



ROSH HASHANAH

5777

TABLE BLESSING RITUAL



Jewish Voice for Peace

by Elliott batTzedek

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COVER IMAGE

Wendy Elisheva Somerson, JVP Artists and Cultural Workers Council
"Humble Strength." 12"x12" encaustic painting on wood panel.

The ram's horn (shofar) and pomegranates are common symbols associated with Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year representing awakening and righteousness.

www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/5777

AS WE WELCOME THE NEW YEAR 5777 on the Jewish Calendar, we pause to take a step out of our busy year, the months and news cycles that collide into each other. We reflect on the grief of the year past, the victories, the mis-steps and the close calls. On Rosh Hashanah, tradition tells us our fate for the coming year is written in the Book of Life, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed—what will we commit to building in the coming year that might change the course of our own lives, and how will we commit ourselves to movements for justice in the year to come?

The Jewish calendar celebrates a total of four New Years- Rosh Hashanah marks the day the world was created, and serves as a new year for humans (whereas Tu B'Shvat is the new year for trees.)

We celebrate by creating a *palace in time* by stepping aside from the rush of the world to honor the possibilities and realities of change. We mark how self-reflection, self-care, and renewal are a vital part of our lives as activists, strategists, and individuals.

On this Erev Rosh Hashanah, you may find yourself around a table with other JVP members, other movement organizers, your chosen family, your family of origin. These blessings and meditations are designed to be used in part or whole for your table ritual.

And G!d says: "And you shall ask yourself: WHO! is my community? and WHO! am I? And what have I done this year that has brought my community closer? And what have I done to put discord and distance into the community? And to WHOM! do I owe apologies? And to WHOM! must I offer forgiveness?"

Dane Kuttler

The Social Justice Warrior's Guide to the High Holidays

Candle Lighting

THIS ROSH HASHANAH, like all of our holidays, we begin by lighting candles and blessing the act of lighting. Why? Because it is quintessentially human to make change, and to make the tools for change. In our religious culture we envision a God who created the world, and humans who have been changing that world ever since. We kindle fire to make light in the dark, warmth in the cold, and to cook foods that are pleasing to our senses.

As Jews, we are obligated, no matter how difficult the times, to recognize and bless beauty and creativity. Joy is as real as struggle, a truth we assert as we begin this holiday, this Head of a New Year.

**ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם אשר קדישנו במצותיו
וצונו להדליק נר של יום טוב**

*Ba'rukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam ah-sheh k'dishanu
b'mitz-vo-tav v'tziva-nu l'hadlik ner shel yom tov*

BLESSED ARE YOU, SOURCE OF LIGHT, OUR GOD, THE SOVEREIGN
OF ALL WORLDS, WHO HAS MADE US HOLY WITH YOUR MITZVOT AND
COMMANDED US TO KINDLE THE FESTIVAL LIGHT.

**ברוכה את ה' השכינה רוח העולם אשר קדישנו במצותיה
וצונו להדליק נר של יום טוב**

*Brucha at Yah HaShechinah Ruach ha-olam ah-sheh k'dishanu
b'mitz-vo-tayha v'tziva-nu l'hadlik ner shel yom tov*

BLESSED ARE YOU, YAH, SHECHINAH, THE SPIRIT OF ALL WORLDS,
WHO HAS MADE US HOLY WITH YOUR MITZVOT AND COMMANDED US
TO KINDLE THE FESTIVAL LIGHT.

Kiddush

WHEN WE BLESS WINE we are blessing the fertility of the earth, the products of vines and trees and plants that have fed us for thousands upon thousands upon thousands of years. In our inherited culture we learn that the land of ancient Israel was richly fertile. Historically, we know the fertility endured as people farmed the land to raise crops and groves, and we know this abundance is being destroyed by military Occupation, land theft, abuse of water and salination of aquifers, and decades of intentional policies to make the land unable to support the Palestinian people.

As we bless this wine, this harvest of the land, we celebrate that we are ha-adamah, creatures of the earth and we insist that all creatures of the earth have inherent rights to the fertility and abundance of our world:

ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן

Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam borei pri hagafen

BLESSED ARE YOU, ETERNAL WELLSPRING, OUR GOD, SOVEREIGN OF
ALL WORLDS, WHO CREATED THE FRUIT OF THE VINE.

ברוכה את ה' השכינה רוח העולם בוראת פרי הגפן

Brucha at Yah HaShechinah Ruach ha-olam bora'at pri hafen

BLESSED ARE YOU, ETERNAL WELLSPRING, SHECHINAH, SPIRIT OF
ALL WORLDS, WHO CREATED THE FRUIT OF THE VINE.

A Special Reading for 2016

BEFORE WE RECITE THE SHECHEYANU, THE BLESSING FOR HAVING ARRIVED AT THIS POINT IN TIME, WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE MANY STRUGGLES OF THIS YEAR, AND THE COMMUNITIES WHO, IN THE FACE OF VIOLENCE AND OPPRESSION, HAVE COME TOGETHER, ORGANIZED, AND INSISTED ON CHANGE.

We have witnessed a rising tide of racism, nationalism, and leaders willing to whip up power through fear that is all too familiar to us as Jews. Political movements that mark some people as “other” to then be feared and scapegoated are part of our history – in oppression we’ve faced – and part of our present – in the military Occupation of Palestine by Israel, done in the name of all Jews. For U.S. Jews whose family trees were shattered by the rise of fascism in Europe last century, the current events touch a deep wound.

With the rise of racism, nationalism, and scapegoating comes increasingly militarized policing that justifies the execution of Black citizens. With it comes explicit targeting of Muslim communities and threats to “ban all Muslims.” With it comes a view of war-torn refugees as perpetrators of violence, a perversion of the basic human instinct toward compassion. With it comes laws to prevent human rights of LGBTQ citizens, and laws to deny women control of their own bodies. And through all

of this, arms manufacturers make ever-increasing profits, using the evening news to display their products on the streets in Black neighborhoods and the skies above Gaza.

And yet with each new call to violence, with each new attempt to demean and deny rights, communities rise up with courage and creativity. The Movement for Black Lives has issued a clear and brilliant call for change. Indigenous communities in the U.S., Canada, and Brazil, long robbed of their culture, their land, their children, and their spiritual practices, have risen up, claimed power from their deep traditions, and are standing against the corporations that

are destroying our planet. And Palestinians have continued to work around the government and legal structures that have failed them and engaged civil groups across the globe, growing pressure for real change.

All of this—this increase in scapegoating and violence, and the courageous rising-up of communities—has shaped the year that has passed. We carry all of this to this moment we are about to bless.

IF THERE ARE PARTICULAR STRUGGLES, LOSSES, RESISTANCES, THAT YOU WANT TO NAME ALOUD, WE CAN ADD THOSE TO WHAT WE HOLD AS A COMMUNITY HERE TONIGHT.

Shehecheyanu

WHENEVER WE CELEBRATE A MOMENT IN TIME we say the shehecheyanu, a blessing of thanks to God for having sustained us and brought us to this time.

To begin this blessing we acknowledge the generations of activists who have come before, people whose lives and organizing and theories and songs and stories and passions created the social justice movements we work within today.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO INVITE ANY OF THESE TEACHERS OR ANCESTORS INTO THE NEW YEAR WITH YOU, PLEASE SHARE THEIR NAMES.

As Jewish activists for peace and justice we also want to mark the many victories our movement has celebrated this year. As our sage Marge Piercy writes:

*This is the blessing for a political victory:
Although I shall not forget that things
work in increments and epicycles and sometime
leaps that half the time fall back down,
let's not relinquish dancing while the music
fits into our hips and bounces our heels.
We must never forget, pleasure is real as pain.*

And we may celebrate victories, of bodies of faith, institutions, and corporations choosing to divest from the Occupation in 5776:

- Unitarian Universalists Divest from Companies Profiting from Israel's Occupation .
- Portland's Socially Responsible Investment Committee Passes the City Boycott of Caterpillar.
- Delaware Neighbors Against the Occupation Defeats Anti-BDS Bill.

- New York University Graduate Employee Union Becomes First Private University Labor Union to Support Full BDS.
- UMass Amherst Graduate Employee Union (UAW) Overwhelmingly Endorses BDS
- University of South Florida Student Government Senate Passes Joint Resolution for Divestment.
- G4S announces that it is leaving Israel completely, as well as withdrawing from juvenile detention centers in the U.S.
- Ahava announces that its factory is leaving the West Bank.
- No Way to Treat a Child Campaign worked with Rep. Betty McCollum to get 20 Members of Congress to sign a congressional letter to President Obama asking him to appoint a Special Envoy for Palestinian Youth to address the issue of military detention of Palestinian Children.

And so with each other, with our community of activists extending around the globe and back through the generations, we bless our arrival at the beginning of a new year:

ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם שהחיינו וקימנו והיגענו
לזמן הזה

*Ba-ruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam she-he-che-ya-nu
vi-kee-yi-ma-nu vi-hi-gee-an-u liz-man ha-zeh*

BLESSED ARE YOU, WATCHMAKER, OUR GOD, SOVEREIGN OF ALL
WORLDS, WHO HAS KEPT US ALIVE AND SUSTAINED US AND LET US
REACH THIS TIME.

ברוכה את ה' השכינה רוח העולם שהחיינו וקימנו והיגענו
לזמן הזה

*Brucha at Yah HaShechinah Ruach ha-olam she-he-che-ya-nu vi-kee-
yi-ma-nu vi-hi-gee-an-u liz-man ha-zeh*

BLESSED ARE YOU, WATCHMAKER, SHECHINAH, SPIRIT OF ALL
WORLDS, WHO HAS KEPT US ALIVE AND SUSTAINED US AND LET US
REACH THIS TIME.

Handwashing

WHILE MANY U.S. JEWS encounter handwashing only in the Passover seder, the tradition is to wash hands before making the blessings of the bread. Tonight, in honor of the start of 5777, we will say together the blessing for handwashing, and then pour water over each other's hands.

AS THE WATER FLOWS OVER EACH PERSON'S HANDS, THEY ARE INVITED TO NAME ONE THING THEY FEEL THEY SHOULD HAVE FINISHED THIS YEAR AND DIDN'T AND THEN PROCLAIM, "THIS IS THE SEASON TO BE ABLE TO START AGAIN." TÔ THIS THE ENTIRE GROUP WILL RESPOND: KAYN YIHEE RATZON - SO BE IT.

ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו
וציונו על נטילת ידים

*Ba-ruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam asher k'dishanu
b'mitzvotav v'tzi-va-nu al ne-tilat yadayim*

BLESSED ARE YOU, WATCHMAKER, our GOD, SOVEREIGN OF ALL
WORLDS, WHO HAS MADE US HOLY WITH YOUR MITZVOT AND
COMMANDED US TO WASH HANDS.

ברוכה את ה' השכינה רוח העולם שהחינו וקימנו והיגענו
לזמן הזה

*Brucha at Yah HaShechinah Ruach ha-olam asher k'dishanu
b'mitzvotav v'tzi-va-nu al ne-tilat yadayim*

BLESSED ARE YOU, WATCHMAKER, SHECHINAH, SPIRIT OF ALL
WORLDS, WHO HAS MADE US HOLY WITH YOUR MITZVOT AND
COMMANDED US TO WASH HANDS.

Blessing for Bread

WHEN WE BLESS WINE we bless the grapes, but when we bless bread we bless not the grain but *lechem* – the product made by human labor from the created world. This reveals one strain of Jewish thought, the idea that the God who created the world is in partnership with humans, and that peace and justice, a time of redemption, will come not by divine miracle but by generations of hard work repairing what is broken.

As Rabbi Tarfon wrote in Perkei Avot, "You are not free to desist from the work [of tikkun olam]." And as he also said, in the grand Rabbinical tradition of making sweeping declarations of Divine intent fit into actual human lives, "but neither are you obligated to finish it."

AS PEOPLE WHO INTENTIONALLY OPEN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS TO HURT AND VIOLENCE AND TRAGEDY IN THE WORLD, THE FIRST PART OF THAT STATEMENT CAN EASILY OVERWHELM THE SECOND! TÔNIGHT, BEFORE WE BLESS THE CHALLAH, WE'LL HELP EACH OTHER REMEMBER BY REPEATING BOTH PHRASES TO ALL HERE.

THE FIRST PERSON WILL SAY, "I AM NOT FREE TO DESIST FROM THIS WORK," AND THE SECOND PERSON, TO THEIR RIGHT, WILL RESPOND, "BUT NEITHER ARE YOU PERSONALLY OBLIGATED TO FINISH IT." THEN THAT SECOND PERSON WILL SPEAK THE FIRST PHRASE, AND THE PERSON ON THEIR RIGHT WILL ANSWER WITH THE SECOND PHRASE.



And G!d says: “You, who are exhausted with the work already. You, with the asphalt-worn boots, with the house full of placards. You, who are always breathing in, preparing to shout, who sees the work everywhere and swallows the impossible sea of it: breathe out, weary ones. Prepare yourselves to go in, and to go in deep. Find the work inside: the work of self-kindness, the work of healing and repair. The work on the street will still be there when you re-enter. The world needs you whole.”

Dane Kuttler

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ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם המוציא לחם מין הארץ

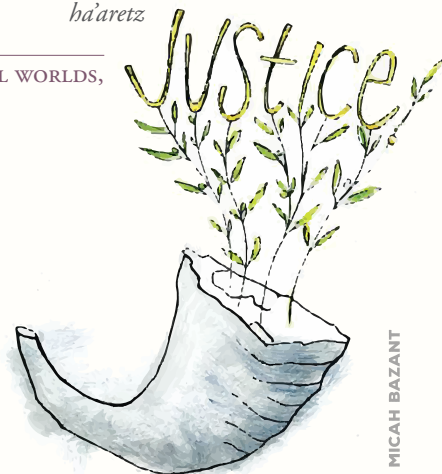
*Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam hamotzi lechem min
ha'aretz*

BLESSED ARE YOU, GROWER, OUR GOD, SOVEREIGN OF ALL WORLDS,
WHO BRINGS FORTH BREAD FROM THE EARTH.

ברוכה את ה' השכינה רוח העולם המוציאת לחם מין הארץ

*Brucha at Yah HaShechinah Ruach ha-olam ha'motziat lechem min
ha'aretz*

BLESSED ARE YOU, GROWER, SHECHINAH, SPIRIT OF ALL WORLDS,
WHO BRINGS FORTH BREAD FROM THE EARTH.



Dipping in Honey

DIPPING CHALLAH OR APPLES INTO HONEY is a trademark custom of new year celebrations. The sweet taste reminds us of the sweetness of the world, and the ritual can be a plea for God to be compassionate and sweet when we account for our year.

As we taste the sweet honey (or syrup, or agave) we focus the taste, and remember that no matter how hard the struggle we must feed ourselves and each other sweet and beautiful things.

*“The worker must have bread,
but she must have roses, too.”
— Rose Schneiderman, 1911.*

And G!d says: “Hear the sounds of the shofar! And if you cannot hear the shofar, if you cannot step foot in the synagogue for whatever reason, then hear what is meant to wake you. Hear: I Can’t Breathe, Hear: Black Lives Matter, Hear the cries of refugees, Hear the names of the restless dead. Wake. Stay woke. It is all a shofar.”

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New Fruit

IT IS TRADITIONAL TO EAT A NEW KIND FOOD, or to eat a favorite food for the first time this year, at the Rosh Hashanah table. New year, new chances, new risks, new joys!

Entering into a new year is a chance to look at our work with fresh eyes, and take the inspiration of newness from this moment.

PASS A PLATE WITH NEW AND SPECIAL FRUITS, AND AS YOU PICK A PIECE OF NEW OR FAVORITE FRUIT TO EAT, SHARE A NEW STRATEGY, IDEA, THEORY FOR CHANGE THAT YOU WILL TRY THIS YEAR.

ברוך אתה ה' אלוהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי העץ

Barukh atah Adonai Eloheinu melech ha-olam b'orei pri ha'etz

BLESSED ARE YOU, BLOSSOMER, OUR GOD, SOVEREIGN OF ALL
WORLDS, WHO CREATES THE FRUIT OF THE TREE.

ברוכה את ה' השכינה רוח העולם בוראת פרי העץ

Brucha at Yah HaShechinah Ruach ha-olam b'orei pri ha'etz

BLESSED ARE YOU, BLOSSOMER, SHECHINAH, SPIRIT OF ALL WORLDS,
WHO CREATES THE FRUIT OF THE TREE.



**Jewish Voice
for Peace**

Justice • Equality • Dignity