



5778 High Holiday Reading Selections

EREV ROSH HASHANAH

Freedom by Graham Sagel

Sometimes we can take freedom for granted, but we shouldn't. We have so much power compared to some other people around the world, and we should appreciate that. We get the privilege of getting to walk outside, do what we want, be with whom we want; but many others do not. As Nelson Mandela once said, "To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others." Taking that into mind, by being grateful for the freedom we have, we must realize that it has been earned for us, and that many people have not had freedom earned for them. By "respecting and enhancing others' freedom" we must first be accepting of all people, because most of them have good intentions. Next, we must help them earn their freedom. We discussed in class this year that privileged people are the ones that can most help targeted people. In this scenario, we are all privileged because we have freedom, and the people that don't have freedom are targeted. Together, we can make it possible for everybody to live a strong, productive, and free life.

Letter to Dad by Sarah Lust

Dear Dad,

We haven't had a chance to talk in a while. Here's a little note to tell you I'm thinking of you. You died on a Wednesday morning in July, while I read you the Tao of Pooh. I had a feeling the time was coming but somehow it still took me by surprise.

I miss you terribly, though truth be told you were a huge pain in the rear in your final few months. You complained about my cooking and then didn't eat when I moved heaven and earth to find something appetizing for you. Caring for you was incredibly hard, but you know what? I wouldn't change a thing. I don't regret for a second you living with us for two years. For every difficult moment there were twice as many great ones. It warmed my heart when you told nurses proudly that I am, "Dr. Lust" and even more proudly that your grandson Elliot is brilliant. It was unbearably endearing when you told me I was "the best thing you've ever done" because I think you did some pretty incredible things.

If I could tell the world something important at this moment it would be not to stigmatize people with mental illness – to try to see beyond what meets the eye. Though you struggled most of your life with schizophrenia and depression you managed to generate over 11 and a half *thousand* pages of incredible and unique artwork. You had an insight for math, physics and chess that bores or befuddles most people. Most importantly you were caring, compassionate and generous. Even at times when you had next to nothing, you wanted to give to others and always saw to it that I was taken care of. I know sometimes you lamented all the things that you might have been or done but I couldn't imagine a better role model. I hope you know that I feel blessed and honored to have had you as my father.

Elliot still frequently asks where grandpa is. "Did he go to Heaven up in this sky? Is he in outerspace?". I say yes since that's the best explanation I've got for a two year old, but I hope you don't mind that I told him he has to wait a long while before he can go to outerspace. We've got a lot of work to do here on Earth. I hope we continue to make you proud.

Love Always,
Sarah

The Banana Lady by Rachel Delston

I get all my groceries delivered from Schnucks by a service called Instacart that shops and delivers your groceries to your doorstep. So when I was bringing 80 bananas to Gateway 180 Homeless Shelter as part of our Mensch Makers (a CRC program where young kids perform mitzvahs each month) event, I naturally had Instacart deliver the 80 bananas. I added a special note saying “This isn’t a typo. I actually want this many bananas”. Mensch Makers made bagged lunches for the clients of Gateway 180 and we had a wonderful time. Each bagged lunch got a banana. The next week I wanted just two single bananas for my own household. I opened my door when the Instacart driver arrived and my entire front porch was a sea of bananas. We could have gone swimming in the bananas!!! Turns out any note you attach to an item on Instacart carries over from week to week. My 2 bananas turned into 160 bananas—2 orders of 80. I stood there with my jaw open. I begged the instacart driver to take them back to Schnucks! He obliged and I was banana free. Many Instacart deliveries later I randomly got the same driver. When he saw me he did a double take and said “You are the Banana Lady”!!! He told me he went back to Schnucks but they wouldn’t take the bananas back. He kept all 160 bananas in his truck and whenever he saw a homeless person he pulled over and gave them a couple bunches of bananas. He said it was such a meaningful experience that he started buying bananas to give to homeless people he drove by once he had run out of my bananas! And that is the story of how one mitzvah turned into another mitzvah.

ROSH HASHANAH

Reading by Karen Flotte

The Autumnal Equinox, signals a time of shortening days and of harvest. Most cultures throughout history honor the ancestors during this season. As the harvest bounty nourishes the body during the dark days of winter, connecting with the transformational power of our ancestors nurtures the soul. For me the Days of Awe are a particularly potent time to remember our ancestors who sustain and empower us in this holy work of t'shuvah.

In the past 5 months, two women who shaped my life in powerful ways joined the ancestors, my beloved sister, Mary Flotte and my soul sister, CRC member Sheila Michaels. I often reflect on how their lives continue to be a blessing not only for me but also for society at large.

Both Mary and Sheila grappled with painful brokenness in their own lives. In this struggle they claimed their authentic selves and true paths in life. Their suffering opened their hearts to connect with the suffering and oppression they witnessed in our world. These two women brought shalom, that peace which brings healing and wholeness into some of this world's most difficult places.

Mary came out as lesbian over 30 years ago in a homophobic world. During this time she also struggled with depression and alcoholism. Mary was almost swallowed by her despair but choose life. This struggle unleashed her power and strength to live her authentic truth and claim her rightful place at the table. From that time onward, she accepted herself without compromise and extended that radical love and compassion to everyone she met. As a psychiatric social worker, Mary choose to work with people in crisis or at their most vulnerable moments. She worked in flood relief, with children suffering trauma and in psychiatric in-take, the emergency room for those experiencing extreme psychiatric events. Mary was known for her uncanny ability to put anyone at ease even in the most profound crisis. As I reflect on the arc of her life, it becomes clear that personal liberation has a dynamic impact on the world. The very act of speaking and living one's truth not only liberates others but also transforms society expanding the dynamic of liberation.

Sheila's early years were marked by rejection at the most primary levels a child can endure. Conceived while her mother was having an affair, both Sheila's step-father and biological father wanted nothing to do with her. When her parents divorced, Sheila was sent to live with her grandmother at the age of 3 returning home at age 8 when her mother remarried. Their family life was shaped by her mother's alcoholism. Sheila understood what it meant to be marginalized, to be unwanted, and to be seen as expendable. Rather than harden her, these experiences endowed Sheila with a fierce compassion, tender heart and thirst for justice.

At age 20, Sheila cast her lot with those marginalized by law and racism joining the Civil Rights Movement full-time. Sheila was disowned by her step-father for this decision, yet she persisted. As an activist, Sheila was prepared to die, sought to reverence the divine spark in every human being, endured hatred, bigotry, violence and imprisonment returning only shalom. These were the principals that infused all her work that followed, as a founder of the next wave of feminism, as a humanitarian working with children in Laos, as a feminist biblical scholar and oral historian.

Both Sheila and Mary built their lives on this truth: the wholeness of our community depends on the wholeness and freedom of each member. They were women of great courage who lived an audacious hope, determined and resilient, never giving up in the face of any challenge.

In these times, when we acutely feel the descending darkness of our national climate, remembering our ancestors infuses us with power to kindle the light of love in action. Their memory emboldens us to speak our authentic truth, to unleash our strength and power, to live in audacious hope so that we can rebuild this world in love.

KOL NIDRE

Prophetic Judaism Teaching for the High Holidays by Rick Isserman

In my grandfather, Rabbi Ferdinand Isserman's last sermon to his congregation in 19?? he advocated and extolled us to be vigilant against Anti-Semitism and that we had an obligation to win the hearts of many of our neighbors and fellow citizens who rejected the old doctrines and were looking for a prophetic religion. My grandfather met the Great Rabbi Leo Baeck, Chief Rabbi of Germany, who had just been released from Auschwitz. Rabbi Baeck told my grandfather, "In the concentration camp I asked myself day after day, what sins have the Jews committed that this terrible tragedy has come to them?" "I came to one conclusion, we were not missionaries.... We did not share our truths and the great message of GoD."

Now two generations later, are we fulfilling the Prophetic callings of our Faith? Look around you. As CRC, we are white, black, LGBTQ, standing side by side in Ferguson against injustice to make a difference. Some even going to jail. We are Muslim and Jews coming together to clean up and raise \$160,000 from the Muslim Community to rebuild the Jewish Cemetery after it was vandalized.

It may be time to defeat Anti-Semitism by sharing the truths of prophetic Judaism. The great Missionary Religions of our time extoll the virtues to others and make their tents bigger. Is it time that we join the fight against anti-Semitism by extolling the great visions of the prophets to help the most vulnerable? That is why the Holy Ground Emergency Lending became important to me. A Chance to build up someone's credit, to help them with a leg up in the credit world. The first two loans were giving to people that started businesses right here North of Delmar. One lady used the money to get her real estate license and another used the funds to start a stain glass business in her home. These loan program would not have worked without the Holy Ground community coming together as a single entity to raise 35,000 and loan it out.

Central Reform has continued the great Doctrine of Rabbi Leo Baeck to fight anti-Semitism, by Sharing the great Message of prophets through deeds that show the great message of healing for all people from our prophetic tradition.

YOM KIPPUR

Epiphany on Tunganth "Remember you Climbed the Mountain!" by Joy Lillard

I received a special greeting card with this message from a friend and fellow hiker. It is a useful reminder that every step in each day requires a degree of Courage. How did the adventure happen? After selling my home of 29 years and clearing out its contents one year ago, I took off for my sabbatical. It was a work-study opportunity in a retreat center in the Poconos Pennsylvania. Retreats there included yoga, hikes, prayer and vegetarian meals. There were also opportunities for excursions and pilgrimages. After being placed on a waitlist, my number came up.

The goal of this journey was a pilgrimage to the ancient shrines in an area in the Himalayan mountains with postcard breathtaking views. Nestled in the midst of the heights reached after hours of rigorous climbing were temples with the Rishis, or sages. The ceremony and chanting were deeply uplifting and affected our whole group. After several days of camping and Hiking to various altitudes under many conditions we were off to the Big one!

In preparation for the rigors of trekking I had been hiking for a while in the hills of the Poconos. One month prior to the Excursion on a visit to my son in Kansas City, I covered a lot of ground exploring the hills there. Just as I was leaving I twisted my ankle after building up my endurance - 8 miles. OY! One of many challenges on the journey. After a rest of one week and wrapping the ankle during the trip, I kept going.

We got to the 12, 500 ft climb, after a long and very windy bus ride. Snow, ice and slush up to the calf height greeted us. Well, this is what I came to do, and so one foot at a time. There was royal blue sky and Cliffside paths with slippery Trails. Then after about a half-mile my body froze in fear. How was I ever going to get back down? Paralyzed and watching others go on, I was scared stiff!

The guide said don't worry about getting down. Things will be different with changing temperatures. Finally my foot moved and slowly steadily, one step after another, over many hours and seeing exquisite Vistas, I made it to the top!

Then greeted by my hiking buddy with a hug, tears of, well, Joy, overwhelmed me. At that Crystal Clear moment, I knew I was coming back to St Louis. Strengthened spiritually, in moments I feel challenged I can always remember that I climbed the mountain!

Each One, A Holy Soul by Julie Cooper

In these hyperpartisan times, when people are often reduced to broad categories--left, right; red, blue; pro, anti--and feel compelled to retreat to their comfortable corners, it can be hard for each of us to stay focused on the humanity of other individuals. To see another person as a person, in all their complexity, trying to find their way in the world just like the rest of us. The best way for us to regain our focus is to engage one-on-one with others, to interact with them and not allow them to just be a part of the faceless mass.

In our CRC Mussar study group, we recently talked about the soul-trait of kavod, honor. The soul-trait is based on the understanding that we are all human beings created in G-d's image, and that each one of us is a holy soul that should to be honored. Practicing kavod is more than just understanding that other people deserve respect and recognition. It requires that we give that respect and recognition to them, actively. And so our first "assignment" for practicing kavod was to greet every person we encountered during the day. To acknowledge them, even if only for a moment. Sounds easy, right? I figured that I already tried to be mindful about saying hello and thank you to people I interacted with at restaurants, Schnucks, Walgreens, the post office. So how hard could it be to extend that to all people I encountered? I will tell you - it was hard. I began to realize how many people I passed each day, on the street, in my office building, even in my apartment building, who I looked straight past, not even acknowledging their presence with a glance. Maybe this instinct is just the New Yorker in me - don't make eye contact with anyone. But it brought me to a realization that it is easy to shrink our personal interactions to the handful of people who we work and live with, and to lump everyone outside of those circles into "the faceless mass." And when we start to disconnect from the other people who we encounter, even in passing, it can breed mistrust and misinformation about them.

My great privilege since becoming involved with CRC has been to participate in a number of community service projects that have allowed me to practice kavod with a variety of individuals outside my daily circles - from a family in College Hill whose children helped us weatherize their apartment's windows, to the dedicated staff at Grace Hill Settlement House who give their all to serve their community every day, to a woman from Room At The Inn who was the most entertaining food critic I've had the opportunity to meet. Our interactions were short, and in the grand scheme of things, perhaps not very consequential. But each instance was an opportunity for us to acknowledge each

other, to focus not on our differences but on the most basic thing we share - that we are human beings, created in G-d's image; that we are, every one of us, a holy soul.

As we start the new year of 5778, we have a chance to reflect on the past year, on what went well and what we'd like to change for the coming twelve months. For myself, I know that I will continue to seek ways to have intentional interactions with others, especially people I don't know, in ways that will honor them and, at the same time, honor myself as the reflections of G-d's holiness that we all are. I hope that you will all find opportunities to do the same.

ONLINE SELECTIONS

My Prayer for us All by Robert A. Frauenglas

Can we live in a world where people care about each other?

Amen

Can we live in a world where no one is considered other?

Amen

Can we live in a world of sharers and not users and takers?

Amen

Can we live in a world where love has outlawed hate?

Amen

Can we live in a world where peace has overtaken war?

Amen

Can we live in a world where guns are indeed turned into plowshares?

Amen

Can we live in a world where the word poor no longer describes anyone?

Amen

Can we live in a world where all the homeless have places in which to live?

Amen

Can we live in a world where religion brings understanding & not division?

Amen

Can we live in a world where laughter trumps despair?

Amen

Can we live in a world where optimism overrules pessimism?

Amen

Can we live in a world where human worth is richer than material wealth?

Amen

Can we live in a world where greed is once again a negative trait?

Amen

Can we live in a world where human incarnations of Pollyanna do exist?

Amen

Can we live in a world where hope is valued more than cynicism?

Amen

Can we live in a world where apathy no longer exists?

Amen

Can we live in a world where no one is unwanted and alone?

Amen and Hallelujah!

Interpretation of Psalm 27 by Michael Getty

My being here is proof
of vast conspiracies defeated
and all my buried longings come to this —
to stand, one beating heart
and ask
just one more day
one more day
to feel the breath
of miracles
catalogue the near-misses, beaten odds
feel the sudden ground beneath my feet
and raise
my face
just one more time
and sing
Is anybody there?
or have I always been alone?
I think sometimes I hear
a voice inside that says
I am everywhere you look for Me
I'm so afraid of
who would listen
after all I've wasted
getting by
by the skin of my teeth
on fumes, on chances
numbered like heartbeats
Achat sha'alti
This one
I ask
to stay
to find
a different way
to be
a better path
around the sinkholes
traps, false starts
Make no enemies, invite
no bitterness. Have faith
In something.
Find the good.
Find God where I am.

A Poem for Us by Janessa Hall

This poem was written a few weeks after my father passed away and about 4 months after losing my mother. In that space of time, I also lost friends from the CRC congregation...Marie Taris, Ursula Wayne, and of course a member of our "row of misfits", Molly Smith. During this time, I learned a lot about myself. I learned that I could lean into tradition and do unbearable things such as watching my mother die, and delivering eulogies for both Molly and my Father. I learned the blessing of being grateful, and the grace of humility. And I learned that what gets you through to the next sunrise is not money or grand gestures or soaring rhetoric. It is a firm and gentle hand, a knowing look, and warm bread. This poem is written to honor my Ozarks and Appalachian ancestors, as well as the women who have welcomed me so generously into the Sisterhood of Israel.

In this next year, I pray that G_d gives me the humility to keep accepting the overflowing gifts of my sisters, and the strength to take up their causes.

And the women came and washed the body,
And the women came and pressed the last dress.

And readied the house around the dim figure slumped at the table,
And gathered her children beneath their wings.

And the women found the singers,
And told them her favorite hymns.

And the women wrote the words for the paper,
And sent the notices to her folks.

And the women came to the preacher,
And told him the names and the verses she loved.

And the women came bringing food for that longest day,
And the women came with food for the long days afterwards.

And the women did the essential and unnoticed,
Except by their sisters.

Then news of a new baby traveled over the hills,
And the women came.

A Letter to CRC by Bill Weiss

Dear Friends,

We are at a point in time, where our world needs whatever help we can offer. We might think, what can we do, just one person, for the entire world? The truth is, we CAN make a difference. Even a small bit of help can grow if more and more people would help. We have the ability to create a positive influence on very subtle, yet very powerful levels of awareness.

Science has proven, through the many studies inspired by the Transcendental Meditation program, Dr. Herbert Benson of Harvard University and countless other researchers, which showed that when 1 person meditates, they affect as many as 99 others in a positive way.

“...the nature of life is to grow. Ninety-nine people can violate their own nature to grow and maybe weave around non-growth. One man, having a desire to evolve, having a desire to progress, having a desire to grow, by nature, he'll take up Meditation or Prayer. On that basis, he will start producing a harmonious influence around him. Without knowing how he does it, without knowing the mechanics of how the radiations go from a more orderly mind to influence the less orderly minds around him, without knowing it, invariably he'll be producing a harmonious influence in the whole society. Then the whole society will find a trend in the direction of evolution.”

This quote came from a great teacher known as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. He continues on:

“What is necessary is just a small area in the whole room to become lighted and the whole room becomes lighted. What is a bulb? It is a very small filament. How much is that, in relation to the whole volume of the room? It's a very insignificant area. Yet it becomes lighted and the whole room becomes lighted. One simple, single individual brain becoming a little bit more orderly—how much more orderly could one become in fifteen minutes, with all the chaos and disorderliness of the whole day?—but that little orderliness increasing in the mind of an individual is good enough to radiate its influence. One small filament becoming lighted is enough to light the whole room. Like that, one person, one slightly enlightened person, is good enough for the whole society. It's a blessing for the whole society.”

The fact that we have Jewish prayers, Great Rabbis, teachers and a wealth of knowledge from the Torah and other scriptures, along with Mitzvot's of selfless service that we can individually offer others or, to simply have the image of what the Almighty might be in our mind, these are all blessings that we can use for the benefit of the world.

Through acts of kindness, doing Mitzvot or simply giving in any way to others, during this difficult period of the world, means that we have a very great opportunity to do something wonderful for ourselves as well as the world. What is meant by our giving of ourselves to others, without expectation of gain, whatever it may be, whenever we may do it and to whatever extent we do it, the value counts. Just like what Maharishi meant by 1 person doing prayer or meditation, can affect 99 others.

It has been stated by the great saints that even "counterfeit selfless service" counts. This means that our good efforts to bring calm, peacefulness, orderliness and happiness into this world during these very tough times, 'builds the credits of good 'karma' in our 'karmic' bank account'.

When we practice any of the attributes of creating greater harmony through the methods Judaism has given to us, we will receive TWICE the benefits! Yes, twice the good karma!

This is the time to make haste and really score!! Our efforts to go within, no matter how short, even a few minutes casts some light into the darkness. We may wish to remember our Creator during the day, when the mind is not so busy, when we are walking for instance, as even these few, precious minutes will help the world in some small way.

We are all on the path to more and more, even liberation, because we want more freedom in life. We are all selfish for wanting more out of life and in so doing, may we all be selfish for the rest of humanity. Being that there is only one Consciousness, when we enliven that field of perfection, we enliven it for all living creatures.

Take advantage of knowing that your positive efforts will make a difference now, more than ever! Include these evolutionary and powerful methods of improving all life in your daily activities. The results of your good and Life-Supporting efforts will come back to you without delay. In fact, your efforts to improve life count twice as much these days. Make every day count!

Tremendous thanks to our members and friends who shared their time and writing talent with CRC. We are always grateful to welcome the new year with the writings and voices of our dear members.

We pray that 5778 will bring you and your loved ones a good year, a healthy year, and a year of peace.