

Temple Sinai Poetry Class 2021
(Two Thursdays: 8/19/21 and 8/26/21, 6-8 pm)

Instructor: Shelagh Connor Shapiro

This will be an immersive and cooperative class focusing on writing poems that in some way express or react to students' experiences of the pandemic, possibly giving primary consideration to gratitude and finding a way forward. We will read and discuss the Birkat Hagomel as influence and poetic inspiration.

Ahead of time, Shelagh will ask participants to share the names of one or two favorite poets or writers of prose in an email. She will then choose a sampling of work from those and other sources to share in class. During the class, we will discuss what we like to read and if we have any writing background ("zero," being the pre-requisite), as well as subjects on our minds of late: illness, community, anger, gratitude: whatever tickles or engages. An early in-class writing session will focus on subjects that students are afraid to address but will attempt and/or subjects they might be tempted to address but for some reason will not. Participants proctor their own decisions in this regard. Any sharing of work is voluntary.

Poetic form will not be a large part of the class – we only have so much time – but will be introduced to help writers in their process of discovery. Form can be another way into inspiration and productivity. Framed by syllabic structure or word repetition rules, students may find themselves trying things they might not have otherwise, which can result in delightful, unexpected choices. Alternatively, prose poems lessen any intimidation that might keep new poets from writing with abandon.

First class:

- Introductions
- Read and discuss the Birkat Hagomel and what it means to us (as a lifelong influence, or just in reaction in the moment).
- A brainstorm session where we free write (not necessarily poetry) for ten minutes about our COVID experiences.
- I share some sample poems and forms and talk about how they can open up ideas/inspiration.
- Prompt / in-class writing session.
- Optional sharing of work.
- Prompts to take home with the expectation of returning with a few options to choose from and (optionally) share in the second class.

Second class:

- Discuss experiences of working from prompts at home.
- Anyone who wishes may share work.
- Brainstorm session where we free write (not necessarily poetry) for ten minutes about our hopes for the coming year.
- I share more sample poems and forms to consider as we work.
- Prompt / in-class writing session.
- Optional sharing of class work.
- Discussion of how each class member wants to take this forward after the class ends: just for the high holidays? Beyond that?
- Revisit the Birkat Hagomel in light of our recent work.