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"What is the most important prayer we'll say this High Holidays season?"

Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer

Humanistic Jews greet the High Holidays with optimism and purpose. For us, these are not days of dread and awe, but opportunity for renewal and rededication to the tasks of bettering our own lives and the world around us. Our readings are not vertical prayers to a deity but introspective conversations we have in our own heart or collectively with our community.

This year, perhaps more so than any other year, we will have in our minds the death of Heather Heyer and the blatant display of racism, neo-Nazism and anti-semitism of Charlottesville. We will be thinking of the lack of moral leadership coming from the White House. We will be thinking of the stripping away of rights to immigrants, health care for woman, the privilege for transgender people to serve in the military, voting access, and on it goes.

To this end, we will focus particularly on certain lines and passages in our services. On Rosh Hashanah we will say, "Where there are prejudice and hatred, let there be acceptance and love. Where there are tyranny and oppression, let there be freedom and justice. Where there are strife and discord, let there be harmony and peace."

And on Yom Kippur we will acknowledge that "we have acted wrongly by hardening our hearts, by shirking duty, by keeping the poor in the chains of poverty and turning a deaf ear to the cry of the oppressed, by failing to work for peace, by keeping silent in the face of injustice."

But we will also take encouragement from the strength we bring to each other. And we will say, "May our hearts not despair of human good. May no trial, however severe, embitter our souls and destroy our trust. May we too find strength to meet adversity with quiet courage and unshaken will."