

WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?

Hello!

We have chosen to gather and see if we can get some personal meaning out of rosh hashana and yom kippur, learning from what each other have to say.

The way this gathering will work, is that hopefully these sheets will lead the way without need for facilitation by a leader.

That means that everything we will be doing is written on these sheets, and they will guide us as we turn them and follow their instructions.

If you notice that someone hasn't spoken, that we have got way off the topic, that people are hungry or thirsty, then go ahead and do something about it! (tea + kettle + food are in the kitchen).

If you would like to add a thought, question, reading or activity that is not here, then please jump in and do so.

The poems we will read are by Marge Piercy, a Jewish feminist author and poet.

The first step is to flick through, glance at the themes and pick one or two that we should focus on. And then follow those activities.

Shana tova! xx

To start with, find the poem called '*the head of the year*' and someone should read it out.

Discuss: what is the value of asking for forgiveness and of forgiving?

ROSH HASHANA: a JEWISH new year

1 Discuss: What makes Jewish New Year different from the secular new year in January? What is specifically Jewish about Rosh Hashana?

2 Rosh Hashana is intricately tied with Yom Kippur. Repentance, relationships, reflection, resolutions and community are all hefty themes that both chaggim have in common.

Read 'the art of blessing the day'.

3 Each person should take 4 slips of paper.
Write on each one something bitter, something sour, something salty and something sweet about the world around you.
When done, put them in the middle and mix them around.
The slips of paper should be read out, with each person taking a turn to pick one out of the middle.

PRAYER

1

Prayer has become a crucial element of a Jewish marking of traumatic, celebratory and spiritual occasions. Sometimes we connect with the syllables / sounds of the words, and sometimes we connect with the fact of the history and heritage of those words. Sometimes, merely saying them in a group or community gives us a spiritual or emotional connection.

However, sometimes it is the meaning of the words that counts. Sometimes we might agree with what we are saying and sometimes not.

We are going to construct a prayer or blessing as a group.

2

Read 'the task never completed'
and
'to be of use'

3

Take a piece of paper and a coloured pen.

Think of a theme you would like to construct a prayer or blessing about. Eg. Healing; cycles; betterment; redemption; slichot; forgiveness etc.

Write one line of your prayer or blessing and fold the paper over a small amount so it cannot be read.

Pass on your piece of paper.

As you receive a new piece of paper, continue to write more of your prayer/blessing.

When the pages have rotated round the circle, read them out.

Each member of the group should take their communal blessing home.

CUSTOMS #1

1

Discuss:

Have you ever done *tashlich*? (could someone explain what it is if anyone is unsure)

What did it feel like? What did you think about?

Would you do it again?

2

Read '*breadcrumbs*' and '*tashlich*'

3

Discuss:

What is the crucial meaning of rosh hashana and yom kippur for you?

Each person should tell the group what action is the most crucial and appropriate thing for them to do on rosh hashana or yom kippur, that fulfills that underlying meaning.

CUSTOM #2: LEARNING FROM OUR ANCESTORS

1 Read one of the parashot that are read on rosh hashana quietly to yourselves.

2 Share a summary of each story.

3 Discuss for each story:
Why has it been chosen for reading on Rosh Hashana?
What can we learn from it that is relevant to the themes of rosh hashana?

The Head of The Year

The Moon is dark tonight, a new
Moon for a new year. It is
Hollow and hungers to be full.
It is the black zero of beginning.

Now you must void yourself
Of injuries, insults, incursions.
Go with empty hands to those
You have hurt and make amends.

It is not too late. It is early
And about to grow. Now
Is the time to do what you
Know you must and have feared

To begin. Your face is dark
Too as you turn inward to face
Yourself, the hidden twin
Of all you must grow to be.

Forgive the dead year. Forgive
Yourself. What will be wants
To push through your fingers.
The light you seek hides

In your belly. The light you
Crave longs to stream from
Your eyes. You are the moon
That will wax in goodness

The Art of Blessing the Day

This is the blessing for rain after draught:
Come down, wash the air so it shimmers,
A perfumed shawl of lavender chiffon.
Let the parched leaves suckle and swell.
Enter my skin, wash me for the little
Chrysalis of sleep rocked in your plashing.
In the morning the world is peeling to shining.

This is the blessing for the sun after a long rain:
Now everything shakes itself free and rises.
The trees are bright as pushcart ices.
Every last lily opens its satin thighs.
The bees dance and roll in pollen
And the cardinal at the top of the pine
Sings at full throttle, fountaining.

This is the blessing for a ripe peach:
This is luck made round. Frost can nip
The blossom, kill the bee. It can drop,
A hard green useless nut. Brown fungus,
The burrowing worm that coils in rot can
Blemish it and wind crush it on the ground.
Yet this peach fills my mouth with juicy sun.

This is the blessing for a political victory:
Although I shall not forget that things
Work in increments and epicycles and sometime
Leaps that half the time fall back down,
Let's not relinquish dancing while the music
Fits into our hips and bounces our heels,
We must never forget, pleasure is real as pain.

The blessing for the return of a favorite cat,
The blessing for love returned, for friends'
Return, for money received unexpected,
The blessing for the rising of bread,
The sun, the oppressed. I am not sentimental

About old men mumbling the
Hebrew by rote
With no more feeling than one
says gesundheit.

But the discipline of blessing is to
taste
Each moment, the bitter, the sour,
the sweet
And the salty, and be glad
for what does not
Hurt. The art is in compressing
attention
To each little and big blossom of
the tree
Of life, to let the tongue sing each
fruit,
Its savour, its aroma and its use.

Attention is love, what we must
give
Children, mothers, fathers, pets,
Our friends, the news, the woes of
others.
What we want to change we curse
and then
Pick up a tool. Bless whatever you
can
With eyes and hands and tongue.
If you
Can't bless it, get ready and make
it new.

The Task Never Completed

No task is ever completed,
Only abandoned or pressed into use.
Tinkering can be a form of prayer.

Twenty-six botched worlds preceded
Genesis we are told in ancient commentary,
And ha-Shem said not only,

Of this particular attempt,
It is good, but muttered,
If only it will hold.

Incomplete, becoming, the world
Was given to us to fix, to complete
And we've almost worn it out.

My house was hastily built,
On the cheap. Leaks, rotting
Sills, the floor a relieve map of Idaho.

Whenever I get some money, I stove
Up, repair, add on, replace.
This improvisation permits me to squat

Here on the land that owns me.
We evolve through mistakes, wrong
Genes, imitation gone wild.

Each night sleep unravels me into wool,
Then into sheep and wolf. Walls and fire
pass through me. I birth stones.

Every dawn I stumble from the roaring
Vat of dreams and make myself up
Remembering and forgetting by halves.

Every dawn I choose to take a knife
To the world's flank or a sewing kit,
Rough improvisation, but a start.

To Be Of Use

The people I love best
Jump into the work head first
Without dallying in the shadows
And swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of the element,
The black sleek heads of seals
Bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
Who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
Who strain in the mud and muck to move things forward
Who do what has to be done again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
In the task, who go into the fields to harvest
And work in a row and pass bags along,
Who are not parlor generals and field deserters
But move in a common rhythm
When the food must come in or the fire put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
Has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
But you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

Tashlich

Go to the ocean and throw the crumbs in,
All that remains of seven years.
When you wept, didn't I taste your years
On my cheek, give you bread for salt?

Here where I sing at full pitch
And volume uncensored, I was attacked.
The pale sister nibbled like a mouse
In the closets with sharp pointed teeth.

She let herself in with her own key.
My trust garlanded her round. Indeed
It was convenient to trust her
While she waned paper thin with envy.

Here she coveted. Here she crept.
Here her cold fluttering hands lingered
On secrets and dipped into the honey,
Her shadow fell on the contents of every drawer.

Alone in the house she made love
To herself in the mirror wearing
Stolen gowns; then she carried them home
For their magic to colour her life.

Little losses spread like tooth decay.
Furtive betrayals festered, cysts
Hidden in flesh. Her greed swelled
In the dark, its hunger always roaring.

No number of gifts could silence
Those cries of resentful hunger,
Not for the baubles, the scarves,
The blouses she stole, but to be twenty

And pretty again, not to have to work
To live but merely to be blond and thin
And let men happen like rain in the night
And never to wake alone.

On the new year my grandmother Hannah
Told me to carry crumbs to the water

And cast them out. We are tossing
Away the bad part of ourselves

And we are throwing evil from the
house
The rancid taint of envy spoiling
the food
The pricing fingers of envy
rumpling the cloth
The secret ill wishes chewing from
inside

The heart's red apple to rot it out.
I cast you away like spoiled milk.
Let the salty wind air the house and
cleanse
The stain o betrayal from the new
year.

Breadcrumbs

Some times on Rosh Hashana I go,
A time dictated by tide charts,
Services. Then once I did tashlich

On the rising tide and the crumbs
Came back to me, my energy soured,
Vinegar of anxiety. Now I eye the times.

I choose the dike, where the Herring River
Pours in and out of the bay, where at
Low tide in September blue herons stalk

Totemic to spear the alewives hastening
Silver-sided from the fish ponds to
The sea. As I toss my crumbs, muttering,

Prayers, a fisherman rebukes me: *Its*
Not right to feed the fish, it distracts
Them from his bait. Sometimes

Its odd to be a Jew, like a three-
Legged heron with bright purple head,
An ibis in white plumes diving

Except that with global warming
We do sometimes glimpse an ibis
In our marshes, and I am rooted here

To abide the winter when the tourist
Has gone back to Cincinnati.
My rituals are mated to this fawn

Coloured land floating on the horizon
Of water. My chavurah calls itself
Am ha-Yam, people of the sea,

And we are wedded to the oceans
As truly as the Venetian doge who tossed
His gold ring to the Adriatic

All rivers flow at last into the sea
But here it is, at once. So we stand
The tourist casting for his fish

And I tossing my bread. The fish
Snap it up. Tonight perhaps
He will broil my sins for supper.

BEREISHEIT 21: 1 [FIRST DAY READING]

1 Now God was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and God did for Sarah what he had promised.

2 Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.

3 Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him.

4 When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him.

5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

6 Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me."

7 And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

8 The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast.

9 But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking,

10 and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.

12 But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring ^[b] will be reckoned.

13 I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

14 Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of Beersheba.

15 When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes.

16 Then she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there nearby, she ^[c] began to sob.

17 God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there.

18 Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

20 God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer.

21 While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

22 At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do.

23 Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you are living as an alien the same kindness I have shown to you."

24 Abraham said, "I swear it."

25 Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized.

26 But Abimelech said, "I don't know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today."

27 So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a treaty.

28 Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock,

29 and Abimelech asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?"

30 He replied, "Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well."

31 So that place was called Beersheba, ^[d] because the two men swore an oath there.

32 After the treaty had been made at Beersheba, Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of the Philistines.

33 Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of god, the Eternal God.

34 And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

HAFTARA FOR FIRST DAY: SHMUEL 1:1-2:10

1 There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite ^[a] from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. 2 He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

3 Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to god Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of god. 4 Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. 5 But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and god had closed her womb. 6 And because god had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. 7 This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of god, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. 8 Elkanah her husband would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?" 9 Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of god's temple. ^[b] 10 In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to god. 11 And she made a vow, saying, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to god for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head." 12 As she kept on praying to god, Eli observed her mouth. 13 Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk 14 and said to her, "How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine." 15 "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to god. 16 Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief." 17 Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him." 18 She said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast. 19 Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before god and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah lay with Hannah his wife, and god remembered her. 20 So in the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, ^[c] saying, "Because I asked god for him." 21 When the man Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to god and to fulfill his vow, 22 Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before god, and he will live there always." 23 "Do what seems best to you," Elkanah her husband told her. "Stay here until you have weaned him; only may god make good his ^[d] word." So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him. 24 After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, ^[e] an ephah ^[f] of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of god at Shiloh. 25 When they had slaughtered the bull, they brought the boy to Eli, 26 and she said to him, "As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to god. 27 I prayed for this child, and god has granted me what I asked of him. 28 So now I give him to god. For his whole life he will be given over to god." And he worshiped god there.

- 2:1 Then Hannah prayed and said:
"My heart rejoices in god;
in god my horn [a](#) is lifted high.
My mouth boasts over my enemies,
for I delight in your deliverance.
- 2 "There is no one holy [b](#) like god;
there is no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.
- 3 "Do not keep talking so proudly
or let your mouth speak such arrogance,
for god is a God who knows,
and by him deeds are weighed.
- 4 "The bows of the warriors are broken,
but those who stumbled are armed with strength.
- 5 Those who were full hire themselves out for food,
but those who were hungry hunger no more.
She who was barren has borne seven children,
but she who has had many sons pines away.
- 6 "God brings death and makes alive;
he brings down to the grave [c](#) and raises up.
- 7 God sends poverty and wealth;
he humbles and he exalts.
- 8 He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
he seats them with princes
and has them inherit a throne of honor.
"For the foundations of the earth are god's;
upon them he has set the world.
- 9 He will guard the feet of his saints,
but the wicked will be silenced in darkness.
"It is not by strength that one prevails;
- 10 those who oppose god will be shattered.
He will thunder against them from heaven;
god will judge the ends of the earth.
"He will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed."

BEREISHIT 22 [SECOND DAY READING]

1 Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied. 2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." 3 Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. 4 On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. 5 He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." 6 Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, 7 Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" 8 Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together. 9 When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. 10 Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. 11 But the angel of god called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied. 12 "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." 13 Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram ^[a] caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14 So Abraham called that place God Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of god it will be provided." 15 The angel of god called to Abraham from heaven a second time 16 and said, "I swear by myself, declares god, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, 18 and through your offspring ^[b] all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." 19 Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba. 20 Some time later Abraham was told, "Milcah is also a mother; she has borne sons to your brother Nahor: 21 Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel (the father of Aram), 22 Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel." 23 Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. Milcah bore these eight sons to Abraham's brother Nahor. 24 His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also had sons: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maacah.

HAFTARAH FOR SECOND DAY: JEREMIAH 31:1-19

1 "At that time," declares god, "I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they will be my people."

2 This is what god says:

"The people who survive the sword
will find favor in the desert;
I will come to give rest to Israel."

3 God appeared to us in the past, ^[a] saying:

"I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

4 I will build you up again

and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel.
Again you will take up your tambourines
and go out to dance with the joyful.

5 Again you will plant vineyards

on the hills of Samaria;
the farmers will plant them
and enjoy their fruit.

6 There will be a day when watchmen cry out

on the hills of Ephraim,
'Come, let us go up to Zion,
to god our God.' "

7 This is what god says:

"Sing with joy for Jacob;
shout for the foremost of the nations.
Make your praises heard, and say,
'O LORD, save your people,
the remnant of Israel.'

8 See, I will bring them from the land of the north

and gather them from the ends of the earth.
Among them will be the blind and the lame,
expectant mothers and women in labor;
a great throng will return.

9 They will come with weeping;

they will pray as I bring them back.
I will lead them beside streams of water
on a level path where they will not stumble,

because I am Israel's father,
and Ephraim is my firstborn son.

10 "Hear the word of god, O nations;
proclaim it in distant coastlands:
'He who scattered Israel will gather them
and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.'

11 For god will ransom Jacob
and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they.

12 They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion;
they will rejoice in the bounty of god –
the grain, the new wine and the oil,
the young of the flocks and herds.
They will be like a well-watered garden,
and they will sorrow no more.

13 Then maidens will dance and be glad,
young men and old as well.
I will turn their mourning into gladness;
I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.

14 I will satisfy the priests with abundance,
and my people will be filled with my bounty,"
declares god.

15 This is what god says:
"A voice is heard in Ramah,
mourning and great weeping,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because her children are no more."

16 This is what god says:
"Restrain your voice from weeping
and your eyes from tears,
for your work will be rewarded,"
declares god.
"They will return from the land of the enemy.

17 So there is hope for your future,"
declares god.
"Your children will return to their own land.

18 "I have surely heard
Ephraim's moaning:
'You disciplined me like
an unruly calf,
and I have been
disciplined.
Restore me, and I will
return,
because you are god my
God.

19 After I strayed,
I repented;
after I came to
understand,
I beat my breast.
I was ashamed and
humiliated
because I bore the
disgrace of my youth.'