

Alternative Selections from Mishkan T'filah

A Prayerbook Companion

1

Tell them I'm struggling to sing with angels
who hint at it in black words printed on old paper gold-edged by time.
Tell them I wrestle the mirror every morning.
Tell them I sit here invisible in space;
nose running, coffee cold & bitter.
Tell them I tell them everything
& everything is never enough.

Tell them I'm davening & voices rise up from within to startle children.
Tell them I walk off into the woods to sing.
Tell them I sing loudest next to waterfalls.
Tell them the books get fewer, words go deeper
some take months to get through.
Tell them there are moments when it's all perfect;
above & below, it's perfect,
even in moments in between where sparks in space
(terrible, beautiful sparks in space)
are merely metaphors for the void between
one pore & another.

David Meltzer, Adapted
(Page 3 in Mishkan T'filah)

2

Ever-living God, Your majesty is proclaimed
by the marvels of earth and sky.
Sun, moon and stars testify to the power of Your wisdom.
Day follows day in endless succession
and the years vanish from our sight,
but Your sovereignty endures.
Though all things pass,
let not Your glory depart from our lives.
Help us to become co-workers with You,
and fill our days with abiding worth.

Samuel Cohon, Revisted
(Page 7 in Mishkan T'filah)

3

When people come to you for help, do not turn them off with pious words, saying: "Have faith and take your troubles to God!" Act instead as if there were no God, as though there were only one person in all the world who could help— only yourself.

Martin Buber

(Page 13 in Mishkan T'filah, below the line)

4

Standing on the parted shores of history,
we still believe what we were taught
before ever we stood at Sinai:
that wherever we are, it is eternally Egypt
that there is a better place, a Promised Land;
that the winding way to that promise passes
through the wilderness
that there is no way to get from here to there
except by joining hands, marching
together.

Michael Walzer, Adapted

(Page 17 in Mishkan T'filah)

5

Teach me, O God, a blessing, a prayer
on the mystery of a withered leaf,
on ripened fruit so fair,
on the freedom to see, to sense,
to breathe, to know, to hope, to despair.
Teach my lips a blessing, a hymn of praise,
as each morning and night
You renew Your days,
lest my day today be as the one before;
lest routine set my ways.

Leah Goldberg, Translated by Pnina Peli

(Page 21 in Mishkan T'filah)

6

May we find peace with those we love,
growing together over time.
May we be at peace with ourselves
and with the labors that fill our days.
May we fashion peace in our world
with wisdom and gentle patience.

Blessed are You, Adonai, who blesses our people Israel with peace.

Judith Z. Abrams
(Page 97 in Mishkan T'filah)

7

Lend us the wit, O God, to speak the lean and simple word;
give us the strength to speak the found word, the meant word;
grant us the humility to speak the friendly word, the answering word.
And oh, make us sensitive, God
sensitive to the sound of the words which others speak —
sensitive to the sound of the words — and to the silences between.

Sheldon Blank
(Page 101 in Mishkan T'filah)

8

Entrances to holiness are everywhere.
The possibility of ascent is all the time,
even at unlikely times and through unlikely places.
There is no place on earth without the Presence.

Lawrence Kushner
(Page 145 in Mishkan T'filah)

9

Days pass and the years vanish, and we walk sightless among miracles.
God, fill our eyes with seeing and our minds with knowing;
let there be moments when Your Presence, like lightning,
illuminates the darkness in which we walk.
Help us to see, wherever we gaze, that the bush burns unconsumed.
And we, clay touched by God, will reach out for holiness, and exclaim in wonder:
How filled with awe is this place, and we did not know it!

Blessed is the Eternal One, the Holy God

Chaim Stern
(Page 171 in Mishkan T'filah)

10

Whoever wrapped in a tallit in one's youth will never forget:
taking it out of the soft sack, opening the folded tallit,
spreading it, kissing the border along its length (sometimes embroidered
and sometimes embossed). Afterwards, a great sweep over the head
like the heavens, like a huppah, like a parachute. Afterwards, folding it
around one's head as if playing hide and seek, and then wrapping
the body in it, tight tight, letting it fold you like a cocoon
and then opening it like wings for flying.
And why are there stripes and not black-white squares
like a chessboard? Because squares are finite without hope
and stripes come from infinity and go on to infinity
like the runways at the airport
so that angels may land and take off.
When you wrap yourself in a tallit you cannot forget
coming out of a swimming pool or the sea
and being wrapped in a great towel and casting it
over one's head and wrapping in it, tight tight
and shivering a little and laughing and — blessing.

Yehuda Amichai
(Page 191 in Mishkan T'filah)

11

May the One whose spirit is with us in every righteous deed,
be with all who work for the good of humanity
and bear the burdens of others,
and who give bread to the hungry,
who clothe the naked,
and take the friendless into their homes.
May the work their hands endure,
and may the seed they sow bring abundant harvest.

Chaim Stern, Adapted
(Page 193 in Mishkan T'filah)

12

Six Torah episodes are to be remembered each day, to refine our direction:
Y'tziat Mitzrayim: Recall the Exodus from Egypt – depart from whatever enslaves.
Amalek: Recall Amalek who attacked from behind – be on guard against evil.
Maamad Har Sinai: Recall standing at Sinai – make Torah part of your daily life.
Maaseh Eigel HaZahav: Recall the Golden Calf – keep material desires in check and be wary of heresy.
Korach: Recall Korach's rebellion – prevent ego from misleading and destroying your way.
Shabbat: Recall the first gift, Shabbat – welcome Shabbat holiness each week.

Adapted from a Sephardic siddur
(Page 205 in Mishkan T'filah, below the line)

13

For our teachers and their students,
and the students of the students,
we ask for peace and lovingkindness,
and let us say, Amen.

And for those who study Torah
here and everywhere,

may they be blessed with all they need,
and let us say, Amen.

We ask for peace and lovingkindness,
and let us say, Amen.

Debbie Friedman
(Page 209 in Mishkan Tefilah)

14

As soon as, in accordance with Jewish teaching, your lives have been touched by aspiration, all your windows are thrown open and the light of infinite hope enters. Then the community as a whole demands your help and you dare not say, “why bother?”....Let us consider well, in the light of religion, what are the things worth bothering about. Perhaps we shall find ourselves bothering about mere trivialities – indulging in fears, which have no foundation now and never will have any reality. Perhaps we are wasting our opportunities altogether or using them in a futile way. Let us pray for guidance, and as we pray let us remember that when all the rubbish is pushed to one side, there are many things which we shall have to bother about, which concern us immensely because they concern the well-being of the community as a whole... In spite of our absurd inadequacy, in spite of all our weaknesses, [we can] affect by our lives, the life of humanity in its progress towards God.

Lily Montagu
(Page 211 in Mishkan T'filah)

15

You have my attention: which is
a tenderness, beyond what I may say. And I have
Your constancy to something beyond myself.
The force of Your commitment
charges us – we live in the sweep of it, taking courage
one for the other.

Denise Levertov, Adapted
(Page 225 in Mishkan T'filah)

16

What makes a fire burn
is space between the logs,
a breathing space.
Too much of a good thing,
too many logs
packed in too tight
can douse the flames
almost as surely
as a pail of water would.

So building fires
requires attention
to the spaces in between,
as much as to the wood.

When we are able to build
open spaces
in the same way we have learned
to pile on the logs,
then we can come to see how
it is fuel, and absence of fuel
together, that make the fire possible.

We only need to lay a log
lightly from time to time.
A fire grows
simply because the space is there,
with openings in which the flame
that knows just how to it wants to
burn
can find its way.

Judy Brown
(Page 225 in Mishkan T'filah)

17

Rise and open the door that is shut.

Solomon Ibn Gabirol
(Page 225 in Mishkan T'filah)

18

In the beginning, even then,
a new light was sown for the righteous;
a promise that Your light would become
the catalyst, first for Order
and then for Hope.

Author of language and light,
help us to use words as You have,
to cast light into dark waters
and draw out justice and truth.

Elyse Frishman
(Page 229 in Mishkan T'filah)

19

Once or twice in a lifetime,
a man or woman may choose
a radical leaving, having heard
Lech l'cha - Go forth.

God disturbs us toward our destiny
by hard events and by freedom's now urgent voice
which explode and confirm who we are.

We don't like leaving,
but God loves becoming.

Norman Hirsh
(Page 231 in Mishkan T'filah)

20

If we can hear the words from Sinai
then love will flow from us;
and we shall serve all that is holy
with all our intellect and all our passion
and all our life.

If we can serve all that is holy,
we shall be doing all that humans can
to help the rains to flow,
the grasses to be green,
the grains to be golden like the sun,
and the rivers to be filled with life once more.
All the children of God shall eat
and there will be enough.

But if we turn from Sinai's words
and serve only what is common and profane,
making gods of our own comfort or power,
then the holiness of life will contract for us;
our world will grow inhospitable.

Let us therefore lace these words
into our passion and our intellect,
and bind them as a sign upon our hands and eyes.
Let us write them in *mezuzot* upon our doors,
and teach them to our children.

Let us honor the generations that came before us,
keeping the promise for those yet to be.

Richard Levy
(Page 235 in Mishkan T'filah)

21

If people fall, can they not also rise?
If they break away, can they not return?
The stork in the sky knows when to migrate,
the dove and the swallow know the season of return.
What human instinct knows the time to turn back?
What cue sparks the conscience of the soul?
We pray to sense this day anew,
attuned to the call of sacred living.

Elyse Frishman, Based on Jeremiah 8:4, 7
(Page 237 in Mishkan T'filah)

22

And what is my life span?
I'm like a man gone out of Egypt;
the Red Sea parts, I cross on dry land,
two walls of water; on my right and on my left
Pharaoh's army and his horsemen behind me.
Before me the desert,
perhaps the Promised Land, too.
That is my life span.

Yehuda Amichai
(Page 241 in Mishkan T'filah)

23

The good in us will win,
over all the wickedness, over all the wrongs we have done.
We will look back at the pages of written history, and be amazed,
and then we will laugh and sing,
and the good that is in us, children in their cradles, will have won.

Our hearts beat with certainty
that there is a day and an hour, and a mountain called Zion,
and that all of the sufferings will gather there and become song,
ringing out into every corner of the earth, from end to end,
and the nations will hear it,
and like the caravans in the desert will all to that morning throng.

Hugh Nissenson, Adapted
(Page 241 in Mishkan T'filah)

24

Prayer invites
God's presence to suffuse our spirits,
God's will to prevail in our lives.

Prayer may not bring water to parched fields,
nor mend a broken bridge,
nor rebuild a ruined city.

But prayer can water an arid soul,
mend a broken heart,
rebuild a weakened will.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, Adapted
(Page 243 in Mishkan T'filah)

25

On this holy Shabbat,
may we draw nearer
to life, to peace and to joy.

May we find true rest,
holiness in our deeds,
worth in our study of Torah.

Let us feed on the love of goodness,
let us drink from the love of goodness,
restrain our thirst for excess,
and cleanse our hearts to serve life well.

On this holy Shabbat,
may we draw nearer
in life, in peace and in joy.

Richard Levy, Adapted
(Page 255 in Mishkan T'filah)

26

How welcome on the mountain are the footsteps of the herald,
announcing peace, proclaiming deliverance.

Baruch atah, Adonai, oseh hashalom.

Isaiah 52:7

(Page 359 in Mishkan T'filah)