



VOICES OF DISABILITY

Jewish Prayers,
Blessings and Poems

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About VOICES OF DISABILITY

"For my house shall be a house of prayer for all people."

–Isaiah 56:5

To live by these words of Isaiah, we must actively ensure that Jewish spaces are accessible and welcoming for all. One in four people has some kind of disability, whether physical, developmental, cognitive, learning, sensory, psychiatric or a combination of several disabilities. We know that too many groups and individuals have historically been marginalized in Jewish spaces, including people with disabilities.

In the last few decades, disability self-advocates and allies have made great strides in disability awareness, acceptance and inclusion in the Jewish community, though there continues to be much work to do around access, reducing stigma and full belonging.

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About **VOICES OF DISABILITY**

Our hope is that these new prayers, poetry and liturgy, written by Ritualwell contributors, will inspire you and your community to engage in the transformative work of full inclusion so that every Jewish space becomes a home for all people. Many of these prayers use Jewish liturgy as a jumping off point to explore the lived experiences of disability.

Ritualwell is committed to being an inclusive, accessible platform for all people and we are always eager to engage in the ongoing work of creating greater accessibility.



Image: Person in a green coat with a scarf and sunglasses standing with a golden retriever on a leash outside a building.



Image: Two people potting plants together indoors, wearing aprons and gloves, focused on their task.

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TRADITION & INNOVATION

Voices of Disability **FOR OUR COMMUNITY**

"Do not curse a person who is deaf and do not place a stumbling block in front of a person who is blind."

–Leviticus 19:14

Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance, and Inclusion Month (JDAIM) was founded in 2009 in order to unite Jewish communities worldwide to raise awareness and champion the rights of people with disabilities. JDAIM takes place during February, and while we know that disability access is essential 365 days of the year, JDAIM is a time when many communities shine a light on this important issue. These resources are ideal to use in Shabbat services and other communal events— during JDAIM and throughout the year.

A BLESSING FOR DISABLED AND CHRONICALLY ILL JEWS DURING JEWISH DISABILITY AWARENESS AND INCLUSION MONTH (JDAIM)

by Rabbi Emily Aronson

יְבָרַכְךָ יְיָ וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ

Y'varech'cha Adonai v'yishmerecha

May God bless you and keep you

May you be reminded of your inherent holiness, for you were created

B'tzelem Elohim, in the image of God.

May you feel enveloped by the sacred energy of the universe.

May you be included, celebrated, and honored, not just this month, but every month.

יָאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיִחַנְךָ

Ya'er Adonai panav eleicha vichuneka

May God's light shine upon you and favor you

May *Or HaChaim*, the light of life, course through you, filling you from within.

Continue on next page



Image: Silhouette of diverse people holding hands against a sunset background.

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May *Shekinah*, the indwelling presence,
accompany you on your journey.

May *HaMakom*, the place,
help you feel a sense of home and hope.

ישׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם

Yisa Adonai panav eilecha v'yasem l'cha shalom

May God's countenance be raised towards you
and grant you peace

May others treat you with respect, kindness, dignity, and true
allyship.

May this month of being centered encourage pride in your
identity, self-discovery, and solidarity.

May you experience moments not only of
shalom, peace, but also of *shleimut*, wholeness.

Ken yehi ratzon | May it be so.

BLESSING FOR THE INSTALLATION OF A RAMP TO THE BIMAH

by Rabbi Emily Aronson

*Etz hayyim hi lamakhazikim bah,
Vetomekheha me'ushar.*

It is a tree of life to those who hold fast to it,
and all who cling to it find happiness.

We honor our *Torah* through study, through relationships,
Through touch, through curiosity and wonder.

For too long, the *sefer Torah* in our sanctuary
Has been out of reach for many.

Today we honor our community's progress
Toward its mission of bringing us close to *Torah*
And *Torah* close to us

With the addition of this ramp to our *bimah*



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Derakheha darkhei noam

Vekhol netivoteha shalom

Its ways are ways of pleasantness,
and all its paths are peace.

May this ramp serve as a conduit of *Torah*

Honoring the dignity of each member of our community

Granting access, safety, and leadership to all

Hashiveinu Adonai eilekha v'nashuvah

Hadeish yameinu ke'kedem

Return us to you, God, so that we shall return

Renew our days as of old.

Let this one point of access be just the beginning

So that all who wish to cling to *Torah*

May freely enter our building and sacred spaces

And may find themselves represented in our sacred texts and
traditions.

Return us, we who are created in Your image,

To the holy task that lies ahead

To each other

To You.

Ken yehi ratzon | May it be so.

CREATED IN YOUR IMAGE: A BLESSING FOR INCLUSION

by Gabrielle Ariella Kaplan-Mayer

Makor HaHayim,

Source of Life,

You created human beings in your image,

B'tzelem Elohim.

Each one of us

a unique creation—

genetic material that

holds a *neshamah*,

a soul that is pure.

Our bodies and our minds

are different and diverse creations—

Full of strengths and vulnerabilities,

talents

challenges

abilities

struggles.

Some of us born into our bodies needing help

to move, to see, to hear, to talk, to eat.

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Continued from previous page

CREATED IN YOUR IMAGE: A BLESSING FOR INCLUSION

by Gabrielle Ariella Kaplan-Mayer

Some of us will take our bodies and minds for granted
until they change with age...

reminding us that there are times
when we all need support.

The human body is a vessel
that we can see–

but deeper,

what is constant and in common
among us all

is the unseen–

the souls that you have placed within us.

Makor HaHayim,

Source of Life,

Help us to

encounter one another

as that pure soul

created in Your image;

that we see ourselves and one another

as *Btzelem Elohim.*

FOR THOSE WHO ENDURE CHRONIC CONDITIONS

by Alden Solovy

God of our mothers and fathers,
Watch over all who
Live with genetic disorders,
Life-threatening medical conditions,
And chronic or degenerative diseases.
Bless them with endurance and resilience,
Fortitude and hope,
With opportunities to thrive and shine
Even as their conditions
Progress.
Watch over them,
Their families and friends,
Our community,
And all of humankind.
We pray
For the wisdom and insight
To see each member of our community

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FOR THOSE WHO ENDURE CHRONIC CONDITIONS

by Alden Solovy

With clear eyes and an open heart,

As another human being,

A whole person

With hopes and dreams,

Proud of who they are,

Striving to be their best selves,

Struggling with this life,

And loving it, too,

As we all do.

Rock and Shelter,

Grant us all the ability

To see each other's humanity clearly,

To cherish each other's individuality,

To care deeply about one another,

To mourn our losses and

Celebrate our victories together,

So that we live, act, and pray

As one community

Of care and blessing.

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FOR THOSE WHO ENDURE CHRONIC CONDITIONS

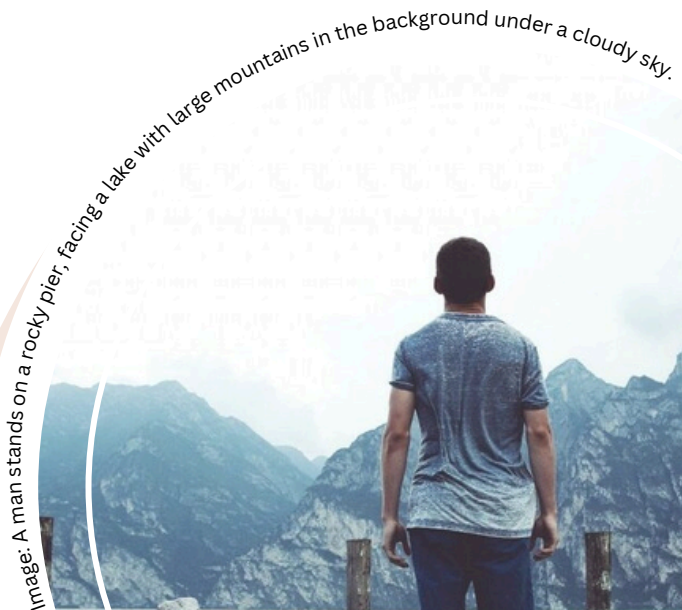
by Alden Solovy

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמְּכִיֵּן מִצְעָדֵי גִבּוֹר.

Barukh atah Adonai, Eloheinu melekh haolam, hameikhin mitzadei gaver.

Blessed are You, *Adonai* our God, Ruler of the Universe, who strengthens our steps.

Image: A man stands on a rocky pier, facing a lake with large mountains in the background under a cloudy sky.

A circular inset image showing a man from behind, standing on a rocky pier. He is wearing a blue t-shirt and dark shorts. He is looking out over a calm lake towards a range of large, rugged mountains under a cloudy sky. The pier is made of wooden posts and rocks.



Additional Resources For Our Community

[A TU B'SHVAT SEDER FOR JEWISH
DISABILITIES AWARENESS AND INCLUSION
MONTH](#)

by Rabbi Alanna Sklover

[VE'AHAVTA PRAYER IN ASL](#)

[BLESSING BEFORE TORAH READING IN
HEBREW AND ASL \(RECONSTRUCTIONIST
VERSION\)](#)

[SOME VARIETIES OF BAR, BAT, AND
B'MITZVAH POSSIBILITIES](#)

by Len Felder, PhD



Image: People gather around a boy holding a Torah scroll, engaged in a joyful interaction.

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TRADITION & INNOVATION

Voices of Disability **FROM OUR VOICES**

“As Jews we are taught that every human is created b’tselem Elohim, in God’s image. Every person is imbued with the divine spark, infinite in value and unique. Those words inspire us every day to respect and improve the lives of others, Jews and non-Jews alike.”

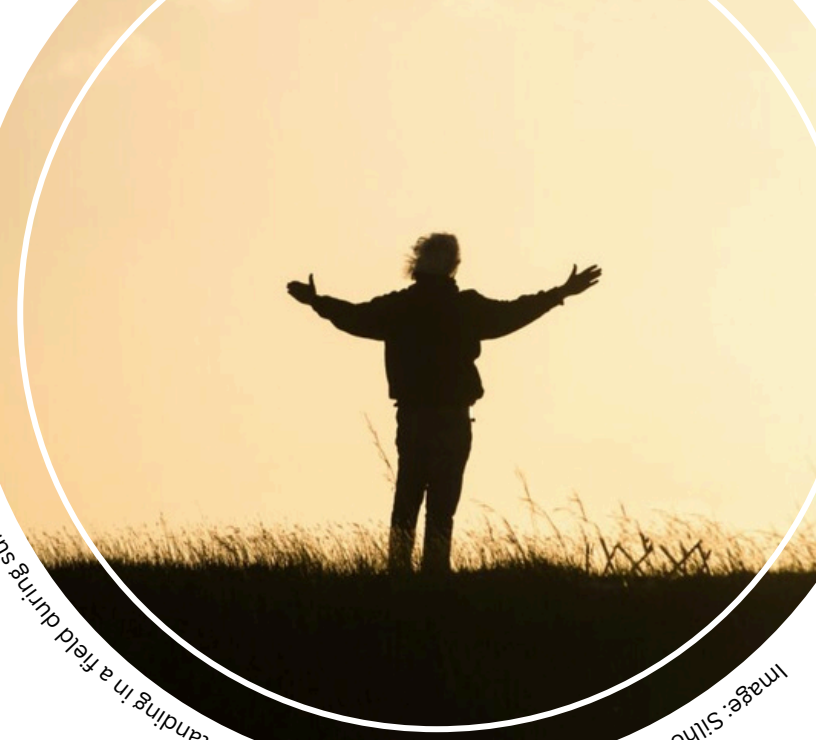
–Rabbi Lynne Landsberg, z”l

The phrase “nothing about us without us” was created by disability activists and has been used continually to insist that policies related to people with disabilities are created and implemented with their full and direct participation.

In our Jewish communal life, “nothing about us without us” means that the voices of people with disabilities are valued and upheld when creating accommodations in educational, congregational and other communal settings.

The readings in this section share diverse lived experiences from community members with disabilities.

Image: Silhouette of a person with outstretched arms standing in a field during sunset, with grass and sky in the background.



BERAKHAH FOR THE AUTISTIC MIND

by Yaakov Whiten

Praised are you Lord my God, who formed me in my mother's womb.

Praised are You Divine Master, who gave me the ability to see things in a new and different light to those around me.

Praised are You who formed the autistic mind to contribute something wonderful and unique in the world.

BLESSING (BRAKHA) FOR USING MEDICAL DEVICES

by char Hersh

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַיִךְ וְצִוֵּנוּ עַל
מִצְוֹת _____

*Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher kidshanu
b'mitzvotav vitzivanu al mitzvot _____ (the action you are about to perform)*

Blessed are You, God, Sovereign of the Universe, who made us
holy through mitzvot, and instructed us on the mitzvah of
_____ (the action you are about to perform)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַיִךְ וְצִוֵּנוּ עַל
שְׁמִירַת הַגּוּף

*Barukh ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher kidshanu
b'mitzvotav vitzivanu al shmirat haguf.*

Blessed are You, God, Sovereign of the Universe, who made us
holy through mitzvot, and instructed us about taking care of
our bodies.

A PRAYER FOR THOSE WITH LESS VISIBLE OR INVISIBLE DISABILITIES

by Melissa Hoffman

Sometimes we feel confined to the narrow path
Between what we feel and what others see
Between what we know and what others don't know
Between our abilities and what we think others expect of us
Our tradition tells us that despite appearances, *lev yodea marat nafsho* (Proverbs 14:10) – the heart knows the bitterness of its own soul.

Let us rise in strength and spirit because we are the best arbiters of our choices.

We know more than anyone else the bitterness, the joys, the pain, and the triumphs of our bodies and spirits.

When we enter narrow straits, may we harness the courage that resides in us daily.

May we be liberated by the expanse of our gifts – the gifts of humility, compassion, and inspiration that the world gains when we bring to it our whole selves.



Image: A person in a wheelchair, wearing a cozy coat, peacefully meditates with hands together outdoors in sunlight.

A KAVANNAH AND BLESSING FOR REMAINING SEATED DURING THE AMIDAH

by Mat Wilson

As we enter this sacred moment, we prepare ourselves for prayer.

If your body calls you to remain seated,
if stillness grounds you,
if rest holds you in its holy embrace,
know that your prayers are received all the same.

The Psalmist teaches, the earth and all that it holds are *Hashem's*
Our prayers are rooted in this truth:
whether we sit, rise, bow, or sway,
the Divine perceives the murmurs of our hearts.

Blessed are You, *Hashem* our God, Dweller of the Universe, who sanctifies us through *mitzvot*, and invites us to worship with the fullness of who we are.



Image: A person in a wheelchair high-fives a friend while another friend looks on.

Additional Resources for From Our Voices

LIKE LEAVING EGYPT

by Cantor Karen Webber

FROM DOOR TO DOOR: A YOM KIPPUR PRAYER FOR THE CHRONICALLY ILL

by Sybil Sanchez Kessler

PRAYER FOR ACUTE MENTAL ILLNESS CRISIS

by Rabbi Beni Wajnberg

Voices of Disability **DISABILITY JUSTICE**

“May the one who blessed our ancestors, heal this world that regards sick and disabled people as disposable.”

– Rabbi Elliot Kukla

As members of local and global Jewish communities, we bear responsibility for pursuing justice and equality for all the citizens of the world. Part of pursuing justice is a commitment to speak out against ableism (discrimination against people with disabilities) whenever we encounter it.

These rituals and prayers infuse the work of disability justice with a sense of both urgency and holiness.

Image: Two people, one in a wheelchair, raise their heads, basking in the sun.



WE ARE NOT THE FRINGES

by Devon Spier

we are not the fringes of our garment

but the entire garment

we are not in need of shelter

we are shelter

and our abilities are not our shame

or our unraveling

rather by weaving our own existence, we weave self and
community

*Barukh atah adonai eloheinu melekh ha'olam asher kid'shanu
b'mitvotav v'tzivanu l'hitatef batzitzit.*

holding difference

embracing life

we cannot

nor shall we ever be contained

all the weaving days of our lives

Image: Hands holding tzitzit, wearing a purple patterned fabric tallit.



BEYOND V'AHAVTA

by Joanie Calem

Please don't make me your project or your *mitzvah* for the day
Don't make me your mascot, lucky charm that wins your game
Don't push me away and then smile and pretend
All I really want is a friend.

V'ahavta l'raicha cmocha...

...אָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ...

Please don't use me for credit in that service learning class
If someone did that to you you'd realize it's just plain crass.
Don't treat me like I'm stupid even if you think I do things
"wrong"
Who says that I can't sing a different song?

V'ahavta l'acher cmocha...

...אָהַבְתָּ לְאַחֵר כְּמוֹךָ...

Please don't look at me with pity in your eyes
Don't think that I don't see when you've got a scornful smile
I know sometimes I'm awkward, can't relax in my own skin,
All I really want is to be let in....

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BEYOND V'AHAVTA

by Joanie Calem

Bridge:

Buddha said, "Hurt not others with that which pains you."

Jesus said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Muhammed said, "Do to others what you wish they'd do for you."

Every culture preaches about this very same rule

V'ahavta l'zar cmocha...

...אַהֲבַת לְזָר כְּמוֹךָ...

Image: A group of five friends make heart signs with their hands



KADDISH FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: A PRAYER OF REMEMBRANCE

by Wendy Elliott-Vandivier

In God's name, we remember you.

The first group to perish during the Holocaust. You were labeled “life unworthy of life”, mass sterilized, and systematically murdered in medically administrated “mercy death” in Adolph Hitler’s secret “Operation T4”. 275,000 people with disabilities were killed.

In God's name, we remember you.

Americans with disabilities, who were incarcerated and denied their constitutional rights. You were locked away in poorhouses or institutions, treated like charity cases, tragedies, and freaks. Sterilized without your consent by practitioners of eugenics in the name of improving the human race, forced to undergo radical lobotomies to render your diverse minds ‘harmless’.

In God's name, we remember you.

The unnumbered, denied the chance to be born solely based on your disabilities. Doctors and parents assumed you would live a limited life of suffering or be a burden. Your parents were often never informed of life-saving treatments and therapies, or the reality of what people with disabilities can accomplish.

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KADDISH FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: A PRAYER OF REMEMBRANCE

by Wendy Elliott-Vandivier

In God's name, we remember you.

The hundreds of victims of filicide. You were murdered by your caregivers, even your parents: shot, starved, drowned, chained, punched. The media portrayed your killings as justifiable or inevitable, your lives as a “burden to the family”. Your killers were given sympathy and lighter sentences, if sentenced at all.

In God's name, we remember you.

The Black and Brown disabled Americans killed at the hands of the police. Sandra Bland, Eric Garner, Freddie Gray, Tanisha Anderson, Deborah Danner, Ezell Ford, Alfred Olango, Keith Lamont Scott, George Floyd and a third of all Black and Brown victims of police brutality were also people with disabilities.

In God's name, we remember you.

The millions of people with disabilities who died of COVID because of your medical conditions, group living settings, or systemic healthcare and social inequities.

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KADDISH FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: A PRAYER OF REMEMBRANCE

by **Wendy Elliott-Vandivier**

You perished in large numbers because of policies that ignored your community when distributing protective equipment, vaccines, and hospital care. In just a single year in the US, over 181,000 people with disabilities died of COVID in long-term care facilities alone.

We remember you. Your lives were worthy and had value.

Blessed is God, Ruler of the Universe, who created people with disabilities in Your image.

Blessed is God, who cherishes disabled lives and desires that they flourish and thrive.

May each human heart and every society respect the civil and human rights of people with disabilities.

May the one who makes peace above, break the deadly cycle of history repeating itself in our midst, in all of Israel, and in the whole world.

And let us say, Amen

Image: A father in a wheelchair holds his child on his lap, they smile at each other

Additional Resources for Disability Justice

POKEAKH IVRIM: OPENING OUR MINDS TO NEW FORMS OF INCLUSION

by Rabbi Lauren Tuchman

BUILDING A SANCTUARY OF INCLUSION

by Rabbi Lauren Tuchman

A BITTERSWEET SHEHEKHIYANU

by Ilana Schatz

Voices of Disability

WRITE YOUR OWN

The Ritualwell team values your ability to create new work. We would love to receive your creative expression about disability and Jewish community. **If you want to write a prayer, here's a creative prompt to help you get started. You may prefer to draw, speak, sculpt, play or otherwise express your idea.**

- Imagine a world in which people with disabilities have all the resources and access that they need available to them.
- Imagine a world in which every Jewish setting is accessible and inclusive.
- Imagine a world in which we work together to make this reality possible.

Compose your own prayer, poem or blessing inspired by what you imagine is possible.

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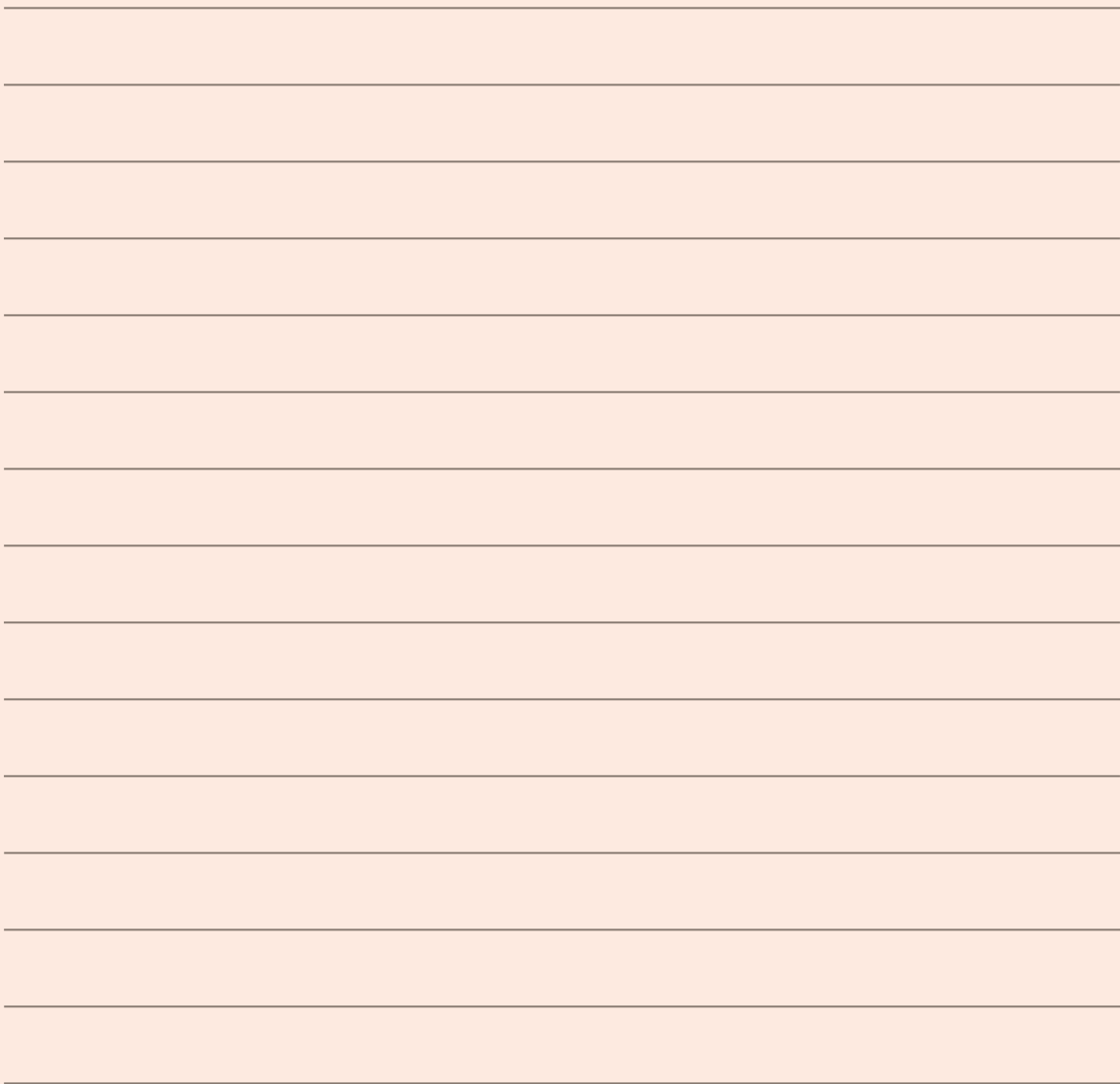
One way to begin your expression is by thinking of it as a letter to the Source of Life. Here are some words to help you get started:

Dear God,

I wish that...

I pray for...

May there be a world in which...



A large, light-orange rounded rectangle containing 18 horizontal lines for writing.



Additional Resources from our Community and Partners

[RECONSTRUCTING JUDAISM: DISABILITY AND ACCESSIBILITY](#)

[THE JEWISH DISABILITY INCLUSION NEWS](#)

[DISABILITY TORAH PROJECT](#)



Image: A person in a wheelchair raises their arms, looking out to the water

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