

High Holidays 2020

Selihot



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We are grateful for the efforts of Rabbi Amy Loewenthal for producing this excerpt in tandem with the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association under the leadership of Rabbi Elyse Wechterman.

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HAPPY NEW YEAR • SHANAH TOVAH • שנה טובה

לְשָׁנָה טוֹבָה תִּפְתָּכוּ

סְלִיחוֹת

The Selihot service serves as an introduction, preparation and bridge into the season of teshuvah/return. The service below is designed to serve as preparation through reconnecting to melodies and prayers—it is the season's overture.

The service is in outline form in order to make it easily adaptable for local use by adding music, poetry and prayers as the needs of the community dictate. The act of turning the pages of the mahzor itself can be a powerful experience. For that reason, it is preferable that the mahzor be used and not reproductions of key pages.

Most communities precede the Selihot service with study and refreshments. For study, materials can be selected from the meditations at the beginning of the mahzor, or any other material or activity suitable to the mood of the season can of course be undertaken.

Havdalah, marking the end of each Shabbat, separates the ordinary from the holy. At this *Selihot* hour, we not only separate the beauty and serenity of Shabbat from the work week that is coming; we also begin the process of separating from the year that is ending and progressing toward the coming year. This is a time for savoring last year's triumphs, moving beyond last year's doubts, accepting last year's pains and joys, acknowledging its fears and shortcomings. Only by facing the year that is ending—and sensitively recognizing and placing its many pieces in our memories—can we prepare ourselves for the new year with whole hearts. This *Havdalah* marks the beginning of the season of hope renewed. We separate from the past, making it part of memory, that we might enter into the future, growing together in hope.

David A. Teutsch and Micah Becker-Klein

HAVDALAH

At the end of Shabbat, a Havdalah candle is lit. A full cup of wine and spices are near at hand, and the lights are dimmed.

With the permission of this company:

Blessed are you, THE BOUNDLESS ONE, our God, the sovereign of all worlds, who creates the fruit of the vine.

It is the custom for some to take a sip of the wine here. Others wait until after the final beraḥah / blessing.

Blessed are you, REVIVER, our God, the sovereign of all worlds, who creates various spices.

After the blessing is said, the leader smells the spices and passes them on.

Blessed are you, THE RADIANCE, our God, the sovereign of all worlds, who creates the light of fire.

After reciting the blessing over fire, participants hold their hands before the candle flame so that their fingers look radiant in its light and then cast shadows on their palms. Then the following blessing is said:

Blessed are you, THE MANY-NAMED, our God, the sovereign of all worlds, who separates between holy and ordinary, light and dark, the seventh day and the six days of work. Blessed are you, THE INVISIBLE, who separates the holy from the ordinary.

The candle is now extinguished. Some do this by immersing it in wine from the cup.

COMMENTARY. While lighting candles marks both the beginning and the end of Shabbat, the *Havdalah* candle has a meaning different from that of the *Erev Shabbat* candles. Lighting this new fire signals commencement of the work week because fire is so often an instrument of labor. Every *beraḥah*/blessing must correlate to an event or action so that it is not in vain. We “use” the candlelight here to cast a shadow on our palms by lifting our curled fingers toward the light.

D.A.T.

סְבִירֵי חֲבֵרִי:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן:

Savrey ḥaveray.

Baruh atah adonay eloheynu meleḥ ha'olam borey peri hagafen.

It is customary for some to take a sip of wine here. Others wait until after the final berahah/blessing.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא מִיְּנֵי בְשָׂמִים:

Baruh atah adonay eloheynu meleḥ ha'olam borey miney vesamim.

After the blessing is said, the leader smells the spices and passes them on.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא מְאוּרֵי הָאֵשׁ:

Baruh atah adonay eloheynu meleḥ ha'olam borey me'orey ha'esh.

After reciting the blessing over fire, participants hold their hands before the candle flame so that their fingers look radiant in its light and then cast shadows on their palms. Then the following blessing is said:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֵל בֵּין
אוֹר לְחֹשֶׁךְ בֵּין יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי לְיַמֵּי הַמַּעֲשֶׂה: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה
הַמְבַדִּיל בֵּין קֹדֶשׁ לְחֵל:

Baruh atah adonay eloheynu meleḥ ha'olam hamavdil beyn
kodesh leḥol beyn or leḥosheḥ beyn yom hashevi'i lesheshet
yemey hama'aseh. Baruh atah adonay hamavdil beyn kodesh
leḥol.

The candle is now extinguished. Some do this by immersing it in wine from the cup.

COMMENTARY. Just as we greet Shabbat with blessing, we usher it out with blessing. Candlelight and wine mark these borders. Thus we attempt to bring the flavor and insight of Shabbat into the everyday. At *Havdalah* there is the addition of spices, as if to revive our spirits flagging at the loss of Shabbat and to bear the sweet savor of Shabbat into the week. D.A.T.

Elijah the prophet, come speedily to us hailing messianic days.

Miriam the prophet will dance with us at the waters of redemption.

COMMENTARY. As Shabbat fades, our people's centuries-old yearning for redemption is voiced through song. When we sing the traditional "*Eliyahu Hanavi*," we recall the saving message and leadership of Elijah the Prophet, harbinger of the messianic age. The contemporary lyrics of "*Miriam Hanevi'ah*" parallel the traditional, offering an inspiring leadership model. Midrash tells us that Miriam helped to bolster the Israelite women's courage in taking the risk of fleeing Egypt toward freedom. A prophet in her own right, Miriam led our people in a celebration and dance after we "took the plunge" to freedom at the Reed Sea (Exodus 15:20-21). As we strive for תיקון עולם / *tikun olam* / repair of the world and as we pray for the coming of the messianic age, both Elijah and Miriam are inspiring prophetic figures who model leadership traits that may help to strengthen us on our journey toward redemption.

L.G.B.

הבדלה

אֵלֶיָּהוּ הַנָּבִיא אֵלֶיָּהוּ הַתְּשֻׁבִי אֵלֶיָּהוּ הַגִּלְעָדִי:
בְּמַהְרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ יָבֹא אֵלֵינוּ עִם מְשִׁיחַ בֶּן דָּוִד:

Eliyahu hanavi, Eliyahu hatishbi, Eliyahu hagiladi.
Bimherah veyameynu yavo eleynu, im mashi'ah ben David.

מִרְיָם הַנָּבִיאָה עֹז וְזִמְרָה בִּידָה
מִרְיָם תִּרְקֹד אֲתָנוּ לְהַגְדִּיל זִמְרַת עוֹלָם
מִרְיָם תִּרְקֹד אֲתָנוּ לְתַקֵּן אֶת־הָעוֹלָם:
בְּמַהְרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ הִיא תִּבְיָאֵנוּ
אֶל מֵי הַיְּשׁוּעָה:

Leila Gal Berner

Miriam hanevi'ah oz vezimrah beyadah
Miriam tirkod itanu lehagdil zimrat olam
Miriam tirkod itanu letaken et ha'olam.
Bimherah veyameynu hi tevi'enu
el mey hayeshu'a.

שָׁבוּעַ טוֹב. / Shavu'a tov. / Have a good week.
אַ גוּטע וואָך. / A gute voch. / A good week.

SHAVU'A TOV!

Now is the time for turning.

The leaves are beginning to turn from green to red and orange.
The birds are beginning to turn and are heading once more
toward the south. The animals are beginning to turn to storing
their food for the winter.

For leaves, birds, and animals, turning comes instinctively.

But for us turning does not come so easily. It takes an act of will
for us to make a turn.

It means breaking with old habits. It means admitting that we
have been wrong; and this is never easy. It means losing face; it
means starting over again; and this is always painful. It means
saying: I am sorry. It means recognizing that we have the ability
to change.

These things are terribly hard to do.

But unless we turn, we will be trapped forever in yesterday's
ways.

God, help us to turn—

from callousness to sensitivity,
from hostility to love,
from pettiness to purpose,
from envy to contentment,
from carelessness to discipline,
from fear to faith.

Turn us around, O God, and bring us back toward you.
Revive our lives, as at the beginning.

And turn us toward each other, God,
for in isolation there is no life.

Jack Riemer (Adapted)

Prayers II

I still don't know whom,
I still don't know why I ask.
A prayer lies bound in me
And implores a god,
And implores a name.

I pray
In the field
In the noise of the street,
Together with the wind when, it runs before my lips,
A prayer lies bound in me,
And implores a god,
And implores a name.

איך ווייס נאָך ניט צו וועמען,
איך ווייס נאָך ניט פאַרוואָס איך בעט,
אַ תפילה ליגט בא מיד געבונדן,
און בעט זיך צו אַ נאָט
און בעט זיך צו אַ נאָמען.
איך בעט
אין פעלד,
אין רעש פון נאָט,
מיט ווינט צוזאמען, ווען ער לויפט מיר פאר
אַ תפילה ליגט בא מיד געבונדן,
און בעט זיך צו אַ נאָט
און בעט זיך צו אַ נאָמען.

Kadya Molodowsky (Translated by Kathryn Hellerstein)

Where are you? Whether God's question is addressed to Adam or to some other person, God does not expect to learn something God does not know....

Adam hides himself to avoid rendering accounts, to escape responsibility for his way of living. Every person hides for this purpose, for everyone is Adam and finds himself in Adam's situation. To escape responsibility for his life, he turns existence into a system of hideouts. And in thus hiding again and again from "the face of God," he enmeshes himself more and more deeply in perversity. A new situation thus arises, which becomes more and more questionable with every day, with every new hideout.

Adam finally faces the Voice, perceives his enmeshment, and avows: "I hid myself." This is the beginning of the way. The decisive heartsearching is the beginning of the way in life; it is, again and again, the beginning of a human way.

Martin Buber (Adapted)

COMMENTARY. *Seliḥot* prayers derive their name from the Hebrew word סליח/pardon. Some communities traditionally recited *Seliḥot* prayers at dawn throughout the month of Elul, which precedes Rosh Hashanah. Other communities began the penitential recitations much closer to Rosh Hashanah—on the Saturday night at least three days before the holiday. Contemporary communities continue the practice of reciting *Seliḥot* on that Saturday night even if they have dispensed with the practice of reciting them at dawn on subsequent days.

D.A.T.

A new year approaches, and we prepare to see ourselves, not in the mirror of our vanity, nor in the opinion of our neighbors, but in the light of our highest ideals, that which we call Sacred.

We are not at one with ourselves or with our neighbors. Our problems, pride and impatience separate us from the atonement we seek. Yet without that atonement, we are maimed in mind and spirit. The burden of old quarrels, whose cause we scarcely remember, weighs upon us. So too, do the broken friendships and promises, the appeals we denied, the requests we refused, and all the opportunities for good we rejected.

This *Seliḥot* night, we confirm our need for reconciliation and atonement to repair our fractured lives. In silence we remember our sins, our failings and mistakes.

וְעַל כָּלֵם אֱלֹוֹהַּ סְלִיחוֹת סְלַח לָנוּ: מְחַל לָנוּ: כַּפֶּר-לָנוּ:

Ve'al kulam eloah seliḥot selah lanu. Meḥal lanu. Kaper lanu.

For all these sins, we seek forgiveness, pardon and atonement.

COMMENTARY. The traditional *Seliḥot* service is dominated by *piyutim*, liturgical poems, many of which are recited only on *Seliḥot* night. These *piyutim* are difficult to understand, and many contemporary Jews experience them as unedifying and sometimes theologically objectionable. The *Seliḥot* prayers worked well for Jews who were already in a penitential mood and were familiar with this liturgy as well as that of the entire High Holy Day season. In our time, substantial reframing of the *Seliḥot* service has become necessary in order to address contemporary needs and issues.

D.A.T.

Choose from among the following songs:

אַחַת שְׁאַלְתִּי / AHAT SHA'ALTI

אַחַת שְׁאַלְתִּי מֵאֵת־יְהוָה אוֹתָהּ אֶבְקֶשׁ
שְׁבִתִּי בְּבֵית־יְהוָה כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי
לְחַזוֹת בְּנֹעַם־יְהוָה וּלְבַקֵּר בְּהִיכְלוֹ:

Ahat sha'alti me'et adonay otah avakesh
shivti beveyt adonay kol yemey hayay
lahazot beno'am adonay ulevaker beheyhalo.

One thing I ask from God; one thing do I seek—
that I may stay in the divine presence all the days of my life,
envision divine delight, and contemplate God's presence.

Psalms 27:4

Ahat Sha'alti is a verse from Psalm 27, which is recited daily throughout the month of Elul. This penitential season preceding the High Holy Days has as its theme the task of returning to the path toward God. Thus, *Ahat Sha'alti* encapsulates our hopes for this season. D.A.T.

אֶשָּׂא עֵינַי / ESA EYNAY

אֶשָּׂא עֵינַי אֶל־הַהָרִים Esa eynay el heharim
מֵאֵין יָבֹוא עֶזְרִי: me'ayin yavo ezri.
עֶזְרִי מֵעַם יְהוָה ezri me'im adonay
עוֹשֶׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ: oseh shamayim va'aretz.

I lift my eyes up to the hills:
from where does my help come?
My help is from THE UNSEEN ONE,
the maker of the heavens and the earth.



פִּתְחוּ־לִי / PITHU LI

פִּתְחוּ־לִי שַׁעֲרֵי־צֶדֶק Pithu li sha'arey tzedek
אֲבֹא־בָם אוֹדֶה יְהוָה: avo vam odeh yah.
זֶה־הַשַּׁעַר לַיהוָה Zeh hash'a'ar ladonay
צַדִּיקִים יָבֹאוּ בוֹ: tzadikim yavo'u vo.

Open to me, O you gateways of justice,
Yes, let me come in, and give thanks unto Yah!
This is the gateway to ONE EVERLASTING,
let all who are righteous come in.

אֶשָּׂא...וָאָרֶץ / I...earth (Psalms 121:1-2).

פִּתְחוּ...בוֹ / Open...come in (Psalms 118:19-20).

THE UNCREATED reigns! O world, rejoice!
Be happy, dwellers of all continents!

Clouds and thick darkness surround God,
justice and judgment bear up the Throne,

a fire goes before it,
flames surround its back,

its lightning flashes light the world,
the earth beholds and trembles,

mountains melt like wax before THE ONE,
before the First of all the earth,

whose justice all the skies declare,
whose glory all the nations see.

Let all who worship images be shamed,
all those who boast amid their idols,

let all gods
submit
to God.

Zion has heard, and has rejoiced,
the women of Judah sound their joy,

because of justice,
yours

YAH. ↩

יְשׁמְחוּ אַיִּים רַבִּים:	יְהוָה מָלַךְ תִּגַּל הָאָרֶץ
צֶדֶק וּמִשְׁפָּט מְכוֹן כְּסָאוֹ:	עָנָן וַעֲרַפֵּל סְבִיבָיו
וַתִּלְהֹט סְבִיב צָרָיו:	אֵשׁ לִפְנֵי תִלְךָ
רָאָתָה וַתַּחֲלֵל הָאָרֶץ:	הָאֲרִי בִרְקִי תִבֵּל
מִלִּפְנֵי אֲדֹנָי כָּל-הָאָרֶץ:	הָרִים כְּדוֹנָג נִמְסוּ מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה
וְרָאוּ כָל-הָעַמִּים כְּבוֹדוֹ:	הִגִּידוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם צֶדֶקוֹ
הַמִּתְהַלְלִים בְּאַלִּילִים	יִבְשׁוּ כָל-עַבְדֵי פֶסֶל
	הַשֹּׁתְחוּ-לוֹ כָּל-אֱלֹהִים:
וַתִּגְלֶנָּה בָנוֹת יְהוּדָה	שָׁמְעָה וַתִּשְׂמַח צִיּוֹן
	לְמַעַן מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ יְהוָה: ←

KAVANAH. The belief in the sovereignty of God should keep in our minds the prophetic teaching that God should be obeyed rather than worshipped, that obedience to God's laws is the highest form of worship. It is an error to believe that the main function of the spiritual is to afford us an escape from the turmoil and the temptations of life—a sort of ivory tower of detachment. The truth of the sovereignty of God should remind us that our task is to turn temptations into a means of serving God.

M.M.K. (Adapted)

בנות יהודה/Judea's daughters, the women of Judah. The place rejoices, then the people join in. Some say that "daughters" includes the place itself.

L.W.K.

For you are THE RADIANCE
above all earth.

Powerfully, you have ascended
over all the image-gods.

And you who love THE CREATOR hate the bad,
so that the Guardian of loving souls

might save them
from the power
of the wicked.

Lightbeams are seeded for the righteous,
happiness for those steadfast of heart.

Rejoice, O righteous ones, in THE UNNAMEABLE,
be thankful for its sacred Trace!

עַל־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ
עַל־כָּל־אֱלֹהִים:
שֹׁמֵר נַפְשׁוֹת חֲסִידָיו

וְלִישְׂרֵי־לֵב שְׂמֵחָה:
וְהוֹדוּ לְזֵכֶר קֹדְשׁוֹ:

כִּי־אַתָּה יְהוָה עֲלִיּוֹן
מְאֹד נִעְלִיתָ
אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה שְׁנָאוּ רָע
מִיַּד רְשָׁעִים יִצְּלִים:

* אֹר זָרַע לַצַּדִּיק
שְׂמֵחוּ צַדִּיקִים בִּיהוָה

Or zaru'a latzadik, ulyishrey lev simḥah.
Simḥu tzadikim badonay vehodu lezeḥer kodsho.

...אוהבי /you who love.... The lover of God naturally fights evil. Ethics and spirituality are closely linked.

שֹׁמֵר נַפְשׁוֹת /God protects. Those who fight injustice are often in need of protection.

זֶרַע /seeded. Light is like seeds because it needs to be nourished and tended. It demands patience. Another reading is זֶרוֹחַ /*zaru'ah*, a brilliant, dazzling light (The Me'iri).

לִישְׂרֵי־לֵב /right-hearted, steadfast of heart—those with focused minds.

L.W.K.

The service continues with the following prayers:

The Thirteen Attributes, page 1161

Shema Kolenu, page 1087

Ki Anu Ameḥa, page 1165

Vidui, page 1167

Avinu Malkenu, page 1183

Mourners' Kaddish, page 1215

Yigdal, page 1225

SOURCES

Except as indicated below, all English translation is the work of Joel Rosenberg (contemporary poet, essayist, professor of Hebrew Literature and Judaic Studies at Tufts University). All calligraphy and other art work is by Betsy Platkin Teutsch. Citations for previously published commentary, and full attribution for unpublished material by Mordecai M. Kaplan (American rabbi, 18891-1983; founder of Reconstructionist Judaism), are included below. To avoid confusion, sometimes a title or initial phrase is given. Refer to the key on page ix for full names of commentators. Biographies of authors of original works appear below. Full credits for outside sources and commentary are located in ACKNOWLEDGMENTS, pages xii-xvii.

Page 1

Baḥya ibn Pakuda (eleventh-century Sephardic moral philosopher), *Hovot Halevavot*, 7.7.

Page 2

Mordecai M. Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, page 165.

Ibid., page 187.

Rainer Maria Rilke (German-Austrian poet, 1875-1926), “Memory” from *The Book of Images*; translated from the German by Edward Snow.

Page 3

Adapted from Abraham Joshua Heschel (European-American rabbi and theologian, 1907-1972), *God in Search of Man*, page 75.

Michael Strassfeld (Reconstructionist rabbi and Hebrew editor of this *mahzor*), *The Jewish Holidays*, page 123.

Amir Gilboa (Israeli poet, 1917-1984), “*Ani mitpalel mitoh halev sidur*/I pray a siddur from my heart.”

Pages 4-5

Adapted from Lorraine Kisley and Martin Buber.

Page 5

Leila Gal Berner (Reconstructionist rabbi).

Page 6

Mordecai M. Kaplan.