

# J.E.D.I.

JEWISH EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

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## JEDI HIGH HOLIDAYS READER

5783



The Jewish Federations<sup>®</sup>  
OF NORTH AMERICA

# ABOUT THE READER



In this High Holiday Reader, you will find an overview of each of the upcoming high holidays, some customs from the diverse mosaic of Jews around the world, and writings from Jews representing various identities (race/ethnicity, LGBTQ+, religious denominations, genders, abilities, and peoples whose primary language isn't English. Finally, each holiday contains reflection exercises to aid in teshuvah.

The audience for this reader is probably curious or actively working on issues of social and racial justice in the Jewish community. As we enter into the holiest time of the year in our calendar, whether secular, spiritual, or religious in some way, we take our regrets, missteps, hopes and passion for Jewish Equity, Diversity and Inclusion with us into these days of reflection and teshuvah. Let the heartfelt writings, Torah, reflections, and the Belonging Checklist at the end, help to create an "open tent" where all Jews and their loved ones find meaningful reflection and commitment to change, a culture of belonging, and hope for a sweet new year.

The following piyyut (song, poem) sung in many Sephardic communities at this time speaks to our desires to go beyond the surface, search our own deeds for teshuvah, and emerge renewed to continue our work for justice.

אָדוֹן הַסְּלִיחוֹת - Adon HaSelichot  
בוֹחֵן לְבָבוֹת, - examiner of hearts  
גּוֹלֵה עֲמוּקוֹת - the revealer of depths  
דּוֹבֵר צְדָקוֹת - speaker of justice  
חָטְאָנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ, רַחֵם עָלֵינוּ - We have sinned before You, have mercy upon us.



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# YOUR PEOPLE

**JULIE PLATT, CHAIR | ERIC FINGERHUT, PRESIDENT & CEO, JEWISH FEDERATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA**

We commonly use phrases like “our community,” the “Jewish community,” or “am yisrael – the people of Israel,” when we refer to ourselves collectively.

One name for our community that used to be more common, but is less so today, is “amcha.” “Amcha” literally means “your people.” Whose people? Pretty clearly, “amcha” is referring to G-d, and so “your people” means “G-d’s people.”

This has particular resonance during Rosh Hashanah and the ten days of repentance that lead up to Yom Kippur, as we add in our daily prayers:

בְּסֵפֶר חַיִּים בְּרָכָה וְשְׁלוֹם וּפְרֻנְסָה טוֹבָה נִזְכָּר וְנִכְתָּב לְפָנֶיךָ אֲנַחְנוּ וְכָל עַמְּךָ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל לְחַיִּים טוֹבִים  
וְלְשְׁלוֹם

“May we be remembered and inscribed before You in the book of life, blessing, peace and abundant maintenance; we and all Your people, the House of Israel, for a good life and peace.”

Well, G-d, “your people” have had another amazing, challenging, scary but exhilarating year. In the past year, your people have saved lives in Ukraine and Russia, resettled refugees in Israel, Europe and North America, brought new olim to Israel from every corner of the globe, including a renewed aliyah from Ethiopia, strengthened the security of dozens of our communities with more to come, launched mental health supports across the Jewish community, brought relief to victims of trauma, built affinity groups that make our communities more welcoming and inclusive, provided important leadership development to our professionals and lay leaders alike, and much more.

And G-d, your people could not have done it without you, but we also know we can not accomplish anything without each other. Your people have worked together consistently and collaboratively, lifting each other up, learning from each other and teaching each other, making an impact that can only be achieved by collective action.

Finally, G-d, your people come to this New Year 5783 in humility and reflection, preparing to care for the needs of the Jewish people once again in the coming year, in our own communities and around the world.

On behalf of the lay leaders and professional team at the Jewish Federations of North America, we wish you and all your loved ones a happy, healthy and sweet new year. We thank you for all that you are doing for the Jewish people and look forward to working together in 5783!

Shanah tova!



# THE HIGH HOLIDAYS TELL US TO NEVER GIVE UP ON HUMANITY

**RABBI ISAIAH J. ROTHSTEIN, RABBINIC SCHOLAR AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS ADVISOR JFNA'S JEDI INITIATIVE**

The Hebrew month of Tishrei is woven with a 3,000-year-old annual campaign to love, cherish and protect humanity's common bond and to never give up on the world and its inhabitants.

On Rosh Hashanah, the first day of the month, we hear the shofar's call for change, reminding us that the world is never immutable, no matter how fixed society might seem. Ten days later on Yom Kippur, we embody that change by disrupting our habits for a day, punctuating the 25-hour fast with individual and communal commitments to live with integrity. Three whole days later, we dwell in a sukkah of peace, a tent that in its parameters is truly big enough for everyone.

What bridges these days together is the birthday of humanity, or as the liturgy states hayom harat olam — today, the world was created. Our sages taught that the world was created on the 25th day of the previous month, Elul. Since Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day of the creation story [Genesis 1:27](#), that makes the first day of Tishrei the birthday of humanity.

Like our individual birthdays, these Days of Awe and raw emotion encourage us to reflect on our collective and individual choices, assess our missteps, and integrate forthright changes so that we can reinstate our capacity as a species to build a world of humility, sacredness and shared fortitude. As I write these words, I can't help but think how different this Tishrei will be. As humanity prepares to mark its birthday, there are too many ways in which our planet faces an uncertain future. One has to wonder: Can the spiritual technology of Tishrei respond to a moment beset by civil unrest and profound polarization?

With multiple crises unfolding, the Jewish year 5780 has unmasked just how disparate the human experience is for people of different ages, locations, socioeconomic status, community, skin color, and more. And yet, COVID-19 has also shown us all that there is a common link between all of us. Working to see ourselves in the other is like engaging in spiritual push-ups. And like physical push-ups, it is not always easy, but in the long run, it's worth it.



The new Jewish year will dawn at a time of great complexity. But Tishrei is also a moment to set a new standard and redefine humanity's bond for the better — every year. These High Holidays teach us not to ignore or repel the realities of life but to remain vigilant in reimagining what is possible.

**Here are three ways you might do that this year:**

- Love and honor yourself: So many in our generation feel lonely and helpless. How can you remind yourself of your unique soul qualities? If you listen to yourself, the answers will arise.
- Consider your choices, actions and inactions: During the month of Tishrei, we engage in a process called teshuvah, returning to our best selves. What is something you regret or wish to free yourself of? Teshuvah is believing you can make life more pleasant for you and your fellow humans.
- Unlearn that which is harmful, unjust and untrue: At the close of the fall holiday season on Simchat Torah, we return to the Torah as if it were brand new— not only because the rabbis were romantics, but also because sometimes we need to circle back to what we thought we knew to really move forward. What do we need to unlearn as a society to move forward? What do you as an individual need to unlearn?



# INTENTIONALLY PLANTED, INTENTIONALLY PLANNING

**JOAN LUBAR, CHAIR OF THE JEDI COMMITTEE, JEWISH FEDERATIONS**

Elul, the month preceding Rosh Hashanah, is a time for reflection and preparation for a new beginning. We think about how to set ourselves up for a successful year and what direction we would like to see our lives take. Though we cannot predict every part of the year to come, an intentional planning process will help us best know how to recalibrate when the unexpected, yet inevitable enters our path.

This year my family was blessed to celebrate my parents' 70th wedding anniversary! When my parents married they knew they wanted to create and build a strong family unit. Of course, no one can predict all that may happen, but one can lay the foundation to deal with what one may encounter. Over the 70 years of my parent's marriage, there have been unexpected, and even tragic, events in our family, but the strength of the roots of our family tree that my parents intentionally planted has kept us grounded throughout painful and celebratory times. My parents were secure in their values and direction and so our family tree blossomed on a solid and healthy foundation, which allowed my parents to impart their values to their children, my siblings and me; and on to our children, and now even our grandchildren.

Our tradition teaches that the Hebrew month of Elul is an acronym for "Ani Lodi V'Dodi Li" from chapter 6 of the Song of Songs, meaning, "I am my beloved and my beloved is mine." Many couples say these words under the wedding huppah. These words are not only beautiful, they also represent a deep commitment to another person, to all they value and hold dear. My parents have demonstrated 70 years of such commitment, and this year, Jewish Federations celebrates 120 years of commitment to this community's vibrant Jewish life. Each one of us is nurturing a branch of our community tree. More than enjoying the fruits of our beautiful community tree, it is about watering it, taking care of the needs of it, and creating an atmosphere for growth; and even finding space for new seeds.

As we use our Elul to reflect on our priorities this year, think about where each of you can use your strengths and passions and make a contribution to our community. Each day in the month of Elul, we blow the shofar, the instrument passed down from generation to generation since the time of our ancestors. The sound of the shofar wakes us up to prepare for the tasks at hand. May it be so.



# HOW CAN WE INCLUDE EVERYONE?

**MATAN KOCH, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR STRATEGIC CHANGE AT RESPECTABILITY.ORG**

As a young child with an anxiety disorder, I found the Unetaneh Tokef and surrounding liturgy so disturbing that I had to leave. As a young child in a wheelchair, I waited in an empty shul while everyone ran to the river to do Tashlich. Even though, for me, getting into the synagogue was easy, it was getting some awe that was difficult.

What does it mean to be included in the Days of Awe? Most of our synagogues have a plan. When a wheelchair user approaches the building, they are directed to seats that have been set aside. A worshiper who is hard of hearing is directed to an assistive listening device, and a worshiper who is blind is guided to his seat and given a Braille machzor (High Holidays prayer book). In the synagogues that think of themselves as most inclusive, various members with disabilities – physical, intellectual, and emotional – are given bimah honors.

Laudable plans, all – but we could spend a great deal of time talking about how they fail. Too often, well-intentioned ushers drag a blind person to their seats or push a person with a mobility impairment to sit in the space they've created, even if they'd like to and can safely sit somewhere else.

The oft-repeated but never worn out idea that the first answer to inclusion is to meet an individual where they are – and these are in fact all things that we should think about as we begin to prepare for the Days of Awe. And yet, they miss the bigger question. On the High Holidays, we read, “Untaneh-tokef k’dushat hayom – ki hu nora v’ayom.” Gates of Repentance, an older version of the Reform machzor, translated this phrase to, “Let us proclaim the sacred power of this day, it is awesome and full of dread.”

Sometimes I think the words “nora v’ayom” might refer to the incredible mess and strain of preparing our Jewish institutions to accommodate two and three times the capacity of even the busiest other times of year, a tremendous effort to do the impossible. Trust me, I get it: I’m the son of a pulpit rabbi, and I’m also a former Hillel board member who’s active in multiple shuls and counts among my friends an astonishing number of people currently preparing to manage and lead the High Holidays. I get it, it’s truly a taxing time. Within this context, it would be easy to say that merely remembering to arrange accommodations is a triumph, and it is. Yet we can’t forget the full sentence: “Untaneh-tokef k’dushat hayom – ki hu nora v’ayom,” “Let us proclaim the sacred power of this day, it is awesome and full of dread.”



We learn that this is a day of sacred power for Jews – when our fates hang in the balance, when we do an accounting of our souls, offer them up in full knowledge, and so be it. At the end of 10 days, we culminate with a daylong mini-death, rigorous confessions of our sins, the hurried knowledge that the gates are closing, and a spiritual transformation when at last we hear the final blast of the shofar. What, then, does it really mean to include someone in awe?

It's not just getting into the sanctuary but being able, within reason, to sit where you want. It's not just attending a service with an assistive listening device but, for a person with a hearing impairment, being able to attend a service that speaks to them, that fills them with power and quivering. It's allowing those who need to walk around to walk, and those who need to rock around to rock. And, as my opening examples indicate, the barriers to inclusion don't stop once worshipers enter the room.

As congregational leaders, our task is not to get people nominally in the doors of our sanctuary but to help them through the gates of repentance – even as we amble through ourselves.

Even as you juggle seating plans and sermons, parking cordons and English readings, I challenge you not merely to congratulate yourself for having figured out how to get people into the room. At this holy time of year, think instead about how you can include them in awe.

If there's time (and at this point, maybe these will become notes for next year), do an exercise like the one I propose in my webinar "Writing Inclusive Liturgy" on the URJ's Disabilities Inclusion Learning Center. Help people understand the prayers, especially the troubling ones, and the concepts, and find a safe way to internalize. Think about how you're going to be as flexible as possible with seating, and whether or not you can find listening solutions for multiple rooms.

Your question should not be, "If a person with a disability shows up, how do we include them in our service?" but rather, "How do we include them in awe?"



# ROSH HASHANAH



# ROSH HASHANAH

## Facts

- Known as the Jewish New Year
- Time of self-reflection
- Begins the 10 days of teshuvah (repentance=return or renewal)

## Mosaic of Jewish Customs

- Apples and Honey eaten to symbolize the desire for a “sweet” year. Kabbalistically understood to also counteract bitterness of judgment.
- Rosh Hashanah Seder in Sephardic communities- Many Jews from N. Africa and Hispanic heritage will have a seder which is a meal featuring symbolic foods (simanim) representing aspects of hope and prosperity for New Year.
- Black Eyed Peas Sephardic and some non-European Jews eat Rubia/blackeyed peas to symbolize hope for increase and growth, especially in the area of good deeds. Rabbi Manashe Klein zt”l, says it can symbolize desiring our good deeds to influence others to do the same. Many African Americans also eat these on civil new year to symbolize growth and good luck. [Check out some Sephardic and Mizrahi recipes.](#)
- Shofar- Ram’s horn blown ceremonially to represent a “wake up” call for reflection and returning to our best selves.
- L’Shana Tovah- customary greeting of the season meaning “To a good year” in Hebrew.

## Reflection Exercises

1. Teshuvah serves as hope that our past mistakes don’t determine our future. We have the power to change, but we must have the courage to face mistakes and commit to change. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, zt”l suggest Rosh Hashanah is about the future. Reflect on one commitment for your future growth in social/racial justice.
2. Have you ever celebrated Rosh Hashana with a Jew with a different custom? Can you find someone or attend a program?

[This year’s Jewish Federations’s Rosh Hashanah campaign marketing materials are here!](#) This year’s theme puts a new message and feel around the theme “Dear New Year”. Within this packet, you’ll find a video, social posts, direct mail letters, and more!



# HOLY BROKENNESS

RABBI ANGELA BUCHDAHL, SENIOR RABBI AT CENTRAL SYNAGOGUE



if you have come here tonight on Rosh Hashanah and feel that there is nothing to examine, no wound in your life to heal, no relationship to repair—then I hope you will listen especially closely to the shofar. Rosh Hashanah is also known as Yom Teruah—the Day for the Sounding of the Shofar.

The purpose of the Shofar blast is to shake us up, and to disturb our status quo. The shofar call, 'shevarim,' literally means 'broken.' And if you do not feel any cracks emerge from that sonic signal, you might ask yourself if you've truly fulfilled your obligation to hear it.

For the shofar blast should be a wake up call that reminds us to dig a little deeper, to bear into what is hard, to stop living life on the surface of it all. To return to our fractured relationships.

To lean into the grief that you're feeling for someone you lost. To examine the imperfections that we constantly criticize and then, to get curious. Perhaps this pain—this flaw—this broken heart—has a purpose...

That brokenness is all around us. And inside each one of us. Unearth its meaning, confront its terrible beauty, and we may realize that true divinity is in that broken shard that cut us in the first place.

God has given us a sacred task and opportunity: to make our own tikkun. But in the coming year, instead of trying to make our broken parts whole, may you find in them—what is most holy.



**YOM KIPPUR**



# YOM KIPPUR

## Facts

- Known as the Day of Atonement
- Many follow custom to wear white to symbolism purity
- 25 hour fast from food and drink
- We apologize to people we hurt or may have hurt intentionally or unintentionally

## Mosaic of Jewish Customs

- Iraq/Morocco/Yemin - Quince, a fragrant pear like fruit is cooked and part of meals as a base of cooking sauces and jam.
- Children may carry a quince pierced with cloves to synagogue for people feeling faint to smell.
- Kreplach-Served pre-fast by many Jews of European heritage (Ashkenazim). These triangle meat filled dumplings 3 corners represent the patriarchs Abraham, Issac and Jacob.
- Tzedakah-Throughout the High Holidays prayers include the phrase, "Repentance, prayer and tzedakah may avert the evil decree." Tzedakah is monetary giving to take care of the needs of others. Many see it as cultivating mutual empathy and responsibility, cultivating an open heart and moral consciousness to the injustices and disparities around us.
- Gmar Chatima Tovah- A customary greeting among Jews on [Yom Kippur](#) [and the period between Yom Kippur and [Rosh haShanah](#)]" (JPS). lit. "a good end of [the process of] sealing [in the Book of Life]".

## Reflection Exercises

1. As we look many times during this season at the [13 attributes of G-d](#) (Exodus 34), compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness and truth...pick an attribute you would like to commit to emulating in 5783.
2. In the days leading up to Yom Kippur, reach out to those 5 you have harmed. Perhaps there was something that has been left unsaid or perhaps too much was said. In Jewish tradition, community is paramount and with that strengthening its ties takes intentional work and dedication.
3. Take some time to reflect on the ways that you've let yourself down during this year, and write an apology letter to yourself. While it is important to acknowledge the ways that we've missed our mark, what is most important is the practice of forgiveness. Be generous and write yourself a forgiveness letter to hold on to throughout the year.



# A JEWISH FESTIVAL WITHOUT FOOD

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is the holy of holies of Jewish time. It is that rarest of phenomena, a Jewish festival without food. Instead it is a day of fasting and prayer, introspection and self-judgment when, collectively and repeatedly, we confess our sins and pray to be written into God's Book of Life.



# FORGIVENESS

AARON SAMUELS, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, BLAVITY

Each year my Yom Kippur begins with white Linen pants, canvas sneakers, a kepah, a tallis

I walk covered in white to the temple steps

I walk past four police officers. I see their weapons

How they make the community feel safe. I ready my body to pray. Long before Kol Nidre melodies, we inscribed chants in Aramaic, to request annulment from the divine

I empty the metal from my pockets. my keys, my phone. Each item that could have been a gun

I walk towards the metal detector.

And I am on a dark road, my hands on the wheel, my eyes in the rear view as the officer approaches. I walk through the metal detector.

And I am buying candy in a new neighborhood. I exit the metal detector, and I am asleep in my own bed

This is my place of worship. These are my people my vows no longer vows; my oaths no longer oaths

Forgive me.

This year we said black lives matter with lower case letters and we said Black Lives Matter with capital letters.

And we said All Lives Matter. Said we were afraid to say the Black, what it could mean for the All

what it could mean for our people, our safety. We were afraid but we said it regardless.

And we argued with our parents.

And we lost friends. And we said Black to apologize. And we said Black to mourn.

Before our temple was destroyed, we offered sacrifice.

Now, instead, we offer a service, a Musaf. A Torah wrapped around a burning man. As the letters rise from the scroll

We mourn, ten martyrs. Ay-Leh Ehz-kih-Rah

These martyrs I will remember And pour out my soul within me.



This Musaf for Ahmaud Arbery, who ran towards the horizon This Musaf for Breonna Taylor, who brought us back from the edge of death  
This Musaf for George Floyd, who molded safety into the night This Musaf for Tony McDade, who built a home for those who needed  
This Musaf for Philando Castile, who gave nutrition to the students This Musaf for Sandra Bland, who filmed the truth  
This Musaf for Eric Garner, who planted flowers for the city This Musaf for Michael Brown, who made music with his mouth  
This Musaf for Trayvon Martin, who repaired bicycles for his family This Musaf for Emmett Till, who stuttered and bought groceries  
And while we still ask for forgiveness, we continue to perpetuate the harm  
We still ask for forgiveness for the oaths we made to some, that created curses for others; a begrudging eye, a scoff

A moment where I wanted what was not mine, wanted it nonetheless  
I still ask for forgiveness for all in which I was complicit  
Knowingly, yes, knowingly.  
How many shall pass?  
Who by fire and who by plague?  
This world we built with our hands  
And we have the audacity to ask  
Forgive me  
Forgive me  
Forgive me



# THE HIGH HOLIDAYS IN LADINO

## STROUM CENTER FOR JEWISH STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

The congregants complained to the rabbi that they didn't understand the prayers in Hebrew. "They say with regret that the prayers of the High Holy Days do not make any impression upon us; to the contrary, these prayers are even terribly boring for us, and we have to spend so many hours in the synagogue singing and reading in a language that is totally unknown to us." Hearing this, Rabbi Reuven Eliyahu Israel took it upon himself to translate the most important poems in the holiday liturgy into the spoken language of the Sephardic Jews, Judeo-Spanish, in order "to lift us out of our lethargy and awaken in us sentiments of piety and devotion." In short, he sought to inspire in his congregants a deep understanding and a sense of spiritual connection during the High Holidays—a connection that echoes into the twenty-first century.

In 1910, Israel published two editions of *Traduksyon livre de las Poezias Ebraikas de Rosh Ashana i Kippur* (the introduction is quoted above): one in Latin characters to cater to his small, more assimilated and Europeanized congregation in Craiova, Romania; and one in Hebrew characters for his more traditional native community on the island of Rhodes, which was still part of the Ottoman Empire at the time. Since then, at least eleven versions of Israel's Free Translation of Hebrew Poems for Rosh Ha-Shana and [Yom] Kippur have been printed in Izmir, Livorno, Rhodes, Buenos Aires, Brussels, and even here in Seattle, Washington, where multiple editions have appeared in recent decades.

The Sephardic Studies Collection at the University of Washington now holds over twenty copies of **Traduksyon livre de las Poezias Ebraikas de Rosh Ashana i Kippur**. For more information see <https://jewishstudies.washington.edu/sephardic-studies/high-holidays-in-ladino/>



# YIZKOR: YOM KIPPUR AND REMEMBRANCE

**DEBORAH E. LIPSTADT, UNITED STATES SPECIAL ENVOY FOR MONITORING AND COMBATING ANTISEMITISM.**

Repentance and memory can stimulate that going, that desire to move ahead, to keep changing. And it is here that the third purpose served by Yizkor comes into play. When we remember, irrespective of whom we are remembering—a parent, a grandparent, a sibling, an aunt or uncle, teacher or mentor—these memories become part of us. As we internalize these memories they change us and we evolve, we grow. So, too, those who will follow us and remember us may be changed by their memories of us.

Memory is not just a link from generation to another. It also has its lateral aspects. Every human action, as Yerushalmi notes, “elicits certain inevitable results.” If I remember something and am changed by it, that change may, in turn, elicit a reaction from those around me. In other words, the impact of remembering travels down from generation to generation but also cuts across all generations. It happens now.

Even though scientists have unlocked our genetic makeup, they have not been—and probably never will be—able to tell us about the transmission of the soul, of our very being. It remains a mystery; but one of the ways in which it is passed on is through memory. Each of us takes our perception of the past and, as we incorporate it into our own experiences, it becomes part of who we are. Remembering becomes an ontological experience, something that changes the essence of our being.

An Excerpt from JOFA's Publication entitled ["Shema B'kolah: Listen to Her Voice"](#)



# SUKKOT



# SUKKOT

## Facts

- Jewish tradition tells us to build temporary structures and sleep, eat, and invite in “Ushpizin,” Hebrew for guests for seven days.
- Four species consisting of etrog (citrus like fruit), palm fronds, myrtle, and willow are shaken and waved according to a prescribed ritual. There are several correlations to their symbolic meaning, “defined by both their smell and taste, or lack thereof, along with some interesting imagery from the Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 30:12)”:
- The etrog has both taste and smell, representing people who both perform good deeds and have Torah (knowledge).
- The lulav has taste but no smell, representing those who do not use their knowledge to perform good deeds.
- The hadass (myrtle) has smell but no taste, representing those who perform good deeds but lack the knowledge to excel at them.
- The aravah (willow) has no taste and no smell, representing those who lack both.

## Mosaic of Jewish Customs

- Sukkahs in Florida have AC, Canadian Jews have heaters, many Israelis erect sukkahs on the porches of their apartments.
- Moroccans “hang” a chair for Elijah and Israelis decorate with Christmas lights.
- In the Abayudaya Jewish community of Uganda, the tradition is a big walk, where the entire community walks around viewing one another’s sukkahs before settling in one for kiddush. Read the new book, [Sukkah: A Story from Uganda](#).
- The book of Kohelet also known as Ecclesiastes is read.

## Reflection Exercise

Just like each of the four species has something different to offer and only together do you have the required elements for the Lulav and etrog, every Jew has something to offer the community. Look around at your community (synagogue, work, social group, etc.) who is NOT represented there. How can you invite them in and not only invite but ask them what needs to be in the space for them to contribute with their whole authentic self? Be willing to CHANGE up the “spaces” based on the answers.



# KIDDISH? THE BLACK USHPIZIN OF SUKKOT

## RABBI SHAIS RISHON, MAH NISHTANA

In a little over a week, the holiday of Sukkot will be upon us, part and parcel of which is observing a kabbalistic custom to invite one of seven exalted guests—or *ushpizin*, in Aramaic—into the sukkah for each night, each one being one of the seven “shepherds of Israel”: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and David.

According to tradition, each night a different guest enters the sukkah followed by the other six, with a unique lesson to teach that parallels the spiritual focus of the day on which they visit, based on the *sefira*—the divine attribute that categorizes G’d’s relationship with our reality—associated with that personage, and empowering us with the particular quality that defines them.

The traditional guests and their corresponding *sefirah* are:

- First day - *Chessed*: “Benevolence/Love” Abraham
- Second day - *Gevurah*: “Severity/Discipline” Isaac
- Third day - *Tiferet*: “Beauty/Harmony” Jacob
- Fourth day - *Netzach*: “Victory/Endurance” Moses
- Fifth day - *Hod*: “Splendor/Humility” Aaron
- Sixth day - *Yesod*: “Foundation/Connection” Joseph
- Seventh day - *Malchut*: “Sovereignty/Leadership” David

In more recent times, there has come to be a recognition of a set of seven female shepherds of Israel—called variously *Ushpizot* (using modern Hebrew feminine pluralization), or *Ushpizata* (in reconstructed Aramaic)—the most widespread of which being in accordance with the listing of traditional Judaism’s main seven prophetesses—as per Tractate Megillah 14a-b—with the associated *sefirot* established by Rabbi Menachem Azariah de Fano in his 17th century work *Asarah Ma’amarot*:

- First day *Chessed*: “Benevolence/Love” Sarah
- Second day *Gevurah*: “Severity/Discipline” Miriam
- Third day *Tiferet*: “Beauty/Harmony” Deborah
- Fourth day *Netzach*: “Victory/Endurance” Hannah
- Fifth day *Hod*: “Splendor/Humility” Abigail
- Sixth day *Yesod*: “Foundation/Connection” Hulda
- Seventh day *Malchut*: “Sovereignty/Leadership” Esther



To be fair, these seven (or fourteen) souls are our “shepherds” all year round, but during the seven days of Sukkot it is a time when their presence in our lives is more pronounced and revealed, where they are able to empower us to connect with the seven dimensions of our soul’s divine image and nourish us for the rest of the year.

As such, what would it look like—in the wake of the social and racial unrest in these days, and particularly in America—if (as Jews who are also Black Americans) figures from our past would should up to our sukkah this year, to likewise empower us? Who would they be? What would they represent?

And so I present the Ushpizin of Black America:

- First day Chessed: “Benevolence/Love” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Second day Gevurah: “Severity/Discipline” Malcolm X
- Third day Tiferet: “Beauty/Harmony” Madame C. J. Walker
- Fourth day Netzach: “Victory/Endurance” Eartha Kitt
- Fifth day Hod: “Splendor/Humility” John Lewis
- Sixth day Yesod: “Foundation/Connection” Maya Angelou
- Seventh day Malchut: “Sovereignty/Leadership” - Barack/Michelle Obama



# SUKKOT EXPLANATION AND EXPANSION

CANTOR SABRINA SOJOURNER

## Waving/Shaking the Lulav – Updating a Wondrous Act

### **Beyond the mitzvah/commandment (duty) to wave the four species during sukkot, what is the meaning of this ritual?**

According to the Talmud, the primary purpose is to praise the Creator of heaven and earth (four directions), and to request the withholding of “bad dew” (from above) and the withholding hard winds (all directions). The beginning of Rosh HaShanah (Head of the New Year) signals the beginning of the rainy season in Israel. The four species are presented as a request for a bountiful winter and reminded to the Eternal that “We are Your people.”

### **Is there more than one way to wave/shake the lulav?**

Yes! And, though we frequently speak of “shaking” or “waving” the lulav, the brakhah/blessing speaks of “taking” the lulav. In many communities, we start and face the east. After saying the blessing for taking the lulav, we shake/wave to the east and continue clockwise – south, west, north, up to heaven, and down to earth. Some Sephardic and Chassidic communities shake/wave south, north, east, up, down, west based on a teaching of Rabbi Yitzchak Luria.

### **What’s to love about Sukkot?**

Everything! We are alive for the change in the season. Some of the best produce of the year comes during the fall. If we have a garden or are near farms, we are very aware of the rush to harvest before the cold comes. Another way to be with the ritual is to shake away what we need to release in order to see and welcome the bounty to come.

The Kabbalists assigned values to each of the directions. I’ve added the ancient meanings to consider as well as a 7th direction.

1. East: harmony (tiferet) and honoring our past.
2. South: lovingkindness (chesed) and honoring our journey.
3. West: connection (yesod) and honoring our future.
4. North: discipline (gevurah) and honoring our choice.
5. Up: perseverance (netzach) and honoring our persistence.
6. Down: submission (hod) and honoring I don’t know.
7. (Added) Bringing the four species towards one’s heart and stir: communication (malchut) and honoring all there is!



# GOD DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE, PEOPLE DO

**RABBI ISIAH J. ROTHSTEIN, RABBINIC SCHOLAR AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS ADVISOR JFNA'S JEDI INITIATIVE**

Of all the words that I heard prayed as a child during the High-Holidays, there was one prayer that stood out and puzzled me: *...may it be God's will ...that peace spread across the world, with the entire Jewish people...*

I wondered who were the “entire Jewish people” (*Klal Yisroel*) in the “world” (*Olam*) that we were praying about. I wondered if my family was included, I wondered if my friends of mixed-race identities were included, I wondered if my friends who don't believe in God were included, or those who identified as LGBTQ or secular were included.

Today, as an adult, I still wonder.

Moreover, the limited awareness of the world I had as a child has broadened. Wars, attacks, and brutality, how can I not doubt the possibility of a world-peace. When bombs could be falling at any moment, and when natives to lands are being exiled, and peoples are being physically and spiritually massacred, can we come together? Is there a place where we can truly respect each other?

Consider this: What if, at the end of all of this, God came to the Muslims and said “You were right.

The whole thing! The Koran, the holy wars, Al Aqsa...it's all true!” would the Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Jews bend? Would the whole world start to go to do Hajj in Mecca? Would the whole world accept upon themselves the Sharia Law? What if, at the end of all of this, God came to the Christians and said “You were right. The whole thing, the Gospel, Jesus, Grace and the Trinity—Yup—True!” would Jews and Muslims suddenly start praying in a different direction? Would the day of rest become Sunday? I know...slightly provocative, but hear me out, this idea is a little unsettling for me too.

I don't believe that God would gather some peoples of the world for peace, at the expense of disowning the many. You know why? Because God doesn't discriminate; people do.

God doesn't hold a ruler out to your torso to see how tall you are before riding the roller coaster of life, at least the God I believe in doesn't. God doesn't watch your eyes to see if you are “really praying,” or if your body language gives off the impression that you care, God just doesn't.



God doesn't say "you're cool, but you are not." But people do.

After thousands of pages of penitence and supplication, the mind, body and spirit need an opportunity to slow down, and see how God may exist in the world.

The High Holidays come to an end and the holiday of Sukkot arrives.

Sukkot is also called, "The time of our rejoicing" is upon us (Zman Simchataynu), the holiday of gathering (Chag Ha'asif). Our tradition tells us to build a temporary dwelling, a sukkah. The God I believe in would build a sukkah for the entire world to dwell in, no matter what color, creed or political leaning.

The God I believe in would spread the Sukkah of Peace across the world unto everyone "like water covers the sea ([Isaiah 11:9](#))," the God I believe in would say that love belongs to everyone and that although there were many generations of Pharaohs' decrees, this is a generation of Abraham's brave big tent, relentlessly opening doors for others despite how different they may be from me.

The sukkah comes to remind us of a unity beyond our wildest dreams, a unity that resonated with all peoples of all kinds, the palm branches, the citrons, everyone! Maybe that is why the holiday is called the Feast of Tabernacles, because just as the Tabernacle was a place for all peoples of all streams to stand in awe of the one Source of all, on Sukkot we dwell in the sukkah as if the high-priest dwelling in the Temple of Jerusalem (Talmud: Mesechet Sukkot 9a) fully in the presence of a loving God.



# TURNING A TRICKLE INTO A STREAM OF JUSTICE

## **MICHAEL SAXON, VICE CHAIR OF EMPOWERMENT ON THE JEDI COMMITTEE**

It is an especially white affliction to be unable to see beyond race to the value of an individual. To claim we do not see race is to admit to being blinded by it. The question is not whether we see race but whether we see beyond race. Can we honor the differences between us and be strengthened by those differences as we move forward together?

How long will we live in a society where we allow people to be defined by race without speaking up? How long will we allow people that don't look like us to be humiliated in ways large and small. How long will we insist that the police "keep people in line" at the expense of the humanity of both.

I'm not afraid of the term White Supremacy - if the shoe fits, wear it - but if that term doesn't resonate with you, think of it as "Race with Benefits."

Being born white was not my choice, but it has been my benefit. It has sheltered me from hatred, even as a Jew. It has provided me with easy access to the normal resources that people in a community need to thrive - housing, education, loans. It has meant that I've been taken seriously for what I might contribute to society without having to first prove myself; that people I didn't even know well have believed in and encouraged me. It has meant that others have dignified me with the humanity that I ought to be entitled to.

Do I feel guilt over having had these benefits? No. Am I ashamed of having been the beneficiary of these advantages? Absolutely not. But I'm angry that these benefits are still not available to everyone.

I am outraged by the injustice and humiliation suffered by others and am not willing to let myself fall victim to my own indifference, much less my own arrogance. It is my intention to make a difference by not sitting idly by; by spreading the message openly and privately to others; by encouraging them to be outraged that racial injustice is still a part of our lives; by hoping that they, too, will recognize the need for this to be an active process - to spread the message themselves - because if we are all outraged, it will no longer be so.

My voice is a drop. Together, our voices become a trickle. Joined with others it becomes a brook and then a stream and then a river. When it becomes an ocean, our work will be done.



**HOSHANA RABBAH**  
**SHEMINI ATZERET**  
**SIMCHAT TORAH**



# HOSHANAH RABAH, SHMINI ATZERET, SIMCHAT TORAH

## Facts

- The Seventh day of Sukkot is called Hoshana Rabba
- Shemini Atzeret means the Eighth day.
- Simchat Torah means, Rejoicing in Torah
- Some Jewish communities combine all the celebrations for Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah into one day after sukkot; more traditional communities are each separate days of celebration.

## Mosaic of Jewish Customs

- At the end of Sukkot, during Shemini Atzeret, we add a verse to the second blessing of the Amidah called “gevurot geshamim,” meaning the power of rain. Sephardic Jews recite a different prayer for rain, **Tikkun Hageshem**. Take a [listen](#) to a rendition by Yonatan Razel.
- Many American Jews will say Chag Sameach or Gud Yontif, Sephardic and Israeli are more likely to say "Moadim L'Simcha!" This special greeting for the middle days of Passover and Sukkot means 'Joyous Festivals!' And then the person can respond: "Chagim u'zmanim l'sasson" which means "Joyous holidays and seasons!"
- The season is deeply connected to water as it is a time the rains begin in Israel. All of the symbols relate back to water in some way. In Temple times there was a special water libation ceremony. *“He Who fashions their hearts alike, Who considers all their deeds”*; and on the festival of Sukkot they are judged concerning water, i.e., the rainfall of the coming year. [Mishnah Rosh Hashana 1](#). Water gives life and sustenance when it is enough, yet has life destruction potential when rain or water is too abundant or is altogether absent.

## Reflection Exercise

Rabbinic sources tell us that water is a metaphor for Torah because water is a necessity of life and is a transformative substance. But the water must be LIVING, not stagnant. Stagnant water stands still, trapped, sitting undisturbed for hours or days. But how does this relate to people? A dry or stagnant person or system sits undisturbed by harm to people or the environment. A dry human being can't breathe or live to their full potential, finally, when there is little “oxygen” flow spiritually, this can lead to low oxygen physically. Yet, A human being emulating living water is moist, adhesive, and able to bond with others

Consider, where do you feel stagnant or dry in your concern for the state of the world we live in and in relationship with others? With whom or where would you like to increase your water-like bonding in 5783?



# WEAKEN ATTACHMENTS, STRENGTHEN BONDS

**GENNADY FAVEL, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND RESOURCES AT JCC ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA**

As most refugees know, material possessions are temporary. Leaving the U.S.S.R in the 1980s, most Russian Speaking Jews (RSJs) could take only few possessions with them, and nothing of value. We couldn't take money, couldn't take jewelry beyond what was on us, couldn't even take our stamp collections. Learning about Sukkot brings back those memories. It's a reminder that all our stuff, even the houses and even the places we live in are most often temporary stops...I think on Sukkot we learn to weaken our attachments to things that are insignificant and strengthen our bonds to things we hope will last forever.



# THE TORAH DANCE FOR THE OUTSIDERS: A SIMCHAT TORAH PRAYER

DEVON SPIER, AUTHOR & DIGITAL DESIGN THEOLOGIAN (PROEMOLOGIAN), AND RABBINICAL STUDENT

There is a [hakafah](#) for periphery dwellers.  
Those of us who did not dwell in [sukkah](#) and cannot dwell  
in circle or song.  
Though our longing is as real as mourning.  
And the weight of pulled back tears as restrained as our  
hardened hearts.  
We are part of a hidden community.  
Made real by the truth of our experience, the richness of  
our vulnerability and the [Torah](#)  
scroll of our living.  
Yes, our strength is our People's.  
And our fringe does expand the Jewish circle, to lead us  
and all those on its outside,  
Miraculously, audaciously,  
In.

As published in [Ritualwell.org](https://ritualwell.org)



# JEDI BELONGING CHECKLIST



# JEDI BELONGING CHECKLIST FOR CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

The Rabbis teach: The Mitzvah of welcoming guests into your space is so great that they say “*Gedolah Hakhnasat Orchim M’kabalat Pinei HaShekhina* - Welcoming guests is greater than greeting the face of the Divine. גדולה הכנסת אורחים מקבלת פני שכינה”

## BACKGROUND

The JEDI Belonging Checklist was created to empower Jewish communal organizations (Jewish Federations, Synagogues, Schools, Hillels, Camps and Home-based) to apply best practices relating to Jewish Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI).

## JEWISH EQUITY, DIVERSITY, & INCLUSION (JEDI)

Jewish Federations’ JEDI Initiative supports the Jewish communal ecosystem in creating a culture of belonging for all Jews and their loved ones, while building bridges across socially and culturally diverse communities. Since its inception in June 2020, JEDI has established itself as a leader in driving a system-wide effort to advance a transformation in the American consciousness, centering social/racial justice, equity, diversity and inclusion with a Jewish lens amidst political divides. Through education, engagement and empowerment programs, JEDI increases individual and organizational capacity to collectively build flourishing Jewish life and civil society.

## WHAT DOES BELONGING LOOK LIKE FOR JEWISH CONFERENCES, PROGRAMS AND EVENTS?

Jewish events are often key touch points for individuals and families, and can determine their receptivity for Jewish involvement for the year, and even years to come. The JEDI Initiative’s event checklist is a community and organizational resource for professional and volunteer organizers to integrate a Jewish Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) lens, tools and best practices into the processes, curation and content of Holiday events, programs, services, conferences, retreats and safety and security. Together our aim is to cultivate a culture of belonging for participants both in the virtual and in person setting.

## COMMUNITY SAFETY AND BELONGING - JEDI LIVESECURE

LiveSecure is a comprehensive program created by the Jewish Federations of North America, in partnership with the Secure Community Network, to create a system of safety and security for all communities served by our Jewish Federation system. Not only is it important to consider aspects of JEDI and belonging when implementing safety and security initiatives with LiveSecure, but also when considering how we show up as authentic allies for all who are at risk of attack because of who they are.



# PRE-EVENT PLANNING



## **Planning Committee, Volunteers, Staff + Presenters**

- When building planning committees and working groups, make sure to consider the diverse representation across JEDI's Identity Pillars. For example, one pager on the history of a holiday and relevant language.
- Be explicit about the purpose, outcomes and processes (POP) and provide in writing a skeletal arc for its program before inviting partners in. This will expedite the alignment necessary to empower individuals to bring their input, ideas and feedback and will help ensure that a JEDI lens is transparently incorporated into the agenda.
- It is essential that the planning of programming be administered with enough time to make sure that planning committee members are able to source diverse representation across all aspects of the program.
- Ensure a wide range of presenters across social and cultural groups, and in particular, those who have been historically underrepresented.
- Communicate expectations around JEDI code of conduct presenters
- Provide presenter training on facilitation skills to help navigate difficult conversations without implicit biases leading the way.
- Moderators should be given identifying information for speakers that include their demographics, correct pronunciation of their name and how to refer to the speakers.
- Solicit presenters for their feedback for how they would like to engage with the audience.
- Be deliberate about treating program staff, senior leadership, presenters, and maintenance staff with equal care and concern.

## **Representation, Recruitment & Invitations**

- Ensure a percentage of registration spots are allocated to diverse social and cultural groups across identities, geographic regions and areas of expertise.
- When inviting individuals to attend, make sure there are funds allocated to subsidize any financial burden that might prevent ideal audiences from participating.



## **Safety and Security**

- Ensure all security staff, paid and volunteer are briefed about the diversity of the community.
- Take time to listen to community members most impacted by engaging with security representatives and be sensitive to the fact that for some community members, the presence of armed security may be triggering.
- Develop a consistent protocol for security to follow when engaging with community members and communicate relevant security requirements to all event attendees, volunteers and staff. Eg., “all bags will be checked by security” or “all adults will need to show a government issued ID before being allowed to enter...”
- Communicate firearm protocols for attendees, as this may vary from community to community. (eg. no guns sign, registered gun owners with concealed carry permits must have clearance from community leaders prior to carrying a weapon at event)
- Develop a process for resolving diversity related security complaints.
- Seek guidance from local safety and security experts to develop security protocols and ways to approach security in an inclusive, respectful and culturally competent manner.

## **Marketing + Communications, Promotion and Invitations**

- Ensure marketing and communication materials are using language and visuals representative of the people you serve. Consider how the swag of your conference highlights and reflects JEDI and the rich mosaic of Jewish life.
- Be sure to engage a diverse range and broad spectrum of organizations in promoting the event/program and that promotion is sent to diverse target audiences.
- Include questions in the registration form that ask about dietary needs, accessibility, pronouns, and what one might need for their experience to cultivate a sense of belonging.
- Be clear on what kind of accommodations you can offer so that participants can request from a range of provided offerings.
- Ensure clear instructions are provided on transportation and mobility needs.
- Connect with every individual and family before program via phone call or email communication to demonstrate they matter and are essential to the event mandate and vision



## **Date, Venue, Food, Transportation, Budget**

- Confirm Program dates do not conflict, or immediately before or after, a secular or religious holiday, school or school district calendar/s.
- Make sure all rooms have the same technology set up and that all presenters have equal resources to present, e.g., all rooms should have wireless microphones, projectors, adaptors for laptops and enough space for the presenter to present.
- When budgeting, be sure to factor in expenses relating to the diversified needs of the audience you are trying to serve (e.g., kosher, vegan, gluten free, and/or nut free food, wheel-chair access, and regional proximity).
- When choosing an outside venue, or if using your own facility, ensure the space caters to a variety of accessibility needs. Reconfirm as the conference gets closer and order materials at least 8 weeks in advance.
  - *Mapping of locations*
  - *Reserved seating*
  - *Magnifying sheets*
  - *Different strengths of reading glasses*
  - *Ear plugs*
  - *Materials in other languages including braille*
  - *Music stands for people who have trouble holding materials*
  - *Elevators*
  - *Assistive learning devices (ALD)*
  - *Closed caption/sign-language interpreters*
  - *Ramps*
  - *All-gendered bathrooms*
  - *Legible signage*
  - *Proper sound and lighting*
  - *Ventilation*
  - *Rooms for prayer*
  - *Private space for breastfeeding*
  - *Quiet checklist*



**DURING THE PROGRAMMING/EVENT**



## Registration

- Have a print out of JEDI Code of Conduct for people to sign at registration
- Ensure technology used for registration models the JEDI lens in language, representation, and accessibility (e.g. many elderly participants are still more fond of paper than electronics, etc.)
- When checking in make sure the tables, signs and materials are all visible and accessible for those in need (elder, disabled, pregnant etc.)

## Program, Panel and Session Preparations

- Create sessions dedicated to communal wellbeing, mental health, and belonging.
- For ongoing educational programming, gather teachers, moderators and leads to envision how the programming may go and how to engage families, students, and participants on an ongoing basis and how to anticipate and navigate “critical conversations”.
- If programming or events include children/families, provide education resources to ensure current families and children/youth understand language and have the tools to interact with empathy and confidence.
- Make sure formal programming begins and ends at an hour that allows for individuals to travel home. Or if it is an overnight event, to allow decompression and 6-8 hours of sleep.
- Provide over the counter essentials including feminine hygiene products, facemasks, aspirin and first aid supplies in or near every bathroom.
- For multi hour/day programming, ensure a designated organizer of the events checks in with people throughout the event/program to ask them how they are feeling and if there is anything they can do to enhance their experience. (an official “Belonging Ambassador” squad).
- Create opportunities for people to engage with their families virtually or in person by creating a family friendly drop-in

## Apply JEDI Code of Conduct

- Develop and distribute code of conduct and statement of belonging for the programming/event or into handbooks (for ongoing programs), swag bags, and hard copies of schedules to every participant. Please also have this code digitally available on the program platform.
- JEDI Code of Conduct should be referenced at main stage programs and plenaries, at the beginning of the sessions as the container for creating a sense of belonging. For ongoing programs/events, the Code of Conduct should be referenced on a regular basis and/or posted.
- Delineate easy and clear steps to follow in the event of an incident. For incidents involving children and families, please allow for privacy and ask parent consent to speak with minors.



# POST EVENT/PROGRAMMING



## **FOLLOW UP, AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

- Send a post event survey out with questions about JEDI and belonging where experienced by participants.
- For family programming where children are separate from parents/households, send surveys asking about their child's experience of belonging. If multi sessions, consider sending after the first session, middle, and at the end.
- Ensure contracted guest speakers are paid on the day of the event, or within 2 weeks of the event's close. Or as their contract stipulates.
- Reach out to presenters to thank them personally and ideally include examples of what you appreciated from their presentation. Also ask them for feedback based on the overall experience.
- Follow up with participants individually for 20-30 minute meetings to encourage relationship building and provide pathways for further engagement.

*Please adjust this checklist to your organization's internal processes and review as some of these items may require consensus and community input.*



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The Jewish Federations®  
OF NORTH AMERICA

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