

TEMPLE BETH ISRAEL PRESERVATION SOCIETY

DANIELSON, CONNECTICUT



ראש השנה

ROSH HASHANAH

2015 / 5776

SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

Leshana Tovah. Welcome to the New Year 5776.

1. For thousands of years we have celebrated the New Year with joy, hope and thoughtful reflection. Today we are here to continue that tradition. The holidays of Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur provide time and space for self-examination and personal reflection. We are here to reflect on the year that has passed and open our hearts to the possibilities of the year to come.

2. Today is a day of introspection and growth, of assessment and healing, of receptiveness and renewal. We evaluate and measure ourselves and our choices. We strive to take responsibility and to write our own destiny for the New Year.

We ask: What has transpired this past year and what adjustments can we make to the next year individually, in our communities, and in the world? What do Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur mean to our community and to our families and ourselves?

Today, we will consider these questions together as a community.

Hiney Ma Tov

(How Good and Pleasant it is for People to Live Together in Unity)

Hiney ma tov umanayim)
Shevet akhim gam yakhad) *repeat*

Hiney ma tov)
Shevet akhim gam yakhad) *repeat*

Oy vi gut un vi voyl es iz)
Brider un shvester tsuzamen) *repeat*

Oy vi voyl es iz)
Brider un shvester tsuzamen) *repeat*

3. This is the first day of the Jewish New Year – a day when we come together to remember the year just past, and to plan the year to come.

This is a day of joy. We are thankful for life; for the health and happiness that make life bright and good; for our dear families and for all the rich blessings that we enjoy every day.

This is a day when we express our hope that we shall be blessed with continued life, happiness, and peace. Welcome to a New Year!

4. **Giving birth**

Hayom harat olam. Today is the birthday of the world, the day on which the world was conceived - so we say each Rosh HaShanah. And today it is being born again - as it is every day, and every hour. With each moment, the old world disappears and a new world comes into being. Everything always happening for the first time.

Why, then, is this birthday special? On Rosh HaShanah, we set out on a path of deliberate change, change that is in our own powers to affect - *t'shuvah*, the return to one's truest self.

As we celebrate the birthday of the world, the great creation out of which we are born, we bring attention to the ongoing creation of our lives, by which we make ourselves new each day.

Marcia Falk

5. **Pausing at the Threshold: In Praise of Open Gates**

My experience of the High Holy Days is shaped by how they end: the drama of heavenly gates – open for ten days, but now, at N'ilah, swinging shut, our prayers pelting up against them like pebbles. Will our repentance and our heartfelt wishes make it in? Will the words of our lips be welcomed in or shut out? The sun is setting. Time is of the essence! We feel power in the recurrence of words and melodies, urgency in the final shofar blast; and we know in our bones that this moment is fraught like no other time in the liturgical year. Rendered receptive (or simply worn down) by fasting and the sheer length of the services, I surrender to the ancient sounds, and to the unvarnished, almost primitive, imagery. By submitting to this process, I let the holy days alter how I see the world, at least for these few hours – but, if I have done this well, for far longer.

6. **The potent image of a gate swinging shut** has a counterpart in the liturgy: the monumental Book of Life, also imagined as being shut – sealed for another year. But if we wish to find our way to and through the gate of N'ilah, it helps to travel back in time and revisit the intensifying routines of the Ten Days, the optimism of Rosh HaShanah, the gentle and insistent pleading of Elul. Our task is to gain entry, to pass through, to be transformed. Rosh HaShanah – the entire holy season – is more than sacred time. It is sacred space: a threshold.

7. **Doorways are charged spaces.** We know that the world on one side of a door is different from the world on the other side. Inside – outside,

nurture – nature, safety – danger, private – public: any number of binaries are made real and concrete by the placement of a doorway. There is power and potential at the threshold, but also danger and vulnerability. Normally we give little thought to the doors and gates through which we pass, but the High Holy Days are different: we construct an “existential doorway” and linger there for ten days of reflection.

8. A year of decision-making lies behind us and demands an accounting; a year of decision-making lies before us and poses for each of us a fundamental challenge; will we stumble as we cross the threshold? Will we manage to leave some of our waywardness behind? Rosh HaShanah is a time for starting fresh, for taking stock, and for identifying ways to be better – not perfect.

9. As we pass through the doorway we feel the dangerous uncertainty of our lives: despite our efforts, we may be found wanting, our acts deemed insufficient. A mirror hangs near this doorway, inviting us to examine ourselves before we step over the threshold. We see for ourselves how frail and flawed we are. The open door of repentance offers promise and possibility; a sense of welcome, hospitality and refuge. As anxious as we may feel when confronting the unknown, our prayers remind us that we are not forever constrained by habit and history.

On Rosh HaShanah the gates of repentance swing wide; the Book of Life is turned to a new page. For a precious few days, the portals are unlocked and open. Then, at N’ilah, the gates close and our fates – metaphorically – are sealed. But even as the gates of repentance are closing, others begin to open: gates of prayer, gates of tears, gates of righteousness.

Our challenge is not merely to enter the New Year, but to discover the many openings to a better life. We stand on the threshold. Let us enter!

Adapted from Rabbi Laura Lieber, PhD

10. Here I Am

Here I am,
One soul within this prayer community.
Like those around me,
I bring my own concerns and yearnings to this place.
Hoping they will find expression in the time hallowed words
Of my people and in the traditions cherished by generations
Before me.
May I bring the best of my energies to these Holy Days,
Approaching this spiritual work with open heart and mind,
Sincerity and sustained focus on the deep questions

of this season;
Who am I? How shall I live?
Where have I fallen short – or failed?

This day I take up the challenge of the Days of Awe;
Cheshbon hanefesh – a searching examination of my life,
A moral inventory of my deeds, words, and thoughts.

During the next ten days,
Let me face the truth about myself and listen to Your still,
small voice.
Taking comfort in Your promise
that I am always free to change,
Released from staleness and routine,
Let me know the joy of beginning again.
May I gain strength as I share this task with those around me,
United by our common purpose,

Tikkun midot (improving our characters)
and *tikkun olam* – (repairing the world).

I now prepare myself to pray –
one soul amidst this holy congregation.

11. The Ancient Words

I don't understand them.
They are in a language I do not know.
Why are they so familiar?

There is a rhythm to them,
A beat, a pulse I understand
From somewhere very deep inside me,
My heart, my soul.
I am connected to a past I never lived
And to a future I shall not know.

A member of the human race,
Running through my time
And still connected to many lives which came before me.
So many cultures, faces, tears and joys,
A Jew, connected
To the past, to a future.

Hoping always

That peace and love will finally come to all the world,
That we may really live with no barriers
And each of us, in the comfort and beauty of our varied
Traditions.

Long before I understood what it means to be Jewish,
I knew that I was a part of something larger than myself,
Beyond my comprehension.

I think of my family, and my friends,
My people, and all the people of the world.
The living, and those who live on in our hearts and minds,
Of the earth, and all its creatures
Of our universe.

And I am reminded of my responsibility
To fulfill the promise of peace
While I am on earth—Shalom.

-adapted from Emily Dina Ruth Maltz

An Alternative Amidah

(All rise and read aloud together.)

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 real companionship with our children
Or was there 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 did we hold it back?
Did we deceive others?
Did we deceive ourselves?
 Did we respect the rights and feelings
 Of those who worked with 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?

Jack Riemer

(together)

12. 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 toward 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.

These things are terribly hard to do.
But unless we turn, we will be trapped forever
In yesterday's ways.
Help us to 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 and bring us back toward what is of ultimate worth in our
lives.
Revive our lives, as at the beginning.
And turn us toward each other, for in isolation there is no life.

- Jack Riemer

13. Blowing the Shofar

Many years ago, we announced the start of the New Year by blowing a Shofar. Actually, we blew the Shofar to announce the first day of every month, *Rosh Chodesh*, which always started when a new moon appeared, every 29 days.

But on the first day of the New Year, we blew the Shofar especially loud and long. We blew it to remind us to think carefully about the year just past, and to be sorry for the things that we had done wrong.

14. The Shofar call for the New Year has three parts, and a long blast at the end. They are:

Tekiah: This is the sounding of the alarm, the sound of remembrance. Another year of life has slipped away and we must ask ourselves what we have accomplished in that year.

Shevarim: The low note is a reminder that life may bring fear, frustration, tragedy, and sorrow. The high note is a note of hope that life will also bring us happiness and serenity.

Teruah: This is the call to arms asking each of us to make a personal commitment to work towards the liberation of all oppressed people, and for an end to exploitation and tyranny in all forms.

(together)

May the sound of the Shofar remind us that it is time to “Proclaim liberty throughout the land and for all the inhabitants thereof.”

May the sound of the Shofar awaken us to the flight of time,
And summon us to spend our days with purpose.

May the sound of the Shofar shatter our complacency,
And make us conscious of our weaknesses and our strengths.

15. Unetanah Tokef

One of the most solemn prayers on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, the structure of this poem and its language suggest that it was composed during the Byzantine period. The concepts on which it is based come from Jewish apocalyptic literature and parallel Christian writings based on similar sources, the most famous of which is the *Dies irae* (day of wrath) – found in

the requiem mass – which offers a vivid description of the day of judgment for all humankind.

In Unetannah tokef, however, the subject is not the final judgment but the much more immediate, yearly Day of Judgment – Rosh HaShanah.

16. This poem is the pinnacle of the Rosh HaShanah liturgy. The poet has painted a picture of the most solemn day of the year, which to him is Rosh HaShanah, not Yom Kippur. All other concepts associated with the day have been stripped away. "Awesome and terrible" are the only fitting words to describe it.

The poet describes the day when humanity is judged. And he fills in the details to spread before us a terrifying spectacle of heaven and earth called to judgment.

17. But this is not a day of suffering without hope. No matter what one has done, says the poet, the severe decree -- the penalty of death -- can be averted. Indeed, one need only follow the advice of the Sages, "Three things cancel the decree, and they are prayer, charity, and repentance." The poet has set it correctly in the context of the Day of Judgment, focusing on the ten-day period from the beginning of Rosh HaShanah until the end of Yom Kippur as a time when these three actions must be undertaken to change the outcome of the trial.

18. Time

We use it - wisely or not. We fill it and mark it. We try to stop it, but there is no end to it. And yet, we never have enough.

It is a circle, and it is a line. Moving forward, day-by-day, year-by-year, we come round and round again. Again the spring, again the fall - but every leaf a new one, every fall a new shape falling.

Always starting, never finished, we live always in the between.

No time, we say, we have no time. Yet we have all the time in the world.

And there is no time like now.

Marcia Falk

19. I Had a Box of Colors

Shining, bright and bold.
I had a box of colors,
Some warm, some very cold.

I had no red for the blood of wounds.
I had no black for the orphans' grief.
I had no white for dead faces and hands.
I had no yellow for burning sands.

But I had orange for the joy of life,
And I had green for buds and nests.
I had blue for bright, clear skies.
I had pink for dreams and rest.

I sat down
and painted
Peace.

-Tali Sorek, age 13, Beersheba, Israel

(together)

20. This Is the Beginning of the New Year

We have this year
to use as we will.
We can waste it,
or grow in its light
and be of service to others.

But what we do
with this year is important
because we will have exchanged
a year of our lives for it.

The last year is now.
May we not regret the price paid for it.

21. May It Be So

May the year bring abundant blessings -
beauty, creativity, delight!

May we be confident, courageous,

and devoted to our callings.

May our lives be enriched with education.
May we find enjoyment in our work
and fulfillment in our friendships.

May we grow, may we have good health,
in darker times, may we be sustained
by gratitude and hope.

May we be infused with joy.
May we know intimacy and kindness,
may we love without limit.

May the hours be enhanced with music
and nurtured by art.
May our endeavors be marked by originality.

May we take pleasure in daily living.
May we find peace within ourselves
and help peace emerge in the world.

May we receive the gifts of quiet.

May reason guide our choices,
may romance grace our lives.

May our spirits be serene,
may we find solace in solitude.

May we embrace tolerance and truth
and the understanding that underlies both.

May we be inspired with vision and wonder,
may we be open to exploration.

May our deepest yearnings be fulfilled,
may we be suffused with zeal for life.

May we merit these blessings
and may they come to be.
May it be so.

Marcia Falk

May we create for ourselves, our family, friends and community a year of health, happiness and peace. May we be inscribed and sealed for a good year.

Gut Yontef, Gut Yor.
A Good Holiday, A Good Year.



Thank you for your participation in our High Holiday Ritual. These services were assembled by the Ritual Committee of the Temple Beth Israel Preservation Society – Alan Turner, Jack Hodys, Rosa Goldblatt, Martin Drobiarz and Norman Berman.

We have drawn, in part, from the work of the Boston Workmen's Circle, the Shalom Center, the works of Marcia Falk, Jack Reimer and the writings of Rabbi Marcia Prager and Rabbi Laura Lieber, PhD. We welcome your comments and suggestions.

We wish you a happy, healthy and meaningful New Year.

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