

Yom Kippur Morning

Torah service - Opening



RECONSTRUCTING JUDAISM

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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

HOTZA'AT SEFER TORAH / THE TORAH SERVICE

There is none like you among the powerful, ETERNAL ONE,
and there are no deeds like your deeds.
Your realm embraces all the worlds,
your reign encompasses all generations.
THE ETERNAL ONE reigns!
THE ETERNAL ONE has always reigned!
THE ETERNAL ONE shall reign beyond all time.
THE ETERNAL ONE gives strength to our people.
May THE ETERNAL ONE bless our people with enduring peace.

Source of all mercy,
deal kindly and in good will with Zion.
Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
For in you alone we place our trust,
God, sovereign, high and revered,
the life of all the worlds.

COMMENTARY. We approach the Torah slowly. First we open the ark so that the Torah is visible. We look at the Torah but refrain from touching. Next, the Torah is removed from the ark and held by the service leader. Later the Torah is carried through the congregation, and everyone can touch the Torah. This demonstrates that the Torah is not the property of those leading the services; the Torah belongs to the Jewish community. Finally, the coverings of the Torah scroll are removed, allowing us a privileged intimacy with the words we hear.

In the words of the Torah we hear our ancestors' experience of the divine. We communicate with generations past and, perhaps on occasion, we hear Torah as the voice of God refracted through human speech. D.E.

COMMENTARY. יהוה מלך יהוה מלך...ועד / THE ETERNAL ONE reigns...has always reigned...shall reign beyond all time. The divinity we discover within human existence is eternal; it is the same Power that our ancestors named יהוה, that the talmudic rabbis knew as *Hamakom*/ The Place, that the mystical Kabbalists knew as *Eyn Sof*/ Without End, and that we now seek to name. R.H.

הוֹצֵאת סֵפֶר תּוֹרָה

אֵין כְּמוֹךָ בָּאֱלֹהִים אֲדָנִי וְאֵין כְּמַעֲשֵׂיךָ:
מְלֻכּוֹתֶיךָ מְלֻכּוֹת כָּל־עֲלָמִים וּמְשַׁלְתֶּךָ בְּכָל־דּוֹר וְדוֹר:
יְהוָה מְלֻךְ יְהוָה מְלֻךְ יְהוָה יִמְלֹךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:
יְהוָה עֹז לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן יְהוָה יִבְרַךְ אֶת־עַמּוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם:

אֲב הַרְחַמִּים הַטִּיבָה בְּרִצּוֹנְךָ אֶת־צִיּוֹן תִּבְנֶה חוֹמוֹת יְרוּשָׁלָּיִם:
כִּי כָךְ לְבַד בְּטַחְנוּ מְלֻךְ אֵל רָם וְנִשְׂא אֲדוֹן עוֹלָמִים:

Eyn kamoha va'elohim adonay ve'eyn kema'aseha.

Malhuteha malhut kol olamim umemshalteha behol dor vador.

Adonay meleh adonay malaḥ adonay yimloh le'olam va'ed.

Adonay oz le'amo yiten adonay yevareh et amo vashalom.

Av haraḥamim hetivah virtzoneha et tziyon tivneh ḥomot
yerushalayim.

Ki veḥa levad batahnu meleh el ram venisa adon olamim.

אֵין...ירושלים / There is none...Jerusalem. This section of the service is composed of selections from Psalms 86, 145, 93, 29, and 51, and Exodus 15:18.

וְעַד יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ...יְמֻלְךָ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד / THE ETERNAL ONE reigns...shall reign beyond all time. The assertion of God's sovereignty is a challenge to human beings—it is we who are called upon to crown God. In declaring God's sovereignty, we dedicate the daily deeds of our lives to making the earth a divine realm. D.E.

יְרוּשָׁלַיִם תִּבְנֶה חוֹמוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם / Rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. How different these words must have sounded before there was a sovereign, living state of Israel! No longer do we merely dream of a distant rebuilding. The walls are rising before our eyes. Like our ancestors, we must be concerned with building both the earthly Jerusalem and the heavenly Jerusalem. D.E.

The ark is opened.

One of the following may be sung:

(1)

And it happened, when the Ark began its journey,
that Moses said: Arise, ASCENDANT ONE,
and may your enemies be scattered,
May the ones who oppose you
Be afraid of your might!
Behold, out of Zion emerges our Torah,
and the word of THE WISE ONE from Jerusalem's heights.
Blessed is God who has given us Torah,
to Israel, our people, with holy intent.

(2)

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.

KAVANAH. Whenever the ark was moved, this signaled to the Israelites that it was time to break camp and move on. In our religious life, we can never be sure when the command to get up and move will reverberate in our minds and hearts. This is the threat and meaning in openness to religious experience, for it can transform who we are and lead us on a journey whose destination we do not know as we set out. All we need is the courage to listen.

R.H.

The ark is opened.

One of the following may be sung:

(1)

וַיְהִי בְנִסְעֵ הָאָרֶן וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה קוּמָה יְהוָה וַיִּפָּצוּ אִיבֵיךָ וַיִּנָּסוּ
מִשְׁנֵאֵיךָ מִפְּנֵיךָ :
כִּי מִצִּיּוֹן תֵּצֵא תוֹרָה וּדְבַר יְהוָה מִירוּשָׁלַיִם :
בְּרוּךְ שְׁנַתֵּן תוֹרָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִדְשָׁתוֹ :

Vayhi binso'a ha'aron vayomer mosheh kumah adonay veyafutzu
oyveha veyanusu mesaneha mipaneha.

Ki mitziyon tetzey torah udvar adonay mirushalayim.

Baruh shenatan torah le'amo yisra'el bikdushato.

(2)

פְּתַחוּ לִי שַׁעַר־צְדָק אֲבֹא־בָם אוֹדֶה יְהוָה :
זֶה־הַשַּׁעַר לַיהוָה צְדִיקִים יָבֹאוּ בוֹ :

Pitḥu li sha'arey tzedek avo vam odeh yah.

Zeh hashā'ar ladonay tzadikim yavo'u vo.

ויהי...מפניך / And...might! (Numbers 10:35).

כי...ירושלים / Behold...Jerusalem's heights (Isaiah 2:3).

בו...פתחו / Open...come in (Psalms 118:19-20).

(3)

The Torah of THE ONE is flawless, it restores the soul.
The testimony of THE ONE is true, it makes wise the simple.

The precepts of THE ONE are sure, they make the heart rejoice.
The mitzvah of THE ONE is clear, it gives light to the eyes.

Fear of THE ONE is pure, it stands eternally.
The judgments of THE ONE are true, together they are just.

The following paragraph is omitted on Shabbat.

ADONAY ADONAY, God loving and gracious,
patient, and abundant in kindness and truth,
keeping kindness for a thousand ages,
forgiving sin and rebellion and transgression,
making pure!

And as for me, my prayer is for you, GENTLE ONE,
may it be for you a time of desire.
O God, in the abundance of your love,
respond to me in truth with your help.

יהוה...צדקו יחדיו / The Torah...together they are just (Psalms 19:8-10).

ואני...ישעך / And as for me...your help (Psalms 69:14).

יהוה...ונוקה / ADONAY...pure! It is customary to recite Exodus 34:6-7 on the High Holy Days. Kabbalists beginning with Isaac Luria (sixteenth-century Safed) understood these verses to contain the thirteen attributes of God. Reciting the attributes celebrates God's presence as vividly experienced in the observance of the Days of Awe. D.A.T.

(3)

מְשִׁיבַת נְפֶשׁ:	תּוֹרַת יְהוָה תְּמִימָה
מִחְפֵּימַת פְּתִי:	עֲדוֹת יְהוָה נְאֻמָּה
מְשִׁמְחֵי לֵב:	פְּקוּדֵי יְהוָה יִשְׂרָיִם
מְאִירַת עֵינָיִם:	מִצְוֹת יְהוָה בְּרָה
עוֹמְדַת לְעַד:	יִרְאֵת יְהוָה טְהוֹרָה
צְדָקוֹ יַחְדָּיו:	מְשַׁפְּטֵי יְהוָה אֲמַת

Torat adonay temimah meshivat nafesh.
Edut adonay ne'emanah mahkimat peti.
Pikudey adonay yesharim mesamehey lev.
Mitzvat adonay barah me'irat eynayim.
Yirat adonay tehorah omedet la'ad.
Mishpetey adonay emet tzadeku yahdav.

The following paragraph is omitted on Shabbat.

יְהוָה יְהוָה אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנוּן אַרְךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְאֲמַת נֶצֶר חֶסֶד
לְאֵלִפִּים נִשְׂא עֶז וְכֹפֶשׁ וְחִטָּאָה וְנִקְהָ:
וְאֲנִי תְּפִלְתִּי־לָךְ יְהוָה יַעַת רְצוֹן אֱלֹהִים בְּרַב־חֶסֶדְךָ עֲנֵנִי בְּאֲמַת
יִשְׁעֶךָ:

Adonay adonay el rahum vehanun ereh apayim verav hesed
ve'emet notzer hesed la'alafim nosev avon vafesha vehata'ah
venakey.

V'ani tefilati leha adonay et ratzon elohim berov hasdeha aneni
be'emet yisheha.

The leader takes out the Torah and recites each line, followed by the congregation:

Listen, Israel: THE ETERNAL is our God, THE ETERNAL is one!

One is our God, great is our sovereign,
holy and awesome is God's name.

The leader faces the ark, bows and says:

Declare with me the greatness of THE INFINITE,
together let us raise God's name.

The leader carries the Torah around the room as the leader and congregation sing:

To you, ETERNAL ONE, is all majesty,
and might, and splendor, and eternity, and power!
For everything that is, in the heavens and the earth,
is yours, ALMIGHTY ONE, as is all sovereignty,
and highest eminence above all beings.

Exalt THE MIGHTY ONE our God,
Bow down before God's footstool.

God is holy!

Exalt the name of THE INEFFABLE,
Bow down before God's holy mount,
For holy is THE AWESOME ONE, our God!

The Torah reading for the first day of Rosh Hashanah begins on page 481 or page 491; for the second day of Rosh Hashanah, page 503; for Yom Kippur, page 517.

רגליו / להדום / before God's footstool. According to tradition, in the Jerusalem Temple there were two cherubim whose wings joined to form a seat. In other ancient Near Eastern temples, an idol was seated in such a chair. In Jerusalem, the chair remained empty with the ark below. The ark was seen as God's footstool, and the Temple as God's entry point into the world. We hope our worship brings God into the world. D.E.

The leader takes out the Torah and recites each line, followed by the congregation:

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד:

Shema yisra'el adonay eloheynu adonay ehad.

אֶחָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ גָדוֹל אֲדוֹנֵינוּ קְדוֹשׁ וְנוֹרָא שְׁמוֹ:

Ehad eloheynu gadol adoneynu kadosh venora shemo.

The leader faces the ark, bows and says:

גְּדִלוֹ לַיהוָה אֲתִי וְנוֹרְמָמָה שְׁמוֹ יַחְדוֹ:

Gadalu ladonay iti unromemah shemo yahdav.

The leader carries the Torah around the room as the leader and congregation sing:

לֵךְ יְהוָה הַגְדֵלְהָ וְהַגְבוֹרָה וְהַתְפָּאֶרֶת וְהַנְצַח וְהַיְהוּד כִּי כָל בְּשָׂמַיִם

וּבְאָרֶץ לֵךְ יְהוָה הִמְמִלְכָה וְהִמְתַּנְשָׂא לְכָל לְרֹאשׁ:

רוֹמְמוֹ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְהֵדָם רְגִלָיו קְדוֹשׁ הוּא:

רוֹמְמוֹ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְהֵר קְדָשׁוֹ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ:

Leha adonay hagedulah vehagevurah vehatiferet vehanetzah
vehahod ki hol bashamayim uva'aretz leha adonay hamamlahah
vehamitnasey lehol lerosh.

Romemu adonay eloheynu vehishtahevahu lahadom raglav kadosh
hu.

Romemu adonay eloheynu vehishtahevahu lehar kodsho ki kadosh
adonay eloheynu.

The Torah reading for the first day of Rosh Hashanah begins on page 482 or page 492; for the second day of Rosh Hashanah, page 504; for Yom Kippur, page 518.

גדלו...יתרו / Declare...name (Psalms 34:4).

לך...לראש / To you...beings (I Chronicles 29:11).

רוממו...אלהינו / Exalt...our God! (Psalms 99:5,9).

The Torah is placed on the reading table and opened. The gabay says:

May God help, protect, and save
all who seek refuge in God's shelter,
and let us say: Amen.

Let everyone declare the greatness of our God,
let all give honor to the Torah.

May _____ arise,

as the first (second, third, . . . seventh) one called up to the Torah.

Blessed is the One who has given Torah to the people Israel! ↪

COMMENTARY. The public reading of the Torah is a form of ritualized study designed to actively engage the participants. During the Torah reading, one person reads from the scroll. There are also two *gabayim*. One *gabay* assigns the Torah honors, calls people up to the Torah, and recites additional prayers, including the *mi sheberah* prayers. The second *gabay* follows the Torah reading closely and corrects errors.

Traditionally, seven adult Jews were called on Shabbat morning, six on Yom Kippur, five on Pilgrimage Festivals and Rosh Hashanah, four on Rosh Hodesh and three on weekdays, Hanukah and Shabbat afternoon. On days when the *haftarah* is chanted, an additional *aliyah*, known as the *maftir*, is given to the person who reads the *haftarah*. In many contemporary synagogues, there are fewer *aliyot* on Shabbat and holidays. D.A.T.

The Torah is placed on the reading table and opened. The gabbay says:

וַיַּעֲזֹר וַיִּגַּן וַיּוֹשִׁיעַ לְכָל הַחֹסִים בּוֹ וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן:
הַכֹּל הָבֹה גָדֹל לְאֱלֹהֵינוּ וְחָנוּ כְבוֹד לְתוֹרָה:

יַעֲמֹד/תַּעֲמֹד/יַעֲמֹדוּ _____ בֶּן/בַּת _____ לְעֲלִיָּה/לְמַפְטִיר
[הָרֵאשׁוֹנָה, הַשְּׂנִית, הַשְּׁלִישִׁית, הָרְבִיעִית, הַחֲמִישִׁית, הַשִּׁשִּׁית,
הַשְּׁבִיעִית, הוֹסְפָה]
כְּרוֹף שְׁנַתָּן תּוֹרָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִדְשָׁתוֹ: ←

NOTE. The biblical texts used in this *mahzor* for all Torah and *haftarah* readings follow the Masoretic vocalization and trope, and therefore differ from the liturgical Hebrew in the rest of the book.

Congregation and gabay continue:

And you who cling to THE ETERNAL ONE your God,
are all alive today!

COMMENTARY. The 1945 Reconstructionist prayerbook eliminated all references to Jewish chosenness for both ideological and moral reasons. Chosenness posits a God who chooses, and it supports claims of national superiority. Thus, that prayerbook's Torah blessings replace *baḥar banu mikol ha'amim* /who has chosen us from all the peoples, with *asher kervanu la'avodato* /who has drawn us to your service. This prayerbook follows the 1945 version but provides alternatives in the commentary on the facing page.

D.A.T.

COMMENTARY. The *aliyah* is the public enactment of an individual's commitment to Judaism, reiterated in the words of the hallowed formula. It is an enactment of belonging and an enactment of belief.

The *aliyah* is always a numinous moment when the experience of divinity is strong. Even though this numinous quality often is dimmed by repetition or by our increased informality, we still experience the power of standing on the *bimah* before the Torah ark, *ner tamid* (eternal light), Jewish officiants, and fellow Jews. The act links us in the living moment to the mythic event of God's calling the Jewish people at Sinai, as well as to all other moments of calling in Jewish and human experience. When we chant new words, rather than the words of the tradition, we are doing more than merely changing a formula of words; we are enacting our own calling to a new and no longer traditional way of being Jewish. Whereas saying *asher baḥar banu* links us to the biblical drama at Sinai, chanting *asher kervanu* links us both to that drama and to the Reconstructionist movement's root metaphor of Judaism as an evolving religious civilization.

Robin Goldberg

וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים...הַיּוֹם /And you who cling...today (Deuteronomy 4:4). The people to whom this verse was originally spoken live on through their place in the chain of tradition. We touch the past by bringing the ancient words to life. And when future generations recite this verse, we, who have kept the chain alive, will be present. You who cleave to Adonay your God, you are *all* alive today.

D.E.

Congregation and gabay continue:

וְאַתֶּם הַדְּבָקִים בִּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם חַיִּים כְּלַכֶּם הַיּוֹם :

Ve'atem hadevekim badonay eloheyhem hayim kulehem hayom.

The last part of the blessing preceding the Torah reading has been the subject of considerable discussion. Below are several current variants. You can use these by selecting one from section I, one from II, and then III:

- I. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם Blessed are you, ETERNAL ONE,
Baruh atah adonay eloheynu meleh our God, sovereign of all worlds
ha'olam
- בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ חַי הָעוֹלָמִים Blessed are you, ETERNAL ONE,
Baruh atah adonay eloheynu hey our God, life of all the worlds
ha'olamim
- נְבַרְךָ אֵת עַיִן הַחַיִּים Let us bless the source of life
Nevareh et eyn hahayim
- II. אֲשֶׁר קָרַבְנוּ לְעַבֹדְתוֹ וְנָתַן לָנוּ who has drawn us to your service,
אֵת תּוֹרָתוֹ: and given us your Torah.
asher kervanu la'avodato venatan
lanu et torato.
- אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים וְנָתַן לָנוּ who has singled us out from all
אֵת תּוֹרָתוֹ: the peoples and given us your
asher bahar banu mikol ha'amim Torah.
venatan lanu et torato.
- III. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה: Blessed are you, ETERNAL ONE,
Baruh atah adonay noten hatorah. giver of the Torah.

The phrase *nevareh et eyn hahayim* was originally formulated by poet Marcia Falk (see SOURCES, p. 1248).

BIRHOT HATORAH / TORAH BLESSINGS

Those who receive an aliyah to the Torah say the following blessings:

Bless THE INFINITE, the blessed One!

Congregation:

Blessed is THE INFINITE, the blessed One, now and forever!

*The response of the congregation is repeated, and the blessing continued as follows
(For alternative versions, see page 474):*

Blessed are you, ETERNAL ONE, our God, the sovereign of all worlds, who has drawn us to your service, and has given us your Torah. Blessed are you, ETERNAL ONE, who gives the Torah.

After the section of the Torah is read, the following blessing is recited:

Blessed are you, ETERNAL ONE, our God, the sovereign of all worlds, who has given us a Torah of truth, and planted in our midst eternal life. Blessed are you, ETERNAL ONE, who gives the Torah.

COMMENTARY. Group *aliyot* provide an opportunity for including more people in public roles on the *Yamim Nora'im*. In this season of transition, many communities focus group *aliyot* on beginnings (births and adoptions, new homes, jobs, new committed relationships, weddings, new schools), endings (loss of loved ones, retirements, graduations), and milestones (trips to Israel, *beney mitzvah*). Some communities use one day to mark the past year's accomplishments (*tikun olam*, Jewish learning, leading worship, offering hospitality, communal leadership, *tzedakah*, adult bar/bat mitzvah). Some use a day for marking similar new commitments. Other *aliyot* might be used for those who are healing or who have recovered from life-threatening illness, or those new to the community. B.P.T./R.S./D.A.T.

COMMENTARY. The blessing over the Torah recalls the *Barechu*, the call to worship, the beginning of the morning and evening services recited only in the presence of the minyan, ten adult Jews. The blessing encircles the Torah reading in a familiar liturgical pattern of blessing and study. Through blessing, study, and community we manifest God, Torah and Israel. S.P.W.

בְּרָכוֹת הַתּוֹרָה

Those who receive an aliyah to the Torah say the following blessings:

בְּרָכּוּ אֶת יְהוָה הַמְּבָרָךְ:

Barehu et adonay hamevorah.

Congregation:

בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה הַמְּבָרָךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד:

Baruh adonay hamevorah le'olam va'ed.

*The response of the congregation is repeated and the blessing continued as follows
(for alternative versions, see page 474):*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִרְבָּנוּ לְעִבּוּדְתוֹ
וְנִתַּן-לָנוּ אֶת-תּוֹרָתוֹ: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה:

Baruh atah adonay eloheynu meleh ha'olam asher kervanu
la'avodato venatan lanu et torato.

Baruh atah adonay noten hatorah.

After the section of the Torah is read, the following blessing is recited:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר נִתַּן-לָנוּ תּוֹרַת אֱמֶת
וְחַיֵּי עוֹלָם נִטַּע בְּתוֹכָנוּ: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה נוֹתֵן הַתּוֹרָה:

Baruh atah adonay eloheynu meleh ha'olam asher natan lanu
torat emet vehayey olam nata betoheynu.

Baruh atah adonay noten hatorah.

DERASH. *Aliyah* is ascent. We ascend to the Torah to acknowledge that we choose to live under its laws and principles. We ascend to the Torah to affirm that we are part of a people and a story that is much greater than ourselves. We ascend to the Torah to represent those who remain below. We ascend to the Torah to risk receiving an honor, to risk being known and seen, to risk being at Sinai again. We ascend to the Torah with slow steps, or in haste, with enthusiasm or reluctance, in awe or in fear, in hope and in love.

S.P.W.

BIRKAT LIMUD TORAH/
BLESSING PRECEDING TORAH STUDY

Blessed are you, THE ONE OF SINAI, our God, the sovereign of all worlds, who made us holy with your mitzvot, and commanded us to occupy ourselves with words of Torah. ↪

COMMENTARY. The three blessings on pages 170, 174, and 176 constitute a meditation on body, soul and intellect. The first blessing reflects the intricate workings of our physiology. We recognize the wondrous system of arteries, organs and glands that comprise the “human machine.” We then celebrate the purity of the soul that is implanted within us, we feel the “wind-spirit” of our own breath, our *anima* filled with air. As we breathe, all the systems of our bodies are also filled with life-sustaining oxygen. Finally, we rejoice in our intellects—in our ability to study and grapple with words of Torah, to reflect on them and our capacity to teach them to future generations.

L.G.B.

בְּרַכַּת לְמוּד תּוֹרָה

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ
לְעַסֵּק בְּדִבְרֵי תּוֹרָה: ←

Baruḥ atah adonay eloheynu meleḥ ha'olam asher kideshanu
bemitzvotav vetzivanu la'asok bedivrey torah. ↪

לעסֵק בדברי תורה /to occupy ourselves with words of Torah. The Hebrew words here do not say “to study Torah,” but rather to “be engaged” or “to be busy with” the study of Torah. We study Torah not as an intellectual exercise alone. Rather, we understand our “engagement” with Torah more holistically—as an every day, every moment activity. We also understand that to be fully “engaged” with Torah is to wrestle with Torah—to challenge our tradition while loving it, to question while celebrating it.

L.G.B.

Transmit to us, WISE ONE, our God, your Torah's words, into our mouths, and to the mouths of all the House of Israel, who called you kin. May we, and our children, and all the children of your people, the House of Israel, all of us, be knowers of your Name and learners of your Torah, for its sake alone. Blessed are you, THE SAGE, who teaches Torah to your people Israel.

Study selections on the themes of the High Holy Days from biblical and rabbinic literature follow. Other selections could, of course, be used.

COMMENTARY. Blessings and texts for Torah study are a traditional part of *Birhot Hashahar*. Like body and soul, Torah study is a daily part of Jewish living. Rabbinic literature records more than a half dozen versions of Torah blessings. The ornate Torah blessing in our text (pages 175-178) both begins and ends with the formula "*Baruh atah*." In the first instance, the formula of the blessing acknowledges that Torah study is essential to Jewish life. The concluding phrase of blessing praises God as the teacher of Torah. From a Reconstructionist perspective, the metaphor of God as teacher is an invitation and challenge to discern the divine presence in learning. A talmudic passage appears between the two blessings. It offers the hope that we, the people Israel, will always see Torah as an intrinsic part of ourselves.

S.S.

וְהֵעֲרַבְנָא יְהוּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶת דְּבָרֵי תוֹרַתְךָ בְּפִינוּ וּבְכָפֵי עַמְךָ בֵּית
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִהְיֶה אֲנַחְנוּ וְצִאֲצָאֵינוּ וְצִאֲצָאֵי עַמְךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּלָנוּ
יּוֹדְעֵי שְׁמֶךָ וְלוֹמְדֵי תוֹרַתְךָ לְשִׁמְחָה:
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוּה הַמְּלַמֵּד תּוֹרָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Veha'arev na adonay eloheynu et divrey torateha befinu uvefi
ameha beyt yisra'el venihyeh anahnu vetze'etza'eynu
vetze'etza'ey ameha beyt yisra'el kulanu yodey shemeha
velomdey torateha lishmah. Baruh atah adonay hamlamed
torah le'amo yisra'el.

Study selections on the themes of the High Holy Days from biblical and rabbinic literature follow. Other selections could, of course, be used.

DERASH. We must study the Torah with a view toward discerning the great traits of Jewish consciousness that struggled to become articulate in its traditions, laws, prophecies, psalms and wisdom. We should study all of its traditions with the purpose of finding out their bearing on Israel's destiny and duty in the world and then seek to make that destiny and duty our own.

M.M.K. (Adapted)

BIRKAT HAGOMEL / BLESSING FOR DELIVERANCE AND GOOD FORTUNE

If the person called up to the Torah has recently escaped danger or returned safely from a journey, he or she recites as follows:

Blessed are you, ABUNDANT ONE, our God, the sovereign of all worlds, who bestows good things on those in debt to you, and who has granted me all good.

Congregational response to one who offers this blessing:

Amen. And may the one who has bestowed upon you good, continue to bestow upon you good.

For a mi sheberah for an individual or for a group, see pages 479-480. For other mi sheberah prayers, see Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Veḥagim, pages 685-693.

COMMENTARY. *Mi sheberah* prayers announce to the whole community individual times of joy and need. When *birkat hagomel* or a *mi sheberah* is recited, it is customary to contribute to *tzedakah*. Often this offering is directed to the synagogue. On happy occasions this serves as an offering of thanksgiving. A *mi sheberah* in the form of petition, such as a prayer for healing, was traditionally offered in the hope that a good deed would encourage divine intervention. More recently the act of *tzedakah* has been understood as a tangible way of expressing gratitude for the support and good wishes of the community. Just as the community supports the individual in times of need, so does the community depend upon the support of each individual.

D.A.T.

בְּרַכַת הַגּוֹמֵל

If the person called up to the Torah has recently escaped danger or returned safely from a journey, he or she recites as follows:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַגּוֹמֵל לְחַיִּיבִים טוֹבוֹת
שְׂגַמְלָנִי כָּל טוֹב:

Baruḥ atah adonay eloheynu meleḥ ha'olam hagomel leḥayavim
tovot shegemalani kol tov.

Congregational response to a man who offers this blessing:

אָמֵן. מִי שְׂגַמְלָךְ טוֹב הוּא יְגַמְלֶךְ כָּל טוֹב סְלָה:

Amen. Mi shegemaleḥa tov hu yigmolḥa kol tov selah.

Congregational response to a woman who offers this blessing:

אָמֵן. מִי שְׂגַמְלָךְ טוֹב הוּא יְגַמְלֶךְ כָּל טוֹב סְלָה:

Amen. Mi shegemaleḥ tov hu yigmoleḥ kol tov selah.

COMMENTARY. At the mysterious edges of life we seek the embrace of our community past and present. Hence individuals marking recovery from illness or the birth of a child are blessed before the open Torah. This process can build community as news is communicated and support mobilized. Most significantly it counteracts the devastating possibility of isolation in times of vulnerability. The practice gives voice to gratitude and anxiety in a forum where it can be shared and transformed into connectedness and faith. S.P.W.

Male

מי שִׁבְרָךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֲבָרְהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שָׂרָה רַבְּקָה רַחֵל וְלֵאָה הוּא יְבָרְךָ אֵת _____ בֶּן _____ וְ _____ שְׁעֵלָה לְכָבוֹד הַמָּקוֹם וְלְכָבוֹד הַתּוֹרָה (וְלְכָבוֹד הַשַּׁבָּת) וְלְכָבוֹד יוֹם הַדִּין: * הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יַחְיֶיהוּ וְיִשְׁמְרֵהוּ מִכָּל-צָרָה וְצוּקָה וּמִכָּל-נֶגַע וּמַחֲלָה וְיִשְׁלַח בְּרָכָה וְהַצְלָחָה בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו וְיַכְתֹּבֵהוּ וְיַחְתֶּמֶהוּ לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים בְּזֶה יוֹם הַדִּין עִם-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל אָחִיו וְאֶחְיוֹתָיו וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן:

Female

מי שִׁבְרָךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֲבָרְהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שָׂרָה רַבְּקָה רַחֵל וְלֵאָה הוּא יְבָרְךָ אֵת _____ בֵּת _____ וְ _____ שְׁעֵלְתָה לְכָבוֹד הַמָּקוֹם וְלְכָבוֹד הַתּוֹרָה (וְלְכָבוֹד הַשַּׁבָּת) וְלְכָבוֹד יוֹם הַדִּין: * וְלְכָבוֹד הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא יַחְיֶיהָ וְיִשְׁמְרֶיהָ מִכָּל-צָרָה וְצוּקָה וּמִכָּל-נֶגַע וּמַחֲלָה וְיִשְׁלַח בְּרָכָה וְהַצְלָחָה בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיהָ וְיַכְתֹּבֶהָ וְיַחְתֶּמֶהָ לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים בְּזֶה יוֹם הַדִּין עִם-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל אָחִיהָ וְאֶחְיוֹתֶיהָ וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן:

May the one who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, bless _____ who has risen today in honor of the SOURCE OF ALL and in honor of the Torah (and Shabbat) and in honor of this Day of Awe.* May he/she be granted life and kept from every trouble and affliction, and from every harm and sickness. May he/she be granted blessing and success in all his/her labors, and may he/she be written and sealed for good life on this Day of Awe along with all of Israel, and let us say: Amen.

*At this point in the *mi sheberah*, an additional phrase can easily be added. The *gabay* may choose to chant part or all of the *mi sheberah* in English. When Hebrew alone is used, an English announcement of the occasion is appropriate.

D.A.T.

COLLECTIVE BLESSING FOR THOSE WHO
HAVE RECEIVED ALIYOT

מִי שִׁבְרָךְ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֲבָרְהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ שָׂרָה רִבְקָה רָחֵל
וְלֵאָה הוּא יְבָרְךָ אֶת כָּל אֵלֶּה שְׁעָלוּ הַיּוֹם לְכָבוֹד הַמָּקוֹם לְכָבוֹד
הַתּוֹרָה (וְלְכָבוֹד הַשַּׁבָּת וְ) יוֹם הַדִּין בְּשִׁכְרֵי זֶה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא
יְחַיֵּים וְיִשְׁמְרֵם מִכָּל צָרָה וְצוּקָה וּמִכָּל נֶגַע וּמַחֲלָה וְיִשְׁלַח בְּרָכָה
וְהַצְלָחָה בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵיהֶם וְיִכְתְּבֵם וְיַחַתְמֵם לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים בְּזֶה
יוֹם הַדִּין עִם כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל אַחֵיהֶם וְאַחִיוֹתֵיהֶם וְנֹאמֵר אָמֵן :

May the one who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, bless all those here who have risen today in honor of the Omnipresent, and in honor of the Torah, (and in honor of Shabbat,) and in honor of this Day of Awe. And by this merit, may they be granted life and kept from all trouble and affliction, and from every harm or sickness, and may they find blessing and success in all their labors, and may they be written and sealed for good life on this Day of Awe, along with all of Israel, all their brothers and their sisters, and let us say: Amen.