

“And it came to pass...when it was morning that [there was] a very powerful blast of the shofar, and the entire nation that was in the camp shuddered.”

Exodus 19:16



*“The Four Festivals: ‘Rosh HaShannah/Yom Kippur’”
Glass Art by Nancy Current*

Piyyutim: Poetry, Prose, Prayers, & Art

Days of Awe 5779

Congregation Beth Shalom

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Introduction - Yamim Noraim 5779:

*"Tradition is not the worship of ashes
but the preservation of fire."*

- Jewish composer and conductor Gustav Mahler.

When you request a get-together with a friend, the inevitable question, either stated or implied, is: "What's on your mind?" Does it literally mean, "What are you thinking about?" Perhaps it means: "What's really important to you right now?"

The original *piyyut*, which comes from the Greek word for *poet*, was a liturgical poem meant to be chanted or sung during religious services. In our own booklet, our contributors created prose, poetry and art for thoughtful contemplation in order to answer the question we ask of our friends: "What's on your mind?" This variety of creative answers comes from our community of friends. And, maybe because they are our friends, or will soon become our friends, they need no introduction.

Our gratitude goes to our special contributors, the Beth Shalom staff, and especially to Lauren Fellows, for her diligent work in preparing this booklet.

We hope you enjoy our *Piyyutim* and our happy holidays.

Jeremy Alk, Editor

A Poem of Gratitude for 5779

by Marilyn Meyer

I've been a sister, a cousin, an aunt,
a friend, a wife, and mother.
Soon I shall be a grandmother.
I am not, have never been
an esshet chayil, a woman of valor.
When I am remembered, may it be
as a woman of joy and gratitude
for things great and small.

I take joy in little things:
In two eggs remaining in the carton for
breakfast, for gala apples, bartlett pears
and ripening figs in the fruit bowl,
for cartons of coconut milk for morning espresso,
for cardamom, turmeric, garlic and garam masala
in savory soups, for mushrooms in stir fries that
reincarnate from refrigerator leftovers,
for Shabbat challot that peak in golden brown braids,
and for my beloved partner Stuart to share them.

By day I love to watch
skaters and scooters who leap off ledges,
and descend on both feet. I'm in awe
at the ascent of neighborhood
labradors flying to fetch, landing with frisbees,
between their teeth, and amazed by
tiny children who call out "Your dog has two-colored
eyes!" while hanging by their fingertips off parallel bars.

On Mondays and Fridays, I am grateful for green lights,
and smooth sailing across the West Seattle Bridge,
happy for a prime landing spot in yoga, teacher Will in clear sight.
On the inevitable traffic jam home, I am grateful
for the voices of actors and authors on audio.

In spring I am grateful, now at age 70,
to still hike along Longfellow Creek
with my geriatric dog Gilah at my side.
We walk, no longer run, along the trails to Camp Long.
Together we enjoy the sounds of morning birdsong,
pick tiny red thimble berries, tart salmonberries,
and early blue Oregon grapes along the route.
In summer we share the ubiquity of wild blackberries,
the reward of blackberry pie, well worth the thorns.

Thanks to my beloved Stuart my garden greens grow,
Flowers, fruits and berries, harvested in their season,
My partner plucks the reddest ripe strawberries,
Trims lavender, rosemary and forsythia
shrubs, prohibits volunteer vagrant
columbines to compete with pink peonies.

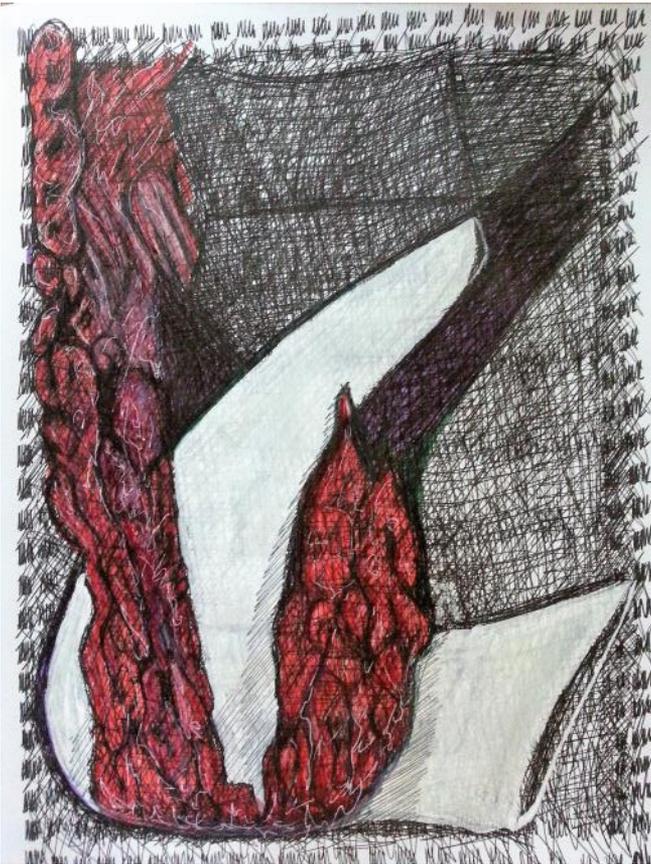
I am grateful to my beloved for nocturnal trips
to QFC for Fleischman's yeast and Sleepytime tea,
for his Jumble clues, Sudoku coaching, filling in
titles, names, and places when my tongue forgets.
Grateful for installing fans, vacuuming floors
repairing doors, opening windows, calling my elusive
cell phone when it's lost and found and lost and found,
for mastering the melody of the full kiddush,
for unlocking my soul to love again.

In every season I find wonder in
the sounds of crashing waves as tidal waters
roar into Puget Sound, grateful to discern driftwood
the shape of sea monsters at Coleman Beach.
And the sight of tall beach grasses waving in the wind
against tawny sand and silver beach rocks.

(Continues on the following page)

(A Poem of Gratitude for 5779, continued)

Last week, descending to Lincoln Park at sunset,
The sun, was crimson and orange in a darkening sky.
I stopped in wonder at the silhouettes of Vashon Island,
And the faint peaks of Olympic Mountains beyond it.
Tonight, the moon is golden, a duck egg in the eastern sky.
For these gifts of sight, sound, touch, taste and awe,
This is my prayer of gratitude.



Drawing by Terry Kalet

FOR THE ANNIVERSARY OF MY BIRTH by Jeremy Alk

Every year I pass this day
Wondering when the sun sets
And the silence will arrive
A tired traveler
Like the dissolving beam
Of a lightstar

I wear familiar garments
Fitting, for this reverent day,
Surprised at this time
With love
With the sun shining
And the squirrels playing
And the butterflies fluttering
And the autumn air crisp
And the renewal of my soul

The High Holidays: Sins and Virtues

By Amy Stephson

The High Holidays are a time for reflecting on our imperfections and doing something about them. We correct, repent, apologize, restore, vow to do better. This is central to the holiday.

But the Viddui confession just doesn't speak to me, nor does it describe most of the people I know. Yes, some of the sins are on target: gossiping and hating, for example. But I'm sorry, there are a lot of things in it that are not on target: I don't abuse, kill, oppress, pervert, steal, or yearn to do evil (unless yearning to eat mounds of mac and cheese counts), among other things. Nor, to my knowledge, do my friends and acquaintances.

So am I proposing a different list of sins? No. We conscientious Jews have enough guilt. But how about a checklist of virtues that we can look at during the holidays and either feel good about ourselves for a change or be inspired to improve. As a workplace coach, I sometimes ask clients to draft a list of 100 accomplishments over the previous year. Each person defines their accomplishments for themselves and an accomplishment can be major or very minor. I did this myself when I had a coach during my training and it was a great exercise.

I've come up with a starter list of virtues, large and small, for exploration and reflection. (Please note: I am not saying that I myself am this virtuous!) Do add your own ideas. You can still confess to your sins, of course, but this is another way to approach our quest to become better people.

- ☆ I call my mother/father/grandparent/other special relative or friend on a regular basis. I do it because I love them or it's important to honor them, not because I "should." It feels much better that way.
- ☆ I donate to nonprofits doing good in the world in an amount that is significant for me.
- ☆ I listen more than I speak.

- ☆ I engage in acts of kindness and thoughtfulness on a regular basis, to both friends and strangers.
- ☆ I believe in nuance and complexity – this reduces self-righteousness and increases empathy. At the same time I believe there are standards of right and wrong.
- ☆ I work on eliminating stereotyping and bias in myself, in all of its myriad forms.
- ☆ I work to make the world a better place however I can, trying not to dwell on all of the ways I cannot.
- ☆ I answer the call to make meals for or visit those in need.
- ☆ I contribute my time and talents to organizations that are important to me.
- ☆ And here are a few more. They may not count in the high holiday sense, but are virtues nonetheless.
- ☆ I brush my teeth twice a day and floss once a day.
- ☆ I eat food, mostly plants, not too much. (Thanks to Michael Pollan.)
- ☆ I don't buy too much stuff – it clutters the home, the mind, and the soul. I try to only have what I love and what I need. Or as the Zac Brown Band sings in "Homegrown:" "I got everything I need and nothin' that I don't."
- ☆ If I like to exercise, I do so, but I don't overdo it. If I don't like to exercise, I try to find something I like in order to remain fit, and I don't underdo it.
- ☆ My sleep hygiene is excellent.

So is there a specific time and ritual for reciting your virtues? Maybe in place of a Viddui or two, or whenever the spirit moves you. As for a ritual, we beat our breasts for our sins, maybe we can pat ourselves on the back for our virtues – though only in our minds, of course.



**ON THE OCCASION OF RABBI HILLEL'S ENTERING THE
STUDY HALL AFTER NEARLY FREEZING TO DEATH ON
THE ROOFTOP BY THE SKYLIGHT or
SEARCHING FOR THE SOURCES OF BOOKS
FOR THE NEW STUDENT AT BARNES & NOBLE**

By Jeremy Alk

Had I found the books on Judaism

 In the Transportation section

 I would not have been surprised

I found the books of Rabbi Sacks

 In the Inspirational Christian section!

 They are apparently well prized.

And the melamed Malamud's

 Barrels of magic stories

 Are out of print!

Perplexed, I could not find guidance

 For this predicament.

Our foundling brother Hillel the Woodcutter

 Was rescued on the rooftop of Your house, O Lord.

Help him find the books of Thy people.



“Solomon’s Study”
Drawing by Lauren Fellows

Women of the Wall (WOW)

by Diane Ray

We are Golda's daughters in Kotel purdah, Shayna maideleh, bubbe, Sabra, made Aliya, live in Diaspora, the Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leahs of right now, Reform, Conservative, Orthodox Jewish women braiding WOW.
We claim unfettered davening as birthright.

The usual Haredi white beard stands command astride his chair, a wizened Washington crossing the Delaware, lobbying decibels over the *mechitzah*: *Whores! Jezebels!* but flies no chairs at women's heads today, this Rosh Hodesh not being: Rosh Hodesh Of Sanctioned Rioting, Nor: Banishment By The Bathrooms, nor: Bus Loads Of Haredi Girls Swarming Our Minyan.

We pray, led by a willowy Sara in long jeans skirt, her lovely soprano floating against the din as soldiers deploy deaf ears and stony brows while all the while photographing WOW. Anat, serene leader and lawyer, arrested many times. The crime: davening-freely-while-female. Anat, dragged across her cell in Eretz Israel, food missiled in through bars. Anat, overnight on a jail floor, cocooned in her tallit and resolve.

Sent to hiss and finger wag at floozy Jews, Haredi Dvora in modest gray and snood tells her Tirzah, Leah, You go ahead, so they'll think she needs the facility. Rare in her many-peopled life, a moment with no one from Mea Shearim in it. She hurries up to young Miriam who stands on stone past the stones marked sacred, holding holy contraband for WOW in Kotel exile.

Sefir Torah? she asks. *Ken!* First time in her pious life, Dvora touches Torah, snuggling, cradling, kissing the mantle gold, lifting face to sky as though inhaling Shekinah.

The white beard loses breath and all is melody
as birds flit in and out the holy crevices
swift song and prayers mingling.

Note: Dvora's story adapted from Mary Brett Koplen post, WOW website, July 11, 2011. In 2013, after 25 years, WOW won the right at Kotel to wear tallitot but not to read or carry Torah. On Rosh Hodesh Tevet 2017, WOW prayer leader was attacked and other WOW members were injured by Ultra-Orthodox women shouting death threats. Western Wall Heritage guards stood by, aloof. A version of this poem appears in "Voices Israel 2018."



Drawing by Terry Kalet

The Most Unusual Dream

by Jeremy Alk

It was truly the most unusual dream
That I've ever had.

I heard the Voice.
The decision has been made
To change all human beings
Back to an animal-like existence
In the Garden of Eden,
To drink from the flowing river.
Frightened, out of my control,
I felt my body began to bend
As I headed toward the stream
To drink with my mouth,
Not able to use my "hands" anymore.

God was going to try again with another beast.

Rosh Hashanah 6779

by Lauren Fellows

On the green planet New Terra,
12 Gregorian light-years away from Earth,
Jews say the Shema with their faces upward
Toward Jerusalem across the stars.



A Bridge Over Troubled Waters by Cynthia Green-Alk

I did not think anything of it, I did not plan to wake up at that time. I fell asleep feeling happy to have had the experience of sailing on a beautiful ship. All of a sudden I woke up, wide awake and a bit disoriented. I looked out the window, it was nearly pitch black outside but I did see large dark shapes pass by the window. I checked the time on my cell phone, 5:30 am. I got up, opened the door and stepped out on the veranda and looked to the right—nothing. Then to the left—I sucked in my breath, and my heart started to race. I could not believe my eyes, the Golden Gate Bridge sparkling above inky waters in the dawning sky. With tears in my eyes, I began taking photos of the ship approaching the bridge and then sailing under it.

I felt so grateful, blessed and fortunate to have been able to be on a cruise, something my parents would never have had the opportunity to do. I thought about my grandfather Meyer, who came by ship alone, from Russia, at 16 years of age, 125 years ago. How did he feel, sailing into the port of New York, seeing the Statue of Liberty?

I returned to my room, having a renewed feeling of hope, in these times of troubled waters.

Elegy

by Laurie Blauer

Sarah discovered *The Book of Consequences* under a fraying oriental rug in the house she hoped to sell. A woman had died recently in the home that creaked with complaints. The structure listed towards overgrown, scrabbling bushes that continuously brushed a peeling exterior. Sarah had to step carefully through the mostly empty rooms because the rotting floors sometimes blossomed with overly attentive and grasping holes. She brought sticky ointments and bandages in her purse.

A whole city surrounded the small house with its banter of car horns, conversations, buses, passersby, open windows full of music. Sarah's boy waited patiently as a pet on the scarred stone bench in the front yard, his own book open between his palms. Long grass swayed around his legs. The white picket fence lay in ruins. The marriage had gone badly and Sarah thought of the woman with a cello who had introduced herself as a friend of her former husband.

Sarah sat on the splintered floor, opened the first page of the stiff, odorous, hard-shelled book. *The woman, Leah, had lived in a town of fields and rubble. One day, while shopping, she was herded to a train, hustled past soldiers, barbed wire. She was invited into a boxcar by remnants of families. The space hardly accommodated her arms and legs. As the train lurched forward a chicken was tossed out. Its pale feathers climbed a ladder of air. She screamed for her husband, her two children. A hand leaked over her mouth. She was told they would meet her at their destination and that her life would start.*

Sarah peered out the dirty window. Her boy had found a chewed ball, his eyes following a blonde woman walking by. Sarah could see he wanted to go with her.

She turned the pages. *Leah found questions within questions, a dream of water and food, human skin that didn't fit over its bones anymore. She was touched everywhere with despair and hope. A few more pages and Leah had nothing to hold but a fistful of white feathers.*

Sarah didn't see her boy on the bench. All her experiences had confused her, plunged her into the self her boy nicknamed "Headaches." Sarah leaped out the unsettled door just as a plane flew by overhead, dragging the shadow of its wings across the lawn. There was her boy, happy, his long, thin fingers deep in a puddle in which his face flickered. Small, brown birds hovered and then flew away from the head in the water.

"You frightened me."

"Sorry," the boy smiled, "I thought I saw a spotted cat."

"I'm almost done." She grasped his tiny hand, so unlike hers, returned him to the bench, his picture book.

Sarah's loneliness gathered as she entered the precarious house once more. Through the streaked window she noticed a handsome blind man passing the boy. The man turned around. The two exchanged words. The man with a cane and clutching hands neared the boy, felt the child's face while Sarah's heart froze. Sarah stopped herself from bolting outside by staring at the tattered head of an elk on the wall. She contemplated how parts of the body fell off, had been cut, or had stopped working. When she looked up the man had left her boy unscathed.

No words could describe the indescribable. Leah said we were synonymous with loss, the damage of touch, exiles. Each act had its consequence. Leah tried to absorb the air, the clouds, the birds until she could become them. It would be a relief. Memory was the worst part.

Sarah looked around her. She wasn't sure she could sell this house disintegrating back into the earth. She waved at her boy. She noticed his arms were scratched by disobedient bushes. His bones and will could break temporarily but wouldn't be broken. Sticky ointments and bandages could work for some of that. Sarah placed the book on her knee again, skipping to the end. *Leah brought what was left of her body back with her to this far, new city, found a man that loved the best that had remained in her. She began again.* It was possible.

Turning 90

by Rochelle Wynne

Do you know someone 90?
Who has seen in the stretch of time
War, terror, sickness and
Miracles
Who has seen friends and family leave this world
And new ones entering
Who knows so very much
But now is lonely, isolated
Bright eyes glazed with sadness, even fear
Where are you?
Are you visiting?
Are you listening to their stories
Looking at their photographs?
Did you bring your child (or grandchild) with you?
Did you help make the old face shine?
With memories and expectation
And the child's face with wonder
Do this. It is a mitzvah
The Mitzvah of *hiddur piney zaken*
Beautify the face of the elderly.

(inspired by a sermon given by Rabbi Jack Riemer on his 90th birthday)

Hypnagogic Hallucinations

by Jeremy Alk

Yizkor
Not a dream
Not fully awake
They return
Not fully asleep
They come back
Seeing them
A memory
Of those we miss
Fleeting
Then they're gone
Again



"Night and Day"
By Hannah Kurland-Cohen



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