

Sukkot 2020

Share Sukkot: Green and Grow the Vote



What must you do?
Connect what you see with your
eyes
To what you do with your hands.
Look with joy and respect
On the threads of connection
That you tie as fringes
On the edges of your self.
Smooth Mountains of Power
Into valleys of abundance.
Turn to sun and My Wind
To empower my people.
Make My breath amidst you
A Hurricane of justice —

Then the grass will grow,
The forests will flourish,
And all life will weave the future
in fullness.

Then eysh and mayim,
Will join in shamayim:
Fire and water,
No longer in battle,
Will each find its place
In the balance of Earth:
The heavens will clear
And your lives will be lived
in heavenly joy

From A Prayer in a Time of Planetary Danger by Rabbi Arthur Waskow

Introduction

Full moon, full harvest, full hearts. As the moon of Tishri draws to fullness, we are ready to celebrate Sukkot – the Festival of Huts. We have experienced the moment of rebirth, the rediscovery of our true identity, the re-examination of our selves, the return to our true path – at Rosh Hashanah, the moment of the new moon. We have experienced the moment of intense contact and reconciliation with God at Yom Kippur, in the swelling of the moon. And now at the full moon we celebrate Sukkot – the festival of fulfillment, of gathering in the benefits that flow from repentance and forgiveness. The harvest that takes the form of joy and shalom, harmony, in the world.

Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Seasons of Our Joy

And yet, in the midst of joy, through the open spaces in the walls of our Sukkah we hear the cries those most vulnerable among us, of Mother Earth wounded and burning, of all of creation. The festivals are the offspring of a love affair between the Jewish People and Earth. Now Mother Earth is badly wounded, and many human beings suffer from poverty, racism, war and war-like policing. Earth and Humanity need the healing help of their children the festivals. Earth and Humanity need the healing help of their children the festivals.

Opening Blessings and Rituals

Air: Sacred Breath, Sacred Name

Moses heard that Name, “YHWH,” at the Burning Bush. In biblical writing it is not replaced by “Adonai, Lord,” and rarely connected with “Melekh, King.” Those were substitutions made by Rabbinic Judaism.

The Name never had vowels, and so was not “Yahweh,” nor “Yahovah.” If one tries to pronounce it, what comes is simply a Breath. Its brilliance as a Name of God is that It alone, Breathing alone, is “spoken” in every human tongue. All the myriad names of God have breath as their root and nurture. And not only human languages – but also every grass and tree, every frog and leopard. The interbreathing of oxygen and CO2 between animals and vegetation is what keeps all Earthly life alive.

As the Siddur teaches, “Nishmat kol chai tivarekh et-shimcha, YHWH elohenu -- The Breath of all life praises your Name, Yahhhh our God” because the Name is the Breath of all life. In that phrase, “our God” does not mean the Jews’ God, nor the humans’ God – but the God of all living, breathing beings.

And in our era, when the entire web of life on Earth is threatened by the insistence of some human Carbon Pharaohs on choking us with more CO2 than all the trees and grasses can transmute to oxygen, what we call the “climate crisis” is a crisis in the very Name of God.

Naming God as “the Interbreathing Spirit of the world, Ruach Ha’Olam” is to see each being as unique, all interwoven into Echad, the One. No “Melekh,” no ruler, no subjugator.

– Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Dancing in God’s Earthquake

Draw gathered community into Echad Oneness by connecting with the Interbreathing Spirit of the World

Blow the *Shofar* to awaken our hearts and souls
Sing a niggun of your choice or

Strong wind, deep water, tall trees, warm fire
I can feel it in my body. I can feel it in my soul.
Heya, heya, heya, heya, heya, heya, heya, ho
Heya, heya, heya, heya, heya, heya, heya, ho

Adamah V'shamayim, Chom Ha'esh, Tzvil hamayim
Ani margish zot begufi, beruchi, benishmati.
Heya, heya, heya, heya, heya, heya, heya, ho
Heya, heya, heya, heya, heya, heya, heya, ho

Fire: Light Sacred Fire

A Prayer for Lighting Candles of Commitment.

All recite in unison

We are the generation that stands
between the fires:
Behind us the flame and smoke
that rose from Auschwitz and from Hiroshima;
From the burning forests of the Amazon,
From the hottest years of human history
that bring upon us
Melted ice fields, Flooded cities, Scorching droughts.
Before us the nightmare of a Flood of Fire,
The heat and smoke that could consume all Earth.
It is our task to make from fire not an all-consuming blaze,
Not fire and fury,
But the light in which we see each other fully.
All of us different, All of us bearing
One Spark.
We light these fires to see more clearly
That the Earth and all who live as part of it
Are not for burning.
We light these fires to see more clearly
The rainbow in our many-colored faces.

Baruch atah YHWH -- Yahhh -- elohenu ruakh ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvot
vitzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Sukkot.

Blessed are You, Interbreathing Spirit of the world, Source of all creation, Who calls us
into holiness through making connections with each other, and Who connects us by
kindling the lights of this festival, Sukkot.

Light candles of commitment and joy

Water: Libation Ceremony honoring the Ushpizin Ancestors in the Sukkah

The Temple ceremonies for Sukkot included a ritual that is not mentioned in the Torah: the water pouring, which became the focus of the joy that the Torah commands for Sukkot. Both water and wine were offered in this ceremony; water being the offering that every Israelite, no matter how poor, could bring.

Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Seasons of Our Joy

Libation offerings have been part of many religious traditions throughout time including today. Many cultures honor and remember ancestors by pouring libation, that meaning has been added here as we joyfully invite ancestors to join us in the sukkah.

In these times, when we acutely feel the descending darkness of our national climate, remembering our ancestors infuses us with power to kindle our own light of love. Their memory emboldens us to speak our authentic truth, to unleash our power and strength, to live and act in audacious hope so that we can rebuild this world in love.

– Karen Flotte, Remembering our Ancestors Transformation and Hope

Invite the Ushpizin (Sacred Guests) to Your Sukkah

These last days and months the losses seem immeasurable, incomprehensible. Each one a light, a teacher carrying a unique lesson into this world. In two months we lost two great lights of the American People, Congressman John Lewis on July 17 and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg hours before Erev Rosh Hashanah on September 18. Before we invite the Ushpizin into our sukkah, let us pause to remember Congressman Lewis and Justice Ginsburg. Add to their names those who you can no longer touch but who have touched your life deeply. Light a Yartzheit Candle and say:

*What is the candle we kindle here,
The fires we light?
We among all life-forms
face the nightmare of a Flood of Fire
The heat and smoke that could consume all Earth.
We come to douse that outer all-consuming fire.
We must light again in our own hearts
the inner fire of love and liberation
that burned in the Burning Bush --*

*The fire that did not destroy the Bush it burned in --
As that inner fire burned in the heart of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and John Lewis --
The fire that did not destroy but loved and liberated
Loved and liberated women and men;
Loved and liberated Black women and men denied the right to vote;
Sought to love and liberate us all.
Both became a great light of the American people,
Calling forth the fire within us,
Each of us and all of us,
Our fire of love and liberation.
For that love is strong as death --
Love's Fire must never be extinguished:
The fire in the heart of all Creation.
It is our task to make from inner fire
Not an all-consuming blaze
But these loving lights we kindle now
in which we see more clearly
The Rainbow Covenant glowing
in the many-colored faces of all life.*

Adapted from Erev Rosh Hashanah Candle Lighting, Rabbi Arthur Waskow

Pass a pitcher of water and beautiful vessel. Each person invites one of the martyrs and heroes for voting rights throughout our history, using the words below and then reading the description from the Shalom Center's Ushpizin posters and pouring a libation from the pitcher into the vessel

"I invite to this meal the exalted guest, (Name and Description on the poster)

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

John Lewis

James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, Michael Schwerner

Heather Booth

Charles McDew, Fannie Lou Hamer, Bob Moses

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Roy Wilkins, A. Philip Randolph, Arnold Aronson

Ida B. Wells, Rosika Schwimmer

Earth: Blessings for the Sukkah and Benschng the Lulav

Benschng the Lulav

“What is going on in the waving? There are many possibilities of spiritual approach:

Close your eyes as you wave. Focus on the rustling sound of the lulav and the smell of the etrog. Let them become your branches and your fruit, so that you are the four-in-one tree whose fruit and branches are waving in the wind. You. Are. The. Tree. The. Tree. Of. Life, which according to tradition is what the Torah is. A human being living a decent, holy life becomes a Torah, a Tree of Life. Such a person becomes an organic part of the natural world, a microcosm of the universe.

As you wave, be conscious that you are pulling all six directions of the universe toward you, for a moment the very center of all the worlds. They all are depending on your internal clarity and unity.

The four species represent the four letters of the Name. The etrog looks like a yod; the soft and curving myrtle like a hay; the tall and springy palm branch like a vav; the soft and curving willow like a hay. The bringing together of the right and left hands unifies the Name. It is spelled in the right order only for someone facing you. God? Your friends and comrades? Those who are not yet conscious of the Unity, since Sukkot is the moment when God’s Name will become One to all who live on earth?

And each new experience with waving lulav may lead to a new sense of what is going on.”

Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Seasons of Our Joy

Take up the lulav and etrog.

Wave the lulav and etrog, in the seven directions — six outward – Left, Right, Front, Back, Up, Down – each time bringing the lulav inward to touch your heart – the seventh direction, accompanied by blessings.

Say: May my thoughts be holy, in token of the abundance of blessing that is mine from heaven and earth. With these four species, I reach out to the Interbreathing Spirit of all Life, whose Presence is with us in all directions and in all ways.

Wave the species in the seven directions and recite the blessing, first in masculine, then feminine.

Baruch Atah Yah, Eloheynu ruach haolam, asher kid’shanu b'mitzvot v'tzivanu al netilat lulav.

Bruchah At Yah Eloheynu ruach haolam asher kid'shatnu b'mitzvot v'tzivatnu al n'tilat lulav.

Blessed are you, Yah, Breath of Life, who makes us holy us with Your commandments [or “connections”] and has enjoined upon us the mitzvah of the lulav.

Blessing for Being in the Sukkah:

Eternal God spread over us *sukkat shlomekha*, your sheltering peace. Surround us with your radiance and open our hearts that we may feel your abundance. Let there be food and drink for all who hunger and thirst.

Baruch atah Yah eloheinu Ruach ha-olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotah, v'tzivanu leisheiv basukah.

Blessed are You, YAH, Breath of life, whose Presence fills creation making us holy with your mitzvot, inviting us to dwell in the sukkah.

Barukh Atah Yah, Eloheynu ruakh haolam, shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higiyanu lazman hazeh.

Blessed are you, Yah, Breath of Life, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this moment.

The Sacred Meal

Blessing Over the Wine

Baruch Atah Yah Eloheinu ruach ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

Blessed are You, *Yah*, Breath of Life, creator of the fruit of the vine.

Blessing Over the Bread

Baruch Atah Yah Eloheinu ruach ha'olam, hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.

Blessed are You, *Yah*, Breath of Life, who has brought forth bread from the earth.

After Meal Song of Praise:

Written at the beginning of sheltering in place this year, Rabbi Randy Fleisher was hoping to find solace in the Psalms and found they contained beautiful poetry about so much of what he treasures in creation-nature, music, and sacred gatherings—but they were wrapped in an ancient theology that did not resonate with him. So, he wrote something like a Psalm, one he could sing with integrity, and called it a Psalmish. It was also inspired by Reb Zalman Schacter-Shalomi of blessed memory, a great teacher of Rabbi Randy's as well as many others. Randy remembered the first time he saw Reb Zalman lead davening, he sang the 150th Psalm to the tune of Michael Row the Boat Ashore which is perfection because the last Hebrew word in the Psalm (and therefore the last word in the entire book of Tehillim) is also the refrain of 'Michael Row'—Hallelujah-praise the Breath of all life!

Psalmish

Words by Rabbi Randy Fleisher

Sung to the tune of Michael Row the Boat Ashore

Praise Yah for the mountains high.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah for the oceans' tides.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah, dense forests of trees.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah, deserts, valleys.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah thunderous waterfalls.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah creatures large and small.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah promise of sunrise.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah sunsets then the stars.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah for dance and song.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah strings, flute and horn.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah for drumming that resounds.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah joyful noises that rebound.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah for folks of every kind.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah hearts souls and minds.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah speaking truth to power.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah letting our best selves flower.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah vision over visibility.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah in Oneness we believe.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah arms open wide.	Halleluyah
Praise Yah Beloved gatherings every size.	Halleluyah
Let every soul and voice give thanks and praise.	Halleluyah
Kol HaNeshamah Tehalel Yah.	Halleluyah
With every breath we renew our awe.	Halleluyah
Kol HaNeshamah Tehalel Yah.	Halleluyah!

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Texts, Teaching, Reflection and Discussion

Grow the Vote! Green the Vote!

There are many values hidden in the Sukkot festival that may only show up when you need them. One is hidden in plain sight: Because both Sukkot and the dates of major U.S. elections are connected with the Harvest, Sukkot in every national election year always comes several weeks before the election. The festival can be a period of spiritual, emotional, and intellectual preparation for voting.

If the religious communities of America are serious about our deepest spiritual teachings of the profound worth of every human being and every species, Growing the Vote is crucial. For Jews, sharing Sukkot (the festival from the evening of October 2 to the evening of October 9) and its profound teachings with the “seventy nations of the world” and drawing on its wisdom to Grow the Vote is crucial. In our lives, that includes making sure the poor, the disabled, the young and the old get to vote.

- In the midst of the pandemic, do we have a clear understanding of all the ways that we can vote safely?
- Are we in a position to assist in getting information out about how to vote?
- How can we develop strategies as individuals and as a group to support all the ways people can vote and vote safely?

You can find our guide at www.TheShalomCenter.org/ShareSukkotResources

The sukkah is a home for the homeless. Torah says that sukkot were the first homes of the Exodus band of runaway slaves – refugees – who created a community of freedom. So they remind us of to learn and share the sacred practice of empowering disempowered and marginal people, especially refugees from despotic and violent power. Sukkot affirms the value of protection for refugees an important issue in the upcoming election.

Sukkot’s relationship to the fall harvest strengthens its connection with Earth. And the sukkah is open to our Mother Earth, reminding us to heal her from the wounds of modern Carbon Pharaohs.

The elections offer us the chance to cry out when it matters. If we stay silent now, the Carbon Pharaohs will do their best – their worst—to control the next Administration, no matter who wins. Incremental steps are not enough. If we are standing at the edge of a precipice, incremental steps will just plunge us into the abyss of death. We must leap into a new society, as our forebears crossed the Red Sea. Action strategies:

- Write two newspapers a letter to the editor. One to your biggest metropolitan paper. One to a communal paper. Maybe your Jewish paper. Or your neighborhood paper. Or your congregational newsletter. Say this: “The West is afire. The climate crisis is no hoax. I demand that the candidates for President and our local candidates for House and Senate (name the ones you mean) speak NOW on what they will do to face the climate crisis. A program.”

- Call your local Presidential and Senatorial campaign offices and say the same thing. Call them once a day. Ask your friends to call. Share this letter with them.
- Evaluate all candidates – local, state, federal -- using these questions, share your thoughts with others:
 - How do candidates plan to address the systemic racism that pervades U.S. law enforcement agencies, especially the police?
 - What measures will the candidate take to protect Native American lands from exploitation by the fossil fuel industry?
 - How will the candidate work with community groups to reduce the pollution that disproportionately impacts communities of color?
 - What is the candidate’s plan to address the inequities in our public education system that disadvantage students of color?
 - What is the candidate’s position on raising the minimum wage to a living wage?
 - What are the candidate’s plans to reform our criminal justice system which criminalizes people of color and incarcerates them at rates much higher than their percentage of the population?
 - What has the candidate said about policies/programs needed for the protection of our land, water and air?
 - What has the candidate said about oil and gas drilling on land and in the water? What protections has the candidate advocated for?
 - What has the candidate said about the Paris Climate Agreement? Would the candidate support the US re- entering the Agreement? If so, what action would the candidate take?
 - What has the candidate said about strengthening and supporting the Environmental Protection Agency to protect and promote clean air, clean water, and renewable energy?

Justice Gardeners: Nourishing our Neighbors, Nourishing Ourselves, Healing Our Mother Earth

There is an ancient tradition that Sukkot celebrates the harvest of abundance and justice not for Jews alone but for all “the seventy nations” of the world.” So Sukkot represents a commitment to a loving relationship for all nations with all Earth. The sukkah itself – a fragile hut with a leafy, leaky roof – is the house of the poor just as matzah is the bread of the poor. The tradition of inviting Ushpizin into the Sukkah includes inviting guests from those most vulnerable in our community. The intersection of the climate crisis, racism and inequality is having cataclysmic impacts on those most vulnerable among us. Through the open spaces in the walls of our Sukkah we hear their cries, their demand for justice. We open our hearts and souls with compassion.

Rapidly rising rates of hunger in this nation were heartbreaking before the pandemic. Recent images of cars lined up for miles at food pantries tell the story of parents and grandparents stretched beyond imagination to provide for their families. Food pantries are scrambling to meet these families’ nutritional

needs, especially fresh fruits and vegetables so essential to support growing bodies and strong minds for learning.

Justice Gardeners, a new movement emerging in St. Louis has a powerful vision to address economic, inclusion and environmental justice through faith-based communal gardening for those that are most vulnerable in our communities.

Drawing on their experience leading The CRC Mitzvah Farm, Justice Gardeners has created a communal garden model which is easily replicated, focused on relationship, and builds communities seeking justice. They have trained and mentored 12 other gardens in the region. With a small budget, a small group of volunteers, and a small plot of land, you can have a significant impact on food security, biodiversity and building community. For example, the CRC Mitzvah Farm produces 1,500 pounds of organic produce to families' dinner tables each year on a small plot. Imagine the impact if 50, 100, or even 1,000 places were growing organic food in communities facing food insecurity and in the process healing the earth?

Can you imagine this happening in your own community? Does your community or synagogue have access to :

- A small amount of land with sun?
- A source of water?
- 5 or so volunteers?
- \$500 or less for seedlings and supplies?

Justice Gardeners provides free training and mentoring to develop your own Justice Gardener team. Please visit www.JusticeGardeners.org to dream—and sign up for their October and November online seminars.

Justice Gardeners envisions a world where gardens become spaces of resistance in which communities reclaim their sacred interconnectedness, nourish body and soul, respond to community concerns, and build resilient, sustainable communities with love. Join this nascent movement.

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