



Alexander JFS
The Velva G. & H. Fred Levine
Jewish Chaplaincy Program
A joint project with Jewish Federation of Greater Houston



Rosh Hashanah



JOAN AND STANFORD
ALEXANDER
JFS
Houston
Light • Hope • Help



At this time of year, being away from your family and friends and synagogue community poses unique challenges. Inside you will find a variety of meditations, prayers and reflections that capture the essence of the High Holidays. May you find within these pages inspiration, hope and encouragement. May you experience healing and shalom.

Shana Tova u'M'tukah... Have a sweet and good new year!

This booklet has G-d's name printed in it. It should be treated, according to custom, as a sacred document when you have finished using it. To learn more, speak to your clergy or reach out to our Jewish chaplain.

Rosh Hashanah

Evening worship

Your book of life doesn't begin today, on Rosh Hashanah. It began when you were born. Some of the chapters were written by other people: your parents, siblings, and teachers. Parts of your book were crafted out of experiences you had because of other people's decisions: where you lived, what schools you went to, what your homes were like. But the message of Rosh HaShanah, the anniversary of the creation of the world, is that everything can be made new again, that much of your book is written every day – by the choices you make. The book is not written and sealed; you get to edit it, decide what parts you want to emphasize and remember, and maybe even which parts you want to leave behind. *Shanah tovah* means both a good year, and a good change. Today you can change the rest of your life. It is never too late. (Rabbi Laura Geller, b. 1949)

Beginning to Pray

Where do I begin? Where do I find G-d? How do I begin to pray? There is *tzelem Elohim*, an image of G-d, implanted in me. The image of G-d is found in myself, in whom G-d breathes *nishmat hayyim* – the divine breath of life. In each of us is a *n'shamah*, a soul whose origin in G-d. In prayer I enter into the deepest parts of my self, discover who I am, and touch G-d's presence.
(Harold Schulweis)

Our G-d and G-d of our ancestors,
may we know Your blessings in the year five thousand
seven hundred eighty seven.

Eternal One, bless us and the whole House of Israel
with renewed life, happiness and peace, comfort and courage,
resilience and strength.

May the words of our heart be acceptable to You
in the New Year that stretches before us.
We are forever grateful for the gift of life.

Inscribe Us in the Book of Life

For us the Book of Life has been reduced to words of casual welcome, spoken or written on cards, *l'shanah tovah tikateivu* (May you be inscribed for a good year.) The Book of Life. I wonder. Is that all it means today? When I hear those words, those words to me have meaning. I do not see a ledger in the skies wherein my fate is written, signed, and sealed. Nor do I see some greeting card, bedecked with gaily colored scenes, where on the bottom line – unvocalized – appear the words *l'shanah tovah tikateivu*. The Book of Life to me is a symbol. It says to me, "You are recorded! What you say is more than words whispered into the wind. What you are is something more than pebbles on a beach. What you do has an effect."

Faith

Faith is not something that we acquire once and for all. Faith is an insight that must be acquired at every single moment ... Those who honestly search, those who yearn and fail, we did not presume to judge. Let them pray to be able to pray, and if they do not succeed, if they have no tears to shed, let them yearn for tears, let them try to discover their heart and let them take strength from the certainty that this too is a high form of prayer.
(Abraham Joshua Heschel)

After a long illness I was permitted for the first time to step outdoors. And as I crossed the threshold, sunlight greeted me. So long as I live I shall never forget that moment ... And everywhere in the firmament above me, in the great vault between earth and sky, on the pavements, the buildings – the golden glow of sunlight. It touched me, too, with friendship, with warmth, with blessing ... And I remembered how often I had been indifferent to the sunlight, how often preoccupied with petty and sometimes mean concerns. I had disregarded it. And I said to myself, how precious is the sunlight, but alas, how careless we are.

Source of blessings –
may we open our eyes to the radiance around us;
may we open our hearts with gratitude,
and our souls with appreciation.

Mi Shebeirach · Prayers for Healing

A Prayer for Those Who Are Ill and for Givers of Care

May the Ruling Spirit who blesses all life,
bless and strengthen all of us
who struggle against illness.

May we whose lives are touched by illness
be blessed with faith, courage, love and caring.

May we experience the support and sustenance
of family, friends, companions, and community.

May we be granted restful nights and days of comfort.
We pray for *re'fuah sh'leimah* – precious moments of healing –
and a sense of wholeness in body and soul.

May those who care for the sick
with their hands, their voices and their hearts
be blessed with courage and stamina.

May those who pursue healing
through medical skill and knowledge
be blessed with insight, patience and compassion.

May all of us,
the sick and the well together,
find courage and hope.
Amen

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ

***Avinu Malkeinu* · Almighty and Merciful**

Avinu Malkeinu: Strong was the faith of generations before us. In exile, they proclaimed enduring hope. In the shadow of persecution, they affirmed a transcendent love and compassion. Ours is a different age – less confident and certain, more tentative in its trust.

There are many who say to the works of their hands: you are our G-ds. But when our worship centers on our own creations, we feel less gratitude, more doubt and despair. This is the paradox of our spiritual lives: we grow smaller in self-exaltation, nobler when we reach for You.

On this night of return, let us find the humility to come close to You, and open ourselves to Your presence. For You are absent only when we fail to make room for You in our hearts; distant, only when we turn away from You. Now, as others have done before us, let us overcome doubt and speak these words of affirmation:

We call You *Avinu* –
as loving Parent, forgive our wrongs and failings; accept us in our human frailty.

We call you *Malkeinu*
as Sovereign of our souls, help us rise from our brokenness to build a world of shalom.

To this vision we offer ourselves anew.

Almighty and Merciful

Avinu Malkeinu, choneinu vaaneinu;

ki ein banu maasim.

Aseih imanu tz'dakah vachessed,

v'hoshi-einu.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ, חֲנֵינוּ וְעֲנֵנוּ,

כִּי אֵין בָּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים.

עֲשֵׂה עִמָּנוּ צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד,

וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ.

Avinu Malkeinu—Almighty and Merciful—

answer us with grace, for our deeds are wanting.

Save us through acts of justice and love.

Inscribed—and Sealed

לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה תִּכְתְּבוּ – וְתִחְתְּמוּ!

L'shanah tovah tikateivu – v'teichateimu!

May you be inscribed – and sealed – for a good year!

Sources of content:

Mishkan Hanefesh
Machzor for the Days of Awe
Rosh Hashanah
CCAR Press
2015/5776

Machzor Lev Shalem
Volume One: Rosh Hashanah
The Rabbinical Assembly
2012

Morning worship

The Effect of Prayer

Prayer is a way of sensitizing ourselves to the wonder of life, of expressing gratitude, and of praising and acknowledging the reality of G-d.

One need not believe that G-d will interfere with the ongoing process of nature to feel that prayer is worthwhile. We may have different understandings of what G-d is. No definition we have is sufficient or answers all doubts and questions. To be aware that G-d exists – that there is more in the universe than physical matter, that a moral order is inherent in creation, that humans are responsible for their conduct and can help to bring about the perfection, or at least the improvement, of the world and of life – that is sufficient reason for prayer.

(Reuven Hammer)

Psalm 19 – a Personal Prayer

Help me to be aware of my selfishness, but without undue shame or self-judgment.

Let me know that You are always present, in every atom of my life.

Let me keep surrendering my self until I am utterly transparent.

Let my words be rooted in honesty and my thoughts be lost in Your light, unnamable G-d, my essence, my origin, my lifeblood, my home.

(Stephen Mitchell)

Statistically, the probability of any one of us being here is so small that you'd think the mere fact of existing would keep us all in a contented dazzlement of surprise. We are alive against the stupendous odds of genetics, infinitely out-numbered by all the alternates who might, except for luck, be in our places.

Even more astounding is our statistical improbability in physical terms. The normal, predictable state of matter throughout the universe is randomness, a relaxed sort of equilibrium, with atoms and their particles scattered around an amorphous muddle. We, in brilliant contrast, are completely organized structures, squirming with information at every covalent bond...

Add to this the biological improbability that makes each member of our own species unique. Each of us is a self-contained, free-standing individual, labeled by specific protein configurations at the surfaces of cells, identifiable by whorls of fingertip skin, maybe even by special medleys of fragrance. You'd think we'd never stop dancing.
(Lewis Thomas)

The Holiness of the New Year

Every year, there descends and radiates a new and renewed light that has never yet shone. For the light of every year withdraws to its source in the Infinite One, who is beyond time ... But through the shofar's sounding and by means of the prayers we utter, a new and superior light is elicited ... that has never yet shone since the beginning of the world. Its manifestation, however, depends on the actions of those below, and on their merits and penitence during the Ten Days of Repentance.
(Shneur Zalman of Liadi)

Shofar service

Hear the sound of the shofar!
You who are caught up in the daily routine,
losing sight of eternal truth;
you who waste your years in vain pursuits that neither profit nor save.

In what ways do my heart, mind, and soul need to be awakened by the shofar?

What truly matters to me? What makes me feel that my life is significant?

Am I too often wasting my most precious possession – the minutes, the hours, the days of my life?

Hear the Sound of the Shofar

The shofar is sounded.

תְּקִיעָה שְׁבָרִים-תְּרוּעָה תְּקִיעָה
תְּקִיעָה שְׁבָרִים תְּקִיעָה
תְּקִיעָה תְּרוּעָה תְּקִיעָה

T'kiah Sh'varim-T'ruah T'kiah

T'kiah Sh'varim T'kiah

T'kiah T'ruah T'kiah

Avinu Malkeinu, may we taste anew the sweetness
of each day.

Renew for us a year of goodness.

*Where do I find moments of sweetness and beauty?
As a new year begins, where will I devote my best energies?
How can I bring more goodness to the lives of others?*

May We Save Lives

Avinu Malkeinu, choneinu vaaneinu;

ki ein banu maasim.

Aseih imanu tz'dakah vachessed,

v'hoshi-einu.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ, חֹנֵנוּ וְעֲנֵנוּ,
כִּי אֵין בָּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים.
עֲשֵׂה עִמָּנוּ צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד,
וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ.

However small our deeds, let us see their power to heal. May we save lives through compassion, generosity, and justice.

בְּרָכוֹת לְרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה

B'rachot L'Rosh HaShanah **Blessings for the New Year**

Baruch atah, Adonai,

Eloheinu melech haolam,

borei p'ri hagafen.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי,
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
בוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.

Source of blessing, Sovereign Ruling Spirit,
Your majestic power creates the fruit of the vine.

Baruch atah, Adonai,

Eloheinu melech haolam,

hamotzi lechem min haaretz.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי,
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Source of blessing, Sovereign Ruling Spirit,
Your majestic power brings forth bread from the earth.

Baruch atah, Adonai

Eloheinu melech haolam,

borei p'ri ha-eitz.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי,
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
בוֹרֵא פְּרִי הָעֵץ.

Source of blessing, Sovereign Ruling Spirit,
Your majestic power creates the fruit of the tree.

Inscribed—and Sealed

T'kiah g'dolah!

תְּקִיעַה גְּדוּלָּה!

לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה תִּכְתֵּיבּוּ – וְתִחְתֶּימוּ!

L'shanah tovah tikateivu—v'teichateimu!

May you be inscribed—and sealed—for a good year!

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History of the Jewish Chaplaincy Program

Since 1965, the Houston Jewish Chaplaincy Program served thousands of Jewish patients, their families and caregivers who come to the Texas Medical Center from all over the world. A joint program of Aleander Jewish Family Service and The Jewish Federation of Greater Houston, it is professionally staffed by full-time chaplains.

In 2011, Dolores Wilkenfeld and Velva G. and H. Fred Levine created a ten-year fund to strengthen the program.

In 2022, after endowing the program to ensure its continuation for the future, the program was renamed the Velva G. and H. Fred Levine Jewish Chaplaincy Program.

A group of dedicated volunteers make patient visits and deliver Shabbat and holiday gifts. Our primary purpose is to provide emotional and spiritual support to those in need by providing comfort and encouragement during a time of stress, change or crisis.

Patients or their families are welcome to reach out to the chaplaincy program to request Shabbat boxes or visits or for any additional information.



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A United Way partner

