

AMIDAH CHORUS 2023

These original prayers, offered on Rosh Hashanah, follow the order and themes of the holiday Amidah. At the end is an interpretive *V'abavta*.



Dorot – Ancestors

To those who have come before us...the named, the unknown, the remembered and the forgotten. We, your sons and daughters, nieces and nephews cousins and grandchildren bear the fruits of your resilience, your courage, your calls for justice and your unrelenting actions that have fought injustices throughout time with your words, actions, leadership and lives.

We know you through the likes of the the Harvey Milk's, the Bella Abzug's, the Lillian Hellman's and the Ruth Bader Ginsburgs.....as well as through the genius of the Leonard Cohen's, Irving Berlin's and the Roger's and Hammerstein's. We see you today in the Adam Schiff's , Jamie Raskins and Bernie Sanders.

When we look in the mirror we can see you in our own reflections and when we look around this room your presence is everywhere.

May we your heirs continue to sow the hearty seeds you have bequeathed to us. May we be the shoulders for future generations to stand upon with resilience, courage, and commitment to a just world.

May it be so.....Amen.....

(Roberta Teller)

Gevurot – Power of Life and Death

Three Keys: A Gevurot Prayer

Three keys the Holy One, blessed be
To hold, to pocket, three
A key to open the womb
A key to open the sky
A key to open the grave

I was a speck of dust that grew
And left my mother for a world
Of dust that cries for rain
Rain to unparch soil, to sustain

When I die I shall return to earth
Sleep in dust
Hold the faith

While you hold the keys
A key to open the womb
A key to open the sky
A key to open the grave

Three keys the Holy One, blessed be

(Cyndi Norwitz)



Zokhrenu – Remember us for Life

Remember Us for Life, Write Us in the Book of Life, *for Your Sake, God.*

Wait a minute, why am I asking to be written in the book of life for God's sake. God, you want me to live another year—not because of anything I'll do to deserve it. You want me to live because I am part of you. Through me your wisdom, love, and mercy can shine. Letting that happen is scarier than striving for it. Because of you, I *am* good.

Remember Us for Life, Write Us in the Book of Life, for Your Sake, God.

(Jane Lawhon)

Kedushah – Holiness and Holy Beings

God is holy. Celestial beings (or the natural forces and energies of the universe) are always singing praise!

Who am I? How should I live? Creation is too vast, too awesome. So many choices. Too many. Too many thoughts, too many options. My mind spins round and round. Is there a resting place, an unmoved center? There is. A steady note beneath all the noise. We can be here to witness God's presence as a daily experience and to sanctify our lives as a daily task.

(Gesher Calmenson)



R'tzeh – May Our Prayers Be Accepted

Hello God, Master of the Universe, Gracious One,

I'm sorry to say that I don't believe in you, though I wish I could. Are you a loving, caring force? Would you hear my prayers if I asked for your help? Are you even out there?

I am here, year after year, with my Ner Shalom Community, celebrating Rosh HaShana. I come with hopes of a new year that is healthier, wiser and more peaceful for myself, for my community, and for the world. Shechinah, I want to believe in you, and feel your feminine presence of Godliness, caring for the world, which I do witness as selfless kindness in many people.

If you exist Shechinah, wrap us all in loving kindness, and help me be open to your possibility and find the strength within myself to continue to try to bring goodness into the world.

(Leslie Gattmann)

Hoda'ah – Gratitude

What a gift to become aware of myself, a wave in this sea of unfolding divinity, every breath an opportunity to remember the Oneness of all.

What a miracle to be a great-grandchild and an ancestor, invisibly sustained by that which will be and is and was.

May we take this next breath, and as many as we can, in gratitude.

(Lauren Broersma-Grossman)

V'ahavta – You Shall Love

Let yourself love the Majestic One, the All That Is Was and Ever Will Be with all you are.

Love the smell of the toast in the morning and the warmth of the washing-up water afterward and the stink of the garbage.

Love the dust mote sparkle that clouds your vision opening you to other worlds.

And all day long mumble to yourself the questions that plague you.

And interrupt yourself with exclamations of wonder that you get to wonder and complain because it means you are noticing the complexities of this precious life, the myriad possibilities of the One Who breathes us.

And tell all your stories and wonderments to your children and make sure they know their own stories will surpass yours and be the angel for them that says, “Grow, grow!”

And talk to those you wait with in grocery lines. Tell them something you notice of beauty in their being or their bright red shoes.

Every day and every evening say hello to those selves you are in all the worlds who listen to your sighs and marvel at how you manage to hope and stay sane in this density that needs flesh suits.

And say yes to everything you possibly can for there is a set of coordinates where you will feel the eternal embrace of the shining One Who brought you here and has breathed your every moment.

(Leiah Bowden)

ORIGINAL POEMS 2023

WHEN LOVE ENTERS

The first time a protective mask slid off me,
no, more like it burst open
of its own accord, there were Douglas firs,
harnesses, anxious ropes course participants,
a co-leader I adored, sunshine, blue irises.
Without warning *Love* entered the clearing,
marched right up and smacked me in the chest.
After the thump, a pang.
I felt heavy, featherlight, full, empty.
Heat like a star's corona infused me
where she blazed and simmered.
The two of us shone as one radius of light
Illuminating the deep woods.
The cool, confident leader mask melted and
reformed from, I-have-it-all-in-control
(a phrase sure to make *Love* laugh) to
something akin to - there's only me and love.
I felt safe and filled and overflowing.

A participant said, you seem like you're in love
I thought, no, *Love* is in me.
I said, Yes and smiled.
Love and I smiled.
I wanted *Love* to stay. Always. I believed she
would.
And she did. All that day and the next.

After the glow faded in the shade of everyday,
I began to
sense *Love* hidden in the attic dust, the damp
basement.
I learned to wait for her return especially

when I was masked. With guests soon to arrive,
every
cobweb needs to be swept and towels fluffed just
right.
When the news fills me with despair and I wish
I was everywhere at once, holding a hand,
patting an arm in comfort by charred timbers or a
wall of rubble that was once their home,
at the cemetery that now cradles their beloved.

When this helplessness encircles me, I wait
When my perfectionist pulls on her white gloves, I
wait
When the Do-gooder, Judger, or Grouch
convinces me that is who I am, I wait
until I feel that first hint of her arrival.
It begins as a tickle in my chest, like a child
tiptoeing
through a field of daisies not wanting to bend a
single flower.
A sensation wells up, what I imagine removing
a suit of armor might feel like, relief, lightness, a
heaved sigh.
Despite the imperfection in my home, my heart, the
world,
when I quiet myself with patience *Love* emerges
from depths within where she resided all along.

Then I'm reminded there's only one thing that is
real.
Love and I here in this small body I call "me."
She takes my hand and pats my arm and says,
Hello dear. And whispers whatever I need to hear.
I say, Thank you *Love*.
And she smiles and says, You're welcome.

(Sally Churgel, 2023)

UNMASKED

I walk carefully, cautiously on the Peterson Creek Trail every day
Admiring the seasonal shift of the grapes' colors, pale green to deep purple
Longing to see the red tailed hawk feeding her chicks high in the cork tree nest
Looking to nature's angels to enlighten me
To free me from masked worries
Instead, heaps of broken branches from columns of trees hug the creek's bank , settle
on its slopes
My imaginations ' tidbits of fires past and unruly winds carrying embers cloud my
vision.
I am a stranger here on this macadam path, an observer of natures' whims and
contradictions
Then, I see him again a fellow traveler, a familiar sight . I nod a welcome. Ask my first,
“ How are you, “ of this older, disheveled man, clicking along with his cane.
He touches his neck; his voice salty, raspy scratching from his tracheotomy voicebox.
“ Thanks for the greeting.I've passed many a time waiting for that hello. Just waiting .
And yes now.” The old man nods and hobbles off.
I mumble, look upwards, hoping I'll see the blessing of the mother hawk tending
exhaustedly to her chick.
I wonder how often I miss the randomness of a gift. Masks off.

(Rita Rowan)

RETURN AGAIN VIII

“Return again, return again . . .”

Title from a song of the Jewish New Year embodying Tshuvah, or returning to oneself

My soul is a field
that life tills and tends.
Perhaps rocks need to be broken,
or dips and holes need to be filled.
Perhaps sand, or seaweed, or humus added
before it can yield something
lovely like a potato, maize, or a sunflower.

And, like a field, my soul longs to be sung to
while I water, compost, cover-crop, and putter.
For what am I born for if not to praise?

And the Earth will praise us, too,
even as she takes our bodies
back into her arms.
We are so intimate,
why act as strangers?
Like an open hand,
our secrets are all known.

During how much of each day can I drop
my false faces to be naked before you?

I count on you to raise me up
when, like a child learning to walk,
I fall again and again and again.

Now, I sing to you,
Be alive in me—
a little more, a little more.

(Raphael Block)

What masks do we wear, and why? I've been prompted lately to think about masks.

Everybody wears a mask now and then. In a lifetime, we start blind, eyelids closed, within the watery dark womb. For nine months we curl up in there like a fiddlehead fern.

We emerge to play blindfolded children's games. Dizzy, we try to pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey, or we swing sticks at candy-stuffed piñatas dangling from branches just out of reach.

American Halloween brings us out into the tricking-or-treating night disguised as: ghosts in bedsheets, robots, dachshunds, happy or sad clowns, criminal presidents.

And, let's not overlook Purim's inevitable gender-bending topsy-turvy masquerades.

Now, here we are in our contagious 21st century, itching and sweating behind pandemic masks. We have strained sequestered behind our nearly-sky-blue masks, trying to read lips we cannot see.

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Masks can keep stuff out or keep stuff in. They can be used for making friends. Or they can be used for warding off enemies within and without.

Some handy-dandy masks are reversible, can be turned inside-out and outside-in.

Tragedy vs. Comedy. Hate on one side, Love on the flip-side. Crabby Hermit on one side, Social Butterfly on the reverse. Cat-phobe on the A-side and Hello-Kitty on the B-side.

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Masks are three-dimensional objects, which can make intentions tangible. Judaism has many tools and rituals to help us physicalize our aspirations.

Some of us use our prayer shawls to cover our heads, creating a private mask or hood or tent where we can pray unobserved. We do what we do under there. (I have trembled and wept and rejoiced under mine.)

When praying, some of us cover our eyes, to avoid distraction and focus our attention. Our hands act as a mask.

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Personally, I have secret masks. Shielded, I perform a mediocre impersonation of an adult.

Over the years, I've fabricated or acquired quite a collection of grown-up camouflages. One I wear almost daily is my Troubled-Humanoid-Without-Guidebook. My Kind-and-Patient-Person disguise barely hides the snarky restless curmudgeon wearing it.

My Graying-Wrinkled-Senior veneer is a useful prop when pleading for a discount or misbehavior forgiveness. Or, there's the Suave-Lesbian-Date mask covering the exuberant vulnerable clueless tail-wagging puppy-dog beneath it, panting *"Oh, please pet me!"*

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And so, I wear masks, self-consciously or unconsciously. I strap them onto my head. They never fit right. The hard plastic ones pinch and dig into my facial contours.

The pliable rubbery ones freeze hard and brittle in my social winters. Or they melt in my humiliating adolescent summers, drooping like jowls down my cheeks and stinking like old girdles left out in the sun. And the elastic holding the masks on is flimsy, too loose or too tight. My complex complexion feels suffocated.

Between blinders, I long for peripheral vision, the sides of frontal frontiers, the wide and wild panoramas.

Behind the veils, my naïve, natural, and often nonsensical face longs to breathe, yearns for snowflakes on my tongue and sunshine on my sun-blocked Jewish nose.

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What would happen if we stripped off our façades? If we came face-to-face -- with ourselves, with each other and with all that is Divine?

And speaking of the capital-D Divine, does G*d ever unmask G*d's own face? That elusive One hides between boulders in the clefts of cliffs -- because, as the Torah tells us, we cannot see that Face and survive.

Is it forbidden to even *imagine* that Visage unmasked?

What does G*d look like to *you*? (Are there even words to describe this?)

Divinity can be seen in a baby's open face. Or deep in the eyes of loved ones. Can we catch a glimpse of the divine Countenance while looking at ourselves unmasked in the mirror?