

Making 'Home for the Holy Days' a Meaningful Experience

"Do you remember Janis Joplin singing, 'Don't know what you've got 'til it's gone?' While she isn't one of the scholars whom we study at HUC, those words still hold a lesson for us all. As we begin this ...year and come together as a community once again, even with all of the pandemic related limitations, I realize just how much I have missed our larger community. ...We may only be together in the virtual world but that does not erase the energy and support that is created by our joined spirits and our commitment to the mission and values of our [community]. This [High Holy Days] let us accept the challenge to remain aware and grateful for the blessing of one another's presence."

---- A recent Shabbat message Rabbi Julie Schwartz, Associate Dean of HUC-JIR/Cincinnati

[Substituted "community" for school, and "High Holy Days" for Shabbat.]

The Season of Healing

This is the season of healing:
Of healing our hearts and minds,
Of healing the moments we share with each other
And the moments we share with ourselves.

This is the season of memory:
Of remembering our parents and grandparents,
The love of generations,
The holiness of our ancestors.

This is the season of stillness,
The season of silence and quiet:
Of deep breaths,
Of open eyes,
Of compassion and consolation.

This is the season of healing:
The season of grief turning to wonder,
Of loss turning toward hope,
The season that binds this year to the next,
The season that frees this year from the next,
The season that heralds the redemption of spirit
And our return to God's Holy Word.

© 2017 CCAR Press from *This Grateful Heart: Psalms and Prayers for a New Day*.

“When successful, *t’shuva* is restorative and utopian, for it enables us to return to our truest selves and overcome the past for the sake of a better future.”

---“T’shuva: Returning to Our Truest Selves at the High Holidays,”
Rabbi John L. Rosove

Rabbi Rosove reminds us that *t’shuva* is “a process that brings us back to our truest selves, our families, friends, community, the Jewish people, Torah, and God...*It is a step-by-step process*” and a “central theme of the High Holiday season” to live with humility, gratitude, generosity, compassion, and loving-kindness.

--Source: What Does it Mean to Make Successful T’shuva?
August 20, 2020, Lee B. Kass, from reformjudaism.org blog post

The Season of Return

This is the season of return:
Of returning to ourselves and our people,
Of returning to our G-d
And returning to our calling.

This is the season of quiet:
Of quieting the mind to hear the Voice,
Of quieting the heart to hear the Soul,
Of quieting the self to make space for the Ein Sof.

This is the season of surrender:
Of surrendering fear and despair to hope and adventure,
Of surrendering odd quirks and old habits to dignity and kindness,
And to honor and service.

This is the season of return:
Of returning to wholeness and love,
To prayer and charity,
To family and friends.
This is the season that reminds us of who we are
And who we might become.
The season that summons us to return our days to purpose
And our lives to G-d’s Holy Word.

Teshuvah begins with a turn, a turn away from the external world and toward the inner realm of the heart. We effect this turn in many ways. If we are not used to solitude or contemplation, if we are normally consumed by a frantic round of activity...then simply stopping - can suddenly leave us in confrontation with the contents of our heart. Often all that's required of us is to be still for a moment, and the heart begins to disclose itself to us of its own accord.

--Rabbi Alan Lew, This is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared

Courage

And I said:

O if only I had wings like the dove
I would fly away and find a restful abode.
I would wander afar while hastening
to find a haven from the stormy tempest. (Psalm 55:7–9)

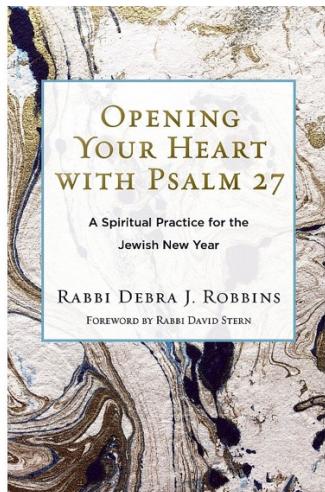
And so I pray

that my spirit have the strength to soar, that my heart have the courage to seek, and my mind the wisdom to discover,
a life of meaning and purpose.

Grant me, O God, strength, courage,
and wisdom.

—Rabbi Karyn Kedar, *Amen: Seeking Presence with Prayer, Poetry, and Mindfulness Practice* (CCAR Press, 2020), p. 59.

Read the same psalm every day for fifty days?
The same one we read last year?
Using the same book and the same practice?
Yes. Yes. Yes and yes.
Get a new notebook or open a new computer file.
Sharpen your pencils or find your new favorite pen.
But yes, return to the psalm, return to the book, return to the practice
(this is after all the psalm for the season of return, *t'shuva*h).



Why?

Because the world has changed.
Because the ways we see or hear,
experience and reflect on the same words have changed.
We know it to be true from our experience,
reading the same Torah portions in their annual cycle.
We see a character or situation from Genesis in a new way
because of something or someone we encountered or considered.
We understand the ethical demands of Leviticus differently
because we are sitting in a different chair, the light is brighter or dimmer,
we've lost or gained: a friend, a few pounds, some perspective.
And so this year, as we make our way in a world infected with COVID-19,
we hear, read, experience Psalm 27 again.¹

--- Rabbi Debra J. Robbins

¹ <https://ravblog.ccarnet.org/2020/07/opening-your-heart-psalm-27-pandemic/>

Psalm 27:4

I'm Asking God One Question

אחד שאלתי (Achat Shaalti)

If I could ask only one thing of God, what would it be?
It's nearly impossible to decide.

My prayer bends toward gratitude, not supplication.
“Thank You, Strength, for the steps I take as I walk the dog.”
“Thank You, Wisdom, for the opportunity to study Torah.”
“Thank You, Generosity, for abundance in my life.”
“Thank You, Protection, for keeping us alive
and allowing us to reach this moment.”
Endless gratitude,
every new day of every New Year.

If I could ask God for only one thing, what would it be? I have no requests,
only questions . . .

Maybe . . .

Who can . . . ?

When will . . . ? What if . . . ? Where was . . . ? Why did . . . ?

No. Now I know my question. If I could ask God something,
not for something,

The one thing I would ask is:

“How can I help?”

—Rabbi Debra J. Robbins, Opening Your Heart with Psalm 27: A Spiritual Practice for the Jewish New Year (CCAR Press, 2019), pp. 26–27.

Sheltering in Place

May it be Your will,
G-d of our fathers and mothers,
That our sheltering in place
Be for health and healing,
Longevity and life,
Sustenance, renewal and love.
Let our best selves shine forth
In these moments of uncertainty,
These moments of unfamiliar distances,
These moments that may yield stress or conflict,
Confusion or despair.
Let peace arise inside us.
Let kindness flow between us.
Let deliverance rise up from heaven,
And let health and goodwill radiate throughout the world
As a river of blessings.

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