

Rosh Hashanah & Yom Kippur Readings:

Marking the 25th Anniversary of the September 11th Attack

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By the Hudson River

Rabbi Karen Reiss Medwed

By the Hudson River,
there we were bombed,
there we wept,
remembering September Eleventh.

By the Hudson River
we suffered a blow of evil and terror,
there we learned
we are not always safe.

By the Hudson River
where we watched buildings collapse,
planes, dust and ash,
there we grieved the loss of thousands.

We learned on that fateful day of September Eleventh,
that we know how to come together, to be one people,
whose faith, love, and hope guide them,
as we care for one another.

We learned on that fateful day of September Eleventh,
to walk each other home,
across a bridge,
to watch over our neighbors, to look in on our children.

We learned by the Hudson River, on that fateful day of September Eleventh,
that we lost our innocence.

And now it falls to us to forge a path,
by which we shall win back
our independence, our liberties,
and our faith in humanity's goodness.

And today, on this Rosh HaShanah, this New Year,
may it be the will of our Shekhina
that she envelop us in her shelter of peace,
and provide a sweet year of renewed possibilities,
of peace to envelop the earth,
and for all creatures to stand hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder,
to repair our injustices and find our common ground.

So may the rebuilding of our tower
be a rebuilding of our communal commitment
to the flame of liberty that shines in our New York Harbor.

May peace fill our world,
and let us say: Amen.

על נהרות ההאדסון

על נהרות ההאדסון,
שם הפצצנו,
שם בכינו,
בזכרנו את האחד עשר בספטמבר.

על נהרות ההאדסון
חוינו מכת טרוריסטים,
שם למדנו
שאנחנו לא תמיד בטוחים

על נהרות ההאדסון
משם ראינו בנינים מתמוטטים,
מטוסים, אבק ועפר,
שם כאבנו באבדן אלפים.

למדנו ביום גורלי זה של האחד עשר בספטמבר,
כי יודעים אנו להתאחד, להיות עם אחד,
עם אמונה אהבה ותקווה שינחווהו,
עם שדואג איש לרעהו.

למדנו ביום גורלי זה של האחד עשר בספטמבר,
ללוות איש את רעהו הביתה,
מעבר לגשר,
ללוות את שכנינו, לפקד על ילדינו.

למדנו על נהר ההאדסון,

ביום גורלי זה של האחד עשר בספטמבר,
כי אבדה תמימותנו.

ועתה עלינו לסלל נתיב,
אשר בו נשוב ונזכה
בעצמאותנו, בחריותינו,
ובאמונתנו בטוב האנושות.

ובראש השנה, בשנה החדשה הזאת,
יהי רצון מלפני שכינתנו
שתעטפנו בסכת שלומה,
ותעניק לנו שנה מתוקה של אפשרויות מתחדשות,
של שלום העוטף את המדינה,
כשכולם יעמדו יד ביד, כתף אל כתף,
לתקן בצדק משפט ורחמים בשתפות.

כן תהי בנית מגדלינו מחדש
בניה של מחיבותנו המשתפת
ללהבת החרות הזוהרת בנמל ניו יורק.

וימלא העולם שלום,
ונאמר: אמן.

Intro Unetaneh Tokef 5787: Rosh Hashanah Day One

Rabbi Robyn Fryer Bodzin

Before we begin Unetaneh Tokef, I want us to pause for a moment.

Today is Rosh Hashanah, but yesterday was September 11, and this year marks 25 years since that terrible morning.

Twenty-five years ago, Naomi Solomon was 52 years old. She was a vice president at a software company in San Francisco and she was in New York for a trade show. That morning, she was attending a technology conference at Windows on the World, on the 107th floor of the World Trade Center.

And then the plane hit.

I think about Naomi this morning because Unetaneh Tokef asks us to confront something that we spend most of our lives trying not to think about: how little control we actually have over what happens to us.

מי באש ומי במים Who by fire and who by water?

מי בחרב ומי בחיה Who by sword and who by beast?

מי ברעש ומי במגפה Who by earthquake and who by plague?

These words are thousands of years old. And yet, somehow, they still describe the world we know.

Naomi wasn't expecting that morning to be her last morning. She was going to a conference. She was doing her job. She was living her ordinary life.

And that is what makes Unetaneh Tokef so difficult—and so important. Because we don't know.

We don't know what this year will bring. We don't know what tomorrow will bring. And none of us knows how many ordinary mornings we have left. But we do know that we are here today.

So as we recite Unetaneh Tokef, I want us to remember Naomi Solomon, and all the thousands of people whose lives ended that day.

Not only to remember how they died. But to remember that they lived. They had families. They had friends. They had plans. They had ordinary mornings. And so do we.

May we not take the ordinary for granted.
May we appreciate the people sitting beside us.

And may we enter this new year grateful—not because we know what lies ahead, but because we have been given this moment, this day, this life.
And now, together, we turn to Unetaneh Tokef.

Writings From Rabbi Naomi Levy

An excerpt from *Talking to God*:

September 11, 2001. The blow was sudden, swift, and beyond comprehension. How can you witness the loss of so many innocent lives and make any sense of it? We can all understand the pain of a single death. That's why the television anchors and newspaper columnists sought to reveal individual stories of heroism and grief to us. Each isolated account brought a sense of reality to the tragedy. But who can grasp the simultaneous horrific deaths of so many without seeing a blur? Who can look into a mass grave and experience the true depth of each life lost?

God can.

There is a blessing Jews are instructed to say when they see a large crowd gathered: "Blessed is God, the Knower of secrets." When we look at a crowd, all we see is a bunch of anonymous people, but when God looks into a crowd, God sees inside each and every soul. God knows us intimately. God knows our goodness, our specialness, our loves, our dreams, our imperfections, our secrets. When three thousand people are murdered together, God bears the loss of each man, woman, and child in his or her uniqueness. God gathers up their pure, innocent souls, and fills them with the peace that was stolen from them on earth. God knows the pain of every single mourner left behind. God weeps with them, and God breathes strength and comfort into their souls.

That is why so many of us began to pray again after September 11. We erected handmade shrines on city streets. We joined together in houses of worship and in sports stadiums to talk to God. At baseball games the traditional seventh-inning-stretch rendition of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" was replaced by "God Bless America"—a hope, a prayer.

The terrorist attacks of September 11 shook us to the core. We learned that America is more vulnerable than we ever imagined, and we witnessed how fleeting human life is, how fragile. But through our prayers we gained strength. As we turned to God in pain, I believe God's message to every one of us was: You are much stronger than you ever imagined. You are capable of more than you know. You can heal. You can rise above your grief and fear and repair this world. You are capable of acts of goodness that you never knew were inside you.

I believe this was God's message to America too: You are far stronger than you can possibly imagine. Your firefighters, police officers, and soldiers are more heroic than you ever suspected. Your citizens are more courageous and compassionate than you ever guessed. Your suffering will heal; your prosperity will return; you will restore your security and rebuild your ruins; you will live in peace.

And we continue to pray. We pray for a world without hatred, and we pray for an end to terror. We pray for the strength to overcome prejudice and intolerance and for safety and protection. We pray that God will grant wisdom and compassion to our leaders. We pray for our dead and for those left behind. We pray for healing. We pray for ourselves and for this world. We pray for peace.

A Prayer of Remembrance for Fallen Heroes:

Some might have stood by, but you stood up. You gave your lives so that others might live. We are indebted to you, we are humbled by you.

When all hope was lost, when the world seemed like a dark and heartless place, you restored our faith in people and our trust in God. You taught us hope, and fearlessness, and honor.

We miss you. We will never forget your heroism. We will teach our children and grandchildren about your courage in the face of danger. We will try with all our might to live up to the example you have set.

We will not ignore human suffering, we will not be indifferent to the cries of those in pain; you did not die in vain. You have changed us. You live on inside us, in pride and in love.

May God watch over you as you watched over us. Rest in peace. Amen.

Inspired by Laberit Habet in Nashuva Machzor:

Like clay in a potter's hand,
That can be molded or discarded,
So are we in Your hand, Creator,
Remember the covenant, not our failings.

Like stone in a sculptor's hand,
That can be chiseled with care or shattered,
So are we in Your hand, Source of life and death,
Remember the covenant, not our failings.

Like iron in a smith's hand,
That can be hammered or cast aside,
So are we in Your hand, Guardian of the poor and weak,
Remember the covenant, not our failings.

Like a rudder in a sailor's hand,
That can be guided or abandoned,
So are we in Your hand, God of forgiveness,
Remember the covenant, not our failings.

Like glass in a blower's hand,
That can be bent or broken,
So are we in Your hand, God of repentance,
Remember the covenant, not our failings.

Kol Nidre in Nashuva Machzor:

The world of the spirit mirrors the world of matter, just as heaven mirrors earth. The words we speak are a bridge between these two dimensions. They arise from the flesh and are carried by the life breath into the realm of the spirit. Vows we make to God do not evaporate like mist even though we have the power to ignore them. Our oaths leave a permanent imprint on an eternal consciousness. They linger as a testament to all our unfulfilled promise. At this moment on this night we pray for the strength, God, to refrain from making vows to You. Instead, let us be judged on heaven and on earth by our actions. May our prayers lead us beyond the realm of intentions to the world of deeds. Let all vows, promises, and oaths we make to You, God, from this Yom Kippur until the next be erased, released and forgiven. We regret having spoken them. Let our vows to You not be vows, our promises to You not be promises, our oaths to You not be oaths.