



Lights of hope: Teshuva, Tefila and Tzedaka

High Holy Day Resource Collection
5785

Edited and Curated by Rabbi Debi Shoua-Haim



Dear friends around the world,

5784 has been a challenging year, both here in Israel and for you overseas. It has brought with it trials we never could have imagined.

Yet, despite a year of war, loss, and displacement, where we have been shaken to the core, we have also found opportunities to reconnect with our pluralistic values and strengthen our sense of peoplehood and solidarity.

Throughout the year, we have all felt the profound need for a comforting, embracing, and inclusive community. You, our friends and partners from around the world, have stood with us, supported us, volunteered with us and joined us in numerous missions all along.

In times of turmoil, a people are not only measured by their ability to endure adversity but also by their capacity to act and rebuild amidst differences. It is evident that our strength lies in our collective commitment to both one another and to a socially resilient Israel that is reflective of the values we hold dear.

We have found solace and strength in coming together.

As we enter the month of Tishrei and gather with family, friends, or community to dip our apples in sweet honey, listen to the penetrating and spiritual sound of the shofar, sing, pray and reflect, I urge you to join us in making this year different. Let us act with purpose and determination to shape the future we envision. Let us advocate for the immediate release of hostages and promote a deal, without any further delay!

Let us invest in rebuilding our society, with a thoughtful focus on the North and South regions affected by the war, and foster a renewed spirit of community and shared society.

May this year be beautiful and different from the previous one

“שיפה ושוונה תהא השנה אשר מתחילה לה עכשיו”

On behalf of the Reform Movement in Israel, its leaders, rabbis, congregations and members,

Shana Tovah!

Anna Kislanski, IMPJ CEO

Foreword

It is that time of year again. As we enter the month of Elul, we seek to fill our lungs with a deep breath of hope. We want to believe that this year will offer us the chance to start anew. Yet, this year is like no others, standing both apart from and within the continuum of many moments in Jewish history, as we find ourselves, once again, on unstable grounds.

I present this High Holy Day collection to you with a heart both shattered and full of hope, as the gentle, crisp air of Jerusalem, with its touch of autumn, brushes against my fingers. At the end of a very unstable year, I find comfort and inspiration in the words from the Jerusalem Talmud, which have served as the foundation for this collection.:

אָמַר רַבִּי לְעֶזֶר: שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים מְבַטְלִין אֶת הַגְּזֵרָה קָשָׁה, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן: תְּפִלָּה וְצַדִּיקָה וְתְשׁוּבָה. וְשִׁלְשָׁתָן פְּסוּק
אֶחָד: (דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים ב ז, יד) "וַיִּכְנָעוּ עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר נִקְרָא שְׁמִי עֲלֵיהֶם", "וַיִּתְפַּלְלוּ", זו תְּפִלָּה;
וַיִּבְקְשׁוּ פָנַי", זו צַדִּיקָה, כְּמָה דָאֵת אָמַר: (תְּהִלִּים יז, טו) "אֲנִי בְצַדִּיק אֶחָזֶה פָנַי"; "וַיִּשְׁבוּ מִדַּרְכֵיהֶם
רַעִים", זו תְּשׁוּבָה. אִם עָשׂוּ כֵן, מָה כְּתִיב תָּמֹן? "וְאֲנִי אֲשַׁמַּע מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְאֶסְלַח לְחַטָּאתָם וְאֶרְפָּא אֶת
'אֲרָצָם". תְּלִמּוּד יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, מִסַּכַּת תְּעֻנִית, ב: א

In the Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Ta'anit, Rabbi Eleazar said, "three things annul the harsh decree. They are: prayer, charity and repentance. All three are from one verse: My people, over whom My Name is called, will submit and pray, this is prayer, and desire my presence, this is charity as you are saying, by charity I shall see Your presence. They will repent their evil ways, this is repentance. When they act in this way, what is written there? Then I shall hear in Heaven and forgive their sins and heal their land."

Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Ta'anit, 2a

During the High Holidays, we will cry out these words in various forms as we recite the well-known Piyut (Jewish liturgical poem) '**U'netane Tokef**'. But how can these words bring us comfort when they remind us that harsh decrees are an integral part of our lives?

Rabbi Alan Lew, offers an explanation of this concept in his book 'This is real, and you are completely unprepared': "Prayer, righteousness, and Teshuva will not change what happens to us; rather, they will change us. We will understand what happens differently. These activities will not tear up the decree; rather, they will transform the evil of the decree. Spiritual practice won't change what happens. Rather it will help us to experience what happens not as evil, but simply as what happens"



Teshuva (repentance), **Tefila** (prayer) and **Tzedaka** (charity), have guided my spiritual practices for many years, bringing light and hope to our lives. This resource collection is intended to be your spiritual companion from Rosh Hodesh Elul through Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. Inside, you will find a variety of texts, including poetry, philosophical reflections, and personal stories, which may be used around your holiday table, shared with your community, integrated into various programs, or simply drawn upon for inspiration.

Shana Tovah!

Rabbi Debi Shoua-Haim

Editor and Curator, IMPJ High Holy Day Resource Collection 5785

Throughout the collection, four symbols indicate the main concept each text focuses on:



Teshuva
Repentance
תשובה



Tefila
Prayer
תפילה



Tzedaka
Charity
צדקה



Light
אור

Month of Elul



Many Jewish communities around the world begin the process of Selichot (prayers of repentance said in the period leading up to the High Holy Days) with the start of the Jewish month of Elul. It is a time to gradually prepare ourselves each day for the marathon of the High Holy Days.



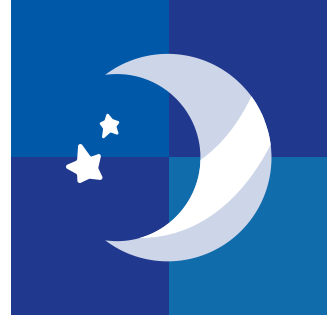
Viddui: the Jewish confession

One of the texts recited repeatedly during Elul and the High Holy Days is the Viddui (confession). For each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, there is a word representing a sin—an acknowledgment of wrongdoings we confess to. The sins are listed in the plural form to remind us that we all fall short at times. While confessing a sin aloud in the singular can be frightening, reciting it as a community helps us recognize that we are not alone in our failings, just as the person standing next to us.

It is customary to beat your chest with your fist with each word of the confession:

אָשָׁמְנוּ	We are guilty
בְּגַדְנוּ	We have betrayed
גָּזַלְנוּ	We have stolen
דִּבְרָנוּ דַּפִּי	We have spoken incorrectly
הִעֲוִינוּ	We have committed immoralities
וְהִרְשַׁעְנוּ	and We have done bad things
זָדְנוּ	We have been presumptuous
חָמְסְנוּ	We have been violent
טָפְלָנוּ שֶׁקֶר	We have framed with lies
יַעֲצָנוּ רָע	We have counselled badness
כָּזַבְנוּ	We have lied
לָצַנוּ	We have scorned
מִרְדְּנוּ	We have rebelled
נִאֲצָנוּ	We have blasphemed
סָרְדְנוּ	We have revolted
עֲוִינוּ	We have been immoral
פָּשַׁעְנוּ	We have transgressed
צָרְדְנוּ	We have oppressed
קָשִׁינוּ עֵרֶךְ	We have been stiff-necked
רָשָׁעְנוּ	We have been bad
שִׁחַתְנוּ	We have corrupted
תַּעֲבָנוּ	We have done the abhorrent
תַּעֲוִינוּ	We have gone astray
תַּעֲתִיעְנוּ	We have caused others to stray

Shanni Reiff Profesorsky, a naturopath and yoga teacher who grew up in the Jerusalem-based Reform congregation **Mevakshei Derech**, explores this concept in her book “Berī'a” (which means both Creation and the feminine for Healthy or Wholesome). In it, she offers readers a holistic journey through the Jewish year and the human life cycle:



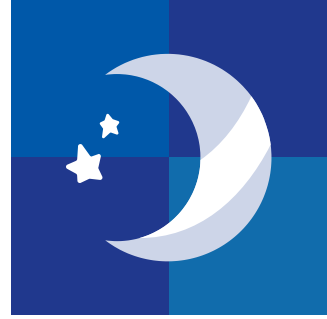
A holistic approach to the choreography of the Viddui **Shani Reiff Profesorsky**

Even when everything seems to be going wrong—like what many of us experienced this past year—choose to see the positive things in what happens to us or in what we have done. This is a choice which is not always obvious and requires practice.

One way to practice it is by an exercise called the swing. Stand with your feet parallel at shoulder width, knees facing forward and slightly bent. Turn your pelvis from side to side, thus turning your entire torso and giving the spine a twist from the tail bone all the way up to the base of your head. Blink your eyes and let your sight wander from one spot to the next, looking at several objects at various distances.

When you swing your body in this exercise, make sure your shoulders, elbows, wrists and fingers are completely relaxed. This relaxation enables the flexibility required for your arms to swing freely, remaining completely passive. Their motion comes from the open-heart swinging from side to side. When the joints are stiff, the hands will probably stay closed in a fist which will bang on the chest, hitting the heart like in repentance. Ashamnu Bagadnu.

When the arms and hands—as an extension of the heart—are open, relaxed and flexible, they are free to fly anywhere they will and are more likely to reach the opposite shoulder with the fingers open, resulting in a nice pat on the back.



The seasons did not change on time this
year
But the clock struck Elul
Forgive me
For not rising with the sun
To beg your forgiveness for the year that
has passed.
From the pardons of my life
I am learning to walk anew.

On cracked, stony soil
I no longer apologize
It is not my turn to apologize this year
I simply learn to pray for rain

The clock struck Elul
And I awoke as the morning gently pushed
back the night
To thank You, nevertheless, for all You
have created
For creating me
To be who I am destined to be
And who I was.

Understand
It's too much for me to be born anew every
Tishrei
So, I prefer to patch over
Just a single hole
In the hole-ridden firmament above us

הַעוֹנוֹת לֹא הִתְחַלְפוּ: הַשָּׁנָה בְּמוֹעֵדָן
אָבֵל הַשָּׁעוֹן צִלְצַל אֱלוֹהִים
סָלַח לִי,
שְׁלֵא קָמַתִּי עִם זְרִיחָהּ
לְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת מְחִילָתָךְ עַל שָׁנָה שֶׁחָלְפָה
מִמְּחִלוֹת חַיִּי אֲנִי לוֹמְדָת מְחַדָּשׁ
לְלַכֵּת.

עַל אֲדַמַּת טְרָשִׁים סְדוּקָה
כִּכְּבֹר לֹא מִתְנַצֵּלָת
זֶה לֹא תוֹרִי לְהִתְנַצֵּל הַשָּׁנָה
רַק לוֹמְדָת לְהִתְפַּלֵּל לְגִשְׁמִים

הַשָּׁעוֹן צִלְצַל אֱלוֹהִים
וְהִתְעוֹרַרְתִּי כְּשֶׁהִבְקֹר הַדָּרְךְ בְּעֵדִינּוֹת אֶת הַלֵּילָה
לְהוֹדוֹת עַל מַה שֶּׁבִּכְלֵל זֹאת בְּרֵאתִי
עַל שֶׁנִּבְרַאתִי
לְהִיוֹת מִי שֶׁאֲנִי עֲתִידָה לְהִיוֹת
וְעַל מִי שֶׁהֵיִיתִי.

תְּבִין
גְּדוֹל עָלַי לְהוֹלִיד כָּל תִּשְׁרֵי מְחַדָּשׁ
אֲזֵ אֲנִי בּוֹחֶרֶת לְהִטְלִיא
רַק חֹר אֶחָד
בְּרִקְיעַ הַמְּחוֹרָר שֶׁמְעֵלֵינוּ.

Rosh Hashana



Rosh Hashanah is a festival that emphasizes both family and community. We come together around the table to wish one another an abundance of blessings and goodness. We gather together to pray for the greater good of our community, the Jewish people, and the world at large.

In this section of the collection, you will find three categories of inspirational thoughts and blessings: those for our families, our communities, and all of humanity.

Seder HaSimanim, symbolic blessings and foods

Every Rosh Hashanah evening, we gather around the table to bless the new year. We wish it to be as sweet as an apple dipped in honey and as abundant as a pomegranate filled with seeds. Sometimes, we incorporate other fruits and vegetables into our blessings, using clever puns in Hebrew or other languages. It is also customary, on the second evening of the holiday, to serve a new fruit that we haven't yet eaten during the year and recite the She'he'ch'yanu blessing over it.



Please follow this link for the [full Seder HaSimanim](#)

This year, inspired by Hannah Senesh's poem, we are introducing a blessing for the Carambola, or star fruit. Take a moment to read the following poem and blessing at your family table –



Yesh Kokhavim (There Are Stars) / Hannah Senesh

There are stars
whose light reaches the earth only after
they themselves have disintegrated
and are no more.
And there are people
whose scintillating memory lights the
world after they have passed from it.
These lights –
which shine in the darkest night – are
those which illumine for us the path.

יש כוכבים שאורם מגיע ארצה,
רק כאשר הם עצמם אבדו ואינם.
יש אנשים שזיו זכרם מאיר
כאשר הם עצמם אינם עוד בתוכנו.
אורות אלה המבהיקים בחשכת הליל –
הם הם שמראים לאדם את הדרך.

We have chosen to bring the Carambola (star fruit) to the table this year because its yellow color and star-like shape, when sliced resonate, deeply with our current sentiments. The yellow symbolizes the ribbons worn by many of us in solidarity with the hostages still held by Hamas.



Stars, as described by Hannah Senesh, represent the light of those who are no longer with us, guiding us on our journeys. We have experienced significant loss this year, and for some families and communities, celebrating Rosh Hashanah may feel unbearable. The blessing over the star fruit is a way for us to hold both our grief and our joy in the same breath.



Blessing the Carambola - Light of renewal | אור ההתחדשות



יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ שְׁתַּחֲדֵשׁ עֲלֵינוּ שָׁנָה שֶׁל אֲרוֹת כּוֹכָבִים שִׁירָאוּ לָנוּ אֶת הַדֶּרֶךְ
גַּם בְּשָׁעוֹת חֹשֶׁךְ הַשְּׂוֹכוֹת.

Yehi Ratzon Milfaneicha Adonai Eloheinu ve Elohi Imoteinu Va'Avoteinu She'Titchadesh
Alienu shana shel orot kochavim sh'yar'u lanu et Ha'derech gam ba'sha'ot Hachi chashuchot.

**May it be your will, Adonai our god, and god of ancestors that this new year will be
lightened by the light of stars to show us the way, even in the darkest of hours.**

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ [רוּחַ] הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָעֵץ
Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech [ruach] ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-etz

**We praise You, YHVH our God, Ruler [Breathing Spirit] of the universe who creates the
fruit of the tree.**

The blessing for our community for this year is the one of coming together in prayer:



Prayer as human pursuit of Truth / Rabbi Stacey Blank

As Reform Jews, when we set aside a time for the stated purpose of prayer, we actually do it. Our prayers are shorter. We read and sing most everything together at a pace that allows us to hear and understand the words and to think about them. We have altered certain traditional prayers to reflect values of egalitarianism and universality. I strive to create a space in which prayer is meaningful and in which prayer created interpersonal and intrapersonal connection. I believe that prayer is meant to encapsulate the human pursuit of Truth.

In Judaism, G-d is associated with truth, as, according to the Talmud (Tractate Shabbat 5a), Truth is the seal of the Holy One. In the midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 8:5), Truth is one of the ministering angels that when G-d created Adam, Truth says better not to. G-d threw Truth down to the earth. The other angels chastise G- d for this. However, I believe that G-d threw down Truth in order to use it as a "seed" for growing the human being, as says beautifully in the Psalms, "Truth from the land will sprout and Righteousness will reflect in the heavens." Truth is the seed of human existence.

Prayer is our pursuit of Truth. When we prayer, we actively participate in attempting to speak Truth. Judaism is about seeking. The prayerbook is a consensus of what we, as Jews, believe in terms of our relationship to G-d and tradition. It compiles the heartfelt intentions of previous generations that continue to ring true even today. Authentic prayer experience connects us with some aspect of the Truth about G-d, physical existence, and spiritual understanding.

This is the time of year that most of us pray the most. Let us consider how we pursue Truth as a community.

Come for as long as you can, whether it is short or long. During that time be present, engage and focus. Don't feel like you have to say all the words all the time. You can go slow, fall behind, and read over carefully the words. Sometimes, even just focus on a word or two. Stay with it for awhile. Feel free to mentally edit. Make changes to make the text authentic for you. Take out words or add words. Change the gender of G-d and of our plural "we" from time to time.

Our tradition teaches that there are "seventy faces to Torah". We can move among them. Prayer provides us with movement. Truth is not static, it moves with us.

Rabbi Stacey Blank is the Director of the Center of Education and Leadership Development of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. She is a member of **Kehilat Har El** in Jerusalem

Finally, for this Rosh Hashanah, we are pleased to present a unique Midrash text composed by Rabbi Yael Vurgan, the Regional Rabbi of **Sha'ar HaNegev**. This text offers a blessing for all of humanity and can be studied in a community Beit Midrash and in interfaith meeting settings:



Midrash One Nation to Another / Rabbi Yael Vurgan

Yael said: All my days, I grieved over this verse: *And God said to her, two nations are in your belly, and two peoples will go their separate ways from your bowels, and one people another* will overpower, and the elder will serve the younger.* (Genesis 25, 23)

And I asked: How did Rebecca hear this harsh prophecy while Isaiah heard: no nation will take up a sword against another (Isaiah 2,4)?

And Abraham had already said to Lot: Let there not be conflict between me and you...for we are brethren. (Genesis 13, 8)

Until there came a generation that hated no more. And who are these? Moses and Aaron, of whom it is said: How good and pleasing it is when siblings dwell together (Psalms 133. 1).

And I heard most of the people and the leaders saying: we will live by the sword forever, and I grieved and wept even more, that they prefer that bad prophecy that Rebecca heard over the good one.

Until a poem came into my hands:

"And I shall keep faith in the future, Though the day be yet far away, Surely it will come - when nations Will share blessing and peace"

אמנינה גם בעתיד, אף אם ירחק זה היום, אך בוא יבוא - ישאו שלום, אז וברכה לאום מלאום
(Shaul Tchernichovsky)**

I rejoiced a great joy that Tchernichovsky had come and turned the first prophecy upside down and made it like the second, better one. And I too chose to believe in it with all my heart and all my might.

And I would go about in the city and call out: The two nations can, they can, live on this land in peace, share its blessings and be a blessing to one another!

* Midrash Tanhuma Exodus 27: Who will make you like a brother to me (Cant. 8:1) one finds that all brothers hate one another. Cain hates Abel...Ishmael hates Isaac...Esau hates Jacob...the Tribes all hated Joseph...and so of what brother was Israel [in Cant. 8:1] speaking of to God? Like Moses and Aaron, as is written How good and pleasing it is when siblings dwell together (Psalms 133).

** Shaul Tchernikhovsky, "I Believe" in Hezyonut u-Manginot [Visions and Melodies], Odessa, 1892



Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur - the day of atonement, is a day in which we stop. We stop eating, stop washing, stop working and we refrain from many of our day-to-day activities. This profound pause within the Jewish calendar is part of a deep process of reflection for oneself, for the community and for the entire Jewish people.

One of the most dramatic moments of the day in Ashkenazi liturgy is the recitation of **U'netane Tokef**, a Piyut (Jewish liturgical poem) that describes various decrees that might befall us. In addition to the commentary provided in the introduction to this collection, Rabbi Ma'ayan Turner of **Kol HaNeshama** congregation in Jerusalem and Rabbi Rachel Druck of **Tiferet Shalom** congregation in Tel Aviv each offer their perspectives on how to address such evil decrees:



Decree / Rabbi Maayan Turner

You can't save yourself from the evil decree - that's just the way it works. Whether you got unlucky or you got broken or you got punished. That's you now. You can't save yourself. Prayers and thoughts won't get you out of this. Praying for a second chance (or a third or eleventh, whatever it is) when you'll do better, be better, give more, be more. That doesn't work. It doesn't. So you stop. And you go out (if you can) and you do what you can. You can. Give: food, smiles, a careful hand, a coin or a ballot in the box, an hour. Give back a little of what you've taken without need, without heed. Because somebody else needs it now: things and chances and perhaps even love. And, yeah, give thanks. Those prayers can't save you from the evil decree, but you might save someone else. You might help save someone else. You might help save the world when you make it do better and be better and give more and be more. You can. If you (and you, and you, and you...) help stop the evil (oh, so many evils - pick one for now), then the decree might not be so bad. You get unlucky and you get broken and you get punished - that's just the way it works. That's the world. But it might not be so bad, because we can give and give back and give thanks. We can. We can save each other (it'll take time, it'll take effort, and money and sweat and disappointment and the giving might never end, but we can. We have to).



Tearing up one's decree / Rabbi Rachel Druck

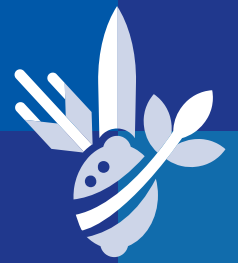
U'Netaneh Tokef, one of the most powerful High Holiday prayers, ends with the statement "And repentance, prayer, and charity avert the severe decree."

The author of U'Netaneh Tokef was not the first to come up with this formula for averting a bad decree; it is based on a recurring idea within rabbinic literature, though with some additions. The Talmud states: "A person's sentence is torn up on account of four types of actions. These are: Giving charity, crying out in prayer, a change of one's name, and a change of one's deeds for the better." Maimonides would later take this a step further and add going into exile as being another necessary action.

According to the Talmud and Maimonides, while prayer, repentance, and charity are essential for atonement, they are not enough. A person must also state, clearly and unequivocally, that as part of their atonement, they have become another person entirely, one who does not have the same inclination to repeat their sins. We, as ourselves, are not able to truly change, and the only means by which change can truly happen is by literally reinventing ourselves and becoming someone new.

But the author of U'Netaneh Tokef has a different approach to the project of atonement that we undertake during the High Holiday period. The author's list, notably, does not include any change indicating the birth of a new self. U'Netaneh Tokef understands that we are who we are. This does not mean that we are incapable of change. Instead, we need to bring our full selves to the atonement process. It is with all aspects of ourselves that we lay the foundation not for a new self, but for a better self, a better world, and a better year ahead.

Sukkot



One of the deeper meanings behind the concept of Sukkot is the fact that we intentionally build our Sukkah outdoors, under the stars. The Sukkah creates an open yet safe space in which we can meet one another, those who may be living right next door but are not an integral part of our lives, and even complete strangers.

Ushpizin and Ushpizot

Ushpizin, an Aramaic term for "guests," refers to inviting male ancestors into the sukkah during Sukkot, with one ancestor honored each day. with a special prayer. These are spiritual guests, who join our actual guests are welcomed into the sukkah with a special prayer.

In the Reform movement we invite a broader variety of gender and generational spiritual guests including **Ushpizot** – our female ancestors.

The blessing of welcoming Ushpizin and Ushpizot ברכת אשפיזות ואשפיזין

Words: Inspired by the traditional blessing and the writings of Rabbi Dalia Marx which appear in her book 'from time to time'
Music by: Shani Ben Or and Boaz Dorot
2015

Come and sit, David and Ruth
I am inviting the lofty guests to my feast
Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob
and Lea, Joseph and Rachel, Moses and
Tzipporah, Aron and Miriam.
Come and sit, David and Ruth.

מילים: בהשראת הרבה דליה מרקס מתוך הספר "בזמן", על
בסיס ברכת האושפיזין
לחן: שני בן אור ובוועז דורות, 2015

עולו תיבו דוד ורות
אנמיין לסעודתי אשפיזין עלאין
אנמיין לסעודתי אשפיזין עלאין

אברקם ושרה, יצחק ורבקה, יעקב ולאה, יוסף ורחל
משה וצפורה, אהרן ומרים
עולו תיבו דוד ורות

Ensemble Nigunim was founded by Shani Ben Or and Boaz Dorot in 2010. Born and raised in Israel, Shani and Boaz are inspired to connect between their Israeli heritage, music and prayer. The ensemble presents and creates a range of sacred music in the spirit of Jewish music from all around the globe.



Follow this link for the [Blessing of the Ushpizin sung by Ensemble Nigunim](#)

Israeli Reform Ushpizin and Ushpizot

This year, we would like to highlight seven special guests: Ushpizin and Ushpizot from Reform congregations across Israel. Each of these guests has shared an inspiring message of hope and peace that reflects the(ir) current Israeli reality. Their words resonate with the central themes of this collection: **Teshuva, Tefila, Tzedaka, and Light.**



As you welcome both physical and spiritual guests into your sukkah, consider also figuratively welcoming these contributors by sharing their messages with your family, class, or community.



1. Annette and Aart van 't Land

On the street where we live, we build a Sukkah each year for the community. After all, the Sukkah should be big enough to invite others to join in. A place where you demonstrate in practice the text (which adorns one of the more than 80 year old Persian carpets in our home):

“ואהבת לרעך כמוך”, *Love your Neighbor as Thyself.*

However, since October 7th, inviting others in has become a more selective process. The relationship with the “stranger”, the “other” is not always a good one.

Hopefully, this year, the visitors to the Sukkah will have read the text from Zacharias 8:19 - “וְהָאֱמֶת וְהַשְּׁלוֹם” - “וְאָהְבוּ”, *love truth and peace*, and in that spirit, despite existing disputes, we hope to be able to talk in a manner of understanding and mutual acceptance, enjoying the tradition and beauty of the Sukkah in its entirety.



Annette and Aart van 't Land were born and raised in the Netherlands. In 2011 they made Aliya and came to live on Kibbutz Beit Hashita. They supported the establishment of the local Reform congregation and to this day they are key members of the community. Annette and Aart have 2 children, one living in Israel and one in Massachusetts.



2. Eyal Shchory



It was a week before Simchat Torah. The preparations for the Second Hakafot are well underway in our community. This year, we are joining forces with the Olim Club in Nahariya. We expect that over 300 people will come – a record for any activity in our community.

We have a sense of hope. We have a new rabbi, we have started to join with new partners, and the future of our community looks brighter than ever.

And then October 7 came.



Our community is situated in Nahariya, was and continues to be under rocket attacks. Members of the community who were able, went to stay with relatives abroad. Those of us who stayed could no longer pray together safely, so we went back to Zoom services. Every Friday, we would log on for services – some of us from abroad, despite the time difference. Our activities were reduced significantly after the war began.

How do we gather the community together again, to bring in new members and the older generations back into the circle of activity? We are continuing to use the format of Zoom services, and soon we will open a Beit Midrash program in anticipation of the High Holidays.

Emet veShalom in Nahariya is one of the oldest Reform communities in Israel. We have always been blessed with a strong core group of dedicated members. Most of the members are seniors, our location is problematic, and each of us must face the trauma facing Israeli society, both as individuals and a community. But I am almost certain that we will be able to overcome these challenges. With hope for better days.

Eyal Shchory is the president of **Congregation Emet ve'Shalom** in Nahariya. He is Married to Esther and is a father of two adult children. The northern town of Nahariya, though deeply affected by the war, has not been evacuated. Eyal himself is a resident of Shlomi, a small town in proximity to Nahariya that has been evacuated. This places him in a complex situation where he is both displaced and needs to continue functioning normally while in survival mode.



3. Nati Katli

Thoughts about Sukkot from the Gaza Envelope



Before we try to cope with Simchat Torah, the festival whose very name commands us to rejoice, we need to prepare through the seven days of happiness

“After the ingathering from your threshing floor and your vat, you shall hold the Feast of Booths for seven days. You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the [family of the] Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities”. (Deuteronomy 16:13-14)



And we ask... how can we rejoice? Of all things, You command us to rejoice. To rejoice with everyone – but you forgot our brothers and sisters in the “desert”... Maybe we can host their children, their widows and orphans and try to make them happy... But how?

I searched for a different way to connect to the festival, to keep the commandment without faking a joy that isn't there yet. Between now and Simchat Torah, I hope we will be able to tear this page out of this anthology...

Eli Ben Gal said: “When I sit in the Sukkah with my friends, and their singalong rises up as the prayers of Jews with no God, I often reflect on what we have done, but dare not reveal what I am thinking: If an earthquake comes and swallows up everything we have built – buildings, workshops, housing projects, and chicken coops... If it uproots all the wonderful trees we have worked so hard to plant and nurture over decades... If the fire wats away at every piece of furniture, every book and picture, every work of art and item of clothing... If only we remain on this hill... If beyond the sorrow, we can say: ‘Despite everything, even if we had known in advance that all this would be destroyed, what we lived here was worthwhile’—then, and only then, we will have performed our task and ensured our achievement—an achievement that cannot be taken from us, because it lies inside us. More than we came to build, we came to be built.”

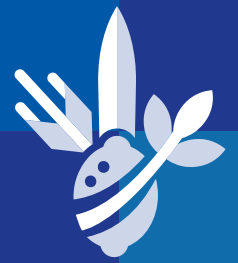
Let the sons and daughters of the Gaza Envelope say: We came to build, we stayed to be built. But our Sukkah is made of concrete, because what drizzles from the sky here is armed, is not welcome rain. And the joy? The joy is mixed with sadness for as long as we cannot welcome here our brothers and sisters, who were kidnapped on that morning that was meant to be joyful...

With gratitude and recognition of boundless love for the members of the Reform movement—my extended family.

Nati Katli is a member of Kibbutz Or Haner, located in the Gaza envelope, and is the Chairperson of the **regional Congregation of Sha'ar HaNegev**. Nati and her family were were evacuated to Jerusalem following October 7th, where they lived in temporary residence for six months. They chose to return home once it was possible, to their community and friends. knowing that much of the infrastructure of schools and community life will heal very slowly and never be the same.



4. Rabbi Miriam Klimova



יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יי אֱלֹהֵי שְׁתַּתֵּן לִי לֵב טוֹב חֶלֶק טוֹב יֵצֵר טוֹב סֶכֶר
טוֹב שֵׁם טוֹב עֵין טוֹבָה וְנֶפֶשׁ טוֹב וְנֶפֶשׁ שְׁפֵלָה וְרוּחַ נְמוּכָה... וְאֵל תְּהִי
אֲחֵרְתֵינוּ לְהַכְרִית וְלֹא תִקְוֵתֵינוּ לְמַפְח נֶפֶשׁ.
תְּלַמּוּד יְרוּשָׁלַיִם

"May it please You, o Eternal, my God, that You might give me a good heart, good part, good inclinations, good hope, good repute, benevolent eye, good soul, meek soul and meek spirit... Our future should not end in destruction, nor our hope in sorrow."

Jerusalem Talmud Berakhot 4:2

These were the words with which each day began in the house of Rabbi Yannai. The requests for personal qualities continue with a request for the future and for hope. I believe that the order of these words is not accidental. After all, our common future is necessarily connected in the world. Therefore, lest the common hope end in sadness, each of us individually must strive to make his or her heart good, to create good things, to cultivate good inclinations – and to beware of pride, to be considerate and empathetic to both those who are close and distant from us.

Each of these qualities is like a stepping stone leading to a common future. If each of us cultivates these qualities, perhaps there will be more hope and light, and less destruction and sadness in the future of humanity.

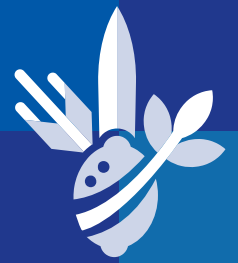
Rabbi Miriam Klimova has been the spiritual leader of **Congregation Shirat Ha-Yam** for the past four years. It is a community of Russian and Ukrainian-speaking Olim and refugees in Haifa who have been affected by both the war in Ukraine and the war in Israel. Opening the way to liberal Judaism for Russian-speaking Israelis, Miriam conducts conversion courses and participates in community and charitable initiatives.





5. Nurit Amedi

Songs that Accompany Me During the War



I have been evacuated from my home in Kiryat Shmona. I left home with my husband on October 8, 2023, before the organized evacuation began. Luckily, I had somewhere to go: my parents' home on Kibbutz Alonim.

I would like to mention some songs that can help me describe this period.

"Beaches sometimes long for the stream..." (Natan Yonatan). My sense of detachment is not so much from my physical home – maybe because I am back in my childhood home now.



The biggest pain is the detachment from life, from little habits, from the garden I cared for, where the plants are dying now. From the valley, with the Golan mountains to the east and the Naftali Hills to the west. And above all, from the streams of the north. I miss the streams so much. Last winter I didn't get to see the stream overflowing its banks. In the summer I didn't get to swim in the freezing-cold water of the stream and I didn't get to sit in my favorite spot and watch the water flowing by. The longing Natan Yonatan describes resonates with me now.

So what gives me the strength to continue?

The song "Human, rise above, rise... you have wings of spirit" reminds me of the strength in my soul. The song "Please, in strength" reminds me of my connection to the forces of the universe. In particular, the phrase "unravel the knot" in that song symbolizes for me the hope to solve, unravel, and expand all that is narrow, difficult, and complex.

But there's another area of life whose importance has become much clearer to me during these difficult times: the connection to people – family, community, and nation, in smaller and broader circles - they are each very meaningful to me. The lyrics of Ehud Manor, as set to music and sung by Boaz Sharabi, sum up many of my feelings:

"If only – we'd not suffer and each person would love their fellow

If only – the gates of Eden would again be opened

If only – East and West would blend together

If only, if only – we could renew our days here as long ago."

A simple wish for a bond between people who are different, but who respect each other and allow differences and space while maintaining mutual responsibility and a shared society.

If only!

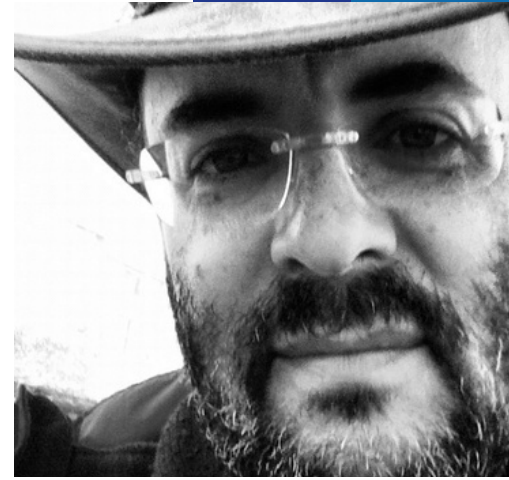
Nurit Amedi, was born in Kibbutz Alonim and after studying special education moved to Kiryat Shmona, where she met my husband had three children. She joined **Poteach Shearim Congregation** in Kiryat Shmona, led by the Rabbi Orit Rozenblit, because she was searching for a place to connect to her Jewish tradition and heritage, in a liberal spirit.



6. Rabbi Daniel Burstyn



This year on Sukkot, I will turn 60 and (my daughter tells me) I will be a grandfather. There's no doubt that Sukkot is my absolute favorite among the holidays. I love constructing the Sukkah, and collecting branches in the date orchard for it. Here in the Arava, the change of seasons is dramatic – the days are hot, but the wind in the evening begins to blow cool around this time, and finally we can open the windows and turn off the air conditioners.



This year on Sukkot, or thereabouts, I will become a grandfather, God willing. It's a difficult time to imagine bringing a new soul into the world. The past year has been a year of tragedy and pain, of turmoil and war. Yet we need to maintain an optimistic outlook, and two actions are especially optimistic: one is the birth of children, the other is planting trees.

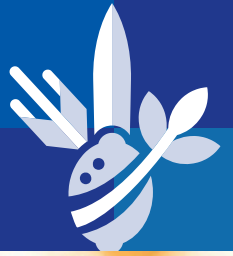
There is a tradition related in the Talmud (Gittin 57a) – when a boy was born, they would plant a cedar tree, and when a girl was born, they would plant a cypress tree. When the children were grown, they would cut the trees and make their huppah poles from the wood.

May we continue to plant trees and bring children into the world, and may God bless us with length of days, that we might see the trees we plant grow and be cut for our grandchildren's huppah poles, and maybe even build part of their sukkot.

Rabbi Daniel Burstyn has been a member of **Kibbutz Lotan** since 1990, where he was the manager of the landscaping department for many years. Since 2019, he has served as the regional Rabbi for the Israeli Movement for Reform Judaism in Hevel Eilat, the southernmost regional council in Israel. He is married to Eliza and father of Amalia and Reuven.



7.Linor Ein Gedy



Answer Us (Bring Them Home)

One more cloud before the sunshine
One more wave to crush to shore
One more breeze between the leaves rhymes
Nothing is as was before

One more prayer before creation
Hold us while we thirst for rain
One more day before salvation
As kingdom comes and love will rein

Don't let us burn alone
Don't let us burn further on and on
See our bodies minds and souls
Don't let us burn alone
Bring them home



 Follow this link to listen to [Answer Us \(Bring Them Home\) by Linor Ein Gedy](#)

Linor Ein-Gedy is an Israeli musician and singer-songwriter from Kibbutz Mefalsim in the Gaza border. Serving as cantor of the **Sha'ar Hanegev** regional congregation for over 8 years and conducts music performances with and in different communities. Her music and singing are inspired by everything soulful and oldies from many genres.

Shemini Atzeret



The prayer for rain

The evolution of Jewish tradition has created a situation in which Israel-based Jewish communities celebrate Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah on one day, combining both holidays. In contrast, in the diaspora these are two different days. Based on this, we offer two different intentions, one for each day:

The eighth day that follows the seven-day festival of Sukkot is Shemini Atzeret. On this day we begin to pray for rain. We add petitioned prayers to the Musaf prayer of that day in which we plea for the rains to come to the land of Israel.

In addition we add the following to the Amida prayer:

”משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם“, **Mashiv HaRuach U’Morid HaGeshem**
”**He/the One Who makes the wind blow, and causes rainfall**“

These prayers are very central to the Jewish liturgy originating in the the land of Israel. The fact that no substantial water resources exist here requires that we acknowledge our dependence on the rain for our agricultural needs. To the seven Ushpizin and Ushpizot we have hosted during the seven days of Sukkot, we add an eighth guest whose deep contribution to the land of Israel in this past year was through the lens of agriculture.



8. **Debbi Hirsch Levran**



Debbi Hirsch Levran, lawyer and social worker, recently retired from the Ministry of Social Welfare, and is an active member of **Kol HaNeshama congregation** in Jerusalem.

This past year, since October 7th has been incredibly challenging for all of Israel and for the Jewish community worldwide. Already in October 2023, in an effort to look beyond our anguish and sadness, Kehilat Kol HaNeshama through its Keren Tzedakah committee, looked for ways to help others and build community. After cooking for soldiers for several weeks, I reached out to Joseph Gitler, founder of Leket Israel, to help make contact with farmers in different parts of the country (including in the Gaza Envelope) who were in need of volunteers to do agricultural work after their Palestinian and Thai workers left post-October 7th. Slowly but surely a group of Kol HaNeshama volunteers was formed, volunteering once or even twice a week in agriculture. We worked in cauliflower and strawberry fields, in a medicinal cannabis farm and in vineyards; planted broccoli, picked avocados, pomelos, tomatoes and sweet potatoes; packaged persimmons, lettuce, parsley and more. We heard the farmers’ stories, received small tokens of their heartfelt appreciation (such as bags of produce) and after every volunteer day we concluded with a cup of coffee at a local coffee kiosk to hear each other’s stories. We got to know both the country and our friends from Kol HaNeshama in ways we never imagined. It has been a heartbreaking year and, yet, a heartwarming year. This is our reality in Israel today.

Simchat Torah



Every year on Simchat Torah we are joyful for the completion of yet another cycle of reading the whole Torah during the year.

Simchat Torah of 5784 was a traumatic, devastating event. But a mere week later, in the midst of this trauma, we began reading the Torah, once again, from the beginning. Because no matter what happens in Jewish history, we read the narrative of creation, again and again.

Just like the story of creation, light is created every day by the Divine, and we, as mortals, have the obligation to keep on praying for that light to be created, to keep opening our eyes to see the light and to keep on telling the story of how light came to be.

On this coming Simchat Torah of 5785 we would like to put the emphasis on the healing power of the spoken and written word. The words of Torah in general and the words of creation in Genesis, which give us the light and hope we are looking for.



Poem by Rabbi Osnat Eldar

"A single small word may have encompassed its whole essence"

Revelment and Concealment in Language, Haim Nahman Bialik

Where is the single small word?
The word that encompasses its whole essence
And ours.
The word whose roots are sufficiently deep
And which remains stubbornly standing
Through all our deliberate or chance trials.
Mutilate its stamens and scatter them in the wind
Lest they fertilize desolate soil
In the absence of rain.

Where is the single small word,
The word that comes into the world after harsh birth pangs
Of many generations
The word that has passed through camp after camp of living
souls
Leaving behind a shadow
And the smell of hope.

"יש שבמילה קטנה אחת נגנזה כל תמצית
חייה"
גילוי וכיסוי בלשון, חיים נחמן ביאליק

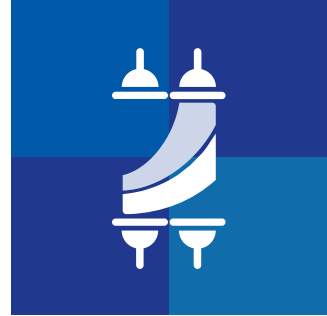
היכן היא המלה הקטנה האחת
זו שנגנזה בה כל תמצית חייה
וחיינו.

זו ששרשיה עמקים דים
והיא מתעקשת לעמד איתן בכל נסיונותינו
המכוננים, או לפי תומנו.
לעקר אבקניה ולזרותם לרוח
שמה יפרו אדמה תחוקה
ולא מגשם.

היכן היא המלה הקטנה האחת,
זו שבאה לעולם אחרי חבלי לדה קשים
של דורות הרבה,
זו שעברה דרך מחנות-מחנות של נשמות חיות
והשאירה אחריה צל
גריח של תקווה.

Finally, we bring you words of wisdom written by **Smadar Bilik**, a student-Rabbi who will be ordained as a Reform rabbi this coming fall. Smadar delivered these words on Shabbat Bereshit, upon beginning the new Torah reading cycle, a mere week after the horrors of October 7th.

Reading them a year later, the words still resonate the fragile idea that the light within the Torah is strong enough to brighten up even the darkest of moments and even the dimmest places in our souls.



Bereshit (Genesis) / Student-Rabbi Smadar Bilik

English by Barbara Hurwitz

The human eye - the delicate and complex organ that allows us to see - has evolved over millions of years; refining the role of each mechanism and each nerve to allow us to better process the variety of images of reality before us. Among these evolved mechanisms is the ability to see at night.

Since the night receptors adapt to darkness gradually, our night vision is sharpest when the surrounding darkness is complete and prolonged. With the full potential of night vision, the human eye can distinguish even very faint light sources in the dark -up to a thousand times weaker than those absorbed by the eye in daylight.

I wonder - do our psychological and spiritual systems also have a mechanism that allows us to recognize the faintest light in deep darkness? Similarly, are there mechanisms in our social circles that make it possible to absorb even the weakest of light - especially during the darkest of times?

It is written in the first chapter of Genesis - "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and void, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the water. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light."

Light is the first thing that was created, and the first thing that our eye is naturally drawn to. The operation of the light receptors in the eye is a simple biological and physical fact.

But the light receptors of the soul, of the community, of the nation - these are more elusive. Often, they are not drawn to the light but rather to the darkness. Our mental and spiritual "light receptors" are not a fact - but rather a task. These days, this is a never-ending task. Time and time again we will be forced to look at the darkness, to direct our gaze to absolute evil and darkness, but then turn our eyes back to the light.

In the year that have passed since October seventh, we have trained our souls, our sense of resilience and our communities, to hold on to faith and hope in face of the longest and hardest war our country has known since its independence. Holding on to hope, holding on to light, has not been a simple task this year, and to do so we seek the hand reaching out from Jewish communities around the world. Together, we embrace the words of the prophet Isaiah - "Moreover, the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that Adonai binds up the breach of His people and heals the wound from His blow". (Isaiah 30: 26)