

## ***TISHREI* AND THE *YAMIM NORAIM*: THROUGH A SPIRITUAL LENS**

**Shelly Barnathan**

### **SESSION SUMMARY**

These *Tishrei* materials are a compilation of art, poetry, and readings for *Tishrei*. They allow us to open the gates to our deepest *Neshamot*, souls, as we prepare ourselves for the *Yamim Noraim*. The art, poetry, and readings are by various artists, rabbis, and poets whom I admire. Please enjoy -- use these resources yourselves, share them with congregants, encourage both children and adults to slow down enough to return to the breath and soul in preparation for the beauty and the possibility contained within the season of the *Yamim Noraim*.

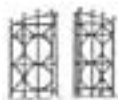
### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Rabbi Shelly Barnathan is Associate Rabbi/Educator at Congregation Beth Am Israel in Penn Valley, PA. Shelly was ordained from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. Shelly has a passion for the spiritual within Judaism, always searching for that which touches our souls in our Jewish prayers, practices and traditions.

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Artist - Betsy Plafkin Teutsch



1. שערי תשובה לעולם פתוחין.

The gates of repentance are always open.

—DEUTERONOMY RABBAH 2.12

בשבילי נברא העולם  
For my sake was the universe created

2. עפר אני  
I am but dust

Keep these two truths in your pocket and take them out according to the need of the moment.  
--Chasidic teaching 18<sup>th</sup> century

3. Return again, return again, return to the land of your soul  
Return again, return again, return to the land of your soul  
Return to who you are, return to what you are  
Return to where you are born and reborn again  
Return to who you are, return to what you are  
Return to where you are born and reborn again...

sung by Neshama Carlebach



4. **Make Our Days Seem Fresh**  
 "Make our days seem fresh" should not be seen as a plea for restoration of a formerly perfect condition; we were never perfect. Rather, it is a plea for resilience, a plea for the ability to renew ourselves after moments of crisis and dislocation. As Elie Wiesel remarks, "God gave Adam a secret—and that secret was not how to begin, but how to begin again."



Turn us toward You, ADONAI, and we will return to You; make our days seem fresh, as they once were.

Hashivenu, Hashivenu  
 Adonay Eylecha  
 V'nashuva, V'nashava  
 Chadesh, Chadesh  
 Yamenu K'kedem  
 Chadesh, Chadesh,  
 Yamenu K'kedem

Shiviti : Spiraling  
 Betsy Platkin Teutsch

# FORGIVENESS

5. Self-forgiveness is the essential act of the High Holiday season. We can forgive others on our own. But we turn to G-d, because it is so hard to forgive ourselves.

*Rabbi Alan Lew, z"l*



## *It's hardest with yourself*

**Dan Gottlieb**

is an Inquirer columnist and host of "Voices in the Family" on WHYY-FM (90.9)

**W**hy is it so hard for us to forgive ourselves?

This business of self-judgment is, for many people, the ultimate question, because it addresses our relationship with ourselves. So what's the nature of that relationship? It turns out that many good people refuse to forgive themselves — whereas many people who are really bad often have no difficulty forgiving themselves. In a prison, you find little guilt and high self-esteem. The majority of murderers have very high self-esteem. So much for theories.

Why do some people judge themselves so harshly? We beat ourselves up in order to improve ourselves: "I'm going to whip myself until I improve my income, looks, well-being." And of course, we have to do the opposite. We have to alter our relationship with ourselves.

Self-judgment is a kind of unforgiving road map. That's both good and bad. If we're always beating ourselves up, we always have motivation and goals. We know what tomorrow's going to look and feel like. We can use our misfortunes and failings as structuring elements: My parents were no good, my spouse was no good, Saddam Hussein's a bad guy. Self-anger becomes an anchor. But here's irony about anchors: They keep you stable in storms — but they also keep you stuck when there's no storms, and you can't move.

When we feel we've screwed up, the question is: Who has screwed up? Is it a person we feel compassion for, and love? If so, then there's a way to improve matters. But many of us insist on seeing ourselves as unimprovable, so we can be validated and just go on and on not liking ourselves.

A colleague of mine once told me a variation of the story in which Moses met God on the mountain. God's back was to Moses, and God passed before Moses' eyes, and in one moment, Moses saw the world through God's eyes. He saw what it is to have compassion for all things. So if you want to be fully human, even divine, see the world — including yourself — with that level of compassion for all living beings.

But if you stopped judging yourself for just a few minutes and felt compassion, you'd lose your road map. To embrace yourself as you are is frightening, terrifying. We're scared to death of our own impulses (as crazy as our culture is). To give that fear up means we have to be reconciled with our desires, urges, and impulses and still feel compassion for ourselves. It's to know that we can be wonderful and evil ... pedophiles and murderers and incredibly wonderful ... and to feel compassion in the presence of all these things.

To ask people to forgive themselves is to ask them to take a heroic step into a world they can never live in for very long at a time. They just need to keep taking single, heroic steps.

Contact Dan Gottlieb at [voicesin@aol.com](mailto:voicesin@aol.com).

6. *Ahavah, v Rachamim, Chesed, V'shalom - Love and Mercy, Lovingkindness and Peace*



7. Lovingkindness and Compassion -by Shelly Ramathan

G-d, thank You for opening my eyes  
 Allowing me to see  
 That I can love myself without conditions  
 That I can embrace myself fully...  
 With your help, Adonai,  
 I relinquish my need to constantly judge myself.  
 Embracing my own heart as it beats,  
 even as it bleeds.  
 Adonai - please give me the strength  
 to grow in compassion and acceptance for myself.  
 Thank You for lighting my way -  
 For gently illuminating a path in the darkness...  
 Adonai - Help me to shine the light of compassion on myself,  
 Opening my heart with gentleness  
 The same open heart that I offer so fully to my children,  
 my friends, my family, my community.  
 G-d - Give me the strength to resist  
 harsh self-judgement....  
 You know, G-d, that I am always trying  
 always striving to do what is right...  
 Let me acknowledge this Kavanah, this intention  
 let me cradle it and honor it with gentleness and compassion.  
 Thank you, G-d, for helping me as I grow  
 Day by day  
 To love myself, to honor myself.  
 I am your creation, G-d. As I honor myself,  
 I honor you, and all of your  
 creations.

8. *Reflection for the New Year - Do I love myself fully? Do I appreciate myself? Do I show myself the same forgiveness and compassion that I show my children and my loved ones?*





Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig, "God is a Woman and She is Growing Older"



God is a woman and she is growing older. She moves more slowly now. She cannot stand erect. Her hair is thinning. Her face is lined. Her smile no longer innocent. Her voice is scratchy. Her eyes tire. Sometimes she has to strain to hear. God is a woman and she is growing older; yet, she remembers everything.

On Rosh Hashanah, the anniversary of the day on which she gave us birth, God sits down at her kitchen table, opens the Book of Memories, and begins turning the pages; and God remembers.

"There, there is the world when it was new and my children when they were young..." As she turns each page she smiles, seeing before her, like so many dolls in a department store window, all the beautiful colors of our skin, all the varied shapes and sizes of our bodies. She marvels at our accomplishments: the music we have written, the gardens we have planted, the skyscrapers we have built, the stories we have told, the ideas we have spun.

"They now can fly faster than the winds I send," she says to herself, "and they sail across the waters which I gathered into seas. They even visit the moon which I set in the sky. But they rarely visit me." There pasted into the pages of her book are all the cards we have ever sent to her when we did not bother to visit. She notices our signatures scrawled beneath the printed words someone else has composed.

Then there are pages she would rather skip. Things she wishes she could forget. But they stare her in the face and she cannot help but remember: her children spoiling the home she created for us, brothers putting each other in chains. She remembers seeing us racing down dangerous roads – herself unable to stop us. She remembers the dreams she had for us, dreams we never fulfilled. And she remembers the names, so many names, inscribed in the book, names of all the children she has lost through war and famine, earthquake and accident, disease and suicide... And God remembers the many times she sat by a bedside weeping that she could not halt the process she herself set into motion. Tonight, Kol Nidrei night, God lit candles, one for each of her children, millions and millions of candles lighting up the night making it bright as day. Tonight God will stay awake all night turning the pages of her book.

God is lonely tonight, longing for her children, her playful ones, Ephraim, her darling one. Her body aches for us. All that dwells on earth does perish. But God endures, so she suffers the sadness of losing all that she holds dear.

God is home tonight, turning the pages of her book. "Come home," she wants to say to us, "Come home." But she won't call. For she is afraid that we will say, "No." She can anticipate the conversation: We are so busy, we'd apologize. We'd love to see you but we just can't come tonight. Too much to do. Too many responsibilities to juggle.

Even if we don't realize it, God knows that our business is just an excuse. She knows that we avoid returning to her because we don't want to look into her age-worn face. She understands that it is hard for us to face a god who disappointed our childhood expectations: she did not give us everything we wanted. She did not make us triumphant in battle, successful in business and invincible to pain. We avoid going home to protect ourselves from our disappointment and to protect her. We don't want her to see the disappointment in our eyes. Yet, God knows that it is there and she would have us come home anyway.

What if we did? What if we did go home and visit God this Yom Kippur? What might it be like?

God would usher us into her kitchen, seat us at her table, pour two cups of tea. She has been alone so long that there is much she wants to say to us. But we barely allow her to get a word in edgewise, for we are afraid of what she might say and we are equally afraid of silence, so we fill us an hour.



Then she pushes back her chair and says: Let me have a good look at you. And she looks. And, in a single glance, God sees us as both newly born and dying: coughing and crying, turning our head to root for her breast, fearful of the unknown realm which lies ahead.

In a single glance she sees our birth and our death and all the years in between. She sees us as we were when we were young: when we idolized her and trustingly followed her anywhere; when our scrapes and bruises healed quickly, when we were filled with wonder at all things new (a new dress, a driver's license, the new feelings in our body when we first allowed a friend to touch it.) she sees us when we were young, when we thought that there was nothing we could not do.

She sees our middle years too: when our energy was unlimited. When we kept house, cooked and cleaned, cared for children, worked, and volunteered. When everyone needed us and we had no time for sleep.

And God sees us in our later years: when we no longer felt so needed; when chaos disrupted the bodily rhythms we had learned to rely upon. She sees us sleeping alone in a room which once slept two.

God sees things about us we have forgotten and things we do not yet know. For naught is hidden from God's sight.

When she is finished looking at us, God might say, so tell me, how are you?" Now we are afraid to open our mouths and tell her everything she already knows: whom we love; where we hurt; what we have broken or lost; what we wanted to be when we grew up. We are afraid to speak now, lest we begin to cry.

Yom Kippur we sit in the house of prayer, far from home; holding in our hands pages of greeting cards bound together like a book, thousands of words we ourselves have not written. Will we merely place our signatures at the bottom and drop the cards in the mail box?

God would prefer that we come home. She is sitting and waiting for us as she has waited every Yom Kippur, waiting ever patiently until we are ready. Kol Nidrei night God will not sleep. She will leave the door open and the candles burning waiting patiently for us to come home.

Perhaps this Yom Kippur we will be able to look into God's aging face and say: Avinu Malkeinu, our Mother our Queen, we have come home.





*based on poem by Rabbi Sheryl Lewart, z"l*

May you follow a path of compassion  
As you walk to the rhythm of your own inner being

May you feel the whole world open inside you as you  
As you accept and forgive yourself for being exactly who you are.

May you surround yourself with life-affirming companions  
And dear souls who sustain all the good that is within you.

May the gates of compassion always swing open for you  
and for your loved ones.

May you and your loved ones be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life for good  
and for blessing.

**L'shanah Tovah Tikateyvu v'Teychateymu**  
**לשנה טובה תכתבו ותחתמו**

And let us say, Amen.



Artist -  
Betsy Plafkin Teutsch

