Arvit l’Shabbat
Shabbat Evening Service
for the Month of Elul

אני לדודי ואודי לי
Ani l’dodi v’dodi li —
I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine.
—SONG OF SONGS 6:3
Elul · Days of Reflection and Renewal

Y’did Nefesh

Y’did nefesh, av harachaman,
ms’hoch avd’cha el r’tzonecha.
Yarutz avd’cha k’mo ayal,
yishtachaveh el mul hadarecha.
Ye-erav lo y’didutecha,
minofet tzuf v’chol taam.

Higaleih na, ufros, chavivi, alai,
et sukkat sh’lomecha.
Ta-ir eretz mik’vodecha;
nagilah v’nism’chah vach.
Maheir, ahuv, ki va mo-eid,
v’choneinu kimei olam.

My soul’s Beloved, Source of compassion —
into Your embrace draw this one who longs to serve You.
Like a deer I would leap and run
to do Your will — to kneel in awe before You.
Sweeter than honey from the comb is Your love,
sweeter by far than any taste.

Reveal Yourself, my Beloved;
keep me safe in Your shelter of peace.
Enlighten the earth with Your glory;
with You we shall rejoice and be glad.
Hurry, Beloved, the hour has come!
Show us Your love, as You did long ago.

Y’DID NEFESH שֵׁם תִּדֶּד. Attributed to Rabbi Elazar ben Moses Azikri (1533-1600).
The phrase “Hurry . . . the hour has come!” expresses an intense yearning to feel God’s
presence, as our ancestors did. (See additional commentary on page 97.)
Dodi Li

**Dodi li, vaani lo, haro-en bashoshanim.**
My beloved is mine, and I am my beloved’s—
feasting among the lilies.

**Mi zot ohel min hamidbar,**
Who comes now from the wilderness,
rising like fragrant myrrh and frankincense?

**M'kutret mor ulvonah?**
You have captured my heart, my beloved.
Awake, north wind! O south wind—come!

**Libavtini, achoti chalah — libavtini.**

**Uri tzafon! Uvo-i teiman!**

Ozi V'zimrat Yah

**Ozi v'zimrat Yah**
My strength and Your song
will be my salvation.

**Vaihi li lishua.**

Hineih Mah Tov

**Hineih mah tov umah na-im:**
How good and how pleasant—
Brothers and sisters gathered together!

**Shevet achim/achayot gam yachad.**

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**DODI LI** וּדָדִי לְוָאֵנִי הַרְוָא-אֶנ בְּשָׁשְׁשָנִים, Song of Songs 2:16; 3:6; 4:9, 16. Love is the theme of the month of Elul, in part because the initial Hebrew letters of Song of Songs 6:3 — “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine” (יְהִי לָֹֽנִי וּלָֽנָּֽנִי) — spell out the word Elul. Our Sages saw the verse as expressing the tender mutual devotion that makes t’shuvah possible. If we turn with open hearts to the Holy One, God is forever ready to embrace us with love.

**MY STRENGTH** וּדָדִי, Psalm 118:14. Our own strength, sustained by a power beyond ourselves, allows us to persist in the face of life’s challenges.

**HINEIH MAH TOV** וּדָדִי לְוָאֵנִי הַרְוָא-אֶנ בְּשָׁשְׁשָנִים, Psalm 133:1.
Psalm 27

Adonai ori v’yishi — mimi ira?

יִּנֶּאֶרֶךְ אֵלֶּךָּ מִמֶּעַיְךָ

Adonai maoz-chayai — mimi efchad?

יַמְעַרְתֶּךָ מִמֶּעַיְךָ

God is my light and my refuge secure —
whom shall I fear?

God is the stronghold of my life —
of whom should I be afraid?

When those who act with malice
would devour me with words,
it is they who stumble,
they who fall.

If an army were to take up arms against me,
my heart would not fear.
If war were waged against me,
still I would trust.

Achat shaalti mei-eit-Adonai;

אַחַת שָׁאַלְתִּי מֵאִית אֲדُוֹנָי
oth avakeish:

אַותָה אֲבָכֵשׁ

shivti b’veit-Adonai kol-y’mei chayai,

שִבְּתִי בְּבֵית אֲדֻוֹנָי כֹּלֵי יָמֵי חַיָּא
lachazot b’no-am-Adonai,

לְחָזְתֵן בְּנֵוָם אֲדֻוֹנָי

ulvakeir b’heichalo.

ולְבַקֵּר בְּהֵיכָלוֹ

Just one thing I have asked of God;
only this do I seek:
to dwell in God’s House all the days of my life,
to behold divine sweetness and beauty,
and to gaze in delight at God’s Temple.

God shelters me in times of hardship,
shields me in a tent of divine protection,

GOD IS MY LIGHT יֵרֵעַ נָא. Traditionally, this psalm is read every day of Elul. Its verses reflect a range of human emotion and a wavering sense of faith appropriate to these days of spiritual struggle. The speaker’s confident serenity is disrupted by an anxious awareness of surrounding threats. Not certainty but quest is the dominant mood: the search for light, peace, and strength in tumultuous times. The last verse — “wait for Adonai” — suggests the value of repeated recitation of the psalm. Courage and inner peace come with patience, discipline, and development of a spiritual practice.
raises me high upon a rock —
so that now my head rises above the enemies around me.

Let me make offerings in that tent — the offerings of a joyful cry.
Let me sing hymns,
and celebrate the One who is eternal — Adonai.

Hear my voice when I call;
God, answer me with grace.
My heart spoke for You — it said: “Seek My face.”
Your face, Adonai, I will seek.
Do not hide Your face from me,
nor angrily turn away Your faithful one —
the one You have sustained.
My God-of-rescue, do not desert me!
When my father and my mother have gone,
God will gather me in.
Teach me Your way, Adonai;
and guide me on a straight path,
because of those who lie in wait for me.
Do not hand me over to the will of foes
who rose against me —
lying witnesses and those whose very breath is violence.
If only I could believe that I will see God’s goodness
in the land of the living . . .

Wait for Adonai.
Be strong of heart, and be bold — but wait for Adonai.

Psalm 121:1–2

Esa einai el-heharim:
mei-ayin yavo ezri?
Ezri mei-im Adonai,
oseih shamayim vaaretz.

I lift my eyes to the mountains:
From where will my help come?
My help comes from the Eternal,
Maker of heaven and earth.
Before Candle Lighting

In the beginning: emptiness and chaos;
a great darkness over the deep.
The spirit of God moved over the waters.
Explosion of light—
the long chain of emerging life;
behold: it was very good.
These candles evoke the very first light.
Out of the darkness came reason, purpose,
consciousness of beauty;
the power to discern and do what is right.
Let us hold the light in our hearts.
Let us bring it with us into the darkest corners of creation.
Where there is pain and fear, let us offer the light of love.

I honor the gift of stillness and rest:
a day devoted to peace.
Peace within my soul—
on this day I have everything I need.
Peace with those around me—
on this day I seek no quarrel or strife.
Peace of earth and sky, green trees and quiet water.
I give thanks that I am present in this world.
I celebrate the miracle of existence—
the breath within me, the beating of my heart,
the love that blesses my life.

Fastening the light of the Sabbath candles
to my eyes, my palms are tents
where my fathers rested in the desert.
The light wraps itself to my eyes.
The light gathers into me.

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Fastening the light. By Rivka Miriam (b. 1952); excerpt. "My palms are tents" alludes to covering the eyes with one’s hands during the blessing; translated from the Hebrew.
Candlelighting

*Baruch atah, Adonai,*

*Eloheinu melech haolam,*

*asher kid’shanu b’mitzvotav,*

*v’tzivanu l’hadlik neir shel Shabbat.*

Source of blessing, Eternal our God,
You fill the universe with majestic might,
teaching us holiness through sacred obligations,
giving us the mitzvah of bringing light on Shabbat.


Kabbalat Shabbat
Welcoming Shabbat

From Psalm 95

L'chu n'ran'nah l'Adonai,

nariah l'tzur yisheinu.

N'kad'mah fanav b'todah,

bizmirot naria lo.

Ki el gadol Adonai,

umelech gadol al-kol-elohim.

Asher b'yado mechk'rei-aretz,

v'to-afot harim lo.

Come, let's sing to Adonai,
shout for the Rock of our salvation.
Let us greet the Eternal with gratitude;
with sacred song let's raise a shout!
For great is Adonai —
in majesty supreme,
in whose hands are the depths of the earth
and the mountains’ towering heights.

From Psalm 97

Or zarua latzadik;

ulyishrei-lev simchah.

Light is sown for the righteous,
radiance and joy for the pure of heart.

From Psalm 99

Rom’mu Adonai Eloheinu,

v'hishtachavu l'har kodsho —

ki-kadosh Adonai Eloheinu.

Exalt Adonai our God —
bow toward God's holy mountain,
for Adonai our God is holy.
PeacE iS with you
Angels of stillness
Enter, bless me
Give me rest.

God knows I need you
God knows I’m asking
Harrried, impatient
At war with myself.

Make your home in my soul
Fill my home with your light
Let me breathe in your quiet
Help me savor shalom.

Peace is with you
Angels of stillness
Enter, bless me
Give me rest.

TwO ANGELS follow me home:
Chesed and G’vurah
Kindness and Judgment,
Love and Discipline.
May both dwell within me—
Gentleness and generosity that expand my soul;
Firmness and self-restraint, the strength to say “no.”
On this day of shalom, may I be shalem—well-balanced and whole.

Two Angels. The traditional Shabbat song Shalom Aleichem is based on a Talmudic passage (Shabbat 119b), which says that two angels—one good and one bad—escort us home from synagogue on Friday night. If our home is prepared for Shabbat, the good angel utters a blessing: “May it be so next week!” But if nothing has been done to prepare for Shabbat, the bad angel utters the same words: “May it be so next week!” Celebrating one Shabbat thus creates momentum for the next. A Chasidic teaching interprets the two angels as two aspects of the human personality—both necessary if we are to achieve sh’leimut (wholeness). Thus, the phrase Shabbat shalom (literally, “a Sabbath of wholeness and harmony”) conveys the hope for a balance of chesed (kindness) and g’vurah (firmness).
Shalom Aleichem

Shalom aleichem, malachei hashareit,
malachei elyon,
mimelech malchei ham’lachim —
HaKadosh, baruch hu.
Bo-achem l’shalom, malachei hashalom,
malachei elyon,
mimelech malchei ham’lachim —
HaKadosh, baruch hu.
Bar’chuni l’shalom, malachei hashalom,
malachei elyon,
mimelech malchei ham’lachim —
HaKadosh, baruch hu.
Shuvcham l’shalom, malachei hashalom,
malachei elyon,
mimelech malchei ham’lachim —
HaKadosh, baruch hu.

Peace to you, sacred servants of God, messengers of Majesty most high —
the Blessed One of holiness.

Come in peace, angels of peace, envoys of Majesty most high —
the Blessed One of holiness.

Bless us with peace, spirits bearing peace, symbols of Majesty most high —
the Blessed One of holiness.

Return to us in peace, sustainers of peace, messengers of Majesty most high —
the Blessed One of holiness.

RETURN TO US שוכלכם לשלום. Some substitute this phrase for the traditional Ashkenazic words “Tzeit-chem l’shalom — Depart in peace,” so as not to end the song with a wish that the angels of peace leave us. Instead — with words particularly appropriate to this season of return (t’shuwah) — we invite the angels of peace to return to us next Shabbat. Debbie Friedman (1951–2011) incorporated this kabbalistic custom in a contemporary musical setting in 2010.
L'cha Dodi

L'cha, dodi, likrat kallah;
p'nei Shabbat n'kab'lah.

Shamor v'zachor b'dibur echad,
hishmianu eil hAMYUCHAD.
Adonai echad ushmo echad,
l'shem ultiferet v'l'il-hilah.

Likrat Shabbat l'chu v'nei'chah,
ki hi m'kor hab'rachah.
Meirosch mikedem n'suchah —
sof maaseh, b'machashavah t'chilah.

Hit'or'ri, hit'or'ri,
ki va oreich, kumi, ori!
Uri, uri, shir dabeiril!
K'vod Adonai alayich niglah.

Bo-i v'shalom, ateret balah,
gam b'msimchah uvtzoholah.
Toch emunei am s'gulah —
bo-i chaloh, bo-i chaloh!

COME FORTH This 16th-century work, rich in mystical imagery, was inspired by the Bible’s
great love poem, Song of Songs (“L’cha dodi — Come, my beloved — let us go into the fields”
7:12), and by Talmudic accounts that on Friday at sunset, the Sages would don fine garments and
call, “Come — let us go forth to welcome Shabbat the queen. Come, O bride! Come, O bride!”
(Shabbat 129a). The song (presented here in a singable English translation) envisions a commu-
nity united in love, its members summoning one another to honor Shabbat — a model of how
we might inspire and encourage spiritual growth.

COME NOW IN PEACE. At the last verse of L’cha Dodi, many communities rise
and turn to the west, the direction of the setting sun, as we symbolically welcome Shabbat into
our midst. Throughout the year, this physical act suggests our intention to “turn away” from
the work week and enter fully into the spirit of the seventh day. At this season of turning and
returning (t’shubah), we express our shared intention to rise to a higher level and turn toward
the good.
Come forth, my love, the bride to greet;
Embrace Shabbat, her glory meet.

*Keep* and *Remember* in one divine word
Our people at Sinai that great command heard.
We praise the Eternal and proudly proclaim:
Adonai is one, and one is God’s name!

*Refrain*

To welcome Shabbat together we go —
Fountain sublime, from which blessings flow,
The last of days, but first designed,
A treasure bestowed on all humankind

*Refrain*

Wake up, arise — rise up and shine!
Your light has come, a light divine!
Sing out in praise, city of gold,
The glory of God you will behold!

*Refrain*

Come now in peace; now enter this place,
Beloved bride, with beauty and grace.
Your people await your radiant sight —
Enter with joy, our heart’s delight!

*Refrain*

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**KEEP AND REMEMBER.** A reference to the two versions of the Ten Commandments that appear in the Torah. Exodus 20:8 says “Remember (zachor) Shabbat,” while Deuteronomy 5:12 says “Keep (shamor) Shabbat.” Rashi (1040–1105) comments that the two statements were uttered simultaneously.

**BELOVED BRIDE**. Here Shabbat is envisioned as a figure of radiance and grace whose arrival is eagerly awaited. Sixteenth-century kabbalists in Safed identified Shabbat with the Shechinah, the Divine Presence. On Friday afternoon, clad in white, they would go into the fields and welcome her, to celebrate her union with the community of Israel. The song is suffused with messianic yearning for spiritual renewal and revival of the ruined Jerusalem ("city of gold").
There is no human being who does not carry a treasure in the soul;  
a moment of insight,  
a memory of love,  
a dream of excellence,  
a call to worship.

—RABBI ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL

I orient myself to the east, facing the land of Israel.  
I align myself with my people, embracing a noble tradition.  
I enlist in the work of justice, repairing a broken world.  
I take upon myself this mitzvah: wherever you go, be a blessing.

Bar’chu et Adonai hamvorach.
Baruch Adonai hamvorach I’olam va-ed.

Bless the Eternal, the Blessed One.  
Blessed is the Eternal, the Blessed One, now and forever.

WHEREVER YOU GO. Based on God’s words to Abraham in Genesis 12:2–3.  
BLESS THE ETERNAL Yahweh. Why the need to be summoned to prayer? Perhaps because it does not come easily or naturally. “To pray is so necessary and so hard. Hard not because it requires intellect or knowledge or a big vocabulary, but because it requires of us humility. And that comes, I think, from a profound sense of one’s brokenness and one’s need. Not the need that causes us to cry, ‘Get me out of this trouble, quick!’ but the need that one finds every day of one’s life — even though one does not acknowledge it — to be related to something bigger than one’s self, something more alive than one’s self, something older and something not yet born, that will endure through time.” (Lillian Smith, 1897–1966)
WE CALL YOU
Infinite
Sovereign of Sovereigns
Shepherd and Friend

We call You
Goodness-of-the-World
Eternal
All-knowing
Ancient of Days
Giver of Torah
Living Source
Protector and Guide

We call You
Redeemer
Defender
Father and Mother
Holy One, Blessed One
Almighty and Merciful

In sorrow we call You
Healer of broken hearts
Binder of open wounds

In days of awe we call You
Creator and Judge
my Refuge, my Light

Fathomless mystery:
we praise Your name

HEALER... BINDER. Based on Psalm 147:3: “God heals their broken hearts, and binds up their wounds.”

MY REFUGE, MY LIGHT, Psalm 27:1, traditionally read every day during the month of Elul.
Baruch atah, Adonai,
Eloheinu melech ha'olam,
asher bidvaro maarav aravim;
b'chochmah potei-ach sh'arim,
uvitvnah m'shaneh itim,
umachalif et haz'manim,
umsadeir et hakocharim
b'mishm'roteihem barakia kirtzono.
Borei yom valailah —
goleil or mip'nei choshech,
v'choshech mip'nei or.
Umaavir yom umevi la'ilah;
umavdl bein yom uvein la'ilah —
Adonai Tz'va-ot sh'mo.

El chai v'kayam,
tamid yimloch aleinu l'olam va-ed.

Blessed are You, Adonai.
Your great name fills the universe with majestic might.
Your word creates twilight and dusk,
as Your wisdom opens the gates of night.
Your discernment separates the changing seasons
and causes the passage of time.
The stars, arrayed across the sky, reveal Your design.
You roll out the cycle of darkness and light, shaping day and night.
You sweep away day and carry the world into nightfall,
setting day apart from nighttime.
You are God of all we can perceive,
and all that is beyond our perception.

Living, Eternal God: be our sovereign to the end of time.
**All of them** are travelers—
bodies in motion, obedient servants of celestial laws:
moons orbit planets;
planets circle stars;
stars spin around galaxies;
galaxies cluster, drawn by dark matter;
super-clusters flow, driven by dark energy.

All of us are travelers—
bodies in motion, unwitting servants of the flow of time:
within us, atoms vibrate, electrons whirl;
and we are changing, aging,
spinning our own orbits,
drawn together, drifting apart,
driven by forces we barely understand.

Particles of matter in perpetual motion,
we yearn for clarity and calm,
strength to master our own dark energies,
and to counter the darkness in our world.
As we lift our gaze to the starlight,
may we lift ourselves to embrace a higher law.

**Holy is twilight**—the realm of in-between.
And so our sages taught: pray in the moments when light and darkness touch.
We are all twilight people, beyond categories and labels.
May the sacred in-between of this evening suspend our certainties,
soften our judgments, widen our vision.
Let it illumine our way to the God who transcends all boundaries and definitions.
Blessed are You, God of all, who brings on the twilight.

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**Holy is twilight.** Adapted from Rabbi Reuben Zellman (b. 1978).

**In-between.** Our rabbis of ancient times knew that humanity did not fit into two boxes. Just as day and night cannot be clearly divided into two, according to some of our most ancient texts, neither can people. It was written in the Mishnah: there are people who “are in some ways like men, and in some ways like women, and in some ways like both men and women, and in some ways like neither men nor women.” It goes on to say that people of intermediate sex and gender were not to be harmed; their lives were of equal value to any other person’s. (Rabbi Reuben Zellman)
Love beyond all space and time —
Your love enfolds Your people, Yisrael.
We receive it in Your teaching:
Your gift of Torah, sacred obligations, discipline, and law.
So let us speak these teachings when we lie down and rise up
and find joy forever in Your Torah and mitzvot.
They are the very essence of our life —
ours to ponder and study all our days.
May we never lose or be unworthy of Your love . . .

Baruch atah, Adonai, oheiv amo Yisrael.

. . . for You are blessed: the One who loves Your people, Yisrael.

**LOVE BEYOND ALL SPACE AND TIME** The Sages who composed this prayer saw God’s passionate devotion to the people Israel manifest in the gift of Torah. “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth,” says a verse in the Song of Songs (1:2). The Midrash, reading this secular love poem allegorically, comments: “This refers to the giving of Torah at Sinai.” Each mitzvah in the Torah is thus a “kiss” from God — bestowed as a gift of divine love, expressive of intimacy and the desire for connection. The Jewish people returns this love: we kiss the Torah scroll as it is carried through the congregation or when we are called for an aliya. It is a sign of love for the Torah and commitment to its sacred words.
IF YOU FIND JOY in Torah—

You’ll sit with the Sages and drink their words;
your soul refreshed like a tree by streams of water.

Wisdom will follow you all the seasons of your life—
celebration in the sunlight, consolation in the night.

Your roots will grow deep —
you’ll anchor yourself in courage and hope.

You’ll savor and cherish the true work of your hands;
your passion for life will not wither or fade.

They’ll treasure the lessons you leave behind;
remember what you taught in word and deed.
And those who come after you will honor your path.

Mah-ahavati toratecha; kol-hayom hi sichati.

How I love Your Torah!
All day it is my conversation.

OPEN UP OUR EYES

Open up our eyes, teach us how to live
Fill our hearts with joy and all the love You have to give
Gather us in peace
As You lead us to Your Name
And we will know that You are One.

IF YOU FIND JOY IN TORAH. Images in this reading are drawn from Psalm 1 and inspired by the words of this midrash: “Rabbi Abba taught: If you find joy in Torah, the result will be the naming of Torah after you.” (Midrash T’hilim 1:16)

HOW I LOVE, Psalm 119:97.

OPEN UP OUR EYES. Lyrics by Cantor Jeff Klepper (b. 1954).
This is the path of wisdom:
How beautiful — to dwell together in unity.
This is the teaching of truth:
Have we not all one Parent? Did not one God create us?
This is the call from Sinai:
There shall be one law, for the citizen and the stranger in your midst.
This is the gift of Torah:
Adonai is our God; Adonai is One.

Sh'ma, Yisrael: Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai echad!
Listen, Israel: Adonai is our God, Adonai is One!

Baruch shem k'vod malchuto l'olam va-ed.
Blessed is God’s glorious majesty forever and ever.

HOW BEAUTIFUL, Psalm 133:1.
HAVE WE NOT ALL, Malachi 2:10.
THERE SHALL BE ONE LAW, Exodus 12:49.
BLESSED IS GOD’S GLORIOUS, Mishnah Yoma 3:8.
ipiored by Nehemiah 9:5.
The parchment inside the mezuzah contains two names of God. On the outside of the scroll is the name Shaddai, often translated as “God Almighty.” Inside the parchment, the first line of the Sh’ma bears the sacred four-letter name of God which we read as Adonai. . . . We encounter El Shaddai through phenomena of nature; just as it appears on the outer surface of the mezuzah scroll, this divine name draws us outside of ourselves to behold God’s majesty in the world. But the name Adonai is more hidden: nestled deep within the folds of the parchment, we find it only through an inward journey to the center of our soul. (Rabbi Lawrence Englander; b. 1948)
How Do We Respond to God’s Oneness?
By Loving God and Devoting Ourselves to Torah

V’ahavta et Adonai Elohecha — be’chol-l’vav’cha,
uschof-nafsh’cha,
uschof-m’odecha.
V’hayu had’varim ha-eileh
asher anochi m’tzav’cha hayom
al-l’vavecha.
V’shinantam l’vanecha v’dibarta bam
b’shvit’cha b’beitvecha,
uschof-vaderech,
uschof-b’cha, uvkumecha.
Ukshartam l’ot al-yadecha;
V’hayu l’totafot bein einecha;
uchtav tam al-m’zuzot beitecha
uschof-becha.

You shall love Adonai your God with all your mind,
with all your soul, and with all your strength.
Set these words, which I command you this day, upon your heart.
Teach them faithfully to your children.
Speak of them in your home and on your way,
when you lie down and when you rise up.
Bind them as a sign upon your hand;
let them be a symbol before your eyes;
inscribe them on the doorposts of your house, and on your gates.

V’AHAVTA בָּאֲハַוָּת, Deuteronomy 6:5–9.
TEACH THEM FAITHFULLY. Teach love, compassion, and understanding to your children
when you sit in your home, while you walk on your way, when you retire and when you
arise. Bind these words as a sign upon your arm so that you may fight against prejudice;
between your eyes so that you may not be blind to the suffering of others; and write them
on the doorposts of your homes and gates so that you remind yourself and others that
intolerance will not be tolerated within these walls. (Bracha Yael, b. 1958)
L’maan tizk’ru vaasitem
et-kol-mitzvotai,
viyitem k’doshim l’Eloheichem.
Ani Adonai Eloheichem —
asher hotzeiti et-chem mei-eretz
Mitzrayim liyot lachem l’Elohim:
ani Adonai Eloheichem.

Be mindful of all My mitzvot,
and do them;
thus you will become holy to your God.
I, Adonai, am your God,
who brought you out of Egypt to be your God —
I, Adonai your God.

אָנִי אֲדُונָי אֵלֹהֵיכֶם אֲמֶה.
Adonai Eloheichem emet.
Adonai your God is true.

L’MAAN TIZK’RU, Numbers 15:40–41, the conclusion of the third section of the Sh’ma.
YOU WILL BECOME HOLY, Numbers 15:40. How do we attain holiness? We learn from this verse that it is a two-step process: first, awareness; then, action. First, be mindful of what God wants; then, behave accordingly. This kind of holiness is not an exclusive trait of priests and prophets, sages and scholars. It can be discovered by all who attach themselves to the guiding force that brought Israel out of Egypt for a purpose and set us on the course we call “Jewish history.” This kind of holiness is democratic and egalitarian. It depends on individual choice and solidarity with community; thus, it honors both personhood and peoplehood.
V’AHAVTA FOR ELUL

You shall love the ones who are close
with all your heart,
with all your spirit,
with all your strength.

Remember these words; inscribe them on your heart:
love them when they struggle,
when they sadden and disappoint you;
love them when they fail.

See the good within them, even when they can’t.
Look at them, and listen, even when it’s hard.
Be grateful for their guidance (even their reproof)
when they save you from yourself.

Love them when they give you joy,
and love them when they don’t.
When you lie down, let go of anger.
When you rise up at dawn, begin again.

Praise them for their deeds at home;
speak to them in public with respect.

Bind yourself to the ones you love
with promises kept and vows fulfilled.

Open to them the gates of your heart, the doorway of your soul—
and let them know you.
So shall the ones you cherish feel your love, your presence, and your care.

LOVE THE STRANGERS among you;
love them as yourself.
See yourself in their eyes;
with your own hands, bind up their wounds.
Teach your children to unlock their hearts
and share their wealth.
Inscribe words of welcome at your gates and ports of entry—
for you have been strangers in every corner of the world.

LOVE THE STRANGERS. Based on Leviticus 19:34—“The stranger who dwells with
you shall be like a citizen among you; and you shall love that person as yourself,
for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”
“Be mindful of all My mitzvot, and do them . . .”

In everything you do, the mitzvot go with you:

If you build a house, there is this:
   When you build a new house,
   you shall make a protective barrier for your roof,
   so that you do not bring bloodguilt on your house
   if anyone should fall from it.

When you cross a threshold, there is this:
   Set these words upon your heart. . . .
   Inscribe them on the doorposts of your house
   and on your gates.

When you see an elder, there is this:
   Rise before the one whose head is white with age,
   and regard an elder with respect.

If you hire a person to work for you, there is this:
   You shall not exploit your neighbor. . . .
   You shall not keep a worker’s wages with you overnight,
   until morning.

If you have dealings with a stranger, there is this:
   The stranger who dwells with you shall be like a citizen among you;
   and you shall love that person as yourself,
   for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

When you engage in holy work, there is this:
   Everyone who excelled in ability
   and everyone whose spirits moved them came,
   bringing to the Eternal their offerings.

Even when you are just taking a walk, not occupied with anything,
the mitzvot go with you—for there is this:
   Set these words upon your heart. . . .
   Speak of them on your way.

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In everything you do. Deuteronomy 22:8; 6:9; Leviticus 20:32; 19:13; 20:34;
Emet ve-emunah kol zot, v’kayam aleinu,
ki hu Adonai Eloheinu — v’ein zulato;
vaanachnu Yisrael amo.
Hapodeinu miyad m’lachim;
malkeinu hago-aleinu mikaf kol he-aritzim.
Ha-oseh g’dolot ad ein cheiker,
v’niflaot ad ein mispar;
hasam nafsheinu bachayim,
v’lo natan lamot ragleinu.
Ha-oseh-lanu nisim b’Pharoh;
otot umohtim b’admat b’nei cham.
Vayotei et amo Yisrael mitocham
l’cheirut olam.

Truth and faith —
these are fundamental to our existence.
God alone is their source,
and we are Israel, a people of God.

Our Sovereign saves us from tyranny,
redeems us from its violence through countless wonders,
from its brutality through great feats beyond measure.

We are Israel, a people of God —
the Giver of life, who would not let our feet give way;
the Maker of miracles for us against Pharaoh,
of signs and portents in the land of Egypt —
the One who brought our people Israel from its midst
to enduring freedom.

REDEEMS US FROM ITS VIOLENCE. This prayer celebrates the miraculous power of God’s compassion,
experienced by Israelite slaves who had known only brutality and indifference. The poem on the facing page
("Kindness") evokes a similar moment of awareness: those who have known loss and sorrow realize the
transcendent power of human compassion.
Then Moses and Miriam and all Israel sang to You this song of utter joy:

“Mi-chamocha ba-eilim, Adonai?
Mi kamocha — nedar bakodesh,
nora t’hilot, oseih-fele?”
Malchut’cha ra-u vanecha,
bokei-a yam lifnei Mosheh uMiryam;
“Zeh Eili!” anu v’am’ru:
“Adonai yimloch l’olam va-ed.”
V’ne-eman: “Ki fadah Adonai et-Yaakov;
ug-al miyad chazak mimenu.”

“Of all that is worshiped, is there another like You? Maker of wonders, who is like You — in holiness sublime, evoking awe and praise?”

When Your children saw Your sovereign might — the splitting of the sea before Moses and Miriam — they responded, “This is my God!” And they said, “The Eternal will reign till the end of time.”

As it is written: “Adonai will save Jacob, and redeem him from one stronger than himself.”

ברוך אַתָּה יְהֹוָה, בָּאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל.
Baruch atah, Adonai, gaal Yisrael.
We praise You, Eternal Power, the One who redeemed Israel.

IS THERE ANOTHER LIKE YOU  מֵעַיְמַרְךָ, Exodus 15:11.
ADONAI WILL SAVE  יְהֹוָה יִפְגַּם, Jeremiah 31:11.
CROSSING THE SEA

Eternal, watch over my small domain
Of light and shadow
Those few people who share my love
And all others upon this earth
That sometimes shakes with thunder
And reverberates with lightning
Help us to live with fear
And conquer rage
Heal the hate that makes us kill
And covers the ground with this red sea
That only You can part
So we may all walk through the Wilderness
To Your realm of peace
Where all men and women are one
And sing Your blessed name.

“WHEN ISRAEL WENT FORTH FROM EGYPT . . .”

We went forth!
Behind us now, the speech of strangers;
ahead, the freedom to speak our own words
and discover the Holy. Witnessing this,
the great sea fled; the river changed its course;
the mountains danced like rams, the hills like sheep.
Sea, river, and mountains—what has become of you?
Why flee? Change course? Why dance like rams and sheep?
Stand in awe, all the earth:
the God of Jacob turns rock to water,
stone to a gushing stream.
Life changes course in an instant—
sing from the heart; awaken to life’s wonders.

WE WENT FORTH. Based on Psalm 114.
Bless our sleep with peace, Adonai, and awaken us to life when we rise.

With power sublime, spread over us Your shelter of shalom;
and through Your wisdom restore us — make us whole.
Let Your name proclaim Your presence in our lives —
be our shield; make us stronger than the enemies we face:
ilness and war, famine and sorrow;
and stronger than the enemies in our hearts: wickedness and sin.

Carry us to safety as on wings —
for You are the Monarch of grace, the Sovereign of compassion;
You are the One who cares for us and sets us free.
Watch over us, we who go forth to life; watch over us,
that we may come home in peace — now, and till the end of time.

Baruch atah, Adonai, hapeires sukot shalom aleinu,
v'al kol amo Yisrael, v'al Y'rushalayim.

Blessed One, You spread over us a canopy of peace —
a shelter of shalom over all Israel, Your people, and over Jerusalem.
FALL OF EVENING,
darkness all around us.
The three-year-old wakes up crying,
sees monsters in the shadows.
And we lie awake for hours,
dreading monsters that are real.

Eventually you learn:
there are no charmed lives,
no special immunity from suffering and loss.
We cannot pray for safety—
only for the strength to endure.

So let us build a canopy while we can,
for the darkness falls on all of us.
There is no shelter from the shadows,
no protection from the terrors of night—
nothing but the warmth of a loving touch.
Comforting reminder: you are not alone.

PEACE COMES with the sunset
Cool breezes ease the heat of day
All things settle into stillness
Gentle song of crickets
Moonrise and the silence of night . . .
Give us shelter in Your presence
Bring peace to those who yearn for peace
Enfold us in Your quiet
Let our fears find rest in You.

BLESS OUR SLEEP WITH PEACE (page 42). In the ancient world, the approach of darkness evoked fear of unseen threats; and even today, the end of the day’s distracting activities often calls forth fear and anxiety. The Hashkiveinu prayer acknowledges the reality of threats to human well-being, both external and internal, but responds to potentially disabling anxiety by offering words of trust in a loving God. In letting go of consciousness at night to experience the renewing power of sleep, we relinquish the illusion of control, for at least a few hours, placing the world, as it were, in God’s hands.
V’sham’ru v’nei Yisrael et-haShabbat,
l’asot et-haShabbat l’orotam b’rit
olam.
Beini uvein b’nei Yisrael
ot hi l’olam;
ki-sheishet yamim asah Adonai
et-hashamayim v’et-haaretz,
uvayom hash’vi-shavat vayinafash.

Let all Israel keep Shabbat
and celebrate Shabbat for all generations
as an everlasting covenant.
It is a sign forever —
a bond between Me and Israel —
that in six days the Eternal One made the heavens and the earth;
but on the seventh day God stopped,
and breathed a new soul into the world.

V’SHAM’RU ושבות, Exodus 31:16–17.
LET ALL ISRAEL KEEP SHABBAT ושבות. It is not easy to keep the Sabbath.
The society in which we live does not create it for us; we have to create it for ourselves. And that
requires remembrance, effort and self-discipline. We are not the first generation of Jews to face
that difficulty; let us not be the first to be defeated by it. (Rabbi John D. Rayner, 1924–2005; and
Rabbi Chaim Stern, 1930–2001)
STOPPED, AND BREATHED A NEW SOUL ושבות. The act of stopping to refresh oneself by
taking a breath (Hebrew: vayinafash, from nefesh, meaning "breath," "soul," or "life") is intrinsic
to the experience of Shabbat. Renewing our souls on the seventh day is both life-saving and con-
ductive to spiritual growth. Our Sages believed that on the Sabbath we are endowed with a higher
level of awareness—perhaps because we take the time to stop and breathe. Said Rabbi Shimon ben
Lakish: "The Holy One gives an extra soul to a human being on the eve of Shabbat. When Shabbat
leaves, the extra soul departs… The additional soul helps us leave behind the turmoil of the week
and experience the joy of Shabbat" (Talmud Beitzah 16a).
Jacob came upon the place and stopped there for the night, for
the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put
it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he
dreamed, and behold — a ladder set up on the earth, and its
top reached to heaven. . . .
—GENESIS 28:11–12

Jacob’s dream is ours. Our bodies dwell on the earth,
but our souls yearn to reach the heavens.
—BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI MOSHE OF KOBRYN

Unless we aspire to the utmost, we shrink to inferiority.
Prayer is our attachment to the utmost.
—RABBI ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL

Adonai, s’fatai tiftach,
ufi yagid t’hilatecha.

Adonai, open my lips,
that my mouth may declare Your praise.

RABBI MOSHE OF KOBRYN. Chasidic leader (1784–1858) who lived in what is
now Belarus.

UNLESS WE ASPIRE . . . ATTACHMENT TO THE UTMOST. Rabbi Heschel
(1907–1972) reminds us that one purpose of prayer is to express our aspira-
tions — the higher and better world we long to create; the higher and better
self we yearn to become. We might imagine our T’filah as a spiritual ladder
guiding us toward the Jewish values and behaviors we seek to embody. “Who
rise from prayer better persons, their prayer is answered” (George Meredith;

ADONAI, OPEN MY LIPS. Psalm 51:17.
**MEDITATIVE AMIDAH FOR ELUL**

*Take my thoughts and build from them houses of prayer . . .*

—Asher Reich

**INTRODUCTION**

Jewish tradition encourages introspection and self-examination (*cheshbon hanefesh*) during the month of Elul, as preparation for the Days of Awe. In Sephardic communities, this spiritual practice is observed with the aid of eight penitential psalms (17, 25, 32, 51, 65, 85, 86, and 102), which are recited on weekday mornings from the second day of Elul until the day before Yom Kippur. The blue pages that follow (through page 75) contain verses from these psalms and poems that evoke the traditional themes of the Amidah; they are offered as aids to our practice of *cheshbon hanefesh*. The silence of the Meditative *Amidah* can be a momentary withdrawal from community to achieve greater clarity.

**PRAYER**

Before the Silent Prayer,
some slip the hood of their prayer shawls
over their heads,
so that even among many worshipers
they are alone with God.

Primo Levi wrote about the sadness of
“a cart horse, shut between two shafts
and unable even to look sideways . . .”

Let me be like those pious ones
or that horse,
so that, even amidst a crowd,
no other crosses the threshold
of my dreaming.

---

**TAKE MY THOUGHTS.** By Asher Reich (b. 1937).

**PRAYER.** By Yehoshua November (b. 1979). There is a long history to the individual’s silent (or “whispered”) recitation of *HaTfilah*—“The Prayer” (also known as the Amidah—the “Standing Prayer”). The Mishnah (*Brachot* 5) describes the Sages’ efforts to achieve intense concentration during *HaTfilah*. Inspired by a similar goal, some worshipers today cover their heads with the *tallit* to block out distractions and focus inward. Here the poet hopes that immersion in silence will afford him a sense of solitude and privacy “even amidst a crowd.”
Avot v’Imahot—What Binds Us to the Past?

Kavanah from the Elul Psalms

Your faithfulness—a wondrous thing to behold!

Your awe—who can grasp it?
   They who choose Your path, whose lives rest on goodness—
   their children will inherit the land.

Blessed is the one who finds forgiveness,
   whose misdeeds are overcome.

Parting the Waters

Nothing is lost.
The past surfaces
from the salted tide pool
of oblivion over
and over again,
and here it is now—
complete
with ironed sheets, old sins,
and pewter candlesticks.
My mother and aunts approach,
shaking the water from
their freshly washed hair
like aging mermaids.
They have been here
all along, sewing
or reading a book, waiting
for the wand of memory
to touch them.

Parting the Waters. By Linda Pastan (b. 1932). The poem’s evocation of the persistence of memory echoes the Avot v’Imahot prayer (see facing page), which leads us toward God by inviting us, at the outset, to contemplate the memory of those who came before us.
G’vurot—What Gives Us Strength?

Kavanah from the Elul Psalms

Create for me a pure heart;  
renew within me constancy and calm.

Respond!  
Answer us with justice and awe.  
God of our salvation,  
You are the Source of trust—  
from the farthest ends of the earth to its most distant seas.

Hands

He is surprised by his hands,  
observes them seriously, brings  
one hand up to his face, long cold  
purple fingers, knurled arthritic joints.  
He places one against the other,  
pressing finger to finger in an arch.  
His hands remember all the ways  
they’ve ever moved, swiveling at the wrists  
as though they’re leading an orchestra,  
appearing to thread a needle and soar,  
gliding sideways across the luncheon tray  
as once I watched him check the buff  
and polish of a Queen Anne chest.  
All the while we play Bach for him  
and stare—old, old man, his hands  
that come to rest, one hand curled  
around my mother’s finger as an infant  
grasps in reflex, love’s first and last.

Hands. By Margot Wizansky (b. 1941). Though unable to speak, the poet’s loved  
one listened to music and conducted. Despite Alzheimer’s disease, there was  
kinetic memory in his hands. And what gives the caregiver strength? In the  
words of the G’vurot prayer: “Your life-giving power is forever, Adonai—with  
us in life and in death.”
K’dushat HaShem—What Leads Us to Holiness? (I)

KAVANAH FROM THE ELUL PSALMS

Is it not Your will to bring us back to life again—
that, through You, we may find happiness?

When love and truth touch,
justice and peace will kiss.

THE TREE in the twilit street—
the pods hang from its bare symmetrical branches
motionless—
but if, like God, a century were to us
the twinkling of an eye,
we should see the frenzy of growth.

I AM A MAN: little do I last
and the night is enormous.
But I look up:
the stars write.
Unknowing I understand:
I too am written,
and at this very moment
someone spells me out.

---

KAVANAH, Psalm 85:7 and 85:11.

THE TREE. By Charles Reznikoff (1894–1976). Contemplating divine holiness, we seek our own human way to share in that holiness. The poet here suggests a path: perceive the extraordinary in the ordinary. A seemingly insignificant object—a tree standing motionless—is rendered as remarkable as the burning bush by our awareness of the dynamic energy it embodies.

I AM A MAN. By Octavio Paz (1914–1998); translated from the Spanish. A different perspective on holiness: the poet’s contemplation of the night sky is both inspiring and humbling, reminding him of human insignificance. Yet his vision of the stars returns him to the meaning of his own life, and the realization that he—and every human being—is the unique expression of a purpose greater than the self.
Incredible Splendor—ethereal, delicate!
What transparency!
With one slight breath drawn from the deep breast,
the pattern that we know ceases to be.

Uprooted, everything is flying.
No wonder that a leaf—a leaf?—a tree is soaring.
There is no miracle, and not one thing is hidden.
Everything’s revealed. The tree, the whole tree’s soaring.

You raise your voice—no echo; you bend your head—no shadow:
You are lighter than the webs of late September.
Matter shakes off the burden of its weight
as riffling a book’s pages frees it of its words.

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INCREDIBLE SPLENDOR. By Hayim Lenski (1905–ca. 1942).
WEBS OF LATE SEPTEMBER. The Hebrew phrase may be translated also as
“cobwebs at the end of Elul.” The reference to the Hebrew month adds a
spiritual dimension: it is the season of clearing away the accumulation
of emotional knots and difficulties that entangle us.
K'dushat HaYom—What Leads Us to Holiness? (II)

Kavanah from the Elul Psalms

A year of Your goodness—Your crowning gift:
Your paths grow lush with oil, drop by drop;
pastures for grazing thrive in the wilderness,
and the hills are encircled with joy;
flocks of sheep clothe spacious fields,
and the valleys wear garments of grain.
Filled to bursting
they shout,
they praise—
an exultant song of delight.

Snow

On Sabbath eve
down to the world floated
a kerchief of snow so very beautiful
and I grasped one end
and God grasped the other
and both of us danced
with the shuddering of closeness
and distance
with the dizziness of the joy
of our sudden love.

Kavanah, Psalm 65:12–14.

Snow. By Sivan Har-Shefi (b. 1978). This contemporary Israeli poem deserves
the traditional name piyut (religious poem). The rare experience of suddenly
feeling God’s love and one’s love for God is captured by the metaphor of falling
snow—a somewhat rare and always majestic event in the Jerusalem hills, as the
line between heaven and earth disappears in swirls of whiteness. The kerchief
dance signifies a wedding; “the shuddering of closeness and distance” felt by the
dancers is an erotic and mystical way of evoking Avinu Malkeinu, the High Holy
Days prayer in which God is experienced as simultaneously remote and near.
“Completed now were the heavens and the earth
and their whole array . . .” (page 56)

TO SHAPE THE WORLD ANEW
The sea pushes back off the shore,
yielding to gravity with a sigh,
not a leaving but a letting go,
a retreat into its own deep fullness.
The sun relinquishes its hold on the sky
only to rise once more at daybreak
as the tide rolls back in,
a different kind of letting go,
an unspooling across the expanse.
And we creatures of earth are granted a fresh start,
a chance to gather the debris
and shape the world anew.

Wholeness is a kind of holiness,
the stasis of perfection.
But brokenness demands re-creation,
a churning cycle of endings and beginnings,
the act of pulling hope and brightness from the wreckage,
taking the jagged shards and making of them,
if not wholeness, a new sort of sacred splendor.

GOD BREATHED INTO US a living soul—
the gifts of respiration, inspiration, aspiration.
May we sanctify this day by breathing deeply.
Attentive to all gifts,
we taste the sweetness of the world that could be.

COMPLETED NOW, Genesis 2:1.
BROKENNESS DEMANDS RE-CREATION. In Jewish tradition: tikkun olam (repairing the world) and tikkun midot hanefesh (repairing and strengthening personal traits and qualities).
A LIVING SOUL. Based on Genesis 2:7.
THE WORLD THAT COULD BE. Our Sages describe Shabbat as a foretaste of the messianic time. Some honor this idea by giving tzedakah before lighting Shabbat candles, dedicating themselves to the goal of a world without poverty.
Avodah—What Inspires Our Devotion?

KAVANAH FROM THE ELUL PSALMS

Bring joy to my life of service,
when I turn to You for purpose and hope.

God, teach me Your path;
Your truth will guide my steps.
Point my heart toward awe—
Your name the center of my devotion.

PSALM

(Levavi oculus)

Moon moss, goldfinch in the lavender;
baptisia, indigo’s pretender,
jetsam, driftwood, the sea’s provender.

Bees snarled in the sweet peas, untended;
low the swing song the swallow suspended,
locusts the hurricane upended.

Far knock of ship’s bells, a horn bleating
across the long water’s green pleating,
the tide’s endless parting and meeting.

And in the salt ditch between fir seedlings,
dragonflies, the quick whirl as speeding
they fly to the cattails, kneading

their lances, grass turning to tinder
in June’s flaring gentian, day ended;
the sky shot full of flight, repeating:
Not the sun, nor moon by night, pleading.

KAVANAH, Psalm 86:4 and 86:11.

PSALM. Cynthia Zarin (b. 1959) infuses her psalm of nature with the spiritual force of Psalm 121: I lift up my eyes (verse 1; in Latin) and Not the sun, nor moon by night (verse 6). “Pour forth Your spirit on us” (see facing page) comes alive in the poem: the spirit of the Creator is seen in nature by those who “lift up [their] eyes.”
1 Hodaah—What Fills Us with Gratitude?

KAVANAH FROM THE ELUL PSALMS

You are my home, my shelter.
You soothe my distress.
You embrace me with songs of deliverance.

Adonai, my link to eternity—open my lips;
help me in my struggle to praise You.

TRANSFORMATIONS

How the sun couples with a cloud!
How the wind shifts the shapes
of the trees!
There’s the fragrance of rain in the air!
Oh, all this joy!

Even after me.

A MOMENTARY GLORY

This world is a momentary glory.
I never thought it would last forever
so I tried to get it down
in one notebook or another,
in one poem or another.
Somewhere you can find it.

---

KAVANAH, Psalms 32:7 and 51:17.

TRANSFORMATIONS. By Tuvia Ruebner (b. 1924).

A MOMENTARY GLORY. By Harvey Shapiro (1924–2013).

HOW THE SUN . . . YOU CAN FIND IT. The more deeply we acknowledge our mortality,
the more intense the urge to be attentive and appreciative, and to bear witness to the
glory of life. Taken together, these two poems echo the impulse behind the Hodaah
prayer (see facing page): an urgency to praise “the power that endures from age to
age,” to give thanks for “the constant miracle” that outlives us all.
All That Is Glorious Around Us

is not, for me, these grand vistas, sublime peaks, mist-filled
overlooks, towering clouds, but doing errands on a day
of driving rain, staying dry inside the silver skin of the car,
160,000 miles, still running just fine. Or later,
sitting in a café warmed by the steam
from white chicken chili, two cups of dark coffee,
watching the red and gold leaves race down the street,
confetti from autumn’s bright parade. And I think
of how my mother struggles to breathe, how few good days
she has now, how we never think about the glories
of breath, oxygen cascading down our throats to the lungs,
simple as the journey of water over a rock. It is the nature
of stone / to be satisfied / writes Mary Oliver, It is the nature
of water / to want to be somewhere else, rushing down
a rocky tor or high escarpment, the panoramic landscape
boundless behind it. But everything glorious is around
us already: black and blue graffiti shining in the rain’s
bright glaze, the small rainbows of oil on the pavement,
where the last car to park has left its mark on the glistening
street, this radiant world.

For All These Gifts . . .

For the gifts I received today:
air in my lungs;
pulse in my veins;
my restless mind, alive and curious,
awakening suddenly to beauty.
For love, and the memory of love;
forgiveness
when I didn’t deserve it;
another chance at life.
Let my soul give thanks to You—
Let me not forget Your kindness.

ALL THAT IS GLORIOUS. By Barbara Crooker (b. 1945).
LET MY SOUL . . . KINDNESS. Based on Psalm 103:2.
Shalom — Peace

Shalom rav al Yisrael am’cha tasim
l’olam —
ki atah hu melech adon l’chol hashalom;
v’tov b’einecha l’vareich et am’cha
Yisrael,
b’chol eit uvchol shaah, bischomecha.

[On Shabbat Shuvah:]

B’sefer chayim, b’rachah, v’shalom,
ufarnasah tovah,
nizacheir v’nikateiv l’fanecha,
anachnu, v’chol am’cha beit Yisrael,
l’chayim tovim ulishalom!

Peace — profound and lasting, all-embracing.
Peace — let this be Your gift to Israel, Your people.
In Your goodness, Author of peace, bless us and all people —
every season, every hour —
with the peace that is Yours to give.

[On Shabbat Shuvah:] Let us, and the whole family of Israel,
be remembered and inscribed in the Book of Life.
May it be a life of goodness, blessing, and prosperity!
May it be a life of peace!

ברוך אתה, זר’ה, שבברך את עם ישראל ברוך.

You, Adonai, are the Blessed One who blesses us with peace.

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PEACE — The term shalom encompasses not merely the absence of conflict but wholeness, harmony, serenity, and well-being. A midrash likens shalom to "the leaven in the dough": as yeast transforms grain into edible, nutritious bread, so shalom makes possible a fulfilling and productive world, in which human talents may flourish.

BLESS US AND ALL PEOPLE — The traditional version of Shalom Rav expresses our Sages’ yearning for a secure existence for the Jewish people, who have often endured a precarious foothold on the margins of society, marked by periodic expropriation of their property and expulsion from their home. This version includes a prayer that all people may be blessed with peace.

YOU, ADONAI — On Shabbat Shuvah, we say: "Baruch atah, Adonai, oseh hashalom —
You are the Blessed One, Eternal Source of shalom."
IT IS TRUE that a Jew never worships as an isolated individual but as a part of the Community of Israel. Yet it is within the heart of every individual that prayer takes place. It is a personal duty, and an intimate act which cannot be delegated to either the cantor or to the whole community. We pray with all of Israel, and every one of us by ourselves.

A SHORT TESTAMENT

Whatever harm I may have done
In all my life in all your wide creation
If I cannot repair it
I beg you to repair it,
And then there are all the wounded
The poor the deaf the lonely and the old
Whom I have roughly dismissed
As if I were not one of them.
Where I have wronged them by it
And cannot make amends
I ask you
To comfort them to overflowing,
And where there are lives I may have withered around me,
Or lives of strangers far or near
That I've destroyed in blind complicity,
And if I cannot find them
Or have no way to serve them,
Remember them. I beg you to remember them
When winter is over
And all your unimaginable promises
Burst into song on death's bare branches.

IT IS TRUE. By Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972).
A SHORT TESTAMENT. By Anne Porter (1911–2011).
Yiyu l’ratzon imrei-fi
v’hegyon libi l’fanecha,
Adonai, tzuri v’go-ali.

May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to You, Soul of eternity,
my Rock and my Redeemer.

Oseh shalom bimromav,
hu yaaseh shalom aleinu,
v’al kol Yisrael,
v’al kol yoshvei teiveil.
V’imru: Amen.

May the Maker of peace above make peace for us,
all Israel, and all who dwell on earth. Amen.

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MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH With the words of Psalm 19:15, we pray that both our speech and our thoughts may be acceptable "offerings" to God. It is a prayer for integrity: true consistency between our inner world and the public realm in which we speak and engage with others. Such integrity is one way that human beings may bring God’s holiness into the world. "The heavens declare the glory of God" (Psalm 19:2) by revealing vast constellations above; we can reveal God’s presence on earth through the goodness of our thoughts, words, and deeds.
Mi Shebeirach

Mi shebeirach avoteinu
M’kor hab’rachah l’imoteinu —
may the Source of strength who blessed the ones before us
help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing
and let us say, Amen.

Mi shebeirach imoteinu
M’kor hab’rachah laavoteinu —
bless those in need of healing with r’fuah sh’leimah,
the renewal of body, the renewal of spirit,
and let us say, Amen.

May all who gather this evening be blessed.
Those who celebrate — we wish you joy,
your happiness made sweeter because it is shared.

Baruch atah, Adonai,
Eloheinu melech haolam,
hatov v’hameitiv.

You abound in blessings, Soul of Goodness;
we praise You for bestowing goodness.
Aleinu l’shabei-ach laadon hakol,
liteit g’dulah l’yotzeir b’reishit —
shenu asanu l’shomrei haadamah,
v’hu samanu lishlichei haTorah;
shenu sam chayeinu itam,
v’goraleinu im kol haolam.
Vaanachnu korim,
umishtachavim, umodim
lifnei melech malchei ham’lachim:
HaKadosh, baruch hu.

Our calling is to praise the Living Source. Our duty is to make known the greatness of the One Creator, who trusts us to be guardians of the earth and messengers of Torah; who gives us a destiny shared with all human beings, and who binds our lives to theirs. And so we bend, bow, and give thanks before the Blessed One whose realm is unfathomable, whose sovereignty over all makes all life holy and precious.
And Will They Ever Come

And will they ever come, days of forgiveness and grace,
when you’ll walk in the fields, simple wanderer,
and your bare soles will be caressed by the clover,
or the wheat-stubble will sting your feet, and its sting will be sweet?

Or the rainfall will catch you, its downpour pounding
on your shoulders, your breast, your neck, your head.
And you’ll walk in the wet fields, quiet widening within
like light on the cloud’s rim.

And you’ll breathe in the scent of the furrow, full and calm,
and you’ll see the sun in the rain-pool’s golden mirror,
and all things are simple and alive, you may touch them,
and you are allowed, you are allowed to love.

You’ll walk in the field. Alone, unscorched by the blaze
of the fires, along roads stiffened with blood and terror.
And true to your heart you’ll be again humble and softened,
as one of the grass, as one of humankind.
Preparing for the Mourners’s Kaddish

In Blackwater Woods

Look, the trees
are turning
their own bodies
into pillars
of light,
are giving off the rich
fragrance of cinnamon
and fulfillment,
the long tapers
of cattails
are bursting and floating away over
the blue shoulders
of the ponds,
and every pond,
no matter what its
name is, is
nameless now.
Every year
everything
I have ever learned
in my lifetime
leads back to this: the fires
and the black river of loss
whose other side
is salvation,
whose meaning
none of us will ever know.
To live in this world
you must be able
to do three things:
to love what is mortal;
to hold it
against your bones knowing
your own life depends on it;
and, when the time comes to let it go,
to let it go.

In Blackwater Woods. By Mary Oliver (b. 1935).
כְּשֶׁי יָתוֹם

Kaddish Yatom · Recalling Our Loved Ones

Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'meih raba,
balma di v'ra chirueth.
V'yamlich malchuteih b'chayeichon
uvyomeichon,
ucchavei d'chol beit Yisrael —
baagala uvizman kiriv;
v'imru: Amen.

Y'hei sh'meih raba m'varach
l'alam ul-almei almaya.
Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpaar
v'yitromam v'yitnasei v'yit-hadar
v'yitaleh v'yit-halal sh'meih
d'kudsha — b'rich hu —
leila min kol birchata v'shirata,

[On Shabbat Shuvah, say instead:]
l'ela ul-leila mikol birchata v'shirata,
tushb'chata v'nechemata
daamiran balma;
v'imru: Amen.

Y'hei sh'lama raba min sh'maya,
v'chayim aleinu v'al kol Yisrael;
v'imru: Amen.

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

AND ALL WHO DWELL ON EARTH, Psalm 33:8.
May God’s great name come to be magnified and sanctified in the world God brought into being. May God’s majestic reign prevail soon in your lives, in your days, and in the life of the whole House of Israel; and let us say: Amen.

May God’s great name be blessed to the end of time. May God’s holy name come to be blessed, acclaimed, and glorified; revered, raised, and beautified; honored and praised. Blessed is the One who is [On Shabbat Shuva:] entirely beyond all the blessings and hymns, all the praises and words of comfort that we speak in the world; and let us say: Amen.

Let perfect peace abound; let there be abundant life for us and for all Israel. May the One who makes peace in the high heavens make peace for us, all Israel, and all who dwell on earth; and let us say: Amen.

*May the Source of peace bestow peace on all who mourn, and may we be a source of comfort to all who are bereaved. Amen.*

**Those Who Sow**

*Hazorim b’dimah — b’rinah yiktzoru.* נָאִרֵים בְּדִימָה, בְּרִנָּה יִקְצְרוּ

Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.

**Adonai Oz**

*Adonai oz l’amo yitein,* נִי עָזָא לַעֲמוֹ יִתְיַטֵּן.

*Adonai y’vareich et-amó vashalom.* נִי יְבֵרָךְ אַחֲרֵי עָמוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם.

May God give strength to our people. May God bless all people with peace.

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THOSE WHO SOW נָאִרֵים בְּדִימָה, Psalm 126:5.
ADONAI OZ נִי עָזָא, Psalm 29:11.
Shofar · The Voice of Return

Return, Israel, to the One who takes you back in love. . . .
—HOSEA 14:1, 5

The shofar is sounded from the first day of Elul until the eve of Rosh HaShanah, to signal the approaching Days of Awe. The sound of the shofar implores us to engage in “cheshbon hanefesh—an accounting of the soul.”

Amid shouts of joy, to the sound of shofar, the Holy One ascends.

Let us ascend . . .
   as we hear the call of community, the voice of return.
Let us ascend . . .
   as we feel the pull and power of tradition.
Let us ascend . . .
   toward forgiveness and peace of mind,
   toward heartfelt change and acts of repair.
Let us ascend to the sound of shofar.
Let us enter the gates of t’shuvah.

Reach deep —
   into the sanctuary of the heart.
Reach beyond —
   to the infinite and eternal.
Reach deep —
   with every quiet breath.
Reach beyond —
   summoned by the ancient, ringing blast of the shofar.

AMID SHOUTS OF JOY, Psalm 47:6
T’SHUVAH. Return; repentance; a spiritual reorientation.
REACH DEEP. Inspired by Psalm 150.
SANCTUARY OF THE HEART. In Hebrew: Mishkan HaLev.
Kavanot: Focusing Meditations for the Sounding of the Shofar

1
The shofar curves upward.
Its name means Beauty;
its essence is ascent.

Sound of the ram’s horn —
lift us from lethargy;
shatter despair.
Beauty beckons;
tomorrow’s door is open —
and we can be better than we are.

2
Breath of life
we share with all the creatures of earth —
pass through the horn of this animal
with the hope that we can transcend
the animal within us.

3
Summon the energy to
sound the horn;
muster the strength to change.
Move from judgment to compassion;
shift your perspective, and heal.
Be the first to apologize;
offer the hand of forgiveness.
Open your heart to hear the horn;
believe in your power to change.

4
The shofar sounds,
and I am awake.
Shaken out of the daze of sleep,
I see the truth:
the Day of Judgment approaches.
Soon we will stand before the One
who can’t be flattered or fooled.
Soon we will stand in the
courtroom of conscience.
Soon we will know the joy
of beginning again.

Its Name Means Beauty. One meaning of the Hebrew root of “shofar” (sh-f-r) is “to be beautiful.” A modern Hebrew verb derived from this root (l’shapeir) means “to improve.”

Move From Judgment to Compassion. A reference to a teaching in the Zohar, a central text of Jewish mysticism, which envisions divine compassion awakened by the sound of the shofar: “The shofar below awakens the shofar above; and the Holy One, blessed be God, rises from the throne of judgment and sits in the throne of compassion.”

I Am Awake. A reference to the words of Maimonides (ca. 1135–1204), who taught that the message of the shofar blast is: “Awake, you sleepers, from your slumber…examine your deeds, return in repentance, and remember your Creator.”
Baruch atah, Adonai,  
shomei-a t’ruah.

Blessed are You, Adonai,  
who hears the sounding of the Shofar.

*The shofar is sounded.*

*T’kiah Sh’varim-T’ruah  T’kiah*
Olam Chesed Yibaneh

Olam chesed yibaneh, dai dai dai dai dai...
I will build this world from love... dai dai dai dai dai...
And you must build this world from love... dai dai dai dai dai...
And if we build this world from love... dai dai dai dai dai...
Then God will build this world from love... dai dai dai dai dai...

Hashiveinu

Hashiveinu, Adonai, eilecha — v’nashuvah.
Chadeish yameinu k’kedem.

Take us back, Adonai —
let us come back to You.
Renew in our time the days of old.

Od Yavo Shalom

Od yavo shalom aleinu
v’al kulam!

Salaam, aleinu v’al kol haolam
Salaam — Shalom.

Peace will yet come
for us and everyone.
Peace —
for us and all the world.
Salaam — Shalom

OLAM CHESED YIBANEH, Psalm 89:3 (“The world is built on kindness”); lyrics by Rabbi Menachem Creditor (b. 1975).
HASHIVEINU נ bachar, Lamentations 5:21.
OD YAVO SHALOM. By Mosh Ben Ari (b. 1970).
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