

B'REISHIT

Each year we sit expectantly, waiting to hear how it all began. We strain and stretch ourselves, not to imagine darkness, chaos—darkness and chaos are states with which we are well acquainted. No, we begin

by trying to conjure first light, form and order and sense emerging from *tohu va-vohu*. And how can it be that on Day One there was light, night and day, but sun and moon not till Day Four? OK, we think, put aside that question for the moment

as we struggle to see how it was, for light has limitless possibilities to consider—shimmering white heat of the Negev, June sunset over the Pacific, the way it sparkles on early morning maple leaves in Maine woods when everything seems new and promising.

And yes, before sun and moon, the Yangtze, the Nile, Mississippi, Danube, North Sea, Finger Lakes, Victoria Falls, Ein Gedi. And fig trees, fuchsia, redwood, rhubarb, palm, eucalyptus, birch, blueberries, mango, mustard seed, dogwood, dill, the mighty oak, oregano, arugula, climbing roses, cinnamon and cyclamen.

A fifth day brings us dolphin and wren, duck and swan, seagull and whale, crocodile, crab, bat, octopus, butterfly, sockeye salmon and shark, trout, snapping turtle, blue jay, hawk and dove, ladybug, lobster, falling sparrow, heron and herring and hummingbird, whooping cranes, and bees. Now our hearts are pounding wildly, our eyes fill with tears at the glory of this world—

(continued)

The Creation of the World

FROM THE TORAH: THE FIRST DAY OF CREATION

When God began to create heaven and earth, the earth was unformed and void, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God swept over the water. God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day and the darkness Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day. *Genesis 1:1–5*

CREATION: A MEDIEVAL PIYYUT

Who established the highest heights?
Who propelled the sphere's rays?
Who is as great as the Divine?
Who can describe the Most Sublime?
Even silence is Your praise!

Who spoke and with word day came to be?
Who glanced, and in that gaze created land?
Who propelled the waves and set limits to the seas?
Who raised up mountains and formed the valleys?
Who exactly measured the distance the world spanned?
Even silence is Your praise!

Who placed hair on human heads and caused it to grow?
Who made each worm slither, and move only that way?
Who formed each person, each in Adam's mold?
Who created species, members alike, numbers untold?
Who can describe God's ways; and what God has given, who can repay?
Even silence is Your praise!

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: וְהָאָרֶץ הִיְתָה תֵהוֹ וְכָהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי־אוֹר: וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאוֹר כִּי־טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ: וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם וּלְחֹשֶׁךְ קֶרָא לַיְלָה וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד: בְּרֵאשִׁית א א-ה

מִי יִסַּד שָׁמַי גְבוּהֵימ, מִי נָטָה גִלְגַּל נְגָהִים?
מִי אֵל גָּדוֹל פְּאֵלֵהִים, מִי יִמְלֵל גְבוּרוֹת אֱלֹהִים?
לָךְ דּוּמְיָה תְהִלָּה אֱלֹהִים!

מִי אָמַר וְתִהְיֶה אִמְרָתוֹ יוֹם מִתִּיחַת שְׁחָקִיו?
מִי בָט וַיִּכּוֹן מִבְּטָאוֹ יוֹם נְטִיַת אֲרָקִיו?
מִי גָדַר גְּדָרוֹת מִצְלוּלִים יוֹם שׁוּמוֹ חֲקִיו?
מִי דָבַק רִגְבֵי אֲרֶץ יוֹם הִכִּינוּ עִמְקִיו?
מִי שָׁם מְמִדְיָהּ כִּי תִדַע אוֹ מִי נָטָה עֲלֶיהָ קוֹ?
לָךְ דּוּמְיָה תְהִלָּה אֱלֹהִים!

מִי קָבַע בְּרֵאשִׁית אֲנוּשׁ הַרְבֵּה נִימִין בְּגִדְלוֹ?
מִי רָשָׁם לְכָל נִימָה וְנִימָה בְּפָנָי עֵצְמָה
מְלַחֲכָחִישׁ נְהוּלוֹ?

מִי שִׁפַּר תֵּאֲרָ פֶלַע יִצוֹר כְּתֵאֲרָ אָדָם הָרֵאשׁוֹן וְכָלוּלוֹ?
מִי תִכַּן לְהַשְׁווֹת לָזוֹ לְזוֹ בְּצוּרָתוֹ וְאִמִּירָתוֹ וְקוּלוֹ?
מִי יִגִּיד עַל פְּנֵיו דְּרָכּוֹ, וְהוּא עֵשָׂה – מִי יִשְׁלָם לוֹ?
לָךְ דּוּמְיָה תְהִלָּה אֱלֹהִים!

WHO ESTABLISHED מִי יִסַּד. The poem excerpted here was written by Joseph Ibn Abitur (10th–11th centuries, Spain) to be recited as a *piyyut* on the new year. It takes its inspiration from God's speech at the end of the Book of Job (chapter 38), where God questions Job as to whether the latter truly understands what powers are at work in the universe. The images that Abitur uses are taken both from Job and from talmudic midrashim.

EVEN SILENCE לָךְ דְּמִיָּה. Psalm 65:2.

WHO EXACTLY MEASURED מִי שָׁם מְמִדְיָהּ. Job 38:5.

WHO CAN DESCRIBE מִי יִגִּיד עַל פְּנֵיו. Job 21:31.

WHO CAN BATTLE מִי הִקְשָׁה. Job 9:4.

INTRODUCTION TO KIDDUSH HA-SHANAH. Whereas some *piyyutim* (liturgical poems) were composed specifically for the evening of Rosh Hashanah, they did not become a standard part of the liturgy. This mahzor introduces a series of readings—biblical readings, medieval *piyyutim*, and modern readings—to dedicate the new year. Opinions in the Babylonian Talmud consider the first day of the month of Tishrei (Rosh Hashanah) as the first day of creation (Rosh Hashanah 10b–11a). Yet the Midrash records an opinion that the world was created on the 25th day of the preceding month, Elul (Pesikta D'rav Kahana, Piska 23:1). That is, the sixth day of creation—the day on which God created human beings—fell on the first day of Tishrei. Thus according to this opinion, Rosh Hashanah celebrates the creation of human-kind. As we dedicate the new year, we keep both opinions in mind, and in this ceremonial moment we celebrate both views with the appropriate verses from Genesis and also with poetic reflections.

(continued from previous page)

all in a jumble then, frantically
getting ready for Shabbos,
come antelope and alley cat,
Irish setter, polar bear, black bear,
beaver, tiger, squirrel, chipmunk
and camel, lioness and spring lamb,
zebra, elephant, rattlesnake,
hippopotamus, giraffe,
monkey, mountain goat—
and just as it's time to reach into
the box at the back of the cupboard
to pull out two candles and find
the matches for *licht bentschen*—

miraculously comes the human
who can strike the match
and sanctify all the work
that God has done, eons ago
and every moment since,
battling *tohu va-vohu*,
the chaos that threatens
to once again engulf it all.
Shaken and humbled, we
reach for the match
and the blessing,
full of gratitude
for this holy world.

—MERLE FELD

The Creation of Humanity

FROM THE TORAH: THE SIXTH DAY OF CREATION

And God made human beings in God's image—
thus were they created: God created them male and
female. And God blessed them and said to them, "Be
fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and conquer it;
rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens,
and all living things that crawl on earth." . . . And God
saw all that had been done and thought it very good.
And there was evening and there was morning, the
sixth day. Genesis 1:27–28, 31

One or more of the following selections may be included.

✠

THE ROSE OF SHARON

My being, my heart, my soul
set out toward the fragrance of the rose.
The smell of happiness,
the joy of the sand dunes,
rises toward me through the damp,
through the emptiness
of endless space,
flies on its white wings,
and the world again becomes a discernible reality,
a heavenly charm,
an instrument of holiness, surely.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים | אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵ אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא
אֹתוֹ זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם: וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמְרוּ
לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמְלְאוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ וּכְבַשְׁתֶּהּ וּרְדוּ
בְּדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל-חַיַּי הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-
הָאָרֶץ: . . . וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב
מְאֹד וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי: בְּרֵאשִׁית א כז-כח, לא

One or more of the following selections may be included.

✠

קָרְבִי, לְבִי, נַפְשִׁי –
יוֹצְאִים אֶל נִיחוּחַ הַחֲבֻצֵּלֶת.
נְשִׁימַת הָאֲשֶׁר
מְשׁוֹשׂ הַחוּלוֹת,
הִנֵּה הִיא עוֹלָה אֵלַי מִן הַטַּחֵב
מִן הָרִיק
מֵאֵין אָפֶק,
פוֹרַחַת בְּכַנְפֶיהָ הַלְבָנוֹת,
שׁוֹב הָעוֹלָם מִמְשׁוֹת מְלֻטָּשׁת
מִזֶּל עֲלִיוֹן
בְּעַל קִדְשָׁהּ וְדָאִי.

MY BEING, MY HEART
קָרְבִי, לְבִי. A poem by the
modern Israeli poet Zelda
Schneerson Mishkovsky
(1914–1984), known simply
as "Zelda."

ב

IN YOUR IMAGE

In Your Image You fashioned us;
You owe us Your Presence.

*We need to bow to You, ask Your forgiveness,
hold You responsible for the unfair, the ugly.*

We need to return to You,
hold You accountable for what defies comprehension,
that we may turn to You more fervently, with gratitude for
the seasons and the stars and the day and the night.

*We are humbled by the wonder of the world,
grateful for the gift of thought,
grateful for our dreams, our hopes,
grateful for our never-ending illusions,
grateful for these beautiful souls that transcend death.*

God of the faithless,
God of the faithful,
God in all forms and formless,
who was and who is and who will be:
You are the Eternal One.

ג

Let every breath of life praise ADONAI. Halleluyah!

Kol ha-n'shamah t'hallel yah, hal'luyah.

ד

May this year's troubles end, and a year of blessing begin.

*Tikhleh shanah v'kil'loteha,
taheil shanah u-virkhoteha.*

ב

בְּצִלְמֶךָ בְּדַמוֹתֶיךָ בְּרֵאתָ אוֹתָנוּ
וְחָיִב אֶתְּהָ לְהִיּוֹת נוֹכַח לָנוּ.

עֲלֵינוּ לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת אֵלֶיךָ
לְבַקֵּשׁ אֶת־סְלִיחָתְךָ

וּלְחַיֵּב אוֹתְךָ עַל כָּל־הָאִי־צַדִּיק וְהַמְכַעֵר בְּעוֹלָם.

עֲלֵינוּ לָשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ

וּלְבַקֵּשׁ דִּין וְחֶשְׁבוֹן עַל כָּל־שְׁלֵא מוֹבָן
שָׂאזְ נוֹכַח לְפָנֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ בְּכוֹנֵה
לְהוֹדוֹת לְךָ עַל הַעֲתִים וְעַל הַפּוֹכְבִּים,
עַל הַיּוֹם וְעַל הַלַּיְלָה.

לְפָנֶי פְּלֵאֵי הָעוֹלָם אָנוּ מוֹשְׁפָלִים
אֶסְיִרִי תוֹדָה עַל חֲנוּן הַדַּעַת

עַל כָּל־חֲלוּמוֹתֵינוּ וְתַקּוּתֵינוּ

עַל אֲשֶׁלְיוֹתֵינוּ שְׂאִין לָהֶן סוּף

וְעַל הַנְּשֻׁמוֹת הַיְּפוֹת שְׁחִיּוֹת חַיֵּי עוֹלָם.

אֵל הַכּוֹפְרִים

וְאֱלֹהֵי הַמְּאֲמִינִים

אֱלֹהֵי בְּכָל־דְּמוּיוֹת וְשֵׂאִין לוֹ דְּמוּת

שְׁהִיָּה הוּהָ וְיִהְיֶה

אֶתְּהָ הוּא אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד.

ג

כָּל הַנְּשֻׁמָּה תִּהְיֶה לְךָ, הַלְלוּ־יָהּ.

ד

תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ.

תִּחַל שָׁנָה וּבִרְכוּתֶיהָ.

IN YOUR IMAGE בְּצִלְמֶךָ בְּדַמוֹתֶיךָ. This poem, composed in French by Myriam Kubovy and published in 1956, draws upon recognizable phrases of the liturgy. It asserts that the "image of God" in human beings includes not only the ability to appreciate the wonder of creation and the Creator's wisdom, but also the ability to struggle with God. The English translation of this excerpt is by Amy Gottlieb; the Hebrew translation, by Alan Letofsky.

TIKHEH תִּכְלֶה. This refrain is taken from a popular Rosh Hashanah Arvit piyyut in the Sephardic liturgy.

May it be Your will, ADONAI our God and God of our ancestors, that the year _____ be one of balanced and mindful growth for us as individuals, for our families, and our communities. May we return next year in good health and in appreciation of a year of greater peace, a year in which we deepened our lives through learning and the performance of mitzvot, a year in which we were conscious of the Divine Presence, a year in which we strengthened our shared commitment to *tikkun olam*, the betterment of the world.

MEDITATION

In Your great kindness, aid us, ADONAI our God, to embrace this Rosh Hashanah with love and overwhelming joy, as a gift from You. Through the celebration of this sacred Rosh Hashanah may we attain a full and true faith. Help us to gather together the sparks of holiness within ourselves, as we join with all the people Israel congregating from their individual homes and joining together on these holy days of Rosh Hashanah to bless Your sacred name.

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְפָּנֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
 [וְאִמּוֹתֵינוּ], שֶׁתַּחַדְשׁ עָלֵינוּ אֶת-הַשָּׁנָה הַזֹּאת, שְׁנַת
 חֲמִשָּׁת אֲלָפִים _____ וְתִהְיֶה זֶה שָׁנָה שֶׁל שְׂגִיּוֹג
 שְׂקוּל לָנוּ לְמִשְׁפָּחוֹתֵינוּ וְלְקִהְלוֹתֵינוּ. יְהִי רְצוֹן שְׂגִיּוֹב
 בְּשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה לְמָקוֹם הַזֶּה בְּבְרִיאוֹת וּבְרִגְשֵׁי הוֹדָאָה
 לְשָׁנָה שֶׁל שְׁלוֹם, שָׁנָה בָּהּ נִמְצָא דְרָכִים לְהִיטִיב אֶת-
 חַיֵּינוּ בְּלִמּוּד תּוֹרָה וְקִיּוּם מִצְוֹת,
 שָׁנָה בָּהּ נִהְיֶה פְתוּחִים לְנוֹכְחוֹת הַשְּׂכִינָה,
 שָׁנָה בָּהּ נַחֲזֵק אֶת-יְחֻסֵּינוּ הָאִישִׁים לְאַחֲרִים וְשִׁתּוּף
 פְּעוּלָתֵנוּ בְּתַקּוּן עוֹלָם. כֵּן יְהִי רְצוֹן.

MAY IT BE YOUR WILL יְהִי רְצוֹן. This meditation is adapted from the writings of the 20th-century rabbi and liturgist, Chaim Stern.

תַּעֲזֹרְנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ, בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ הַרְבִּים שְׁנִזְכֶּה לְקַבֵּל
 אֶת-רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה, מִתְּנֶה טוֹבָה שְׁנַת־לָנוּ, בְּאַהֲבָה
 וּבְשִׂמְחָה רַבָּה. וּבְזִכּוֹת קִדְשׁ רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה נִזְכֶּה
 לְאַמוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה בְּאַמְתּוֹ. וְתַעֲזֹרְנוּ וְתוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ שִׁיתְקַבְּצוּ
 יַחַד כָּל-נִיצוּצוֹת הָאַמוּנָה הַקְּדוּשָׁה שֶׁבְּתוֹכֵנוּ, עַל יְדֵי
 הַקְּבוּץ הַקְּדוּשׁ שֶׁל עַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמְתַּקְבְּצִים בְּכָל-
 הַקִּהְלוֹת יַחַד בְּכָל-מְקוֹמוֹת מוֹשְׁבוֹתֵיהֶם בְּיָמֵי רֵאשׁ
 הַשָּׁנָה הַקְּדוּשִׁים לְבָרֶךְ אֶת-שֵׁם קְדֻשָּׁךְ.

IN YOUR GREAT KINDNESS תַּעֲזֹרְנוּ. A prayer adapted from Rabbi Nathan Sternharz (1780–1845), the chief student of the Hasidic master Nahman of Bratzlav and the compiler of the main body of the Bratzlav corpus. Nahman’s teachings stress a life of faith and joyfulness.