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SHABBAT THEMES

Light a Candle

Light a candle,
drink wine.
Softly the Sabbath has plucked
the sinking sun.
Slowly the Sabbath descends,
the rose of heaven in her hand.

How can the Sabbath
plant a huge and shining flower
in a blind and narrow heart?
How can the Sabbath
plant the bud of angels
in a heart of raving flesh?
Can the rose of eternity grow
among the slaves
of destruction,
among the slaves
of death?

Light a candle!
Drink wine!
Slowly the Sabbath descends
and in her hand
the flower,
and in her hand
the sinking sun.

Zelda (translated by Marcia Falk)

READINGS: SHABBAT / 732
Introduction to Ma’ariv

Our noisy day has now descended with the sun beyond our sight, and in the silence of our praying place we close the door upon the hectic joys and fears, the accomplishments and anguish, of the week that we have left behind. What was but moments ago the substance of our life has now become its memory, and what we did must now be woven into who we are. On this day we shall not do, but be; we are to walk the outer limits of our humanity, no longer ride unseeing through a world we only vaguely sense beneath our cushioned wheels. On this day heat and warmth and light must come from deep within ourselves; no longer can we tear apart the world to make our fire. On this day, but a breath away from our creation, we are to breathe in a world from which we may no longer feel apart, but as close as eye to blossom, and ear to the singing in the night. On this day we must open wide the windows behind which we have hidden from the world, and send forth hand and heart to learn where we have come, and what we have become.

Richard Levy (adapted)

We come together on this Shabbat, each bringing to this sanctuary a private world of hopes, of fears, of dreams. Some of us are burdened by anxieties and cares that all but crush our faith in the future. Others have hearts filled with happiness, grateful for the joys of the past week, yet aware that even the most fortunate are vulnerable before the mystery of tomorrow. Every life is a unique blending of joy and sorrow, of fulfillment and frustration. Beneath our uniqueness we are all bound together by our common humanity. All of us most deeply yearn for the blessings of freedom and peace. Each of us seeks the personal liberation of a mind that is not enslaved to conventional wisdom, a heart that is able to love without fear, a spirit that cries “yes!” to the universe. Each of us strives too for the inner peace that comes with finding a harmony between what we want out of life and what we can have, between our aspirations and our abilities. This is the Shabbat peace to which we aspire.

733 / READINGS: SHABBAT
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Song of the Sabbath / Das Gezang fon Shabes

I quarreled with kings till the Sabbath,
I fought with the six kings
of the six days of the week.

Sunday they took away my sleep.
Monday they scattered my salt.
And on the third day, my God,
they threw out my bread: whips flashed
across my face. The fourth day
they caught my dove, my flying dove,
and slaughtered it.
It was like that till Friday morning.

This is my whole week,
the dove’s flight dying.

735 / READINGS: SHABBAT
At nightfall Friday
I lit four candles,
and the queen of the Sabbath came to me.
Her face lit up the whole world,
and made it all a Sabbath.
My scattered salt
shone in its little bowl,
and my dove, my flying dove,
clapped its wings together,
and licked its throat.
The Sabbath queen blessed my candles,
and they burned with a pure, clean flame.
The light put out the days of the week
and my quarreling with the six kings.
The greenness of the mountains
is the greenness of the Sabbath.
The silver of the lake
is the silver of the Sabbath.
The singing of the wind
is the singing of the Sabbath.

And my heart's song
is an eternal Sabbath.

Kadia Molodowsky (translated from Yiddish by Jean Valentine)
Wellfleet Sabbath

The hawk eye of the sun slowly shuts.
The breast of the bay is softly feathered
dove grey. The sky is barred like the sand
when the tide trickles out.

The great doors of the Sabbath are swinging
open over the ocean, loosing the moon
floating up slow distorted vast, a copper
balloon just sailing free.

The wind slides over the waves, patting
them with its giant hand, and the sea
stretches its muscles in the deep,
purrs and rolls over.

The sweet beeswax candles flicker
and sigh, standing between the phlox
and the roast chicken. The wine shines
its red lantern of joy.

Here on this piney sandpit, the Shekhinah
comes on the short strong wings of the seaside
sparrow raising her song and bringing
down the fresh clean night.

We know what to do with space but do not know what to do
about time, except to make it subservient to space, or to while
it away, to kill time. However, time is life, and to kill time is to
murder. Most of us seem to labor for the sake of things of space.
As a result we suffer from a deeply rooted dread of time and
stand aghast when compelled to look into its face. Shrinking
from facing time, we escape for shelter to things of space.

737 / READINGS: SHABBAT
Most of us do not live in time but run away from it; we do not see its face, but its make-up. The past is either forgotten or preserved as a cliché, and the present moment is either bartered for a silly trinket or beclouded by false anticipations. The present moment is a zero, and so is the next moment, and a vast stretch of life turns out to be a series of zeros, with no real number in front.

Blind to the marvel of the present moment, we live with memories of moments missed, in anxiety about an emptiness that lies ahead. We are unprepared when the problem strikes us in unmitigated form.

Time is our most important frontier, the advance region of significant being, a region where our true freedom lies. Space divides us, time unites us. We wage wars over things of space; the treasures of time lie open to every one of us.

Time has independent ultimate significance; it is of more majesty and more evocative of awe than even a sky studded with stars. Gliding gently in the most ancient of all splendors, it tells so much more than space can say in its broken language of things, playing symphonies upon the instruments of isolated beings, unlocking the earth and making it happen. Time is the process of creation, and things of space are results of creation. When looking at space we see the products of creation; when intuiting time we hear the process of creation. Things of space exhibit a deceptive independence. They show off a veneer of limited permanence. Things created conceal the Creator. It is the dimension of time wherein we meet God, wherein we become aware that every instant is an act of creation, a Beginning, opening up new roads for ultimate realizations. *Time is the presence of God in the world of space,* and it is within time that we are able to sense the unity of all beings.

Abraham Joshua Heschel

**READINGS: SHABBAT** / 738
The Sabbath expresses for modern Jews, as it did for their ancestors, the thought that the world is so constituted that we can achieve salvation if, by adhering to valid ideals, we put ourselves in contact with the creative forces that shape life and make it worth living. Since we identify God with that aspect of reality which gives to life its supreme value or holiness, this is but another way of saying in more traditional language that the Sabbath expresses for us the faith that humanity can achieve salvation by cleaving to God, the Source of salvation.

But the Sabbath is not only a symbol of the salvation to be achieved by communion with God. It is itself an instrument that we may employ to advantage in our pursuit of salvation. We need perhaps more than ever before to terminate each week with a day that shall stimulate our thirst for salvation and keep us faithful to the ideals that lead to its attainment. Otherwise our mere preoccupation with the business of “making a living,” that is, of securing the conditions indispensable to life, tends to absorb all our attention, and life itself becomes empty and meaningless. We work to keep alive that we may work to keep alive, until our powers are spent in this weary treadmill, and death brings suacease of labor. If life is to be lived zestfully, and to employ all those human faculties the full exercise of which calls forth true joy in being alive, we dare not permit life to sink to such a level of mere preoccupation with the problem of survival. The Sabbath, with its insistence upon interrupting the routine of our daily business and concerning ourselves with spiritual values, helps to save us from such a fate.

Mordecai M. Kaplan (adapted)
PRAYER

Teach me my God, a blessing, a prayer
On the mystery of a withered leaf
On ripened fruit so fair
On the freedom to see, to sense,
To breathe, to know, to hope, to despair.

Teach my lips a blessing, a hymn of praise
As each morning and night
You renew Your days,
Lest my days be as the one before
Lest routine set my ways.

Leah Goldberg (translated by Pinna Prfi)

READINGS: PRAYER / 740
Be a Jew / Zayn a Yid

Being a Jew means running forever to God
even if you are God’s betayer,
means expecting to hear any day,
even if you are a nay sayer,
the blare of Messiah’s horn;
means, even if you wish to,
you cannot escape God’s snares,
you cannot cease to pray—
even after all the prayers,
even after all the “evens”.

Aaron Zeitin (translated from the Yiddish by Robert Friend [adapted])

741 / READINGS: PRAYER
Prayer requires no consecrated edifice and no appointed hour. Indeed it needs no words or forms fixed and eternal. Prayer is a step on which we rise from the self we are to the self we wish to be. Prayer is not an escape from duty. It is no substitute for the deed. Prayer seeks the power to do wisely, to act generously, to live helpfully. Prayer takes us beyond the self. Joining our little self to the selfhood of humanity, it gives our wishes the freedom to grow large and broad and inclusive. Our prayers are answered not when we are given what we ask, but when we are challenged to be what we can be.

Morris Adler (adapted)

A long time ago, before anything had a name, we didn’t know that we were man or woman, human or animal, male or female. When the wild reeds bowed their heads in the wind, we bowed our heads too, for it was the same spirit—breath that breathed through us every second, every hour, every day of our lives. At dawn when the brilliant orange squash blossoms opened gently, gently at the first warm kiss of sun, we too opened our eyes and uncurled from sleep, stretching wide, stretching far, rejoicing as every part of our bodies came to life again. And when the rains came forth, loving Earth so much that she grew fruits and berries and nuts to feed us with, we were full of her joy and we loved each other and we grew our own children to eat Earth’s joys, her fruits, so that the rains would come again and visit her.

It was before we were called man or woman, even before we could speak one word. In those days we prayed with our entire beings, in the wind, in the sun, in the rain; every second, every day, every hour of our lives; at the rising of the sun and the dark of the moon, at the birth of the son and the death of the grandmother, at the wedding of two lovers, at the buzzing of the Spring. We breathed, we bowed, we laughed, we wept. This was before we called it prayer.

Pnina V. Adelman

READINGS: PRAYER / 742
Look at this day,
For it is life,
The very life of life.
In its brief course lie all
The realities and verities of existence,
The bliss of growth,
The splendor of action,
The glory of power—
For yesterday is but a dream,
And tomorrow is only a vision.
But today, well lived,
Makes every yesterday a dream of happiness
And every tomorrow a vision of hope.
Look well, therefore, to this day.

Sanskrit Proverb

Strange is our situation here upon earth. Each of us comes for a short visit, not knowing why, yet sometimes seeming to divine a purpose. From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know: that we are here for the sake of each other, above all, for those upon whose smile and well-being our own happiness depends, and also for the countless unknown souls with whose fate we are connected by a bond of sympathy. Many times a day I realize how much my own outer and inner life is built upon the labors of others, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received and am still receiving.

Albert Einstein (adapted)

743 / READINGS: PRAYER
Prayer is not a stratagem for occasional use, a refuge to resort to now and then. It is rather like an established residence for the innermost self. All things have a home, the bird has a nest, the fox has a hole, the bee has a hive. A soul without prayer is a soul without a home. Weary, sobbing, the soul, after roaming through a world festered with aimlessness, falsehoods and absurdities, seeks a moment in which to gather up its scattered life, in which to divest itself of enforced pretensions and camouflagé, in which to simplify complexities, in which to call for help without being a coward. Such a home is prayer. Continuity, permanence, intimacy, authenticity, earnestness are its attributes. For the soul, home is where prayer is.

In her cottage, even the poorest person may bid defiance to misery and malice. That cottage may be frail, its roof may shake, the wind may blow through it, the storms may enter it, but there is where the soul expects to be understood. Just as the body, so is the soul in need of a home.

Everybody must build his own home; everybody must guard the independence and the privacy of her prayers. It is the source of security for the integrity of conscience, for whatever inkling we attain of eternity. At home I have a parent who judges and cares, who has regard for people, and when I fail and go astray, misses me. I will never give up my home.

What is a soul without prayer? A soul runaway or a soul evicted from its own home. To those who have abandoned their home, the road may be hard and dark and far, yet do not be afraid to steer back. If you prize grace and eternal meaning, you will discover them upon arrival.
How marvelous is my home. I enter as a supplicant and emerge as a witness; I enter as a stranger and emerge as next of kin. I may enter spiritually shapeless, inwardly disfigured, and emerge wholly changed. It is in moments of prayer that my image is forged, that my striving is fashioned. To understand the world I must love my home. It is difficult to perceive luminosity anywhere if there is no light in my own home. It is in the light of prayer’s radiance that I find my way even in the dark. It is prayer that illumines my way. As my prayers, so is my understanding.

Abraham Joshua Heschel (adapted)

There are times when you must prepare yourself before you can pray.
Reciting Psalms or studying Torah before prayer may provide the strength you need.
But take care also to avoid giving yourself too fully to these preparations, lest they consume all your strength and leave no room for prayer itself.

* * *

Enter into prayer slowly.
Do not exhaust your strength, but proceed step by step.
Even if you are not aroused as your prayer begins, give close attention to the words you speak.
As you grow in strength and God helps you to draw near, you can even say the words more quickly and remain in God’s Presence.

* * *

745 / READINGS: PRAYER
Put all your strength into the words proceeding from letter to letter with such concentration that you lose awareness of your bodily self. It will then seem to you that the letters themselves are flowing into one another. This uniting of the letters is our greatest joy. If joy is felt as two human bodies come together, how much greater must be the joy of this union in spirit!

*         *

Do not think that the words of prayer as you say them go up to God. It is not the words themselves that ascend; it is rather the burning desire of your heart that rises like smoke toward heaven. If your prayer consists only of words and letters, and does not contain your heart’s desire—how can it rise up to God?

 Nahman of Bratslav (translated by Arthur Green and Barry Holtz)

READINGS: PRAYER / 746
A Sense of Your Presence

Among our many appetites
There is a craving after God.

Among our many attributes
There is a talent for worshiping God.

Jews who wandered in deserts beneath the stars
Knew their hearts were hungry for God.

Jews who studied in candle-lit ghetto rooms
Thirsted longingly after God.

In tent or hut or slum
Jewish women prayed to God.

But we who are smothered with comfort
Sometimes forget to listen.

Help us, O God, to recognize our need,
To hear the yearning whisper of our hearts.

Help us to seek the silence of the desert
And the thoughtfulness of the house of study.

Bless us, like our ancestors in ancient days
With that most precious gift: a sense of Your presence.

Brush us with the wind of the wings of Your being.
Fill us with the awe of Your holiness.
We, too, will praise, glorify, and exalt Your name.

Ruth Brin (adapted)

747 / READINGS: PRAYER
Untie

Dear God,
We are bound with very tight knots.
They choke off air and stop the blood from pulsating freely.
The knots make us like computers with carefully controlled
circuitry.
The knots in our brains tie our creativity—our link with You.
We follow the knot around in its intricacy—but it remains a
knot.
The knots in our hearts keep us from crying and dancing when
we long to—
They tie us to the posts of the fences that separate us from each
other.
The knots in our muscles keep our teeth clenched, our jaws
locked, our legs crossed, our shoulders stooped, our backs bent,
our chests from inhaling and exhaling the full sweetness of life’s
breath.
O, God, untie all our knots!

Te Deum

Not because of victories
I sing,
having none,
but for the common sunshine,
the breeze,
the largess of the spring.

Not for victory
but for the day’s work done
as well as I was able;
not for a seat upon the dais
but at the common table.

READINGS: PRAYER / 748
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The Sunset Prayer / Davenen Minha

I'll let you in on a secret
about how one should pray the sunset prayer.
It's a juicy bit of praying,
like strolling on grass,
 nobody's chasing you, nobody hurries you.
You walk toward your creator
with gifts in pure, empty hands.
The words are golden,
their meaning is transparent,
it's as though you're saying them
for the first time.
If you don’t catch on
that you should feel a little elevated,
you’re not praying the sunset prayer.
The tune is sheer simplicity,
you’re just lending a helping hand
to the sinking day.
It’s a heavy responsibility.
You take a created day
and you slip it
into the archive of life,
where all our lived-out days are lying together.
The day is departing with a quiet kiss.
It lies open at your feet
while you stand saying the blessings.
You can’t create anything yourself, but you
can lead the day to its end and see
clearly the smile of its going down.

See how whole it all is,
not diminished for a second,
how you age with the days
that keep dawning,
how you bring your lived-out day
as a gift to eternity.

Jacob Glazenstein (translated from the Yiddish by Ruth Whitman)

751 / READINGS: PRAYER
Submit to God, uniquely conscious soul,  
And rush to worship God in reverence.  
Day and night turn toward your eternal source—  
Why pursue vanity and emptiness?  
Filled with life you resemble the living God  
Who is invisible as you are unseen.  
If your Creator be pure and flawless,  
Know that you too are perfect and pure.  
The Mighty One holds the heavens on one arm,  
As you uphold the silent body.  
My soul, present your songs to your Rock  
Who has not placed your form in the dust.  
My limbs, praise your Rock continuously  
The one whose name every soul does praise.

Solomon ibn Gabriel (translated by Reena Spicerhandler)

**READINGS: PRAYER / 752**
I Know Not Your Ways

I know not your ways—
A sunset is for me
a godset.
Where are you going,
God?
Take me along,
if, in the “along,”
it is light,
God.

I am afraid of the dark.

Malka Hechtz Tussman (translated from the Yiddish by Marcia Falk)

753 / READINGS: PRAYER
NATURE THEMES

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I look up to the sky and the stars,
And down to the earth and the things that creep there,
And I consider in my heart how their creation
Was planned with wisdom in every detail.
See the heavens above like a tent,
Constructed with loops and hooks,
And the moon with its stars, like a shepherdess
Sending her sheep into the reeds;
The moon itself among the clouds,
Like a ship sailing under its banners;
The clouds like a girl in her garden
Moving, and watering the myrtle-trees;
The dew-mist—a woman shaking
Drops from her hair to the ground.
The inhabitants turn, like animals, to rest,
(Their palaces are their stables);
And all fleeing from the fear of death,
Like a dove pursued by the falcon.
And these are compared at the end to a plate
Which is smashed into innumerable shards.

Where We Can Find God

Where will I find God
Whose glory fills the universe?

I find God
Wherever the farmer ploughs a furrow through the hard soil,
Wherever the quarryman pounds the stone to gravel,
Wherever one earns her bread by the sweat of her brow,
In the company of the friendless, the afflicted, the lowly, the lost,
There God abides in sun and shower.

755 / READINGS: NATURE
I find God
Wherever the mind is free to follow its own bent,
Wherever words come out from the depth of truth,
Wherever tireless striving stretches its arms toward perfection,
Wherever people struggle for freedom and right,
Wherever the scientist toils to unbare the secrets of nature,
Wherever the poet strings pearls of beauty in lyric lines,
Wherever glorious deeds are done.

I find God
In the merry shouts of children at play,
In the lullaby the mother sings, rocking her baby to sleep,
In the slumber that falls on the infant’s eyelids,
    And in the smile that plays on his sleeping lips.

I find God
When the dawn comes with her golden cornucopia,
Or when evening falls, bringing peace and rest from the
    Western ocean of rest.
God is in the joy that streams from heaven with the morning
    light,
In the current of life that courses day and night through my
    sinews and through all nature,
In the life that throbs exultant in the dust of the earth and
    through the blades of grass innumerable,
    And that flows, in a multitude of tempestuous waves, through
    the leaves and flowers.

I find God
In the wealth of those passing delights that live but for a
    moment,
In the pulsebeat of a life that comes from eternity and dances
    in my own blood,
In birth that keeps renewing the generations,
    And in death that keeps knocking on the doors of life.

Rabindranath Tagore (translated and adapted)

READINGS: NATURE / 756
God The Life of Nature

Our ancestors acclaimed the God
Whose handiwork they read
In the mysterious heavens above,
And in the varied scene of earth below,
In the orderly march of days and nights,
Of seasons and years,
And in the checkered fate of humankind.

Night reveals the limitless caverns of space,
Hidden by the light of day,
And unfolds horizonless vistas
Far beyond imagination's ken.
The mind is staggered,
Yet soon regains its poise,
And peering through the boundless dark,
Orients itself anew
By the light of distant suns
Shrunk to glittering sparks.
The soul is faint,
Yet soon revives,
And learns to spell once more the name of God
Across the newly visioned firmament.

Lift your eyes, look up;
Who made these stars?

God is the oneness
That spans the fathomless deeps of space
And the measureless eons of time,
Binding them together in deed,
As we do in thought.

757 / READINGS: NATURE
God is the sameness
In the elemental substance of stars and planets,
Of this our earthly abode
And of all that it holds.

God is the unity
Of all that is,
The uniformity of all that moves,
The rhythm of all things
And the nature of their interaction.

God is the mystery of life,
Enkindling inert matter
With inner drive and purpose.

God is the creative flame
That transfigures lifeless substance,
Leaping into ever higher realms of being,
Brightening into the radiant glow of feeling,
Till it runs into the white fire of thought.

And though no sign of living things
Breaks the eternal silence of the spheres,
We cannot deem this earth,
This tiny speck in the infinitude,
Alone instinct with God.

By that token
Which unites the worlds in bonds of matter
Are all the worlds bound
In the bond of Life.

God is in the faith
By which we overcome
The fear of loneliness, of helplessness,
Of failure and of death.

READINGS: NATURE / 758
God is in the hope
Which, like a shaft of light,
Cleaves the dark abyss
Of sin, of suffering, and of despair.

God is in the love
Which creates, protects, forgives.

It is God’s spirit
That broods upon the chaos we have wrought,
Disturbing its static wrongs,
And stirring into life the formless beginnings
Of the new and better world.

In Praise

GENESIS 1, 2

Hail the hand that scattered space with stars,
Wrapped whirling world in bright blue blanket, air,
Made worlds within worlds, elements in earth,
Souls within skins, every one a teeming universe,
Every tree a system of semantics, and pushed
Beyond probability to place consciousness
On this cooling crust of burning rock.

Oh praise that hand, mind, heart, soul, power or force
That so inclosed, separated, limited planets, trees, humans
Yet breaks all bounds and borders
To lavish on us light, love, life
This trembling glory.

759 / READINGS: NATURE
Trees

To be a giant and keep quiet about it,
To stay in one's own place;
To stand for the constant presence of process
And always to seem the same;
To be steady as a rock and always trembling,
Having the hard appearance of death
With the soft, fluent nature of growth,
One's Being deceptively armored,
One's Becoming deceptively vulnerable;
To be so tough, and take the light so well,
Freely providing forbidden knowledge
Of so many things about heaven and earth
For which we should otherwise have no word—
Poems or people are rarely so lovely,
And even when they have great qualities
They tend to tell you rather than exemplify
What they believe themselves to be about,
While from the moving silence of trees,
Whether in storm or calm, in leaf and naked,
Night or day, we draw conclusions of our own,
Sustaining and unnoticed as our breath,
And perilous also—though there has never been
A critical tree—about the nature of things.

Howard Nemerov

Readings: Nature / 760
The essence of the Jewish conception of life seems to me to lie in an affirmative attitude to the life of all creation. The life of the individual has meaning only insofar as it aids in making the life of every living thing nobler and more beautiful. Life is sacred—that is to say, it is the supreme value, to which all other values are subordinate. The hallowing of the supra-individual life brings in its train a reverence for everything spiritual—a particularly characteristic feature of the Jewish tradition.

But the Jewish tradition also contains something else, something which finds splendid expression in many of the Psalms, namely a sort of intoxicated joy and amazement at the beauty and grandeur of this world, of which humankind can just form a faint notion. It is the feeling from which true scientific research draws its spiritual substance, but which also seems to find expression in leafy trees and the crash of waves.

Albert Einstein

In No Way

I am of the family of the universe, and with all of us together I do not fear being alone; I can reach out and touch a rock or a hand or dip my feet in water. Always there is somebody close by, and when I speak, I am answered by a plane’s roar or the bird’s whistling or the voices of others in conversation far apart from me. When I lie down to sleep, I am in the company of the dark and the stars.

Breathe to me, sheep in the meadow. Sun and moon, my father and my father’s brother, kiss me on the brow with your light. My sister, earth, holds me up to be kissed. Sun and moon, I smile at you both and spread my arms in affection and lay myself down at full length for the earth to know I love it too and am never to be separated from it. In no way shall death part us.

David Ignatow

761 / READINGS: NATURE
God, grant me the ability to be alone;  
may it be my custom to go outdoors each day  
among the trees and grass,  
among all growing things,  
and there may I be alone,  
and enter into prayer,  
to talk with the One to whom I belong.  
May I express there everything in my heart,  
and may all the foliage of the field  
(all grasses, trees and plants)  
may they all awake at my coming,  
to send the powers of their life  
into the words of my prayer  
so that my prayer and speech  
are made whole  
through the life and spirit of all growing things,  
which are made as one  
by their transcendent  
Source.

Attributed to Nahman of Bratzlav (translated by Shmuel Kanner)

READINGS: NATURE / 762
My thoughts awaken me to see you;  
They show me in my heart's eye your deeds;  
They teach me to tell your wonders,  
"When I behold your heavens,  
The work your fingers made."

Around its course the disk of heaven walks,  
A potter's wheel enwhirling the world;  
It has no lips, and yet it tells your glory  
To earth, unmoved within its orbit,  
Suspended in the void,  
By cords of your love stayed.

763 / READINGS: NATURE
Thither the sun yearns, and there burns,
And of its light some to the moon lends.
While heaven’s sphere is spread out like a tent,
With stars blooming on it, a garden,
Proclaiming how profound
The plans that you have laid.

Moses ibn Ezra (translated by Raymond Schadlin [adapted])

כַּתָּגְדֵי שָׁעִי בָּהוּ מִשְׁמַר הַכֹּבֵּרִים
כַּתָּגְדֵי קָרָא הַמִּשָּׁבָּרִים בָּהוּ צַיִּי
מַכְמַבַּל הָאֹלֶּה גָּוִי מַשְׁלָלָה יִשְׁעֵמָה
לָא กָּחָנְנָה כָּנָה לֶחוֹשֵׁב בֶּמָּשָׁבָּרִים
לָא בְּשָׁנָה הַמִּשָּׁבָּרִים בֶּן פְּלָט
רַקְמָה הָאֹלֶּה בָּהוּ זְרָה יַרְוָה זְבָלָבָּכִים

With the ink of its showers and rains,
with the quill of its lightning,
with the hand of its clouds,
winter wrote a letter upon the garden,
in purple and blue.
No artist could ever conceive the like of that.
And this is why the earth, grown jealous of the sky,
embroidered stars in the folds of the flower-beds.

Solomon ibn Gabirof (translated by T. Carmi)

READINGS: NATURE / 764
The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Wendell Berry

765 / READINGS: NATURE
How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land?...If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them?

Every part of this earth is sacred. Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters; the deer, the horse, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the juices in the meadows, the body heat of the pony, and people—all belong to the same family....

This shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you land, you must remember that it is sacred, and you must teach your children that it is sacred and that each ghostly reflection in the clear water of the lakes tells of events and memories...The water's murmur is the voice of my father's father.

The rivers are our brothers, they quench our thirst. The rivers carry our canoes, and feed our children. If we sell you our land, you must remember, and teach your children, that the rivers are our brothers and yours, and you must henceforth give the rivers the kindness you would give any brother.

You must teach your children that the ground beneath their feet is the ashes of our grandparents. So that they will respect the land, tell your children that the earth is rich with the lives of our kin. Teach your children...that the earth is our mother. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth. If we spit upon the ground, we spit upon ourselves.

This we know: the earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth. All things are connected. We are kin after all....

Ted Perry, 1970. Speech often attributed to Chief Seattle, 1851

READINGS: NATURE / 766
EXODUS THEMES

During the last two thousand years, Jews have never wearied of referring to the Exodus. In the morning and evening prayers, in the thanksgiving benediction after each meal, and in the Kiddush inaugurating Shabbat and Festivals, Jews have thanked God for having delivered their ancestors from Egypt. And every year with the return of the Festival of Pesah they have recounted to their children the story of that redemption. The main motive which has kept alive the memory of the Exodus during the last two thousand years has undoubtedly been the hope that, as God had wrought miracles for Israel in the past, had been gracious to them and had delivered them from bondage, so will God, when the time comes, once again manifest power on behalf of the Jewish people, free them from oppression and restore them to their land.

Changes, however, have taken place in human life which render that simple version of Exodus and its meaning no longer adequate. Jews are still the victims of oppression. But they have entered into such intimate relationship with the life of the world about them that they can no longer envisage their own deliverance except as a phase of general human deliverance. If miracles are to be enacted as part of the future redemption, they cannot be conceived as similar to those which tradition associates with the Exodus. The new redemption to which Jews look forward involves the redemption of society in general from present ills. It implies the transformation of human nature and social institutions through the divine power of intelligence and goodwill. There can be no question that in the Torah the story of the Exodus has the connotation that to help the oppressed is an essential attribute of godhood.

Mordecai M. Kaplan (adapted)

767 / READINGS: EXODUS
So pharaonic oppression, deliverance, Sinai, and Canaan are still with us, powerful memories shaping our perceptions of the political world. The “door of hope” is still open; things are not what they might be—even when what they might be isn’t totally different from what they are.... We still believe, or many of us do, what the Exodus first taught, or what it has commonly been taken to teach, about the meaning and possibility of politics and about its proper form:
—first, that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt;
—second, that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land;
—and third, that “the way to the land is through the wilderness.” There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching.

Michael Walter

I Shall Sing to the Lord a New Song

I, Miriam, stand at the sea
and turn
to face the desert
stretching endless and
still.

My eyes are dazzled
The sky brilliant blue
Sunburnt sands unyielding white.
My hands turn to dove wings.

My arms
reach
for the sky
and I want to sing
the song rising inside me.
My mouth open
I stop.

Where are the words?
Where the melody?

READINGS: EXODUS / 768
In a moment of panic
My eyes go blind.
Can I take a step
Without knowing a
Destination?
Will I falter
Will I fall
Will the ground sink away from under me?
The song still unformed—
How can I sing?
To take the first step—
To sing a new song—
Is to close one’s eyes
and dive
into unknown waters.
For a moment knowing nothing risking all—
But then to discover
The waters are friendly
The ground is firm.
And the song—
the song rises again.
Out of my mouth
come words lifting the wind.
And I hear
for the first
the song
that has been in my heart
silent
unknown
even to me.

Ruth H. Sohn

769 / READINGS: EXODUS
Sinai

The men rushed ahead
They always do
in battle, to defend us
in eagerness, to get the best view
to be there with each other
as a community

We followed later
some of us waited
till we were done nursing
others waited to go together
with those who were still nursing
most of us were herding several children
carrying a heavy two year old
On one hip
(it's hard to move forward quickly
with a heavy two year old on one hip)
last came the very pregnant ones
when you're that far along
it's your instinct to be afraid of crowds
afraid of being jostled
you hang back
you feel safer being last

Anyway, I was one of the ones
with a heavy two year old on one hip
such a sweet body he had
warm soft delicious flesh
he was afraid of the noise
he clung to me so tightly
his fingers in my neck
his face buried in my neck

READINGS: EXODUS / 770
I showered him with little kisses
not so much to comfort him
as out of habit
and my pleasure

The earth shook, it vibrated
and so did I
my chest, my legs
all vibrating
I sank to my knees
all the while with this little boy attached to me
trying to merge himself back into me

I closed my eyes
to be there more intensely
it all washed over me
wave upon wave upon wave...

And afterwards, the stillness
of a nation, a people
who had been flattened
forever imprinted
slowly raising themselves
rising again from the earth

How to hold onto that moment
washed clean
reborn
holy silence

771 / READINGS: EXODUS
SOCIAL ACTION

We cannot merely pray to God to end war;
For the world was made in such a way
That we must find our own path of peace
Within ourselves and with our neighbor.

   We cannot merely pray to God to root out prejudice;
   For we already have eyes
   With which to see the good in all people
   If we would only use them rightly.

We cannot merely pray to God to end starvation;
For we already have the resources
With which to feed the entire world
If we would only use them wisely.

   We cannot merely pray to God to end despair;
   For we already have the power
   To clear away slums and to give hope
   If we would only use our power justly.

We cannot merely pray to God to end disease:
For we already have great minds
With which to search out cures and healings
If we would only use them constructively.

   Therefore we pray instead
   For strength, determination, and will power,
   To do instead of merely to pray
   To become instead of merely to wish;
   That our world may be safe,
   And that our lives may be blessed.

   Jack Werner (adapted)

READINGS: SOCIAL ACTION / 772
We cannot actually picture goodness. It is not a being; it is a force, like electricity. Nobody ever actually saw electricity. We know that it exists. We can see and feel what electricity does. If we have an electric heater and connect it, we get heat. If we have an electric motor and attach it to a vehicle, we get the vehicle to move. In other words, we get to know what electricity is by what it does. In the same way, we get to know what God is by what God makes us do: when people are, so to speak, connected with God, they do good things. We call such people godly and their acts godly. Whenever this force is active, we say that God has exercised influence and power.

Belief in God, therefore, has to do...with human nature, with the way individual men and women act, with their attitudes, their ideas of what is good and what is bad, with their ideals. Belief in God has to do with our attitude toward life itself. Do we find life good? Is life worthwhile? If we believe that life is worthwhile, that it is good, that, in spite of sickness and accidents, in spite of poverty and war, in spite of all the sad and difficult conditions in the world, the world is a wonderful place to live in and can be made a still better place, then we believe in God. When we believe in God, we cannot be discouraged because we believe that all the misery in the world is due, not to the fact that misery must be there, that it is a necessary part of life, but to the fact that we have not yet discovered how to do away with that misery.

Ira Eisenstein (adapted)

773 / READINGS: SOCIAL ACTION
In Germany, the Nazis first came for the Communists, and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Socialists, but I did not speak out because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak out for me. To make sure this does not happen again, the injustice to anyone anywhere must be the concern of everyone everywhere.

Quoted by Martin Niemoller

In religion, we try to find answers to the elementary questions that confront each of us every morning. What meaning and what value is to be ascribed to our life? What am I to this world? What is my purpose in it? What may I hope for in this world? I do not want to consider my existence merely as one that rises and perishes among the multitude of beings that constitute the universe, but as a life that has value.

Albert Schweitzer

READINGS: SOCIAL ACTION / 774
PEACE THEMES

“A Prayer for Peace” can be found on pages 422-423.

Shalom is one of the many names by which God is known in Judaism. It is the name by which God will bless you if you dedicate yourselves to each other in accordance with the divine will. The name Shalom embraces everything that is calculated to render life happy, useful and holy. It denotes, in the first place, love—love that is binding and everlasting, love that does not fade with the flowers or pass with the sunshine. Shalom is the peace that is secured when we have done our share toward our companions, whenever we bring light into hearts that are dark with despair and cheer into souls overcast with gloom. No language possesses a word that so accurately describes the serenity of the soul which we experience whenever we have thus made God’s presence real to men and women. By seeking to promote the happiness of your neighbor, by engaging in every effort to be of help to your companion and by emphasizing that aspect of life that we call holy, you will realize the full blessing of love and peace, the blessing of Shalom.  

Mordecai M. Kaplan (adapted)

When the blessing of shalom
Is lacking,
However much we have
Of other blessings—
Wealth or power,
Fame or family,
Even health—
These all appear
As nothing.

But when shalom
Is present,
However little else we have
Somehow seems
Sufficient.

775 / READINGS: PEACE
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A peace
without the big noise of beating swords into plowshares,
without words, without
the heavy thud of the rubber stamp; I want it
gentle over us, like lazy white foam.
A little rest for the wounds—
who speaks of healing?
(And the orphans' outcry is passed from one generation
to the next, as in a relay race:
that baton never falls.)
I want it to come
like wildflowers,
suddenly, because the field
needs it: wildpeace

Yehuda Amichai (translated by Chana Bloch and Ariel Bloch)

חוקרת לוחות הנשים
לא להפכים אותה-Lengthen her
לאחר זה, לא להפכים למשרדי-Lengthen them.
לחשות כליה, גותיה.
מי צירפתה למשרדי, שוכ דממה.
ניצונה לוחות כליה, כליה הטרדה.

An Appendix to the Vision of Peace /
Toseft Lahazon Hashalom

Don't stop after beating the swords
into ploughshares, don't stop! Go on beating
and make musical instruments out of them.
Whoever wants to make war again
will have to turn them into ploughshares first.

Yehuda Amichai (translated by Glenda Alezmoon and Tudor Parfitt)

777 / READINGS: PEACE
We Mothers

We mothers,
we gather seeds of desire
from oceanic night,
we are gatherers
of scattered goods,

We mothers,
pacing dreamily
with the constellations,
the floods
of past and future,
leave us alone
with our birth
like an island.

We mothers
who say to death:
blossom in our blood,
We who impel sand to love and bring
a mirroring world to the stars—

We mothers,
who rock in the cradles
the shadowy memories
of creation’s day—
the to and fro of each breath
is the melody of our love song.

We mothers
rock into the heart of the world
the melody of peace.

Nelly Sachs (translated from the German by Ruth and Matthew Mead)

READINGS: PEACE / 778
JEWS AROUND THE WORLD

Who Are These Jews?

There were women who sat in the market
selling beets and cabbages so their men could study;
they were Jews.

There were men of Yemen, great swordsmen,
guards of the king: they were Jews.

There are dark women from India, wearing saris,
Black farmers from Ethiopia,
Children with slanted eyes: all Jews.

There are dressmakers and sculptors,
thieves and philanthropists, scholars and nurses
beggars and generals.

There are women who follow every rule of Kashrut
and men who know none of the rules,
yet all of us are Jews.

Though we are not alike in mind or body,
somewhere in the depths of our souls
we know we are the children of one people.

We share a history, a hope, and some prayers;
We speak many languages;
We have heard one Voice:

All of us stood together at Sinai
When our past and our future
Exploded in thunder and flame before us.

Ruth Brin

779 / READINGS: JEWS AROUND THE WORLD
Out of the Strong, Sweetness

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 Ukrainia,
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 Rennikoff
TORAH STUDY

Somewhere out of time
In the mystery of time
Somewhere between memory and forgetfulness,
Dimly though
I remember how once I stood
at Your mountain trembling
Amid the fire and the thunder.
How I stood there, out of bondage
In a strange land and afraid.
And You loved me and You fed me
And I feasted on Your words.
And, yes, I can remember
How the thunder was my heart
And the fire was my soul.
God, I do remember.
The fire burns in me anew.
And here I am once more
A witness to that timeless moment.
Present now in the light of Your Torah
I am reborn.

Nancy Lee Gosels

781 / READINGS: TORAH STUDY

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All I Got Was Words

When I was a boy and fancy free,
my folks had no fine clothes for me.
All I got was words:
Got tsu danken (Thank God)
Zoln mir lehn un zeyn gezunt. (We should live and be well)

When I was wont to travel far,
They didn't provide for me a car.
All I got was words:
Gey gezunt (Go in health)
Gey palmelek (Go slowly)
Hob a gliklekhe rayse. (Have a good trip)

I wanted to increase my knowledge
But they couldn't send me to college.
All I got was words:
Hob seykhel (Have common sense)
Zey nisht keyn nar (Don't be a fool)
Toyreh iz di beste skhoyre. (Torah is the best merchandise)

The years have flown,
the world has turned,
things I've gotten, things I've learned,
Yet I remember
Zog dem emes (Tell the truth)
Gib tsedukeh (Give tzedakah)
Hob rakhmones (Have compassion)
Zey a mensch! (Be a mensch!)

Author Unknown

READINGS: TORAH STUDY / 782
The rabbinic concept of language and meaning has at its center the concept of the divinity of the text.... The text ultimately is not... that authoritative and divine document given to Moses at a particular time and place. The Talmud claims that “the Torah preceded the world” (Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 88b). If the world of space and time had not yet been created, then in what manner did the Torah exist? “It was written with letters of black fire upon a background of white fire” (Rashi on Deuteronomy 33:2). The material ink and parchment are seen as the garments for the divine wisdom enfolded therein.

In other words, in the rabbinic view, the Torah is not an artifact of nature, a product of the universe; the universe, on the contrary, is the product of the Torah. According to the famous midrash on the first verses of Genesis:

It is customary that when human beings build a palace, they do not build it according to their own wisdom, but according to the wisdom of experts. And the experts do not build according to their own wisdom, rather they have plans and records in order to know how to make rooms and corridors. The Holy One did the same. God looked into the Torah and created the world. (Bereyshit Rabah:1:1)

Far from being a physical book, the Torah, in the rabbinic view, is the blueprint of creation and therefore there is a direct correlation between the world and Torah. The Torah is not seen as speculation about the world, but part of its very essence.

Susan A. Handelman (adapted)

783 / READINGS: TORAH STUDY
A new "learning" is about to be born—rather, it has been born. It is a learning in reverse order. A learning that no longer starts from the Torah and leads into life, but the other way round: from life, from a world that knows nothing of the Law, or pretends to know nothing, back to the Torah. That is the sign of the time.

It is the sign of the time because it is the mark of the men and women of the time. There is no one today who is not alienated, who does not have some small fraction of alienation inside. All of us to whom Judaism, to whom being a Jew, has again become the pivot of our lives...we all know that in being Jews we must not give up anything, not renounce anything, but lead everything back to Judaism. From the periphery back to the center; from the outside in.

This is a new sort of learning. A learning for which—in these days—those are the most apt who bring with them the maximum of what is alien. That is to say...they will succeed, not in the capacity of specialists, but only as Jews who are alienated, as those who are groping for the way home.

It is not a matter of pointing out relations between what is Jewish and what is non-Jewish. There has been enough of that. It is not a matter of apologetics, but rather of finding the way back into the heart of our life. And of being confident that this heart is a Jewish heart. For we are Jews.

Franz Rosenzweig (translated from the German by Francis C. Goffling [adapted])

READINGS: TORAH STUDY / 784
LIFE CYCLE

See Mi Sheberah section, pages 414, 687-691 for additional life cycle blessings.

A Blessing

(For birth, bar/bat mitzvah)

May your eyes sparkle with the light of Torah,
and your ears hear the music of its words.
May the space between each letter of the scrolls
bring warmth and comfort to your soul.
May the syllables draw holiness from your heart,
and may this holiness be gentle and soothing
to the world.
May your study be passionate,
and meanings bear more meanings
until Life itself arrays itself to you
as a dazzling wedding feast.
And may your conversation,
even of the commonplace,
be a blessing to all who listen to your words
and see the Torah glowing on your face.

Danny Siegel (Inspired by Talmud Berahot 17A)

(For bar/bat mitzvah)

The days come and go. Imperceptibly our lives change. We
grow older and are hardly aware of it. Our children grow up
and we hardly notice. Then, suddenly, we come to this time and
we realize that our sons and daughters are children no longer.
They have become young men and women, ready to take their
first step into adulthood.

We are grateful that we have been able to bring them this far.
We are thankful for the strength to cope with the stresses and
responsibilities of rearing them. And we give thanks for the
pleasure and pride we have had in them.

785 / READINGS: LIFE CYCLE
Now we realize they are children no longer. Only another year, two, three, and they will begin to go from our homes to find their own way in the world.

We ask ourselves, have we truly prepared them for this? Have we done enough, taught them enough? We are almost afraid to let them go.

Yet it was for this that we raised them, that they might grow up to take their places in the world.

(For aufruf, engagement, anniversary)

We are thankful for ___ and ___
and for what they mean and bring to each other.
We are thankful that a deep need for each other,
and the capacity to love and to care for one another
has been implanted within them.
May they be modest in their demands of one another,
and generous in their giving to each other.
May they never measure how much love or encouragement they offer;
may they never count the times they forgive.
Rather, may they always be grateful
that they have one another
and that they are able to express their love
in acts of kindness.
Keep them gentle in their speech.
When they offer words of criticism,
may they be chosen with care, and spoken softly.
May they waste no opportunity to speak words of sympathy,
of appreciation, of praise.
May they be blessed with health, happiness and contentment.
Above all, may they be granted the wisdom to build a joyous and peaceful home.

Shuly Greenberg (adapted)

READINGS: LIFE CYCLE / 786
PRELUDES TO KADDISH

Dirge Without Music

I am not resigned to the shutting away of loving hearts in the hard ground.
So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been, time out of mind:
Into the darkness they go, the wise and the lovely. Crowned
With lilies and with laurel they go; but I am not resigned.
Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.
Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.
A fragment of what you felt, of what you knew,
A formula, a phrase remains, but the best is lost.
The answers quick and keen, the honest look, the laughter,
the love,
They are gone. They are gone to feed the roses. Elegant and curled
Is the blossom. Fragrant is the blossom. I know. But I do not approve.
More precious was the light in your eyes than all the roses in the world.
Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

787 / READINGS: PRELUDES TO KADDISH
Each Of Us Has a Name

Each of us has a name given by God
and given by our parents
Each of us has a name
given by our stature and our smile
and given by what we wear
Each of us has a name
given by the mountains
and given by our walls
Each of us has a name
given by the stars
and given by our neighbors
Each of us has a name
given by our sins
and given by our longing
Each of us has a name
given by our enemies
and given by our love
Each of us has a name
given by our celebrations
and given by our work
Each of us has a name
given by the seasons
and given by our blindness
Each of us has a name
given by the sea
and given by
our death.

Zelda (translated by Macia Falk)

READINGS: PRELUDES TO KADDISH / 788
In Many Houses

In many houses
all at once
I see my mother and father
and they are young
as they walk in.

Why should my
tears come,
to see them laughing?

That they cannot
see me
is of no matter:

I was once
their dream:
now
they are mine.

To open eyes when others close them
to hear when others do not wish to listen
to look when others turn away
to seek to understand when others give up
to rouse oneself when others accept
to continue the struggle even when one is not the strongest
to cry out when others keep silent—
to be a Jew
it is that,
it is first of all that
and further
to live when others are dead
and to remember when others have forgotten.

Emmanuel Eyjou (translated from the French by Jonathan Magner)

789 / READINGS: PRELUDES TO KADDDISH
Connections are made slowly, sometimes they grow underground. You cannot tell always by looking what is happening. More than half a tree is spread out in the soil under your feet. Penetrate quietly as the earthworm that blows no trumpet. Fight persistently as the creeper that brings down the tree. Spread like the squash plant that overruns the garden. Gnaw in the dark and use the sun to make sugar.

Weave real connections, create real nodes, build real houses. Live a life you can endure: make love that is loving. Keep tangling and interweaving and taking more in, a thicket and bramble wilderness to the outside but to us interconnected with rabbit runs and burrows and lairs.

Live as if you liked yourself, and it may happen: reach out, keep reaching out, keep bringing in. This is how we are going to live for a long time: not always, for every gardener knows that after the digging, after the planting, after the long season of tending and growth, the harvest comes.

Birth is a Beginning

Birth is a beginning
And death a destination.
And life is a journey:
From childhood to maturity
And youth to age;
From innocence to awareness
And ignorance to knowing;
From foolishness to discretion
And then perhaps to wisdom;

READINGS: PRELUDES TO KADDISH / 790
From weakness to strength
Or strength to weakness—
   And, often back again;
From health to sickness
   And back, we pray, to health again;
From offense to forgiveness,
From loneliness to love,
From joy to gratitude,
From pain to compassion,
And grief to understanding—
   From fear to faith;
From defeat to defeat to defeat—
Until, looking backward or ahead,
We see that victory lies
Not at some high place along the way,
But in having made the journey, stage by stage,
   A sacred pilgrimage.
Birth is a beginning
And death a destination
But life is a journey,
A sacred pilgrimage—
   To life everlasting.

Alvin J. Fine

791 / READINGS: PRELUDES TO KADDISH
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READINGS: PRELUDES TO KADDISH / 792
From My Mother's Home

My mother's mother died
In the spring of her days.
And her daughter
Did not remember her face.
Her portrait, engraved
Upon my grandfather's heart,
Was erased from the world of images
After his death.
Only her mirror remained in the home,
Sunken with age into the silver frame.
And I, her pale granddaughter, who does not resemble her,
Look into it today as into
A pool which conceals its treasures
Beneath the waters.
Very deep down, behind my face,
I see a young woman
Pink-cheeked, smiling.
And a wig on her head.
She puts
An elongated earring on her ear-lobe, threading it
Through a tiny hole in the dainty flesh
Of her ear.
Very deep down, behind my face, the bright goldness
of her eyes sends out rays,
And the mirror carries on the tradition of
The family: That she was very beautiful.

Leah Goldberg (translated by Ezra Spieckhandler)
To My Father

You gathered incredible strength
in order to die
to seem calm and fully conscious
without complaint, without trembling
without a cry
so that I would not be afraid

Your wary hand
slowly grew cold in mine
and guided me carefully
beyond into the house of death
so I might come to know it

Thus in the past you used to take my hand
and guide me through the world
and show me life
so I would not fear

I will follow after you
confident as a child
toward the silent country
where you went first
so I would not feel a stranger there

And I will not be afraid.

Bлага Dimitrova

READINGS: PRELUDES TO KADISH / 794
The Intention

Healing is both an exercise
and an understanding
and yet not of the will
nor of the intention
It is a wisdom
and a deeper knowledge
of the daily swing
of life and death
in all creation
There is defeat
to overcome
and acceptance of living
to be established
and always
there must be hope
Not hope of healing
but the hope which informs
the coming moment
and gives it reason
The hope which is
each man’s breath
the certainty of love
and of loving
Death may live
in the living
and healing rise
in the dying
for whom the natural end
is part of the gathering
and of the harvest
to be expected

795 / READINGS: PRELUDES TO KADDISH
To know healing
is to know that
all life is one
and there is no beginning
and no end
and the intention is loving

_Life After Death_

These things I know:
  How the living go on living
  and how the dead go on living with them
so that in a forest
  even a dead tree casts a shadow
  and the leaves fall one by one
and the branches break in the wind
and the bark peels off slowly
and the trunk cracks
  and the rain seeps in through the cracks
and the trunk falls to the ground
and the moss covers it
  and in the spring the rabbits find it
and build their nest
inside the dead tree
so that nothing is wasted in nature
  or in love.

_Margaret Torrie_

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_READINGS: PRELUDES TO KADDISH / 796_

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FAMILY WORSHIP

First a Spark (For Candlelighting)

First a spark
then candle glow.

I watched you at sunset time
eyes sparkling in Shabbat light.

Circling above the flames,
my hands pulled
the warmth of Shabbat peace inside.

Praying for a good week and for blessing.

Take time—the lights beckon
for dreams and wonder,
for the candles grow smaller,
the children taller,
even as we pray.

Hold this sunset moment and let it go
into morning light.

Another generation’s candlesticks
receive the next generation’s lights.

And somewhere in the middle
we stand, holding hands
with yesterday and tomorrow
linking echoes of ancient melodies
with the breath of our children.

Finding God and hope in their embrace,
renewing days of creation.

In ordinary time—remember—
First a spark
and then candle glow.

Sandy Eisenberg Sasso

797 / READINGS: FAMILY WORSHIP
He doesn’t know the world at all
Who stays in his nest and doesn’t go out.
He doesn’t know what birds know best
Nor what I want to sing about,
That the world is full of loveliness.
When dewdrops sparkle in the grass
And earth’s aflood with morning light,
A blackbird sings upon a bush
To greet the dawning after night.
Then I know how fine it is to live.
Hey, try to open up your heart
To beauty; go to the woods someday
And weave a wreath of memory there.
Then if the tears obscure your way
You’ll know how wonderful it is
To be alive.

We give away our thanks
to the earth,
which gives us our home.
We give away our thanks
to the rivers and lakes and oceans,
which give away their water.
We give away our thanks
to the trees,
which give away fruit and nuts.
We give away our thanks
to the wind,
which brings rain to water the plants.
We give away our thanks
to the sun,
which gives away warmth and light.

READINGS: FAMILY WORSHIP / 798
All beings on earth—the trees, the animals, the wind and the rivers—give away to one another—So all is in balance.
We give away our promise to begin to learn how to stay in balance—with all the earth.

A Native American Prayer

God's Wheel

God says to me with kind of a smile, “Hey how would you like to be God awhile And steer the world?” “Okay,” says I, “I'll give it a try. Where do I set? How much do I get? What time is lunch? When can I quit?” “Gimme back that wheel,” says God, “I don’t think you’re quite ready yet.”

Shel Silverstein

O our Mother the Earth, O our Father the Sky, Your children are we, and with tired backs We bring you the gifts you love. Then weave for us a garment of brightness; May the warp be the white light of morning, May the weft be the red light of evening, May the fringes be the falling rain, May the border be the standing rainbow. Thus weave for us a garment of brightness, That we may walk fittingly where birds sing, That we may walk fittingly where grass is green, O our Mother the Earth, O our Father the Sky.

Tewa (Native American)

799 / READINGS: FAMILY WORSHIP
When the people of Israel crossed through the Red Sea, they witnessed a great miracle. Some say it was the greatest miracle that ever happened. On that day they saw a sight more awesome than all the visions of the prophets combined. The sea split and the waters stood like great walls, while Israel escaped to freedom on the distant shore. Awesome. But not for everyone.

Two people, Reuven and Shimon, hurried along among the crowd crossing through the sea. They never once looked up. They noticed only that the ground under their feet was still a little muddy—like a beach at low tide.

"Yucch!" said Reuven, "there's mud all over this place!"

"Bleecch!" said Shimon, "I have muck all over my feet!"

"This is terrible," answered Reuven. "When we were slaves in Egypt, we had to make our bricks out of mud, just like this!"

"Yeah," said Shimon. "There's no difference between being a slave in Egypt and being free here."

And so it went, Reuven and Shimon whining and complaining all the way to freedom. For them there was no miracle. Only mud. Their eyes were closed. They might as well have been asleep.

Lawrence Kushner

The Wolf and the Dog

Once there was a wolf who was very skinny because he never had anything much to eat. One day as he was looking for food he met a dog. The dog said, "What are you looking for?"

And the wolf said, "Food."

The dog laughed and said, "I don't have to look for food. My master gives me food and a place to sleep. I lead a good easy life and I'm taking a walk."

READINGS: FAMILY WORSHIP / 800
The wolf said, “May I come home with you?”
The dog said, “Sure, my master would like to have you.”

Just then the wolf saw the mark on the dog’s neck. “What is that mark on your neck?” he asked.

“Oh, that’s just the collar chain I wear during the day. You’ll get used to it.”

But the wolf stopped and ran in the opposite direction. Calling over his shoulder to the dog, he said, “You may have your good food. As for me, I’ll keep my freedom.”

And the wolf never came there again.

Moral: Freedom having hardships is better than being in chains.

— Carmen Bonati, Age 12

Anne Frank was a young girl in Amsterdam, Holland during the terrible days of Nazi occupation.

Two weeks before she was arrested—one of the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust—she wrote the following words in her diary:

It’s really a wonder that I haven’t dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can’t build up my hopes on a foundation of confusion, misery and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness. I hear approaching thunder....I can feel the suffering of millions, and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come out right, that this cruelty will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again. In the meantime, I must hold on to my ideals for perhaps the day will come when I shall be able to carry them out.

Anne Frank [translated from the Dutch by B.M. Mooyart-Doubleday]

801 / READINGS: FAMILY WORSHIP
A Prayer / Tefilah

What shall I ask You for, God?
I have everything.
There’s nothing I lack.
I ask only for one thing
And not for myself alone; ַם

READINGS: FAMILY WORSHIP / 802
It's for many mothers, and children, and fathers—
Not just in this land, but in many lands hostile to each other.
I'd like to ask for Peace.
Yes, it's Peace I want,
And You, You won't deny the single wish of a child.
You created the Land of Peace,
Where stands the City of Peace,
Where stood the Temple of Peace,
But where still there is no Peace...
What shall I ask You for, God? I have everything.
Peace is what I ask for,
Only Peace.

Shlomit Grosberg, Age 13, Jerusalem (translated by Don Yard)

When will peace take over?
When will it come, the day?
When with armies and bombs will they do away,
When all this hostility cease,
A day on which battleships
Will become palaces of leisure and fun
Floating on the seas.

A day on which the steel of guns
Will be melted into pleasure cars,
A day on which generals will begin to raise flowers.
When peace
Will include all the peoples of these neighboring lands,
When Ishmael and Israel
Will go hand in hand,
And when every Jew
The Arab's brother will be.
When will it come, the day?

Mahmud Abu Radj, Age 12, Kfar Sachnin (Arab Village)

803 / READINGS: FAMILY WORSHIP
May I ever learn to find my place among the people of Israel.
May my heart be a Jewish heart,
    my mind a Jewish mind,
    my soul a Jewish soul.
May all my actions bring a good name to the word Jew.
May the works of my hand and the ideas I design
Be kind and gentle.
May I find my home in the House of Prayer,
My life in the tasks of my people,
My words in the words spoken truly in the name of all that is good,
My deeds a credit to my people.
May law rule over all the earth; and justice and mercy
    be everlasting.
May the Messianic days come soon and in my own life, bringing
    peace and hope to all.
And may I take my place beside those who love and serve all that is good and righteous.

Seymour Rosol (adapted)
MEDITATIONS FOR ELUL

God, help me through the days of Elul to prepare myself for the New Year with its promise of new life for my body and my soul. Help me face questions I wish to avoid! Help me accept truths that do not comfort! I wish to journey to the light, but the path to it is hidden by all the promises I never kept, by the goodness I deserted. May the words from the past show me the way of return. I begin the road of repentance. Meet me, God, as I journey on it.

“For everything is empty except the pure soul.”

The impulse to evil is like one who runs about the world with a tightly closed hand. Nobody knows what is inside of it. Everyone asks: “What do you have in your hand?” And they all think that just what they want most of all is hidden there. And everyone runs after the impulse to evil. Then the hand is opened, and it is empty.

“Where is the place of God’s glory?”

“Where is the dwelling of God?” This is the question with which the Rabbi of Kotzk surprised a number of learned Jews who happened to be visiting him. They laughed at him: “What a thing to ask! Is not the whole world full of God’s glory?” Then he answered his own question: “God dwells wherever people let God in.”

Martin Buber (adapted)

805 / MEDITATIONS FOR ELUL
“Give us integrity to love you and fear you.”

When R. Yoḥanan ben Zakai was on his death bed, his disciples came to visit him. Before leaving they said, “Master, give us a farewell blessing.” He said to them, “I’ll pray that fearing God may be as important to you as fearing people.” His disciples asked, “But should we not fear God more than people?” He replied, “If only you can attain this! When you think of committing a transgression, you say: ‘I hope no one sees me!’ If the fear of God is no more than this, it will be enough to keep you from many sins.”

Talmud Berahot 28b

“Gates, lift up your heads! Be raised, you everlasting doors!”

In the future you will be asked “What was your occupation?” If you reply, “I fed the hungry,” then they reply, “This is the gate of God; you who feed the hungry shall enter.” (Psalm 118:20) So with giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, with those who look after orphans, and with those, generally, who do deeds of loving-kindness. All these are God’s gates, and those who do such deeds shall enter within them.

Mishnah Psalms
SHABBAT SHUVAH

*Freedom Is A Habit*

Freedom is a habit
and a coat worn
some born to wear it
some never to know it.
Freedom is cheap
or again as a garment
is so costly
[some] pay their lives
rather than not have it.
Freedom is baffling:
[some] having it often
know not they have it
til it is gone and
they no longer have it.
What does this mean?
Is it a riddle?
Yes, it is first of all
in the primers of riddles.
To be free is so-so:
you can and you can’t:
walkers can have freedom
only by never walking
away from their freedom:
runners too have freedom
unless they overrun:
eaters have often outheaten
their freedom to eat
and drinkers overdrank
their fine drinking freedom.

Carl Sandburg

807 / READINGS: SHABBAT SHUVAH
Certain sages include repentance among the entities created before the world itself. The implication of this remarkable statement is that repentance is a universal primordial phenomenon; in such a context it has two meanings. One is that it is embedded in the root structure of the world; the other, that before we were created, we were given the possibility of changing the course of our lives. In this latter sense repentance is the highest expression of our capacity to choose freely—it is a manifestation of the divine in human. By repenting, we can extricate ourselves from the binding web of our lives, from the chain of causality that otherwise compels us to follow a path of no return.

SUkkOT

Take for your own sake...[a cluster including] the product of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook (Leviticus 23:40), the product of goodly trees [the etrog] standing for some in Israel: even as the etrog has aroma and has edible fruit, so the people Israel have in their midst those who have knowledge of Torah and also have good deeds. Branches of palm trees also stand for some in Israel: as the palm tree has edible fruit but no aroma, so the people Israel have in their midst those who have knowledge of Torah but have not good deeds. Boughs of leafy trees also stand for some in Israel: as the myrtle tree has aroma but has not edible fruit, so the people Israel have in their midst those who have good deeds but have not Torah. And willows of the brook also stand for some in Israel: even as the willow has neither edible fruit nor aroma, so the people Israel have in their midst those in whom there is neither knowledge of Torah nor good deeds. The Holy One says: In order to make it impossible for Israel to be destroyed, let all of them be bound together as plants are bound into a cluster, so that the righteous among them will atone for the others. Hence Moses charged Israel: Take for your own sake on the first day a cluster (Leviticus 23:40).

Psikta Rabati 51.2

READINGS: SUKKOT / 808
Feast of Booths

This was the season of our ancestors’ joy:
not only when they gathered grapes and the fruit of trees
in Israel, but when, locked in the dark and stony streets
they held—symbols of a life from which they were banished
but to which they would surely return—the branches of palm trees and of willows, the twigs of the myrtle,
and the bright odorous citrons.

This was the grove of palms with its deep well
in the stony ghetto in the blaze of noon;
this is the living stream lined with willows;
and this the thick-leaved myrtles and trees heavy with fruit
in the barren ghetto—a garden
where the unjustly hated were justly safe at last.

In booths this week of holiday
as those who gathered grapes in Israel lived
and also to remember we were cared for
in the wilderness—
I remember how frail my present dwelling is even if of stones and steel.

I know this is the season of our joy:
we have completed the readings of the Torah
and we begin again;
but I remember how slowly I have learnt, how little,
how fast the year went by, the years—how few.

Charles Reznikoff

809 / Readings: Sukkot
TU BISHVAT

On Tu Bishvat
When spring comes,
An angel descends, ledger in hand,
And records each bud, each twig, each tree,
And all our garden flowers.
From town to town, from village to village,
The angel makes a winged way,
Searching the valleys, inspecting the hills,
Flying over the desert
And returns to heaven.
And when the ledger will be full
Of trees and blossoms and shrubs,
When the desert is turned into a meadow
And all our land is a watered garden,
Messianic days will be with us.

Attributed to Shin Shalom (translator unknown)

READINGS: TU BISHVAT / 810
PESAH

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev comments that the true miracle of the Exodus, the “great” miracle, in fact took place on the tenth of Nisan, not later. When Israel decided that they would slaughter sheep (which according to tradition were gods in Egypt) without regard for what their Egyptian taskmasters would say or do to them, their liberation had begun. That God can wreak plagues, split the sea, and all the rest—these are no source of surprise to the person of faith. But Israel’s courage to defy the Egyptians—that is truly worthy of being called miraculous.

* * *

Rabbi Naḥman of Bratzlav comments on “and they made no provisions for the way”: “When you are about to leave Egypt—any Egypt—do not stop to think ‘But how will I earn a living out there?...’ One who stops to ‘make provisions for the way’ will never get out of Egypt.” A comment to be repeated annually for college seniors, midlife-crisis confronters, and all the rest of us.

* * *

How strange that we should begin the seder with the statement “This year we are slaves!” The point is, according to one Ḥasidic reading, that while we recognize our current enslavements, we also recognize the great distance we have traversed from Egyptian bondage to the sort of slavery we feel in our current lives. Had someone come to us while we were in Egypt and said, “You know, someday you and your children will be telling this tale as though it were all in the past,” we would hardly have believed him. See how far we have come! And for those of us who have gone this far in the path of liberation—remembering that we once were carriers of bricks and mortar—nothing in the liberation that lies ahead should seem impossible to us.

Arthur Green

811 / READINGS: PESAH
In Germany at the end of World War II

Perhaps for the thousandth time, the Jewish committee in Buchenwald was holding a meeting on the question: Where to? A Polish Jew, a German, a Czech, a Hungarian—each faced the same burning problem: Where should the few surviving Jews of Buchenwald go? How could we ever have believed that at the end of the war the surviving Jews would have no more worries, that everything would be fine! The world, we had thought, would welcome our few survivors with open arms! We, the first victims of the Nazis. They would love us!

Quickly enough, we saw that the world had other things on its mind than Jewish suffering. So where to?

Comrade Posnansky put forth an idea: into our own kibbutz. To build a group of Buchenwald’s youth, and find a farm where we could prepare for Palestine. A wonderful idea. There would be no lack of candidates for the kibbutz, for energy was reawakening in the survivors and seeking an outlet.

From that idea sprang Kibbutz Buchenwald.

After several days of coming and going, the Jewish committee in Buchenwald possessed a document from the American Military Government which gave it the right to make use, for a long term, of the township farm of Eggendorf, near Blankenheim.

June 3, 1945—Here we are, the first few comrades, sitting on a truck that is taking us away from Buchenwald. Finally, the Buchenwald chapter is ended. The concrete road takes us away from the barracks, the watchtowers, the SS quarters; on this straight road, which turns neither to right nor to left, we head for our new life. We are all determined to follow this road to a place of our own, a Jewish settlement where we can put our energies into something that will belong only to us, a place where we can live for the future. This road must take us to Palestine.

Members of Kibbutz Buchenwald

READINGS: PESAH / 812
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An Arab Shepherd Is Searching for His Goat on Mount Zion

An Arab shepherd is searching for his goat
on Mount Zion,
And on the opposite hill I am searching for my little boy.
An Arab shepherd and a Jewish father
Both in their temporary failure.
Our two voices meet above
The Sultan’s Pool in the valley between us.
Neither of us wants the boy or the goat
To get caught in the wheels
of the “Had Gadya” machine.

Afterward we found them among the bushes,
And our voices came back inside us
Laughing and crying.

Searching for a goat or for a child has always been
The beginning of a new religion in these mountains.

YeHUDA AミICHAי

READINGS: YOM HA’ATZMA’UT / 814
NEW YEAR'S DAY

Each year should be the best year we have yet lived.
Each year we are more learned in the ways of life.
Each year we are wiser than the year before.
Each year our eyes know better the sights to seek.
Each year our ears listen with a finer tuning.
Every happening is a jewel, wrought about the fancy of time.
All that we understand of the universe is the setting for each
sight and sound of day.
The child looks with gladness each year to be one year older.
Should not this welcome pursue us all our years?
The piling of the years is a richness like the piling of gold.
Our years are coins with which we can purchase more wisely at
the bazaars of each new season.
Our love is more pliant and patient having been taught by time.
This New Year is one year older than the last.
The earth is more abounding in its growth.
The creatures have moved another step in their unfolding.
Humankind has left us one more year of art for our
contemplation.
History is one year more resonant with lessons.
The sunrises are one year more familiar and promising.
The sunsets are one year less fearful, and the peace of the night
is one year closer.

Kenneth L. Patton

815 / READINGS: NEW YEAR'S DAY
MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY

Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God’s children...[And] we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream....

I say to you today, my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal....” This is our hope.

With this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day....

So, let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia; let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee; let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi—from every mountaintop, let freedom ring.

And when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village, from every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children, black and white, Jew and Gentile, Protestant and Catholic, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God almighty, we are free at last!”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

(on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial August 28, 1963)

READING: MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY / 816
PRESIDENTS' WEEKEND

Gentlemen,

While I receive with much satisfaction your address replete with expressions of affection and esteem; I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to New Port....

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good government to become a great and a happy people.

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy, a policy worthy of imitation.

All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support....

May the children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants, while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig-tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid....


817 / READINGS: PRESIDENTS' WEEKEND
Most governments have been based practically on the denial of the equal rights...ours began by affirming those rights. They said, some...are too ignorant and vicious to share in government. Possibly so, said we; and by your system you would always keep them ignorant and vicious. We proposed to give all a chance; and we expected the weak to grow stronger; the ignorant, wiser; and all better and happier together.

We made the experiment; and the fruit is before us. Look at it—think of it. Look at it in its aggregate grandeur, of extent of country and numbers of population—of ship, and steamboat, and trail.

* * *

From the first appearance of man upon the earth down to very recent times, the words “stranger” and “enemy” were quite or almost synonymous. Even yet, this has not totally disappeared. The man of the highest moral cultivation, in spite of all which abstract principle can do, likes him whom he does know much better than him whom he does not know. To correct the evils, great and small, which spring from want of sympathy and from positive enmity among strangers, as nations or as individuals, is one of the highest functions of civilization.

* * *

This is a world of compensation; and one who would be no slave must consent to have no slave.

Abraham Lincoln

READINGS: PRESIDENTS' WEEKEND / 818
MEMORIAL DAY

_The Young Dead Soldiers_

The young dead soldiers do not speak.
Nevertheless they are heard in the still houses.
(Who has not heard them?)
They have a silence that speaks for them at night
And when the clock counts.
They say,
_We were young. We have died. Remember us._
They say,
_We have done what we could_
But until it is finished it is not done.
They say,
_We have given our lives_
But until it is finished no one can know what our lives gave.
They say,
_Our deaths are not ours,_
They are yours,
_They will mean what you make them._
They say,
_Whether our lives and our deaths were for peace and a new hope_
Or for nothing
_We cannot say._
It is you who must say this.
They say,
_We leave you our deaths._
Give them their meaning.
Give them an end to the war and a true peace,
Give them a victory that ends the war and a peace afterwards,
Give them their meaning.
_We were young, they say._
_We have died._
_Remember us._

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Archibald MacLeish

819 / READINGS: MEMORIAL DAY
FOURTH OF JULY

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness....

We, therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in general congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the name, and by authority of the good people of these colonies, solemnly publish and declare that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be free and independent States....And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.

The Declaration of Independence

May America remain loyal to the principles of the Declaration of Independence and apply them to ever widening areas of life.

May our country be free from oppression, persecution, and unjust discrimination; may we overcome religious, racial, and class conflicts; and may we be restored as a haven of refuge for the victims of injustice and deprivation.

READINGS: FOURTH OF JULY / 820
May we learn the art of living together, and come to understand how to appreciate differences, to reconcile clashing interests, and to help one another achieve a harmonious and abundant life.

May we acquire the wisdom to choose honest and capable leaders who will govern us by democratic and ethical principles.

And may the enterprise of our American people be blessed that we may utilize the resources of our land for the good of all the world.

1945 Reconstructionist Prayer Book (adapted)

The New Colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Gloows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

Emma Lazarus

821 / READING: FOURTH OF JULY
LABOR DAY

In Palestine we must do with our own hands all the things that make up the sum total of life. We must ourselves do all the work, from the least strenuous, cleanest, and most sophisticated, to the dirtiest and most difficult. In our own way, we must feel what a worker feels and think what a worker thinks—then, and only then, shall we have a culture of our own, for then we shall have a life of our own.

It all seems very clear. From now on our principal ideal must be Labor. Through no fault of our own we have been deprived of this element and we must seek a remedy. Labor is our cure. The ideal of Labor must become the pivot of all our aspirations. It is the foundation upon which our national structure is to be erected. Only by making Labor, for its own sake, our national ideal shall we be able to cure ourselves of the plague that has affected us for many generations and mend the rent between ourselves and Nature. Labor is a great human ideal. It is the ideal of the future, and a great ideal can be a healing sun.

Aaron David Gordon

Fish Crier

I know a Jew[ish] fish crier down on Maxwell Street with a voice like a north wind blowing over corn stubble in January. He dangles herring before prospective customers evincing a joy identical with that of Pavlova dancing. His face is that of a man terribly glad to be selling fish, terribly glad that God made fish, and customers to whom he may call his wares from a pushcart.

Carl Sandburg

READINGS: LABOR DAY / 822
The Operator

He’s as absorbed in what he sews as though this work is all he was created for.
Beyond the pane he sees no pigeons soar, 
nor on the sunlit roofs the melting snow.

823 / READINGS: LABOR DAY
At the machines around him, row on row,
bent at their work like him sit many more.
As if under a heavy film they are.
His ear is shattered by a cry of woe.

To slaves of distant times he’s brother sworn:
of Egypt, Babylon, Jerusalem
and Rome—an endless chain uniting him
with all the slaves that ever have been born.

And deep within his low and narrow brow
a fire darts about and shoots up strong;
as if the battle’s being born inside his brain right now,
out of the uproar leaps a liberation song!

THANKSGIVING

She Was Like No Doll I’d Ever Seen...

When I sat down at the table for breakfast, the doll was at my
place. Mama had made hair out of dark brown yarn and she’d
embroidered eyes, a nose, and a mouth on the face. She had
covered the yarn hair with a yellow kerchief embroidered with
red flowers.

“She’s gorgeous, Mama,” I managed to murmur. “But she
doesn’t look like the Pilgrim woman in the picture.”

“No?” Mama said.

“She looks like you in that photograph you have that was taken
when you were a girl.”

“Of course,” Mama said. “I did that on purpose. What’s a
Pilgrim, shaynkeit? A Pilgrim is someone who came here from
the other side to find freedom. That’s me, Molly. I’m a
Pilgrim!”

Barbara Cohen

READINGS: THANKSGIVING / 824
...at P.S. 125..., as soon as October was folded back on the calendar, we began paying intense, if somewhat baffled, homage to the glories of Thanksgiving.

Most of us were the children of immigrants from Vilna or Minsk or Odessa, who rarely budged from Brooklyn, and we had to sing loud our praises for the gathering of the harvest and the prodigal bounty of the land as the trolley cars clanged by under the windows. Day after day...we devoted ourselves to that old American holiday first conceived, we were told, in a bleak place called New England, by the Pilgrims, also known as ancestors. These ancestors spoke English without an accent, did not have to pass through Ellis Island when they reached the golden land, and had come to these shores to escape from religious persecution....

We labored intently...making the first Thanksgiving—the huge Pilgrim family, at an enormously long table, in the clearing they had courageously hacked out of the ominous New England forest. With crayons and paints we smeared a lavish feast....

There was a song we sang only in November—“We gather together and ask the Lord’s blessing. He chastens and hastens His will to make known.” We sang it with loud and cheerful assurance as Miss Johnson thumped away on a piano....Like Christmas carols...this Thanksgiving hymn had the lure of the forbidden. I would come home on November afternoons, my face hectically pink from the autumn air and the grandeur of Thanksgiving, and sing “We Gather Together” until my mother, who would be working on a dress for me or one of her customers and never seemed to be listening, would suddenly hear “the Lord’s blessing” and exclaim, “What kind of a song is this for a Jewish girl to sing! Stop this minute, it’s not nice somebody should hear you.”

825 / READINGS: THANKSGIVING
For weeks before the holiday I brought the same lament home from school every afternoon....“But Mama, why can’t we have turkey for Thanksgiving like everybody else?”

“Who’s everybody?” my mother would say, without taking her eyes from the sewing machine. “The Feins eat turkey Thanksgiving? Doris Levine’s mother goes on the subway to buy a turkey God knows where Thanksgiving?”

“Oh, honest to God, Mama. You’re always making believe you don’t understand one single word I’m saying. I meant like Americans have on Thanksgiving, not that dopey Doris....”

I knew it was useless to argue. I knew it before I began to try. But something urged me, every November, to try just this once more. How easy it seemed, how easy and beautiful and right, as I pictured it, mooning in my room....the round table in the living room swelled with the two leaves we dragged out from behind the sofa only at Passover time....At four in the afternoon, all the guests would assemble....This day would differ from other days because on Thanksgiving my brother and I would be glad to see our cousins, who for a change would not say, “What do you have to take dopey violin lessons for?” And after we had all kissed each other sweetly, we would sit down, with cheerful smiles, around the jolly table set exactly the way they showed in the Ladies’ Home Journal. After we sang “We Gather Together,” my mother would march in from the kitchen at just the right moment, holding the enormous, steaming brown bird aloft on a silver platter, which she placed reverently in front of my father, poised and ready with a carving knife handed down, of course, by ancestors. Then Papa would begin to carve with magnificent effortless skill, an art taught him by his father who had learned it from his father....

Pearl Karin

READINGS: THANKSGIVING / 826
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ZEMIROT / SONGS

MAH YAFEH HAYOM

Mah yafeh hayom shabbat shalom.

How wonderful the day is!
Shabbat Shalom.

KOL DODI

Kol dodi hiney zeh ba
medaleg al heharim
mekapetz al hageva’ot.

The voice of my beloved—look, he’s coming
dancing on the mountains, leaping on the hills.

Song of Songs 2:8

ZEMIROT / 828
Yom zeh leyisra’el orah vesimḥah
shabbat menuḥah.

Tzivita pikudim bema’amad sinay
shabbat uno’adim lishmor beḥol shanay
la’aroh lefanay maset va’aruḥah
shabbat menuḥah.

This translation can be sung to the same melody as the Hebrew.

To Israel this day brings rest and release,
O Sabbath of peace, O Sabbath of peace.
God bade us cherish you, long ago on Sinai’s height,
To make of you a day of rest, a day of light,
To spread a joyous feast, dainties rare for your delight,
O Sabbath of peace, O Sabbath of peace.

Attributed to Isaac Luria (translated by Judith Kaplan Eisenstein)

829 / SONGS
TZUR MISHELO

The source—of whose food we have eaten—
Do bless, my faithful ones.
We have eaten and there's still plenty;
This is the word of God.

God feeds the world as a shepherd—
Our mother whose bread we have eaten,
Father whose wine we have drunk,
So we give thanks and praise God's name:
There is no Holy One but God.

With song and thanks we'll bless our God
For our ancestral land of delight.
Food and provision have sated us,
God's love has overwhelmed us,
How faithful is our God!

Translated by Judith Kaplan Eisenstein
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Aḥat sha’alti me’et Adonay otah awakesh
shivti beveyt Adonay kol yemey ḥayay
laḥazot beno’am Adonay ulvaker bechevḥalo.

One thing I ask from God; one thing do I seek—
that I may stay in the divine presence all the days of my life,
envision divine delight, and contemplate God’s presence.

Psalm 27:4

Aḥat Sha’alti is a verse from Psalm 27, which is recited daily throughout
the month of Elul. This penitential season preceding the High Holy Days
has as its theme the task of returning to the path toward God. Thus, Aḥat
Sha’alti encapsulates our hopes for this season.

D.A.T.

ZEMIROT / 832
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YOM ZEH MEHUBAD

Yom zeh mehubbad mikol yamim ki vo shavat tzur olamim.

Sheshet yamim asey melahsheha veypom hashev'i leyloheha shabbat lo ta'aseh vo melahah ki hol asah sheshet yamim.

Yom zeh mehubbad mikol yamim ki vo shavat tzur olamim.

Rishon hu limikra'ey kodesh yom shabaton shabbat kodesh al ken kol ish beyeyno yeekadesh al shetey lehem yivte'u temimim.

Yom zeh mehubbad mikol yamim ki vo shavat tzur olamim.

Ehol mashmanim shetey mamtakim ki el yiten lehol bo devekim

beged lilbosh lehem hakim basar vedagim vehol matamim.

Yom zeh mehubbad mikol yamim ki vo shavat tzur olamim.

Lo tehsar kol bo ve'ahalta vesavata uverahata
et adonay eloheha asher ahava ki veraheha mikol amim.

Yom zeh mehubbad mikol yamim ki vo shavat tzur olamim.

Hashamayim mesaperim kevodo vegam haaretz malah hasdo re'u kol eleyh asetah yado ki hu hatzur po'olo tamim.

Yom zeh mehubbad mikol yamim ki vo shavat tzur olamim.

ZEMIROT / 834
Az iḥ vel zingn leḥo dodi
zolstuzingn chiri biri bim.
Az iḥ vel zingn likras kalo
zolstuzingn chiri biri bom

Leḥo dodi: chiri biri bim
Likras kalo: chiri biri bom
Leḥo dodi, likras kalo:
Chiri-biri-biri-biri-bom

Az iḥ vel zingn yerushalayim...
Az iḥ vel zingn ir hakoydesh...

ZEMIROT / 836
This is the day, beloved day, the day that God has blessed,
This is the day God chose to rest, the day God chose to rest.
Six long days you ply your trade, for in six days the world was made,
But greet the seventh proud and unafraid, the day God chose to rest.

Translated by Judith Kaplan Eisenstein

835 / ZEMIROT
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Uḥshe’omar leḥah dodi
Tomru kuleḥem chiri biri bim
Uḥshe’omar likrat kalah
Tomru kuleḥem chiri biri bam
Leḥah dodi: chiri biri bim
Likrat kalah: chiri biri bam
Leḥah dodi, likrat kalah
Chiri-biri-biri-biri-bam.

If I sing, “Come my beloved,”
Then you sing, “Chiri biri bim.”
If I sing, “to greet the bride,”
Then you sing, “Chiri biri bam.”
Come my beloved: Chiri biri bim.
To greet the bride: Chiri biri bam.
Come my beloved to greet the bride.
Chiri biri biri biri bam.
If I sing, “Jerusalem,”....
If I sing, “the holy city”....

837 / SONGS
SAḤAKI

Sahaki saḥaki al haḥalomot
zu ani haḥolem saḥ
saḥaki ki va’adam a’amin
ki odoni ma’amin bah.

Ki od nafshi deror sho’efet
lo meḥartiha le’egel paz
ki od a’amin gam ba’adam
gam beruho ru’ah az.

A’minah gam be’atid
af im yirḥak zeh hayom
ah bo yavo yisu shalom
az uvraḥah le’om mile’om.

This translation can be sung to the same melody as the Hebrew.

Laugh, yes, laugh, at all my dreaming—
This do I the dreamer say.
Laugh at my belief in people
For I still have faith in you.

For my soul yet longs for freedom—
I will not sell it for a calf of gold
For I still believe in people
And in their spirit a powerful soul.

I will hold fast my trust in the future
Though that day be far away
For its arrival is most certain
Bringing peace and blessing to every land.

ZEMIROT / 838
Hali'ah Lekeysaryah
(ELI, ELI)

Eli shelo yigamer le'olam
haḥol vehayam
rishrush shel hamayim
berak hashamayim
tefilat ha'adam.

This translation can be sung to the same melody as the Hebrew.

My God, my God, I pray that these things never end.
The sand and the sea, the rush of the waters,
the crash of the heavens, the prayer of the heart.
The sand and the sea, the rush of the waters,
The crash of the heavens, the prayer of the heart.

Hannah Szenes

Al sheloshah devarim ha'olam omed.
Al hatorah ve'al ha'avadah ve'al gemilut ḥasadim.

On three things the world stands—
on Torah, on worship, and on caring deeds.

839 / SONGS
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Soon the day will arrive when all will be together
and no longer will we live in fear.
And the children will smile without them wond’ring whether
on that day dark new clouds will appear.
Wait and see, wait and see, what a world there will be,
If we share, if we care, you and me.
Wait and see, wait and see, what a world there will be,
If we share, if we care, you and me.

Eleh ḥamedah libi ḥusah na ve’al na titalem.
Only this does my heart desire—
concern yourself with me and make manifest your presence.

841 / SONGS
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In order to view this proof accurately, the Overprint Preview Option must be set to Always in Acrobat Professional or Adobe Reader. Please contact your Customer Service Representative if you have questions about finding this option.
Jerusalem, Jerusalem (Jerusalem of Gold)

This translation can be sung to the same melody as the Hebrew.
The olive trees that stand in silence
Upon the hills of time,
To hear the voices of the city
As bells of evening chime.
The Shofar sounding from the Temple
To call the world to prayer,
The shepherd pauses in the valley
And peace is everywhere.
The water well for those who thirsted,
The ancient market square,
Your golden sun that lights the future
For people everywhere.
How many songs,
How many stories,
The stony hills recall.
Around her heart my city carries
A lonely ancient wall.
And far away beyond the desert
A thousand suns will glow.
We shall be going to the Jordan,
By way of Jericho.
My simple voice cannot acclaim thee,
Too weak the words I choose,
Jerusalem, if I forget thee,
May my right hand its cunning lose.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
Forever young, yet forever old,
My heart will sing your songs of glory, Jerusalem.
Jerusalem, Jerusalem,
Oh, city with a heart of gold,
My heart will sing your songs of glory, Jerusalem.

Naomi Shemer (translated by Norman Newell)

ZEMIROT / 844
HAMILHAMAH HA’AHARONAH

Beshem kol hatankistim ufneyhem hame’uvakot
asher avru et kol ha’esh vevashe’hikot
Beshem hayama’im asher pashetu al hanemalim
ve’eyneyhem kevedot mimelah vegalim.
Ani mavti’ah lah yaldah sheli ketanah
shezo tiyeh hamilhamah ha’a’haronah.

I promise you my child that there will come an end to war. 
When dreams of love and peace will all come real and true.
The people will be free to live their lives with love once more.
This pledge designed with heart and mind I promise you.

For all the men and women who had left their homes to fight, 
To bring a time of peace, of love, so good and true.
For all the people, young and old, who fought through day and
Night, those sounds of war will sound no more, I promise you.

H. Hefer

845 / SONGS
על כל אלה

Al kol eleh

Al havedash ve’al ha’oketz
al hamar vehamatok
al bitenu hatinoket
shemor eli hatov.
Al ha’esh hamevo’eret
al hamayim hazakim
al ha’ish hashav habaytah
min hamerhakim.

Al kol eleh al kol eleh
shemor na li eli hatov
al havedash ve’al ha’oketz
al hamar vehamatok.
Al na ta’kor natu’a
al tishkah et hatikvah
hashiveni ve’ashuvah
el ha’retz hatovah.

Shemor eli al zeh habayit
al hagan al hahomah
miyagon mipahad peta
umimilhamah.

Shemor al hame’at sheyesh li
al ha’or ve’al hataf
al haperi shelo hivshil od
vehene’esaf.

Al kol eleh...

Zemirot / 846
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KOL HA'OLAM KULO
Kol ha'olam kulo
gesher tzar me’od
veha’ikar lo lefahed kelal.

The entire world is a very narrow bridge.
The essential thing is to have no fear at all.

Attributed to Nahman of Bratzlav

VE'ANU MATZANU
Ve'anu matzenu menuhah
mitahat kanfey hasheghinah.

We found rest
beneath the wings of the Sheghinah.
THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND

This land is your land, this land is my land
From California to the New York Island
From the redwood forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me.

As I was walkin' that ribbon of highway
I saw above me that endless skyway
I saw below me that golden valley
I said this land was made for you and me.

I've roamed and rambled and I followed my footsteps
To the sparkling sound of her diamond desert
And all around me, a voice was sounding:
This land was made for you and me.

Down in the city, in the shadow of the steeple
By the relief office, I saw my people
As they stood there hungry I stood there
    whistling: This land was made for you and me.

Nobody living can ever stop me
As I go walking my freedom highway
Nobody living can make me turn back,
cuz this land was made for you and me.

The sun came shining, and I was strolling
And the wheat fields waving and the dust cloud rolling
As the fog was lifting, a voice was chanting
This land was made for you and me.

Woody Guthrie

849 / SONGS
AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood,
From sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for pilgrim feet,
Whose stern, impassioned stress,
A thoroughfare for freedom beat
Across the wilderness!
America! America!
God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law!

America! America!
God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!

Katherine Lee Bates

ZEMIROT / 850
Kol od balevav penimah
Nefesh yehudi homiyah
Ulfa’atey mizrah kadimah
Ayun letziyon tzofiyah
Od lo avedah tikvatenu
Hatikvah mishenot alpayim
Lihyot am hofshi be’artzenu
Be’eretz tziyon virushalayim.

So long as a Jewish soul still lives within a heart,
And so long as an eye gazes longingly to Zion in the far
reaches of the East,
Then the hope is not lost,
The hope of two thousand years,
That we may be a free people in our land,
Land of Zion and Jerusalem.

Nahali Herz Imber (translated by Judith Kaplan Eisenstein)
PSALM 150

Hallelu / Yah!
Call out to Yah in Heaven’s holy place!
Boom out to Yah across the firmament!
Shout out for Yah, for all God’s mighty deeds!
Cry out for Yah, as loud as God is great!
Blast out for Yah with piercing shofar note!
Pluck out for Yah with lute and violin!
Throb out for Yah with drum and writhing dance!
Sing out for Yah with strings and husky flute!
Ring out for Yah with cymbals that resound!
Clang out for Yah with cymbals that rebound!
Let every living thing
Yah’s praises sing,
Hallelu / Yah!

ZEMIROT / 852
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Let every living thing
Yah's praises sing!
Hallelu/Yah!