

Westchester Community for Humanistic Judaism



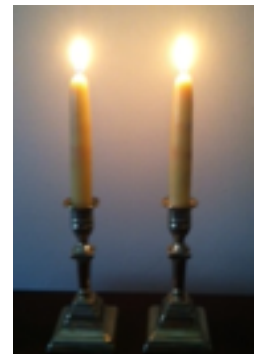
ערב יום כפור / כל נדרי



Erev Yom Kippur / Kol Nidrey Meditations, Readings, and Reflections

Lighting the Candles / Beginning the Fast - נרות

This is the fast I choose: To unlock the chains of evil and untie the cords of enslavement, to free the oppressed and break off the yoke. Share your bread with the hungry, bring the poor into your home. When you see the naked clothe them, and do not overlook your kin. Then your light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will rapidly blossom. - Isaiah 58. 6-8



May the mind be clear, the spirit awake as we light the candles and begin.

- Marcia Falk

Opening Meditation

Sit or stand as you feel most comfortable. Place your feet comfortably apart, firmly feel the ground below you. This meditation takes you through the months of the Jewish year. After the instructions for each month, take at least two minutes to reflect and consider.

Tishrei: Think back to the High Holidays last Year, recall the sound of the shofar. What has cried out to you in this last year? What moved you from the routines of your life?

Heshvan: Sometimes we are awakened for good and sometimes we are awakened to that which is bitter. We cannot overlook that which is difficult or hard, reflect on the pain and suffering that has been a source of challenge this last year.

Kislev: Recall the candles that burned last Hannuka. Light can transform darkness. Miracles can happen. Consider one or many of the rays of light that have given you hope this past year.

Tevet: The winter rains are that which later bring forth possibilities. What have you done in this last year that will create changes in the future? Reflect on the work that you have done that has not yet born fruit.

Sh'vat: This is the month where we celebrate the trees. Each year they add a ring to the strength of experience that they already possess. Focus on one way in which you have added to your own strength this year.

Adar: We all hide elements of ourselves from the world. Consider what part of yourself you are keeping hidden, ask yourself what you risk by revealing it and what might you accomplish if you shared it.

Nissan: Sometimes freedom comes in grand moments, other times in small steps. What have you managed to let go of in this last year? Who or what helped you in that process? What did you learn or gain?

Iyar: Even when times are good there is often grumbling and it is only to be expected when times are tough. Focus on some of the complaints that have recurred during this year, ask yourself if they are warranted,

Sivan: Revelations can change the way we see or act. What new things have you discovered about yourself this year, how have you grown in your understanding? Consider something that you have learned about yourself or something that you hope will be revealed soon.

Av: Baseless hatred can be the source of much destruction. Where have you been quick to judge in this last year? Consider the implications of your negative judgments, for yourself, those close to you, and your community. How might you repair damage done or shift your approach in the future.

Elul: Where are you now? Consider the year that lies ahead. What work do you want to do, need to do, so that you can be fully present?

Reading 1

Kol Nidrey: Nothing Affects The Human Being More Than Music

One night, in the late 1960s, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik reflected on music. He said: “Nothing affects the human being more than music. By happenstance, a person can hear a certain melody at a time of personal difficulty or joy and then let the melody pass out of his mind, as innocently as it entered. Years later, even decades later, the same person may suddenly hear the same melody, only to be overpowered by the emotional sadness or joy he experienced when he first heard the melody decades earlier. Music is powerful. Music doesn’t forget. Emotions are never dead, only dormant. A person’s link to his past is never severed. Memory never entirely recedes, and music may summon it.”

- Rabbi Hillel Goldberg

Reading 2

Kol Nidrey: All Vows – כל נדרי

All vows - promises and pledges - that we have made to ourselves and that no longer serve for the good - may their grip be loosened, that we be present of mind and heart to the urgency of the hour.

- Marcia Falk

Reading 3

Shema: Teach Them Well To Your Children - שמע

It says in the Hebrew Bible that Moses was the greatest leader of the Jewish people. And yet he was not called a liberator or a prophet, but simply *Moshe Rabenu*, Moses our Teacher. From earliest days, the Jewish ideal has been to enlighten and inform every Jew at every age of his or her life. The acquisition of knowledge of Jewish tradition has always been considered everyone’s responsibility.

The Yiddish word for scholar is *lamden*. It literally means “one who learns.”

The highest praise that can be bestowed on someone is to say “*er ken lernen - he knows how to learn.*” Little wonder that Isaac Bashevis Singer said, “A Jew who doesn’t learn is not a Jew.”

Among the Jewish books saved from the millions burned by the Nazis was one that bears the title *The Society of Woodchoppers for the Study of Mishna in Berdichev*. The woodchoppers of Berdichev, men of a low social status, would meet regularly to study the Talmud.

- Rabbi Saul Teplitz

Reading 4

Widening Our Circle Of Compassion

The important thought that we are not separate from the rest of the Planet is brought home with great force in the touching words of the late Albert Einstein, one of the world’s greatest scientists: “A human being is part of the whole called by us universe. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection to a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

- Albert Einstein

Reading 5

Community - קהילה

Yom Kippur is the closing holiday of the New Year celebration. Yom Kippur is the Hebrew way of saying “Day of Reconciliation.” It is the time when we repair family relationships and friendships which may have been broken. It is a time when we bring together our hopes and our actions; when we return to the pursuit of our ideals, to what is most important in our lives. The new year festival gives us the opportunity to look back on the past and to plan for the future. It gives us the chance to think about our lives, to think about our behavior, to think about the people we need and love.

- Rabbi Sherwin Wine

Reading 6

Build Your World Thoughtfully

Thoughts can dominate or liberate us. Tame the tyrannical thoughts of fear and hate with thoughts of faith and love, and we have overcome a meek adversary. If we allow rampant domination of negative thinking, we are defeated by a foe with no more power except that which we thoughtfully grant to it.

With love and wisdom we are capable of control what enters and leaves our mind. Love thoughts push out hate thoughts. Honest thoughts push out fraud thoughts which trick us into self-righteousness and emotional immaturity for temporary satisfaction and false release. We alone are the hosts who must answer to thoughts: "Invited or Uninvited." Thought is the key which unlocks the doors to the world.

- Rabbi Joseph Gelberman, z"l

Reading 7

On Success

Success means we go to sleep at night knowing that our talents and abilities were used in a way that served others. We are compensated by grateful looks in people's eyes, whatever material abundance supports us in performing joyfully and at high energy, and the magnificent feeling that we did our bit today to save the world.

Our work should spread love. Our store should spread love. Our technology should spread love. Our business should spread love. Our life should spread love. The key to a successful career is realizing that it is not separate from the rest of our lives, but rather an extension of our most basic self. And our most basic self is love.

- Marianne Williamson

Reading 8

On Love And Hatred



"Hatred is increased by being reciprocated, and can on the other hand be destroyed by love. Hatred which is completely vanquished by love, passes into love; and love is thereupon greater than if hatred had not preceded it."

- Baruch Spinoza

Reading 9

Life's Journey

Our lives are the entire stretch of our existence. See it as a journey. Let us keep in mind that although this journey through life can be beautiful, ugliness is often part of it; that love is glorious, but now and then, one will encounter hate; that success is delightful, yet it must be earned, and often there is travail in the earning. "Evils" often are mere unpleasantnesses if one chooses to see them that way. And even actual evils are only subservient parts that serve to set off the goodness of life. - Louis Binstock

Reading 10

Kind Words

A kind word assuages anger, creates friendship in the hearts of enemies, turns bitterness into good-will and transmutes hatred into sympathy and love. A kind word is the true expression of humaneness, for humaneness can only be understood in terms of kindness, it can only be effective when it is embodied in the quality of kindness. A kind word represents the wisdom of all the ages; it represents the preachings of the prophets, the ethical teachings of the sages, the fruits of all the minds that strove and sacrificed for the advancement of humanity.

And just as one ought to speak kindly *to* people, so ought he to speak kindly *of* people. One cannot truly speak kindly to people unless he also speaks kindly of people. Speaking kindly to people means encouragement, and entails appreciation and respect. To speak kindly of people one must be imbued with a certain sense of generosity. There are those who regard words of praise in behalf of others as entailing depreciation of their own selves; they feel that by praising and admiring others their own qualities are inferior; they are instead inclined to slander others under the delusion that this would establish them as free from the faults they deplore. In speaking of others, one must overcome these petty, vain, unbecoming inclinations, and show large-heartedness in their stead. One must see and express the fineness, the goodness, the greatness in others.

- Rabbi Morris Lichtenstein, [How to Live](#)

Reading 11

An Alternative Al Khet - על חטא

The term for sin in Hebrew - khet, comes from the language of archery and literally it means “missing the target.” In committing transgressions, not only do we cheat others of their due, but we miss the target by cheating ourselves as well.

The Litany

By giving in to anger, we have cheated ourselves of peace, joy, and satisfaction with life.

By giving in to envy, we have cheated ourselves of contentment and gratitude.

By giving in to jealousy, we have cheated ourselves of self-worth.

By giving in to hate, we cheat ourselves of love, health, buoyancy and strength of spirit.

By giving in to fear, we cheat ourselves of high adventure and joyful achievement.

By giving in to impatience, we cheat ourselves of the enjoyment of the fruits of our labors.

By giving in to laziness, we do not make full use of the powers we have.

By giving in to worry, we cheat ourselves of serenity, confidence, and power.

By giving in to mistrust, we cheat ourselves of the security that friendships give us.

By giving in to greed, we fail to appreciate our gifts and blessings.

Reading 12

Avinu Kolenu (Avinu Malkeinu) - אבינו קולנו

*Avinu kolenu, cha-ney-nu a-ney-nu
Avinu kolenu, cha-ney-nu a-ney-nu
Ki eyn banu ma-a-seem*

*Aseh ee-ma-noo
Tse-da-kah va-che-sed*

*Aseh ee-ma-noo
Tse-da-kah va-che-sed
V'nee - va - a she- ee-yah.*

Voice of our conscience, our inner judging voice - Let us forgive ourselves and let us accept ourselves for who we are. Even though we have not done enough, with charity, righteousness, and justice, we can save the world.

- Ron Donagi

Reading 13

An Adaptation Of Psalm 101

Let me discover my innermost thoughts: I think of mercy and justice,
Give heed to virtuous ways, with truth in my heart I will walk in my house,
Avoiding the sight of the base, and the doing of crooked things;
These shall not cleave to me. A perverse heart shall depart from me;
No evil will I know.

I will chide the teller of tales, denounce the haughty of eye, the arrogant ones.

They who are faithful may dwell with me, and they who walk in righteous ways shall minister to me.

I shall try to forbear with the wayward man till he find virtue in Jerusalem.
These are the meditations of my innermost heart.

- Emil Weitzner, Humanist Meditations and Paraphrases

Reading 14

Are You Guilty?

So, you've committed what you perceive to be a crime. Perhaps you spoke unkind words to a relative, friend, neighbor, or co-worker. Maybe you told a lie, cut someone off in traffic, bounced a check, went off your diet, drank too much, started smoking again.

Perhaps you are being too hard on yourself for remaining in an undesirable relationship or job, which is not for your highest good. Maybe you are guilty of believing that you are not living up to your innate capabilities and responsibilities. Only you know personally where you perceive yourself to have "sinned." Ask yourself - Was it really a sin?

Become your own judge and jury. Reflect on your situation and then learn to pardon yourself. Begin to release any heavy, unnecessary burden of guilt you may be carrying. Lighten up and remember the wisdom of Rabbi Sefer Hasadi: "If one is cruel to himself, how can we expect him to be compassionate with others?"

- Edie Jurmain

Reading 15

Letting Go

If a person hurt you so terribly, he doesn't deserve the right to loom so large in your mind. He doesn't deserve the power to make you a bitter, resentful person, to change your personality for the worse. You want to get even with him? You don't get even by continuing to hurt, by continuing to seethe with rage so that you can't enjoy the life you have. You get even by letting go, so that he can no longer pull your emotional strings.

- Harold Kushner

Reading 16

High Holidays in Italy

As a rabbi in Milan, I was stunned to learn that for Italian Jews, the night before Rosh Hashana did not include a synagogue service. Instead it was

a Rosh Hashana Seder.

From the North to the South, from the “thigh” of the Italian “boot” all the way down to the “toe,” Italian Jews gather round the family table just as we do at Passover. At the Rosh Hashana Seder, Italians share symbolic foods, stories, poems, and songs to welcome the New Year.

“*Ricorda Rabbina*, Remember Rabbi,” my school director Eva explained, “It’s the birthday party of the world. The Rosh Hashana Seder is our way to have a birthday party.” And what a celebration it is! The Seder itself offers an array of foods that symbolize our hopes and dreams for the coming year. Seven bowls are arranged in a circle on the table, much like the Passover Seder Plate, but using dates, pomegranates, apples and honey, string beans, pumpkin, spinach, and scallions. Traditionalists place a fish head or a sheep’s head in the center of the plate. We modernists choose a head of lettuce instead! Then each bowl is passed around and every guest samples its contents while the Seder leader makes a specific blessing over each food.

The Seder concludes with the hope: “May we be heads, not tails, leaders and not followers. May we always be at the head of what is right and what is good in the year to come.”

- Rabbi Barbara Aiello

Reading 16

Turning The Heart - Teshoovah HaLev - תשובה הלב

Stand at the roads and consider. Look into the paths of the past, see which is the road of goodness. Walk it and find tranquility.

- Jeremiah 6. 16

In the mirror of our eyes, the other is reflected;
 In the eyes of the other - ourselves.
 We look outward, inward, see how we have hurt and harmed.
 How hurt embeds even in the smallest wounds
 We give ourselves over, begin to make amends,
 Begin to make ourselves whole.

- Marcia Falk

Reading 17

Judging Others Favorably

Most of us are quick to jump to negative conclusions about other people. Yet we judge without knowing all the factors that go into their decisions. Our tradition urges us to give up this (often unconscious) habit in order that we not cultivate a heart of suspicion in ourselves, nor a personal world peopled by perceived wrongdoers. Giving others the benefit of the doubt elevates both your own heart and the world in which you live. -Alan Morinis

Hillel taught: Do not judge your fellow until you are in his place. - Pirke Avot 2. 4

Reading 18



Autumn Speaks

Out of doors, the colors of bright autumn and the bright sun tell of the beauty of that which dies, but always comes again.

They speak directly to the heart of the eternal which outlives all moments and yet lives only in them.

Outlives all forms, yet comes again in them as in ourselves. It is said that there is nothing new in the world, no thoughts, even, which others have not thought.

Yet every thought is new to him who for himself thinks it for the first time. Each miracle of life is also rebirth, life born again, though every individual be new, existing from his birth for his first time.

Life in each one, as in the leaf and flower, accepts and yet cheats death. There is a sadness in the autumn leaf: I feel a sorrow that its beauty dies.

And I feel its message for the lives of those, as of myself, whom I have known and loved.

The leaf comes not again, though other leaves and flowers will bloom, and other lives, richer than we have been, shall take our place.

Perhaps the autumn teaches us a wiser grace through which we live, by learning to let go.

- Robert T. Weston, *Seasons of the Soul*, 1963

Reading 19

Community Service - Serving Others We Serve Ourselves - עבודתה

There is a story about a mountain climber who was lost in a terrible snowstorm. Blinded by snow and ice, exhausted and half-frozen, he knew that he would freeze to death if he stopped and fell asleep. As he attempted to walk to safety, he fell across a body in the snow. He didn't know what to do. If he paused, he would jeopardize his own life, and yet here was the semi-conscious form of a fellow human being. He began to massage the fallen man. After many minutes of exertion, the man started to revive, and the warmth of the victim's body began to rejuvenate the good Samaritan. They both stumbled to safety.

Who received the greater blessing? The recipient or the giver? Actually, both of them were blessed, because they helped each other.

-Rabbi Hillel E. Silverman

Reading 20

Communicate With Love And Grace

Whenever I'm seeking to express myself to others, I am responsible for my own effect. It is my responsibility, and only mine, to communicate in such a way as invites others into my heart.

I am aware that there are ways to speak, and ways to behave, that cause fear instead of love to rise up in those around me. It is not the job of others to figure out who I really am; rather it is my job to make it clear for all to see. If I want others to see the love in me, then I must show it to them.

- Marianne Williamson

Reading 21



The Shofar - השופר

We need to change and we need to be alert for action. There is an old Jewish sound of warning, an old Jewish sound that calls us to action. It is the sound of the *shofar*, the call of the ram's horn. The ram's horn was the first musical instrument of our Hebrew ancestors. It was the natural sound marker for nomads and shepherds.

The *shofar* did many things. It warned people of danger. It called them to battle against attacking enemies. It summoned men and women to public meetings, and announced the election of new rulers.

In later years, it became the special instrument of the New Year, the special sound of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. It warns us of the danger of doing nothing. It calls us to battle our excuses and alibis. It summons us to work together to make a better world. It announces that the time for change is *now*.

- Rabbi Sherwin Wine

Reading 22

Reward And Punishment

Righteousness is its own reward and unrighteousness its own punishment; for while the unrighteous may prosper, while he may, at times, gain apparent advantages, yet he fails to secure happiness; there is too much disharmony in his soul, too much rebellion in his conscience, too much violation of the finer emotions. Unrighteousness may attain to possessions, but it can never attain happiness in this world.

Reward and punishment, we see, do not wait for any hereafter. They are experienced here in this world, they accompany man's every action, just as his shadow, in the daylight, accompanies his every step. The right - the right action, the right conduct, the right thought, the right mode of living - are always rewarded. The wrong, no matter what that be, is always punished.

- Rabbi Morris Lichtenstein, How To Live, 1929

Reading 23

Questing Inward

Practically it is not an easy matter to “look within.” Techniques *do* exist, however, and until quite recently religion seemed to have a monopoly on them. Spiritual meditation has always been the gateway to a special kind of self-knowledge, and certainly, a rich reward awaits the contemplative soul that can commune with itself under the solitary shelter of thought. Ancient Judaism understood the healing value of inner contemplation and devised many of its holy days to serve as vehicles for the encouragement of self-communion and confession.

- Rabbi Joshua Loth-Liebman, Peace of Mind. 1946

Reading 24

Self-Love

The attainment of proper self-love must become the concern of every wise religion because as long as human beings are enslaved to wrong attitudes about themselves they cannot help expressing wrong attitudes toward others. If the self is not loved, how can the neighbor be loved as oneself?

- Rabbi Joshua Loth-Liebman

