
**If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else.
Character, not circumstances, makes the man.**

Booker T. Washington

We know what we are, but know not what we may be.

William Shakespeare

There is a power that can raise you up even from the lowliest of places and guide you to the forefront of change if you truly want to create a better world.

John Lewis

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that has.

Margaret Mead

I shall pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.

Stephen Grellet

If you are not a better person tomorrow than you are today, what need have you for a tomorrow?

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

The Miracle of Morning

I thought I'd awaken to a world in mourning.
Heavy clouds crowding, a society storming.
But there's something different on this golden morning.
Something magical in the sunlight, wide and warming.

I see a dad with a stroller taking a jog.
Across the street, a bright-eyed girl chases her dog.
A grandma on a porch fingers her rosaries.
She grins as her young neighbor brings her groceries.

While we might feel small, separate, and all alone,
Our people have never been more closely tethered.
The question isn't if we will weather this unknown,
But how we will weather this unknown together.

So on this meaningful morn, we mourn and we mend.
Like light, we can't be broken, even when we bend.

As one, we will defeat both despair and disease.
We stand with healthcare heroes and all employees;
With families, libraries, schools, waiters, artists;
Businesses, restaurants, and hospitals hit hardest.

We ignite not in the light, but in lack thereof,
For it is in loss that we truly learn to love.
In this chaos, we will discover clarity.
In suffering, we must find solidarity.

For it's our grief that gives us our gratitude,
Shows us how to find hope, if we ever lose it.
So ensure that this ache wasn't endured in vain:
Do not ignore the pain. Give it purpose. Use it.

Read children's books, dance alone to DJ music.
Know that this distance will make our hearts grow fonder.
From a wave of woes our world will emerge stronger.

We'll observe how the burdens braved by humankind
Are also the moments that make us humans kind;
Let every dawn find us courageous, brought closer;
Heeding the light before the fight is over.
When this ends, we'll smile sweetly, finally seeing
In testing times, we became the best of beings.

Amanda Gorman

Across That Bridge

You are a light. You are the light. Never let anyone — any person or any force — dampen, dim, or diminish your light. Study the path of others to make your way easier and more abundant. Lean toward the whispers of your own heart, discover the universal truth, and follow its dictates.

Release the need to hate, to harbor division, and the enticement of revenge. Release all bitterness. Hold only love, only peace in your heart, knowing that the battle of good to overcome evil is already won.

Choose confrontation wisely, but when it is your time don't be afraid to stand up, speak up, and speak out against injustice. And if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love, if you shine like a beacon for all to see, then the poetry of all the great dreamers and philosophers is yours to manifest in a nation, a world community, and a beloved community that is finally at peace with itself.

John Lewis

A Daily Meditation

I need strength, humility, courage, patience.
Strength to control my passions,
humility to assess my own worth,
courage to rise above defeats,
patience to cleanse myself of imperfections.
And wisdom: to learn and live by our sacred teachings.

Let me not be discouraged by my failings.
Let me take heart from all that is good and noble in my character.
Keep me from falling victim to cynicism.
Teach me sincerity and enthusiasm.
Endow me with perception and courage, that I may serve others with compassion and love.

Rabbi Robert I. Kahn

THOUGHTS FOR OUR TIME

Yom Kippur wasn't supposed to be like this.

Yes, we fast. Yes, we reflect. No, not as much as we probably should. No, we didn't complete all of the teshuvah we had hoped. And yes, life goes on.

Yet, here I am - Hineini. Here I am on a Yom Kippur afternoon that wasn't supposed to be like this. Our world wasn't supposed to be like this. Our way of dealing with societal and health plagues wasn't supposed to be like this. Relationships with friends, family, co-workers have been stressed and strained to a breaking point...definitely not what was supposed to be.

Here I am on a Yom Kippur afternoon reflecting, realizing that when I sat in the sanctuary with my community last year, I didn't envision my life, my family, my friends, my God would be like this. I didn't *really* consider deadly wildfires. I didn't *really* consider that Black Lives Matter. I didn't *really* consider acts of anti-Semitism. I didn't *really* consider a world-wide health crisis. I didn't *really* consider violence in my own city. I didn't *really* consider poverty, starvation, cyber-bullying, political malfeasance, gender discrimination, global warming, economic disaster, and so many other worldwide tragedies because they were unimaginable last year. And I certainly didn't think I could do anything about them. I mean...who am I? What I can I do for the suffering? What can I do for myself?

Hineini - Here I am, calling out to You for change from the straits of my soul.

The Psalmist writes of how You reply to Your people's meek requests with a Grand Expanse. But look...if I'm really honest with myself, I know the change has to come from me, from us. I just need to know that You're there, that You can hear me. Can You, my God, hear me? Can you, my community, hear me? Can you, my family, hear me? Can I hear myself?

Yom Kippur wasn't supposed to be like this. But it is. Now is the time for change. Now is the time for teshuvah. Now is the time to create a new year the way it is supposed to be.

Answer Me

Music & Lyrics: David Yazbek

Here I am; Here I am
And the light is dying

Where are you? Where are you?
Will you answer me?

All alone, In the quiet
And my ears are thirsty

For your voice; For your voice
Can you answer me?

If I try, maybe I can see your shadow
In the sodium light that masquerades as moon

If I try, I might take off like a sparrow
And I'll travel around the guiding breeze

Very soon; Very soon
That's the sound of longing

Are you there? Are you there?
Will you answer me?

. . .

SEEKING PERSPECTIVE

Again, God?

It's been a whole year since last *yontif* with You.

It seems like yesterday, that year ago...

I remember wanting to show both You and myself

All the changes I'd make,

All the fine things I'd do,

As I sat here last *yontif*...as I sat here with You.

Those beautiful prayers, how they inspired me -
The idea that we could still grow...emotionally, spiritually,
The thought that I alone could make a difference in the world -
Such powerful words when I read them.
How committed I felt when I said them.

But I fear I have fallen short, God.
I fear I am the same person now I was then -
With the same limitations...the same struggles...the same inertia.

Does this struggle not end?
Do we forever have to be starting again?
And again?
And still again...
Asking forgiveness, confessing to sin?
Does this cycle have something to do
With why I'm compelled to come back to You?

To keep trying, right? We must keep trying.
It is a process, right? Crossing those deserts within?
A process. Not an end.

AM I FAILING MYSELF?

We live in a dynamic world.
Everything changes.

Winds change direction, sands shift.
Rivers change course, mountains move.
Glaciers melt.

No one ever stays the same.
Everyone changes.

One cell becomes two; two become four.
What we were and what we are
Give way to what we will become.

Children grow up.
We grow old.

And there is no choice,
Except for what we *choose* to become.

So the question is not *will* we change,
But *how* will we change.

. . .

I know today is a day for change.
But change moves through me like an unsettling wind –
Invisible, yet I know it is there. I feel its movement.

At times the breeze is cold and makes me shudder.
In my attempt to shield myself from the harshness of life, do I
wrap myself with so many layers that I cut off my very breath?

At other times, the breeze is friendly and awakens me to
possibilities.

But in my zeal to advance life's potential, do I shed my layers in
such impassioned response that I lose perspective?
I am confused about this thing called change.

Today is a day for change.
Today is a day for growth.
Am I here to change?
Am I here to grow?

Am I here because I am a Jew and it is *Yom Kippur*?

Am I here because my family expects me to be here?

**Am I here to strengthen the bonds with my family;
With my people;
With God?**

Am I here to seek forgiveness for sins I have committed?

I am here to understand how, exactly, I have sinned.

I am here to discover my sins.

But what is sin?

Sin is a foreign word these days with no meaning for me.

I get up,

Go to work,

Do my job.

What is my sin?

I play,

Laugh,

Cry,

Rejoice,

And mourn.

What is my sin?

OK...sometimes I shout,

Argue,

Am disagreeable.

Are these sins?

I nurture, protect, provide.

I do the best I can.

*I am here to discover my sins.
I am here to confront myself,
To see myself as I really am.*

I am willing to look at myself.

**I see separation – separation from my family by my work,
by fatigue, fear, anger;
by my preoccupation with myself.**

**I see detachment – insulating me from what I prefer not to see
or deal with.**

Are these sins?

I am here to confess.

**Yes, to confess. For only when I confess can I start anew.
Only when I confess can I begin to grow.**

*Now is the time to sow the seeds of growth –
The ground is fertile,
The season is here,
The time is now.*

**But I...I am afraid to dig into the earth of my soul, for I do not
know what I might find there.**

**I don't know if I have the courage to change, to grow, to break
through the crust of hardened soil, of hardened soul.**

**Change is the corridor between where I am now and places
unknown.**

I don't know what I might find beyond the corridor.

*Though I hope for fulfillment, I fear failure.
Though I hope for treasure, I fear trouble.
I seek a better way, but I fear losing my way.*

So, God, I have no alternative.

To admit that I have failed in the past is to break ground.

To examine my failures is to plant the first seed.

But to grow...ah, to grow from my failures is to stand tall in the garden of peace.

Let us begin.

. . .

Time has Told Me

Music & Lyrics: Nick Drake

*Time has told me you're a rare, rare find
A troubled cure for a troubled mind
And time has told me not to ask for more
For someday our ocean will find its shore*

*So I'll leave the ways that are making me be
What I really don't want to be
Leave the ways that are making me love
What I really don't want to love*

*Time has told me you came with the dawn
A soul with no footprint a rose with no thorn
Your tears they tell me there's really no way
Of ending your troubles with things you can say
And time will tell you to stay by my side
To keep on trying 'til there's no more to hide*

*So leave the ways that are making you be
What you really don't want to be
Leave the ways that are making you love
What you really don't want to love*

Time has told me...

. . .

On Yom Kippur, we look inward in an attempt to grow - morally, spiritually, emotionally. But how can we grow unless we know who we are? To grow demands complete honesty with ourselves - no face to be saved, no barrier between us and the truth. For unless we drop all pretense, we will not find the truth and will never be free from yesterday's ways. So let us resign from the frantic pace of other days, and in the moving quiet of this day, face ourselves honestly, squarely:

I think of myself as an ethical person.

*Do I live by my principles?
Or do I merely pay them lip service?*

I think of myself as a person of strong moral character.

*When facing life's attractive but questionable options,
do I follow my conscience? Or do I stray from the path?*

I try to make choices based on what is right, not what is popular, or convenient, or expedient.

*Do I?
Or, do I do as I please, and then try to justify my behavior?*

I try to set a good example.

By deed as well as by word?

I value what is really important in life.

*Do I?
Or do I place virtual reality, material gain, and success above
honor, integrity, and even the people I love?*

O God, these are difficult questions. Having to answer them makes me uncomfortable. Yet I understand part of the purpose of such probing questions – indeed, part of the purpose of this entire day – is to make me uncomfortable...uncomfortable for the sins I have committed. I need to speak these words aloud and know that the universe hears them. I get caught in old patterns and paradigms; I am stubborn and hard-headed. In the last year I have missed the mark more than I want to admit.

Forgive me, Source of all being, for the sin I have sinned before you:

By allowing my body to be an afterthought too often and too easily;

By not walking, running, leaping, climbing, or dancing although I am able;

By eating in my car and at my desk, mindlessly and without blessing;

By not embracing those who needed it, and not allowing myself to be embraced;

By not praising every body's beauty, with our quirks and imperfections;

By letting my emotions run roughshod over the needs of others;

By poking at sources of hurt like a child worrying a sore tooth;

By revealing my heart before those who neither wanted nor needed to see it;

By hiding love, out of fear of rejection, instead of giving love freely;

By dwelling on what's internal when the world is desperate for healing;

By indulging in intellectual argument without humility or consideration;

By reading words of hatred, cultivating anger and contempt;

By avoiding intellectual discomfort that might prod me into growing;

By living in anticipation, and letting anxiety rule me;

By accepting defeatist thinking and the comfortable ache of despair;

By not being awake and grateful, despite uncountable blessings;

By not being sufficiently gentle, in my actions or in my language;

By not being flexible, but obstinate, stark, and unbending;

By not being generous with my time, with my words, or with my being;

By not being kind to everyone who crosses my wandering path.

For all of these, eternal Source of forgiveness:

Help me know myself to be pardoned.

Help me feel in my bones that I'm forgiven.

Remind me I'm always already at-one with You.

• • •

SEEKING AT-ONE-MENT

God, help me cross that desert place within me -
The desert I feel when faced with my dreams
Which I fear will vanish at my touch -
 Mirages in the desert.

The desert of sleeplessness,
And the desert of dreamlessness,
And the harsh drought of a morning
Full of empty tasks.

The desert of silence, and the bone-dry rattle of wind
Through a mound of hollow phrases.

In the drought of empty dreams,
In the dreams of empty drama,
I have grown barren.

At times, I move without meaning,
And my gestures wither in my hands.
At times, I speak without meaning,
And my words turn to dust in my mouth.

Across the loneliness of all these deserts, God,
I cry for help.

As You helped my ancestors cross the desert
Out of exile in Egypt,
Help me from my exile,
And guide me toward At-one-ment...
 With myself and with You.

. . .

AM I FAILING MY FAMILY?

Hopefully, each of us is nurtured in the family nest. Ideally we are nudged and coaxed and encouraged to crawl, to walk, to run, to soar.

So do we learn the values by which we live. Ideally our parents nudged and coaxed and pushed. They were our teachers by word and by example, as were their parents for them.

In the homes we establish, love and partnership among the generations must continue to be the pattern of our lives. Therefore, if the Day of Atonement is to have full meaning for us, we must seek At-one-ment not only with ourselves, but with our families.

SILENT MEDITATIONS

God, help me always to appreciate the precious gift of my family.
Help me protect and comfort those closest to me.
Let me each day do something that shows my love.

And if I get angry, prompt me always to turn back without delay –
to forgive...and be forgiven.

I pray –
Strengthen my love for my family.
May I always remember they are part of me.
Bless them, O God,
Keep them safe and strong.

For Teens

Dear God,

As I grow up, there seems to be more tension,
more turbulence,
more clashing of needs and ideas within my family.

I know this is just a part of growing up,
but is there something I can do to make things smoother?

Am I a good son/daughter?

Am I considerate?

Do I honor my parents?

Do I respect their feelings, or is it all about *me*?

Am I a good person?

Do I disappear into the electronic and virtual world, when instead I
should cherish the personal touch?

Am I living my life responsibly?

Do I choose my friends wisely?

Do I live by the values I have been taught?

Or do I too often give in to peers,
even though they may be leading me astray?

I pray –

Strengthen my love for my family.

May I never forget they are part of me.

Bless them, O God.

Keep them safe and strong.

For Young Adults Living On Their Own

Dear God, this is an exciting time for me.
I am now an independent adult,
able to provide for myself.

There are so many opportunities in life...
I want to "do it right" –
Make good choices,
Be a contributing member of society,
Earn the respect of the people I respect.

And when life demands too much of me,
I want to "do it well" –

Keep things in perspective,
Maintain balance in my life,
Become a loving spouse and parent...
and still remain close to my parents and siblings.

I want always to remember what is important in life.
Who is important.

And I want to be there for those I love...
For those who love me.

I pray –
Strengthen my love for my family.
May I never forget they are part of me.
Bless them, O God,
Keep them safe and strong.

For Parents Of Children At Home

By Your help, God, I was blessed with children.
With Your help, I pray I am a good parent.

I know the words to speak to them...
Words of love and praise,
Words that set boundaries,
Words that impart value,
Words that will help them believe in themselves.
I know they will learn from my words.

But I also know they will learn from my behavior.
From the way I *speak* the words –
The tone of my voice,
The look on my face.
From the way I interact with others.

And they will learn too when I say one thing and do another –
When I rationalize my misbehavior.

Please God, help me do what's right.

I want to let them know every day
that they are important to me.

And when they speak, I want to listen...
To *hear* what they are saying,
To know what they are *feeling*.

I pray –
Strengthen my love for my children.
May I never forget they are part of me.
Bless them, O God,
Keep them safe and strong.

For The “Sandwiched” Generation

Dear God, this is a difficult time for me.

My children are grown and on their own...
Our relationship has changed, as it must.
But still, letting go is difficult –

Am I accepting of their independence?
Do I trust his judgment?
Have faith in her choices?
Do I accept that I am no longer central to their life?
Do I use good judgment about when to speak,
and when to remain silent?
When to act and when to refrain?

Am I mindful that my suggestions are not always appropriate?
Not always...welcomed?

As I struggle with these issues, God, there are others...

My parents are growing older, more dependent.
How difficult it is to watch the strong man wither,
the confident woman erode. Am I doing enough for them?

My partner and I sometimes seem detached from each other...
Our hearts no longer beating to the same rhythm,
Our steps no longer sure as before.

Am I doing my part to make our relationship close and loving?

Dear God, I am pulled in so many directions.
Some days I am overwhelmed.

I pray –
Strengthen my love for my family.
May I never forget they are part of me.
Bless them, O God.
Keep them safe and strong.

For Adults

Dear God, as I enjoy the freedom and autonomy of maturity, I pray that I constantly challenge myself to live purposefully within my community.

Am I living a good life?

Do I make a difference in those around me and in the world?

Are my eyes open to the beauty that surrounds me?

Do I continue to seek knowledge and emotional growth?

I strive for a life full of meaning, of satisfaction, of peace by embracing the precious freedoms that I have been granted:
a healthy body, a strong mind, a good heart.

Help me continue to discover the best way to use my gifts – how to transmit my wisdom, to share my love, to realize my talents, and to offer my reassurance and support.

My dearest friends and family rely on me as much as I need them. May I always be worthy of these relationships.

I pray –

Strengthen my bond with friends and family.

May I never forget they are part of me.

Bless them, O God,

Keep them safe and strong.

. . .

***Yom Kippur* is a time to think not only of what we have done wrong, but of what we have not done right, because sins of omission bring painful regret and are most difficult to forgive in ourselves. Yet we pass by opportunity after opportunity to express to our family – and to others important to us – feelings of admiration and appreciation. We expect those we care about just to know how we feel. Then one day, we look back with regret...wishing we could tell them, but we can't.**

I'd like to tell you, but I haven't time.

I went out.
People were coming and going,
Walking and running.
So pressured.

Everything was rushing: cars, trucks, the neighborhood, the
whole town.

People were rushing not to waste time.
They were rushing after time.
To catch up with time.
To gain time.

Goodbye, excuse me, I haven't time.
I'll come back later, I can't wait, I haven't time.
I must send this email - but I haven't time.
I'd love to help you with your homework, but I haven't time.
How will you get to soccer practice, I haven't time.
I want to volunteer, but I haven't time.
That looks like a great concert, but I haven't time.
I can't accept having no time.
I can't think, I can't read, I'm swamped, I haven't time.

I'd like to pray, but I haven't time.

I want to tell you I love you, but I haven't time.

*Today we take the time to express what is often in our hearts,
but seldom on our lips.*

...

Hello in There

Music and lyrics: John Prine

We had an apartment in the city
Me and Loretta liked living there
Well, it'd been years since the kids had grown
A life of their own, left us alone
John and Linda live in Omaha
And Joe is somewhere on the road
We lost Davy in the Korean war
And I still don't know what for, don't matter anymore

You know that old trees just grow stronger
And old rivers grow wilder every day
Old people just grow lonesome
Waiting for someone to say, "Hello in there, hello"

Me and Loretta, we don't talk much more
She sits and stares through the back door screen
And all the news just repeats itself
Like some forgotten dream that we've both seen
Someday I'll go and call up Rudy
We worked together at the factory
But what could I say if he asks "What's new?"
"Nothing, what's with you? Nothing much to do"

You know that old trees just grow stronger
And old rivers grow wilder every day
Old people just grow lonesome
Waiting for someone to say, "Hello in there, hello"

So if you're walking down the street sometime
And spot some hollow ancient eyes
Please don't just pass 'em by and stare
As if you didn't care, say, "Hello in there, hello"

• • •

To the one I love:

I appreciate you...

Not only for what you are,
but for what you have helped me to be,
Not only for what you have made of yourself, but
for helping me become who I am.

I thank you...

For passing over
all the foolish, thoughtless things you
cannot help seeing in me,
And for drawing into the light the positive qualities you
have found in me.

You have listened, tolerated, encouraged
and supported me.

You have enriched my life
with a kind word,
an understanding glance,
a warm embrace,
And most of all, by caring.
You are always there for me, and that comforts me.

If in this year I have offended you, belittled you, taken you for
granted, or expected too much of you, I am truly sorry. Please
forgive me.

To my parents:

Have I neglected to tell
you I appreciate the
sacrifices of your time for
my time,
of your needs for my needs?

Have I neglected to tell
you You have been
my anchor,
my sounding board,
even my scapegoat?

You have loved me
even when I frustrated you,
even when I disappointed you,
even when I angered you.

From your example I have
learned to love,
to care,
to commit, to
grow.

You provided me the foundation upon which to build my life.

Have I neglected to tell you how much I love you?
I want to tell you today.

To my child:

There is great love in my heart for you,
And I want you to know of that love.

We may have disappointed each other, you and I.
Even, in some ways, failed each other.
For my mistakes, I am truly sorry,
And I ask your forgiveness:

If I failed to spend enough time with you,
If I let my temper flare too often for too little,
If I was overly critical or overly approving,
If I pushed you in certain directions for my own gratification,
If I was lax when I should have set limits,
If I was rigid when I should have been flexible,
If I neglected you,
Or over-protected you,
If I spoke when I should have remained silent,
Or remained silent when I should have spoken,

I am deeply sorry.

For you, my child, are of me; and all you feel, I feel. If I could protect you from the pain of life, I would. If I could blot out life's indignities, I would.

May you forever know I love you, and as your parent, I pray we are at one again.

. . .

O God, help me grow in my loving relationship to my family.
Help me express my feelings of pride and appreciation;

*And when I am angry, help me express my anger
constructively.*

Help me be as sensitive to my family as I try to be to my associates and friends;

Help me choose my words well, for some words cut deep.

Help me criticize without hurting;

Help me accept criticism without resentment.

Help me face issues that need facing;

Help me not make an issue of every little thing.

Help me be less judgmental, less overbearing;

Help me respect my family's right to do things their way.

Help me love my children when I find them difficult to love;

Help me love them when I find it difficult to feel loving.

Help me be open to the feelings of those I love;

Help me open my heart to those who love me.

Help us to establish homes in the tradition of our people:

Homes where children honor their parents;

Homes where parents respect their children;

Homes where there is shalom.

...

A QUIET INTERLUDE

Reflecting

God, I have brought much before You today.
I have spoken many words,
Shared many thoughts, Made many promises...
And more will follow.

I now need time to sit quietly – To
sit quietly and listen,
To hear Your voice,
To know You have heard mine –
Time to be at peace...
With myself...and with You.

Blessed

It's so easy to forget how blessed we are – I know it is for me.

How often I complain about the nagging difficulties of life.
How often I behave as though the slightest breeze is a
roaring wind.
How often I lose sight of how much real suffering there is
around me.

I take so much for granted.

And sometimes (I have to admit)
I even allow the blessings of others
To blind me to my own.

But starting today, God, on this holiest of days,
May I never lose sight of all that is good in my life,
All that is right with my life,

All the wonderful blessings You have bestowed upon me,
For I am truly blessed.

Struggling

This year has been a difficult one for me –
But even when times were most challenging,
I tried not to question You, God,

Even when darkness descended,
I tried not to lose faith.

I pray –
Please God, continue to grant me the fortitude to meet my trials.
Continue to help me conquer the difficult times.
Ease my path, so that I can be optimistic about tomorrow,
Even as I struggle with today.
Be present with me always and help me find peace.

Remorseful

I made some terrible choices this year, God, and I need to atone –

I used bad judgment –
I should have known better.
I crossed lines –
I *did* know better.

As a consequence of my behavior, I hurt others.
For that, I am profoundly sorry.

On this day of reflection,
I come to You asking as much for strength,
as for forgiveness –

Strength to conquer the hardships I have created,
Strength to repair the hurt I have caused.

Please God, hear my prayers –
Smooth the road before me.
Deal kindly and graciously with me.
Be present with me always, and help me find peace.

. . .

Eyes of the World

Music: Jerry Garcia

Lyrics: Robert Hunter

Right outside this lazy summer home
You ain't got time to call your soul a critic, no.
Right outside the lazy gate of winter's summer home,
Wondering where the nut-thatch winters, her wings a mile long.

*Wake up to find out that you are the eyes of the world,
the heart has its beaches, its homeland, and thoughts of its own.
Wake now, discover that you are the song that the mornin' brings,
But the heart has its seasons, its evenings, and songs of its own.*

There comes a redeemer, and he slowly too fades away,
And there follows his wagon behind him that's loaded with clay.
And the seeds that were silent all burst into bloom, and decay,
And night comes so quiet, it's close on the heels of the day.

Sometimes we live no particular way but our own,
And sometimes we visit your country and live in your home,
Sometimes we ride on your horses, sometimes we walk alone,
Sometimes the songs that we hear are just songs of our own.

*Wake up to find out that you are the eyes of the world,
the heart has its beaches, its homeland, and thoughts of its own.
Wake now, discover that you are the song that the mornin' brings,
But the heart has its seasons, its evenings, and songs of its own.*

• • •

UNPRECEDENTED

Why was this year different than all other years? We search for words but they sound increasingly trite. “Unprecedented, uncertain, troubled, surreal, trying times.”

And now new words and phrases are part of our everyday. “The new normal, the before times, pandemic, social distancing, face masks, essential workers, distance learning, pods, zoombomb, flattening the curve.”

Add to those... “systemic racism, white privilege, anti-racist, racial justice, black lives matter.”

How do we meaningfully atone? How can we change for the good when the events swirling around us are so overwhelming and so out of our control? Paradoxically, our world is both so much smaller and more connected; yet, how isolated we seem. We are struggling with decisions we never anticipated making, that may have life or death consequences. We find ourselves complicit in or at the very least benefitting from systems that we rarely think about but that cause generational harm.

So we reflect; we reconsider; we pray. Our lists of transgressions, acts of atonement, aspirations for the future, are unique to our time.

This year, this unprecedented year...

Have I been selfish? Have I made choices that made my life a little easier, a little more pleasant, but put someone else at risk? Held myself exempt from the standards I hold for others? And held others in judgement without understanding their own unique story and situation? Have I made the right decisions for my family, for people who work with and for me? The moral weight of these decisions weighs so heavily; how will I live with myself if someone gets sick because of a choice I have made?

Have I done everything I can to protect the people working in the stores where I shop, the restaurants I have visited, the people teaching and caring for my children?

When I had to go back to work, possibly in an unsafe environment, did I put my family at risk? My friends? Was there anything else I could have done to keep them or my co-workers safe?

Has my love and worry and my instinct to protect my family caused me to be paralyzed with fear in ways that have done more harm than good?

And my children; I cannot remake the world to counter the loss they are facing, and I cannot provide for them in the way I had hoped. The feeling of powerlessness is palpable, how can I stop it from turning into regret and guilt?

Have I disconnected? Has my world gotten so small that I have lost touch with people I care about? Due to inertia, frustration, exhaustion, tech-overload; who have I left behind? Friends, relatives who are isolated and alone...is there more I could have done to ease their loneliness? Or mine?

Have I let the drumbeat of bad news overwhelm me, force me into retreat? Lost my sense of purpose, of agency; and let fear and despair win out? Shut down, shut in, too much on-line time; have I been a passive consumer of the twin plagues of corona and racial upheaval without knowing what to do to help?

Or did I spend hours binge watching electronic screens or otherwise distracting myself trying to find an escape from the reality of what we must face?

I was going to learn a language, read more, get more exercise, organize my closets, learn to bake. But I didn't.

I was going to get politically active, join a protest, provide help for those in need, or support those fighting for justice. But I didn't.

Was I so awash in stress about my business, my bills, my health, so busy taking care of everyone else, working as a teacher, nurse, cook, and more, that I found no time for myself to laugh, to dance, to sing or to find moments of joy in the midst of all the work and worry?

Am I healthier than before, found the time to care for myself, or have I taken the opposite path? And can I forgive myself no matter what?

The intensity of our family experience; have I grown from it, have I squandered it, have I regressed or progressed? Have my relationships suffered? Have I been dishonest, rude, ungrateful, insensitive more than usual? Even more than allowable, given the circumstances?

What kind of home-schooling teacher was I for my own children? Kind, supportive, creative? Or exhausted, overwhelmed, and impatient? Did I strike a balance working from home, caring for my family and my children, caring for myself, or did I miss the mark?

Did I find myself alone and isolated and did I find ways to reach out? Did I get used to the quiet, and neglect the part of myself that craves community?

Have I supported those I love, appreciated the losses they are experiencing, or have I been so focused on my own loss that I have lost sight of those who are suffering more, who are sick, who are at grave financial risk, who are hungry, who are alone and frightened?

When confronted with my own privilege, have I stared it down and wrestled with it, or did I look away? Am I more aware of the subtle and not-so-subtle acts of racism and misogyny and homophobia and transphobia that I commit, or that occur around me and I do nothing? Did I hire and promote and support people of color? Have I made choices that segregate me and my children from people with different backgrounds? And when it came to recognizing that Black Lives Matter; could I even say the words?

Do I believe it? Have I reconciled my Jewish identity and allegiance and my support for Israel with the need to step up and say it? And act on it?

And in the face of all of these choices, these challenges, these monumental issues, and in a time when our country is more divided than ever, have I made the effort to listen, to understand, to engage, or have I cordoned myself off? And how...how do I fix that when lives are at stake?

Yom Kippur is not just atoning, but making a plan of action for repentance and repair. I want to do that, but how can I possibly plan? How can I map out my atonement and my repentance against a future I cannot possibly predict? But that is my essential work: to try. Even in "uncertain, unprecedented, surreal" times.

Today we are compelled to look back a year, to see twelve months of our failings and weakness. We cannot complete the work; we do not even know what the next month will look like, much less the next year. But we must start. Today.

. . .

AM I FAILING HUMANITY?

**Some days and times and ways,
Before all that is sacred,
We attest to the beauty in life –**

To the magnificent splendor of this world, variously displayed in
Crashing surf and quiet desert,
Soaring peaks and fertile plains,
To the outrageous outburst of Spring,
And the kaleidoscopic palette of Autumn.
And for all these splendors, we declare our thanks, our praise, to
You.
But today, in this place and time and way,
We must attest to the painfulness of life –
To the pernicious and perennial inclination of all humans
To distinguish us from them,
To make much of differences, and light of similarities.
We must attest to the unjust maldistribution of life's most
fundamental resources, and our inclination
To hoard rather than share,
To ignore rather than act.

And we must face how we make such divisions worse by our
own acts of disregard, diminishment, and destruction.

On this holiest of days, in this place and time and way,
We must shamefully admit
Our transgressions as a society,
And our callousness and apathy as individuals
To...well, to You.

Too often, in the absence of a catastrophic event, the world is
reduced to my world, my environment, my needs. There are
people around me hurting, grieving, hopeless, friendless, and I
turn my back. I have troubles of my own. I listen to the news. I
hear about the destruction of our environment. I hear about rape
and child abuse, about hate crimes.

There is a world of hurt around me, and what do I say?
"What can I do? I am only a single voice."

Am I failing my neighbors? Are we failing our world? Apathy and turned heads are not the answer. I am the answer. We are the answer.

. . .

There is so much anguish and despair, so much violence and distress. Let now an Infinite Presence enter our souls and our minds, teaching us a gentleness that transcends force and melts our hardness of heart towards those who need us:

All who struggle vainly for attention,

and those who shrink with fear at another's touch.

All whose outward ugliness may hide a soul of beauty,

and those whose awkwardness blinds us to an inner grace.

All whose minds are clouded or weak,

and all those who bear the burden of broken bodies.

All who wait in pain only for death,

and those who wait for news which never comes.

Those who are alone, unloved, with none to love –

All orphans and widows, abandoned husbands and wives, neglected children.

We sin against You when we sin against our fellow human beings.

For the sin of indifference, O God, we ask forgiveness.

For the sin of wantonly, carelessly abusing our environment – poisoning our water, our air, our soil.

For the sin of not doing my part to stop the polluting. For the sin of not doing enough to stop the polluting.

For the sin of playing it safe when moral issues flame up too hot in the community and in the world.

For the sin of mouthing the words "covenant" and "mission" and "brotherhood" and "justice," and then letting others do our part.

And for the sin of causeless hatred, for the sin we have committed by closing our hearts to people of other races, other nationalities, other orientations.

For the sin we have committed by polluting our children's attitudes with our prejudices.

For the sin we have committed by not respecting God's image in every human being.

For all these sins, O God of forgiveness, forgive us, pardon us grant us atonement.

. . .

Where have all the bright dreams gone? May this penitential season make us more sensitive to the needs of our neighbors, and more responsive to their pleas for sympathy and help:

Uneasy and confused, we cry out, "Who is responsible?"

I am responsible.

Every night, millions of people go to bed hungry, many of them children.

*Have I done anything to help end starvation?
Have I done enough to help end starvation?*

The streets are filled with homeless people.

Have I done anything to give them a chance? Or do I walk by them, eyes closed to their plight?

There are people all over the world oppressed and downtrodden, driven from their homeland. And I am asked repeatedly to help.

Have I done something, anything, to let them know someone cares? Or do I care?

Society abounds with dejected people - on the fringe because they are uneducated, illiterate, ill-prepared to make their way in our competitive world.

Have I done anything to give them hope? Or am I insensitive to their need for help?

Look, I am a very busy person. I have my family, my friends, my job, meetings to attend. And I need some time for myself. You know how it is...a very busy person.

My world is important. But I must reach beyond my world.

Though we can't solve the world's problems alone, or even in our lifetime, we are not absolved from the obligation to try. We must no longer leave it to the next person -

Before next year, let me make a difference.

I could mentor an underprivileged child.

Before next year, let me make a difference.

I can telephone an elderly person, alone in the world.

Before next year, let me make a difference.

I can feed a hungry child.

Before next year, let me make a difference.

I can help teach an illiterate person to read.

Before next year, let me make a difference.

I can reach out to an abused child.

Before next year, let me make a difference.

The community cries out for my involvement.

For the sin of indifference or callousness in the face of human suffering, I ask forgiveness. For the sin of not doing my part, I ask forgiveness.

. . .

I Am Light

Music and lyrics: India.Arie

I am light, I am light

Light as in the opposite of heavy

Light as in the best word in the English language to describe the soul

I am light I am light...

I am not the things my family did

I am not the voices in my head

I am not the pieces of the brokenness inside

I am light, I am light

I am light, I am light

I'm not the mistakes that I have made
Or any of the things that caused me pain
I am not the pieces of the dreams I left behind
I am light, I am light

I am light, I am light
I am not the color of my eyes
I am not the skin on the outside
I am not my age, I am not my race, my soul inside is all light
I am light, I am light

. . .

PROMISE, HOPE, TOMORROW

Today I find strength by admitting I am weak.

But will I find strength tomorrow?

Today I confess and face up to You, God, for the sins of a year.

But will I face up tomorrow?

Today I question my innermost soul to see if it is pure and clear.

But will I question tomorrow?

Today I pledge to follow the road that is right, not the road that is easy.

But which road will I walk tomorrow?

Today I am at one with myself and with You.

But will I be whole tomorrow?

. . .

O God, we know perfection is beyond us, but if we stumble, let it be on steps leading upward.

We are weak and the task seems hopeless, until we remember we are not alone.

There is a grace that every dawn renews, a loveliness making every morning fresh.

We shall endure, we shall prevail. We shall see the soul restore to joy, the hand return to strength, and the will regain its force.

We shall ride with hope - we, the children of the One who crowded the heavens with stars, endowed the earth with glory, and filled our minds with wonder.

Today is a day for change.

Today is a day for growth.

Today is a new beginning.

And to this let us all say:

Amen.

OSEH SHALOM

Music: Jeff Klepper

Lyrics: Liturgical

O'seh sha-lom, sha-lom bim-ro-mav

Hu ya-aseh sha-lom a-lei-nu

V'al kol Yis-ra-el

V'im-ru a-men.

Hu ya-seh shalom

Aleinu v'al kol Yisrael, A-men, A-men.

(May the One who makes peace on high make peace for us
and for all Israel, and let us say: Amen.)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Contemporary Confessions is a creative effort to add significance to our modern Yom Kippur worship. Over time, several committees have devoted months to research, selection, writing, and revision. Although some of the prayers began with the words of one person, the finished product bears the mark of all those who have worked through the years to keep the material fresh and relevant.

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We hope this service adds meaning to the holiest day of the Jewish year.

CREDITS

Page 12	<i>I need to speak</i>	Rabbi Rachel Barenblat
Page 15	<i>God, help me always**</i>	Father Tommy Lane
Page 21	<i>I went out**</i>	Abbe Michael Quiost
Page 31	<i>Throughout history**</i>	B'nai B'rith Series
Page 33	<i>Some days and times**</i>	Reverend James Leach
Page 35	<i>All who struggle**</i>	Chaim Stern
Page 40	<i>We shall ride</i>	Chaim Stern

***Edited*