

Rosh Hashanah Evening

5779 Readings

Reading # 1 – Kabbalat HaShanah

A New Year

I am running now
into a new year.
How it hurts
to run into something,
even to walk into it instead of passing it by,
to pause here
at this doorway
in time,
age-old and brand new,
to stand in this arch and
cry out
to the dome of the universe,
to break through the ceiling
with song.
Follow the light through
the cracks now
and find your way back
to the Source.

Rabbi Annie Lewis

Reading #2 – Kabbalat HaShanah

Hiking Toward Sinai

Now the new year is born
beginning with the wail of shofar
like life begins with the baby's first cry.
How many deserts to cross,
peaks to climb,
as we grow
hiking through the harsh wilderness toward Sinai,
always attempting to rise up
following pillars of radiant clouds,
and mountains painted purple with sunset.
Straining our ears to hear, to apprehend
the shofar when it blows,
in the middle of our ascent,
not as a wail
but as a blast of revelation
full of thunderous wonder
and praise
that we have been able
in such a short time
to come
so far.

Tamar Stern

Reading #3 – Pre Aleynu

What would it mean to live
in a city whose people were changing
each other's despair into hope?—
You yourself must change it.—
what would it feel like to know
your country was changing?—
You yourself must change it.—
Though your life felt arduous
new and unmapped and strange
what would it mean to stand on the first
page of the end of despair?

Adrienne Rich

Reading #4 - Closing

So on this first night of Rosh Hashanah, here we are,
pressed together in a large room, a single spiritual unit,
helping each other acknowledge our actual condition,
and reciting this ancient service given to us by the
Divine Physician as a medicine for that condition, and
that condition is this:

This is real. This is very real.
This is absolutely inescapable.
And we are utterly unprepared.
And we have nothing to offer but each other and our
broken hearts.
And that will be enough.

Rabbi Alan Lew

Rosh Hashanah Day 1

5779 Readings

Reading #1 – Birchot HaShachar

On The Pulse of Morning

Lift up your faces, you have a piercing need
For this bright morning dawning for you.
History, despite its wrenching pain,
Cannot be unlived, and if faced
With courage, need not be lived again.

Lift up your eyes upon
The day breaking for you.
Give birth again
To the dream.

Take it into the palms of your hands.
Mold it into the shape of your most
Private need. Sculpt it into
The image of your most public self.
Lift up your hearts
Each new hour holds new chances
For new beginnings.

Do not be wedded forever
To fear, yoked eternally
To brutishness.
The horizon leans forward,
Offering you space to place new steps of change.

Here, on the pulse of this fine day
You may have the courage
To look up and out upon me, the
Rock, the River, the Tree, your country.
No less to Midas than the mendicant.
No less to you now than the mastodon then.
Here on the pulse of this new day
You may have the grace to look up and out
And into your sister's eyes, into
Your brother's face, your country
And say simply
Very simply
With hope
Good morning.

Maya Angelou, Inauguration Day, 1993 (Page 1212)

Reading #2 - Yotzer

The Summer Day

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?

Mary Oliver

Reading #3: Malchuyot –

Malchuyot

Bowing to Infinite Creator
of unimaginable worlds
space time springing
curving dancing riding
vast starry oceans
on Leviathan's back.
Maker of microorganisms and pulse,
Imaginer of minds that imagine, hands that heal,
elephant and anemone hummingbird vulture
hippopotamus shark electric eel
the people Israel
nations of the world
rings of Saturn
wild marjoram
holy basil
Bless all, oh Creator, Bless our Creator
Melech ha'kavod
Hallelujah.

Rabbi Miriyam Glazer

Reading #4: Zichronot –

Zikhronot: I DID WHAT I DID

Zikhronot...speaks... directly of mindfulness. I am challenged by the idea that what I have forgotten [especially that which I have chosen to forget, that which I would prefer to forget] is not completely forgotten or gone from the world. I am comforted that what I have forgotten [lost from my memory, obscured by years of inattention or crusty resentment or pain] may yet be brought back to mind, still exists in God's remembrance ...

Before God, there is no fudging the truth...however much I may see reasons and explanations for my behavior, my reasons and explanations are really excuses and obfuscations. In the light of God's complete knowledge and memory, I stop even before I start. My mouth opens to explain, and the words freeze in my mouth. I am culpable. I did what I did; I said what I said. And, if I want to live in truth...I had better learn to admit the truth of my life. Facing the full force of the whole truth and nothing but the truth—truth beyond my immediate perception, truth beyond my desire to know—I am laid bare. I am stripped of pretext, made dumb. I can only admit the truth, and with new eyes and a new heart turn myself to doing better later.

And, then, I hope in Adonai.

Rabbi Jonathan Slater,
Mindful Jewish Living: Compassionate Practice

Reading #5: Shofarot

Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.
You can add up the parts; you won't have the sum
You can strike up the march, there is no drum
Every heart, every heart to love will come
But like a refugee.
Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.

Leonard Cohen

Rosh Hashanah Day 2 5779

Readings

*All readings are also found within
Kol Haneshamah Machzor Leyamim Nora'im*

Reading #1

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 are recovering from illness, or have escaped misfortune.
And we rejoice with them.

Some hearts ache with sorrow:
Disappointments weigh heavily on them, and they have tasted despair; families have been broken;
loved ones lie on a bed of 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;
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, lightning each other's burdens, and praying for the welfare of our community.

Chaim Stern, page 24

Reading #2

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 my 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.

Marge Piercy, pages 291-2

Reading #3 -

The Talmud records these words of Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi:

“One person may acquire eternal life after many years of effort, another acquires it in a single instant.”

For some of us the road to reconciliation is incremental: we assign a series of tasks to ourselves, and gradually but steadily accomplish one after another, until we reach our goal.

For some of us, years of self-neglect, complacency, and defeat are suddenly overcome in one moment of insight, in one experience of the holy, in one unexpected moment of victory, in one unanticipated moment of anguish.

Each life is a story of moments: a moment in which a chance remark awakens an unexpected insight; a moment of solitude that results in a renewed sense of responsibility; a moment of atonement that yields eternity, and a moment of awareness that yields hope.

Rabbi Richard Hirsh, page 19

Reading #4 (Responsively)

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?

Rabbi Jack Riemer, page 346

Reading #5 (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, tel 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 they 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, page 584

Yom Kippur Evening

5779 Readings

Reading #1 - Pre Kol Nidrei

ALL THE MISTAKES WE'VE YET TO MAKE

The Kol Nidre is puzzling. The most sacred prayer of the year is not actually a prayer at all, but rather a legal formula to cancel oaths. Oddly, rather than cancelling promises that we made and didn't fulfill in the past year, the traditional formula cancels vows that we'll make in the coming year. Why do we need this formula in advance? Perhaps, we'll promise properly in the coming year? Maybe, just maybe, we'll get it right.

At the holiest moment of the Jewish calendar, the Kol Nidre forces us to confront the impossibility of perfection. The prayer asserts that we will inevitably make mistakes next year, as we did last year. This realization is heartbreaking but strangely liberating at the same time.

A creative Kol Nidre from parent to child, admitting all the mistakes I would make:

God has entrusted me with a precious soul to raise. This task is both amazing and overwhelming. My sweet child, I wish for you that you should know no pain or discomfort, but we don't live in this kind of world. I can't prevent all hurt, and sometimes I may even be its cause. I want to admit to you upfront that I will make many mistakes, large and small, with you, my darling, for I am merely human. Even with the best intentions, I will stumble along the way. I'll lose patience and perspective. I'll be overtired and frustrated, and at that moment, I won't be the parent you deserve. Although I wish I could care for you myself every minute, you will have to share me with others and be cared for by others. In advance, I ask for your forgiveness. Yet I can promise that I will do my best every day to care for you in mind, body and spirit. You will know without a doubt that you are loved because I love you beyond measure.

What is your Kol Nidre for the year? What mistakes do you need to admit upfront that you're going to make?

Rabbi Ilana Grinblat

Reading #2 – Pre-Barchu

“All I am saying is that anyone can do this. Anyone can ask and anyone can bless, whether anyone has authorized you to do it or not. All I am saying is that the world needs you to do this, because there is a real shortage of people willing to kneel wherever they are and recognize the holiness holding its sometimes bony, often tender, always life-giving hand above their heads. That we are able to bless one another at all is evidence that we have been blessed, whether we can remember when or not. That we are willing to bless one another is miracle enough to stagger the very stars.”

Barbara Brown Taylor

Reading #3 – Pre Selichah

We only have one soul. Why do we waste it on hatred? On resentment? Why do we find it so difficult to forgive? What are we thinking of?

Anger can never produce love. Only love can produce love. Only compassion can free us from the prison of our own anger, the compassion we feel for others, and the compassion we feel from them, and the compassion we feel for ourselves.

Letting go of our anger and the leverage we imagine it gives us against others is one of the hardest things a human being can do.

Who will live and who will die? None of us knows that will happen this year. Most of us will live, but some of us in fact will die, and it might be me and it might be you.. But whether we live or we die, we will only have one soul to do it with, one precious soul to inhabit for our brief moment on this mortal coil. Why have we chosen to torment this soul, to fill it with anger and hatred, to hold on to the hot coal of self-righteousness with all our might, in the foolish hope that it may someday hurt the person we imagine to be our enemy, while all the while, it's only hurting us. While all the while it is our own soul – the only soul we have – that is writhing in torment.

What have we been thinking of?

Rabbi Alan Lew,

This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared

Reading #4

The Layers

I have walked through many lives,
some of them my own,
and I am not who I was,
though some principle of being
abides, from which I struggle
not to stray.

When I look behind,
as I am compelled to look
before I can gather strength
to proceed on my journey,
I see the milestones dwindling
toward the horizon
and the slow fires trailing
from the abandoned camp-sites,
over which scavenger angels
wheel on heavy wings.

Oh, I have made myself a tribe
out of my true affections,
and my tribe is scattered!
How shall the heart be reconciled
to its feast of losses?

In a rising wind
the manic dust of my friends,
those who fell along the way,
bitterly stings my face.

Yet I turn, I turn,
exulting somewhat,
with my will intact to go
wherever I need to go,
and every stone on the road
precious to me.

In my darkest night,
when the moon was covered
and I roamed through wreckage,
a nimbus-clouded voice
directed me:

“Live in the layers,
not on the litter.”

Though I lack the art
to decipher it,
no doubt the next chapter
in my book of transformations
is already written.

I am not done with my changes.

Stanley Kunitz

Yom Kippur Day
5779 Readings

Reading #1

Rabbi Chaim of Zans was wont to tell the following parable:

A sojourner had been wandering about in a forest for several days, not knowing which was the right way out. Suddenly, he saw someone approaching him. His heart was filled with anticipation. "Now I will learn which is the right way," he thought. When they neared one another, he asked, "Please, tell me which is the right way out of this forest. I have been wandering about for several days.

Said the other to him, "I do not know the way out either, for I too have been wandering about here for many, many days. But *this*, I can tell you: do not take the way I have been going, for that will lead you astray. Now let us look for a new way together."

S.Y. Agnon Kol Haneshamah Machzor Leyamim Nora'im
Page 11

Reading #2 – after Psalm 150

WHAT WE NEED IS RESTLESSNESS

Daily we should take account and ask: What have I done today to alleviate the anguish, to mitigate the evil, to prevent humiliation? Let there be a grain of prophet in every human being!

Our concern must be expressed not symbolically, but literally; Not only publicly, but also privately; not only occasionally, but regularly.

What we need is the involvement of every one of us as individuals. What we need is restlessness, a constant awareness of the monstrosity of injustice.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Reading #3 –

Invocation

The wind brings your names.
We will never dissever your names
nor your shadows beneath each branch and tree.

The truth comes in on the wind, is carried by water.
There is such a thing as the truth. Tell us
how you got over. Say, Soul I look back in wonder.

Your names were never lost,
each name a holy word.
The rocks cry out—

call out each name to sanctify this place.
Sounds in human voices, silver or soil,
a moan, a sorrow song,

a keen, a cackle, harmony,
a hymnal, handbook, chart,
a sacred text, a stomp, an exhortation.

Ancestors, you will find us still in cages,
despised and disciplined.
You will find us still mis-named.

Here you will find us despite.
You will not find us extinct.
You will find us here memoried and storied.

You will find us here mighty.
You will find us here divine.
You will find us where you left us, but not as you left us.

Here you endure and are luminous.
You are not lost to us.
The wind carries sorrows, sighs, and shouts.

The wind brings everything. Nothing is lost.
Elizabeth Alexander,
National Memorial for Peace and Justice

Reading #4

Every time I listen to your pain
instead of telling you how to fix it
I make a sacrifice.
I used to be a magician
who diverted himself from his problems
by focusing on someone else's.
You might have been impressed by my cleverness
but it did not help either of us.
At last I have been reduced to silence.
My silence can be a mirror for you.
May this offering of emptiness
give you room to heal.

-Rabbi Seth D. Riemer

Yom Kippur Afternoon/Yizkor / Ne'ilah 5779

Readings

Reading #1 Opening Meditation

REMEMBERING

Someone laughs a certain way and suddenly I am feeling you.

The radio plays a song you used to love. It feels as if you are here with me. The evening light glistens on the trees. My heart stings, after so many years, with the loss of you. The family gathers together. Each of us feels the absence of you.

Some of us are consoled for our loss. Some of us are yet inconsolable.

Some of us have bitterly wounded hearts for each and every loss we have suffered –

Some of us have healed.

Grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins and second-cousins, friends from the old days, friends from now...co-workers...

postmen we chatted with, men and women far, far, far from us

How brief life is.

Teach us to number our days, to be fully alive, fully aware each and every day, to live in awareness, to cherish awareness – oh teach us to number our days so that we may attain a wise heart.

That we may remember and mourn those we have lost and still celebrate the gift of their lives. The gift of life.

Rabbi Miriyam Glazer

Reading #2 On Death of Parents

Move to the front
of the line
a voice says, and suddenly
there is nobody
left standing between
you and the world, to take
the first blows
on their shoulders.

This is the place in books
where part one ends, and
part two begins,
and there is no part three.

The slate is wiped
not clean but like a canvas
painted over in white
so that a whole new landscape
must be started,
bits of the old
still showing underneath -
those colors sadness lends
to a certain hour of evening.
Now the line of light at the horizon
is the hinge between earth
and heaven, only visible
a few moments
as the sun drops
its rusted padlock
into place.

Linda Pastan, Kol Haneshamah Machzor Page 1022

Reading #3 SHOAH

Out of the strong, sweetness;
And out of the dead body of the lion of Judah,
The prophecies and psalms;
Out of the slaves in Egypt,
Out of the wandering tribesmen of the deserts
And the peasants of Palestine,
Out of the slaves of Babylon and Rome,
Out of the ghettos of Spain and Portugal, Germany and
Poland,
The Torah and the prophecies,
The Talmud and the sacred studies, the hymns and
songs of the Jews;
And out of the Jewish dead
Of Belgium and Holland, of Rumania, Hungary and
Bulgaria,
Of France and Italy and Yugoslavia,
Of Lithuania and Latvia, White Russia and Ukraina,
Of Czechoslovakia and Austria,
Poland and Germany,
Out of the greatly wronged
A people teaching and doing justice;
Out of the plundered
A generous people;
Out of the wounded a people of physicians;
And out of those who met only with hate,
A people of love, a compassionate people.

Charles Reznikoff, Kol Haneshamah Machzor Page 918

Additional Readings

Ne'ilah

UNOPENED GATES

..the sun is low, the hour is late, let us enter the gates at last...

Each one of us is standing before his or her own unopened gates. Each of us is conscious of other gates that have closed forever. For many, the gates of youth and the blush of early life have closed forever. For some, the gates of stormy adolescence are just opening. For others, the gates of parenthood have been closed while the gates of becoming grandparents have not yet opened... Undoubtedly, there are some who feel that all the gates are locked, while others see only open gates in all directions ...

If we are to change the rhythm and content of our human relations, then we simply must find the keys to open the gates to our own selves. We must find a way to reach those parts of ourselves that have been languishing and have atrophied ... We must exorcise the false gates – of self-deception, selfishness, fear, timidity, bashfulness – that we have permitted to rust on their hinges. We can only love by opening our hearts all the way, and this is no simple task! ... Sometimes it hurts to force a gate open.

...Living implies that there are always gates to be opened, at all ages, at all moments. What is required are the strength and the commitment necessary to search for the right key for the right lock. One must also be aware that upon opening the next gate, we may see things that are not very pleasant. No one can know beforehand what is behind every gate... It is simply risky to open gates. But it is more tragic to live one's whole life locked into one little antechamber surrounded by gates that we don't have the courage to risk opening.

...Let us decide if we want to look for the keys.
Assuming we have the keys, do we want to open up new gates?

Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer

What they did yesterday afternoon

i've been praying,
and these are what my prayers look like;
dear god
i come from two countries
one is thirsty
the other is on fire
both need water.

later that night
i held an atlas in my lap
ran my fingers across the whole world
and whispered
where does it hurt?

it answered
everywhere
everywhere
everywhere.

Warsan Shire