

## TORAH/STYLE

## Don't waste a single word or prayer

## Portion of the Week



**RABBI SHARYN HENRY**  
**RODEF SHALOM**  
**CONGREGATION**  
Yom Kippur

*Think that the letters of prayer are the garments of God. What a joy to be making a garment for the greatest of Rulers!*

— Baal Shem Tov

For the last few weeks, we have been watching a show on the public television station called "Word World." It's aimed at children younger than mine, but "there's nothing else on" (and we don't watch the news because I don't have the courage to explain the world to my children before my first cup of decaf) while we're getting ready for school, so ... "Word World" it is.

One of the things the animal characters do on this program is build words that then become the objects themselves. For example, if the character needs a pot in which to cook corn, she assembles the letters p-o-t and then a pot-shaped object appears that is made up of the letters. It's creative and entertaining.

This morning, after stumbling upon the quotation above from the Baal Shem Tov, I realized that prayer works in the same way. Just as the characters on "Word World" form objects from words, which are themselves a combination of discrete letters, our prayers, a combination of discrete words, become something else. For the Baal Shem

Tov, if we "do it right," our prayers become something else — a garment for God.

To imagine that God is "clothed" by our sincere prayers, this is a beautiful idea. But I would like to add on to the teaching by suggesting that prayer is really prayer when it becomes something else — action. Prayer is really prayer when it motivates us to do: to ask for forgiveness, to make changes in our behavior, to be more generous, to take up a worthy cause. We must not waste our precious time, we must not waste our words — when the words fly off the pages and spring us to action, then we have truly prayed.

The message of the Haftarah portion for Yom Kippur morning urges, in a similar manner, not to waste our fast: "Is this the fast I have chosen? A day of self-affliction? Bowing your head like a reed, and covering yourself with sackcloth and ashes? Is this what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Eternal? Is not this the fast I have chosen: to unlock the shackles of injustice, to loosen the ropes of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to tear every yoke apart. Surely it is to share your bread with the hungry, and to bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, never withdrawing yourself from your own kin." (from Isaiah 58)

This year, let us agree not to waste a single letter, word or prayer. May we arise from our prayer stronger, motivated and with a pure heart — and then go out to make a difference in the world.

G'mar Chatimah Tovah.

*(This column is a service of the Greater Pittsburgh Rabbinic Association.)*

## Pondering life's questions on Yom Kippur



**SUSAN**  
**JACOBS**

In the late 1980s, singer Edie Brickell and the New Bohemians produced a song, "What I am," that mocked the shallowness of American culture and our reluctance to be educated, thinking people.

"Philosophy, is the talk on a cereal box," sings Brickell in the 1988 release, "Religion, is a smile on a dog."

The implication is that empty aphorisms and superficial experiences have replaced profound ideas and beliefs.

The song continues: "Chuck me in the shallow water before I get too deep." In other words, "don't let me get confused by more complicated ideas."

The phenomenon that Brickell mocked in 1988 is even truer today. With a culture that is saturated by so-called reality television, flashy images and an emphasis on instant gratification, there is even less incentive to think deeply about life, or even to think at all.

The trouble is, no matter how deafening the sound on one's MP3 player, we can't shut out life's complications and complexities. Eventually the music stops and we are left alone with ourselves, wondering why things happen the way they do and what it all means.

For Jews, the High Holidays are an appropriate time to dip our toes into those deeper waters, to consider the fragility of life, the awesomeness of God and our responsibility to live ethical lives.

At the end of all of our searching, it is entirely possible, even likely, that we

will emerge with even more challenging questions, and fewer answers. And that is precisely the point.

We enter this season with the audacity to believe that our prayers can somehow affect our fortunes for the next year, but conversely, one of the themes of the High Holidays is that God's actions are beyond our comprehension.

A person who believes in God must wake up every morning and wonder why a merciful God would allow there to be so much pain in the world. The existence of evil is not proof that God is not there, but a challenge to humanity, both to grapple with the difficulty and to do our part to alleviate the world's injustices.

The High Holidays bring this dilemma into stark relief.

As we pray for good health, sustenance and peace, we simultaneously acknowledge that there is sickness, poverty and war in the world, and that while we personally may be safe, healthy and well-fed, there are others in the world who are suffering, and it is hard to understand why this is so.

By the end of Yom Kippur, when we triumphantly recite the Shema, we believe that we have done all that we can to be inscribed for a good year. But the doubts don't end there — Yom Kippur is not a once-in-a-lifetime event, but an annual phenomenon that keeps us religiously centered and aware of life's unanswerable questions.

By the day after Yom Kippur, it is tempting to set aside the big ideas and to go back to our sugar-coated comfortable lives. But if our prayers are to have an impact on the coming year, then we have an obligation to continue pondering life's difficulties.

*(Susan Jacobs can be reached at sjacobs@pittchron.com.)*

A powerful connection.

## JEWISH ASSOCIATION ON AGING

200 JHF Drive  
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

### Residential Services:

Charles M. Morris Nursing and Rehabilitation Center, Assisted Living at Weinberg Village, LHAS Arbor, Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Terrace

### Home and Community Services:

Council Care Adult Day Services, Anathan Club, Mollie's Meals, AgeWell\*, Sivitz Jewish Hospice, Centers for Rehabilitation

\* Collaboration of JF&CS, JAA and JCC, providing a central resource to services for older adults, their families and caregivers.

## ESTABLISH A PERPETUAL MEMORIAL OR HAVE KADDISH SAID FOR A LOVED ONE

Call Jennifer McCay at 412-521-1094

### MORNING SERVICES - 9:30 A.M.

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 23:** CHARLES BAHM, ABBA MAYER BERNEY, ROSE BERNSTEIN, MARK BROOK, FANNIE H. CHAPMAN, BERT COHEN, JOSEPH H. COHEN, LOTTIE COHEN, DAVID COON, ANNA DANIELS, ISAAC DAVIDSON, NUTTE PESACH DEAKTOR, MOLLY FELDSTEIN, MYRA FINKELSTEIN, DAVID GOLDENSON, HERMAN GOLDMAN, REBECCA GOLDMAN, JACOB GORDON, BEN GREEN, LENA HARRIS, JULIA HARTSTEIN, BEN A. HERMAN, BERNARD HODDESON, JACOB JACOBS, SAMUEL JENKINS, JOSEPH KALSTONE, JACOB KLEIN, ISE KRAMER, ROSA LEVINE, ISADORE PVT LEVY, BENJAMIN LIPSITZ, FRIEDA MILLER, BENJAMIN MOSOFF, BELLA RUBIN, FLORENCE RUBIN, HARRY H. SCHAFER, SAM SELTZER, ABRAHAM SHAPIRO, ISADORE J. SHUKLANSKY, PESHA SIFF, HELEN LEE SIMON, JOSEPH M. SINGER, ESTHER LEAH SNYDER, TILLIE SOLOMON, ARNOLD SOMMER, JEAN SWIDELSKI, SHANA TOPAZ.

**MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 24:** KALMAN ADLER, SAMUEL BLOCK, MAX DANOVITZ, HYMAN J. DOBKIN, MAX DOBKIN, HARRY FINE, ELIZABETH FINEBERG, SAMUEL GOODMAN, HARRY M. HARRIS, HELEN HARTSTEIN, NAT HOPPER, BESSIE LEVY JACKSON, RUTH P. KAMIN, LEAH KANE, HERMAN LANG, HYMAN LAUFE, REBECCA LAZIER, MOLLIE LEVINE, ROSE LEVINE, MAX C. LEVY, SARAH LINKER, RUTH O. MARTIN, SAMUEL S. MERVIS, JOSEPH S. MILLER, MORRIS M. MINTZER, MORRIS NEIMAN, IDA OSGOOD, SAUL PERLMAN, ADOLPH PERLUS, IRVING LEONARD PODOLSKY, RACHEL RAPHAEL, RHEA HELFER ROSENTHAL, HENRIETTA ROTSTEIN, EVA SAMUELS, ESTELLE L. SCHAEFFER, ISAAC SHAER, MINNIE SHERMAN, SAMUEL SIEGAL, JOSEPH LEIB SINGER, NACHOMA SULKES, ALFRED SUPOWITZ, ALBERT A. WEINERMAN, REBECCA ZEFF.

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25:** MOLLIE BRAND AMSEL, SAMUEL J. ASKENASE, FRANK BERKMAN, ADOLPH BLATTNER, PVT. HYMAN BUNTMAN, RUTH HALTMAN CAPLAN, JACOB CUTLER, GERALD C. DAVIDSON, FRANK DELL, MIRIAM DOMB, MARY EDLIS, BESSE FRISHMAN, ANNA LEVENSON GOLDSTEIN, JENNIE M. GOODMAN, THEKLA ZIMMERN GORDON, BENJAMIN GUTTMAN, ABE LABINSKY, HARRY P. LETWIN, HARRY LEVENSON, ESTHER MANDALL, ISADORE MARGOLIS, SAMUEL MARYN, MAX MOSENSON, LEON PLOTKIN, JACOB E. RAFFEL, HARRY RATNER, RALPH REESE, SIMON M. ROSENTHAL, MORRIS SAXEN, JEANETTE SCHUTZMAN, HARRY SCHWARTZ, LEIA SHPINER, JACK SIMON, ANNA RUTH SPIEGEL, BERTHA STEIN, MORRIS TERNER, ANNA TRACHTENBERG, HARRY T. WEINER, REV. SAMUEL WIDOM, HENRY L. ZACKS, MARGARET SCHWARTZ ZEIDMAN.

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26:** KATIE ABRAMS, DAVID AUGENBLICK, DA BECKER, KE BERNEY, E.R. BLOOM, JOSEPH BOWYITZ, HARRY AARON BRAUN, FRED A. K. UNIKEL BREGMAN, LEAH BREMAN, DR. JACOB BRODIE, DORA BRODY, LORETTA BRODY, SADIE COLTON, MAX EPSTEIN, BESS R. ESCOTT, HERMOINE GOLDIE FELDSTEIN, JACK J. FELMAN, SARAH FINKELSTEIN, LAURA FLETCHER, ABRAHAM J. FRANKENSTEIN, BESSIE GLOSSE, LEANA M. HERMAN, DOROTHY EVELYN KUNTZ, SARAH LEFTON, NACHMAN LEVENSON, HAROLD MARTIN LEWIS, LOTTIE MIRIAM MAR, BEN MARKOWITZ, RABBI MOSES AARON MARKOWITZ, CELIA MILLER, MOLLIE OSGOOD, DR. GERALD L. OSTFIELD, ELIZABETH L. OSTFIELD, MD, ELEANOR W. PETTLER, SRAEL RAPHAEL, SIDNEY RECHT, CLARENCE ROSENBERG, MAURICE ROSENBERG, CLARA ROSENFELD, BENJAMIN ROSENSHINE, JENNIE ROSENTHAL, BESSIE RUTH ROTH, ROSE RUBINSTEIN, ANNA SELIGSOHN, JOEL ROBERT SEMENOW, ANN B. SHAPIRO, CHARLES C. SHEINBERG, MARTIN HENRY SINGER, ALBERT SOLOMON, MARY DOROTHY SPECTOR, WOLF VICTORIUS, LENA WEISER, HENRY ZISKIND.

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27:** HERTZEL J. AMDUR, BEATRICE ASH, JACOB BENNETT, MAX M. BERGAD, SAMUEL BERNEY, JOEL CAPLAN, JOEL H. CAPLAN, MORRIS R. COHN, MAX DINE, HARRY DORSEY, NETTIE STEINACHER EISEMAN, SAMUEL FAIR, ETHEL FINESMAN, MINNIE FISCHMAN, JACOB FLORMAN, SAMUEL FRIEDMAN, NORMAN FROMMER, HYMAN GANELIN, BETTE B. GLASER, PHILIP R. GOLDBERG, GERTRUDE GOODMAN, SADIE GREKIN, BESS HANSELL, DAVID N. HIMELBLAU, JOSEPH M. JACKSON, HARRIET KAHN, MILLIE KANOWITZ, MORRIS KEMPLER, BERTHA KIRSHENBAUM, NORTON KRAMER, RABBI WOLF LEVINE, PVT. ISADORE LEVY, SAM MANDEL, ERNEST MANNHEIMER, KATIE LEVINE MARCUS, ANNA MAZER, ROSE MERMELESTEIN, JACOB MEYERS, EVA MOSENSON, SADIE MOSKOVITZ, BELLA OLINSKY, FRANK RUBIN, MORRIS SACKS, BESSIE SAMUELS, JOSEPH SAMUELS, LEON SHAPIRO, NATHAN L. SHARON, HUGO SIDENBERG, CHAYA SILKEN, ESTHER SIMON, EVA M. SIMON, HYMAN SMALL, ROSE SNYDER, MORRIS SPANER, MAX STAMAN, ANNA STEIN, FRED G. STEIN, NATHANIEL STEINBERG, REBECCA BERNICE STOLACK, MORRIS WEISBERG, CHARLES C. WEISBURG, BARBARA RUTH WEISENBERG, JOSEPH WEISMAN, LOUIS WESOKY, LOUIS AARON WHITE, MILTON WIRTZMAN, FANNIE ZECHER.

**FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 28:** ITTA ABROMOVITZ, ANNA GOLANTY AMDUR, ESTHER ARONOVITZ, ALLAN H. BARNETT, JACK BERGAD, JOSEPH H. BLOOM, CECILIA WEIS BLUESTONE, MARION BONWIT, FRANCES SYLVIA BROWN, ALBERT P. BURDMAN, ANNE COHEN, ANN COLKER, SOPHIA HARRISON COOPER, SAMUEL DEAKTOR, RACHEL CADISON DUNN, JULIA EHRICH, LOUIS ELKIND, JACOB FARBERMAN, EVA GALANTY, SARAH HALPERN, MINNA WEISSMAN HARRIS, ARTHUR S. HARRISON, NATHAN JABLO, LEON KELLER, ANNETTE KLEE, CHARLES KOVACS, BERNARD S. LABBIE, ROSE LAUAR, FANNIE LIEBERMAN LAWRENCE, LT. RALPH L. LEVIN, DANIEL LEONARD MANDELBLATT, MARY MAZER, SADIE MOLDOVAN, JOSEPH MOSKOVITZ, IDA ESTHER RAMBACH, SAMUEL H. RICHMAN, MYER RUTTENBERG, LOUIS M. SACHS, AARON JOEL SCHWARTZ, JOEL AARON SCHWARTZ, ROSE SHUSET, JACOB SMALL, REGINA SPATZ, MAX TANENBAUM, BERTHA TISCHLER, JULIA WEINSTEIN, LAIB WOLINSKY, AZREAL WOLK, LILLIAN F. WOLK.

**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29:** NOAH W. AMDUR, LOUIS APTER, SYLVIA AUSLANDER, LEO BERKOWITZ, JEANNETTE COHEN, LOUIS COOPER, GILBERT B. CRAMER, IRIS CUMMINGS, RACHEL LEAH DAVIS, MINNIE ECKERT, MURRAY FEILER, ROSE FISHER, TILLIE FRIEDMAN, WILLIAM GOLDSTONE, FANNIE GREENBERGER, IDA R. HARRIS, JACK HIRSCH, JOSEPH LOUIS HOCHMAN, MAURICE E. HOLZMAN, ROSE ISAACSON, ANNA R. JACOBSON, JULIUS KIMBALL, SOPHIA KORSUNSKY, ALEX KRAMER, REBECCA LEBOVITZ, SIMON LEFKOWITZ, ABRAHAM LOBEL, KATIE MARCOVSKY, SAM NADLER, ABRAHAM NUSBAUM, DAVID NATHANIEL RACUSIN, WALTER JACOB ROBINS, GERTRUDE SAFIER, JO ELLEN SAX, MOLLIE SHAPIRA, MYER SHAPIRO, BEN SHRAGER, HARRY Z. (DR) SILVERMAN, HARRY Z. SILVERMAN, M.D., LESTER H. STRAUSS, MURRAY ALAN TALENFELD, ANNIE TAUBER, JENNY WEIN, ABRAHAM WELTMAN, CELIA ZUCKERMAN.