

¶ This Rosh Hashanah, each
of us enters this sanctuary
with a different need.

Some hearts are full of
gratitude and joy:
they are overflowing with
the happiness of love and
the joy of life;
they are eager to confront
the day, to make the world
more fair;
they have recovered from
illness or have escaped
misfortune.
And we rejoice with them.

Some hearts ache with
sorrow:
disappointments weigh
heavily upon them, and
they have tasted despair;
families have been broken;
loved ones lie in bed in pain;
death has taken those whom
they cherished.
May our presence and
sympathy bring them
comfort.

Some hearts are embittered:
they have sought answers
in vain;
they have had their ideals
mocked and betrayed;
life has lost its meaning and
value.
May the knowledge that we
too are searching
restore their hope that there
is something to find.

Some spirits hunger:
they long for friendship;
they crave understanding;
they yearn for warmth.
May we in our common
need gain strength from
one another, sharing
our joys, lightening each
other's burdens, and pray-
ing for the welfare of our
community.

—CHAIM STERN (adapted)

Prayer

You should act in prayer
as if you were a farmer:
first you plow, then
you seed, afterward
you water, and finally
things begin to grow. In
prayer, first you have to
dig deeply to open your
heart, then you place the
words of prayer in your
heart, then you allow
your heart to cry. That's
how salvation grows.

— THE HASIDIC MASTER
ABRAHAM OF SLONIM

*I Will Praise Adonai
at All Times*

It is truly a blessing to be able to praise God in each moment, but most of us see God only in extraordinary events. Would that we could see each moment as a new creation, a special time, a manifestation of the holy.

—ABRAHAM ISAAC KOOK
(*adapted*)

*Taste and See How
Good Adonai Is*

That God can be “tasted” implies that God can be beheld intuitively, confronted and related to. The human can share in God....

The human does not only think of God or comply with God’s will, but feels the touch of God’s hand, the warmth that God’s eyes radiate, so to speak.

—JOSEPH BER
SOLOVEITCHIK
(*adapted*)

Psalm 90—

A Poetic Rendering

...Teach us how short
our time is;

let us know it in the
depths of our souls.
Show us that all things

are transient,
as insubstantial as
dreams,
and that after heaven and
earth

have vanished, there is
only You.

Fill us in the morning
with Your wisdom;
shine through us all our
lives.

Let our hearts soon grow
transparent
in the radiance of Your
love.

Show us how precious
each day is;
teach us to be fully here.

And let the work of our
hands
prosper, for our little
while.

—STEPHEN MITCHELL

Unify Our Hearts

There was once a pious Jew who prayed that he be saved from *pizzur ha-nefesh* (literally, "scattering of the soul"), becoming unfocused, fragmented, not being centered, being "all over the place." Such is the inescapable outcome of trying to own too many things in too many places all at the same time. Since God's oneness is the root of all being, then to join oneself with God is to unify oneself. . . . Consider that the source of our alienation from God's commandments and even from God lies in our personal disintegration, our fragmentation. Our brokenness is overcome by saying *ehad*, "One." By reflecting on God's unity, we begin to recover our own.

—ZE'EV WOLF OF ZHITOMIR

(trans. Lawrence Kushner and Nehemia Polen)

¶ *Sh'ma:*
Declaration of Faith

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

—MARCIA FALK

Redemption

The end of the Exodus story, entering the promised land, was present at the beginning as a hope and an aspiration. . . . God said, "I will bring you into a land flowing with milk and honey," and also said, "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The land is the opposite of Egyptian bondage: free farming instead of slave labor. . . . The kingdom is the opposite of Egyptian corruption: holiness instead of idolatry. Both these promises require human cooperation.

—MICHAEL WALZER
(*adapted*)

¶ *A Prayer for
Redemption*

True redemption will
arrive when enemies
understand the human-
ity common to us all,
when the praises sung by
Israel can be sung by all
peoples, forever rescued
from their fears and
hates, their cowardice
and cruelty.

*As our ancestors sang Your
praise all alone by the Sea
of Reeds, so we sing Your
praise here, in the hope
that soon, in our days, we
may be joined by people of
good will everywhere and
sing . . .* —RICHARD LEVY
(adapted)

Redemption

You cannot find
redemption until you
see the flaws in your
own soul, and try to

efface them. Nor can a people be redeemed until it sees the flaws in its soul and tries to efface them. But whether it be an individual or a people, whoever shuts out the realization of their flaws is shutting out redemption. We can be redeemed only to the extent to which we confront and come to understand our own selves. . . . The world is in need of redemption, but the redemption must not be expected to happen as an act of sheer grace. Our task is to make the world worthy of redemption. Our faith and our works are preparation for ultimate redemption.

—MARTIN BUBER (*adapted*)

Pharaoh

We each have within us a pharaoh—the hard one, the cruel one, the one who is closed to empathy and faith. When we are able to find and uproot the pharaoh who strangles us from within, that is the beginning of our liberation, our truly becoming whom we need to be.

What the Exodus Taught

So pharaonic oppression, deliverance, Sinai, Canaan are still with us, powerful memories shaping our perceptions of the political world. The “door of hope” is still open; things are not what they might be—even when what they might be isn’t totally different from what they are. . . . We still believe, or many of us do, what the Exodus first taught, or what it has commonly been taken to teach, about the meaning and possibility of politics and about its proper form: first, that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt; second, that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land; and third, that “the way to the land is through the wilderness.” There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching.

—MICHAEL WALZER

God of Our Ancestors

As Jews on a religious quest, we recognize that we are, first of all, inheritors. Our spiritual vocabulary, our values, the lives that we lead are pathways built on markers laid down by those who came before us.

Beginning on the roads that they surveyed, we are each able to proceed on our own religious journey. Surely, if we grow at all religiously, we will end up in a different place than they; but as we look back, we will always be reminded that it was possible for us to begin on our way because of the journey they undertook.

*May All Be
Bound Together*

The purpose of creation is not division, nor separation. The purpose of the human race is not a struggle to the death between classes, between nations. Humanity is meant to become a single body. . . . Our purpose is the great upbuilding of unity and peace. And when all nations are bound together in one association living in justice and righteousness, they atone for each other. —MARTIN BUBER

*All Wickedness
Will Disappear*

There were once some lawless men who caused Rabbi Meir a great deal of trouble. Rabbi Meir accordingly prayed that they should die. His wife, Beruriah, said to him: "How can you think that such a prayer is permitted? . . . When sin ceases there shall be no more wicked people. Therefore pray for them that they turn from their ways, and there will be no more wicked people." Then he prayed on their behalf.

—BABYLONIAN TALMUD,
BERAKHOT

God's Justice

Upon setting out to create the world, God thought: If I create the world through My attribute of mercy, then sinners will be plentiful; if I create the world through My attribute of justice, then how will the world endure? I will create the world with a mixture of both attributes and hope that it will be able to endure.

—MIDRASH
GENESIS RABBAH

Thankfulness

It is gratefulness which
makes the soul great.

—ABRAHAM JOSHUA
HESCHEL

The Blessings of Peace

Great is peace, for the only vessel that can contain blessings is peace.

Great is peace, for all the prayers conclude with pleas for peace.

Great is peace, for we must seek it even in time of war.

Great is peace, for it is the reward of the righteous.

Great is peace, for it is bestowed upon those who love the Torah.

Great is peace, for it is bestowed upon the humble.

Great is peace, for it is bestowed upon those who act justly.

Great is peace, for it is equal to all of the work of creation.

Great is peace, for even those who dwell on high need peace, as it is said, עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרְוֵמָי "God imposes peace in God's heights" (Job 25:2). If in a place where there is no hatred and envy, enmity or malice, peace is needed, how much more so in a place where all these qualities are lacking!

Great is peace, for the name of the Holy One is Peace.

—MIDRASH
SIFREI NUMBERS
(trans. Reuven Hammer, adapted)

A Song of David

Each of the two psalms recited as the Torah is carried around the congregation (one on Shabbat, one on weekdays) begins with the same Hebrew words—but in a different order. Psalm 24 begins לְדָוִד מְזִמּוֹר, literally “to David a psalm,” and Psalm 29 begins מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד, “a psalm to David.” The Midrash comments on this difference, saying that sometimes David would be so inspired that he immediately began writing, but at other times he had to struggle to find inspiration.

Israel and the World

The exile of the nation is connected by a very strong tie with the exile of the world, and the redemption of the nation with the redemption of the individual soul. Both the exile of the nation and its redemption are to be thought of not by themselves, but only in relation to the destiny of the world and to the destiny of the soul.

—MARTIN BUBER

*A Meditation on
God's Sovereignty*

We all worship idols. We make our transitory needs into ultimate concerns. We are caught up in the busyness of our lives and then do not see beyond these concerns. But from time to time we can be reminded that there is a perspective in which these matters that are so important to us now will, one way or another, pass away.

There are essential questions which should never be too distant from us: What gives our lives meaning? How do we effectuate good? How do we care for those we love? How do we tend to those in need? How do we not close ourselves off to the cries of pain in the world?

Facing these questions, we are opened to greater concerns than our own neediness. In creating that opening we clear a space for divine instruction as to how to live our lives, how to establish the kingdom of God.

*Meditations on
Redemption*

The kingdom of God is not a kingdom above the world or opposed to it or even side by side with it. . . . It is not a future of miracle for which human beings can only wait, but a future of commandment which always has its present and ever demands a beginning and decision from each human being.

—LEO BAECK

¶ When we really begin a
new year it is decided,
*and when we actually repent
it is determined:*
who shall be truly alive and
who shall merely exist;
*who shall be happy and who
shall be miserable;*
who shall attain fulfillment
in their day and who shall
not attain fulfillment in
their day;
*who shall be tormented by
the fire of ambition and
who shall be overcome by
the waters of failure;*
who shall be pierced by the
sharp sword of envy and
who shall be torn by the
wild beast of resentment;
*who shall hunger for compan-
ionship and who shall thirst
for approval;*
who shall be shattered by
the earthquake of social
change and who shall be
plagued by the pressures
of conformity;
*who shall be strangled by
insecurity and who shall be
stoned into submission;*
who shall be content and
who shall wander in
search of satisfaction;
*who shall be serene and who
shall be distraught;*
who shall be at ease and
who shall be afflicted with
anxiety;
*who shall be poor in their
own eyes and who shall be
rich in tranquility;*
who shall be brought low
with futility and who
shall be exalted through
achievement.
*But repentance, prayer, and
good deeds have the power
to change the character of
our lives.*
Let us resolve to repent, to
pray, and to do good deeds
so that we may begin a
truly new year.

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HAVE COMPASSION תְּמוּנָה.
The three paragraphs that follow are a pastiche of stanzas taken from a variety of different *piyyutim*. All traditional mahzorim arrange them as here.

WE BELIEVE וְכָל מַאֲמֵינִים.
This *piyyut* is 1500 years old, having been composed by one of the earliest liturgical poets, Yannai, who lived in the Land of Israel some time between the 5th and 7th century. The poem is a double alphabetical acrostic: the first line states an attribute of God, and the second uses the same letter to describe the human perspective. As much as he can, the poet alliterates an entire line, thus emphasizing the particular quality.

The Broken Tablets

The broken tablets were
also carried in an ark.
Insofar as they repre-
sented everything
shattered
everything lost, they
were the law of broken
things,
the leaf torn from the
stem in a storm, a
cheek touched
in fondness once but now
the name forgotten.
How they must have
rumbled, clattered on
the way even carried so
carefully through the
waste land,
how they must have
rattled around until
the pieces
broke into pieces, the
edges softened
crumbling, dust collected
at the bottom of the
ark
ghosts of old letters, old
laws. Insofar
as a law broken is still
remembered
these laws were obeyed.
And insofar as
memory
preserves the pattern of
broken things
these bits of stone were
preserved
through many journeys
and ruined days
even, they say, into the
promised land.

—RODGER KAMENETZ

7

When a person commits a sin and does not turn in repentance, when that person forgets the sin, the Holy One remembers it. When a person fulfills a commandment by doing a good deed, and forgets about it, the Holy One remembers it.

When a person commits a sin and later turns in repentance, remembering the sin, the Holy One grants atonement, and forgets the sin. When a person fulfills a commandment and is constantly filled with self-praise because of it, the Holy One forgets it. What a person forgets, God remembers; what a person remembers, God forgets.

—THE HASIDIC MASTER SHMELKE OF NIKOLSBERG

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IN YOUR IMAGE

In Your Image You fashioned us;
You owe us Your Presence.

*We need to bow to You, ask Your forgiveness,
hold You responsible for the unfair, the ugly.*

We need to return to You,
hold You accountable for what defies comprehension,
that we may turn to You more fervently, with gratitude for
the seasons and the stars and the day and the night.

*We are humbled by the wonder of the world,
grateful for the gift of thought,
grateful for our dreams, our hopes,
grateful for our never-ending illusions,
grateful for these beautiful souls that transcend death.*

God of the faithless,
God of the faithful,
God in all forms and formless,
who was and who is and who will be:
You are the Eternal One.