



For Earth's Sake:

Days of Awe, entering 5783

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Rabbi Simcha Bunim (1765-1827) kept two slips of paper in his pockets. One read, "For my sake was the world created." (Sanhedrin 37a) The other, "I am dust and ashes." (Gen. 18:27) When he felt high and mighty, he would reach for the line from Genesis; when he felt lowly and insignificant, he would reach for the quote from Talmud. Through this practice, he sought equanimity.

We live this balance during the Days of Awe. Rosh Hashanah is the birthday of creation (for our sake) and Yom Kippur reminds us of mortality (dust and ashes). This year as the climate crisis intensifies, we ask: what will we do for future generations before we return to dust? Surely only our own actions can sweeten "the harshness of the decree." (Unetaneh Tokef)

R. Rachel Barenblat



911 and The High Holydays

Facing the truth of climate change
While greeting a sweet new year
Or listing one's petty sins
Is like getting ill
When you thought you were well
(but you weren't).

There I was,
I'd eaten my dinner, i was on the sofa
Watching TV
Some story streaming by
And I realized
Oh, I don't feel very good

A little woozy
And then, whoa, I was
Trapped flat on the sofa by an
Unexpected attack of vertigo so fierce that
Up and Down became nostalgic jokes.
Lifting my head plunged me into

Spatial displacement and feelings of peril so fierce
That I cried, and thought,
Ah, this is what it's like to have belief
And then lose it,
Utter devastation as I contemplated the black hole
Where my naive faith in gravity used to live.

So I dove back to the sofa to lay flat and steady,
Holding on to the comfort of the TV remote.
It was two in the morning
Before I allowed myself to wonder if I was dying,
Alone.
Everyone I know who lives nearby has money and

It's August
And they're on vacation.
Damn you, Maine.
I was forced to admit that this was an emergency,



So embarrassing.
I called 911.

Existential vertigo
Is an apt and useful metaphor
For the state of this planet.
Out of whack and reeling,
Everything is new and wrong:
Disorientation, fear of death and nature gone awry.

We had faith in our invulnerability and it's gone.
We used to be able to tell God we're sorry once a year
And be comforted but
This is no longer possible,
This ain't easily fixed with a penitent punch to the heart.
Apples and honey won't make this go away.

So let us use this golden opportunity
To ponder our mortality as a species
And then get to work.
Admit that this is an emergency.
So embarrassing.
Call 911.

Amen

Trisha Arlin



An Unetaneh Tokef For Climate Crisis

B'Rosh Hashanah yikateivun,
uv'Yom tzom Kippur yechateimun:

בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִכְתְּבוּן,
וּבְיוֹם צוֹם כִּפּוּר יִחְתְּמוּן:

On Rosh Hashanah it is written,
and on Yom Kippur it is sealed:

Who will live and who will die –

Who by wildfire choking on ash, and who in waters of swirling flood?
Who by food from poisoned land, and who by air no lungs can breathe?

*Who by searing megadrought? By tsunami waves of rising seas?
Who by gnawing endless thirst? In hungry migration seeking food?*

Who by the next pandemic plague, and who by widespread social collapse?
Who by the lack of the medicines we won't discover as rainforests burn?

B'Rosh Hashanah yikateivun,
uv'Yom tzom Kippur yechateimun:

בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִכְתְּבוּן,
וּבְיוֹם צוֹם כִּפּוּר יִחְתְּמוּן:

On Rosh Hashanah it is written,
and on Yom Kippur it is sealed:

Who will pick through trash to salvage, and who mindlessly throw things away?
Who will cultivate urban gardens, and who feast while others starve?

*Who will ignore the dying world, and who will nurture unlikely life?
Who will succumb to climate despair, and who will reach out to others in need?*

Whose strength will be sapped by corrosive dread? Who will plant the seeds of hope?
Who will destroy, and who will build? Who will sow lies, and who uphold truth?

U'teshuvah u'tfilah u'tzedakah
ma'avirin et roa hagzeirah.

וּתְשׁוּבָה וּתְפִלָּה וּצְדָקָה
מַעֲבִירִין אֶת רֹעַ הַגְּזֵירָה.

Can teshuvah, and spiritual practice, and justice
Together sweeten this decree?



Our lives are written by our actions
And signed by our own hands.

*Counter of uncountable stars, You know who we are.¹
We call You Mercy: slow to anger, ready to forgive.*

Help us. We can't fix this alone. Mere human beings
Are a broken urn, withering grass, a fading flower, a fleeting dream.

*We are dust and ashes, yet we dare to believe the world
Was made for us. For every other creature, too.*

You placed all of Creation in our keeping.
Are we ready to turn from our ways and live?

R. Rachel Barenblat

¹ From Shir Meira's "[Ha-Rofei / Healer of the Broken-Hearted](#)."



How to Sing Avinu Malkeinu?

Blessed Holy Wholeness,
How can I sing Avinu Malkeinu?
How can I use this limited name for God?

I don't do kings
Or queens,
No vertical hierarchies.
Verticality creates the problems, it doesn't fix them.

I don't do fathers
Or mothers,
No parental substitutes.
Parents love you but they really do mess you up.

I don't do tribal gods
Or protective angels
I like my myths to stay fictional.
Supernatural intervention fantasies lead to passive magical thinking.

I don't do male eternal mysteries
Or female avatars.
A gendered God is illogical.
And though I love ineffable spirituality, can it save the planet??

I respect random chance
And don't want to indulge in wishful thinking
But, rationality just isn't much fun.
(Nevertheless, I hold atheism in reserve so I don't look stupid.)

It does feel good to consider God's surrounding presence
And everyone's shared divinity.
I pray to holy wholeness
With a knowingness that I cannot explain away.

Hmmmm.

HaShleimut,
When I sing with the congregation



On the Holy Days
For redemption and second chances
For me and the world,
I think I will sing,
Avinu Malkeinu,
Our Father Our King,
The way it's written.
Then,
Since every metaphor leads to One-ness,
I think I will then pray
To All Of The Above.

It's a lovely tune and I'm used to it.
Sue me.

Amen

Trisha Arlin

For my sake / dust and ashes



Illustration by Steve Silbert

Also available as a set of meditative cards – [Finding Balance: Holding the Whole](#)



Two Pockets

I am dust and ashes...

אֲנִי עֶפֶר וְאַפֶּרֶת

Not nothing, just a single ash,
a speck of dust
struggling to know my place.
A small something in the web of life.
That's not nothing,
and certainly I am part of the web.
G-d willing, may I be a speck
that knows its place and purpose
in Your greater Whole.

The world was created for my sake

בְּשִׁבְלִי נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם

On a web not whole without me.
There is purpose to my being.
Maybe I'm something of a balance point
Between nothing and everything.
Better to say, "the world is a Self-creating whole"
and I am honored to be a part,
a part or apart,
with You or alone.
Alone or all one.

I am dust and ashes.

The world was created for my sake.

Thank G-d I have two pockets.

R. David Zaslow



Vidui / Confession of Our Sins Against The Future

We confess and we forgive
The times we bought leaded gasoline, inorganic beef and whole cow milk.
We forgive the stray plastic bottle unrecycled.
We forgive all the turned pages and unlistened-to reports
Or the phone calls we didn't make
And the emails we didn't send,
We even can forgive the times we didn't vote
And the times we didn't march.
We forgive and we can be forgiven:
We're only humans after all and
We didn't want it to be real.
But now we know.

We confess but we cannot forgive.
We can't forgive these other sins against the earth because
They are sins against the Holy Wholeness.
How do we forgive all the species that have disappeared ?
Or the burnt forests or the dried up lakes?
And how can it be for us to forgive the greed and the selfishness,
The times we chose to not notice the changes,
And the times our lives were too personally pleasant to care?
We signed on to a covenant:
The earth will take care of us
If we will take care of it.
And we reneged.
It is not for us to forgive.

We confess and wonder if our sins will be remembered?
Our children,
And their children,
Will they resent our sins against them?
Will they forget the willful ignorance?
Will they forget the procrastination?
Will they forget the waste?
We will be long gone
So we don't have to care
Which is disgusting
Because we are guilty.
Will our children forgive our sins against the future?

Ashamnu.
Amen

Trisha Arlin



Yom Kippur

I listen to the wind
sing Kol Nidrei on the hills.
I listen with my eyes
as the trees sob their leaves.
This earth is my synagogue
with its congregation of hills and seas,
a spinning shrine singing "Halleluyah!"
October's trees are davvenen,
swaying, and chanting the Shema
like the old men in my shul in Brooklyn
who droned in prayer,
sobbing their atonements and confessions.
Their singing was deep as grief,
the sound of בָּרוּךְ *barukh* fell deep into the sky.
Each year my father lit a candle
for his father, as I now light for him,
and my children will light for me.
I light one each year for my mother
as she lit one for hers
and my children will light for theirs.
Today I cry for my father's grief,
for my mother's grief,
for my own deep grief,
and the grief I have not yet seen.
Today is the Yom Kippur,
a day as deep as grief.
I sing בָּרוּךְ *barukh* deep into the sky,
to the wind that now listens to me.

R. David Zaslow



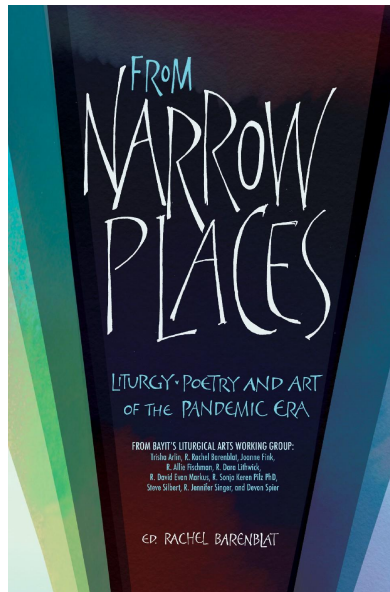
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