

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

The Birthday of the World

On the birthday of the world
I begin to contemplate what
I have done and left undone, but this year
not so much rebuilding of my perennially
damaged psyche, shoring up eroding
friendships,
digging out stumps of old resentments
that refuse to rot on their own. No, this year
I want to call myself to task
for what I have done and not done
for peace. How much have I dared in
opposition?
How much have I put on the line for freedom?
For mine and others?
As these freedoms are pared, sliced and diced,
where have I spoken out?
Who have I tried to move?
In this holy season, I stand self-convicted
of sloth in a time when lies choke the mind and
rhetoric bends reason to
slithering choking pythons.
Here I stand before the gates opening,
the fire dazzling my eyes,
and as I approach what judges me,
I judge myself.
Give me weapons of minute destruction.
Let my words turn into sparks.

Marge Piercy

Neighborly Hands
None of us has solid ground under our feet;
each of us is only held up by the neighborly
hands grasping us by the scruff, with the result
that we are each held up by the next person,
and often, indeed most of the time, hold each
other up mutually.

Franz Rosenzweig

May the door of this synagogue be wide enough
To receive all who hunger for love,
All who are lonely for companionship.
May it welcome all who have cares to
unburden,
Thanks to express, hopes to nurture.
May the door of this synagogue be narrow
enough
To shut out pettiness and pride, envy and
enmity.
May its threshold be no stumbling block
To young or straying feet.
May it be too high to admit complacency,
Selfishness and harshness.
May this synagogue be, for all who enter,
The doorway to a richer and more meaningful
life.

Sidney Greenberg, Likrat Shabbat

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.
Thought your life felt arduous
New and unmapped and strange
What would it mean to stand in the first
page of the edge of despair?

Adrienne Rich

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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

We spend much of our waking time overtaken by busyness, overwhelmed by the world roiling around us, pulled in all directions at once. Yet we are also capable of being focused, keenly alert and aware – present of mind and heart. Such presence may be brought upon us by a source outside ourselves. We may be stunned into alertness by a dramatic event – a birth, a death, a grievous loss – or stirred to it by encounter with beauty, and at once, the world becomes new.

On days when nothing extraordinary seems to happen, we have a chance to be more awake to ordinary moments. Being present to the moment brings about a near-magical transformation, by which ordinary life becomes extraordinary.

Marcia Falk, The Days Between

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
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Perhaps the language we've developed for God has stuck so long precisely because it's useful in helping us to access some important means of connecting. But I wonder if finding new metaphors – not of God as Dad, not of God as Mom, might open up other kinds of experiences for us as well.

When I was younger, I'd think of God-as-Father as, you know, the God that gets mad at you when you don't do your homework. But now, when I think about the divine in the metaphoric clothing of a parent, I think about the desperate desire of a parent who wants to watch kids grow and flourish and become the best possible version of themselves. I think about how a parent regards his or her child with a tender eye, with compassion and concern.

When encountering "God-as-parent" language in the liturgy, when we proclaim "*Avinu Malkeinu*/Our Father, Our King" it's less about begging God not to ground us for breaking the proverbial window with our baseball and a little more about asking to be seen for who we are right now – as the kids who are learning to swim the best we can, but who can't get better any faster than our abilities will allow. And that maybe it's OK to be just where we are.

Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg
Nurture the Wow: On Finding Spirituality in the Frustration, Boredom, Tears, Poop, Desperation, Wonder and Radical Amazement of Parenting.

When men were children,
they thought of God as a Father;
When men were slaves,
they thought of God as a Master;
When men were subjects,
they thought of God as a King.
But I am a woman, not a slave, not a subject,
not a child who longs for God as father or mother.

I might imagine God as teacher or friend,
but those Images,
like king, master, father or mother,
are too small for me now.

God is the force of motion and light in the universe;
God is the strength of life on our planet;
God is the power moving us to do good;
God is the source of love springing up in us.
God is far beyond what we can comprehend.

Ruth F. Brin

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

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New Year's Day, Rosh Hashanah, is also called Yom Hazikaron, the day of memory.

On that day, the day of universal judgment, [the human] appeals to God to remember:

Without memory, our existence would be barren and opaque, like a prison cell into which no light penetrates; like a tomb which rejects the living. If anything can, it is memory that will save humanity. For me, hope without memory is like memory without hope...

We must remember the suffering of our people, as we must remember that of the Ethiopians, the Cambodians, the boat people, Palestinians, the Mesquite Indians, the Argentinian *desaparecidos*, the list seems endless. Because I remember, I despair. Because I remember, I have the duty to reject despair. I remember the killers, I remember the victims, even as I struggle to invent a thousand and one reasons to hope.

Elie Wiesel, Nobel Prize Lecture

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, lightening each other's burdens, and praying for the welfare of our community.

Chaim Stern, page 24

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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

In the preceding pages we offered an extended
blessing for Creation. We accepted our
creatureliness, our place in nature. Now we
shift to concern with what gives our creaturely
lives transcendent meaning.

We learn of our own significance through the
love that is freely offered to us, first by parents
and later by others as well. We learn our
ultimate worth in this love, which is rooted in
the divine love. This is truly essential teaching!
This love teaches us what to do with our lives,
how to serve others, how to do the divine
bidding. Thus loving and learning are
inseparable parts of our tie to the divine.

Rabbi David Teutsch, page 300

The real hero of sacrifice was the ram,
who knew nothing of the plot among the
others.

He sort of volunteered to die in Isaac's place.
I want to sing a song in his memory —
of curly wool, of human eyes,
of the horns, so still in his living head —
and how they turned them into trumpets
after the kill
to sound their war-cry
to sound their crude joy.

I like to see the last scene
as a photo in a glossy fashion magazine
as the young man, tan and pampered
in his designer suit,
and the angel by his side in a
long silk receiving gown,
and both of them empty-eyed,
glancing at two empty places.
And behind them, as a colorful background, the
ram caught in the thicket before the kill,
and the thicket his last friend.
The angel went home,
Isaac went home,
And Abraham and God went home,
But the real hero of the sacrifice
is the ram.

Yehuda Amichai, page 513

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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?

I am grateful for this,
a moment of truth,
grateful to stand before
You
in judgment.

You know me as a liar
and I am flooded with relief
to have my darkest self
expressed at last.

Every day I break my
vows –
to be the dutiful child,
selfless parent, caring
friend, responsible citizen
of the world.

No one sees, no one
knows,
how often I take the easy
way
how often I let myself off
the hook,
how often I give myself
the benefit of the doubt –
every day, every day.

On this day, this one day,
I stand before You naked,
without disguise, without
embellishment, naked,
shivering, ridiculous.

I implore you –
Let me try again.

Merle Feld

Rabbi Jack Riemer, page 346

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I'm cleaning the cupboard
beside the stove, low to the floor,
where pots and pans hide
haphazardly.

Our kitchen is well-used,
baker's rack gleaming
with neat jars of peaches,
string beans, preserves
but one swipe of paper towel
across this hidden surface
and I flinch at the grime
I never noticed before.

This is teshuvah: opening
every closed-up space. I'm
a window smeared with dust,
a cabinet in need of scouring.
It's simple work, but
part of me resists, preferring
distraction to clarity.

When I make the leap
I suddenly can't believe
I ever ignored the dirt.
Hot water blesses my hands
into action. God, help me
put my house in order,
begin the year in readiness
for the wonders I know
are coming, are always here.

Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

The place where we are right

From the place where we are right
Flowers will never grow
In the spring.
The place where we are right
Is hard and trampled
Like a yard.
But doubts and loves
Dig up the world
Like a mole, a plow.
And a whisper will be heard in the place
Where the ruined
House once stood

-Yehuda Amichai

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

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Some of us have cavernous vibrations inside us when we communicate with God. Others are more rational and less messy in our spiritual sense of reality, in our petitions and gratitude and expressions of pain or anger or desolation or praise. Prayer can mean that, in some unique way, we believe we're invited into a relationship with someone who hears us when we speak in silence...

We can pray for a shot at having a life in which we are present and awake and paying attention and being kind to ourselves... Prayer can be motion and stillness and energy – all at the same time. It begins with stopping in our tracks, or with our backs against the wall, or when we are going under the waves, or when we are just so sick and tired of being sick and tired that we surrender, or at least we finally stop running away and at long last walk or lurch or crawl toward something. Or maybe, miraculous, we just release our grip slightly.

*Anne Lamott,
Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers*

I wanted a perfect ending, so I sat down to write the book with the ending in place before there even was an ending. Now I've learned the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle and end. Like my life, this book has ambiguity. Like my life, this book is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, not knowing.

Gilda Radner, The Book of Life

There's a Midrashic story from Leviticus Rabbah, said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, about a boat full of people. Some of those people notice that one man is drilling a hole in the bottom of the boat, and they all protest, but he responds that he's only drilling under his own seat, so what business is it of theirs? The rest of the people, of course, hasten to remind him that his hole will flood the boat for everyone. This is the boat we're all in right now.

The way life works, no-one can say, "What business is it of yours what I am doing?" Everyone is in the same boat, now and throughout history

At this moment the gates are still open. In Judaism we believe in doorways and gates because we recognize that there are thresholds, and that thresholds matter. We can talk all we want on this side of the gates. But at some point we're on the other side, and we're left with consequences, consequences that radiate well beyond us. Today, the gates are closing.

David Ebenbach

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

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Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound.

Let us not rush to offer a band-aid, when the gaping wound requires surgery and complete reconstruction.

Let us not offer false equivalencies, thereby diminishing the particular pain being felt in a particular circumstance in a particular historical moment.

Let us not speak of reconciliation without speaking of reparations and restoration, or how we can repair the breach and how we can restore the loss.

Let us not rush past the loss of this mother's child, this father's child...someone's beloved son.

Let us not value property over people; let us not protect material objects while human lives hang in the balance.

Let us not value a false peace over a righteous justice.

Let us not be afraid to sit with the ugliness, the messiness, and the pain that is life in community together.

Let us not offer clichés to the grieving, those whose hearts are being torn asunder. Instead...

Let us mourn black and brown men and women, those killed extrajudicially every 28 hours.

Let us lament the loss of a teenager, dead at the hands of a police officer who described him as a demon.

Let us weep at a criminal justice system, which is neither blind nor just.

Let us call for the mourning men and the wailing women, those willing to rend their garments of privilege and ease, and sit in the ashes of this nation's original sin.

Let us be silent when we don't know what to say.

Let us be humble and listen to the pain, rage, and grief pouring from the lips of our neighbors and friends.

Let us decrease, so that our brothers and sisters who live on the underside of history may increase.

Let us pray with our eyes open and our feet firmly planted on the ground.

Let us listen to the shattering glass and let us smell the purifying fires, for it is the language of the unheard.

God, in your mercy...

Show me my own complicity in injustice.

Convict me for my indifference.

Forgive me when I have remained silent.

Equip me with a zeal for righteousness.

Never let me grow accustomed or acclimated to unrighteousness.

A Litany For Those Who Aren't Ready For Healing

Dr. Yolanda Pierce, Professor of Black Church Studies, Princeton University

The Yamim Noraim are our time to refuse that everything be closed within us for as long as we live — to open ourselves with the trust of the newborn and the gravity of the dying. To speak courageously and vulnerably, let nothing go unspoken, offer ourselves without reserve. May our imagined crossing of the bridge between life and death help us liberate whatever is closed in us, and say it all as if the moment will never come again.

-Rabbi Melissa Weintraub

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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

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

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

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Malchuyot
Bowling 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

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

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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

“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

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

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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

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

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

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*

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

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

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

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

All the stars are hidden
and the moon is dark tonight.
In the wide expanse of heaven,
north to south -
not a ray of light.

Light a bright candle
in my heart's shadowed tent,
and through the wide expanse of heaven
the light will shine.

Where there is sadness, let us offer love;
where there is fear, let us reach for hope.
On this eve of the New Year
may we bring light to one another.

Machzor Mishkan Hanefesh, page 10

This is the time when one day ends and another
begins,
but the moment of transition is imperceptible.
So too Rosh Hashanah begins as the borders of
the old and new years touch.
What we accomplished in the year that is
ending blends
into the year that begins;
what we hope for in the year that is starting
illuminates what we must leave behind.

Rabbi Richard Hirsh
Machzor Leyamim Noraim, Page 61

A World Where Evil Has no Voice.

If we can be courageous, one more time than
we are fearful; if we can be trusting, one more
time than we are anxious; if we can be
cooperative, one more time than we are
competitive; if we can be forgiving, one more
time than we are vindictive; if we can be loving,
one more time than we are hateful...we will
have moved closer to the next breakthrough in
our evolution.

Jonas Salk

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

Oath of Disloyalty

I am a disloyal Jew.
I am not loyal to a political party.
Nor will I be loyal to dictators and mad kings.
I am not loyal to walls or cages.
I am not loyal to taunts or tweets.
I am not loyal to hatred, to Jew-baiting, to the
gloating connivings of white supremacy.
I am a disloyal Jew.
I am not loyal to any foreign power.
Nor to abuse of power at home.
I am not loyal to a legacy of conquest, erasure
and exploitation.
I am not loyal to stories that tell me who I
should hate.

I am a loyal Jew.
I am loyal to the inconveniences of kindness.
I am loyal to the dream of justice.
I am loyal to this suffering Earth
And to all life.
I am not loyal to any founding fathers.
But I am loyal to the children who will come
And to the quality of the world we leave them.
I am not loyal to what America has become.
But I am loyal to what America could be.
I am loyal to Emma Lazarus. To huddled masses.
To freedom and welcome,
Holiness, hope and love.

Rabbi Irwin Keller

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, Kol Haneshamah Machzor Page 30

We are each created in the image of God.
When we allow the reflections of our own
beings to illuminate the universe, when we
understand that we carry God *within* us, we are
closer to doing the work that will eventually
perfect the world. When we each accept the
purity of our own souls and the purity of the
souls of others, *tikun olam* will have been
achieved.

Rabbi Leila Gal Berner, Page 173

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

A Woman's Meditation

When men were children,
they thought of God as a Father;
When men were slaves,
they thought of God as a Master;
When men were subjects,
they thought of God as a King.
But I am a woman, not a slave, not a subject,
not a child who longs for God as father or
mother.

I might imagine God as teacher or friend, but
those
Images, like king, master, father or mother, are
too small for me now.

God is the force of motion and light in the
universe;
God is the strength of life on our planet;
God is the power moving us to do good;
God is the source of love springing up in us.
God is far beyond what we can comprehend.

Ruth F. Brin

Remember to remember joy. Cook with joy.
Serve with joy. Read with joy. Sing with joy.
Laugh with joy. Fill the space, whatever space
you find yourself in, with so much joy that it
must dance out doors and windows into our
neighborhoods, communities, localities, the
nation, around the globe and into the universe.
Let it touch as many souls as possible along the
way so that their joy also increases. Remember
to remember to increase joy.

Sabrina Sojourner

Do not text me;
I will not notice,
And may ignore it
anyway.
How can one hundred and forty of
anything
compel me
to answer,
unless I merely seek
distraction
and not return?

I will answer
the sound of the shofar
that stayed the hand
that meant to slaughter;
That rang out
and tumbled the walls
that surrounded my heart;
That sang
in aching and awesome mystery
to announce
the presence of God.
I will hear
in this wilderness,
I will hear
in my longing
and I will turn
and turn again
and listen,
and I will
answer the shofar.

Stacy Zisook Robinson

May these hours of rest and renewal
open my heart to joy and my mind to truth.
May all who struggle find rest on this day.
May all who suffer find solace on this day.
May all who hurt find healing on this day.
May all who despair find purpose on this day.
And may I live my life in such a way
that this day may fulfill its promise.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro, Page 52

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

Last year's loose dust has turned into this soft willingness. The wind-flowers have come up trembling, slowly the brackens are up-lifting their curvaceous and pale bodies. The thrushes have come home, none less than filled with mystery, sorrow, happiness, music, ambition. And I am walking out into all of this with nowhere to go and no task undertaken but to turn the pages of this beautiful world over and over, in the world of my mind.

* * *

Therefore, dark past,
I'm about to do it.
I'm about to forgive you
for everything.

Mary Oliver

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

A jellyfish, if you watch it long enough, begins to look like a heart beating. It's the way they pulse, the way they contract swiftly, then release ...If you live to be eighty years old, your heart would beat three billion times. I was thinking about that, trying to imagine a number that large. Three *billion*. Count back three billion hours, and modern humans don't exist - just wild-eyed cave people, all hairy and grunting. Three billion years, and life itself barely exists. And yet here's your heart, doing its job all the time, one beat after the next, all the way up to three billion. But only if you get to live that long.

It's beating when you're sleeping, when you're watching TV, when you're standing at the beach with your toes in the sand. Maybe while you're standing there, you're looking at sparkles of white light on dark ocean, wondering if it's worth getting your hair wet again. You squint a little. You are alive as anybody else right now. Meanwhile, the waves keep rolling over your toes, one after another, like heartbeat, almost - - you can notice or not. And the whole while, your heart just keeps going. It does what it needs to do, one beat after another, until it gets the message that it's time to stop, which might happen a few minutes from now, and you don't even know it.

They are out there, those Jellyfish, pulsing, 23 stings every 5 seconds. They will be out there, maybe for the rest of life on Earth. There are so many things to be scared of in this world: blooms of jellyfish, extinction, a middle school dance. But maybe we can stop feeling so afraid. Maybe we can remember that instead of feeling like a mote of dust, we can remember that all the creatures on this Earth are made from stardust. And we are the only ones who get to *know* it. Humans may be newcomers to this planet. We may be plenty fragile. But we're also the only ones who can decide to change.

Ali Benjamin, The Thing About Jellyfish

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

Rest Me in Peace

I, may I rest in peace - I, who am still living, say,
May I have peace in the rest of my life.
I want peace right now while I'm still alive.
I don't want to wait like that pious man who
wished for one leg
of the golden chair of Paradise, I want a four-
legged chair
right here, a plain wooden chair. I want the rest
of my peace now.
I have lived out my life in wars of every kind:
battles without
and within, close combat, face-to-face, the
faces always
my own, my lover-face, my enemy-face.
Wars with the old weapons - sticks and stones,
blunt axe, words, dull ripping knife, love and
hate,
and wars with newfangled weapons - machine
gun, missile, words, land mines exploding, love
and hate.
I don't want to fulfill my parents' prophecy that
life is war.
I want peace with all my body and all my soul.
Rest me in peace.

Yehuda Amichai

Miracles

Around us, life burst forth with miracles - a glass
of water, a ray of sunshine, a leaf, a caterpillar,
a flower, laughter, raindrops. If you live in
awareness, it is easy to see miracles
everywhere. Each human being is a multiplicity
of miracles. Eyes that see thousands of colors,
shapes, and forms; ears that hear a bee flying or
a thunderclap; a brain that ponders a speck of
dust as easily as the entire cosmos; a heart that
beats in rhythm with the heartbeat of all beings.
When we are tired and feel discouraged by life's
daily struggles, we may not notice these
miracles, but they are always there.

Thich Nat Hanh

How to Pray While the World Burns

Go outside.
Find a patch of grass, sand, dirt.
Sit, kneel, place a hand or just
A finger to the soft earth.
Feel it pulse back.
Open your palms and divine
The words creased between.
Rub the specks of dirt
Between your fingers,
See how they cling to skin,
How they listen in their soft-rough way.
The earth will hold you better
Than God can.
God could not stop the bullets
Or the sale of weapons.
God could not block the open synagogue doors.
But we keep saying, *Shema*,
Listen.
Our God is One. Singular. Invisible.
Hiding in plain sight.
But listen, Israel, our God is beneath
Our feet, between our fingers, coursing
Through our veins.
Our God is trapped
In the poisoned grass,
Where the blood of our brothers cries out,
Where the ants heave centuries on their backs.
Pray to the God who sharpened the tiger's
teeth,
Who stored the roar in its throat.
Pray to the God who gave you lungs and tongue
To sing and groan and hum.
I swear to you
When the leaf shivers in the wind
You have given it chills from all its listening.
The earth hears your prayer.
There is nowhere for God to hide.
Get down on your knees and let
This precious earth soften for the weight of you.
You are held. You are heard.
The wind pulls its blanket over your back,
Smooths the hair from your face,
Touches your cheek
With its cool, trembling hands.

Hila Ratzabi

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

If you always assume
the person sitting next to you
is the Messiah
waiting for some simple human kindness—
You will soon come to weigh your words
and watch your hands.
And if the messiah so chooses
Not to be revealed
In your time—
It will not matter.

Rabbi Daniel Siegel

A Prayer for Responsibility for Children

We pray for children
who sneak popsicles before supper,
who erase holes in math workbook,
who can never find their shoes.
And we pray for those
who stare at photographers from behind cages,
who can't bound down the street in a new pair
of sneakers,
who live in places we wouldn't be caught dead,
who never go to the circus,
who live in an X-rated world.
We pray for children
who bring us sticky kisses and fistfulls of
dandelions,
who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch
money.
And we pray for those
who never get dessert,
who have no safe blanket to drag behind them,
who watch their parents watch them die,
who can't find any bread to steal,
who don't have rooms to clean up,
whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser,
whose monsters are real.
We pray for children
who spend their allowance before Tuesday,
who throw tantrums in the grocery stores and
pick at their food,
who like ghost stories,
who shove dirty clothes under the bed, and
never rinse out the tub,
who get visits from the tooth fairy,

who don't like to be kissed in front of the
carpool,
who squirm in church or temple and scream in
the phone,
whose tears we sometimes laugh at,
and whose smiles can make us cry.
We pray for those
whose nightmares come in the daytime,
who will eat anything,
who haven't ever seen a dentist,
who aren't spoiled by anybody,
who go to bed hungry and cry themselves to
sleep,
who live and move, but have no being.
We pray for children who want to be carried,
and for those who must,
for those we never give up on
and for those who don't get a second chance.
For those we smother...and for those who will
grab
the hand of anybody kind enough to offer it.

--Ina J. Hughs, Children 1990

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

The Revolving Gates

Standing at the gates of Repair
I look behind and am reminded of my loss
Is there something new on these sides of the
gates?

Can I move forward in this New Year
Letting go of short-sightedness, of only having
the good I want,
Shielding myself from the good I am receiving in
this moment?

Will I come to know that the Universe gives to
me by what it removes?
Is there greater learning than only the pain I
have felt with the losses I have experienced?
Are these gates revolving doors, cycles that
evolve?

Am I in my own way?
Allow me to see that my life and my choices can
wind towards goodness
With faith and with grace help me trust that
things emerge as good and whole.

The gates open and close; they spin again.
I arrive at the same spot each time with new
eyes.
Mah Norah HaMakom Hazeh: How awesome is
this place, this moment?!

I did not know
But I am ready to learn

Rabbi Joshua Lesser

For Individual Reflection

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 night 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 middot (improving our characters) and
tikkun olam (repairing the world).

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

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

If you hold your knowledge of self and world wholeheartedly, your heart will at times get broken by loss, failure, defeat, betrayal, or death. What happens next in you and the world around you depends on how your heart breaks. If it breaks apart into a thousand pieces, the result may be anger, depression, and disengagement. If it breaks open into greater capacity to hold the complexities and contradictions of human experience, the result may be new life.

Parker J. Palmer, Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit

I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings

The free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wings
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with fearful trill
of the things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill for the caged bird
sings of freedom

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing
trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright
lawn
and he names the sky his own.

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

Maya Angelou

Kindness

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.

What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white
poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing
inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest
thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense
anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters
and
 purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you every where
like a shadow or a friend.

Naomi Shihab Nye,
The Words Under the Words

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

Readings for Yizkor

I went to visit my mother-in-law today.

She's supposedly there somewhere under that big slab of stone, engraved with her name and her dates and her roles as a mother, wife, teacher and friend.

Personally, I don't buy it. If she's down there, why do I dream that she's walking down the beach barefoot with a bucket, digging for clams?

I lay a seashell on the marble anyway, along with a rock I found in the driveway on the way over. One of the things I loved about her best is how she never let tradition get in the way of happiness, or maybe it's the other way around. I throw a stick for the dog, who runs along the river ignorant of the finality to come for us all. If my mother-in-law were here, I do believe that she would approve that I'm chasing him down in the afternoon sun on the sandy paths of this historic burial ground, the bones of the ancients underfoot, the stones unable to hold down the spirit.

Jessica Leigh Lebos

Jewish tradition teaches that between the living and the dead there is a window, not a wall. The culture of scientific materialism teaches that after death, the links between us and our loved ones who died are forever ended – a brick wall. But, like the rituals of *shiva*, *Kaddish*, and *Yahrzeit*, *Yizkor* opens windows to loved ones who are no longer with us. *Yizkor* creates a sacred space and time, wherein we can open our hearts and minds to the possibility of a genuine interconnection with beloved family members and friends who have left behind the world of the living. *Yizkor* is a window. Within the wellsprings of our infinite souls we find the window of connection between the living and the dead. Prepare to open that window... As you recite *Yizkor* prayers, let your senses and imagination serve as the vehicle of interconnection. For whom are you saying *Yizkor* today? Can you imagine their faces before your eyes? See their smiles; visualize how they might standing if they were next to you. Do you recall the sound of their voices? Hear their words as you stand in prayer. Feel their presence right in this moment. In your mind, in your heart, allow a conversation between you to unfold. What needs to be communicated this year? What's the message you need to hear today? What are the silent prayers of the heart? What remains unspoken? Speak. Listen. Take your time. There is no reason to hurry. This is a timeless moment. Let all the radiance of their love be with you right now.

-Simchah Paull Raphael
Kol Haneshamah Machzor Leyamim Nora'im

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

When I am dead, even then,
I will still love you, I will wait in these poems,
When I am dead, even then
I am still listening to you.
I will still be making poems of you
Out of silence;
Silence will be falling into that silence,
It is building music.

Muriel Rukeyser

Prayer after Pittsburgh

Shall we also sit shiva for America the Beautiful,
land that we love;
Shall we sit shiva for Abraham and Sarah who
welcomed the stranger to their tent;
Shall we sit shiva for the leadership of Moses
who was the humblest of all people;
Shall we sit shiva for Hillel who taught that
which is hateful to you, do not do to another,
the rest is commentary—go and be that
commentary;
Shall we sit shiva for Emma Lazarus whose
poem adorns the Lady who welcomes
immigrants to this country with the torch of
liberty;
For this week we did sit shiva with the Holy One
who made all humans in God's image—as God
sat weeping amidst the ruins of a sanctuary.
There are those who proclaim darkness is light
Who proclaim fake is true
Who say that everyone not like them is
an other.
Who live by stereotype and prejudice
Who seek to divide, disparage and
demean
Yet in the face of the encroaching darkness, we
gather and hold hands proclaiming our
humanity.
Long ago, we ate of the Tree of Knowledge of
good and evil. We know good and evil. Each
week we strive to separate darkness from light,
brokenness from wholeness, helping from
harming.
For there was another tree in the Garden of

Eden. Each week we grasp that Tree of Life as
we return the Torah scroll to the ark. We hold
on to that Torah even as so many more have
joined the too long list of Jews who were killed
only because they were Jews, of black men
killed for being black men, and on and on.
Their deaths were not a kiddush hashem—a
sanctification of God's name. Their deaths were
a horrible tragedy.

The kiddush hashem/sanctification of God's
name is how we will live our lives in the light of
their lives.

We will continue to choose life over death,
caring over callousness, meaning over
meanness.

Od lo avdah tikvateinu—we will not lose hope.
We will organize. We will help. We will march.
We will reach out. We will lobby. We will have
compassion and we will vote.

The time of mourning is past into yizkor.
It is time to get up from shiva.

It is the time to stand—to stand up and cry out.

Rabbi Michael Strassfeld

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

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

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

Readings for Reflection on these Days of Awe
Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation

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*

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
Ukraine,
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*
