



Rosh Hashanah Services Supplement
for 5782/2021
Temple Beth Torah
September 6th-8th

Dear TBT Community,

Shanah Tov! After a challenging year, it is a true joy to be able to come together this High Holiday season. Although the pandemic is not behind us, we are grateful for the opportunity to be together to renew, reflect, and reconnect. We pray for complete healing and for a speedy end to this pandemic.

My greatest hope as your Rabbi is that you receive something you need spiritually during these High Holidays. Whether you are in need of comfort, introspection, inspiration, or connection to tradition and community, my hope is that our services and programming meet you in those needs.

To that end, I have put together this High Holiday services supplement. It contains suggested techniques for prayer, poetry, readings, and interpretive versions of our traditional prayers. Whether you have celebrated the High Holidays over a lifetime or are new to the High Holidays, I hope this supplement will be a source of meaning and inspiration and that you will use it in whatever way it speaks to you.

Wishing you a sweet new year,
Rabbi Mimi

Suggested Techniques for Prayer

Prayer can be hard. Here are some suggestions for how to find your way in.

1) Linger with a phrase that touches you

Don't rush, when a word or phrase grabs your attention, stay with it. Focus on depth rather than volume. The goal is not to get through the prayer; the goal is for the prayer to get through you. You might get behind the congregation. That is OK. You can join us again later.

2) Focus on the words

Focus on the words themselves. Take them seriously as having meaning for you in your life.

3) Interpret the prayers

Try to interpret the meaning of a prayer as you go, the same way you might interpret poetry or a text from the Torah. We are taught: "there are 70 faces to Torah." Which is to say, there are many many ways to read and understand a text or prayer!

4) Skip the offensive/what doesn't work and rewrite it in your head

There will be words in the liturgy that don't work for you. They may be offensive, inaccessible, triggering, or perhaps just "off" in some other way. Sometimes this discomfort can be good, productive even, because it can cause us to examine our own beliefs or feelings. Or it can help us to see the world in a new light. At other times this discomfort can hurt us or get in the way of connecting to prayer and to God. In these moments, skip the passage or rewrite the words in your head.

5) Create your own prayers

Make it a one-on-one conversation with God or just a dialogue between you and the world. Here are some prompts to get you going:

On this day, God, I feel...

I regret that...

I want to...

I am thankful for...

Please...

Poetry and Readings

The Summer Day by *Mary Oliver*

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean -
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down -
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?

Coming Up September by *Marge Piercy*

White butterflies, with single black fingerpaint eyes on their wings dart and settle, eddy and mate over the green tangle of vines in Labor Day morning steam.
The year grinds into ripeness and rot, grapes darkening, pears yellowing, the first Virginia creeper twining crimson, the grasses, dry straw to burn.
The New Year rises, beckoning across the umbrellas on the sand. I begin to reconsider my life.
What is the yield of my impatience?
What is the fruit of my resolve?
I turn from frantic white dance over the jungle of productivity and slowly a niggun slides, cold water down my throat.
I rest on a leaf spotted red.
Now is the time to let the mind search backwards like the raven loosed to see what can feed us. Now, the time to cast the mind forward to chart an aerial map of the months.

The New Year is a great door that stands across the evening and Yom Kippur is the second door. Between them are song and silence, stone and clay pot to be filled from within myself. I will find there both ripeness and rot, What I have done and undone, What I must let go with the waning days and what I must take in. With the last tomatoes, we harvest the fruit of our lives.

Transplanted *by Rabbi Rachel Barenblatt*

God says: face facts. The old year
is ending. You've outgrown it.

The flowerpot that used to be home
isn't big enough anymore. Once

it was spacious. Now your roots
push uncomfortably against the walls.

It's time to stop contorting yourself
to fit inside a story that's too small

for who you can become. God whacks
the bottom of your pot, sends you flying.

Once you're pried from the old year
your roots will ache, shocked

by open air. You'll wonder whether
you could have stopped growing.

But one morning you'll wake, realize
you've stretched in ways you never knew

you hadn't done before. The sun
will feel like a benediction, like

grace. You can't help turning
and re-turning toward the light,

toward becoming. And wait 'til you see

what dazzling flowers you'll discover

springing from your fingertips:
your life renewed, beginning again.

Burning the Old Year *by Naomi Shihab Nye*

Letters swallow themselves in seconds.
Notes friends tied to the doorknob,
transparent scarlet paper,
sizzle like moth wings,
marry the air.

So much of any year is flammable,
lists of vegetables, partial poems.
Orange swirling flame of days,
so little is a stone.

Where there was something and suddenly isn't,
an absence shouts, celebrates, leaves a space.
I begin again with the smallest numbers.

Quick dance, shuffle of losses and leaves,
only the things I didn't do
crackle after the blazing dies.

TESHUVAH: A PRACTICAL INTRODUCTION *by Rabbi Laura Duhan Kaplan*

Teshuvah. Reflection. Repentance. Return. Repair.

Because: people. Can't live with them. Can't live without them. Even the best community has many small ruptures.

Imagine. Maybe you've been sick for months. Just getting by. No energy for social life. Your friend has been caring for a sick relative. She's had no time for friends. So, for six months, you haven't spoken. You feel guilty. She's been so burdened, you should have reached out. So much time has passed. You're ashamed now. Embarrassed to reach out. But she, too, feels guilty. Because you've been sick. She should have checked in. Now she is also embarrassed.

Maybe you agreed to help a co-worker on a project. If you do your part, they will make some money. But you got busy, and missed your deadline. You know they needed the money. So, now you're too afraid even to ask if you can still be helpful.

Or, maybe you loved your late father. But you felt he misunderstood you. And thus did not raise you right. But now you are more mature. With life experience, you see your father differently. You understand why he was as he was. And you'd like to tell him. To have a loving heart to heart conversation. But it's too late. He has passed on.

Imagine if you had a community ritual to help heal small ruptures like these. A time set aside for it. When, together, you learned skills of self-reflection. How to apologize. What forgiveness does and does not mean. And thus, with these tools, you reached out, and repaired relationships.

In Jewish tradition, we have such a ritual. The ten days of *Teshuvah*. Day One of the ritual is *Rosh Hashanah*, the New Year. One of its nicknames is The Day of Judgment. Because we begin to judge ourselves. In synagogue, our prayer poems invoke God, the compassionate judge. Outdoors, we imagine casting our sins away in a flowing stream. At home, we eat fruit and honey as we share our hope for a sweet year.

And then we get to work. We try to start our *teshuvah*. Yes, there is a roadmap. It comes from the Book of Leviticus. The part that tells a nonviolent offender how to repair harm done. But it was updated by the philosopher Moses Maimonides. To properly do *teshuvah*, he says, takes 5 steps.

- (1) Recognize that you did wrong.
- (2) Feel bad about it, so you are motivated to reach out.
- (3) Seek forgiveness from the relevant person.
- (4) Understand what reparation they need, and then make it directly to them.
- (5) Do not repeat the harm.

Step five is hard. What does it even look like?

Maybe you text your friend. She tells you that it's never too late. So you agree not to fall out of touch. At work, you set a new goal. If you are behind schedule, you communicate. So that others can plan their work, too. Scary as it is, it's as simple as sending an email. And maybe you set aside a few minutes a week to remember your father. Talk with him in your imagination. Or find his favourite living cousin. Then, pick up the phone, and remember together.

Day Ten of the ritual is *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. A day of fasting, singing, learning, praying, remembering, crying. Because, no matter what we fixed, so many mistakes remain. Our sincere *teshuvah* does not always bring forgiveness. Still, we vow to do better — even though we know we may not succeed. At the end of the day, we celebrate. And then the community, slightly stronger, leaps into another year.

Interpretive Prayers

Unetaneh Tokef *by Jack Reimer*

Let us ask ourselves hard questions
For this is the time for truth.
How much time did we waste
In the year that is now gone?
Did we fill our days with life
Or were they dull and empty?
Was there love inside our home
Or was the affectionate word left unsaid?
Was there a real companionship with our children
Or was there a living together and a growing apart?
Were we a help to our mates
Or did we take them for granted?
How was it with our friends:
Were we there when they needed us or not?
The kind deed: did we perform it or postpone it?
The unnecessary gibe: did we say it or hold it back?
Did we live by false values?
Did we deceive others?
Did we deceive ourselves?

Were we sensitive to the rights and feelings
Of those who worked for us?
Did we acquire only possessions
Or did we acquire new insights as well?
Did we fear what the crowd would say
And keep quiet when we should have spoken out?
Did we mind only our own business
Or did we feel the heartbreak of others?
Did we live right,
And if not,
Then have we learned, and will we change?

U'netaneh Tokef: The Collective Book of Life *by Rabbi Adina Allen*

Unetaneh tokef is perhaps
the quintessential high holiday prayer,
In it we declare:
On Rosh Hashanah it is written,
on Yom Kippur it is sealed -
who shall live and who shall die.

Who by fire, who by water;
who by hunger and who by thirst;
who by sword and who by beast.
But, the final line promises,
through teshuva, tefilah and tzedakah -
repentance, prayer and good deeds,
we can reverse the Divine decree.
In past years it has felt sufficient to me
to read this prayer through an internal spiritual lens,
seeing it not as about *actual* death,
but more about *spiritual* deadness or aliveness -
“who shall be *truly* alive and who shall merely exist;
who shall be tormented by the fire of ambition
and who shall be overcome by the waters of failure.”
This year, that read feels insufficient.
There has been so much death, so much suffering,
so much violence, hatred, pain, abuse.
If you are like me, you wake up each morning
anxious to check the news,
bracing yourself for what awful tragedy
has happened over night.
Refugees fleeing persecution and violence, seeking safe shores and too often being turned
away;
those unable to escape falling at the hands of abusive governments;
Mass shootings as almost a regular occurrence in our country;
Police brutality; sexual assault across college campuses;
terrorist bombings in our public spaces
causing us to live in perpetual fear;
the ongoing violence and murder
perpetrated against people of color;
homophobia, transphobia, anti-semitism.
The list, as we know, goes on and on.

The suffering and death is all too real.
It goes way beyond a spiritual metaphor.

How can we read U’netaneh Tokef,
a text that assures us that our repentance, prayer and good deeds can change everything -
saying
If we do these three simple things, well then,
we can assure ourselves a place in the Book of Life?
This is a mindset that seems to blame the victim,
saying that if you do not get written into the Book of Life
it is because you failed to pray hard enough,
or repent deeply enough.
This sort of theology is not only absurd,

it is extremely harmful.

The only way I can engage this prayer this year
is by reading it on the level of the collective,
rather than of the individual.

None of us can write ourselves into the Book of Life.

Rather, we must inscribe each other.

Our acts of prayer,

our commitment to work on the places in our lives where we have missed the mark
and to make amends,

our dedication to the good deeds

of educating ourselves and others,

of speaking out when we see injustice,

of welcoming in those on the margins,

of making our our home, our community, our country

a place of refuge and safety,

of challenging ourselves to continue to grow to be more tolerant and open --

These acts won't save us,

individually,

but it is through these acts

that we create a collective Book of Life

in which we all can be written.

We are each responsible for one another,

and we each have our part to do.

May we feel the awe and trembling of this moment

and may we each, in all the ways we can in our lives,

change our actions

so that together

we may reverse the Divine decree.

Avinu Malkeinu: Our Parent, Our Sovereign *By Burt Jacobson*

Our Father, our King, teach us how to make this year a new beginning.

Our Mother, our Queen, teach us how to grow from the harshness of life.

Our Source and our Destiny, teach us how to accept what we must accept.

Our Guide and our Truth, teach us to change what must be changed.

Our Father, our King, teach us how to face disease and death.

Our Mother, our Queen, teach us how to enjoy the gifts of life.

Our Source and our Destiny, teach us how to make peace with our enemies.

Our Guide and our Truth, teach us how we can best help our people, [Israel](#).

Our Father, our King, teach us how we can best help all humanity.

Our Mother, our Queen, let us find pardon for our wrongdoings.
Our Source and our Destiny, let us return to You, wholly and completely.
Our Guide and our Truth, teach us how to help those who are ill.

Our Father, our King, let us write our names in the Book of Life.
Our Mother, our Queen, help us to find meaningful work.
Our Source and our Destiny, help us to find inner freedom.
Our Guide and our Truth, help us to learn how to love.

Our Father, our King, receive our prayers.
Our Mother, our Queen, teach us how to be good lovers.
Our Source and our Destiny, teach us how to be good parents.
Our Guide and our Truth, teach us how to be good children.

Our Father, our King, teach us how to be good friends.
Our Mother, our Queen, teach us how to be good Jews.
Our Source and our Destiny, teach us how to be good people.
Our Guide and our Truth, teach us how to be one with Your universe.

Avinu malkeinu, haneinu va'aneinu ki ein banu ma'asim
Aseh imanu [tzedakah](#) va'hessed Ve'hoshi'einu
Avinu malkeinu, grant us justice and bring us salvation,
Grant us justice and loving kindness and bring us salvation.

Poems for the Shofar Service

By Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

MALCHUYOT

What does it mean
to proclaim Your sovereignty?
Before the Big Bang, there was You.

We allowed habits to rule us.
Help us throw off that yoke
so our best selves may serve.

Help us surrender.
Help us fall to our knees,
find home in Your embrace.

Help us be unashamed of yearning.
Strengthen our awe and our love
so our prayers will soar.

ZICHRONOT

God, remember us—
our good intentions
and our tender hearts.

Remember our ancestors
asking forgiveness
with the wail of the ram's horn.

Today again we open ourselves
to the calls of the shofar
crying, sleepers, awake!

Help us shed old memories
that no longer serve.
Help us remember You.

SHOFAROT

The shofar reminds us
of the ram in the thicket.
Where are we ensnared?

Its shatters complacency.
It wails with our grief,
stutters with our inadequacy.

The shofar cries out
I was whole, I was broken,
I will be whole again.

Make shofars of us, God!
Make us resonating chambers
for Your love.