

When we reach 005

I AM WHAT I AM

By Susanne Batzdorff

I do not visualize G'd
In royal robes, seated
Upon a throne. That image
Resembles human kings and princes.

I do not think we ought to
Create G'd in our own image,
with human features, human foibles,
A being such as we might meet
On a mountain trail,
Or on a bus or train.
Nor do I relate very well
To the concept of a belligerent G'd,
Angry and jealous,
Hungry for praise or prayer,
Disappointed if we don't flatter
Or fawn upon Him,

I seek a G'd that does not resemble people,
A G'd that is stillness, power,
Love, compassion, concern.
I don't expect G'd to show me His face.
People have faces, not G'd.

G'd cannot speak to me; he has
No human voice. But I sense G'd sometimes
In the silence, the warmth, the joy,
G'd speaks to me in the still, small voice within.
He is in my every heartbeat or breath,
In the tear, in anguish, in laughter.

G'd is neither you nor I,
Nor looks like you or me.
When we have grasped this truth,
We need no longer worry
About calling G'd "He" or "She."

For G'd is faceless, soundless
And quite beyond our poor,
Puny power to define Him,
Beyond imagination on the human scale.
Yes, we recognize this. And yet
There are times when we simply must
Talk to G'd and beg Him to answer.

When we reach 010

SHECHINA, M'KOR CHAYENU

[line in Hebrew]

Shechini, Source of our lives, hear our plea - spare us, have compassion upon us.

[line in Hebrew]

Motherly Presence, Source of our lives, keep us in your care, for we are your sons and daughters.

[line in Hebrew]

Holy Presence, Source of our lives, teach us to know our limits.

[line in Hebrew]

Gentle Presence, Source of our lives, guide us in pleasant ways.

[line in Hebrew]

Guiding Presence, Source of our lives, teach us mercy and justice.

[line in Hebrew]

Nuturing Presence, Source of our lives, support those who struggle for peace and justice.

[line in Hebrew]

Compassionate Presence, Source of our lives, turn our lamentation to exultation and our sorrow to joy.

[line in Hebrew]

Caring Presence, Source of our lives, bless our land and all the work of our hands.

[line in Hebrew]

Loving Presence, Source of our lives, assemble your people from the four corners of the world in their land.

[line in Hebrew]

Shechina, Source of our lives, build peace in Jerusalem, our Holy City.

When we reach 035

IT IS NEVER TOO LATE

by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis

The last word has not been spoken,
the last sentence has not been written,
the final verdict is not in.

It is never too late
to change my mind,
my direction,
to say no to the past
and yes to the future,
to offer remorse,
to ask and give forgiveness.

It is never too late
to start over again,
to feel again
to love again
to hope again....

When we reach 149

THESE ENDURE IN EVERY AGE

The transforming power of love,
The redeeming power of compassion,
The healing power of forgiveness,
These endure in every age.

The joy which comes from sharing,
The strength which comes from striving,
The nourishment which comes from beauty,
These endure in every age.

The sanctity of life,
The value of truth,
The primacy of justice,
These endure in every age.

The abiding worth of prayer,
The purifying promise of repentance,
The striving to know God's will,
These endure in every age.

Grant us, O God, amidst relentless change,
The wisdom to know and to cherish
These teachings which endure for all time.

When we reach 149

CREATION IS A KIND OF PRAYER

It is not you alone, or we, or those others who pray: all things pray, all things pour forth their soul.

The heavens pray, the earth prays, every creature and every living thing prays. In all life there is a longing. Creation itself is but a longing, a kind of prayer to the Almighty.

What are the clouds, the rising and setting of the sun, the soft radiance of the moon, and the gentleness of the night? What are the flashes of the human mind and the storms of the human heart?

They are all prayers - the outpouring of boundless longing for God.

Micha Joseph Berdichevski

When we reach 244

SHOFAR: BECAUSE IT'S IMPERFECT

by Rabbi Laura Metzger

The sounds of the shofar are odd, squawky, uneven. They are echoes of an ancient world.

We've made technological advances to improve virtually every area of human life. Yet we still use shofarot made as they always have been, from sheep or goat horns, minimally cleaned up, hollowed out, with a roughly cut mouthpiece.

Why hasn't someone made a better shofar? One that would tekiah with a pure and clear blast like a trumpet. That would shevarim to break your heart like a blues saxophone. That would teruah, vibrating like, well, like a vibraphone. Why not a better shofar? We could do it.

The bleating, blasting, burping shofar gives a most haunting sound. It's not pretty, no. But it stirs us, perhaps because it is imperfect, as are we.

When we reach 394

PURIFY OUR HEARTS

Every Jewish prayer is a small Yom Kippur. It challenges us to examine our hearts and thoughts. It demands that we ask ourselves - -

Have we been silent when we should have spoken out?

Have we been selfish when we should have been responsive to the needs of others?

Have we been thoughtless when we should have been sensitive?

Have we pursued that which is hollow when we should have reached for that which can hallow our life?

In this kind of prayer, we do not ask God to do our will. We accept the challenge to fulfill God's will. We confess our guilt and ask God for strength to purify ourselves.

Ernst Simon

When we reach 564

A PRAYER FOR PEACE

My we see the day when war and bloodshed cease, when a great peace will embrace the whole world. Then nation will not threaten nation, and humankind will not again know war. For all who live on earth shall realize we have not come into being to hate or to destroy. We have come into being to praise, to labor, and to love.

Compassionate God, bless the leaders of all nations with the power of compassion. Fulfill the promise conveyed in Scripture: "I will bring peace to the land, and you shall lie down and no one shall terrify you. I will rid the land of vicious beasts and it shall not be ravaged by war." "Let love and justice flow like a mighty stream. Let peace fill the earth as the waters fill the sea." And let us say: Amen.

When we reach 747

A PRAYER IN MEMORY OF THOSE WHO HAVE DIED IN THE WARS OF ISRAEL

By Uri Zvi Greenberg

Those who Live by their Virtue Will Say,

They were the chosen... They sang... Now their voices are silent.
The true sons of the race of David that fell with their sword in their hand
Simple and lovely like young David of the Shepherd Clan.
And they shall praise Thee, O Lord, from the dust they've returned to!
The dust Thou created them from is the dust of death.
This kind of dust whereof Thou createth primeval man.
The Temple Mount and the Rock -
From that dust they'll praise Thee... Immortal are they!
There is no truth, no glory but them.
And we, in this world, do live by their virtue.
And by their splendor we prosper.
Whoever looks unto their graves will ne'er be enslaved any longer.

When we reach 568

YIZKOR -- REMEMBRANCE
by Susanne Batzdorff

All my life
I've stored up memories
Of pleasures and pains,
Of rooms and houses,
Gardens and playgrounds,
Of people, yes, those
Have been the most vivid.

The board games we played
With Grandma,
Stale chocolate she would bestow on us
Before bedtime,
Her slow, measured steps
And labored breath,
And her words, "Go with God,"
Whenever we went out.

Memories are
What keeps them alive,
Those who have left us forever.
While memories live
In our hearts, in our minds,
Our loved ones are with us,
And every so often,
A gesture, a tone of voice,
A shrug of the shoulder,
A toss of the head
Recalls in an instant
The one who spoke,
Who gestured,
Who smiled like that.

We smile at the memory,
Not quite sure
Whether a tear might not be
More appropriate.

Death is a farewell, a good-bye,
But not quite, not yet.
While someone in this world
Remembers,
Death has not won the battle.

When we reach 804

FOOTNOTE TO A HIGH HOLY DAY PRAYER

By Ruth F. Brin

Like the rays of the late afternoon sun,
Slanting through the trees, shining on each leaf,
You shine upon us, Lord God,
And like the leaves, we reflect Your light.

I thank You with all my heart
For the presence of Your spirit, which is life.
I pray You not to withdraw from me,
I pray You not to depart from me, though I am unworthy,
I pray You let me pray to You.

How can I love You, who are afar off?
How can I know You, whose face I have not seen?
How can I approach You, when I am laden with guilt?

I can love some of Your creatures, and so love something of You.
I can know some of Your world, and so know something of You.

I can approach You with repentance and prayer and righteous deeds,
But I can do none of these. Lord God, without Your help.

Help me to love You and know You and pray to You
That this my existence may become a life,
A life that like a leaf in the afternoon sun
Reflects Your great and golden light.

When we reach 826

Life is a Journey
by Alvin Fine

Birth is a beginning and death a destination;
But life is a journey.
A going, a growing from stage to stage:
From childhood to maturity and youth to old age.

From innocence to awareness and ignorance to knowing;
From foolishness to discretion and then perhaps, to wisdom.
From weakness to strength or strength to weakness and often back again.
From health to sickness and back we pray, to health again.

From offense to forgiveness, from loneliness to love,
From joy to gratitude, from pain to compassion.
From grief to understanding, from fear to faith;
From defeat to defeat to defeat, until, looking backward or ahead:

We see that victory lies not at some high place along the way,
But in having made the journey, stage by stage, a sacred pilgrimage.
Birth is a beginning and death a destination;
But life is a journey, a sacred pilgrimage,
Made stage by stage...To life everlasting.