

Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech
haOlam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav
v'tzivanu la'asot ma'akeh.

*Blessed are you, Breath of All Life, you call
us to an appreciation of the sacred. We give
thanks for all those whose labor benefits the world.*

Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech
haOlam, sh'asah li ness ba'makom hazeh.

*Blessed are you, Breath of All Life, for the
wonder I have experienced in this place.*

Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech
haOlam, chacham harazim.

*Blessed are you, Breath of All Life, You see
what is hidden from our sight.*

Three pre-show prayers

May what we* give be received by whoever can receive it, at whatever level or levels, now or in the future, and may that be enough.

May I give what I can give tonight, and may that be enough.

May I be a vessel.

* "We" includes everyone who has collaborated on or in any way contributed to the show, as well as stage managers and technicians helping to give it to an audience.



✦ After the show: Dayenu

It helps me to have a transition between performing and talking to friends and other audience members. Taking this time is a difficult practice for me to hold to. The desire to greet people is strong. So I set the timer on my watch for 5 minutes.

I close my eyes. I notice my breathing and heartbeat. I say the word "Dayenu." (Dayenu is Hebrew for "it is enough for us" or simply "enough.") By saying "Dayenu," I am telling myself that what happened on stage and with the audience tonight was enough.)

As thoughts surface – often about what happened in tonight's performance – I continue to say, "Dayenu." I also imagine passing some of the audience's appreciation to my director, my teachers, and to God.

Finally the timer beeps. As I prepare to greet people, I resolve to take in whatever anyone says in the spirit of "Dayenu."

Alternative post-show practice: Quilt visualization

Imagine an embroidered square of a quilt. This is the show you've just done.

Then imagine that you're looking at this quilt square on a movie screen. The camera is pulling back, revealing more and more quilt squares. These are the other performances you have done in your life.

The camera pulls back further, showing that all the performances you've ever done are themselves a single square on a larger quilt – which includes all the performances of your friends, and all the shows you've ever seen.

Again the camera pulls back. That quilt is shown to be itself a single square on another quilt, this one representing all the performances done during your lifetime.

Now the camera does something else. It moves to the side, showing just the edge of this largest quilt as it hangs. The camera pulls back yet again. You see the quilt is one of dozens hanging, like rugs in a rug shop. Hundreds of quilts hanging. Thousands. These quilts represent the performances of previous generations.

Spiritual Exercises for Solo Performers

Charlie Varon

Introduction

I have been going on stage to perform my own work for decades. Sometimes, it's been relatively easy; other times, a struggle. It is the times of struggle that have given birth to the exercises in this booklet.

These exercises, I've found are not magic. They don't make my fear go away, cure my egomania, quench my desire to be loved by every audience member. But they do help me find some stability on the bumpy road of performing.

I'm putting together this booklet on the occasion of The Marsh Festival of New Voices, and I dedicate it to the fourteen performers who are premiering work there. May you go from strength to strength.

A note on language:

Some of the exercises use Hebrew words and are rooted in Jewish tradition. If this language doesn't work for you, try changing the words or inventing something new. Use this booklet as a starting point.

Acknowledgments:

Rabbi Dan Goldblatt gave me the blessings I say before a performance. Rabbi Dorothy Richman helped me develop the post-show "Dayenu" practice. I also draw on the ideas of Rabbis Mordechai Gafni, Jonathan Omer-Man, and Pam Frydman Baugh. The meditation on success is adapted from a Zen saying conveyed to me by Huston Smith, scholar of world religion. My collaborator and director, David Ford, made valuable changes and additions to the booklet.

Charlie Varon
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✠ A meditation to use when obsessing about success

What is success?

What is failure?

Both are distractions.

Put them both aside, and go forward.

✠ When experiencing fear or anxiety before a performance

Serious contemplation of fear:

I accept that fear is part of the artistic journey. I will let myself be afraid. Anything else would diminish me as a performer. The fear reminds me that performing is a vulnerable act, and that I care deeply about what I am presenting.

I will do what I can do calm myself.

I accept that the fear may or may not dissipate once I am on stage. Either outcome is all right. If the fear dissipates, wonderful. If it does not dissipate, I will do the best I can, trusting that the work I've done to prepare for this show, and the strength of my body and spirit, will carry me.

Comic contemplation of fear:

I may be scared out of my wits, but it's not just me! Other performers, many others, are just as terrified as I, even at this moment! We are a Tribe of the Anxious, a Union of the Nervous, a Fraternity of the Fretful, and we are scattered in theaters, nightclubs and concert halls throughout our time zone. To the east, nervous performers have finished their shows. To the west, other performers are just beginning to feel their nervousness building. Stories are told of the most celebrated actors vomiting before shows. Since time immemorial, human beings have experienced the fear of performing, and long after I'm dead, others will carry the torch of this fear. I am proud to be but one link in this sacred chain.

When not experiencing fear or anxiety before a performance

Right now I am not afraid, but before other performances I have been afraid, and before future performances I may be. I appreciate the equanimity I now feel. I send some of this equanimity to my nervous self in the past, to my nervous self in the future, and to my brother and sister performers now experiencing anxiety.

When experiencing panic that an audience is not responding

During a show, an audience may not be responding as you had hoped. When this happens, and you begin to panic, remember that you have a story to tell. Take your time and go deeper inside the story.

✠ Blessings before a performance

Baruch ata Adonai Eloheinu melech
haOlam, shehechyanu, vikiyamanu,
vihiggyanu, lazman hazeh.

*Blessed are you, Source of All Life, who has
kept us in life, sustained us, and brought us
to this moment.*

(You can follow this blessing with a meditation on the ancestors, teachers, sources, and artistic community that have brought you to this moment.)

The blessing on fashioning or experiencing a work of art:

Baruch ha'notain lanu keesharon
leetzor yofi v'lehenot meemenu.

*Praised be the One who makes us able to
create and to enjoy works of beauty.*

Baruch yotzer haguf v'keesharon,
shenatah b'tocheynu simchat
hamischak.

*Blessed be the creator of the body and its
skills, who has implanted within us the joy of
the play.*