

A Spiritual “High” for the High holidays

Supplemental Resources for Machzor (stories, quotes and poems) FROM: *Rosh Hashanah Readings: Inspiration, Information and Contemplation, edited by Dov Peretz Elkins*

When we wish each other a "shanah tova," or 'good year,' we think of the Hebrew word "shanah" or 'year,' which has the letters shin, nun and hay. These letters make up the same root for the Hebrew word for 'change'. In other words, the beginning of the year is a time for change, for doing things better in the upcoming year. 'Shanah' is a unique word and may the new shanah bring both old traditions and new changes for the better -- *Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins*

This Year, Hold On to What is Good

Hold on to what is good, even if it is a handful of earth.
Hold on to what you believe, even if it is a tree which stands by itself. Hold on to what you must do, even if it is a long way from here. Hold on to life, even if it is easier letting go. Hold on to the hand of your neighbor, even when we are apart.
--*Native American saying*

Some Old Thoughts for the New Year

Others can live without us, but we cannot live without others
We cannot be happy unless we are useful
It is great to be loved, it is even greater to love
When we improve ourselves, we make a most vital contribution to the improvement of humanity
In morals as in mathematics, a straight line is the shortest distance between two points
We may declare time to be an enemy, when in fact time is our most faithful friend. How do you spend yours?
It is no less important to cultivate the ability to forget than it is to develop the power to remember
The true measure of a person's size is his ability to make others feel large
The indispensable requirement for mastering life is mastering ourselves
We learn to live when we learn to give --*Rabbi Sydney Greenberg*

How We Become Wise

Insight into learning from our mistakes and doing Teshuva (regret and repentance)

After a long, hard climb up the mountain, a group of spiritual seekers finally found themselves in front of the great teacher. Bowing deeply, they asked the question that had been burning inside of them for so long. "How do we become wise?" There was a long pause until the teacher emerged from the meditation. Finally, the reply came: "Good choices." "But teacher, how do we know how to make good choices?" "From experience," said the wise one.

"And how do we gain experience?" they asked.
"Bad choices" smiled the teacher.

God's Boxes

I have in my hands two boxes
which God gave me to hold
He said, "put all your sorrows in the black box and all your joys in the gold"
I listened to what he said and in the two boxes
both my joys and sorrows I stored
But though the gold became heavier each day
the black was as light as before.
With curiosity I opened the black
I wanted to find out why,
and I saw in the base of the box, a hole
which my sorrows had fallen out by
I showed the hole to God and mused,
"I wonder where my sorrows could be"
God smiled a gentle smile and said,
"they're all here with me"
I asked why God gave me the boxes
why the gold and the black with the hole?
"The gold is for you to count your blessings", he said. "The black is for you to let go"

What Being Jewish Means to Me

Elie Wiesel

"...A Jew must be sensitive to the pain of all human beings. A Jew cannot remain indifferent to human suffering, whether in other countries or in our own cities and towns. The mission of the Jewish people has never been to make the world more Jewish, but to make it more human."

"Prayer expresses itself directly in the language the heart knows best"- Rabbi Arthur Green

"God does not want to be believed in, to be debated and defended by us, simply to be realized through us"- *Martin Buber*, 20th century Jewish philosopher

"Days are scrolls: write on them what you want to be remembered" -11th century

A Conversation

"Are you there God?"
she asked prayerfully
"Sometimes,"
He answered carefully
"Do you care God?"

She asked faithfully
"Not always,"
He said playfully
"But, you do believe God?"
she asked persistently.
"At times," he replied.
"But not consistently"

Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins

You Don't Have to Pray It to Say It

"I'm not religious. I don't know the prayers. I'd feel hypocritical. I'm not sure what I believe so how can I pray?" Would you say, "I'm not Albert Einstein so I'm not going to think?" or "I'm not Michael Jordan so I shouldn't play basketball?"
Prayer is scary because we want answers to our questions and may not get them. The very least is that you ask yourself questions to find out who you are and could be "Is there someone there greater than us?" "Does he/she care about me?" "What is expected of me?" The answers may be just in asking, making you think of thoughts you may not have considered before. *Jewish Theological Seminary program advertisement*

Prayer from the Heart

"Hannah prayed in her heart only her lips moved, her voice could not be heard." -I Samuel 1:13

On Rosh Hashanah, we read the story of Hannah, mother of the prophet Samuel during the reading of the Haftara (reading from the book of the prophets). Hannah was barren and desperately wanted a child. She begged with bitter emotion, "heavy in mood," for a child. She was speaking with her heart and because she did so with so much meaning and intention, her prayers were answered and Samuel was born.

Shema- Hear and Listen

"I was taught by my mom and dad that in Judaism the most important prayer is the Shema- "Hear o Israel." It was taught to me from childhood that the most important thing I could do as a Jew was to listen. It wasn't a way for my parents to say, "I know more than you," They meant listen to yourself. Listen to those little whispers that we tend to not want to hear because they're too soft and we tend to listen to shouts not whispers. So listening carefully is what I was taught all my life. When people don't listen, its not that they don't learn, they just deny themselves tremendous opportunities and wise choices" - *Steven Spielberg*

Avinu Malkeinu- Become a ruler over yourself

The theme of God as King is a common theme of the Rosh Hashanah liturgy. Knowing we have little control over certain aspects of our lives, how can we learn to be rulers over our actions and thoughts? We are masters over our

own deeds, not slaves. Since we do have control over our own inclinations, we have the ability to rule over our own passions and desires

---Debra Orenstein

Readings for the Torah Reading

The Binding of Isaac- the Akeida

All of life is a test. The story of the Akeida reminds us of the difficult and painful choices we must make each day. It teaches us of the power of faith and powerful lessons of parenthood

"There is no life without love and no love without pain"- source unknown (*Moments of Transcendence*). Abraham is tested by God and although bound by his faith, experiences the intensity of both love and pain, emotions often felt by parents who want their children to succeed in a harsh, tough world.

"Vayelchu Shnayhem yachdav" - And the two of them went together (Genesis 22:6).

Charles Francis Adams, a 19th century political figure, kept a diary. One day he entered in it: "went fishing with my son today- day wasted." His son also kept a diary. On that same day, he wrote: "went fishing with my father- most wonderful day of my life"

The Binding of Isaac- the Voice of the Mother

Sarah's Song

Why did I keep silent? Why did I not speak
when I saw the smoke in your father's eyes?
I stood in anguished silence waiting for some word,
A word I heard from angels' mouths we mocked me in old age
...no child for me in vibrant youth, when my arms were strong to carry him in joy.
Now I have a son-my only son- child of my laughter, child of my dreams
How dare they take you from me across the desert sands? To a place of smoke and fire, to
Moriah's ancient spire?
Who will draw the first drop and who will weep the most?
And who will take her vengeance on the father of the child?
...now rise up women of silence, sing a new song, with voices echoing over time, make
known how with strength of heart we mastered God and human with strength of love we
forged a covenant of hope

---Michael Halperin

A Parent's Prayer

Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso

Prayer for the Gift of Raising Children

I thank You for the gift of this child to raise, this life to share, this mind to help mold, this body to nurture, and this spirit to enrich. Let me never betray this child's trust, dampen this child's hope or discourage this child's dreams. Help me to help this precious child become all he's meant to be. Let grace and love fall upon him like gentle breezes and give him inner strength and peace and patience for life's journey
--*Mariam Wright Edelman*

Meaning of the Shofar Blasts: One, Three, Nine, Longest

As our ancestors before us, we listen to the sounds of the shofar. First we hear a voice that calls out the names of the sounds, then we hear the sounds of the shofar, each with its own special meaning:

Tekiah (one blast)- the single blast commands us to care about others and reach out to each other one by one

Shevarim (3 short blasts)- the three blasts command us to keep the many promises we make as a new year begins.

Teruah- (nine blasts)- the nine blasts remind us to respond to the many needs of the Jewish people where they live, in the hope that we will stay united

Tekiah Gdola- (longest blast) This long, loud blast commands us to begin our work to make this year better for all people. As the ancient sage Hillel said "If not know, when?"

Because It's Not Perfect

"The sounds of the shofar are odd, squeaky and uneven. Yet it gives a most haunting sound that although not pretty, stirs us. Perhaps it does so because it is imperfect as we are."

--*Rabbi Laura Metzger*

Zikaron- Remembrance

Another name of Rosh Hashana is Day of Remembrance

God Remembers Everything You Forget

"Over God's desk is a plaque that says, "God forgets everything you remember and remembers everything you forget"--*Bernie Siegel, MD*

Remembrance

From the last paragraph of the obituary of Simon Wiesenthal, Nazi hunter:

"He was often asked why he had become a searcher of Nazi criminals. One response he gave was, "I believe that when we come to the other world and meet the millions of Jews who died in the camps and they ask us 'what have you done?' there will be many answers. You will say 'I became a jeweler,' Another will say, 'I built houses,' but I will say, 'I didn't forget you.'"

Teshuvah/Repentance

"While bicycling one the first day of summer, I passed a church bulletin with a message on it that read, "If you are headed in the wrong direction, God allows U-turns." Teshuva,

the idea of repentance means 'turning around.' We're allowed and encouraged to "turn around," to recognize when we've gone off course and have the courage to make the U turn and head in the right direction again.

Changing Ourselves

Why is it easier to give others advice, but difficult to take it ourselves? Changing others is so much easier than changing ourselves.

"Levi Yitzchak wanted to change the world. After several years, he realized that was too hard, so he decided to try to change his own community. Several years later, that goal became too difficult so he decided to focus on changing his family. He finally concluded that the only one he could really change was himself! That's the only person we can truly change anyway. If we decide not to help ourselves, we are totally lost . --*traditional source*

Tefillah- The Prayer of a Confederate Soldier

I asked God for strength that I might achieve
I was made weak, that I might learn to serve
I asked for health that I might do great things;
I was given infirmity that I might do better things
I asked for wealth that I might be happy
I was given poverty that I might be wise
I asked for power, that I might earn the praise of others
I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God
I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.
I got nothing I asked for, but all I hoped for. Despite myself, my unspoken prayers were answered, and I am, among all people, most richly blessed

Shofar and Social Responsibility

"How wonderful it is that no one need wait a single moment to start to improve the world"-- Anne Frank

"If we are able to be involved but remain indifferent, we are responsible for the consequences" --*Midrash* (commentaries, teachings of the sages)

On Eating the apple and honey on Rosh Hashana

"May it be your will our God and God of our ancestors to renew us for a good and sweet year"

Story- If Not Higher

1. IF NOT HIGHER - I.L. Peretz, *famous Yiddish writer*

Every Friday during the month of [Elul](#) the Rabbi of [Nemirov](#) would vanish. He was nowhere to be seen. Where could the Rabbi be? In heaven, no doubt, the people thought, asking God to bring peace in the New Year. Where could the Rabbi be? A villager

decided to find out. One night he sneaked into the Rabbi's home, slid under the Rabbi's bed, and waited. Just before dawn, the Rabbi awakened, got out of bed, and began to dress. He put on work pants, high boots, a big hat, a coat, and a wide belt. He put a rope in his pocket, tucked an ax in his belt, and left the house. The villager followed.

The Rabbi crept in the shadows to woods at the edge of town. He took the ax, chopped down a small tree, and split it into logs. Then he bundled the wood, tied it with the rope, put it on his back, and began walking. He stopped beside a small broken-down shack and knocked at the window. "Who is there?" asked the frightened, sick woman inside. "I, Vassil the peasant," answered the Rabbi, entering the house. "I have wood to sell." "I am a poor widow. Where will I get the money?" she asked. "I'll lend it to you," replied the Rabbi. "How will I pay you back?" asked the woman. "I will trust you," said the Rabbi. The Rabbi put the wood into the oven, kindled the fire, and left without a word.

Now whenever anyone reports that the Rabbi has gone to heaven, the villager only adds quietly, "Heaven? If not higher."

You don't need a synagogue to be experience holiness. Helping others, a holy act, is "even higher."

2. "The shofar is a prayer without words." [Saul Lieberman](#),
Quoted in *Leo Rosten's Treasury of Jewish Quotations*

What prayers do you say without words? How often do you wish and dream internally? On Rosh Hashanah, we read the story of Hannah, who is known to have prayed silently, with heart and soul to have a child. Her prayers were answered as she spoke with her heart and not necessarily her words

3. The King's Secert

There once was a king who would sometimes go out in regular clothes to talk to his people as a regular guy. One day he joined a farmer on a wagon ride into town. The farmer and the king hit it off and the farmer couldn't believe how friendly and thoughtful his new friend was. The farmer talked and talked and the king listened to his thoughts. The King asked the farmer great questions and really made him think a lot. The farmer was so thankful for the opportunity to speak with this nice man. They reached town and parted ways. Suddenly, two boys, the king's helpers, approached the farmer. "You were traveling with the king, did you see which way he went?" The farmer was astonished. "The king? I was with a simple peasant man who pleased me with his thoughtfulness and listened to my woes so well, a king wouldn't have time for little old me! I'm so pleased to have had the chance to talk with the king and get his advice and guidance." "You know", said one of the boys, "I sometimes go to the king when I need advice or guidance or need someone to listen and he helps me feel better. He likes to help when you tell him how you're feeling" The farmer felt warmed by the thought of such an important man making time for his thoughts and feelings and went to visit his friend the king many times again.

One of the themes of Rosh Hashana is Malchut- God as king. Sometimes we talk to our "king" without even realizing we are and it makes us feel at ease just knowing we can express our thoughts somehow