

TEXTS FOR STUDY AND CONTEMPLATION

To BREAK THE BONDS of anger,
To be generous of heart;
To break the bonds of shame,
To live with self-respect;

To break the bonds of envy,
To serve one another in joy;
To break the bonds of boredom,
To be attentive to all God’s gifts;

To break the bonds of fear, To live with courage and strength;
To untie the knots of betrayal;
To love with fullness of being.

To break the bonds of loneliness,
To receive a hand of hope;
To break the bonds of self-centeredness,
To extend a hand of help;

Released from the darkness, our people found their freedom at the sea;
and we pray for liberation at the dawning of this year.

YOU HAVE STAYED long enough in this place, God said.
Time to go forward.

Turn your face to the future. Believe that you can cross this sea and survive.

Inside you is a Moses; within you Miriam dances, unafraid. Lift up your voice and sing a new song.

Let It Not Be Said

Death will come. Its hand will not be stayed
even an instant; nor can we enter into
judgment with it. Our question “Why?” will go
unanswered. But this does not mean that we
are helpless in the face of death. We can and
we do rob death of ultimate victory, by living
life as long as it is ours to live. To ask of death

that it never come is futile, but it is not futility to
pray that when death comes for us, it may take
us from a world one corner of which is a little
better because we were there.

When we are dead, and people weep for us and
grieve, let it be because we touched their lives
with beauty and simplicity. Let it not be said that
life was good to us, but, rather, that we were
good to life.

They went forth from Egypt on a single night
but next time the miracle will be different.

Once two Sages were walking very early in the valley
and they saw the light of the morning star.

Said one to the other,
“This is how the redemption will be.

The dawn breaks with a single ray of light
and bit by bit the sky is illumined,

until morning comes and the darkness is gone.

So the redemption will occur little by little,
growing steadily and gradually

until the world is full of light.”

Do not wait for a miracle
or the sudden transformation of the world.

Bring the day closer, step by step,
with every act of courage, of kindness,

of healing and repair.

Do not be discouraged by the darkness.

Lift up every spark you can
and watch the horizon

for the coming of dawn.

Look closely!

It has already begun.

OUR ACTIONS help us live in such a way that when we suffer life’s darkest depredations,
we will always have ways of coping with them. Our actions may not change the
ultimate outcome one iota, but they alter our attitude, bolster our ability to withstand
challenges, help us handle unavoidable misfortunes better, and see life’s value amid
chaos and dismay.

—Rabbi Aaron Panken (b. 1964)

IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES, we live with an illusion of control. We guard our health by eating
well, exercising, and getting regular checkups. We get ahead professionally by working
hard and building effective relationships. At the liturgical moment of Untaneh Tokef,
we are forced to admit how profoundly our lives can be altered by random occurrences
over which we have no control. A brain hemorrhage or heart attack can come out of
nowhere. A drunk driver can cripple or kill. A parent can have to bury a child.

An organization’s sudden economic reversals can unexpectedly result in layoffs or
firings. A healthy pregnancy can end with a stillbirth. A competent person can be unable
to find work. A trusted marriage can collapse. In my heart of hearts I know that I have as
little control as any other sheep in the flock. At the moment of Untaneh Tokef I know for
a certainty that my life hangs in the balance. When these High Holy Days end, I may be
lulled back into my false sense of security, the cocoon of my routine. But today I feel my
exposure, sense the danger inherent in life, re-encounter my mortality. My end is dust.

I cannot control the unexpected blows that will affect my family, my job, my health.
But I can control how I live with them. *T’shuvah* (cultivating a spiritual life and returning
to Torah), *t’filah* (cultivating gratitude and connecting with transcendent values), and
tzedakah (cultivating generosity and pursuing justice) will mitigate the bad in the
decree. *T’shuvah*, *t’filah*, and *tzedakah* will not stop stock-market crashes, lung cancer,
or the other blows that come our way, but they can radically transform how we are
affected by those blows.

—Rabbi David A. Teutsch, adapted (b. 1950)

I KNOW
that poverty must cease.
I know this through the
 brokenness
and conflict in my heart.
I know
that protest is my most
 prophetic act
and that the world is longing
for a new soul, a new healing
 moment.
I know
that when we awaken to our
 origins
and become truly human
we bring hope to the children
and to the earth.

I feel called today
to bring the people together to
 break the bread
and tell the story.
I feel called today
to be a mystic in action,
aligned to the dynamics of the
 universe.
I feel called today
to give my gift,
to listen to the heartbeat of the
 broken world;
to heal the fragmentation of
 people and planet.
I feel called today
to celebrate the wonder of
 creation
and respond to sacredness and
 the
challenges of life.

I feel called today
to participate in the work of
 my time,
to fall in love,
to feel at home.
I feel called today
to be inflamed with enduring
 hope,
to be at one with the universe,
to be touched by God.
I feel called today
to compose a new paragraph
for life.

Avinu Malkeinu: A Prayer of Protest

Avinu Malkeinu—
Hear our voice:
Some of us have cancer.
Some have lost strength of body; some have
 lost memory and speech.
Some of us are in pain.
Some can’t find work.

Some of us bear the marks of human cruelty—
 inside, where the scars don’t show.

Some live with depression; some battle
 addiction; many feel alone.

Some have known shattered marriages, trust
 betrayed, hopes destroyed.

Some of us have lost the ones we love, far too
 soon.

And some have lost a child.

All of us have seen suffering in our midst.

All of us know the ravages of war—
for which there are no words.

Avinu Malkeinu, why?

Avinu Malkeinu, are you there? Do you care?

Avinu Malkeinu, hear our pain.

Hear our anger. Hear our grief.

Avinu Malkeinu, here is our prayer:
Give us the strength to go on.
Give us reasons to get up each day;
give us purpose and persistence.
Help us to fend off fear and to hold on to hope.
Help us to be kind.

Don’t make us bow or grovel for your favor.

Give us dignity and give us courage.

Avinu Malkeinu—
Show us the way to a year of goodness.
Renew our belief that the world can be better.

Restore our faith in life. Restore our faith in you.

אֶהְבֵּנוּ, בְּכִינּוּ, גַּמְלָנוּ, דְּבַבְנוּ יְיָ. הֶאֱמַנּוּ, וְהִשְׁתַּדְּלוּ, זָכְרָנוּ, חִבְּקֵנוּ, טַעַמְנוּ סֶפֶר. יִצְרָנוּ,
כְּמִהְנֵנוּ, לְחִמְנוּ עָבוּר הַצֹּדֵק, מִצִּינּוּ אֶת הַטּוֹב, בְּסִינּוּ, סָרְנוּ לְרָאוֹת, עָשִׂינוּ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָנוּ,
פִּרְשָׁנוּ, צִדְקָנוּ לְעַעֲמִים, קָרָאנוּ בְּשִׁמְךָ. רָצִינוּ, שְׂמִיחָנוּ, תִּמְכְּנוּ

We loved. And we wept. We were kind—and spoke thoughtfully.

We were faithful and trusting. We put forth effort.

We were mindful. We embraced.

We took delight in the holy books.

We were creative. And we yearned.

We fought for justice—and searched out the good.

We tried our best. And we were attentive.

We did what You commanded us to do.

We found meaning in Torah.

And, most of the time, we did what is right.

We proclaimed Your name. And we were accepting.

We were joyful. And we cared.

WE HAVE ASPIRED TO REACH HIGHER.
WE HAVE BEFRIENDED THOSE IN NEED.
WE HAVE CREATED WORKS OF BEAUTY.
WE HAVE DELIGHTED IN HOLY BOOKS.
WE HAVE EMBRACED OUR DEAR ONES AND HELD THEM CLOSE.
WE HAVE FOUGHT FOR JUSTICE.
WE HAVE GIVEN OURSELVES.
WE HAVE HONORED YOUR MITZVOT.
WE HAVE IMMERSED OURSELVES IN PRAYER.
WE HAVE KEPT WORDS TO BUILD COMMUNITY.
WE HAVE JOINED OUR HANDS WITH INTEGRITY.
WE HAVE LOVED FAITHFULLY AND WELL.
WE HAVE MOVED TOWARD THE LIGHT.

WE HAVE NOURISHED AND SUPPORTED.
WE HAVE OPENED OURSELVES TO HOPE.
WE HAVE PURSUED THE GOOD.
WE HAVE QUIETED OUR ANGER.
WE HAVE REMEMBERED THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE.
WE HAVE SOUGHT MEANING IN TORAH.
WE HAVE TRUSTED AND BEEN TRUSTWORTHY.
WE HAVE UTTERED WORDS OF BEAUTY.
WE HAVE VIGOROUSLY STRUGGLED TO DO RIGHT.
WE HAVE WEPT OVER OUR SHORTCOMINGS.
WE HAVE EXCHANGED BLAME FOR COMPASSION.
WE HAVE YEARNED TO MAKE LIFE BETTER.
WE HAVE ZESTFULLY REJOICED.

As the Day Ends

We stand as one before the gates of a new year —
renewed by this Day of Atonement,
made stronger by all who are with us
and by those whose presence we feel within.

As the long day fades into dusk,
we join our voices in words of hope and dedication:

פִּתְחוּ-לָנוּ שַׁעַר־יְצֹדֵק, נְבִיא־בָּם, נוֹדֶה יְהוָה.

Pit-chu-lanu shaarei-tzedek; navo vam, nodeh Yah.

Open for us the gates of righteousness,
that we may enter and praise the Eternal Source of Life.

Open for us the gates of sacred community,
that we may enter and feel its healing power.

Open for us the gates of truth and integrity,
that we may enter and grow in faithfulness.

Open for us the gates of devotion and principle,
that we may enter and find enduring values and meaning.

Open for us the gates of repentance and return,
that we may enter and offer our best.

Open for us the gates of forgiveness,
that we may enter and offer our humanity.

Open for us the gates of kindness and compassion,
that we may enter and offer our love.

OPEN FOR US THE GATES פִּתְחוּ-לָנוּ. In the Book of Psalms (118:19) the verse reads: “Open for me the gates of righteousness” — a beautiful prayer for private devotion. But N’ilah is not a moment of solitude. In the last minutes of this powerful day, we express our solidarity as a congregation and our solidarity with the Jewish people. We do this by saying, “Open for us . . .”