

READINGS FOR COMMEMORATION

October 7: One Year Later

CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

OCTOBER 7 has indelibly left its mark in our hearts and memories. We remember where we were, what we were doing, and the sinking sense of horror and loss on what should have been a day of celebration and joy in our Torah. Too many Israeli lives were lost; too many hostages were taken; too many families were displaced. The aftermath has unleashed one horror after another: rising waves of antisemitism in the Diaspora, widespread evacuations in Israel's north, hundreds of Israeli soldiers fallen in battle, and tens of thousands of innocent Gazans killed because of Hamas's actions and Israel's response.

There are times to address each of these horrors—to demand hostages be returned home, to reckon with antisemitism at home and abroad, to soothe the divisions within the Jewish community. There will be a time for healing and rebuilding—God willing, speedily. But today, on the anniversary of the worst violence against Jews since the Holocaust, our task is to bear witness, to remember, and to mourn.

We hope these readings, prayers, and poems will provide support, meaning, and connection as you commemorate the anniversary of October 7, 2023.



For One Who Died by Violence

from *Mishkan HaNefesh* (adapted)

RABBIS JANET AND SHELDON MARDER

קוֹל דְּמֵי אָחִיךָ צֶעֶקִים אֵלַי מִן־הָאָדָמָה:

Your brother's blood cries to Me from the ground. (Genesis 4:10)

Creator of life, Source of healing,
grant peace in Your great shelter of peace
to our loved ones
whose lives ended abruptly through acts of senseless violence.

With sadness we recall the joy that they brought into the world;
those voices and faces we will never forget.
May these precious memories console us.
Let there be light—
to guide our way through the shadow of loss.

We long with all our beings
for an end to baseless hatred, war, and violence.
May a time come soon
when no one will suffer or die at the hands of another.

May our loved ones' souls be embraced by You—
free of pain now, held in tenderness and love.
We will cherish forever these lives now lost:
blessings in the bond of life everlasting,
blessings here and now.

Un'taneh Tokef for October 7

RABBI EMILY ARONSON

On Rosh HaShanah it is written,
And on Yom Kippur it is sealed.
[Is this what You intended for this year? Were those children really sealed
in the Book of Death?]
How many shall pass away and how many shall be born,
Who shall live and who shall die,
[who shall run and who shall hide; Can I see that Book of Life, God?]
Who shall reach the end of their days and who shall not,
[who shall become a mourner, a widow, an orphan]
Who shall perish by water and who by fire,
[who by gun and who by rocket]
Who by sword and who by wild beast,
[who by combat and who by fear]
Who by famine and who by thirst,
[Why must we still ask about these?]
Who by earthquake and who by plague,
[who by lack of medical care]
Who by strangulation and who by stoning,
[who by power and who by weakness]
Who shall have rest and who shall wander,
[who will become exiled once more]
Who shall be at peace and who shall be pursued,
[who will be targeted by acts of bigotry and hate]
Who shall be at rest and who shall be tormented,
[who will sleep well and who kept awake by nightmares]
Who shall be exalted and who shall be brought low,
[whose voice will be shunned and whose life will be valued]
Who shall become rich and who shall be impoverished.
[who will claim victory and who will lose hope]
But repentance, prayer and righteousness avert the severe decree.
[I feel so helpless.]

Cry Out

ALDEN SOLOVY

Cry out to the heavens
For the innocent taken captive.
Cry out to the earth
Soaked in so much blood.
Rail at the sky
For the raped and the tortured
On that brutal day of hate embodied
And evil incarnate.
O grief of griefs.
O sorrow of sorrows.
O heartache of heartaches.
My bed is soaked in tears.
I have become ashes and sackcloth,
My heart refuses consolation.
For what consolation can there be
With so many murdered and kidnapped,
Brutalized and maimed,
On a single day of terror.
God of compassion,
Grant a perfect rest
Under your canopy of peace,
To those murdered on October 7, 2023,
Those whose bodies were snatched,
Those who expired in captivity,
And to those who fell defending
Their homes and the land on that day,
And the days, weeks, and months
to come.

God of mercy,
Grant release from the terrors
And nightmares of captivity,
To the hostages who have been freed
And to those who remain prisoners
In body or spirit,
Them, their families, the friends,
And all whom they've touched.
Grant *r'fuah sh'leimah* to all of the
wounded
And injured of body and soul.
God of all life,
Bless the defenders and the protectors
of Israel
With safety and strength.
Bless our military and political leaders
With wisdom and fortitude.
Bless us all with hope
For the day when peace, at long last,
Comes for the people of Israel,
For all of the inhabitants of the land,
For our neighbors and for all of the
Middle East,
And throughout the four corners of
the earth.

Counting Our Blessings

RABBI SARA SAPADIN

“Count each day,” we’re reminded in our Psalms, because every day is a gift, and life carries with it no guarantees. There is so much we don’t know, so much we can’t account for, so much we can’t ever foresee. What is here today may not be here tomorrow, and what is true in this moment may not be true in the next. October 7 is but our latest reminder, an exceedingly painful one at that.

For the world we inhabited on October 6 was very different than the one we inhabit today. The ground had not yet shifted beneath our feet. The earth had not yet ruptured. And the soil had not yet curdled with the blood of untold innocents. But one day can change everything. One day can turn the world upside down. And one day can cause an entire nation to question who they are and what they will become.

And so . . . What can we do? How can we live in the face of this uncertainty that governs our lives so dispassionately? Our tradition encourages us to lean, heavily, into gratitude, by savoring what we have and who we’re with, knowing these gifts could vanish the very next hour or day or week or month. Perhaps this is why our tradition urges us to say one hundred blessings a day; there are so many moments, both grand and granular, to relish.

In a world where everything we know can shift irrevocably in an instant, let us hold tight to the blessings in our midst. Let us embrace and laugh with urgency and passion. Let us say the important things to the important people. Because if we don’t say them now, we might never get the chance.

Achot K'tanah, Renewed

TORI GREENE
(HUC-JIR Rabbinical Student)

The enemy dared to break the Ten Commandments
He stole my sister without protections
The captive trapped in the dungeon
When and who will redeem the hostages?
Let this year and its curses conclude

The enemy reduced her to heathen and despised her
Destroyed her trees and her soul
How does this happen to your holy people?
Please heal her suffering
Let this year and its curses conclude

What's been wronged must be fixed
It's on us to stop the war
Together we will win, and meanwhile
We will renew God's covenant.
Let this year and its blessings begin.

אַחֹת קְטָנָה, מִתְחַדָּשֶׁת טוֹרֵי גְרִין

הַדְּבָרוֹת, הָאוֹיֵב הֵעִז לְשַׁבֵּר
הוּא גָנַב אֶחָוִיתִי בְּלִי לְשֹׁמֵר
הַשְּׂבִי אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית הַבּוֹר
מִתִּי וּמִי יִקְרָא לְשָׁבוּיִם דָּרוֹר
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

הוּא הִקְטִין אוֹתָהּ בְּגוֹיִם הַבְּזוּיָה
הִשְׁחִית אֶת־עֵצָהּ וְאֶת־נֶשְׁמָתָהּ
אֵיךְ זֶה נִקְרָה לְעַם קָדוֹשׁ שְׁלֵדָּ?
אֵל נָא רַפָּא נָא לְסַבְּלָהּ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

צְרִיד לְתַקֵּן אֶת אֲשֶׁר עָוִיתוּ
עֲלִינוּ לְעַצֵּר אֶת מְלַחְמֹתָיו
בִּיחָד נִבְצָח עַד־כֹּה
וְעַד־כֹּה נִחַדֵּשׁ בְּרִיתוֹ
תִּחַל שָׁנָה וּבִרְכוּתֶיהָ.

We Heal with Mercy

RABBI JAMES GOODMAN

We will grieve losses a long time
work the trauma history embedded in our stories
if we understand
we have to tell others what it's like to be us
and when other people understand us
we will understand others better
how history exhales with every breath we inhale
we will be precise with mystery language
treat each other with kindness
above all kindness and gentleness and understanding
and respect and without judgment
without judgment most of all
pick ourselves up and ease off the pain
it's a narrow bridge we must not add to the hurt
be easy on ourselves for not knowing for not having known
for having done this or not done that
what we carry from the past
heavy sacred hard hearted
we have to treat ourselves with kindness and with mercy
because it's right and we need to heal
and we will only heal with mercy

Prayer for Israel

HANNAH ELLENSON
(HUC-JIR Rabbinical Student)

אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וְאַבּוֹתֵינוּ—Our God and God of our ancestors,
we ask your blessing for the State of Israel and for all of Israel's inhabitants.

מְקוֹר חַיִּים—Source of Life, bless and strengthen those who defend the land and
ensure their safe and speedy return home. Protect them and guide them.

הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא—Holy and Blessed One, show Israel's leaders your path so they
may act with wisdom, courage, and dedication and that they may be unwavering
in their pursuit of peace. Strengthen their hearts, but keep them from hardening.

מִתִּיר אֲסוּרִים—Freer of the Captives, return all those who are kidnapped safe and
sound to their homes, without the spilling of more innocent blood, without any
more souls being tarnished by horrific acts.

בֹּעֵל הַרְחָמִים—Master of Compassion, help us hold the humanity and the heart-
ache of the Jewish people while also holding the humanity and the dignity of the
Palestinian people.

As we are made in your image, remind us of your ways. Spread over us your shelter
of peace and fulfill the vision of your prophets: “They shall beat their swords into
plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not take up sword
against nation; they shall never again know war.”*

Together, we say: Amen

*Isaiah 2:4

*With gratitude to Rabbis Sharon Brous, Ayelet Cohen,
Sam Feinsmith, Ofer Sabbath Beit Halachmi, and Mira Regev
for their prayers and words, some of which are excerpted here.*

The Place Where We Are Rigid

JAMES FEDER
(HUC-JIR Rabbinical Student)

The place we are right is not a generative place.
Amichai was right about that.
It's a small place, the place we are truly, fully right—
no wonder the earth there is so hard;
if we never leave that place,
all we can do is circle and stalk, like a lion in a cage,
pressing down the earth beneath the weight of our surety
until it gleams like polished concrete.

Nothing can grow in such a place,
not flowers, not ideas, not empathy,
certainly not those who never leave.

If we live our lives in the place where we are right,
if we only engage with the world where we may be wrong
through the imporous, rigid glass of our fishbowl,
if we only observe the world of nuance and doubt from a distance
as we continue to swim within the waters we know,
then we are destined, damned, to be like the goldfish,
whose container determines how much it can grow.

המקום שבו אנו נקשים ג'יימס פֶדֶר

המקום שבו אנו צודקים הוא לא מקום צמיחה.
עמיחי צדק בשאמר כך.
זהו מקום צר מדי, המקום שבו אנו באמת צודקים לגמרי –
אין פלא שהאדמה שם כל כך קשה;
אם לעולם לא נעזב מקום זה,
נוכל רק להקיף ולעקב, כמו אריה בכלוב,
לרמס את האדמה תחת כבד צדקתנו
עד שהיא תבריק כמו בטון מלטש.
שום דבר לא יכול לצמח במקומות כאלה,
לא פרחים, לא רעיונות, לא אמפתיה,
בוודאי לא אלה שלא עוזבים לעולם.
אם אנו חיים את חיינו רק במקום שבו אנו צודקים,
אם אנו מתקשרים רק לעולם שבו אולי אנו לא צודקים

דָּרָךְ זְכוּכִית קַעֲרַת דָּגִים מוּצָקָה וְנִקְשָׁה,
אִם צוֹפִים בְּעוֹלָם הַנְּיוֹאֲנָסִים וְהַסְּפָק רַק מִמְּרָחֵק
בְּזַמַּן שְׂאֵנוּ מִמְּשִׁיכִים לְשַׁחֲוֹת רַק בְּמִים שְׂאֵנוּ כְּבָר מִכִּירִים,
אֲזָ אָנוּ מִיַּעֲדִים, אַרְוֹרִים, לְחִיּוֹת כְּמוֹ דָּג זָהָב,
שְׂכָלִי קַבּוּלוֹ קוֹבֵעַ לְעוֹלָם כְּמָה הוּא יוֹכֵל לְגַדֵּל.

O How She Sat Alone: A Lamentation*

NURIT HIRSCHFELD-SKUPINSKY
survivor of the slaughter in Kibbutz Nahal Oz
Translated by Yehudah Mirsky

O How She Sat Alone
Nir Oz, full of blood
Sderot, *was like a widow*
A city stunned, and who is faithful to her?

O How They Sat Alone
In the shelter room
One family, and another,
And another, and another one.

O How They Sat Alone
The many-eyed women at the observation posts
And there was no listening,
And deliverance—none.

O How They Sat Alone
Young women and young men
Hiding in pits and shrubs.
Their dancing halted,
And who will rescue them?

O How They Sat Alone
Captive women and captive men
And sitting there, still:
120 men, women, elders and children.
Crying, they are crying at night
Tears on their cheeks
And there is no one who comforts.

*This Lamentation—and other recent writing by Israeli women—will appear in *Dirshuni: Contemporary Women's Midrash*, Vol. 2, edited by Tamar Biala.

O how she sat alone. . . full of. . . was like a widow—A paraphrase of Lamentations 1:1, “*O how she sat alone, the city full of people was like a widow.*” Nir Oz—A kibbutz in the Gaza envelope on the North West Negev, attacked on October 7, 2023. Sderot—a city in the Negev North East of Gaza, attacked on October 7, 2023. *A city stunned, and who is faithful to her?*—A paraphrase of Isaiah 1:21, “*How did she become a whore, the faithful city. Full with justice, righteousness used to rest in her, but now murderers.*” *Crying, they are crying at night, Tears on their cheeks, And there is no one who comforts*—A paraphrase of Lamentations 1:2, “*Crying she will cry at night, her tears on her cheek. No one comforts her of all those who love her. . .*”

קינה: איכה ישבה בדד
נורית הירשפלד סקופינסקי
שורדת הטבח בקיבוץ נחל עוז

איכה ישבה בדד
ביר עד רבתי דם.
שדרות היתה פאלמנה,
קרית הלומה, ומי באמנה?

איכה ישבה בדד
בממ"ד
משפחה, ועוד אחת,
ועוד, ועוד אחת.

איכה ישבו בדד
תצפיתניות רבתי עין,
ולא היתה הקשבה,
וישועה-אין.

איכה ישבו בדד
צעירות וצעירים
במסתורי שוחות ושיחים.
פסקו רקודיהם,
ומי יחלצם?

איכה ישבו בדד
חטופות וחטופים,
ועדין יושבים:
120 גברים, נשים, קשישים וילדים.
בכו בוכים בלילה,
דמעות על לחייהם,
ואין מנחם.

The One Who Makes Peace

RABBI ARIEL TOVLEV

blessing bread bought
from the supermarket
our blessing says, thank you God
for bringing forth bread from the earth

but this bread didn't come from the earth
it came from a store
from a factory
from flour ground
from wheat
from the earth

this bread did not sprout forth
it was created from human hands

we don't thank God for the wheat
which actually came from the earth
God did not create bread
but God knew we could

my kids ask, why do we pray for God to make peace?
I tell them, God makes peace
like God makes bread

which is to say
we have all
the necessary ingredients

peace will not sprout forth
it will be created from human hands

thank you God, for giving us the wisdom
to turn wheat into bread
thank you God, for giving us the wisdom
to turn love into peace

My Silent Prayer

RABBI HANNA YERUSHALMI

During this moment of silence,
bring me the grief of my people,
centuries born and centuries old,
and let it inspire me to still love the world.

Connect me with fleeting grace
and the prophet's power
to keep opening up my soul
even when it is seared with loss.

Bring me the courage to quiet
my desperate need for answers
by letting hearts touch hearts
on some imagined coastal plain.

Connect me with the calm of a desert valley
after a surprise flash flood,
the rich pause between musical notes, or
the serenity of a Jerusalem street on Shabbat.

Bring me the tentative hope in a room
before a newborn's cry.
Connect me to the frail, silvery thread
that links me to the humanity of my neighbor.

During this moment of silence,
though there are horrors all around,
in spite of everything that directs me not,
let the more loving one be—me.

Jerusalem Stone: 3:00 a.m.

RABBI ROBERT LEVY
(on that sleepless first night)

Awake in bed I glimpse stone buildings.
At the window I see more of the stone Jerusalem wears.
Louder than the noise of passing trucks,
Or the voices of the young learning to drink,
These stones disturb the night.
Hard, rough, solid, they describe human presence, Jewish presence.
"We are here, still here," they shout to the mountains and wilderness.

Prayer for Captives

RABBI STEPHANIE CRAWLEY
with Rabbi Josh Beraha and Rabbi Healy Slakman

Mi Shebeirach avoteinu v'imoteinu
Avraham, Yitzhak, v'Yaakov
Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, v'Leah
Mi Shebeirach avoteinu v'imoteinu
God of
Senesh and Ben-Gurion
Bialik and Rachel
Golda and Rabin
Tzur Yisrael—Rock of Israel
Protect these captives
Shield them from the worst of the pain
Guard them from torture
Deliver them from captivity
Help our sisters and brothers
Safeguard their souls
Comfort them in this darkness
Deliver them from this evil
Acheinu v'achoteinu—All of the people of Israel are our family
We pray for all of them
For the soldiers and free spirits
For the grandmothers and the babies
We weep for all of them
We hope for all of us.
May tomorrow be more peaceful than yesterday.
Al na taakor natua
Al tishkach et hatikvah
Hashiveini v'ashuva,
El haaretz hatovah
Do not uproot what has been planted; do not forget our hope.
Return our captives, our family—so we may all return to the good land.
Amen.

The Diameter of the Massacres*

RABBI KAREN BENDER

The diameter of the massacres
was the length of Israel
and the depth of the universe.
It stretched to every continent,
college campuses and social media
It spread information and disinformation
Twisting and distorting morality
And redefining madness
It wreaked havoc and wrecked lives
In Israel and Gaza
In kitchens and living rooms
In bedrooms and porches
In souls and hearts.

The diameter of the visit
was the length of Israel
the distance to California
and everyone and everywhere
we will speak of it.
The mission stretched
our compassion and minds
and challenged our faith
in human nature.
It struck us with awe
in every cell of our being
as we saw the resiliency of our people
and as we strove together to answer
the unspoken question:
Where shall we place all the pain?
We were messengers and witnesses,
representatives with wishes to help
and we did and we will.

The diameter of the hugs
is the length of an Israeli flag
and the width of a tallit large enough
to enwrap every Israeli who hurts right now
and therefore every Israeli
with the comfort of our love
and with a strand of *techelet* turquoise
in the tzitzit to remind us all that
the morning will come and
we will say the *Sh'ma* someday with one voice.

*A reprise of Yehudah Amichai's poem "The Diameter of the Bomb"