

## **New Shul Prayer Readings**

### **The Great Heart of the World - Rebbe Nachman**

At one edge of the world there is a mountain  
And on that mountain a rock  
And from that rock issues the freshest purest water in the universe

Now on the other edge of the world  
Beats the great heart of the world  
It longs for the water, it yearns for the water,  
It sings a song of longing, but it can't have it

And every night, the great heart of the world  
Along with all the other hearts of the world  
Sings its song of longing, its song of yearning.

Now there is a true person of compassion  
Who walks the earth every evening  
And gathers up all these fragments of song  
And pulls them together into time  
And its just enough time for another day

And in this way, out of music  
Out beauty, out longing, out of yearning  
In this way, Out of an impossible dream,  
Truly its an impossible dream  
The world continues to exist

### **MARY OLIVER**

#### **The Summer Day**

Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear?  
Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean-  
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,  
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-  
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.  
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.  
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.  
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.

I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?

### **The Blind Musician (Baal Shem Tov)**

There was once a musician, well known for the great beauty of his music, who came to play before the king. One particular melody was so loved by the king that he ordered the musician to play it for him several times each day. And so it was. After a time, however, the musician began to weary of the song; no longer could he play it with the same passion and excitement as before. The king, to rekindle the musician's love for this favorite song, ordered that a man be brought in from the market, one who had never heard the song before. Seeing someone who had never heard him play, the musician's vigor was renewed, and he played the song in all its beauty. Thus the king ordered a new person brought each day. After some time, the king sought other counsel, for to find a new audience each day was not an easy matter. It was decided that the musician should be blinded, so that he never see a human form again. Now the blind musician sat before the king, and whenever the king sought to hear his favorite song he would simply say, "Here comes someone new, one who has never heard you play before!" And the musician would play with the greatest joy. The parable is not explained. (Baal Shem Tov, Word is Fire, 118)

### **Honi the Circle-Maker (Mishnah)**

They told Honi the Circle-Maker, "Pray that it may rain!" He prayed, but it did not rain. What did he do? He drew a circle and stood in the middle of it and declared, "Ruler of the Universe! Your children have turned to me, considering me as a member of your family. I swear by your great name, that I will not move from here until you show mercy to your children!" It started to drizzle. He said, "That is not what I asked for, but for rains such as will fill the cisterns, pits and caverns!" It started pouring violently. He said, "That is not what I asked for, but friendly rains of blessing and bounty!" The rain fell in proper moderation, until the people left the lower city of Jerusalem and went up to the Temple Mount because of the rain. They came and said to him, "Just as you prayed for the rains to come, now pray that they will go away." (Mishnah Taanit 3:8)

### **En La Mar (Zohar)**

There is a ladino folk song that begins,

*By the sea there is a tower  
in the tower there is a window  
in the window there is a young girl  
that the sailor loves.*

*If the sea was made of milk  
I would be a fisherman  
I would fish for my sorrows  
with words of love.*

it comes from a story in the Zohar.

A girl is in the tower and she is looking for her beloved, her lover. Her lover walks back and forth underneath the window of the tower looking for her, lifting his eyes to every side. Knowing that her lover hovers about her gate constantly, what does she do? She peaks and she hides. She opens the window in the tower, revealing her face, then swiftly withdraws, concealing herself. No one near him sees, only the lover, and his heart and his soul and everything within him flow out to her. Why does she make herself so unavailable? To awaken more love in him. You must become pursuers of your beloved. To awaken more love in him. (Zohar)

### **Wean Yourself (Rumi)**

Little by little, wean yourself.  
This is the gist of what I have to say.

From an embryo, whose nourishment comes in the blood  
move to an infant drinking milk,  
to a child on solid food,  
to a searcher after wisdom,  
to a hunter of more invisible game.

Think how it is to have a conversation with an embryo.  
You might say, "The world outside is vast and intricate.  
There are wheatfields and mountain passes,  
and orchards in bloom.

At night there are millions of galaxies, and in sunlight  
the beauty of friends dancing at a wedding."

You ask the embryo why he, or she, stays cooped up  
in the dark with eyes closed.

Listen to the answer.

*There is no "other world."  
I only know what I've experienced.  
You must be hallucinating.  
(Essential Rumi, 70)*

### **The Guest House (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're 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 whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.  
(Essential Rumi, 109)

### **The Tiger and the Strawberry (Buddhist Tradition)**

Buddha told a parable in a Sutra: A man traveling across a field encountered a tiger. He fled, the tiger after him. Coming to a precipice, he caught hold of the root of a wild vine and swung himself down over the edge. The tiger sniffed at him from above. Trembling, the man looked down to where, far below, another tiger was waiting to eat him. Only the vine sustained him. Two mice, one white and one black, little by little, started to gnaw away the vine. The man saw a luscious strawberry near him. Grasping the vine with one hand, he plucked the strawberry with the other. How sweet it tasted! (101 Zen Stories, pg. 38)

### **Today (Rumi)**

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty  
and frightened. Don't open the door to the study  
and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.

Let the beauty we love be what we do.  
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.  
(Essential Rumi, 36)

### **God Must Act (Meister Eckhart)**

God *must* act and pour himself into you the moment he finds you ready. Don't imagine that God can be compared to an earthly carpenter, who acts or doesn't act, as he wishes; who can will to do something or leave it undone, according to his pleasure. It is *not* that way with God: where and when God finds you ready, he *must* act and overflow into you, just as when the air is clear and pure, the sun must overflow into it and cannot refrain from doing that. (Meister Eckhart, *The World's Wisdom*, pg. 270)

### **We are the Mirror (Rumi)**

We are the mirror as well as the face in it.  
We are tasting the taste this minute  
of eternity. We are pain  
and what cures pain, both. We are  
the sweet cold water and the jar that pours.  
(Essential Rumi, 106)

### **The Empty Carriage**

There is a story told of Reb Elimelech of Lizensk. It was said of him that he had gone beyond his ego to the extent that he was no longer conscious of himself as a discrete entity. And because of this, he perpetually merged with the One of the universe. People would follow his carriage but Elimelech could never understand why. He would ask his coachman why all the people were trailing behind and the coachman would explain about how the people wanted to follow after wisdom and holiness. And then Elimelech would decide that they were doing the right thing by following after the carriage. And he would get out and join the people following the empty carriage.

### **Speak to Us of Children**

Your children are not your children.  
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.  
They come through you but not from you.

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts, for they have their own thoughts.  
You may house their bodies but not their souls, for their souls dwell in the house of  
tomorrow, which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.  
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.  
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.  
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,  
and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.  
Let our bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;  
for even as He loves the arrow that flies,  
so He loves also the bow that is stable.

(Kahlil Gibran)