

Prayers for Israel

Note: the following was compiled by the Union for Reform Judaism's Department of Worship, Music and Religious Living. If you have questions about how they may be used, please contact Rabbi Sue Ann Wasserman, SWasserman@urj.org

The State of Israel has a special hold on our soul. Israel is the very essence of our being. The Torah that spells out for us a way of life and a religious destiny also binds us to a land, and Jewish life cannot be sustained without Israel at its core.... Israel's pain is our pain; her safety, our gladness....

(Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie, President, Union for Reform Judaism)

To give voice to our communal sorrow and hopes for peace we include for your use *Prayers for the State of Israel, Prayers On Behalf of Israeli Defense Forces, Prayers for Peace, Prayers in Song, and Modern Readings and Poems on Israel*. They may be added to your Shabbat worship, read at home or used to create a "liturgy" for a communal gathering in support of Israel.

T'filot L'Midnat Yisrael—Prayers for the State of Israel

- ❖ May the One who blessed our ancestors watch over and protect the Israeli soldiers taken hostage in recent days, Gilad Shalit, Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev, and all others who are deprived of the blessing of freedom.

May God have compassion on them and grant them a speedy and safe return to their homes. May God save them and bring them from captivity to freedom, from enslavement to redemption, from darkness to light.

May the Holy One of Blessing grant them and all those wounded in the current violence a complete healing, a healing of spirit and a healing of body, strengthening their hearts, fortifying their courage, and soon letting them know joy and gladness.

May God bring peace to the land of Israel and all lands, and soon bring about the day when nation shall not lift up sword against nation nor learn war anymore, and let us say Amen.

(Adapted by Rabbis Linda Bertenthal and Alan Henkin from a prayer by Shlomo Moshe Amar, Chief Rabbi of Israel.)

- ❖ As we gather this Shabbat, each in our own community, we will be united in our grief and pain over the violence this week in Israel. We weep, as our mother Rachel wept: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping! Rachel is weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for them, for they are no more. (Jeremiah 31:15)

To our prayers this Shabbat we add a prayer for *Medinat Yisrael*—the State of Israel—and for her people, our brothers and sisters.

From Psalm 122:6-9

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; may those who love you prosper! Let there be peace in your homes, safety within your borders. For the sake of my people, my friends, I pray you find peace. For the sake of the house of the Eternal our God, I will seek your good.

Eternal God, grant blessing to the State of Israel, created to fulfill an age-old dream and to be a haven for the oppressed. Protect her people with Your grace, shelter them with Your peace, and grant them deliverance from the violence that surrounds them. May they live in harmony with one another and with their neighbors. May the bonds of faith and fate that unite the Jews of all lands be a source of strength to Israel and us all.

❖ We pray for Israel,
Both the mystic ideal of our [ancestors'] dreams,
And the living miracle, here and now,
Built of heart, muscle, and steel.

May she endure and guard her soul,
Surviving the relentless, age-old hatreds,
The cynical concealment of diplomatic deceit,
And the rumblings that warn of war.

May Israel continue to be the temple that magnetizes
The loving eyes of Jews in all corners:

The Jew in a land of affluence and relative peace,
Who forgets the glory and pain of his being,
And the Jew in a land of oppression whose bloodied fist
Beats in anguish and pride
Against the cage of his enslavement.

May Israel yet embrace her homeless, her own,
And bind the ingathered into one people.

May those who yearn for a society built on human concern
Find the vision of the prophets realized in her.
May her readiness to defend
Never diminish her search for peace.

May we always dare to hope
That in our day the antagonisms will end,
That all the displaced, Arab and Jew, will be rooted again,
That within Israel and across her borders
All God's children will touch hands in peace.

(Nahum Waldman, *Likrat Shabbat: Worship, Study, and Song*, The Prayer Book Press of Media Judaica, 1981)

- ❖ Protector and Redeemer of Israel, bless Thou the State of Israel which, marks the dawn of our deliverance. Shield it beneath the wings of Thy love; spread over it Thy canopy of peace; send Thy light and Thy truth to its leaders, officers, and counselors, and direct them with Thy good counsel.

O God, strengthen the defenders of our Holy Land; grant them salvation and crown them with victory. Establish peace in the Land, and everlasting joy for its inhabitants.
(excerpted from *Ha-Siddur Ha-Shalem*, Phillip Birnbaum, Hebrew Publishing Company, 1949)

- ❖ Rock and Champion of Israel, please bless the State of Israel, first fruit of the flourishing of our redemption. Guard it in the abundance of Your love. Spread over it the shelter of Your peace. Send forth Your light and truth to those who lead and judge it and to those who hold elective office. Establish in them, through Your presence, wise counsel that they might walk in the way of justice, freedom, and integrity. Strengthen the hands of those who guard our Holy Land. Let them inherit salvation and life. And give peace to the Land and perpetual joy to its inhabitants. Appoint for a blessing all our kindred of the House of Israel in all the lands of their dispersion. Plant in their hearts a love of Zion. And for all our people everywhere, may God be with them, and may they have the opportunity to go up to the Land. Cause Your spirit's influence to emanate upon all dwellers of our Holy Land. Remove from their midst hatred and enmity, jealousy and wickedness. Plant in their hearts love and kinship, peace and friendship. And soon fulfill the vision of Your prophet: "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation. Let them no longer learn ways of war." And let us say, Amen.

(*Kol Haneshamah: Shabbat Vechagim*, Reconstructionist Press, 1994)

- ❖ We pray for the Land of Israel and all its people. May its borders know peace, its inhabitants tranquillity. And may the bonds of faith and fate that unite the Jews of all lands be a source of strength to Israel and to us all. God of all lands and ages, answer our constant prayer with a Zion once more aglow with light for us and all the world, and let us say, Amen.

(*Gates of Repentance*, CCAR, 1978)

- ❖ Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.
Blessed is the flame that burns in the heart's secret places.

Blessed is the heart with strength to stop its beating for honor's sake.

Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.

Israel, born in pain, has lived in peril. We pray for the welfare of her people and their land. May they dwell in safety and live in peace and friendship with their neighbors.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:

*may those who love you prosper!
Let there be peace in your homes,
safety within your borders.
For the sake of my people,
My friends, I pray you find peace.
For the sake of the House of the
Lord our God, I will seek your
good.*

(Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayer Book, CCAR, 1975, pp 412–414)

- ❖ We ask Your blessing, O God, for the State of Israel,
For the Land of Israel, and for the people of Israel.

Bless those who defend the Land and protect its people.
Bless its leaders with wisdom, courage, and dedication.

May they be resolute in the face of challenge,
And unwavering in the pursuit of peace.

May Israel be a beacon of hope for the oppressed,
A source of inspiration to all who are free.

Fulfill in our day the ancient promise,
“Zion shall be redeemed through justice,
And its inhabitants through righteousness.” Amen.

(Siddur Chadash, The Prayer Book Press, Media Judaica, New York and Bridgeport, CT)

- ❖ May 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 [humanity] 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.

On Behalf of Israeli Defense Forces

- ❖ May the One who blessed our fighters Joshua, David and Judah, Deborah, Yael and Judith, those who has been called to active service. May it be Your will, *Adonai* our God, that they be guided safely and protected against every enemy and harm. May their path be successful and guard their going out and coming in to life and peace now and forever. And let us say: Amen.

(Adapted from the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism's siddur)

- ❖ Bless the soldiers of Israel's Defense Forces, and every one who stands guard in order to protect our people. May the Holy One, Blessed be God, protect them and save them from all troubles and afflictions, from all sickness and injury and send blessing to all their endeavors. May the words of the Prophets come to fruition through them "and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. And each one shall sit under the vine and under the fig tree and none shall be afraid," and let us say, Amen.

Prayers for Peace

- ❖ Grant us peace, Your most precious gift, O Eternal Source of peace, and give us the will to proclaim its message to all the peoples of the earth. Bless our country, that it may always be a stronghold of peace, and its advocate among the nations. May contentment reign within its border, health and happiness within its homes. Strengthen the bonds of friendship among the inhabitants of all lands, and may the love of Your name hallow every home and every heart. Blessed is the Eternal God, the Source of peace.

(Gates of Prayer)

- ❖ May it be Your will, *Adonai* our God and God of our ancestors, that You abolish all wars and bloodshed from this world and extend a great and wonderful peace in the world. Nations shall not lift up the sword against one another, neither shall they learn to make war any more. May all the inhabitants of this universe acknowledge the one great truth; that we have not come into this world for friction and dissension, nor enmity and jealousy and vexation and bloodshed. We have come into the world solely that we might know You, eternally blessed One.

And therefore have mercy upon us that through us the written word will become a reality. "And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down untroubled by anyone; I will give the land respite from vicious beasts and no sword shall cross your land." (Lev. 26:6) "But let justice well up like water, righteousness like an

unfailing stream." (Amos.5:24) "For the land shall be filled with devotion to
Adonai as water covers the sea." (Is. 11:9)

(Based on the prayer of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, from Siddur Ha'avodah
She'ba'lev, Service of the Heart.)

❖ Source of peace, Sovereign of peace,
Establish peace among Your people, Israel.
And let there be an ever-increasing peace among all peoples.
May there be no more hatred, rancor, strife or conquest
Between one human being and another.
Let there be only love and a great peace among us,
So that each one of us may know the love of the other.
Until we are able to come and gather together-every person with another.
So that we may speak - one to the other.
So that we may explain - one to the other - Your truth.
God - You are peace, and from You comes peace.
Source of peace, bless us with peace.
Amen.

(Based on the prayer of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, from Siddur Ha'avodah
She'ba'lev, Service of the Heart)

❖ **"If God Would Go On a Sick Leave: A Poem of Peace"**

Nowhere is there more prayer.
The Nuns at the Holy Sepulchre.
The faithful at Al Aqsa Mosque.
The worshippers at the Wall.
The call to prayer at dawn and dusk
Warbling from the citadels.
The church bells,
The Persian trills,
The passion spilled over texts
From every major/minor religious sect.

Nowhere is there more prayer than Jerusalem,
Thanks be to God, *Hamdilala*, *Baruch Hashem*.
And yet,
I'm starting to think that it's You and not them,
God, what's the point of prayer?

If there's nowhere where
There's more prayer,
And terror reigns
Then, Who's to blame?

If suddenly, without a whisper goodbye,
Jesus, Allah, *Adonai*,
The three men they admire most
All took the last train for the coast,

And the Moslems got up from their knees
And the Christians put down their rosaries
And the Jews stayed their hands from kissing
Their *mezuzahs*,
And everyone looked up,
And realized something's missing...

God is missing.
Stop the praying! No One's there,
They'd arrange a party to search everywhere.
They'd look for God
But there'd be no Presence
In Holy Books or stars and crescents
Or steeples and crosses.
People'd be at a loss,
Is He ever coming back?

They'd be so distraught,
Their searching for naught,
There'd be nothing on high
So they'd turn to on low,
There'd be nothing above
So they'd turn to below,
And they'd finally see there,
In the face of the other,
A semblance of sister,
The eyes of a brother,
They'd turn and they'd lean
Upon one another.

You see, every group can't believe that they're the ones chosen,
Every group can't believe that the Holy Land's owed them,
Sometimes faith in You, God,
Builds insurmountable walls,
And everyone falls.
Everyone falls.

How wise are the secularists for whom the dead aren't martyred
But, quite plainly, murdered...

This might sound like an absurd,
ungodly thing to say,
A truly heretical supplication to pray,
(I say this only out of the deepest respect)
But if for a few days, God, You'd just give it a rest,
If You'd take a sick leave and just go away

And let Israel work this out without You in the way,

God, for that kind of peace,
You're a small price to pay.

(Rabbi Zoë Klein)

❖ *"Café Moment"*

One of the bombings in Jerusalem
took place in Café Capit,
and one of the bombings
took place in Café Moment.
I have only lived in Israel for two years,
what do I know of the land?
I didn't pay taxes and have a full-time job.
I was a student.
What right do I have to think of it as home?
And yet, I remember Café Capit.
I always ordered *te im nana*,
tea with sweet sweet mint,
with brown sugar,
sometimes I would meet a friend
and we would share a giant salad
with fresh olives
and crumbled goat cheese,
and sit under the umbrellas on the terrace
with our bookbags at our sides
watching the passersby on the street.
I remember the ivy and the perfume of the rosemary garden
and the hurried waitress with her black apron
and the time we all went there after Shabbat had ended
and on the sidewalk a guitarist strummed out a sweet melody
and we all ate cheese toast with zhatar and
felt at peace.
And I know I wasn't born in Israel,
only spent a fraction of my life there
although the majority of my life I spend thinking about her,
what right do I have to think of it as home?
And yet, I remember Café Moment,
with its giant ice cream sundaes
and *chocolat cham im ketzefet*,
hot chocolate with whipped cream,
grilled vegetable platters,
sometimes I would meet friends there
and sit under the umbrellas on the terrace
or if it was chilly,
just inside behind the plate glass,
studying or gossiping.
I remember the amber light
and the woman with the brown shirt behind the cash register
and the cobblestones just outside,

and the souvenir shop across the street,
and I remember the evening I sat there with Jonathan
and he excused himself
and went to the corner
to call my father from a payphone
to ask him for permission
to ask my hand in marriage,
and how he came back to our little round table smiling,
but not revealing what little conspiracy he
had just planned.
I know I haven't made *aliyah*
and I've lived in Israel only two years
but I love her
Yerushalayim Shel Zahav,
Jerusalem of Gold,
and I pray for her healing,
and the healing of all her children
sipping their tea and tapping their spoons
in her cafés,
I pray for the healing of all her wounded,
just as we pray for
all those in our community who are in need
of healing...

(Rabbi Zoë Klein)

PRAYERS IN SONG

“Shir Hamaalot”

Doug Cotler, Jeff Marx, and Stephen Cotler
(copyright 1994 Wail and Blubber Music, Woodland Hills, CA. From *Doug Cotler Songbook 2*
available at www.dougcotler.com)

There's a song from long ago,
Composed of joy and tears.
It calls me to a place I know,
The hope of 2,000 years.

I'll see the dream
That blows in sand,
And bathe in streams
Of stories of our Promised Land.

Shir Hamaalot
My heart and eyes turn eastward
And I will walk the land my people walked
And sing our song again.

Oh hills of gold
I'll touch the wall.
In stones worn old,

I'll place a blessing for us all.
May children grow.
May struggles cease.
May Israel glow,
And light the way that leads to peace.

Shir Hamaalot
My heart and eyes turn eastward
My soul and song ascend
And I will walk the Land my people walked
And sing our song again.

Shiru la'Adonai - Sing unto God

-Psalm 96:1

Haporeis Sukkat Shalom

Baruch atah, atah Adonai haporeis sukkat shalom
Shalom aleinu v'al kol amo yisrael
(repeat)

V'al yisrushalayim v'al kol amo
V'al yirushalayim shalom.
(repeat)

(Cantor Jeff Klepper)

Peace Will Come

Od yavo shalom aleinu, od yavo shalom aleinu, od yavo shalom aleinu, v'al kulam.
Salaam, aleinu v'al kol haolam, salaam, salaam.
Salaam, aleinu v'al kol haolam, salaam, salaam.
Od yavo shalom aleinu, od yavo shalom aleinu, od yavo shalom aleinu, v'al kulam.

Peace will come to us, peace will yet come to us,
Peace will come to us, and everyone.
Salaam, peace for us and for all the world, peace, peace.

(Words and music by Sheva)

Open Up Our Eyes

Open up our eyes teach us how to live
Fill our hearts with joy and all the love You have to give.
Gather us in peace as you lead us to your name
And we will know that You are one.
(repeat)

(Cantor Jeff Klepper)

Mi Shebeirach

(Version of the traditional prayer for healing. The opening line can be translated as "May the One who blessed our fathers, the Source of Blessing for our mothers." In the second verse, "*r'fuah sh'leima*" means "a full healing.")

Mi Shebeirach avoteinu, M'kor hab'rachah l'imoteinu.
May the Source of Strength, Who blessed the ones before us,
Help us find the courage, to make our lives a blessing,
And let us say - Amen.

Mi Shebeirach imoteinu, M'kor hab'rachah la'avoteinu.
Bless those in need of healing, with *r'fuah sh'leima*.
The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit.
And let us say - Amen.

(Words and music by Debbie Friedman)

Others:

- *Mizmor L'David* - Shenker version with some *niggunim* for the congregation
- *Sim Shalom*
- Even When God is Silent - Michael Horvit (SATB)
- *Oseh Shalom* - from "Kol Shalom" by Ben Steinberg
- Acquainted With the Night - Jack Gottlieb
- *Hashkivenu*
- *Shalom Rav* - Ben Steinberg, changing "*b'chol et uvchol sha'ah bishlomecha*" to "*v'et kol yoshvei tevel bishlomecha*"
- *Al Kol Eleh* - Naomi Shemer
- Psalm 23 in English - Schalit
- *Gesher Tzar M'od* - Chait

Modern Readings and Poetry on Israel

- ❖ From The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel
5 Iyar 5708 / May 14, 1948

WE APPEAL—in the very midst of the onslaught launched against us now for months—to the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve peace and participate in the upbuilding of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its provisional and permanent institutions.

WE EXTEND our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighbourliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land. The State of Israel is prepared to do its share in common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East.

WE APPEAL to the Jewish people throughout the Diaspora to rally round the Jews of Eretz Israel in the tasks of immigration and upbuilding and to stand by them in the great struggle for the realization of the age-old dream—the redemption of Israel.

PLACING OUR TRUST IN THE ALMIGHTY, WE AFFIX OUR SIGNATURES TO THIS PROCLAMATION AT THIS SESSION OF THE PROVISIONAL COUNCIL OF STATE, ON THE SOIL OF THE HOMELAND, IN THE CITY OF TEL-AVIV, ON THIS SABBATH EVE, THE 5TH DAY OF IYAR, 5708 (14TH MAY 1948).

- ❖ The national center will not be a “secure home of refuge” for our people, but it will be a home of healing for its spirit. (Ahad Ha-am, *Summa Summarum*, 1912)

- ❖ “On a Night of Rain in Jerusalem”
The few trees in the yard moan like forest trees,
Heavy-rivered are the thundered clouds,
The angels of peace are at the head of my children’s bed,
In the moaning of the trees and the thickness of the rain.

Outside—Jerusalem: city of the father’s glorious trial,
The binding of his son upon one of the mountains,
The fire-from-dawn still burns on the mountain,
The rains have not put it out: fire between the pieces.

“If God commands me now as He commanded
My ancient father—I shall surely obey,”
My heart and my flesh sing on this night of rain;
And the angels of peace are at the head of my children’s bed!

What of glory? What is like unto this miraculous feeling
Alive ever since the ancient dawn until now and toward the mountain of myrrh?
The blood of the covenant in this father’s prayer-full body sings,

Ready to make the sacrifice on the Hill of the Temple at dawn.

Outside—Jerusalem...and the moaning of God's trees
Cut down there by enemies in all generations...
Heavy-rivered clouds: within them lightnings
And thunderings that to me are on a night of rain are tidings
From the Mouth of The Might until the end of generations.
(Uri Zvi Greenberg, 1954)

- ❖ Even the ordinary soldier
Whose blood fell upon the ancient path
Knew
That the splendor of Mountains,
the silvery treetops,
And the glittering dome
Are the outer gold
Of the song of Solomon and of David's tear.
(Zelda)
- ❖ A people does not get a country on a silver platter. (Chaim Weizmann)