

**A CONFESSION
FOR
OUR TIME**

***A CONTEMPORARY
YOM KIPPUR SERVICE***



HAR SINAI
T E M P L E

PENNINGTON, NEW JERSEY

THOUGHTS FOR OUR TIME

You are not required to complete the work,
but neither are you free to abstain from it.

Rabbi Tarfon

* * *

The mind has exactly the same power as the hands;
not merely to grasp the world, but to change it.

Colin Wilson

* * *

It is right to be contented with what we have,
never with what we are.

Sir James MacIntosh

* * *

From error to error, one discovers the entire truth.

Sigmund Freud

* * *

GESHER TZAR M'OD

Kol haolam kulo gesher tzar m'od
v'ha-ikar lo l'facheid klal.

כָּל הָעוֹלָם כֶּלֹו גֵּשֶׁר צָר מְאֹד
וְהַעֲקָר לֹא לִפְחֹד כָּלֵל.

**All the world is just a narrow bridge
And above all, is not to fear at all.**

A CONFESSION FOR OUR TIME

Again, God?

It's been a whole year since last *yontiv* with You?

It seems like yesterday, that year ago.

I remember how I promised to show both You and myself
all the changes I'd make,
all the fine things I'd do,
as I sat here last *yontiv*, as I sat here with You.

Those beautiful prayers, how they inspired me.

The idea that we could still grow - emotionally, spiritually.

The thought that I could make a difference in the world.

Such powerful words when I read them.

How committed I felt when I said them.

But I fear I have fallen short, God.

I fear I am the same person now I was then,
with the same limitations, the same struggles, the same
inertia. Shouldn't I have changed by now?

"If not now, when?"

I thought there was nothing I couldn't do,
as I sat here last *yontiv*, as I sat here with You.

Does this struggle not end? Must we forever be starting
again? Asking forgiveness, confessing to sin?

Does this cycle have something to do
with why I'm compelled to come back to You?

To keep trying, right? We must keep trying.

It is a process, right? Crossing those deserts within?

A process. Not an end.

Well, if that is the case,
Then don't count me out, God,
and neither shall I, as again I look inward
with an unblinking eye
and see all the kinks that keep me from growing,
all the defenses that keep me from knowing
I can do more than I have done this past year.
Maybe lessen the burden for next time I'm here.

So with incomplete dreams
and unfulfilled tasks,
with emptiness, I hide behind masks,
here I am, God.
There's still work to do,
as I sit here this *yontiv*, as I sit here with You.

Am I Failing Myself?

We live in a dynamic world. Everything changes.

Mountains move. Glaciers melt. Sands shift.
Everyone changes.
Children grow up. We grow old.
What we were and what we are
give way to what we will become.

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

So the question is not will we change,
but *how* will we change?

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

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

At other times, the breeze is friendly and awakens me to
possibilities. In my zeal to advance life' s potential,
do I shed my layers in such impassioned response that I lose perspective?

I am confused about this thing called change.

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

I am here because I am a Jew and it is *yontiv*.

I am here because my family expects me to be here.

I am here to strengthen the bonds with my family.
With my people. With God.

I am here to seek forgiveness for the sins I have committed.
I am here to understand how, exactly, I have sinned.
I get up, go to work, do my job.

What is my sin?

OK ... sometimes I'm disagreeable.
I've been a little selfish, maybe.
I've told a few lies ... but small ones.
Are these sins?

I nurture, protect provide.
I do the best I can.

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

I am willing to look at myself.
I see separation - separation from my family
because of my work, because I am fatigued,
because I feel fear and anger,
because I am preoccupied with myself.

I see detachment –
protecting me from what I prefer not to see,
insulating me from what I don't want to deal with.

I see skepticism over what reason cannot prove –
skepticism over God 's presence in the unknown.

Are these sins? I am here to confess.

To confess? Yes, because this frees me to start anew.
When I confess I begin to grow.

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

HASHIVEINU

Hashiveinu, Adonai, eilecha v'nashuvah;
chadeish yameinu k'kedem.

הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ, יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנָשׁוּבָה;
חַדֵּשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֵדֶם.

Return us to You, O God, and we will return. Renew our days as before. (Lamentations 5:21)

SILENT MEDITATION

Yom Kippur is our time to turn.
But how can we turn unless we know where we are?
How can we grow unless we know who we are?
To turn and to grow demand complete honesty with
ourselves- no saving face, no barrier between us and the truth.
For unless we drop all pretense we will not find the truth,
and unless we find the truth,
we can never be free from our old ways.

So let us resign from the frantic pace of other days,
and in the moving quiet of this day, face ourselves honestly, squarely:

I think of myself as an ethical person.

*But am I faithful to my values
or do I merely pay them lip service?*

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

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

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

Do I? ...

Or, do I do as I please and then justify my behavior?

I try to set a good example.

By deed as well as by word?

O God, these are difficult questions.
Having to answer them makes me uncomfortable.
Yet I understand part of the purpose
of such probing questions – indeed, part of the purpose
of this entire day –
is to make me uncomfortable.

Uncomfortable for the sins I have committed,
for I sin against You when I sin against myself.

We sin against You when we sin against ourselves.

For our failures of self, O God, we ask forgiveness.

For using the sins of others to excuse our own:

For tolerating in ourselves what we condemn in others

For denying our responsibility for our misfortunes;

For refusing to admit our share in the troubles of others.

For pretending to emotions we do not feel;

For having convictions and not expressing them.

For passing judgment without knowing the facts;

For allowing falsehoods to go unchallenged.

For having a talent and not using it;

For having a goal and not pursuing it.

For giving up on our dreams;

For closing our eyes to reality.

For false pride;

For no pride.

For self-contempt;

For inflated egos.

For not recognizing the sacrifice of others;

For making martyrs of ourselves.

For demanding instant gratification.

For expecting constant gratification.

For expecting too much;

For settling for too little.

For always saying no;

For never saying no.

We have failed ourselves by letting problems fester in the dark instead of bringing them into the light.

We have failed ourselves by holding grudges instead of dismantling our anger.

We have failed ourselves by our pettiness and our envy –

By our conformity and imitation,

By our gossip and conceit –

By our arrogance and greed.

We sin against You when we sin against ourselves.
For our failures of self, we ask forgiveness.

For all our failures of self, O God, we ask forgiveness.

I have sinned, I have confessed and I shall repent.
I pray I will be able to overcome any resistance to change.
I pray this day can be one of honest self-analysis in a continuing effort to right what is wrong within me.

V'AL KULAM

*V'al kulam, Elo-ah s'lichot,
s'lach lanu, m'chal lanu, kaper-lanu.*

וְעַל כָּלֵם, אֱלֹהֵי סְלִיחוֹת,
סְלַח לָנוּ, מַחֵל לָנוּ, כַּפֵּר-לָנוּ.

For all these sins, merciful God,
Pardon us, Forgive us, Grant us atonement

AM I FAILING MY FAMILY?

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

So do we learn the values by which we live. Ideally our parents were our teachers by word and by example. As long as we live, our parents are still our parents, and our children still our children. In the homes we establish, love and partnership among the generations must be the pattern of our lives.

Therefore, if the Day of Atonement is to have full meaning for us, we must seek at-one-ment not only with ourselves, but with our families.

* * *

Dear God, help me find peace within my family.
Help me know if I have failed.
My parents are growing older, more dependent.
Am I doing enough for them?

My partner occasionally seems detached from me,
as though our hearts no longer beat to the same rhythm,
Our steps no longer sure as before.
Have I been a good partner?

Have I been a good parent? A good grandparent?
Have I taught my children to live responsibly?
Have I taught them good values?

Have I given my family enough of me?
Or have I too often asked them to be the ones to wait?
Must I repent when I know I have tried to be compassionate,
understanding and loving?

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

* * *

Yom Kippur is a time to think not only of what we have
done wrong, but of what we have not done right,
for sins of omission bring painful regret and are difficult
to forgive in ourselves.

Yet we pass by one opportunity
after another to express to our family - and to others who
are important to us - our feelings of admiration and appreciation.
We expect those we care about the most
simply to know how we feel. Then one day we look back
with regret ... wishing we could tell them, but we can't.

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

Excuse me, could you step on it, please?
Hey, can somebody open another check-out line here?
I haven't got all day.

Well, would you look at this - 50 miles an hour
in a 65-miles per hour zone!

Help you with your homework?
Sorry, honey. No time now.
Later. OK?

Volunteer? You must be joking.
You mean, in my spare time?

Nope, didn't see that Netflix series;
No time.
Maybe tomorrow.

I didn't tell him I loved him.
I didn't tell her I loved her.
And I can't tomorrow.

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

In Appreciation

I appreciate you...

not only for what you are,
but for what you have helped me to be,
not only for what you have made of yourself,
but for sharing in the joy of my accomplishments.

I thank you...

for passing over the foolish, thoughtless things you cannot help seeing
in me, and for drawing into the light the good qualities
no one else looked deeply enough to find.

You have

listened, accepted,
encouraged and supported me.

You have enriched my life
with a kind word and understanding glance,
a warm embrace,
and most of all, by caring.

You are there for me, and that comforts me.

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

To My Parents

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

Have I neglected to thank you
for being my anchor,
my sounding board,
even my scapegoat?

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

From your example I have learned
to care,
to make a commitment,
to grow.

You provided me with the foundation
upon which I am building my life.
Have I neglected to tell you how much I love you?
I want to tell you today.

To My Child

There is great love in my heart today.
I want you to know of that love.

We may have disappointed each other, you and I.
Even, in some ways, failed one another.
For my mistakes, I am truly sorry.

I ask your forgiveness:

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

For you, my child, are of me and all you feel, I feel.
If I could protect you from the pain of life, I would.
If I could blot out life's indignities, I would.
May you forever know I love you,
and as your parent, I pray we are at one again.

* * *

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

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

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

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

Help me offer constructive comments without hurting;

Help me accept criticism without resentment.

Help me face issues that need facing;

Help me not make an issue of every little thing.

Help me be less judgmental, less overbearing;

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

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

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

Help me to be open to the feelings of those who love me.

Help me open my heart to those who love me.

Help us to establish homes in the tradition of our people:
homes where children honor their parents;
Homes where parents respect their children.

Homes where there is shalom.

K'RACHEM AV

(Psalm 103:13)

K'rachem av al banim
Ri-chem Adonai al y'ray-av
K'hig-boa she-mayim al ha-aretz
Gavar chas-do al y'ray-av

As a parent shows compassion on their child,
So too does God have compassion on us.

PERSONAL BLESSINGS

Reflection –

God, I have brought much before You today.
I have spoken many words,
shared many thoughts,
made many promises ... and more will follow.

I now need time to sit quietly ,
a moment of repose,
time to sit quietly and listen,
to hear Your voice,
to know You have heard mine.

Time to be at peace with myself . . .
and with You.

Struggling –

My path through life has been a difficult one. Why, I do not know.

I have tried not to question You, God,
even when the pain seemed unbearable.
I have tried not to lose faith,
even when darkness surrounded me.

On this day of reflection, I come to You
asking for strength as well as forgiveness –
strength to cope, strength to overcome.
Please grant me the fortitude to meet my trials.
Help me conquer the adversity in my life.
Smooth the road before me.

Hear me, God. Ease my path so I can be optimistic about tomorrow,
even as I struggle with today.

Blessed –

It's so easy to forget how blessed we are; I know I do.

I complain about the nagging difficulties of everyday living.
I behave as though the slightest breeze were a roaring wind.
I lose sight of how much real suffering there is around me.
I take so much for granted.

And sometimes (I have to admit)
I even allow the blessings of others to blind me to my own.
But starting today, God, on this holiest of days,
may I not lose sight of all that is good in my life,
all that is right with my life,
all the wonderful blessings you have bestowed upon me.
I am truly blessed.

A Difficult Year –

It was a trying year, God, a difficult year for me.
I stumbled, I fell.

At times I felt so alone –
often in fear of what tomorrow might bring,
often in fear of what tomorrow might not bring.
And yet I knew deep inside that You were with me,
helping me face each day.

I pray that in the coming year, I draw closer to You.

Bless me and keep me, God.
Deal kindly and graciously with me.
Be present with me always and help me find peace.

THE ANGELS' BLESSING by Debbie Freidman

**May our right hand bring us closer to our Godliness.
May our left hand give us strength to face each day.
And before us may our visions light our paths ahead.
And behind us may well-being heal our way.**

All around us is Shechinah (4x)

AM I FAILING MY PEOPLE?

Today we are compelled to look back a year,
to see our weaknesses.

We dare to scrutinize ourselves.

But why today?

What compels us to be here?

"Yom Kippur," we say.

"Yom Kippur," our parents and grandparents said.

"Yom Kippur," we have always said.

We - because we are the Jewish People.

We are what the Jewish people has become.

But will our descendants say Yom Kippur?

Throughout history we have clung tenaciously to our Judaism.

Had we at any time been willing to give up our faith, our culture,
our teachings, not only would our history be different,
it might have ended.

*A heritage has come down to us
along the painful path our people has traveled.*

Was it worth it, the long and painful path?

Are we worthy of it?

For we are what the Jewish people has become.

A heritage of faith and learning has come down to us
out of the life of a people.

Do we live by it?

A heritage of justice and peace has come down to us
out of the life of a people.

Are we worthy of it?

All this is ours. Ours the teaching, ours the task to make the heritage live. Are we worthy of it?

Are we living it? Will our children say "Yom Kippur?"

To betray the present is to destroy the past.
To destroy the past is to extinguish the future.

Am I among those destroying the heritage?

Some of us have strayed from our ancestral faith
and broken the chain of tradition .

Am I among them?

Some of us have despised the birthright
and treated our heritage with the contempt of indifference.

Am I among them?

Some, by our own actions, or failure to act,
have brought dishonor to the good name of our people.

Am I among them?

To betray the present is to destroy the past.
To destroy the past is to extinguish the future.

God, keep me from being among these.

O God, help us to grow as Jews.

May our loyalties be deepened as our knowledge increases.
Forgive us if we have lost the impulse to study our past.
Forgive us if we have not involved ourselves in our community.
Forgive us if we have not inspired our children to love their faith.

May our homes reflect the symbols and pieties
that remind us of our Jewish obligations.

May our congregation reinforce the fellowship of faith for us and our families.

May we preserve the Jewish faith, and may the Jewish faith preserve us.

"Yom Kippur," we say.

"Yom Kippur," our ancestors said.

May our children say "Yom Kippur."

SH'MA

Sh'ma Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu,

Adonai, Adonai, echad.

Baruch Sheim k'vod, Sheim k'vod malchuto

l'olam, l'olam va'ed.

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ

יְהוָה, יְהוָה, אֶחָד.

בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְּבוֹד, שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ

לְעוֹלָם, לְעוֹלָם וָעֵד.

Hear, O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai is One!
God's name is praised, God's glory is everlasting.

AM I FAILING HUMANITY?

Some days and times and ways,
Before all that is sacred,
We attest to the beauty of life:

To the magnificent splendor of this world,
displayed in soaring peaks and fertile plains,
in crashing surf and quiet desert,
To the gorgeous outburst of spring
and the kaleidoscopic
palette of autumn.

For all of this, we declare our thanks, our praise, to You.

But today, in this place and time and way,
we must attest to the painfulness of life:
To the pernicious and perennial inclination of all human beings
to distinguish "us" from "them,"
to make much of differences, and make light of similarities.

We must attest to the unjust distribution
of life's most fundamental resources,
and our inclination to hoard rather than share,
to ignore rather than act.

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

On this holiest of days, in this place and time and way,
we must shamefully admit our transgression as a society,
and our callousness and apathy as individuals to - well, to You.

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

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

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

Where have all the bright dreams gone?
There is so much anguish and despair, so much violence and distress.
Uneasy and confused, we cry out, "Who is responsible?"

I am responsible.

The streets are filled with homeless, hungry people.

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

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

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

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

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

For the sin of callousness or indifference in the face of human suffering,
I ask forgiveness.
For the sin of advancing the status quo if only by my silence or failure to act,
I ask forgiveness.

For the sin of not doing my part I ask forgiveness.

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

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

Though we can't solve the world's problems alone, or even in our lifetime,
we are not absolved from the obligation to make the effort.
We must not leave it to the next person.

Throughout this year, let me make a difference.

I can read to a blind person.

Throughout this year, let me make a difference.

I can mentor an underprivileged child.

Throughout this year, let me make a difference.

I can telephone an elderly person who is alone in the world.

Throughout this year, let me make a difference.

I can teach an illiterate person to read.

Throughout this year, let me make a difference.

I can reach out to an abused child.

Throughout this year, let me make a difference.

The community cries out for my involvement.

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

Let now an Infinite Presence enter our souls and our minds,
teaching us gentleness, transcending force and melting our hardness of heart.
May this penitential season make us more sensitive to the needs of our neighbors
and more responsive to their pleas for sympathy and help.

All who struggle vainly for attention,

And those who shrink from another's touch.

All whose outward ugliness may hide a soul of beauty,

And those whose awkwardness blinds us to their inner grace.

All whose minds are clouded or weak,

And all who bear the burden of broken bodies.

All who wait in pain only for death,

And those who wait for news which never comes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

For the sin of causeless hatred,
for the sin we have committed by closing our hearts
to people of other cultures, other orientations.

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

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

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

STAND STRONG *by the American Conference of Cantors*

PROMISE, HOPE, TOMORROW

Today I find strength by admitting I am weak.
But will I find strength tomorrow?

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

Today I question my innermost soul to see if it is pure and clear.
But will I question myself tomorrow?

Today I pledge to follow the road that is right, not the road that is easy. But
which road will I walk tomorrow?

Today I have hope for the year to come. Will I have hope tomorrow?

Today I am at one with myself and with You.
But will I be whole tomorrow?

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

We are weak and feel hopeless, until we remember we are not alone.

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

***We shall endure, we shall prevail. We shall see the soul restored
to joy, the hand returned to strength, the will regain its force.***

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

OSEH SHALOM

Oseh shalom bimromav,
hu yaaseh shalom aleinu
v'al kol Yisrael, v'imru: Amen.

עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו,
הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ
וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

May the One who causes peace to reign in the high heavens let peace
descend on us and on all Israel, and let us say: Amen.

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