

Entering the Gates of a New Year

Sources for Reflection for the
High Holy Day Season 2020.5781

Compiled by Rabbi Audrey Marcus Berkman



Rosh Hashanah



Questions for Reflection

by Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf

Adapted from "Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur Survival Kit"

1. When do I feel that my life is most meaningful?
2. What would bring me more happiness than anything else in the world?
3. What are my three most significant achievements in the past year?
4. What are my biggest mistakes in the past year?
5. What project or goal, if left undone, will I most regret a year from now?
6. If I knew I couldn't fail, what would I try to accomplish?
7. What is the most important decision I need to make this year?
8. What important decision did I avoid making last year?
9. Over the last year, did my most important relationships become closer and deeper, or was there a sense of stagnation and drifting?
10. What can I do to nurture those relationships this year?
11. If I could change one thing about myself, what would it be?
12. Are there any ideals I'd be willing to die for?
13. If I could live my life over, what would I change?
14. What do I want written on my tombstone? And how do I begin living that way now?

Rosh Hashanah

Coming Up On September

By Marge Piercy

White butterflies, with single black fingerprint 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.

From *A Way In: Jewish Mindfulness Program*

As we stand on the edge of the New Year...we can hear the Mystery
whisper,
Enter,
Come in.
Turn toward your relationship with Me,
Your relationship with all life.

Out of fear or habit
The soul hesitates
It cries. It hides.

There is too much pain. There is too much uncertainty
I don't want to go.

I will wait, the Mystery responds.
I will wait for you to awaken,
I will wait for you to remember
That you were born into this fragile existence
To let your heart shatter and shine.

Casting Away

by Marcia Falk

For Tashlich

We cast into the depths of the sea
our sins, and failures, and regrets.
Reflections of our imperfect selves
flow away.

What can we bear,
with what can we bear to part?

We upturn the darkness,
bring what is buried to light.

What hurts still lodge,
what wounds have yet to heal?

We empty our hands,
release the remnants of shame,
let go fear and despair
that have dug their home in us.

Open hands,
opening heart —

The year flows out,
the year flows in.

Yom Kippur

All Vows

by Marcia Falk

For Kol Nidre

All vows —
all promises and pledges —

that we have made to ourselves
and that no longer serve
for the good —

may their grip be loosened

that we be present of mind and heart
to the urgency of the hour.



Instructions

by Rudy Francisco

Gather your mistakes,
rinse them with honesty
and self-reflection,

let dry until you
can see every choice
and the regret
becomes brittle,

cover the
entire surface
in forgiveness,

remind yourself
that you are human

and this too
is a gift.

Confession

by Marcia Falk

Stand at the roads, and consider.
Look into the paths of the past,
see which is the road of goodness.
Walk it, and find tranquility.

—Jeremiah 6:16

In the mirror of our eyes,
the other is reflected;
in the eyes of the other —
ourselves.

We look outward,
inward,
see how we have hurt
and harmed,
how hurt embeds even
in the smallest wounds.
We give ourselves over,
begin to make amends,
begin
to make ourselves whole.

Yom Kippur

Forgive Yourself

by Maya Angelou

I don't know if I continue, even today, always liking myself. But what I learned to do many years ago was to forgive myself...if you live, you will make mistakes. It is inevitable. But once you do and you see the mistake, then you forgive yourself and say, "Well, if I'd known better I'd have done better," that's all. So you say to yourself, "I'm sorry." If we all hold onto the mistake, we can't see our own glory in the mirror because we have the mistake between our faces and the mirror. We can't see what we're capable of being. You can ask forgiveness of others, but in the end the real forgiveness is in one's own self. The real difficulty is to overcome how you think about yourself. If we don't have that we never grow, we never learn, and sure as hell, we should never teach.

When Death Comes

by Mary Oliver

When death comes
like the hungry bear in
autumn;

when death comes and
takes all the bright coins
from his purse

to buy me, and snaps
the purse shut;

when death comes
like the measles-pox

when death comes

like an iceberg between
the shoulder blades,

I want to step through
the door full of curiosity,
wondering:

what is it going to be
like, that cottage of
darkness?

And therefore I look
upon everything

as a brotherhood and a
sisterhood,

and I look upon time as
no more than an idea,

and I consider eternity
as another possibility,

and I think of each life
as a flower, as common

as a field daisy, and as
singular,

and each name a
comfortable music in the
mouth,

tending, as all music
does, toward silence,

and each body a lion of
courage, and something

precious to the earth.

When it's over, I want to
say all my life

I was a bride married to
amazement.

I was the bridegroom,
taking the world into my
arms.

When it's over, I don't
want to wonder

if I have made of my life
something particular,
and real.

I don't want to find
myself sighing and
frightened,

or full of argument.

I don't want to end up
simply having visited
this world

Yom Kippur

By Glennon Doyle Melton

For Yizkor

Grief - like Joy - is holy.

Grief is love's souvenir.

It's our proof that we once loved.

Grief is the receipt we wave in the air that says to the world:

Look! I loved well. Here is my proof that I paid the price.

The Summer Day

by Mary Oliver

Who made the world?

Who made the swan, and the black bear?

Who made the grasshopper?

This grasshopper, I mean-

the one who has flung herself out of the grass,

the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,

who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-

who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.

Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down

into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,

how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,

which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life?

Yom Kippur

“For ten days, the gates are open and the world is fluid. We are finally awake, if only in fits and starts, if only to toss and turn. For ten days, transformation is within our grasp. For ten days, we can imagine ourselves not as fixed and immutable beings, but rather as a limitless field upon which qualities and impulses rise up and fall away again like waves on the sea. Some of these impulses rise up with particular intensity. We may even experience them as afflictions, but they can be the keys to our transformation. Their intensity points to the disequilibrium and dysfunction in us that is in need of transformation. For ten days, the field of mind is like a painting by Kandinsky. Energy and form float in that field, and we have the sense that we can shape our lives by choosing where to invest our focus and intention, by choosing which forms to follow and which to let go. This is not a linear process, not something that takes a clear nor even discernible path. Rather it happens in fits and starts. Sometimes it may not even seem to be happening at all. But the gates are in fact open, and if our intention is aligned with this spiritual reality, then transformation also opens as a real possibility, even if it doesn’t manifest itself right away.”

- Alan Lew

This is Real and You are Entirely Unprepared

“Humanity will not perish for want of information, but only for want of appreciation. The beginning of our happiness lies in the understanding that life without wonder is not worth living. What we lack is not a will to believe, but a will to wonder. Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement. To get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually.”

- Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

“All of us want to be loved unconditionally. We crave that love. We are born craving to be loved unconditionally. Some of us become warped and crippled from the lack of that love, some of us become stunted, some of us sicken, some of us die from the lack of that love. Maybe the health and vibrancy of the universe too depends on a love like that. Maybe the creation is not finished. Maybe the creation, in its ongoing shifting and changing, altering and evolving, requires a robust strength that love alone can provide, a love given freely and unconditionally throughout the coming and going of stars and mountains and suns and planets, in the coming and going of life. We know we are a source of love. We know we have the ability to receive and to give love, to sustain by giving love. We can love the order of the world, receive and acknowledge with love its gifts of life and beauty and one another. We can express love to a universe that requires it, give love despite fear, despite horror and grief, despite suffering, despite our ignorance, love unconditionally despite death. Each of us can give that gift as we are able. I want this gift to be received. I want to participate in the creation in this way now; wherever now might be, in place, in time, among the countless and the far beyond.”

- Patiann Rogers

Yom Kippur

Shema/V'ahavta

Marge Piercy

Shema

Hear, Israel, you are of God and God is one.
Praise the name that speaks us through all time.

V'ahavta

So you shall love what is holy with all your courage, with all your passion
with all your strength.

Let the words that have come down
shine in our words and our actions.

We must teach our children to know and understand them.

We must speak about what is good
and holy within our homes
when we are working, when we are at play,
when we lie down and when we get up.
Let the work of our hands speak of goodness.

Let it run in our blood
and glow from our doors and windows.

We should love ourselves, for we are of God.

We should love our neighbors as ourselves.

We should love the stranger, for we
were once strangers in the land of Egypt
and have been strangers in all the lands of the world since.

Let love fill our hearts with its clear precious water.

Heaven and earth observe how we cherish or spoil our world.

Heaven and earth watch whether we choose life or choose death.

We must chose life so our children/s children may live.

Be quiet and listen to the still small voice within that speaks in love.

Open to that voice, hear it, heed it and work for life.

Let us remember and strive to be good.

Let us remember to find what is holy within and without.

Yom Kippur

Ahavat Olam

Rabbi Rami Shapiro

We are loved by an unending love. We are embraced by arms that find us even when we are hidden from ourselves. We are touched by fingers that soothe us even when we are too proud for soothing. We are counseled by voices that guide us even when we are too embittered to hear. We are loved by an unending love. We are supported by hands that uplift us even in the midst of a fall. We are urged on by eyes that meet us even when we are too weak for meeting. We are loved by an unending love. Embraced, touched, soothed, and counseled . . . ours are the arms, the fingers, the voices; ours are the hands, the eyes, the smiles; we are loved by an unending love.