

**Birkat HaChamah: April 8, 2009**  
**May We Bring Blessing on the Sun;**  
**May We Let the Sun Bring Blessing Upon Us.**

*The Shalom Center's service for the next cyclical celebration of Birkat HaChamah, the traditional Jewish ceremony for Blessing of the Sun, though rooted in Jewish tradition, invites participation by all. It is shaped with special concern for the crisis of our planet as the ceremony comes to fruition on April 8, 2009.*

*Its universal calling is especially apt in a generation when the world is threatened by an idolatrous addiction to the overuse of fossil fuels, and needs to turn toward the sun and its Creator for the sources of energy to heal and sustain our lives.*

*This version of the service integrates support for solar energy in the Asiyah ("Actuality") world with the other three of the Four Worlds of Kabbalistic thought: the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual aspects of the ceremony.*

*For more information on this unusual ceremony, see*  
*<http://www.shalomctr.org/node/1400>*  
*<http://www.shalomctr.org/node/1402>*  
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**Shalom, salaam, peace – Rabbi Arthur Waskow**

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[Gather at dawn on Wednesday, the fourth day of Creation -- on April 8, 2009 -- to celebrate what ancient Jewish tradition saw as the reappearance of the sun every 28<sup>th</sup> year, in the same place/ time in the universe as at the time of its creation. The last such gathering was on April 8, 1981; the next, on April 8, 2037.

[If possible, gather at a coal-fired power plant, an oil refinery, or some other center of

fossil-fuel production or distribution.

[Different readers may read these paragraphs in succession.]

Why are we gathered here this morning? Because ancient Jewish tradition (Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 59b) teaches: "Whoever sees the sun at its *tekufah* [transformative cycle-marker], the moon in its power, the stars [or planets] in their orbits, and the signs of the zodiac in their orderly progress, should say, '*Baruch oseh ma'aseh v'reshit*. Blessed be the Doer of Deeds of "In the Beginning [Creation]."

' The Talmud continues: "And when is that? Abbaye said: 'Every twenty-eight years when the cycle is repeated and Tekufat Nisan [the Spring Solstice] falls in Saturn on the evening of Tuesday, going into Wednesday."

Though over the centuries, this day has moved away from what we know is the scientifically accurate date of the Spring Solstice, religious tradition has fastened on this date for our celebration of the One Who created the sun.

Traditions throughout the world and human history have celebrated the sun, the source of all earth's light and warmth, a great symbol of the Creator's enlightenment and the Creator's compassionate warmth. "Science" and "religion" have joined in their celebration of the sun.

But in the last three centuries, the human race has replaced our recognition of the sun and its Creator with an idolatrous addiction to the over-use of fossil fuels. These fuels, which had their origin in the power of the sun, have replaced the sun in our daily lives. Like many intensely powerful and useful substances, they have become an addiction from which we need to free ourselves, as they are destroying our planet.

Science has already begun to say that we must renew our connection with the sun, using new technologies for solar and wind power that will not endanger our lives. Our religious traditions continue to honor and celebrate the sun, but have only begun to realize that the celebration must take new forms.

Prayerful celebration at its best has united Spirit, Intellect, Emotion, and Actuality. This is what we seek to do this morning. First we fulfill the Teaching of the ancient rabbis:

[Looking **toward** but traditionally not quite **at** the sun, we prepare to recite the blessing that is at the core of this ceremony. Looking right at the sun is dangerous. It can blind our physical eyes, and, as the rabbis suggest, can blind the inner eye to the truth that what we worship is not the sun itself but rather its Creator. All recite:]

**Blessed is the Doer of deeds of beginning:**  
*Baruch atah YAHh, oseh maaseh v'reshit.*

**Blessed are you, Breathing-Spirit of the Universe, Holy Wind of Change, Who has filled us with life, lifted us up, and carried us to this moment.**  
*Baruch atah YAHh, elohenu ruach ha'olam, sheh'hekhianu v'kimanu v'higianu lazman hazeh.*

[The community sings:]

**Morning Has Broken**  
(By Eleanor Farjeon)

Morning has broken like the first morning;  
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird.  
Praise for the singing! Praise for the morning!  
Praise for them springing fresh from the Word.

Sweet the rain's new fall sunlit from heaven,  
Like the first dew fall on the first grass.  
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden,  
Sprung in completeness where Your feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight! Mine is the morning,  
Born of the one light Eden saw play!  
Praise with elation, praise every morning,  
God's recreation of the new day!

[Someone reads each of the following paragraphs.]

**The Sun of Justice with Healing in its Wings**

This moment is rich with meaning in our ancient rituals, and rich with meaning in the modern crisis of our planet. Tonight we will gather to begin Passover, the Festival of our Freedom. Last night we went through our houses to free our homes from *chometz*, the leavening or souring, the puffed-up, sour aspect of our lives.

Shortly this morning we will be burning up this prideful puffing-up, this aspect of the personal, household pharaohs that make our lives swollen when we pile up our possessions and our pride, when we turn away from sharing with our neighbors, when we obsess ourselves with Making, Doing, Producing, Consuming -- and deprive ourselves of time to Rest, to Love, to Be.

Tonight we will recall the plagues of disaster brought upon the earth and human earthlings when the arrogance of Pharaoh broke all bounds.

On this past Shabbat, the last Shabbat before Passover, known as Shabbat Hagadol, Jewish tradition called on us to hear the last chapter of the last of the classical prophets – Malachi, who spoke about 2500 years ago. This year, the passage takes on an uncanny significance for our generation:

[Someone else reads:] "Here! The day is coming that will flame like a furnace, says the Infinite YHWH / Breath of Life, when all the arrogant and all evil-doers, root and branch, will like straw be burnt to ashes.

"Yet for those of you who revere My Name, a sun of justice will arise with healing in its wings / rays. . . .

"Here! Before the coming of the great and awesome day of YHWH/ the Breath of Life, I will send you the Prophet Elijah to turn the hearts of parents to children and the hearts of children to parents, lest I come and smite the earth with utter destruction." (Malachi 3: 20-21, 23-24.)

Why this danger? Why this chance for healing?

"You are defrauding Me!" says God. "You fail to share My abundance with the poor and landless, you will not bring the common wealth into the common storehouse. Only if you turn back to My teaching will the locusts vanish from your fields. Only then, if you will share My rain of blessings on your harvests, will I pour those blessings down from Heaven." (Malachi 3: 8-11)

We know Malachi was addressing his own generation. Yet many of us may feel tempted to hear this warning as a prophetic vision aimed directly at our own burning world:

[Someone reads each paragraph, having read and absorbed it earlier.] "Here! If you oppress the poor, impoverish workers, and wring super-profits from the earth to plump the rich and powerful, the earth itself will suffer a planetary scorching. If you turn My Breath, My Air, into a furnace, not only the arrogant pharaohs of your day will suffer, but also all life and humankind, as all Egypt suffered from the arrogance of Pharaoh long ago.

"Already droughts scorch your continents, already your waters boil into typhoons and hurricanes, already the ice melts and your sea-coasts flood, already your birds and insects and diseases migrate where there is no place to weave them into the healing web of life.

"Yet even now there is a healing remedy. Even now you can turn away from the fires of coal and oil, turn to the solar energy and the winged wind that rise from a sun of justice and tranquility to heal your planet.

"For God's sake, act now before My Breath of Life becomes a searing hurricane. Turn your own hearts to the lives of your children and the children of your children, turn their hearts to learning from the deepest teachings of the Wisdom you inherited -- that together you can yet avert the utter destruction of My earth."

In 1981, when last Jews gathered to invoke God's blessing for the sun, some of us already sensed the coming fevers of the Day that Blazes like a Furnace. We wrote a scroll together:

"We pledge ourselves to hand on to the next generation  
An earth that is washed in sunlight, not poisoned by waste;  
To see in the sun's light the light of Torah;  
To feel in the sun's warmth the warmth of the human community.  
To use in the sun's energy the strength of the One Who Creates.  
Blessed be the Doer of Deeds of Beginning."

Yet neither we nor world society had yet realized how dire was the danger that we faced.

Now we do. Yet -- will we act?

Will we gather the commitment of every religious and ethical community -- not only to change our own buildings and our own rituals and prayers, but also vigorously to advocate changing public policies to heal the earth?

Will we, in the spirit of Malachi's last words, bring pre-b'nai-mitzvah teens and their families together – learning with each other how to create an actual "Elijah's Covenant between the Generations" to heal the climate crisis and protect the earth?

Will we treat our Seder tonight as a time to face the Ten Plagues of today, the "pharaohs" behind them, and the Ten Healings that we need?

Will we celebrate the Blessing of the Sun by acting to shut down the coal-burning plants and oil refineries that are bringing on "the day that burns like a furnace"?

Says Malachi: "Turn back to Me, and I will turn back to you, implored YHWH Infinite, the Breath of Life." We must lift the wisdom of Birkat HaChamah beyond these words we read on prayerbook paper, beyond these words we hear the cantor chant, into our hearts, our hands to make them real. We will take one act this morning to make this commitment real, by acting to change public policy in favor of solar energy.

Each participant receives a postcard that reads as follows:

**Dear Congressman: Today I came together with other celebrants to carry out an ancient religious ceremony , rooted in Jewish tradition but open to all, for the Blessing of the Sun – and also to express my strong support for solar energy to heal the earth from global climate disaster. With monumental federal energy legislation on the horizon, I write today to urge you to ensure that solar energy plays a pivotal role in this omnibus energy plan.**

Participants sign the card with their names and addresses and Emails, and the cards are collected. Someone reads aloud the Scroll that was signed for Birkat HaChamah at the Jefferson Memorial

on April 8, 1981 -- still relevant because the commitment made then has still not been fulfilled -- and all are also invited to sign it.

[Anyone who wishes to add a brief blessing is invited to do so.]

*[A magnifying glass and pieces of leavened bread and other "chometz" are brought forward, and all recite:]*

May this swollen leavening be as the dust of the earth, ownerless, as a symbol that we are all merely trustees of God's abundance and that we are prepared to set aside the addictions to Producing and Consuming that overwhelm our lives. May we enter tonight a Passover that renews our effort to free ourselves from the Pharaohs of our own generation and the plagues they bring upon us and upon the earth.

*Blessed is the Breath of Life who makes us holy by connecting us with each other and with all of life – by connecting us as we breathe in what the trees breathe out and the trees breathe in what we breathe out – and by ridding ourselves of all the swollen, puffed-up property and pride that keeps us from our freedom and our unity.*

*A magnifying glass is focused so that the rays of the sun set fire to the chumetz.*

[All sing this translation of Psalm 148 to the tune of "Michael Row the Boat Ashore."]

Praise Yah in the heavens, halleluyah.  
Praise God in the heights, halleluyah.  
Praise God, all you angels, halleluyah.  
Praise Yah, all you hosts, halleluyah.  
Praise God, sun and moon, halleluyah.  
Praise Yah, you stars of light, halleluyah.  
Praise God, you high heavens, halleluyah.  
All that flows in all the world, halleluyah.

Let them all praise God's Name, halleluyah.  
For God spoke and they appeared, halleluyah.  
With God they take their stand, halleluyah.  
God's rhythm none can break, halleluyah.  
Praise Yah from the earth, halleluyah.  
You sea-monsters and all deeps, halleluyah.  
Fire, hail, snow, and steam, halleluyah.  
Stormy wind to do God's word, halleluyah.  
Mountains high and small hills, halleluyah.  
Trees of fruit and evergreens, halleluyah.  
Wild beasts and quiet flocks, halleluyah.  
Creeping things and winged birds, halleluyah.  
Leaders and officials, halleluyah.

Societies and peoples, halleluyah.  
Young men and women, too, halleluyah.  
Let us praise the holy Name, halleluyah.  
For God's Name includes us all, halleluyah.  
God's radiance shines out, halleluyah.  
And God lifts the people's hearts, halleluyah.  
For all who wrestle God, halleluyah.  
For all who bring God close, halleluyah.

[The body may, before dispersing, share some food as a "*siyyum*" --- a special meal of celebration for having shared together words that aim toward wisdom. This would release from fasting those first-borns who would traditionally be taking part in the Fast of the Firstborn on this special morning before Passover -- in memory of the death of first-borns in Egypt. The fast is annulled for firstborns who learn Torah at this time. An appropriate blessing to begin the meal might be: "Blessed are You, Yahhh. Breathing-Spirit of the universe, Who unites sun and soil, seed and the sweat of human earthlings, to bring forth this bread from the earth," and an appropriate blessing at the end: "From you we receive, to you we give; together we share, and from this we live."]