JRC High Holiday Readings
5787/2026

Rosh Hashanah Day 1

Pomegranate Seed By Ellen Blum Barrish
Read by David Tabak and Denise Eichhorn

At the head of the year
We are seeds in the pomegranate
Conceived from the ovary of a flower
That blossoms before the harvest

We are kernels of possibility
Vessels of tart-sweet juice
Wrapped in fleshy casing
Red as the cheeks of a beloved

We are many and we are mighty
Connected by pith and grit
Put to sacred use
As paint, nutrient or garnish

We are each a commandment
Renewed in autumn
Marking the miracle
Of the anniversary of the world

We are strong and we are fragile
Inside a thick skin
Capped by a crown, our navel
Linking us to the majesty of creation.

The Low Road by Marge Piercy
Read by Rebecca Zemens and Ryan Blitstein

What can they do to you? Whatever they want.
They can set you up, they can bust you, they can break
your fingers, they can burn your brain with electricity,
blur you with drugs till you
can't walk, can't remember, they can take your child,
wall up your lover. They can do anything
you can't stop them from doing. How can you stop
them? Alone, you can fight, you can refuse, you can
take what revenge you can but they roll over you.
But two people fighting back to back can cut through
a mob, a snake-dancing file can break a cordon, an army
can meet an army. Two people can keep each other
sane, can give support, conviction, love, massage, hope,
sex.
Three people are a delegation, a committee, a wedge.
With four you can play bridge and start an organization.
With six you can rent a whole house, eat pie for dinner
with no seconds, and hold a fund-raising party.
A dozen make a demonstration. A hundred fill a hall.
A thousand have solidarity and your own newsletter;
ten thousand, power and your own paper;
a hundred thousand, your own media;
ten million, your own country.
It goes on one at a time, it starts when you care to act, it
starts when you do it again after they said no,
it starts when you say We and know who you mean,
and each day you mean one more.

Create No Images by Octavia Butler
Read by Liz Jansen and Jason Dyme

Create no images of God.
Accept the images provided.
They are everywhere, in everything.
God is Change—
Seed to tree, tree to forest;
Rain to river, river to sea;
Grubs to bees, bees to swarm.
From one, many; from many, one;
Forever uniting, growing, dissolving—
forever Changing.
The universe is God's self-portrait.

Remember to Remember by Hazzan Sabrina Sojourner *Read by Faye Levin-O'Leary and Susan Weiner*

Remember to remember. Welcome with open heart. Embrace being welcomed, regardless of the heart. Bring joy. Bring wonder.
Forget what you think you know about The Story to discover what still needs discovering.
Remember to remember our story.
Remember to tell the story as if you were there. Because you were there. We were there.
Alongside each other. Waiting. Hoping. Giggling with anticipation. Prayerful. Awed. We were there. You were there. Remember to remember to tell your piece of Our Story.

Remember to remember sorrow. Embrace sorrow. Let her comfort you. Let her open your heart to sweetness. Honor what is gone. Mourn what is gone. Grieve what is gone. Let sorrow comfort you. Let the smiling faces, inviting aromas and savory flavors comfort you. Hold them alongside your sorrow. Remember to remember to embrace life.

Remember to remember joy. Cook with joy. Serve with joy. Read with joy. Sing with joy. Laugh with joy. Fill the space, whatever space you find yourself in, with so much joy that it must dance out doors and windows into our neighborhoods, communities, localities, the nation, around the globe and into the universe! Let it touch as many souls as possible along the way so that their joy also increases. Remember to remember to increase joy.

Remember to remember to welcome you and to allow yourself to be welcomed.
Remember to remember to tell your piece of Our Story. Remember to remember to embrace the fullness of your life.

We are Verbs by Blaze Ardman
Read by Mitchell Channon and Bruce Koff

I asked what I can do to improve myself and the world.

The Source of Consciousness
blessed me with an answer.

Remember, God said, that I am
becoming what I am becoming, as are you.
Know that from each fresh moment to the next,
you are born and reborn again.
We are verbs, you and I.
Kindness is a verb. When you do kindness,
you give wings to hope;
Compassion is a verb. When you do compassion,
you activate the energy of empathy;
Generosity is a verb.
When you do generous, you raise the vibration of gratitude;
Listening is a verb.
When you do listening, you awaken understanding;
Peace is a verb.
When you do peace, the energy of wisdom reverberates;
Stillness is a verb.
When you do stillness, the energy of faith is restored;
Prayer is a verb.
When you do prayer, the energy of joy, healing potential, and return ignites.

May you be blessed to know that your seemingly small acts
kindle everlasting flames of love, goodness, repair.
May you be blessed to know
You are the redeemed and the redeemer
You are the blessed and the blessing
You are the lover and the beloved.
And so together,
we are the unbounded light of consciousness,
the unending essence of divine spark,
life unfolding through eternity.
May you be so blessed.

Rosh Hashanah Day 2

A parable:
Read by Diane Turner

One day a rabbi asked their disciples the question:
"How do you know when there is enough morning light to see and be ready for morning prayers?"

One of them answered:
"There is enough light to see when you can see the current of the river move through the morning mist."

A second replied:
"When you can tell an oak tree from a sycamore"

A third said:
"When you can distinguish the young lambs from the goats as they romp in the morning light."

Then the followers looked at the rabbi and were silent.

Finally the old teacher raised their eyes and spoke quietly with deliberation.
"There is enough light to see when you can look into the eyes of another person and understand that they are your sibling."

Meditation by Rabbi Leila Gal Berner p.5
Read by Sallie Gratch

With the New Year, we have a chance for newness within our hearts, a newness that can change the course of our lives. But change is often frightening, and sometimes we are not sure that we are indeed ready for it. "What will this new heart be like?" we wonder. "How will this purified heart change the persons we are?" "Will the very structure of our lives change as our spirits are renewed?" So much uncertainty comes with change. As we stand at the threshold of a New Year, we pray for the valor to face uncertainty, the courage to truly change what needs to be changed, and the faith to welcome the new spirit that is within us.

A Woman's Meditation by Ruth F. Brin p. 456
Read by Laura Friedlander

When men were children,
they thought of God as a Father;
When men were slaves,
they thought of God as a Master;
When men were subjects,
they thought of God as a King.
But I am a woman, not a slave, not a subject,
not a child who longs for God as father or mother.
I might imagine God as teacher or friend, but those
Images, like king, master, father or mother, are too small for me now.
God is the force of motion and light in the universe;
God is the strength of life on our planet;
God is the power moving us to do good;
God is the source of love springing up in us.
God is far beyond what we can comprehend.

The Real Hero by Yehuda Amichai p. 513
Read by Mary Jo Barrett

The real hero of sacrifice was the ram,
who knew nothing of the plot among the others.
He sort of volunteered to die in Isaac's place.
I want to sing a song in his memory —
of curly wool, of human eyes,
of the horns, so still in his living head –
and how they turned them into trumpets
after the kill to sound their war-cry
to sound their crude joy.
I like to see the last scene
as a photo in a glossy fashion magazine
as the young man, tan and pampered
in his designer suit,
and the angel by his side in a long silk receiving gown,
and both of them empty-eyed,
glancing at two empty places.
And behind them, as a colorful background, the
ram caught in the thicket before the kill,
and the thicket his last friend.
The angel went home, Isaac went home,
And Abraham and God went home,
But the real hero of the sacrifice is the ram.

Yom Kippur Evening/Kol Nidre

Self Forgiveness First by Donna Schaper
Read by Nancy Delman

The first thing people do when restoring old chairs is strip — strip right down to the bare wood. They do this to see what the original might have looked like and to determine if the thing is worth doing over. They strip away all the years of grime, the garish coats of paint piled one on top of the other. They get rid of all the junk that's been tacked on through the years and try to find the solid, simple thing that's underneath.
I'm like an old chair needing that stripping process. Every now and then I have to take a really hard look at the illusions I've built up in myself and see what I've gotten myself into. Illusions? Yes, illusions; the excess baggage I carry around, the unnecessary; all that keeps me living off center too long. Stripping myself of all this is an intentional letting go of these illusions. It is a spiritual act of personal forgiveness. It's hard work to let myself forgive me. I have to discover the original under all these coats I've added, strip away all the cynicism and anger I've built up, get rid of the junk I've taken on, defy my disappointments, and find what is real again.

The Prayer Before the Prayer
by Desmond and Mpho Tutu
Read by Jamie and Jacob Noll

I want to be willing to forgive but I dare not ask for the will to forgive.
In case you give it to me and I'm not yet ready.
I'm not yet ready for my heart to soften.
I'm not yet ready to be vulnerable again.
Not yet ready to see that there is humanity in my tormentor's eyes or that the one who hurt me may also have cried.
I'm not yet ready for the journey.
I'm not yet interested in the path.

I am at the prayer before the prayer of forgiveness.
Grant me the will to want to forgive.
Grant it to me, Not yet but soon.

Can I even form the words?
Forgive me? Dare I even look?
Do I dare to see the hurt I have caused?
I can glimpse all the shattered pieces of that fragile thing.
That soul trying to rise on the broken wings of hope but only out of the corner of my eye.
I am afraid of it and if I am afraid to see how can I not be afraid to say forgive me?
Is there a place where we can meet?
You and me.

The place in the middle where we straddle the lines.
Where you are right and I am right too.
And both of us are wrong and wronged.
Can we meet there and look for the place where the path begins?
The path that ends when we forgive.

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let them go by Aurora Levin Morales

Read by Tracy Hultgren

let them go like birds released from cages
let them go like fruit rinds giving themselves to the soil
let them go like pebbles rolling away underfoot on a steep trail
let them go like crumbs scattered for pigeons
let them go like sweat dripping from our brows
If we have messed up, let it go into the great compost heap
and become the nutrients for new seeds, intentions, blessings
pink blossomed, azure, ripe with tender food.

If others have hurt us, let clean water irrigate the wounds
and let the runoff water effortless gardens
that spring up between the furrows of sleeping fields between the cracks of unswept sidewalks, take over the untended lawns.
Let grudges crumble to dust.
Let shame dissolve into loam.
Let each harsh word we hurl at ourselves
be turned into petals before they land.
Let everything, all of it, be recycled.
Let the trash become jewels we string into necklaces
and drape around each other's necks.

Let us enter the year of fallows
burdenless. loose-limbed,
lie down on the dark earth,
do nothing,
let tiny rootlets emerge from our fingers
let ourselves be covered with moss
and instead of doing

become the sapling students of the elder trees,
and be ourselves into the new year
and be ourselves toward the new world that waits
like an autumn bulb packed with unimagined colors ready to wake and bloom.

Yom Kippur Morning

Things to do in the belly of the whale
by Dan Albergotti
Read by Bonnie Lucas and Stuart Sondheimer

Measure the walls. Count the ribs,
Notch the long days.
Look up for blue sky through the spout.
Make small fires with the broken hulls of fishing boats. Practice smoke signals.
Call old friends and listen for echoes of distant voices. Organize your calendar.
Dream of the beach.
Look each way for the dim glow of light.
Work on your reports.
Review each of your life's ten million choices.
Endure moments of self-loathing.
Find the evidence of those before you.
Destroy it.
Try to be very quiet and listen for the sound of gears and moving water.
Listen for the sound of your heart.
Be thankful that you are here, swallowed with all hope, where you can rest and wait.
Be nostalgic.
Think of all the things you did and could have done.
Remember treading water in the center of the still night sea, your toes pointing again and again down, down, down into the depths.

Kesher V'Gesher by Trisha Arlin
Read by Reese and Joel Gratch

We cross a scary, narrow bridge,
It has an awesome span.
From Tisha b'Av to Simkhat Torah and back again.
It's not a simple stroll across this bridge,
Revealing truth with each step.
How do we get across intact?
Tread gingerly, alone,
Exposed before our friends and family and yes, the Infinite.
But most of all, to ourselves.
We know what we have done. We do.
So what helps us across that bridge?
Our music, the poetry, the liturgy;
The wise words, the sharing, the rhythm of the rituals and conversations with God.
Tefillah.
Our gathering, these clergy and prayer leaders, this community,
Social justice and acts of loving kindness, *Tzedakah*.
Our self-awareness, honesty, regret, humility, atonement,
Our forgiveness, grief, redemption, and joy, *Teshuvah*.
The same stuff every year but shockingly different each time.
This is *Kesher*, our connection to truth and hope.
This is *Gesher*, our bridge across these Days of Awe.
Kesher v'Gesher
Connect. Cross the bridge.
From Tisha b'Av to Simkhat Torah:
From Regret to Celebration
From Celebration to *Teshuvah*
From *Teshuvah* to Sweetness
From Sweetness to Atonement
From Atonement to Awe
From Awe to Abundance
Blessed One-ness, Breath of Everything, we are not alone on this journey.
Walk with us as we cross each bridge to a new year and yet another beginning.

For our Country: Oath of Disloyalty by Rabbi Irwin Keller

Read by Elise and Gregg Jaffe

I am a disloyal Jew.
I am not loyal to a political party.
Nor will I be loyal to dictators and mad kings.
I am not loyal to walls or cages.
I am not loyal to taunts or tweets.
I am not loyal to hatred, to Jew-baiting, to the gloating connivings of white supremacy.
I am a disloyal Jew.
I am not loyal to any foreign power.
Nor to abuse of power at home.
I am not loyal to a legacy of conquest, erasure and exploitation.
I am not loyal to stories that tell me who I should hate.

I am a loyal Jew.
I am loyal to the inconveniences of kindness.
I am loyal to the dream of justice.
I am loyal to this suffering Earth
And to all life.
I am not loyal to any founding fathers.
But I am loyal to the children who will come
And to the quality of the world we leave them.
I am not loyal to what America has become.
But I am loyal to what America could be.
I am loyal to Emma Lazarus. To huddled masses.
To freedom and welcome,
Holiness, hope and love.

Remembering by Rabbi Miriyam Glazer

Read by Debi and David Lewis

Someone laughs a certain way and suddenly I am feeling you.

The radio plays a song you used to love. It feels as if you are here with me. The evening light glistens on the trees. My heart stings, after so many years,
with the loss of you. The family gathers together.
Each of us feels the absence of you.
Some of us are consoled for our loss. Some of us are yet inconsolable.
Some of us have bitterly wounded hearts for each and every loss we have suffered –
Some of us have healed.
Grandmothers, grandfathers, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins and second-cousins, friends from the old days, friends from now...co-workers...
postmen we chatted with, men and women far, far, far from us
How brief life is.
Teach us to number our days, to be fully alive, fully aware each and every day, to live in awareness, to cherish awareness – oh teach us to number our days
so that we may attain a wise heart.
That we may remember and mourn those we have lost and still celebrate the gift of their lives.
The gift of life.

Additional Readings

By Barbara Brown Taylor

"All I am saying is that anyone can do this. Anyone can ask and anyone can bless, whether anyone has authorized you to do it or not. All I am saying is that the world needs you to do this, because there is a real shortage of people willing to kneel wherever they are and recognize the holiness holding its sometimes bony, often tender, always life-giving hand above their heads. That we are able to bless one another at all is evidence that we have been blessed, whether we can remember when or not. That we are willing to bless one another is miracle enough to stagger the very stars."

From The Book of Life by Gilda Radner

I wanted a perfect ending, so I sat down to write the book with the ending in place before there even was an ending. Now I've learned the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle and end. Like my life, this book has ambiguity. Like my life, this book is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, not knowing.

Reflection, by Rabbi Melissa Weintraub

The Yamim Noraim are our time to refuse that everything be closed within us for as long as we live — to open ourselves with the trust of the newborn and the gravity of the dying. To speak courageously and vulnerably, let nothing go unspoken, offer ourselves without reserve.
May our imagined crossing of the bridge between life and death help us liberate whatever is closed in us, and say it all as if the moment will never come again.

This Being Human is a Guest House by Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
Meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.
Be grateful for whatever comes.
Because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

What We Need is Restlessness by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Daily we should take account and ask: What have I done today to alleviate the anguish, to mitigate the evil, to prevent humiliation? Let there be a grain of prophet in every human being!
Our concern must be expressed not symbolically, but literally; Not only publicly, but also privately; not only occasionally, but regularly.
What we need is the involvement of every one of us as individuals. What we need is restlessness, a constant awareness of the monstrosity of injustice.

Our Goal: Shalom by Rabbi Rami Shapiro

Peace, shalom
Is not
The absence of difficulties
But
The handling of difficulties
Without
Loss of balance.
Shalom is not the absence of tension
But the acceptance of it as part of the Way.
Shalom is not the absence of war
But the careful waging of war
Without losing one's balance.
Shalom, is not passive non-violence,
But active confrontation with truth.

Shalom is the ability to see the grain of life
And act in accord with it;
To discover that effortless effort
Action in tune with the Way of the Universe
Is the secret of both peace and power.

As Kol Nidre Approaches by Tiferet Welch

In my handful of Jewish years,
As Kol Nidre approaches
At the tail end
Of this horrific year,
A year of brokenness and loss,
Of tearing that feels beyond repair,
Of trauma igniting trauma,
Of harsh words,
And targeted offense
And radical defense,
Of not knowing who is the offender,
Or who is the offended,
Or who has caused the offense,
Who carries it,
And who will, finally,
Lay it all down.
When our mortal bodies
Sense their mortality
And our souls ache toward
All Infinity
We stand between the worlds;
between the realms.
We cry out that we are trying our best,
Even as we weep
Knowing not everything will be mended.
What else can we do
Expect hold to the promise
That we will be met
Beyond the gates,
By love?
Others do for us,
What we cannot do for ourselves.
We forgives us
In order that we are able to return
To the work,
The service,
And the praise,
In the knowledge that
While we are finite,
It is the goodness
Our lives can add
To the Goodness that will
Ultimately prevail.

Keep Marching by Shaina Taub
From Suffs on Broadway

You won't live to see the future that you fight for
Maybe no one gets to reach that perfect day
If the work is never over
Then how do you keep marching anyway?
Do you carry your banner as far as you can?
Rewriting the world with your imperfect pen?
'Til the next stubborn girl picks it up in a picket line over and over again?
And you join in the chorus of centuries chanting to her

The path will be twisted and risky and slow
But keep marching, keep marching
Will you fail or prevail? Well, you may never know
But keep marching, keep marching
'Cause your ancestors are all the proof you need
That progress is possible, not guaranteed
It will only be made if
we keep marching, keep marching on

Keep marching on
Keep marching on

And remember every mother that you came from
Learned as much from our success as our mistakes
Don't forget you're merely one of many others
On the journey every generation makes
We did not end injustice and neither will you
But still, we made strides, so we know you can too
Make peace with our incomplete power and use it for good
'Cause there's so much to do

The gains will feel small and the losses too large
Keep marching, keep marching
You'll rarely agree with whoever's in charge
Keep marching, keep marching
'Cause your ancestors are all the proof you need
That progress is possible, not guaranteed
It will only be made if we keep marching, keep marching on

Keep marching on

Yes, the world can be changed, 'cause we've done it before
So keep marching, keep marching
We're always behind you, so bang down the door
And keep marching, keep marching
And let history sound the alarm of how
The future demands that we fight for it now
It will only be ours if we keep marching, keep marching on

We must keep marching, marching, marching
We must keep marching, marching, marching
We must keep marching, marching, marching
We must keep marching, marching, marching
Come on, keep marching, marching, marching

Keep marching on