

# HMSI

The Harold M. Schulweis Institute



The Days of Awe approach, and with them the opportunity for personal assessment, communal prayer, and reflection on one's ethical responsibility to change the world for the better in the New Year ahead.

But, as Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis (z"l) himself expressed, this is a time for "prayers that no one can write for {us}." To create his own personal roadmap for such a task, Rabbi Schulweis turned from his signature prose and oratory to more subjective, poetic expression, writing "A Prayer before I Pray". In its verses, he confronts complex questions: how to live and how to pray.

To represent the Schulweis legacy during these High Holidays, this poem is reprinted below. In addition, the Harold M. Schulweis Institute has curated a special selection of Rabbi Schulweis' works appropriate to the season at its website, [hmsi.info](http://hmsi.info), home to the world's largest collection of the sermons, articles, lectures and poems of Rabbi Schulweis. Particularly at this season, we invite you to visit the site to read and to hear his words "with all your heart and soul and might."

*G'mar Chatimah Tovah!*

## A PRAYER BEFORE I PRAY

Before I open the prayer book, or embrace myself in a tallit prayer shawl, and give praise or thanksgiving or petition, it all begins with me.

I cannot petition God without petitioning myself.

I cannot pray for health or peace or love without involving myself, my heart, my thought, my spine

I cannot pray God for peace while my arms are folded, my mouth sealed, my feet dragging

I cannot pray for health with a cigarette dangling from my lips

I cannot pray "God, heal us" and turn my head from my and our obligation to insure the health of the blind, the lame, the lacerated

I cannot pray to the God of creation and treat nature with callousness, accept the toxification of its waters, forests and air

I cannot pray God's love and ignore the vilification and exploitation of His children - the stranger, the pariah, the immigrant, the outcast in our midst

I cannot pray God's love of my people and remain mute before the ganging up on the Jewish people and the attempts to vitiate the life of the Jewish state.

Prayer is not one-sided. Not vertical, God "up there" and we "down here." I am covenanted with God, side by side, not as a passive beggar, but as a co-creator: co-responsible collaborator with Godliness. Therefore, before every petition, I close my eyes and add two words before the yearning petitions of my heart, "Through me."

God help – *through me* – those caught in the whirlwinds, earthquakes, floods, volcanoes, pestilence of the world

God protect – *through me* – those thrashing about in a blood-soaked universe

God bring peace – *through me* – to a world torn by mounting genocides, mass murders and rapes.

The Godliness in me and through me reaches out to the Godliness in others.

In prayer I am reminded that God is lived through me in loving, healing, helping, comforting, consoling, protecting, protesting, wiping away the tears of the afflicted, soothing their pains, binding their wounds, straightening their bent spine.

Through me, through my people, through humanity, I am prepared in prayer to praise, appreciate and petition God who opens the path to life's meaning.

*– A Poem by Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis (z"l)*