging within us, its contradictions
Etching the details of our character and the outlines of our souls.

Let us atone for our transgressions and not judge others harshly for theirs.
Let us move closer, further, ever closer to you as we implore:
B'zchut avoteiynu v'imoteiynu, for the merit of our ancestors,
Tis'lah lanu al kol hatoteiynu, forgive us for all our sins,
V'ha'eir eiyeiynu b'Toratecha, enlighten our eyes with your Torah,
V'dabeik libeinu b'mitzvotcha, and cleave our hearts to your just and compassionate ways.

Gila Gevirtz

Notes:

Lines 1 and 12 are based on *Tehillim*, Psalms 8:6
Closing two lines are from *shaharit*, the morning prayer service,

ALTERNATIVE AL CHET

For all of us, our eternal compassionate Source
to whom we answer for our ethical and moral behavior
give us the strength to overcome, to make atonement
help us find forgiveness and pardon for our mistakes.

It's a long list, an honest list
and each year it gets longer
and every year we do our best
to make our efforts stronger.

Perfection still evades us
Despite all of our prayers;
may we have the will to change
that our list may be shorter next year.

God of our ancestors, forgive us for the sins and mistakes against you and ourselves:

For abusing our bodies through lack of sleep and unhealthy eating
For avoiding the truths revealed by our emotions
For focusing more on trivialities than on meaningful goals
For avoiding important issues out of laziness or denial
For rationalizing and blaming others for our mistakes

Forgive us for our sins and mistakes against you and ourselves:

For resenting others who exceed us professionally
For assuming our answers are always right
For seeking attention in public in inappropriate ways
For faulting our children for the values they choose
For hurting friends by being unavailable

Forgive us for our sins and mistakes against you and ourselves

For offending others by speaking recklessly
For manipulating others to meet our emotional needs
For false promises to friends and family
For nursing grudges against those who have wronged us
For defensiveness and taking offense at constructive criticism

Forgive us for the mistakes against you and ourselves

For not doing more to repair our world

For not being more generous in our tzedakah

For inadequate compassion for the poor and weak

For despair and cynicism about solving the problems of our world.

CONGREGATION

וְעַל כָּלֵם, אֱלֹהֵי סְלִיחוֹת, סְלַח לָנוּ, מְחַל לָנוּ, כַּפֵּר-לָנוּ.

V'al kulam, eloha selichot: s'lach lanu, m'chal lanu, kaper lanu

Forgive us. Pardon us. Grant us atonement.

Shirley C. Samuels

A BACKWARD AL CHET

It's been said that life can only be lived forward, but must be remembered backward. In that spirit, here is a backward Al Chet. Please join in for "Ve'al kulam..."

For **Zig-zagging** between principles and the lack of principles whenever it suits us,
and for **Yearning** for anything that isn't what we already have.
For **eXamining** the lives of our loved ones critically without looking at our own,
and for **Wasting** time, our most precious gift.

For forgetting the beauty and **Vividness** of the world
and for letting visible and invisible **Ugliness** make our lives drab.
For being ruled by our **Tempers** and not by our temperaments,
and for not seeing the **Suffering** of others.

For all these sins, let us forgive ourselves, let us pardon each other, let us find some way to atone.

Ve'al kulam eloha selihot selah lanu. Mehal lanu. Kaper lanu.

For **Reading** the words of the Torah but not paying attention to them,
and for **Quitting** the difficult because it's just too hard.
For **Passively** accepting what is instead of working for what could be,
and for **Overreacting** to real or imagined slights.

For being **Negative** when a friend shares a tentative hope,
and for **Moralizing** when we haven't even tried to understand.
For taking the **Love** of our families for granted,
and for **Keeping** our hands and hearts closed when they long to open.

For all these sins, let us forgive ourselves, let us pardon each other, let us find some way to atone.

Ve'al kulam eloha selihot selah lanu. Mehal lanu. Kaper lanu.

For allowing **Jealousy** to get the best of us and make us our worst,
and for **Ignoring** the entreaties of those less fortunate.
For **Hearing** what we want to hear rather than what's really said,
and for being **Greedy** for attention while decrying greed for money.

For **Frowning** at another's happiness because we ourselves are sad,
and for **Exhausting** ourselves with the empty pursuit of the trivial.
For **Dreading** judgment so much that we never take chances,
and for **Carrying** grudges so heavy they weigh down every step.
For squandering our **Blessings** when we could be sharing them,
and for **Acting** out of fear when joy could stir our souls.

For all these sins, let us forgive ourselves, let us pardon each other, let us find some way to atone.

Ve'al kulam eloha selihot selah lanu. Mehal lanu. Kaper lanu.

Nancie S. Martin

SCAPEGOAT

The history of the word “scapegoat” covers both ancient and modern history.

Leviticus 16:8

Moses purges the Jews of their wrongdoings.

The sins of the people are placed ceremoniously on the head of the goat and disappear into the never-ending wilderness, cleaning the slate of each and every person.

1861

In a war-torn nation, strewn with bodies and bayonets and slavery,

The Union is splitting at its core.

Some southern towns create an impossible solution: The Jews are to blame.

This time there is no wilderness to escape to.

1890

Money flows like endless streams of gold into the greedy hands of the rich.

Workers work and work and work and work.

The gap has never been greater.

And once again, many fault the Jews, an easy punching bag in a time of inconceivable inequality.

The wilderness is nowhere to be found.

1910

“Aliens” flow into the supposedly gold-filled lands of the United States.

Italy, Russia, Hungary, and Poland all empty tens of thousands into the harbor of Ellis Island.

Many are unwanted, “stealing” the jobs of true Americans.

The Jews hold part of the blame, and there is no turning back across the Atlantic Ocean.

1935

The German economy is in shambles.

Citizens use wheelbarrows to hold money just to buy a piece of bread.

Hyperinflation reigns and Hitler believes there is only one people to blame.

Escape is not an option.

We must learn from these mistakes.

Scapegoating

Fails to solve the problem at hand, the equivalent of standing idly by,

Persecutes a person unworthy of embarrassment and shame,

And creates an endless circle of disaster.

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Yet even today, scapegoating is a common practice.
The sins of an entire baseball team are put on the shoulders of the manager,
The faults of the oldest and youngest child somehow always come back to bite the middle
child the most,
The inadequate test scores of kindergarteners result in the firing of their teacher,
And teenager's best friend "procrastination" always seems to get the blame.

Ultimately, none of these situations solve anything.
So the practice of scapegoating must follow the scapegoat itself into the never-ending
wilderness.

Elam Boockvar Klein

KAVANAH ON FASTING

What is this fast?

The shofar blast calls us to pay ATTENTION

Fasting requires INTENTION.

Our dry mouths and growling stomachs draw our attention away, but remind us of the strength of our intention.

We forego food and drink, without which we cannot survive. No mere animal will do that willingly.

Is this the pre-op fast of those who await surgery hoping to awake cured of their ailments?

Is this the fast of the guilt ridden who punish themselves to make manifest the torment of their unforgiving consciences?

Is this the fast of the mourners whose aching sense of loss strips them of their physical hunger?

Is this the fast of the mystics who hope to see that which cannot be seen with the eye and hear that which cannot be heard with the ear?

Today, let us not fast to purge or punish our bodies.

Today, let us not fast from despair or from hope.

Today, let us fast knowing that the past is past and cannot be altered and that the future is unknowable but we can dedicate ourselves to making that future better for all.

Today, let our fast commit us to being stewards for this planet and all who dwell upon it.

Today, let our fast help us to hear the words of the Prophet:

To unlock the fetters of wickedness and untie the cords of the yoke;

To let the oppressed go free;

To share our bread with the hungry and to take the wretched poor into our homes;

To clothe the naked, and not to ignore our own kin.

Al Slawsky

KAVANAH FOR HAFTARAH FASTING

Today, Jews throughout the world are fasting and hearing, once again, the words of Isaiah:

“Is this the fast I have chosen? A day of self-affliction?”

And we contemplate our lives and figuratively weigh our souls in the balance. But for many Jews, even within our New York community, fasting is much more than an annual religious ritual. It is a daily threat.

There are 244,000 poor people: 15% of the Jewish people in the New York area living in households with incomes under 150% of the Federal Poverty Guideline.

There are also 104,000 “near poor” living in Jewish households in the eight-county, metro New York area. They have incomes only marginally above the poverty line. This makes a total of 348,000 poor and near-poor people in Jewish households in the New York area.

The Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty calculates poverty at 150% of the Federal Poverty Guideline, as the appropriate measure of poverty in New York City because of the high cost of living here. For a family of two, that comes to a little over \$22,000 a year; for a family of four, slightly more than \$33,500.

Unfortunately, there are too many people for whom living in a Sukkah would be a blessed improvement.

“Poverty in the Jewish community has its roots in the same issues that cause poverty in other communities. However poverty within Jewish households can be particularly challenging due to certain moral and religious obligations, such as eating kosher food, sending children to Jewish day schools, and living near a synagogue.”

“Although the Jewish population has substantially lower levels of poverty than black and Hispanic populations, Jewish poverty appears to be increasing at a faster rate. This increase is due largely to the influx of refugees from the former Soviet Union during the 1990’s.

On the Upper West Side we may not be aware of this problem in our immediate neighborhood but these people are certainly present within our greater community and probably even within our midst. The present economic crisis has hit people far and wide including some within our own congregation.

Since the 1970s the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty has helped by documenting the size and needs of the Jewish poor among us. And it has also responded by addressing their needs, providing 100,000 New Yorkers with critical services in their fight against poverty each year. With services ranging from domestic violence counseling to kosher food pantries

to career training, Met Council seeks to help individuals find immediate relief and lasting solutions.

Currently, Met Council has helped launch three new kosher "free restaurants." It has also headed up the emergency cash assistance arm of UJA-Federation's Connect-to-Care, which has brought unprecedented services to the Jewish community during a tough economy.

Met Council has been a leader in producing affordable housing for special needs populations in New York City. By leveraging private and public money, their housing portfolio has grown to 2,000 units under management, in construction or in the development process. Of this total, approximately 1,600 units are for the elderly and 400 units are targeted for the homeless and mentally ill. On-site social services are available for residents at each property.

The Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty has not eliminated Jewish poverty and its own need to exist but it is making a vital effort in that direction. It is reaching out to the greater Jewish community for aid and volunteers and has opportunities for all those who want to help. They are at metcouncil.org.

Let us recall the kind of observance of Yom Kippur that Isaiah said would be acceptable to God:

- Unlocking the shackles of injustice;
- Freeing the oppressed;
- Sharing our bread with the hungry;
- Bringing the homeless poor into our homes;
- Covering those without clothes;
- Never withdrawing from our own kin.

That is not easy to accept and difficult to accomplish but a road to follow

Al Slawsky

A Poem:

BY 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 who struggle still.

Stan Samuels

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MY FASTING LIFE

In Boro Park where I grew up
I fasted because it was a day we had to fast.
I knew that
Because my father said so.

In my teenage years
I fasted out of fear of what might happen if I didn't.
And sure enough....nothing happened.
Like the old joke
about clicking your fingers to keep the tigers away.

In my 30's I stopped fasting for a few years
Because nobody said: "This is a day we fast."
Not my rabbi and not my community
Because I didn't have a rabbi and I didn't have a community.

In my forties I started fasting again
Because my new synagogue community fasted
And because I knew it was a mitzvah to fast.
I knew. Because my new husband said so.

The year I turned 60 I did not fast.
My 90-year-old mother
Who usually said, "Don't swim out too far...you'll drown."
even when I was only going to the corner store
Issued a new warning:
"That's enough fasting already.
You'll faint and get a concussion."

And so....I come to this time and place....this Yom Kippur 2012
With a checkered past of fasting
Trailing a boatload, a veritable mountain of misdeeds and blunders

This year I fast.... because
I see belatedly
that fasting is more than a mitzvah.
It is the way I signal to my brain:

Something urgent and life changing is about to happen

I dread....I truly dread
Looking back on my life and having to say

I should have hugged them more.

I should have signed more petitions,
marched in more demonstrations,
drunk a few more cups of Fair Trade coffee.

I should have hugged them more.

I want to look back and say: I used every ounce of love and caring.
I wasted nothing.
I wrung myself dry.

May I be spared any last minute death-bed epiphanies
That I did not lead the life I was meant to lead
Like Tolstoy's Ivan Ilyich
No!! I definitely do not want that

And so I fast
Believing that when I fast with my community
the level of my contrition
Is raised exponentially,
and joins with Jewish voices from other times and other places.

I fast because

At some point during the fast
After sufficient choruses of Avinu Malkeinu,
After all the rounds of Al Chet,
When contrition fatigue is setting in
Something.....just might happen.
I could be swept up...up...and away as if in a Chagall painting

I might just hover wraith-like over the shtetl of Vitebsk
And hovering over the rooftops of Vitebsk
I might see more clearly
the fragile splendor of life.

All the pain and hope and wonder might merge
As contrition morphs into a piercing tenderness
For this splendid, tortured planet.

And in that moment I might know for a certainty
That my contrition is not for nothing...
Redemption.....not an empty word
....tikkun olam.....within my reach

And if I didn't have all these good reasons to fast'
I would fast anyway.
Because....after all. This is a day we fast.
I know....because my father said so.

Barbara Gish-Scult

JONAH

A DRAMATIC MIDRASH

NAZIMOVA

Cast

Jonah

Four different people voicing God Older Man
Older Woman
Young Boy
Young Girl

Ship passengers
(and people in marketplace)

King of Nineveh

Narrators

Thanks to the cast for their suggestions, and to Ken Klein and Margie Schulman for their helpful recommendations outside of rehearsals. Thanks especially to Susan Schorr for her frequent editorial help, and for applying haftarah trope to the English translation of Jonah. Thanks to West End Synagogue for encouraging experimentation and creativity.

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scene one

[People are milling about the market place, buying and selling.]

Jonah

[Walks though the marketplace, turns to look behind him, as if to see if someone is approaching; turns back and says.]

I'm safe here. The clamor of the marketplace, the hubbub of the crowd... I'll hear no still, small voice here. No Divine command calling to me, demanding that I confront my neighbors to tell them that they're bad and need to change. Aren't *I* as bad? Aren't *I* as inadequate? I think the voice of God is really telling me that *I* need to change. But here in the hubbub I'm safe, I'll hear no Voice of God challenging me. It's taken me a long time to achieve balance in my life; I won't allow anything, I won't allow any Voice, to throw me *off* balance.

Narrator

[chants in Hebrew and then in English, Jonah 1:1]

The word of the lord came to Jonah son of Amittai:

God

[all four voices] Listen: Arise and go to Nineveh ... and cry out against it;

[older man's voice] tell them that they have lied to each other,

[young boy's voice] have lied to themselves, have ignored those who have little food,

[young girl's voice] have gleefully used barbed words that bleed others of self-respect.

[all four voices] Speak to them for me, Jonah; be my voice to them.

Jonah

That voice I hear... even over the roar of the crowd... reminding me of my own failings... I cannot do this. I must run, run, run until the only things I can hear are my own feet on the paving stones, the crash of the waves, and the wind in my ears. I must be in constant motion, never stopping to listen to that Voice...

[Jonah looks up, looks around, and runs across the bimah (north) and off the bimah.]

Nazimova

s c e n e t w o

Narrator

[chants in Hebrew and then in English, Jonah 1:3]

Jonah ... arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Yaffo and found a ship going to Tarshish.

[Several passengers are talking on the deck of the ship as it sails the Mediterranean.]

Passenger 1

[To Passenger 2]

...so then I told him, sure, it's a voyage of months, but with the trading opportunities in Tarshish I can pay off my debts and maybe even become rich!

Passenger 2

[To Jonah]

...so, stranger, why are *you* going to Tarshish?

Jonah

I'm running.

[Passenger 1 shows great interest, and Passenger 3, who until now has been looking over the railing, shows an interest and comes to listen.]

Passenger 2

Whoa! From whom?

Jonah

You wouldn't believe me if I told you.

Passenger 3

Try us.

Nazimova

Passenger 1

From whom? Your wife?

Jonah

[sullenly] No.

Passenger 3

Your mother-in-law?

[Passengers 1 & 3 laugh]

Jonah

[sullenly] No.

[Jonah looks around, beyond the boat, then up at the sky.]

From God.

[Passengers all look at each other, unsure if Jonah is desperately crazy or just desperate.]

Passenger 2

You can't run from God!

Passenger 1

God is everywhere. God is woven into the fabric of the world. Why, God is the loom that pre-existed the fabric! You can't escape from God.

Jonah

I'm not trying to escape from God. I'm trying to escape from *hearing* God.

I run to avoid standing quietly, to avoid listening, to avoid hearing God's words.

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Passenger 2

Stranger, life does not go on for ever. A person's life is like pottery easily broken, like a flower that fades, like dust that is blown away. But even so, life is a unique gift. A gift that you may have for many decades to come, or that you may lose a few weeks from now—you cannot know, no one can know.

Why waste your life by running, avoiding, never stopping to catch your breath and listen? Embrace this gift, live life fully, deeply. You may lose it tomorrow, so face it today.

Passenger 3

The sea has become stormy...

I've never seen the wind like this before... it may blow us over! Take down the sails!

Passenger 2

Listen to the wind... it almost sounds like words, words of an unknown language ...

Jonah

It is God, pursuing me. I will not stay. I will not listen!

[Jonah jumps overboard.]

Passenger 3

Man overboard! He'll drown in this gale!

Passenger 1

How bizarre, as soon as the stranger hit the sea, the storm ceased. The talking wind quieted. Perhaps it spoke only to him?

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scene three

Narrator

[chants in Hebrew and then in English, Jonah 2:1]

The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah; and Jonah was in the belly of the fish...

[Jonah sits inside the gut of a large fish, in the dark, alone.]

Jonah

Oh well, out of the frying pan, and into the... fish?!

[stands and looks around] At least I haven't drowned. I'm still alive, and...

God

[all four voices] Hello, Jonah.

Jonah

Aaaaaiiii! Now the voice is all around me, and there's nowhere to run!

God

[all four voices]

[slightly amused] What's eating you?

Jonah

[Angry, looking up, not sure in which direction to address his fury... shakes his fist at the top of the fish's gut.]

This is how you treat your prophet?!

God

[all four voices]

[giving back Jonah's anger] What prophet? You hear my call, but you flee from it!

[more gently] A prophet must have a mouth *and* an ear.

Nazimova

Jonah

That wasn't in the job description.

God

[all four voices] Jonah, a prophet lives his or her life as the voice of God *and* as the ear of the people: you're supposed to be My voice to the people, *and* the people's ear to Me.

How can you speak for me without first listening to Me, listening to my message, listening for my wisdom?

Jonah

Listening to You *is* the problem. When I hear You tell me to announce to the people that they've sinned, I remember that sometimes I've acted as they have.

God

[all four voices] Why does that surprise you? You're human. You're imperfect. All human beings are imperfect. Morally imperfect, just like you.

Jonah

Exactly! When you told *me* to deliver a message to *Nineveh*, *You* were also delivering a message to *me*. You were reminding me that sometimes I've made the wrong choice, that I've had filet mignon *twice* in one week instead of making a larger donation to a food pantry, that I've made fun of someone when they weren't around, that I've cheated on my taxes, that I've given the cold shoulder to the less bright, painfully shy guy I pass every day in town...

When you ask me to threaten the people in Nineveh, *I* feel threatened, because really I'm not so much better than they are.

God

[all four voices] Threatened? I want Nineveh, and I want you, to stop misbehaving, not to stop existing. I want you to change, not to die.

Nazimova

Jonah

You want me to change, and I know I'm not perfect. But I think I'm basically a good person, that I act from good motives. It's a tough world out there, and I think I've achieved a good balance in my life. But you undermine my balance when you suggest that some of my motives *haven't* been good, and that I've *wronged* people. It negates my sense of who I am, it threatens my equilibrium become undone.

God

[all four voices] You misheard Me if you thought I was asking the Ninevites, or asking you, to negate your lives. I don't want you to die, and I don't want you to become undone; I want you to change. I don't expect you to become perfect, but to become a *little* closer to perfect. To be a little *more* responsible for the effects of your actions, and of your inactions.

I want your life to increase in responsibility and in understanding and in love. I want you to live deeply. Not to run from deep questions and questioning voices.

Jonah

sigh It takes strength. Forgive me for running, pardon me, help me to atone.

God

[all four voices] That's what I'm here for. And that's what your community is there for.

Jonah

But God, I've been running for so many years. This late in my life, what can I achieve by trying to change?

God

[all four voices] Jonah, no one knows how many days they have yet to live.

[older woman's voice] But one week, one season, one year from now, if you're still alive, would you rather have spent that time running, living half-a-life? Or would you prefer to have used that week, that season, that year, listening with your full attention, living with a whole heart, acting in a Godly way?

[older man's voice] It's never too late to turn, to return, to make tshuvah.

Nazimova

Jonah

Okay. *sigh* To return. I suppose that means returning to Yaffo? And then turning to Nineveh?

Narrator

[chants in Hebrew and then in English, Jonah 2:11]

The LORD commanded the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon dry land.

s c e n e f o u r

Narrator

[chants in Hebrew and then in English, Jonah 3:3]

Jonah arose and went to Nineveh in accordance with the word of the Lord.

Jonah

Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overturned!

King of Nineveh

You're right! We've been living a life in defiance of Godly morality, in defiance of God's path! We must repent! Today, right now! Let all of us turn back from our evil ways!

Narrator

[chants in Hebrew and then in English, Jonah 3:10]

God saw what they did, how they had turned back from their evil ways. And God repented the evil which He had said to do to them, and did not do it.

Jonah

What!?! That's it? Just like that? I tell them that you're going to overturn them, and now you change your mind?

Nazimova

God

[all four voices] Jonah,

[young girl's voice] A few poetic words about death go a long way. It got them to examine how they were living. And while I didn't overturn them, I got them to begin turning, I got them to begin making tshuvah, didn't I?

Jonah

But you're making me look like a fool! Am I confused, or stupid, that I brought the wrong message? How can I be your prophet and yet not speak the truth? You gave my life its meaning and now you take it away, as if I were nothing but a hollow gourd. Did not my ears hear you? Did not my voice speak your words?

God

[all four voices] You still don't get it, do you?

[older man's voice] I didn't threaten the people of Nineveh because I wanted to kill them, but because I wanted to wake them up. I wanted them to change.

Being written into the Book of Death is a *metaphor* for having deadened one's life, for having deadened one's moral sense.

[older woman's voice] But the Book of *Life* is *real*—the Book of Life is your daily planner, it's your diary, *it's what you do with each day*. You write *yourself* into the Book of Life each day that you live honestly, and each day that you show others kindness and patience and forgiveness.

[older man's voice] You write yourself into the Book of Life each day that you're amazed by life's miracles, and each day that you're grateful for what you have.

[older woman's voice] You write yourself into the Book of Life each day that you're aware of that which is greater than yourself, and each day that you act according to the moral law.

[young girl's voice] Look within yourself, make *cheshbon hanefesh*, an accounting of your soul.

[young boy's voice] Look at your behavior, be aware when what you do is right, and be aware when what you do is wrong. Know your right hand from your left.

[all four voices] When a Godly voice calls to you, don't run.

Jonah

Hineini— Here I am.

Mark Nazimova

BOOK OF JONAH

KLEIN

Reader One: Good afternoon everyone! For those of you fasting, I hope that your fast continues to be an easy one. And for all of us, I hope our self-examination this Day of Atonement will help bring us closer to the holy community and individuals we aspire to be.

It's long been a tradition to read the Book of Jonah during the Minchah service on Yom Kippur. Jonah is one of the most dramatic and enigmatic books of the Bible – as you'll see folks are still arguing about what it really means. So instead of rereading the book this year, I've assembled a panel of experts, all no longer alive, to give their take on the book. I'll introduce each of them – or at least their alter ego for today – when their turn comes. One other thing – the words I'm ascribing to the panelists – they didn't really say any of them – but I imagine they might have. And now, for those who don't fully remember the story, here's a quick retelling.

Reader Two: Thank you. God calls out to Jonah, the son of Amittai, and tell him to travel to the city of Nineveh to tell the inhabitants that in 40 days, because of its sins, God will destroy the city. The story doesn't give Jonah's reasons, but he immediately tries to run away – he books passage on a ship heading for Tarshish, the farthest portion of the known world. While they're at sea, God creates a huge gale which threatens to sink the ship. The sailors all surmise that the wrath of the elements is a punishment from some god, and seek to discover who might have displeased his own god and caused the storm. When they find Jonah, he is fast asleep in the bowels of the ship, and he readily admits that he is a Hebrew who is fleeing God. "Throw me overboard," says Jonah, "and the storm will cease." Although the sailors are reluctant to toss Jonah into the ocean, after the seas become still rougher, they eventually do – and then the storm immediately subsides.

God then sends a "big fish" which swallows Jonah whole, and he survives unharmed in the fish's belly. After three days and nights, Jonah utters a spontaneous prayer to God, declaring that he is now ready to fulfill his mission. And then the fish spits Jonah out safely onto dry land.

Jonah then proceeds to Nineveh. He stops near the center of the city and proclaims, "Forty days more and Nineveh will be overthrown." Amazingly, the entire city takes Jonah's word to heart and goes into mourning. The king decrees, "Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet change His mind and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we might not perish." Seeing the Ninevites' repentance, God relents and the city is saved.

Klein

But Jonah is furious with God. “I knew this would happen,” he says, “because you are a gracious compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in compassion. This is why I ran away in the first place.” While Jonah sits outside the city to see what will happen, God causes a plant to grow beside Jonah to provide shade, an act for which Jonah is grateful. But by the next morning, God causes a worm to consume the plant -- and when the hot sun beats on Jonah, he is so angry he again wishes he were dead. God responds to Jonah saying, “You had concern for the plant which you didn’t tend to or grow. Should I not have concern for all the souls of the

Ninevites?” – And on that enigmatic note the book ends.

Reader One: Thanks. Our first speaker is the Baal Shem Tov – the Master of the Good Name, the legendary founder of Chassidism, who died in 1760. At the core of the Baal Shem Tov’s teaching is the importance of “devekut” – cleaving to God up to the point of intimate spiritual closeness. The Baal Shem Tov also taught that everyone, even the most unlearned peasant, could still reach the highest realms of spirituality.

The Baal Shem Tov: Why is Jonah so angry? I think Jonah’s anger is because he demands justice and, at least to him, Nineveh deserves to be destroyed. You know that virtually throughout the Bible up to this point, when God makes up His mind to punish sin, it’s pretty much a done deal -- He doesn’t give the sinners a chance to repent. For instance, when God tells the Israelites that they’re entitled to settle the land of Israel because He is dispossessing the prior inhabitants who have polluted the earth with their sinfulness – whatever you think of that theology – there is no talk of giving those nations a chance to repent. And when Samuel tells Saul that God is taking away the kingship from his family because he refused to slaughter all the Amalekites, and Saul asks for forgiveness, Samuel replies: “The Glory of Israel does not deceive or change his mind, for He is not human that He should change His mind.” (1 Sam., Ch. 15, v. 29) So, what’s happening in Jonah really is something new and it represents an evolution in religious thought. Jonah intuitively feels that the true God always intertwines strict justice with mercy – and Jonah can’t let go of the old stern God of judgment. And if God is willing to reverse Himself if people will truly repent, then the nature of prophecy has to change too – because what was once an irreversible decree now is provisional based on human response. So, I think the book of Jonah is giving us a richer notion of both justice and prophecy, a notion that its protagonist still can’t accept.

Reader One: Our next panelist is Henrietta Szold. After a renowned career as the editor of the Jewish Publication Society, Szold first traveled to Palestine at age 49 in 1909 and discovered her life’s mission: the health, education and welfare of the pre-state Jewish community of Palestine. She helped found Hadassah, which, with the help of Jewish American women, funded hospitals, a medical school and other services for Palestine’s Jewish and Arab inhabitants. Henrietta Szold died in 1945 at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem.

Klein

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Henrietta Szold: I agree that Jonah can't accept the salvation of Nineveh – but I think so far we've been ignoring the historical context of the book. First, can we tell when the events in the story supposedly take place? In fact, there is a Jonah, son of Amittai, found elsewhere in our Bible – in 2nd Kings, Ch. 14, v. 24, there's a mention of a prophet who lived during the reign of Jeroboam, son of Jehoash, king of Judah. So, the original readers of the Book of Jonah would doubtless have equated the Jonah in our story with this otherwise unknown prophet from around 780 to 750 B.C.E. (before the Common Era) – and people who take the Bible literally, still believe they're one and the same. On the other hand, almost all the biblical scholars – based on the book's themes and style – place the writing of Jonah as a few hundred years later – say around 400 B.C.E. Second, a mere fifty or so years after the events in the book, the Assyrian Empire, with its capital of Nineveh, conquered the Northern Kingdom, dispersed and resettled its inhabitants – and 10 of the tribes of Israel – the 10 Lost Tribes – forever disappeared.

So, if we accept the book is from around 400 B.C.E., but its story takes place hundreds of years earlier, then the audience for the tale already knows that Nineveh, the city being saved, will soon be responsible for obliterating a majority of the Jewish nation.

So, when Jonah is angered almost to death by God's sparing Nineveh, perhaps the prophet senses the magnitude of the disaster about

to befall his own people. So, I think that it's God's extension of mercy even to Israel's enemies, even to its eventual conqueror, that Jonah can't accept – and the radical conclusion of the book is that God responds even to Ninevites' true atonement.

Reader One: Our last scheduled panelist is Christopher Hitchens, curmudgeon, and polemicist, who's included on our panel as one of the founders of what's been called "the new atheism." Mr. Hitchens' attitude towards religion can probably best be summed up by the title of his best-selling book "God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything." Christopher Hitchens died in Houston, Texas in 2011 from cancer at age 82, an atheist up to and including his last breath.

Christopher Hitchens: OK – while I'm not quite as angry as Jonah, I disagree completely with the tone and conclusions of everything said so far. The Book of Jonah may be a fairytale or a parable or what have you – but what is its essential message? If anything, it's that it's never too late to repent, and more important, that God listens to the prayers of the repentant and responds with kindness and mercy. But if the last twenty-five hundred years of history have taught us anything, that's not even wishful thinking – it's all a lie. How many tragedies do we have to recount, how much slaughter did this allegedly merciful God permit,

Klein

how many anguished prayers from defenseless innocents were to no avail? Maybe Jonah is angry because he knows the next time the fully repentant cry out to God with the same faith and fervor as the Ninevites – God’s answer will be silence. Sure, the myth of a responsive God may have been comforting to our ancestors – but after all the pogroms, the concentration camps, the crematoria – can we afford to believe it?

So, I believe that the story of Jonah is a fairytale – but I believe that ultimately it’s a destructive one. And that’s because in a cold and indifferent universe it asks us to place our hopes in a fickle, capricious God who can’t or won’t deliver on his promise of mercy – and if I’ve hurt anyone’s feelings, well, sorry, but perhaps I am as angry as Jonah.

Reader Two interrupting: Pardon me, I thought my part was finished, but I do have some thoughts to add. And perhaps it’s true that we can’t expect or trust God to intervene in the same way the ancients once did – but that doesn’t mean that we’re alone in the universe -- because we still have ourselves and we have each other. And maybe our ideas about God are a little muddled – maybe very muddled -- but we still know what it means to aspire to a holy life. For me, the central message of Jonah is that teshuvah, turning one’s life around, is always still possible. The message is that we can always take stock of our lives, think of what we might change, and then forgive ourselves and resolve to do better. And maybe we can recognize the divine spark in the people around us and forgive them as we ask to be forgiven for the pain we’ve caused.

Yes, the Jonah story is full of miracles – terrifying storms, big fish and vast empires. But maybe we’ve been conditioned to look for miracles in the wrong places. Maybe we should look more to the feelings of love between parents and children, the affection of old friends, the swirling colors of the sky at sunset, the memory of songs we fell in love to, the splendor of a life well-lived, the satisfaction of waking in the morning and feeling in our souls, “I am, I am.”

You know scientists tell us that our earth revolves around an ordinary star, one of over 100 billion in the Milky Way, itself one galaxy among over 100 billion in the visible universe – and here we are, a tiny speck on a tiny speck, for a brief moment in the ocean of time – but conscious, aware and able to marvel at it all. Perhaps, that’s miracle enough.

So for me too Jonah is a fairytale – but it’s one whose message I embrace. The future is in flux, what we do and who we are matters, and forgiveness for all of us and the world is always possible.

Narrator One: Thank you all – a blessed rest of Yom Kippur.

Ken Klein

PARADISE LOST

I'm looking at that picture of us,
The one on my desk next to my lamp;
I think I was only a few months old in it.
You are holding my hand,
Or more like I am grabbing yours,
As I sit on the kitchen counter
In the country house.

With your other hand,
You're tapping a pen
Holding it the way I remember
Tapping the way you used to.
I wish you could hold my hand right now.
I miss your arm tight around me.
Now I'm looking straight into your eyes
And hopefully, you are looking into mine.

Sometimes I stare at this picture,
Caught in some kind of trance, a daze,
Thinking somehow, if I look hard enough,
It will be like you are here,
Or I will be able to remember you more.

I don't know what your voice used to sound like,
And that isn't fair.
But I do remember how you used to lick the tops off my ice-cream cones,
And all around the sides so they wouldn't drip.
I used to ask you to do it.

I remember running up to you on Fridays after school
And how I would bury my face into your chest.
You liked to wear that button down shirt,
The khaki colored one
With the pen embroidered in the pocket.

I was so proud to have my Dad pick me up that day:
Everything was fine
Everything was safe
Everything made sense.

I remember how you used to kiss your tzit-tzit during the Shma,
And with them wrapped around your fingers,
How you would pass the tassels to me
As I sat next to you in synagogue.

I want to write down all the memories I have of you
And someday maybe I will.
But for now all I have is this picture,
And the thought of my hand wrapped around yours.

Jennifer Ferentz

REMEMBERING

Though specks on the continuum of humanity –
our individual lens is narrow

Children and grandchildren,
parents and grandparents form our world.

We see in our children the future,
try to imprint values,
leave a trove of sharing to be cherished.

The past is filled with memories –
families, schools, lovers, challenges
all have shaped us.

On Yom Kippur,
though there are several in my family to mourn,
I focus with great love on a special few who have passed.

Grandpa Lou.
My earliest memories are of him –
a splinter removed, a doll presented, shared time in the country.
He died when I was four,
but he lit up my world with a love that still shines.

Baby Eleanor.
Riddled with birth defects, she must have been in pain.
Yet always ready with a smile
arms raised to be picked up,
I was greeted with pleasure.
She died at five months.
A model in courage, it is hard not to wonder what she might
have become.

And Jerry,
a truly gentle man.
We met late and he died early,
but together we learned that a
loving, supportive,
intimate, equal relationship
was – in fact – possible between two adults.

Today there are many who are close –
who love and are loved

but
these relationships,
each brief,
left enough love behind to ease the lonely times
and remain vividly with me today.

Andrea Bardfeld

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

THE EVIL THAT MEN DO

PSALM 92

Perhaps it is a genetic code, passed on from warriors of past ages.

With saber and shield, equipped only for reflexive and physical confrontation.

To pursue noncombative resolution takes a strength not yet fully realized by many men.

Even now when the tragic ruins resulting from battle are visible to all.

When more men who are nurtured in ways that are better known by women, pursue a bloodless path, evil will diminish.

Andrea Brecker

September 2024

CARRYING ON

I never saw you smile, or cry. All I saw
was you waving at me
from the black-and-white sonogram,
and the lesions on your brain, signaling
a brief and too-painful life if you were born.
And I saw the footprints, no bigger than my thumbnail,
on your birth certificate, issued the same day
as your death certificate, ten years ago.

I have mourned you since then, often wondering
if it is right to miss someone who never really was,
who was only a name and a hope and a different kind of future,
all lost at once. And as the time has passed
I look at children at play, or on their way to school,
and think of who you could have been,
and what I might have been, with you, that I am not now.

I have no memories of your face, or your touch.
But when I look at the black-and-white photo of you in my womb,
inside the beige card that says "Our Baby's First Photo,"
what I remember, my almost-child, is this:
that although I did not carry you to term,
I will carry you for the rest of my life.

Nancie S. Martin

MEDITATION

Morning unfolds in layers
fog hovers
over the mountain
silent birds wait
blurred in vapor
ghost trees shrouded
muffled voices behind walls
horses snort softly somewhere
on an invisible path.

Nowhere to go now
time to evade words
mist enfolds the sitter in the chair
who looks out trying to discern distance
who listens remembering
words spoken in another room

Time to dismantle thoughts
dismiss memory
lower gaze
drop hands
if something beckons
let it go
do not try to describe
absence.

Eva Miodownik Oppenheim

MARTYROLOGY

SAPHIER

Reader

There are two stories to be told during this service. The first is about the millions of Jews and others who have been tortured and killed because of their religious beliefs. This story will be told through the readings I have selected. The second is about the underlying meaning of this service. My talk will be about this.

Since the middle ages the traditional story told at the martyrology service is the story of the Ten Martyrs. This is a story, like many Jewish stories, that encompasses many different levels of understanding and it raises a number of questions. Why was this story written? Why is this story important? And why is it in the Yom Kippur service?

In order to answer these questions we need to start with the traditional story.

During the time of Roman rule, around the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, Rome was persecuting Jews and putting restrictions on religious practices. The Roman governor of Judea studied enough scripture from learned sages that he was able to turn his knowledge against the Jews by bring together ten great sages and asking them: "Judge this matter objectively, pervert it not with falsehood but pass on it truthfully: If a man is caught kidnapping one of his brothers of the children of Israel, treating him as slave and selling him, what should be done?" They answered: "That thief shall die." Then he exclaimed: "Where are your fathers who sold their brother Joseph and battered him for shoes?" "You must atone for the iniquity of your fathers."

The sages asked for a one day reprieve and they turned to Rabbi Ishmael, the most learned amongst them for an answer. Legend has it that Rabbi Ishmael ascended to heaven and inquired of one robed in linen, presumably an angel of God, who said:

"Submit, beloved saints, for I have heard from behind the curtain that this would be your fate." Rabbi Ishmael descended back to earth and told his colleagues the word of God. It was God's divine decree that they should die for the sins of the Jewish people and they all submitted to be put to death.

The story continues with Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel dieing by beheading. Rabbi Ishmael died next. The governors daughter thought him so beautiful she wanted him spared. The Governor instead peeled off his face and had it preserved. Rabbi Akiva died next and famously uttering the Shema; gaining final and complete understanding of what it means to love God with all your soul, all while his skin was being raked off his body. Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava died fourth burnt at the stake while wrapped in a torah scroll.

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Reading 1

We remember the agonies of the Rabbis.

They brought him and wrapped him in the Torah scroll and surrounded him with bundles of twigs with which they lit the fire. They brought wads of cotton that had been soaked in water and put them on his heart so that he would not die quickly. His daughter said to him: Father, must I see you thus? He said to her: were I to be burned alone, it would be hard for me, but now I am being burned along with the Torah. When someone comes to avenge the insult done to the Torah, he will avenge mine as well. His students said to him, my master, what do you see? He said to them: the parchment is burning and the letters fly up into the air.

Eleh Ezkerah

Reader

He watched in wonder as the letters of the Torah danced around him and soared upward. His executioner for unknown reasons was overtaken and plunged himself into the flame and died. There is little description of the death of the other martyrs though we do know who they are and their life's work.

So why was the story of the Ten Martyrs written?

Although the events supposedly take place about 66 CE, at the time of the Jewish revolt that resulted in the destruction of the second temple, the traditional story as we know it was not written until the end of the Rabbinic period in the 6th century. The Ten Martyrs' place in Jewish history is elevated by this story in two ways. First, they are depicted as achieving a special spiritual awakening and closeness to God through their deaths. And second, they died atoning for the collective sins of the Jewish people. This bears a striking resemblance to the story of Jesus. This story was written during the time of Christian ascendancy. Jews were given their own story of resurrection, atonement and martyrdom.

During the middle ages when this story became part of the service it served an additional purpose. This was the time of the Inquisition and the Crusades in Europe. A time when many Jews were slaughtered. Martyrology literature in Europe became popular. It glorified death in order to shore up the Jews and prevent them from converting. Some of these martyrology poems or piyyuts written during the 12th century are traditionally recited during the Yom Kippur service.

Reading 2

We remember the suffering of Jews through the ages.

Behold, I have made libation to my king, said Solomon to God.
And to please Him, I have arranged my affairs.
I bow on my knees to confess my transgressions,
To illuminate my darkness, I offer my head and my face,

My hands and my feet – for in Him is my Source.
I shall make libation with blood and tears.

On the fiery altar, my heart is laid out, my soul is my offering.
My pain is nectar to my palate, and the fire of my tormentors has no power over me.

Solomon Simhah haSofer
Written for the martyrs of Troyes (1288)

Reader

In contrast to the elevation of martyrdom by European Jewry, Maimonides, who lived through the early Inquisition and Muslim persecutions, famously wrote an open letter to the Jews of Yemen telling them that it was better to convert “on the outside” to save their lives. He ruled that they would not be considered idol worshippers or as having committed a capital transgression if they secretly continued to live by the basic tenets of Judaism. He did not believe that Jews should be martyrs in the name of God. This was a radical shift to practicality and reason over religious zealotry, but it was not the prevailing thinking in Europe at the time.

Reading 3

We remember the tortures of the Inquisition.

During the Spanish Inquisition, Jewish women – particularly *conversos* and crypto-Jews – were the primary targets and victims of torture. We remember Maria and Isabel Lopez, accused of abstaining from pork and wearing festive clothes on the Jewish Sabbath. The Lopez family was subjected to a form of water torture called the “*escalera*,” in which defendants were bound naked to a scaffold with their feet over their heads and their faces covered with headpieces. Victims experienced a sense of suffocation when water was poured over their faces and pressure progressively increased through tightened ropes.

Reader

European Jews during the middle ages used this story of the Ten Martyrs and others like it to elevate martyrdom to a high spiritual plane. Through all the pain and suffering and death Jews could hold true to their faith knowing that martyrs achieved a closeness to God that others could not. And they knew that as martyrs they were joining others who died atoning for the sins of the Jewish people. These stories provided strong spiritual support for Jews to resist the temptation to convert in the face of torture and death.

But of all the Jewish deaths due to persecution to choose from, why the story of the Ten Martyrs? In order to answer this we need to understand the importance of the lives of the Ten Martyrs not the importance of their deaths.

Reading 4

We remember the torments of Crusader Europe.

The Crusader period saw the advent of blood libels and the condemnation of entire communities to torture and death; in 1171, the false accusation that a Jewish man had murdered a Christian child induced the Count of Blois to enchain and imprison all of the local Jews, then torture fifty men and women and burn them at the stake.

Reader

Before the destruction of the Temple, a group of scribes, mostly from the Pharisees formed what was known as the Tannaim. This was a group of the most learned Jews, that over a period of about 100 years created a written interpretation of Jewish law that became known as the Mishnah, the interpretation of Jewish scripture that had developed orally over the preceding centuries. This was the first Rabbinic work written in Hebrew, but it was not a major movement in Judaism at the time since the Temple was the center of Jewish life.

The Ten Martyrs were all prominent members of the Tannaim. After the destruction of the Temple, Yochanan ben Zakai, the leader of the Tannaim, founded the Council of Yavneh from which the Mishnah and Rabbinic Judaism emerged.

The Tannaim maintained that LITERATURE and LIFE were co-extensive. The Pirke Aboth is one part of the Mishnah. What stands out when reading it is that the acts of study and living a righteous life are conceived as the supreme act of religious devotion.

In chapter 6:2, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi writes:

All who practice Torah,
Attending to life and revealing Truth,
Will be exalted.
Taking up the path of justice and compassion,
they lift up the world
and thus are themselves uplifted.

Samuel Heilman in The Gate Behind the Wall writes:

To study Torah is to make oneself part of the chain of being, and thereby achieve union with a process which is vastly larger than the individual and for all practical purposes, immortal.

He goes on to state:

Becoming part of the Torah process through study is not an act that brings salvation as its reward. It is itself salvation.

What the Mishnah is saying by its very existence is that God can be found through study.

The Ten Martyrs, not all of whom were actually martyrs, were important participants in the events that forever changed Judaism. They participated in the revolts that led to the destruction of the Temple, thereby ending the temple based sacrificial cult that defined mainstream Judaism. They all participated in the writing of the Mishnah thereby transforming Judaism to a religion of literature and study. The story of the Ten Martyrs is a story about THE moment in history that defines Judaism as we know it today. Unfortunately, the persecution of Jews never ended.

Reading 5

We remember the unspeakable persecution of the Holocaust. We remember not only the gas chambers and the mass graves, but also the assaults on dignity and precious religious commitments: the presentation of pork on Yom Kippur to starving inmates; the shaving of beards; the sexual violation and rape of women and men. We remember the humiliation and disgust of those forced to stew in their own excrement, refused access to latrines and toilet paper.

Readings Three to Five borrowed from Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg with Melissa Weintraub, Rabbis for Human Rights

Reader

That leaves the question of why is this story part of the Yom Kippur service? Something more important is going on here than simply telling the story about the death of these ten men. There are in fact bigger stories being told during the High Holiday services. Much like a Bach sonata, there are at least three intertwining themes. The biggest theme is about the evolution of Judaism. The story arc we follow on these holidays begins with the story of Abraham and Isaac, essentially the birth of Judaism as a nomadic, desert belief with no formal writings or rituals beyond that of circumcision. We then read about Judaism as a highly ritualized sacrificial cult. Followed by the birth of Judaism as a religion of literature, study and interpretation focused on how to live a righteous life in this world.

A second theme has to do with the use of sacrificial rituals in Judaism. On Rosh Hashanah we read about the offering of Isaac as a sacrifice to God and then the sacrifice *Saphier*

of a lamb in Isaac's stead. In today's Torah portion we read about the highly ritualized sacrifices that took place during the time of the Temple. And finally, we have the Ten Martyrs who offered themselves as sacrifices to God for the sins of the Jewish people and whose story punctuates the end of sacrificial rituals in Judaism.

The third theme is isolated to today's service and explains the story's placement. It is the theme of atonement and remembering. Again we start with the Temple sacrifice in the Torah reading. This is a story about offering animal sacrifices as atonement for sins. We then have the Avodah service where the high priests atone for their personal sins followed by the story of the Ten Martyrs who atoned for the sins of the Jewish people. We then close with the mourners kaddish where we not only remember our loved ones but also all those who died defending their right to be Jewish. It is also an appropriate time to remember all those who have been persecuted because of their religious beliefs, nationality or for the color of their skin.

Reading 6

Mamdouh Habib was subject to rendition by the United States. The Americans took him to an airfield, cut his clothes off with scissors, dressed him in a jumpsuit, covered his eyes with opaque goggles, and placed him aboard a private plane. He was flown to Egypt. He was beaten frequently with blunt instruments, including an object that he likened to an electric "cattle prod." And he was told that if he didn't confess to belonging to Al Qaeda he would be anally raped by specially trained dogs. Habib was shackled and forced to stand in three

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torture chambers: one room was filled with water up to his chin, requiring him to stand on tiptoe for hours; another chamber, filled with water up to his knees, had a ceiling so low that he was forced into a prolonged, painful stoop; in the third, he stood in water up to his ankles, and within sight of an electric switch and a generator, which his jailers said would be used to electrocute him if he didn't confess. Last month, after a three-year ordeal, Habib was released without charges.

Outsourcing Torture
The secret history of America's "extraordinary rendition" program
by Jane Mayer.

So there you have it. Although it seems on the surface that the high holidays are about davening and repentance, the real meaning of t'shuvah is returning. I like to think that it means returning to goodness and what we do during the high holidays is return to the story of Judaism and what it means to be Jewish. With that in mind let us read responsively

Reading 7 (Responsively)

Today let us remember all those good and righteous souls who died for their faith.

From the breath of life to the flame of death.
A holy life, a life of kindness, a life of the heart

"A good heart is the way" said Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai
"By the sweat of your brow/ Shall you get bread to eat" said Hashem to Adam

"Everything is seen, yet freedom of choice is given; the world is judged by grace, yet all is according to the work", said Rabbi Akiva.

I may ascend to heaven and meet a figure in linen
I may die full of grace with His name on my lips

I may die surrounded by the dancing letters of His words
Or I may simply fade away back to dust and ashes, the stuff of life

I have my choice as do my enemies. Whatever the world to come may bring,
I choose to die with the fullness of heart
Rather than live with the hollowness of a compromised life

Today I choose to return to goodness and away from evil.

I choose to live a life of grace and kindness

I choose to make the world a better place

I choose to work for peace and understanding

I choose to be guided by my heart so that one day
There will be

No Jewish Martyrs

No Christian Martyrs

No Muslim Martyrs

No Hindu Martyrs

No Buddhists Martyrs

No Black Martyrs

No Gay Martyrs

No African Martyrs

No Israeli Martyrs

No Arab Martyrs

No more Martyrs

Let the powers that guide us, individually and collectively, give us the wisdom to
make a world without martyrs.

David Saphier

LEGENDOLOGY

BRISMAN

Tradition asks that on this day, *Yom Hazikaron*, we remember the stories of our martyrs. Martyr is a difficult word to use these days. How can we honor the memory of the dead with a word that has been twisted out of shape? Our newspapers are stained with the stories of men who kiss their wives goodbye, strap dynamite around their waists, and run onto a crowded bus, leaving bits of disembodied limbs and a widow who has been instructed to tell her children, "Your daddy was a hero."

Martyrs we shall not remember. We will not call our dead by the same name as those who value life so little. We must not mistake the lessons of their fortitude for the belief that their souls are exalted in deliverance from this world. No. If these deaths have taught us anything it is that life is here on earth.

Let our remembrance not be a Martyrology. Let it be instead a Legendology, for the word legend has two meanings: a legend is a story, passed down from generations, which, like a star, is affixed far away, and which we gaze at with wonder. But a legend is also an index on the side of a map that helps us to decode the strange constellations of symbols on the ground on which we stand.

Reader 1: Rabbi Akiba

He was a poor, unschooled shepherd in love with a rich man's daughter. For her he left his flock to study Torah, and for him she left her father's mansion to sleep on a bed of straw. After the failed Bar Kokhba rebellion, Akiba was taken prisoner by Roman authorities who taunted him to abandon his faith. But to Akiba life without Torah was like a fish without water. He chose death over submission. While his torturers raked his flesh with burning iron combs he sang, *Shema yisroel adonai elohenu adonai echad* in voice loud and clear, for now he knew how it was possible to love God with all his soul.

*

It is after midnight on a December evening and the student looks up from his book. He has just read of the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiba. He peers out the window of the university library. A light snow has fallen and he begins to wonder:

What would I give up to preserve the customs of my ancestors? Dinner and movies on a Friday night? Tickets to a baseball game?

What would I forsake to study the texts of my religion? A career as a concert pianist? A life of worldly fame?

What would I risk to feel comfortable in my skin? The social embarrassment of saying, 'your joke offends me'? The linguistic awkwardness of declaring, 'I am a Jew'?

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What would I surrender to pray what I mean? The adherence to tradition? The comfort of saying words I don't understand?

What would I relinquish so that others might pray as they wish? My sense of superiority? A plot of land?

Reader 2: The Shoah

In the spring of 1945 U.S. and British troops landed on foreign soil to liberate the remaining victims of Nazi terror. As these men and women witnessed total destruction, photographs from the camps horrified the citizens back home. These images burned scars in their memories: gaunt faces behind barbed wire, starved eyes bulging from skulls of corpses, barrel after barrel of cyclone, figures piled like matchsticks, gaping pits of bodies, heaps of ash and bone.

*

Decades later, the historian will write her book on cultural memory. She will track the activity of these photographs, how they have been fixed in the minds of viewers, offering narratives for parents to tell their children, for those children to tell their children. She will describe how, unlike the individual memory of a person, which fades over time, the collective memory of a people builds with the passing of generations, grows stronger, exerting an unrelenting hold. The historian will search for a metaphor for this kind of memory. She will think it is like music, like the way a composer etches his notes on paper, and the notes become a song which reaches far beyond the bounds of ink on parchment, extending, permutating, even beyond the death of its author, carried by the voices of the living.

Reader 3: September 11, 2001

Stacey Sanders had started a new job. She was twenty-five and about to be engaged. That Tuesday morning she woke up early to blow dry her hair, sip coffee and read the newspaper before arriving at her office on the 106th floor of the north tower. At 9:25 a.m. she sent a hurried e-mail home reporting intense smoke. Later her mother and sister would read that e-mail, and over the next days they would read it over and over, wondering if there was some way that Stacey had survived. But they would never see or hear from her again.

*

Four years after the attacks an investigator from the National Institute of Standards and Technology will review the videotapes that captured the collapse of the two towers. He will study the architecture of the building trying to calibrate the force of the impact against the inertia of those steel structures. He will rewind and replay these tapes looking for some explanation. At the end of the day he will switch off the monitor, remove his glasses, bend his tired head in his hands, knowing that though he has studied physics for years, and as a scientist has always believed in human's capacity to find answers, his questions and calculations bring no understanding of how something once there can suddenly be gone.

Reader 4: Genocide in Darfur

In the afternoon Taha, a thirteen year-old girl, was returning from school when she saw the planes flying ahead, gathering like swallows in the sky. She wondered if help had finally come so that she and her family might stop living in fear. But then the bombs dropped. The first bomb landed the garden of her home and was followed by four other bombs. Six members of Taha's family were killed including her mother who was carrying her baby brother on her back.

*

Across the ocean Dr. Annie Sparrow, a thirty-six year old physician, begins work on the reports sitting on her desk. She has just returned from visiting camps along the Chad-Sudan border where she went to study sexual violence against refugees. She will begin filing the medical reports but her eyes will be diverted from the charts to the small picture she brought back with her drawn in crayon from an eight year-old girls she met in one of the refugee camps. She will look at the drawing and wonder how the image of a man and woman holding hands—an image that in her own culture would be a sign of friendship, could mean in this context that the soldier is taking the woman away from her family to be raped.

Reader 5: Hurricane Katrina

They called her "The Angel" because of the lightness of her touch. She had been working at the Children's Hospital in New Orleans for twelve years and still had the wispy looks of a young woman with blond hair that broke free from her ponytail and curled around the crown of her head like a halo. They called her the angel even though they knew that it was not her but the inexplicable miracles of biology that woke children from comas. But it seemed as though she had woken Joseph from his. A boy of sixteen he had been brought into the hospital after a diabetic shock. The Angel had sat with him every day for three weeks reading poetry to him even though they all knew he could not hear. "He likes the rhythms of the words," she'd say and so no one protested the day the boy's eyes fluttered open when she said that reading Milton had woken him up. And no one could bring themselves to think, when she drowned two days later, that the Angel had done anything but simply flown away to another place where she was needed.

*

David A. Reich, professor of literature, left the University and made his way down to Louisiana to rescue his son. He could not get over the shock of the news that Joe had woken from the coma nor the chilling irony that the nurse who cared for him, Miss Sally Oberfeld, had died in the hurricane while Joe, whose life hung by a thread, had survived. Now he was coming to bring his son home. It would take several paramedics to hoist him into the car and David knew that he would have to drive carefully—no more than thirty miles an hour—back up the eastern coast of the country to bring Joe home alive. As he drove he thought about the description of nature in chapter seven of *Paradise Lost* and the thunders described in psalm twenty-nine that he read each Shabbat. But the violence of this storm and the fragility of his boy's life were two extremes that not even poetry could describe.

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*

On Yom Hazikaron we students, historians, investigators, psychologists, and mothers gather to remember that our world is still imperfect. Terrorism is spreading and genocide has not stopped. We pause in our questionings to remember the names and the nameless:

May we remember the great Rabbi's life-affirming love for Torah

May we remember the feeble efforts of the camp victims to observe the Sabbath even in imprisonment

May we remember the spontaneous acts of kindness—the supplies of food and clothing, the volunteers who lined up to give blood, the billions of cards written, the poetry read—improvisational acts of love spawned by an unexpected act of hatred

May we remember the devotion of doctors who rush to cure the hurt and who stop to hear even the smallest of voices crying in pain

May we remember the look in the eyes of a boy who has woken to find a world afflicted with suffering and uncertainty

May we pray that his gaze of awe be nurtured into an unbounded pursuit for beauty in the world.

Shira Niamh Brisman

SHMA KOLEINU GOD, HEAR OUR VOICES

How can God hear us?
How can God help us to atone?

My God is within my mind and my heart.
I must listen, attend and act on the messages from there.
The God within tells me to hearken to the voices of my ancestors,
To see the truth and sacredness of our laws and commandments,
To attend to the wondrous creation of the universe
And the beauty and godliness in evolution and nature.

My God respects the goodness and worth in each human being,
Asks that I extend mercy and good will to others,
That I cope and not withdraw when hurt by others
And to be consoled by prayer in times of tragedy.

My God tells me to accept that death is inevitable,
Not to be daunted by the infirmities of aging,
To find hope as my mind dims and my strength ebbs
And to resist shame as my body weakens.

My God tells me I have sometimes shunned my aging peers and relatives.
I have watched verbally fluid friends fumble for words.
I have seen their gait and balance falter,
Their sight and hearing fail.
Depression and anxious thoughts often overwhelm them
As another fall or illness occurs.

Impatience has often colored my reactions to these observations.
I have sometimes sinned by avoiding people close in age to me,
When they aroused my own fears and feelings of helplessness.
Too often, they have reminded me of the unknown that is my own destiny
And in defense, I avoided listening to or consoling them.

The prayer within asks that we not be cast off as we grow old
And not be forsaken when our strength declines.
At times, I have not heeded this message
And I sinned by ignoring the psychological needs of aged friends.

My God tells me to seek pardon for these sins
And to change my thoughts and behavior in the year ahead.
I must arouse the godliness in me and listen to my aging community,
To be more patient with my friends and relatives as they weaken,

To console them, as well as myself, when overcome by depression,
To focus on and talk about our strengths and worth
And to remind myself and them of the wisdom learned from life.

Shma Kolenu, hear all our voices;
We ask God to enable us to follow his laws and commandments
And to strengthen us to face the unknowns as we decline.

The God we believe in answers.
This God tells us not to cast aside the old and the weak,
To act on the mitzvot to help the seniors in our community
And to believe others will not forsake us when we need support.

Shirley C. Samuels

SHMA KOLEINU

Hear us
Do not forsake us. Do not forsake us.
Protect us from those who would harm us.
Yes, see the frail bodies, flesh adrift from bone,
Heads greyed or barren of hair,
Eyes cloudy with age, ears grown large and useless, hands a scrabble of corded veins,
Shrinking slowly, gait halt and body bent.
Yes, see us alone and confused.
Do not forsake us. Do not forsake us.
Protect us from those who would harm us.
But ... look closer,

And see in our creased faces
Maps of sorrow, wisdom and pleasure
Hear us remember how we drank from wild streams, danced with the moonbeams, fought at
the barricades.
Listen harder and hear our hearts beating like sap rising in oak.
Hearts filled with the sweet and the bitter, with hope and with loss.
See us as we are, still human, a bit divine.
Take our hands as we take each other's.
We will embrace and we will dance.
We will not give up. We will not give up.
Let us protect one another from those who would harm us.

Helen Stein

SHMA KOLEINU

(singing) well, you wonder why I always dress in black,
why you never see bright colors on my back
With homage to the prophet Johnny Cash, the "Man In Black. "
Shma koleinu, hear our voice

I wear the black for the poor and the beaten down,
Livin' in the hopeless, hungry side of town,

Shma koleinu families where young and old must work to make one living income

I wear it for the prisoner who has long paid for his crime,
But is there because he's a victim of the times.

Shma koleinu our unfair criminal justice system that has the highest incarceration rate for
minor crimes of any developed country

I wear the black for those who never read,
Or listened to the words that the Lord said,

Shma koleinu children who work in sweatshops instead of going to school

Well, we're doin' mighty fine, I do suppose,
In our streak of lightnin' cars and fancy clothes,

Shma koleinu yes for the 1%

I wear it for the sick and lonely old,

Shma koleinu don't forget us. We need human contact to know that we're still alive

I wear the black in mournin' for the lives that could have been,
Each week we lose a hundred fine young men.

Shma koleinu it's frightening to be a young black man in some states in this country

And, I wear it for the thousands who have died,
Believen' that the Lord was on their side,

Shma koleinu there's more than one way to worship you

Well, there's things that never will be right I know,
And things need changin' everywhere you go,

Shma koleinu, shma kholehem, shma kolanu

**(singing) well, you wonder why I always dress in black,
why you never see bright colors on my back**

Connie Goldfarb

SHMA KOLEINU

Once upon a time, a long time ago, so long ago it might never have happened, i was a child of three or four and like many such children, i had a fear of being left behind. And I was. When my younger sister was born, she took my place as the princess. I was given the role of caretaker. The highlight of this “demotion,” was when my parents went to the 1939 World’s Fair and left me home to watch over the baby. I was older, they said. I was left behind.

Old, older, Shma Koleinu, Adonoi Eloheinu. How that resonates every now and then with the three year old within me. And I am reminded, year after year, that I must plea not to be cast off as I grow old.

Shma Koleinu

Renew our Days like days of old;

Do not cast us away from dwelling in you presence

and do not remove your holly spirit from our midst

AND DO NOT CAST US OFF AS WE GROW OLD

Do not forsake us, Gentle one our God

Do not withdraw from us

I am no longer the three year old - at least not on the outside. Had I been male, I am now at the age to celebrate my second bar mitzvah - three score years and thirteen. Maybe, if Kaplan were alive, he would have me celebrate as he had his daughters celebrate their bat mitzvot - the first such celebrations.

Growing up as a Reform Jew in the 1930’s, there was little discussion of a God - so the image of the old man with the white beard got ingrained - along with the fear of being abandoned.

When my father died at a young age, not too long before the Holidays, I abandoned that God as he and my father had abandoned me. Una tanah tokef - the good shall live and the bad shall die - not my father, you faithless God.

And in my mind, which tends to be so literal, I had no place to go, until I discovered West End Synagogue and Reconstructionism - and a God, with power, to change and protect the universe, if we could connect with that God —with our spirit, study of Torah, study of the Middot, which would help us live a better life, in sync with that God. Belonging, behaving,

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believing I was taught as I sought to “convert” to Reconstructionism, to align myself with that God.

And then there it was: Shma Koleinu, year after year, a God who might reject the infirm, who might cast out the aged, who might ignore our vulnerability were it not for our pleading.

I fear what it says about God; what it says about me. I am weaker than I usually admit. I fear the inevitable loss of power that comes with getting older. I fear my vulnerability — even though I remember the lessons that earned me a 4th degree black belt in karate: I need the support of others to compensate for my vulnerability. I need the community of others for my legacy to live when my vitality is lessening. I need to practice the lessons of self-defense, so they become an integral part of my being — available to use when needed.

Belonging, behaving, believing...the right path so I will not be abandoned.

Belonging - to the West End Community and the community of the world. Behaving - studying the middot and trying to bring the way I live my life into sync with a God that moves the universe in a path of rightness. Believing - asking through meditation and prayer if the way I live my life is in sync with that universe — or can I change.

What then do I ask with Shma Koleinu? In the words of Debbie Friedman, my friend and late singer of Jewish prayer:

Don't hide your face from me
I'm asking for your help.
I turn to You, please hear my prayers O God

If You would answer me
As I have called to You
Please hear me now
Don't hide your face from me.

Let me be a vibrant, cared for member of my community even as I grow old. Let me behave in a way that reflects the ethics of our teachers. Let me accept those things I cannot change and work to change the things I can in a way that benefits my family, my community and the world.

Good Yom Tov

Sandy Warshaw

SHMA KOLEINU

Oh mysterious and infinite source of creation
We stand before you, bereft, vulnerable ,
painfully aware of the poverty of our language,
the insufficiency of our words,
doubting that our prayers will be heard.

We yearn to have our voices heard.
We yearn to believe that our prayers will be answered,
that we will be blessed with goodness and mercy,
that we will reap the rewards of a righteous life

Our glimpse of the eternal is fitful, fragile
Our confrontation with loss and suffering
is vivid, threatening, ever present,

Where will we find the resilience to endure life's brevity, its losses and sorrow?
How will we cope with the illness and loss of so many of our loved ones,
the illness and loss of so many
that we cherish in our community?

How will we make peace with the inevitable decline of aging,
the decline of strength, the decline of memory.

Truly....we are as a reed blowing in the wind.

As we look up at the ever dazzling night sky,
May we grasp with fresh eyes the immensity of creation.
May we be awake to the glimpse of eternity set before us.
May we experience anew the mystery and awesomeness of being
and accept our place in the larger scheme of things

As we proceed on the perilous and wondrous journey of our lives
May we summon the menschlekeit to hold fast to each other,
to exude the love and compassion to others
that we would wish for ourselves

May we summon the will to comfort others,
as we yearn to be comforted.
May we ease the fears of the stranger
as we would have our fears be eased.

May we truly hear each other's prayers
And then, perhaps, in some small but meaningful way,
Our own prayers will have been heard.

Barbara Gish-Scult

THE MYSTICAL SCAPEGOAT

It's 5786 and the scapegoat is merely symbolic, right?
 My sins, my miss-the-marks, are mine to carry.
 But what would it be like to live in a time and place
 Where everything is mysterious and awesome. Not just sins but
 The rising sun, the setting sun, the winds, the rains.
 What if?

I'm a child on my father's shoulders and somehow
 We've inched our way up near the flaps of the Tent of Meeting.
 Even a child knows that place is majestic, dangerous.
 Not sure what is going on,
 I can feel my father's fear, his awe
 Through the thin cloth of his tunic.
 All we know is there are two goats at the flaps of the Tent.
 Inside, Aaron is doing what?
 We cannot, are not allowed to see but Adonai is watching.
 Every step must be exact, precise. If not, Aaron could be consumed by fire.
 It happened to his sons. Could it happen to us?
 We wait. And we wait. And then we wait.
 Only able to imagine what might be going on inside.
 Outside we all shiver, pray and hope.
 While Aaron atones for himself, the Tent of Meeting and finally for us.
 Our sins have been magically placed on the head of the goat marked for Azazel.
 For this one day at least, our burden is lifted, we are lightened.

But it is 5786 and our sins, our miss-the-marks are ours to atone for.
There is no mystical way to offload them.
Only the hard work we've done since last High Holy Days –
In the month of Elul and the Days of Awe.
Until finally today, we have done all we could.
We are free for a few brief hours.
Wishing you a meaningful fast.
And to feel liberated from your own miss-the-marks.

Margie Schulman – Yom Kippur 5786/2025

AVODAH

A SERVICE OF TRANSFORMATION

NAZIMOVA

How does one thing become another?
How is sinfulness transformed into holiness?
How is wrongful behavior transformed into right living?
How does confusion and distraction become clarity and commitment?
How does a relationship that was torn become healed and whole?
How does atonement *happen*?

AT THE TEMPLE GATE

Rabbi

Yom Kippur's process of atonement and renewal is *not* automatic. It requires us to confront ourselves, to become uncomfortable with how we live; once we begin, we can never be certain of where this process will take us. It is not a safe bet or a sure thing that we can take lightly. (If it were, it would have no power to change us.)

This grave uncertainty was inherent in the original Temple service for the Day of Atonement. The High Priest's entry into the Holy of Holies was considered an act fraught with personal danger, and it was a moment of great relief when he emerged safely after having made the great national confession.⁴

In our own time, prayer is a hazard, a venture of peril. Every person who prays is a *kohen* at the greatest of all temples. Our whole world is the Temple. It is as if we may help atone for our sins and purify our personal world with sincere prayer, and may pollute it with insincere prayer. With good prayer we may strengthen our soul, with improper prayer we may weaken our soul. According to Rabbi Ami [Taanit 8a], a person's prayer is answered only if one stakes one's very life on it.⁵

Nazimova

⁴ "This gravity was inherent..." adapted from Jeffrey M. Cohen, *Prayer and Penitence*

⁵ "In our own time, prayer is a hazard..." adapted from *Wings of Awe*

This *Avodah* service, in which we recall and invoke the High Priest's Yom Kippur Temple ritual, is *our* challenge to explore atonement with similar depth and gravity, and to renew our people's ancient and continuing encounter with God.⁶

Congregation

May we, through this *Avodah* service, encounter the FOUNDATION OF JUDGMENT AND MERCY, an encounter of awe and intimacy, of responsibility and forgiveness. May our encounter, built on our prayers, intentions, and acts of *tshuvah*, help to transform *us* as the Temple atonement ritual of an earlier age helped to transform our forebears.

ENTERING THE TEMPLE

Reader 2

Traditionally, a congregation describes, in great detail, the High Priest's preparation and confession and sacrifice for the Yom Kippur Temple service.

Why? It is as if, having lost the Temple and active priesthood that early Israel thought was necessary for atonement, the only recourse we have is to recount that ancient sacrificial service in place of performing it. There is a Chasidic tale that gets to the heart of this:

Reader When the great Rabbi Baal Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews, it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.

Later when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch, had occasion, for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say:

“Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer.”

and again, the miracle would be accomplished.

Still later, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say:

“I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient.”

It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.

Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God:

“I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer. I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is tell the story, and this must be sufficient.”

Nazimova

⁶ “The *Avodah* service on Yom Kippur...” adapted from *Wings of Awe*.

And it was sufficient.⁷

Reader 2

When we need to atone, we have ways that, for us, are more effective and appropriate than simply telling the story of the ancient Temple service. Yet our ways grow out of those ancient ways, and our lives are foreshadowed by that ancient story. But we must know the story before we can transform it. How does it begin?

Reader 1

In ancient Jerusalem, during the seven days leading up to Yom Kippur, the High Priest—the *Kohen Gadol*—would seclude himself to become purer and to review his special Day of Atonement responsibilities. When the day itself arrived, he prepared by immersing himself several times and donning special garments of the finest material. He would make atonement three times—first for himself, then for all the priests, and finally for all Israel—through ritualized confession and offerings. He confessed his and his household’s sins, and the sins of the priestly order, over a bullock that he then sacrificed; he confessed the sins of the entire people over a goat that was then led outside of Jerusalem and sent off a cliff.

Only on this day did the High Priest enter the Temple’s inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies. Only on this day did he pronounce, and the people hear, the name of God. Only on this day could he cleanse the accumulated sins of the entire people, heal the House of Israel.

And this was the first, the most personal, of his three confessions:

<Hebrew here: v’chach hayah omer...>

Thus spoke the High Priest: O God, I have sinned, I have committed iniquity, I have transgressed against You, I and my household. I beseech You now by Your Ineffable Name, to forgive, pardon, and grant atonement for the sins, the iniquities, and the transgressions which I have committed against You, even I and my household; as it is written in the Torah of Your servant, Moses, at Your glorious command: “For on this day shall the High Priest make atonement for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins before the LORD...”

Cantor

<Hebrew here: v’hakohanim...>

And the priests and people who stood in the court, when they heard the glorious, venerated, and Ineffable Name proceed from the mouth of the High Priest, in sanctity and purity, kneeled and prostrated themselves, falling on their faces and saying: Blessed be the name of God’s sovereign majesty for ever and ever.

Nazimova

⁷ “When the great Rabbi...” quoted by Elie Wiesel in *The Gates of the Forest*

Rabbi

And we confess now, together:

[*Congregation*]

I live in a moral universe, and am bound by laws of right behavior.

I have sinned; I have ignored, or forgotten, what is right.

I have cheated someone of time, or of money, or of love and care.

I have robbed someone of respect.

I have ignored too many requests for help.

I have shortchanged myself.

[*To yourself:*]

I have sinned by _____, and by _____.

MOVING INTO THE HOLY:

Understanding Sacrifice, Encountering God

Rabbi

Most of us are uncomfortable with the Temple sacrifice. If the Temple sacrifice wasn't feeding God, what was it doing? If we look at the Hebrew word for sacrifice, *korban*, we find the root *krv*, to be close. Sacrifice was a way of coming close to God, of encountering the Divine. Sacrifice was the medium, but God was the message.

[When the Temple was destroyed, so, too, were the Temple sacrificial rituals. In their place, the Rabbis formalized prayer. In place of the obligatory sacrificial service, they instituted an obligatory prayer service, and scheduled the prayer services to correspond to the sacrificial services. In their own words, they transformed the service of the Temple into the service of the heart.

Rabbi

There are many ways of coming close to what is Godly, and of making amends for our wrongs. The path of atonement that the High Priest traveled for his fellow priests included this prayer, the second of his three confessions:

Nazimova

Rabbi

<Hebrew here: v'chach hayah omer...>

Thus spoke the High Priest: O God, I have sinned, I have committed iniquity, I have transgressed against You, I and my household, and all the sons of Aaron, Your holy people. I beseech You now by Your Ineffable Name, to forgive, pardon, and grant atonement for the sins, the iniquities, and the transgressions which I have committed against You, even I, and my household and all the sons of Aaron Your holy people; as it is written in the Torah of Your servant, Moses, at Your glorious command: “For on this day shall the High Priest make atonement for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins before the LORD...”

Cantor

<Hebrew here: v'hkohanim...>

And the priests and people who stood in the court, when they heard the glorious, venerated, and Ineffable Name proceed from the mouth of the High Priest, in sanctity and purity, kneeled and prostrated themselves, falling on their faces and saying: Blessed be the name of God's sovereign majesty for ever and ever.

Rabbi

We look no longer to the priesthood, to the “sons of Aaron,” to intercede for us with God. Instead, we become members of a congregation, and look to each other for support. We say now, together:

Congregation

We live in a moral universe, and are bound by laws of right behavior.

We in this congregation have sinned; we have ignored, or forgotten, what is right.

We have been blinded by appearances, and have forgotten to look beneath the surface for what is less obvious but more significant.

We have grown too comfortable with what we know, and have forgotten to consider how much we don't know.

We have asked much of too few, and have forgotten to ask ourselves what each of us could do.

We have assumed too much about Jews we do not know, and taken too little time to journey into other Jewish lives and Jewish worlds.

[To yourself:]

We have sinned by _____, and by _____.

Nazimova

ENTERING THE HOLY OF HOLIES:

We Repent

We Return

We are Renewed

We Repent

Reader 1

On this day, the High Priest would enter the innermost part of the Temple, the Holy of Holies—and we should all strive for his degree of purity, being a “kingdom of priests.” But the Holy of Holies no longer exists. What innermost place are we trying to enter today?

First we must ask, how does repentance happen? It happens from the inside out. We see this in the Temple service, when the High Priest’s atonement began with himself and spread outward until it encompassed the entire people.

Congregation

And this is the direction in which I must travel, from the inside out. Maimonides said that the difficult but necessary first step of repentance is to admit the flaw, to recognize the sin. To do this I must drop my armoring self-justification, my barricades of certainty, my outer layers of ego. So that there is nothing left at the center but myself, and the truth. Face to face. And, once I recognize that truth—once I see myself honestly—I can move outward making sincere repentance. To myself. To those my wrong has affected. And to the principles of ethics and justice greater than myself, than any of us; to the FOUNDATION OF JUDGMENT AND MERCY.

Rabbi

In the days of the Temple, the High Priest would atone for the entire people—*Klal Yisrael*—by reciting this prayer. Please join us:

[*Congregation with Rabbi*]

<*Hebrew here: v'chach hayah omer...*>

V'chach hayah omer: anah hashem chatu, ahvu, pashu lefanecha amcha bait yisrael. Anah vashem, kaper na, lachata'im vela'avonot velifsha'im shechatu veshe'avu veshepashu lefanecha amcha bait yisrael, kakatuv betorat moshe avdecha, mipi chevodecha: “ki vayom hazeh yechaper alaychem letahayr etchem mikol chatotaychem lifnay adonai...”

Nazimova

Thus spoke the High Priest: O God, Your people the House of Israel have sinned, have committed iniquity, have transgressed against You. I beseech You now by Your Ineffable Name, to forgive, pardon, and grant atonement for the sins, the iniquities, and the transgressions which Your people, the House of Israel, have committed against You; as it is written in the Torah of Your servant, Moses, at Your glorious command: “For on this day shall the High Priest make atonement for you, to cleanse you; all your sins before the LORD...”

Cantor

<Hebrew here: v'hakohanim...>

And the priests and people who stood in the court, when they heard the glorious, venerated, and Ineffable Name proceed from the mouth of the High Priest, in sanctity and purity, kneeled and prostrated themselves, falling on their faces and saying: Blessed be the name of God's sovereign majesty for ever and ever.

Rabbi

And we atone for the sins of our people today:

Congregation

We live in a moral universe, and are bound by laws of right behavior.

We in the Jewish community, the House of Israel, have sinned; we have ignored, or forgotten, what is right.

We have been blinded by narrow visions of truth; we have forgotten that truth is larger than any of us, and is determined by the Ultimate Judge.

We have spent too much time looking inward—using our own communities as the sole measure of importance and values—and forgotten that all the world was created by God, and that all people are sons and daughters of Eve and children of Noah.

We have pursued knowledge, wisdom, and beauty, but forgotten the knowledge, wisdom, and beauty that reside in our own tradition, and forgotten to continue cultivating new Jewish knowledge, wisdom and beauty.

We have ignored sisters and brothers in other Jewish communities.

[To yourself:]

We have sinned by _____, and by _____.

Nazimova

We Return

Reader 2

Our return to God and to our best selves—*teshuvah*—is possible because we see God not as an exacter of strict retribution but as One who wants to forgive us, who supports our efforts at renewing ourselves and transforming our lives. The moral message of this season—the essential point of *teshuvah*—is that human change is really possible.⁸

Let us accept this holy gift. Let each of us resolve to turn and return.

Now Is the Time for Turning

Responsively: first Rabbi, then Congregation

To everything there is a season.
And there is an appointed time for every purpose
Under Heaven.

Now is the time for turning.

The leaves are beginning to turn
From green to red and orange.

The birds are beginning to turn
And are heading once more towards the South.

The animals are beginning to turn
To storing their food for the winter.

For leaves, birds, and animals
Turning comes instinctively.
But for us turning does not come so easily.

It takes an act of will
For us to make a turn.

It means breaking with old habits.
It means admitting that we have been wrong;
And this is never easy.

It means losing face; It means starting all over again;
And this is always painful.

It means saying: “I am sorry.”
It means admitting that we have the ability to change;
And this is always embarrassing

Nazimova

⁸ “Our return to God...” adapted from Arthur Green in *Forward to Days of Awe*

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These things are terribly hard to do.
But unless we turn, we will be trapped forever
In yesterday's ways

Lord, help us turn—

From callousness to sensitivity,
From hostility to love,

From pettiness to purpose,
From envy to contentment,

From carelessness to discipline,
From fear to faith.

Turn us around, O Lord, and bring us back towards You.
Revive our lives, as at the beginning.

Together

**And turn us towards each other, Lord,
For in isolation there is no life.**

Jack Riemer, *New Prayers for the High Holy Days*

We are Renewed

Congregation

Once we have atoned, it is time for us to stop carrying our mistakes and errors of judgment with us like a weight dragging us ever backward. Once we have truly made *teshuvah*, and the gates of Yom Kippur have closed—when the shofar sounds at the conclusion of the *Ne'ilah* service—we can leave behind our old sins and move ahead to new opportunities for growth and improvement.

Our task, to paraphrase Rav Kook, is to make our old selves new, and to make our new selves holy.

Hashkiveinu: Cantor and congregation

<Hebrew here: Hashkiveinu...>

Hash-ki-vei-nu a-do-nai ei-le-kha ve-na-shu-va. Kha-deish ya-may-nu ke-ke-dem.

Help us, God, to return to You! Renew our days as of old!

Mark Nazimova

AVODAH

SAMUELS

FIRST PART

Reader

Yom Kippur is an ancient experience
That we still embrace today.
It is a time of remembering
And acknowledging
All those who came before us
Their traditions and beliefs and practices.
But, principally, it is a time when we individually reflect
On our own behavior: our past performance,
What we are now.
And — most important —
Who and what we want to be in the year ahead.
The High Priests and the Temple are long gone.
Along with the sacrifices and a great tradition
That succumbed to the realities of the Diaspora.
But each year we must still confront ourselves
And acknowledge and atone for our deficiencies.
We have no High Priests to intercede for us
And must seek our own atonement
So, in time honored fashion,
We must enumerate our own transgressions
Major and minor,
Known and unknown.

Congregation

Our atonement is personal
As is the God we speak to.
Silently we raise thoughts
That we cannot express in words.
From our hearts, our minds
And our deepest emotions.

Reader

We pray for forgiveness, wisdom, strength and guidance.
We each pray, to our personal concept of God.
Today even the non-believer prays,
For there is no one who is not fearful of the future
Or without need of spirituality, guidance and support.

Samuels

Congregation

We are here — young and old,
Assembled yet quite alone —
Contemplating our lives and our place in the world.
We do not have all the answers;
And probably never will,
But we will continue to pray and reflect,
In the tradition we have inherited
And the tradition that we are continuing to create.

Cantor: (Chanted In Hebrew)

Symbolically I bow low and prostrate myself before a power beyond my conception, the beginning of all beginnings; the personification of infinity and eternity. I speak for myself and all those who depend on me. I am weak and small and my responsibility is awesome. But I must shoulder my burden and be a spokesman for myself and all those behind me. Humbly, I offer up my words in prayer and supplication and ask that they be accepted in the spirit that they are offered, despite my own deficiencies.

Reader and Congregation Responsively

**R: Know yourself, who you are
And what you are.**

C: I boast of my strengths
And complain of my weaknesses

**R: Acknowledge your errors
And your imperfections.**

C: I hide what I am
Even from myself

**R: To heal yourself,
You must know yourself;
Even to the depths of your being.**

Congregation

We look back, We look forward.
We see our shortcomings.
And our hopes and aspirations.
We need to atone.

Samuels

We need a spiritual cleaning:
For ALL our sins — known and unknown,
willful and accidental.
We atone for our past deeds,
to prepare ourselves for the year ahead.

SECOND PART

Reader

We live in a world that our forebears
Could never have imagined.
We are perpetually connected
To all of humanity,
By a vast invisible web
But we are less connected to God than our ancestors were.
We know that Heaven is not some happy domain above the clouds
Nor is Hell somewhere beneath our feet.
Perhaps we know too much to confront
That about which we really know nothing.
We are here to worship, to atone
But to Whom? To What?
We must each define that for ourselves.
There is no collective answer
But only a myriad of individual answers
We know so much and yet so little
We see ourselves in the image of God
But we can barely imagine God
Today, lacking High Priests,
And knowledge
And not being sages,
We use the words of the sages
To guide us.

Congregation

So we raise our voices in prayer.
To the God of our ancestors
And the God of our personal beliefs
We ask for atonement for the
Sins, transgressions, errors, mistakes and indiscretions.
That we each committed by not always living a Godly

Samuels

Reader

We enumerate our failings including those
That we do not even remember
We ask for a clean slate For ourselves
And for all our people
And for all to be inscribed, once more
In the Book of Life

Cantor: (Chanted In Hebrew⁹)

We pray to be inscribed in the Book of Life.
What is the book of life?
Is it a parchment scroll written on with a quill pen?
Is it real or symbolic:
A metaphor that defines our fate in the year ahead?
To be inscribed in the Book of Life
Is much more than just to be alive
It is living in service and dedication
To mankind and Godliness.
It is life but life with purpose.

Congregation

And so we each declare:
I have sinned; I have done wrong; I have gone astray,
To whatever external entity there is that can grant atonement
For the sins, the wrongful acts, and the transgressions,
Committed by me and all those in my family.
I pray for myself and for all my sisters and brothers in the House of Israel.

Reader

And so we declare:
Please grant atonement for the sins, the wrongdoing and the transgressions
done by any of us.
For it is written in the Torah:
“... On this day, atonement shall be made for you, to make you clean from all
your wrongdoings. Before the fount of mercy, you shall all be clean!”
Let the source of divine compassion forgive all the people of the House of Israel.

Samuels

⁹ Note: When this Avodah Service was used by West End Synagogue, the Hebrew that was sung by the Cantor was a translation of the English provided by the author. The translation was done by a member of WES.

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Congregation

We look back, We look forward.
We see our shortcomings.
We see our hopes and aspirations.
We need to atone.
We need a spiritual cleaning:
For ALL our sins — known and unknown,
willful and accidental.
We atone for our past deeds,
to prepare ourselves for the year ahead.

Samuels

THIRD PART

Reader

Our tradition tells us
That God created the rainbow
As a sign to Noah
That He would never again attempt
To wipe mankind off the earth.
But what sign shall mankind give
That we will not do it ourselves?
• A mushroom cloud?
• Melting glaciers and flooded cities?
• Widespread poverty and disease?
• Or rampant bloodshed In the name of God?
Shall some or all of these
Be our rainbow?
Too often man assumes that he is God.
But to correct the ills of our world,
Man must indeed be God.
For even if God could perfect the world,
It is not God's job.
It is man's.
The earth was entrusted to man
And man has defiled it.
In the Aleinu,
We pray for the day
When the many names of God
Will be one: When all the people of the world
Recognize that they are all praying to the same God.

Congregation

We pray for our world,
For the atonement of mankind's
Collective sins
And transgressions
And errors.
And we pray for the time
And the knowledge
And the will
To save our world
Before it is too late.

Samuels

Cantor: (Chanted In Hebrew)

In our times
Synagogues have replaced the Temple;
Prayer has replaced ritual sacrifices;
And the Rabbi and Hazzan have replaced the priests.
First among equals,
They speak for the people
And echo their prayers:
The traditional words our ancestors spoke
And the modern words we may not even voice.
We repent. We atone. We seek forgiveness.

Reader and Congregation Responsively

R: 0 Lord-
Show us how to fashion holiness from waste,
uncovering sparks in the broken shells of people beaten
down by circumstance and mired in the boredom of
hollowness.

C: Teach us to take
 a neutralized reality
 and create the sublime,
 forming shapes of blessings with a sacred touch.

R: Instruct us in sympathy,
that we may learn to tear away at hopelessness
and the groan and oy of despair
by stories, jokes, and astonishing embraces.

C: Remove shallowness from our lives and destroy
 senselessness, that we may discover Your plan and fulfill
 Your purposes.

R: Give us insight and vision,
and we will perform signs and wonders
in the sight of all humanity
as You Yourself once did
in the Land of Egypt and at Sinai.

C: Show us Life in all its glory,
 and we will glorify Your name,
 here and now,
 everywhere and forever.

(Danny Siegel)

Samuels

Congregation

We look back, We look forward.
We see our shortcomings.
We see our hopes and aspirations.
We need to atone.
We need a spiritual cleaning:
For ALL our sins — known and unknown,
willful and accidental.
We atone for the year past,
to prepare ourselves for our lives ahead.

Stan Samuels

AVODAH

BARDFELD

Rabbi

In the days of the Temple, the confessions of the High Priest during the Avodah Service were the most holy moments of the year.

Because the position was inherited, the ability of the High Priest to perform his duties varied, and he spent seven days preparing for the occasion with the elders from the Court of Law – studying, reviewing, and being coached. The ceremony was filled with complicated pageantry, ceremony and drama, and perfection was required. Five times the High Priest bathed to purify himself and five times he changed his clothing (from gold to white to gold to linen and back to gold). He performed sacrifices, he placed incense in and sprinkled blood on the Holy of Holies, and sent a goat into the wilderness with a red string tied to its horn. If every detail was not correct, the priest and the people believed that God would strike the priest dead. Additionally, the grandeur of the ceremony had to impress upon the congregation the importance of repentance. It was believed that if the day were properly sanctified, and God accepted the repentance and the sacrifices, the red string would miraculously turn to white, and the nation would be “adorned with salvation, draped in a garment of righteousness”.¹⁰

In all, the High Priest made three confessions. Each had a wider focus, for each of the successive repentance ceremonies was for a larger population. In the first confession, the Kohen Gadol atoned for himself and his family, in the second for the community, and in the third for the whole world.

Bardfeld

¹⁰ Quoted from the ArtScroll Machzor. Footnoted there as from Isaiah 61:10

Congregation (Responsively)

Today we have no Temple and no High Priest, and reject the concept of animal sacrifice.

We have no goat to carry off our sins and no expectation of miraculous salvation. Each person must take responsibility for his or her own confession and for the initiation of change.

Our tradition refers to God granting atonement, that is – accepting the ritual sacrifice the ancients made for their sins, and enabling reconciliation with the Almighty.¹¹

When we speak of atonement, we refer to the process of reviewing our errors, finding ways of making amends for wrongs that have been committed. We strive to deal with our shortcomings, desiring to better represent the Godly within us. We transform the ancient concept of atonement, making it meaningful for us today.

We do not expect perfection from our spiritual leaders, and do not depend on the color and spectacle of the ritual for drama.

We do, however, require the solemn and awesome inspiration of the ancient words to reconnect us to our tradition, and to find the strength for self-evaluation. Hence, we turn to our Rabbi to begin the sacred ceremony, the first of the three confessions. In this confession, she atones for herself and her family.

Bardfeld

¹¹ Harper's Bible Dictionary, (Paul J. Achtemeier, General Editor, HarperCollins Publishers), defines "atonement" as "the means by which the guilt-punishment chain produced by violation of God's will is broken, as well as the resulting state of reconciliation ("at-onement") with God".

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CONFESSION ONE

Rabbi

In ancient times, referring to times still more ancient, the Kohen Gadol would place his hands upon the sacrificial bull and confess: “Upon this holy day, I too, have come into your Temple, which is in your House of Prayer, for as the High Priests of a former time would make confession and beseech your mercy and atonement, in your inner holy chamber, so now I confess before you.”

And thus the Kohen Gadol would declare:

“O Holy One,
I have sinned, I have done wrong, and I have gone astray
before you, I and my household!
I beseech you, Holy One, please grant atonement
for the sins, the wrongful acts, and the transgressions
I have done before you, I and my household”¹²

Cantor

(Hebrew)

Bardfeld

¹² The ArtScroll Machzor translates this passage to indicate that atonement has been made by the High Priest for the people. “For on this day he shall atone for you to cleanse you; from all your sins before HASHEM.” p.561

Cantor (with congregation)

And thus we do declare:

“O Holy One, please grant atonement for the sins,
the wrong doing and the transgressions
that the House of Israel have done before you,
they and all who dwell on earth,
and bring us all to the world’s repair through divine rule.

As it is written in the Torah of your servant Moses:

‘For on this day atonement shall be made for to make you clean from all your wrongdoings.
Before THE FOUNT OF MERCY, you shall all be clean!’”

Congregation

And the priests,
and all the people standing in the courtyard,
when they would hear the glorious and awesome Name of God
uttered aloud distinctly from the High Priest’s mouth,
in holiness and purity,
would prostrate themselves and bow down in acknowledgement,
and touch their faces to the ground and say:
“Blessed are the glorious Name and majesty of God,
to all eternity

Reader: For They Are Our Life

We are not a people that dies...I know it is difficult to find the balm which would heal our body and our soul. But perhaps it will do us good if we kindle freely the lights of our own treasures and then sing freely in all the hues with which they were born. They will follow us in this world as a shadow that is no shadow at all-it is the Jew within us. It becomes abundantly clear that the freer we are, the more Jewish we are. And the more Jewish we are, the more human we become.

Marc Chagall

Reader: The Living Book

It is to a book, The Book, that we owe our survival-that Book which we use, not by accident, in the very form in which it has existed for millennia: it is the only book of antiquity that is still in living use as a scroll.

Franz Rose

Bardfeld

Congregation (responsively)

As we begin the second confession, it is time for each of us to become the High Priest,

Turning inward, creating for ourselves the drama and the sense of purpose of this sacred service.

We review the past year to atone for our sins.

We look ahead - praying for the strength and self-knowledge to become better – to make the new year one of accomplishment.

We atone for ourselves and our family, knowing well that we are able to guide and influence those we love.

It is our responsibility to encourage and support humane interactions, teaching our children well and setting a positive example for them.

We atone for our community, praying for help and courage for each.

We resolve to participate more energetically:
To lead where possible and appropriate, to offer our vision and ideas,
And – in other instances - to be a willing participant, lending time, support and constructive criticism.

To offer friendship, companionship and comfort to those who are in need,

Enriching our lives in the act of giving.

Bardfeld

CONFESSION TWO

Rabbi

And so the High Priest chose by lot the goat to carry the sins of the people into the desert, and tied a thread of crimson on its horn. In the first confession the High Priest took responsibility for his household and his fellow priests. Now, in the second confession we, the people Israel, are obligated to assume responsibility for our mistakes and those that prevail in the community in which we live.

As it was then, so it is now: We the House of Israel, make confession in Your presence.

And thus the High Priest would declare:

“O Holy One,
I have sinned, I have done wrong, and I have gone astray
before you, I and all your people, The House of Israel.
I beseech you, Holy One, please grant atonement
for the sins, the wrongful acts, and the transgressions
I have done before you, I and my household.”

Cantor

(Hebrew)

Cantor (with congregation)

And thus we do declare:

“O Holy One, please grant atonement for the sins,
the wrong doing and the transgressions
that the House of Israel have done before you,
they and all who dwell on earth,
and bring us all to the world’s repair through divine rule.
As it is written in the Torah:
‘For on this day, atonement shall be made for you,
to make you clean from all your wrongdoings.
Before THE FOUNT OF MERCY, you shall all be clean!’”

Bardfeld

Congregation

And the priests,
and all the people standing in the courtyard,
when they would hear the glorious and awesome Name of God
uttered aloud distinctly from the High Priest's mouth,
in holiness and purity,
would prostrate themselves and bow down in acknowledgement,
and touch their faces to the ground and say:
"Blessed are the glorious Name and majesty of God,
to all eternity!"

Reader

Strange is our situation here upon earth. Each of us comes for a short visit, not knowing why, yet sometimes seeming to divine a purpose. From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know: that we are here for the sake of each other, above all, for those upon whose smile and well-being our own happiness depends, and also for the countless unknown souls with whose fate we are connected by a bond of sympathy. Many times a day I realize how much my own outer and inner life is built upon the labors of others, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received and am still receiving.

Albert Einstein
(adapted)

Congregation (responsively)

The circle of responsibility now widens, as we are confronted with the tradition of making atonement for the world.

Today, in our globalized society, we have daily knowledge of the destruction, the greed, the lust for power.

Taking the sins of the world on our shoulders is overwhelming, and we no longer have an expectation that the world will be repaired through divine rule.

None-the-less, we must seek venues to express our outrage; volunteer resources to attempt to positively influence.

In these times when policy often further advantages the rich, leaving the poor to struggle more desperately

We can but pray that the Force for Good, the humane in each individual, helps to inspire each person toward kindness, caring and sanity.

Bardfeld

CONFESSION THREE

Rabbi

The High Priest, in ancient times, placed incense on hot coals in the Holy of Holies filling it with smoke. When he exited he would offer a short prayer in the outer chamber, making sure to keep it brief, so as not to frighten the assembled Israelites.

As he had done previously, he sprinkled sacrificial blood according to the prescribed ritual, and spoke the traditional words as he began the third confession for the community and the world.

And thus he would declare:

“O Holy One, they have sinned,
they have done wrong, and they have gone astray before you-
these the House of Israel, your people.”

Cantor

(Hebrew)

Cantor (with congregation)

And thus we do declare:

“O, Holy One, please grant atonement for the sins,
the wrong doing and the transgressions
that the House of Israel have done before you,
they and all who dwell on earth,
and bring us all to the world’s repair through divine rule.
As it is written in the Torah of your servant Moses:
‘For on this day, atonement shall be made for you,
to make you clean from all your wrong-doings,
before THE FOUNT OF MERCY.”

Congregation

And the priests,
and all the people standing in the courtyard,
when they would hear the glorious and awesome Name of God
uttered aloud distinctly from the High Priest’s mouth,
in holiness and purity,
would prostrate themselves and bow down in acknowledgement,
and touch their faces to the ground and say:
“Blessed are the glorious Name and majesty of God,
to all eternity!”

Bardfeld

Rabbi

At the end of the ceremony, the High Priest bathed a final time and donned his own clothing. He then celebrated with those close to him that he had safely completed the traditional rituals.

The nation awaited word that the scarlet thread of wool on the goat's horn had turned to white indicating that its repentance had been accepted, and then rejoiced.

Congregation (All)

We can do no better than to conclude our ceremony of sacred service with a prayer for peace.

We pray that our leaders mitigate their greed, their quest for power, their need for self-aggrandizement.

We pray that every individual is able to suppress intolerance, jealousy, and destructive tribalism, and accepts responsibility for his or her actions, rather than claiming to be led.

We pledge to find the small ways that we can help, and to make time – joining together, supporting one another, making donations, reaching out – converting our Yom Kippur fast specified by Isaiah into reality by our actions.

We pledge not to hide behind the “us verses them” mentality – we are all “them” and the diminution of liberty and peace for one is a diminution of the quality of life for all.

We pray that the next year will be a safer, kinder, more prosperous year for all.

Amen

Bardfeld

Reader: Prayer for Peace

The man under his fig tree telephoned the man under his vine:
“Tonight they definitely might come. Assign
positions, armor-plate the leaves, secure the tree,
tell the dead to report home immediately.”

The white lamb leaned over, said to the wolf:
“Humans are bleating, and my heart aches with grief.
I’m afraid they’ll get to gunpoint, to bayonets in the dust.
At our next meeting this matter will be discussed.”

All the nations (united) will flow to Jerusalem
to see if the Torah has gone out. And then,
inasmuch as it’s spring, they’ll come down
and pick flowers from all around.

And they’ll beat swords into plowshares and plowshares into swords,
And so on and so on, and back and forth.
Perhaps from being beaten thinner and thinner,
the iron of hatred will vanish, forever.

Yehuda Amichai

Song (All): Oseh Shalom Bimromav

Bardfeld

Materials adapted from:

Prayerbook for the Days of Awe. The Reconstructionist Press, Elkins Park PA, 1999

Complete ArtScroll Machzor for Yom Kippur, translated and commentary by Rabbi Nosson Scherman, Mesorah Publications Ltd..

Readings from:

Prayerbook for the Days of Awe

Likrat Shabbat, Worship, Study and Song for Sabbath and Festival Services and for the Home, compiled and translated by Rabbi Sidney Greenberg, Edited by Rabbi Jonathan D. Levine, Media Judaica, Bridgeport, Conn.

Andrea Bardfeld

NE'ILAH AMIDAH

NAZIMOVA

STANDING AT THE GATES

Rabbi

Traditionally, we begin the Amidah by taking three steps forward, symbolizing that with this prayer we are entering into the presence of God, we are having an audience with the Divine Sovereign.

Yet as we prepare to take these three steps forward, we can hear the Gates of Heaven beginning to swing shut. Our time to enter these Gates in forgiveness is growing shorter. As we prepare to take the first step, we look down and see that we're now standing . . . not on secure ground as we had thought, but on the edge of a precipice. A step away from eternity.

Secure ground? What are our lives built on, that we could ever have fooled ourselves into thinking that our world is secure, our possessions solid, our relationships safe? So now in awe and fear we cling to this ground on which we stand, and we avoid stepping forward; just as in the past we have sometimes avoided taking the steps that are necessary to really repent, and we have too often avoided changing ourselves if it meant stepping out into the unknown.

But this moment, the final hour of Yom Kippur, is *not* a time to avoid stepping into the unknown, *not* a time to be immobilized by fear. There is no getting through the Gates without taking a chance, without risking at least some part of ourselves, without sacrificing some ego. Let's walk ahead *together*. Take three small steps forward... off the edge... and as we stand over the abyss of uncertainty, let us plead one final time for forgiveness...

Nazimova

Avot v' Eemahot / Our Ancestors

Barukh atah Adonay Elohaynu velohey avoteynu ve'imoteynu

Elohey Avraham

Elohey Sarah

Elohey Yitzkhak

Elohey Rivkah

Elohey Ya'akov

Elohey Le'ah

Blessed are you, Ancient One, our God, God of our ancestors,

God of Abraham

God of Sarah

God of Isaac

God of Rebekah

God of Jacob

God of Rachel

and God of Leah;

Nazimova

God of our mothers and fathers, we continue the journey to You on which our ancient fathers and mothers first set out, the journey on which our prophets and sages, our mentors and teachers, and our forebears continued traveling. When we lose our direction, as an earlier generation did in the wilderness of Sinai, show us how to return to Your path, how to make *t'shuvah*. As we stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, we ask You to open Your Gate of Heaven to receive our prayer as earlier You received their prayers. Please guide us on our journey to your Gate of Forgiveness.

Zokhrei-nu l'hkayim melek khafetz b'kayim v'khot-meinu b'sefer ha-khayim, l'ma-ankha Elohim khayim.

Remember us for life, our sovereign who wishes us to live, and seal us in the Book of Life for Your sake, ever-living God.

Melek ozer umoshi'a umagen. Barukh atah adonay magen avraham ve'ezrat sarah.

Regal One, our help, salvation, and protector: Blessed are You, KIND ONE, the shield of Abraham and the help of Sarah.

Gevurot / Divine Strength

Atah gibor le'olam adonay rav lehoshi'a. Morid hatal.

You are forever powerful, Almighty One, abundant in Your saving acts. You send down the dew.

Strength of the Universe, Giver of Life, Who created the world and renews it in mercy, please strengthen our resolve, renew our intention to live rightly, and imbue us with the courage and passion that we need to walk the path of *t'shuvah*, to return to godliness. Demonstrate Your strength through Your *rachmanes*, Your compassion, by opening the Gate of Forgiveness wide enough to receive all of us today before our time runs out.

Nazimova

Baruch atah adonai, el norah uslichah.

Blessed are you, AWESOME ONE, the forgiving God.

Kedushat Adonai / Holiness and Godliness

Justice and mercy are godly, but in tempering justice with mercy You manifest supreme holiness. Now, in this urgent hour, show us Your supreme holiness. If we halt on Your path, entangled by compulsion or frightened by the abyss, help us to move forward. If we falter as we step toward You, take three steps toward *us* in holiness and bring us closer to Your Gate of Forgiveness.

And therefore, may we become aware of holiness—opening our ears to listen, our eyes to look, and our minds to think.

And therefore, may we walk a holy path, making Godly choices in difficult situations and common moments.

And therefore, may we be inspired by examples of holiness, tempering justice with mercy.

Baruch atah adonai, ha-melkh ha-kadosh.

Blessed are you, AWESOME ONE, the forgiving God.

Kedushat Hayom / The Holiness of This Day

We give thanks for these *Yamim Noraim*, these Days of Awe, our people's opportunity for repenting and renewing. We give thanks for this Yom Kippur, this Day of Atonement, when each of us has the opportunity to repent and return *b'emet*, sincerely and in truth, and so receive forgiveness. We have approached the Gate of Forgiveness; meet us here in mercy.

Nazimova

Avodah / Accept Our Service

We are still standing over the abyss of uncertainty, waiting to pass through Your Gate of Forgiveness. God, be attentive to our *avodah u'tshuvah u'tefilah*, our penitential work and prayers! Witness the attempts that we have made to right the wrongs we have done to others, and the atonement that we have done for obscuring Your image in which we were created! Accept our yearnings to be better people; lovingly acknowledge our limitations; keep your Gate of Forgiveness open a few moments more to receive our prayers, our hopes, and our atonement.

Baruch atah adonai, hamachazir shechinato le'amaynu.

Blessed are You, FAITHFUL GOD, who restores Your presence to our people.

Hodah'ah / Gratitude

Thank You, God, for our lives, and for the everyday miracles that are the often-overlooked foundation of our existence. We thank You for the unmerited opportunities that grace our lives—especially the opportunity to do *t'shuvah*, and the guarantee that when we turn and return You will receive us with *selichot*, forgiveness. We are grateful that when we are fenced in by our flaws, You create a gate through which we may pass.

Now we stand before Your Gate of Forgiveness. As the sun sets and the Gate closes, let our intentions and Your mercy escort us through the Gate! Bring us forward into 5765 thanking you for the gift of forgiveness.

Khatome l'khayim tovim kawl-b'nay v'reetekhah. Barukh atah adonai hatov sheemkhah oolkhah na'eh l'hodote.

Seal for a good life all the people of your covenant. Blessed are You, THE GRACIOUS ONE whose name is good, to whom all thanks are due.

Nazimova

Shalom / Complete Peace

Draw us through the Gate of Peace
and into Your embrace.
Heal our hearts, so that we can forgive ourselves
and our neighbors.
Strengthen our spirit to make peace
with those around us,
within the House of Israel,
and among all who dwell on earth.

*English prayers by
Mark Nazimova*

P'TACH LANU SHA'AR

Sun's red globe sinks,
The sky darkens.
Birdsong stills. Horns, phones, squabbles silenced
Slowly, slowly the gates are closing.

Shadows leading, they enter now
A teenager holding his grandmother
A small girl praying
A white-haired senator loudly calling for forgiveness,
A smuggler returning stolen bread.

The crowd swells now, asking for mercy, kindness, nurturance
As they rush through the gates.
They are filled with hope and wonder,
Will they make a gentler tomorrow?

Helen Stein