

Prayers and Readings about Rainforests
Biblical Selections (translations from the Jewish Publication Society)

Psalm 96

(1)Sing to the Eternal a new song, sing to the Eternal, all the earth.(2)Sing to the Eternal, bless God's name, proclaim God's victory day after day.(3)Tell of God's glory among the nations, God's wondrous deeds, among all peoples.(4)For the Eternal is great and much acclaimed, God is held in awe by all divine beings.(5)All the gods of the peoples are mere idols, but the Eternal made the heavens.(6)Glory and majesty are before God; strength and splendor are in God's temple.(7)Ascribe to the Eternal, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Eternal glory and strength.(8)Ascribe to the Eternal the glory of the Name, bring tribute and enter the divine courts.(9)Bow down to the Eternal majestic in holiness; tremble in God's presence, all the earth!(10)Declare among the nations, "The Eternal is ruler!" the world stands firm; it cannot be shaken; God judges the peoples with equity.(11)Let the heavens rejoice and the earth exult; let the sea and all within it thunder,(12)the fields and everything in them exult; then shall all the trees of the forest shout for joy(13)at the presence of the Eternal, for God is coming, for God is coming to rule the earth; God will rule the world justly, and its peoples in faithfulness.

Psalm 104

(10)You make springs gush forth in torrents; they make their way between the hills,(11)giving drink to all the wild beasts; the wild asses slake their thirst.(12)The birds of the sky dwell beside them and sing among the foliage.(13)You water the mountains from Your lofts; the earth is sated from the fruit of Your work.(14)You make the grass grow for the cattle, and herbage for man's labor that he may get food out of the earth—(15)wine that cheers the hearts of men oil that makes the face shine, and bread that sustains man's life.(16)The trees of the LORD drink their fill, the cedars of Lebanon, God's own planting,(17)where birds make their nests; the stork has her home in the junipers.

Hosea 2

(20) In that day, I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; I will also banish bow, sword, and war from the land. Thus I will let them lie down in safety. (21) And I will espouse you forever: I will espouse you with righteousness and justice, and

with goodness and mercy,(22)And I will espouse you with faithfulness; Then you shall be devoted to the LORD.(23)In that day, I will respond —declares the Eternal— I will respond to the sky, and it shall respond to the earth.

Ezekiel 34

(26) I will make these and the environs of My hill a blessing: I will send down the rain in its season, rains that bring blessing. (27) The trees of the field shall yield their fruit and the land shall yield its produce. [My people] shall continue secure on its own soil. They shall know that I am the Eternal when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from those who enslave them. (28) They shall no longer be a spoil for the nations, and the beasts of the earth shall not devour them; they shall dwell secure and untroubled. (29) I shall establish for them a planting of renown; they shall no more be carried off by famine, and they shall not have to bear again the taunts of the nations.

Job 12

(7)But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; The birds of the sky, they will tell you,(8)Or speak to the earth, it will teach you; The fish of the sea, they will inform you.(9)Who among all these does not know That the hand of the Eternal has done this?

Job 14

(7)There is hope for a tree; If it is cut down it will renew itself; Its shoots will not cease.(8)If its roots are old in the earth, And its stump dies in the ground,(9)At the scent of water it will bud And produce branches like a sapling.

Song of Songs 1:14-2:3

(14) My beloved to me is a spray of henna blooms From the vineyards of En-gedi.
(15)Ah, you are fair, my darling, Ah, you are fair, With your dove-like eyes!(16)And you, my beloved, are handsome, Beautiful indeed! Our couch is in a bower;(17)Cedars are the beams of our house, Cypress the rafters.(1)I am a rose of Sharon, A lily of the valleys.(2)Like a lily among thorns, So is my darling among the maidens.(3)Like an apple tree among trees of the forest, So is my beloved among the youths. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my mouth.

Liturgical Responsive Reading, for Jewish or Interfaith settings

When tragedy strikes, when a crisis such as deforestation looms,

It is natural to look the other way, to deny, to disbelieve, to pretend that life can go on as before.

Alas! This cannot be happening – it must be but a nightmare.

When the mind does not want to grasp, the heart too often closes, denies.

Denial is natural – but futile, even dangerous. Actions taken today that could save forests, species, our very climate, may be as empty speech if put off till tomorrow.

The forests burn, the carbon curve climbs, the waters rise – there is such a thing as too late.

To this personal denial, those who put the siren song of profits above the call of the prophets add deception; they assure us the status quo is acceptable and sustainable.

They lull us with the poppy-milk of false prophecies.

It's not happening; or it's inevitable; and anyway it won't be so bad.

Or if it is, we can trust in technology to find a painless solution.

With deception and delusion, we are distracted from justice.

But justice delayed and justice denied bring the sword into the world. (Pirkei Avot 5:8)

This day, we recommit to the pursuit of justice, as we remember:

Zion will be saved by justice, her repentant ones by righteousness. (Isaiah 1:27)

But even when we confront the tragedy of tropical rainforests degraded and destroyed, when we contemplate what is being lost.

We may feel disconnected, abandoned, powerless; we may sink into the murky waters of depression. And so we must learn again to hope.

We remember: the Temple in Jerusalem, when it stood, was the center of our people's world.

There, we gathered. There we felt God's presence. There, life was given meaning.

Through the Temple, we felt connected to the Most High.

A connection many thought eternally severed when the Temple was destroyed.

And yet, even in the midst of loss and mourning, hope may arise like a freshly planted sapling:

“One may lay down at night weeping, yet in the morning, joyous song.” (Psalm 30:6)

We must remember the past. But we have learned in ages since that the whole world is our Temple.

The dwelling-place of holiness, the gateway to the sacred.

The Earth and all in it, our mystics saw as garments of the *Shekhinah*, the indwelling presence of the divine.

And so, hope reborn, we can reconnect with our Creator through our connection to all creation.

And yet today, this most basic of connections is being severed, as the cancer of deforestation spreads, as ancient canopies are felled, as countless species are wiped out, as indigenous communities lose ancient homelands, ways of life, sacred places that have sustained them for generations.

Too many have become disconnected from the consequences of their choices, what we consume and how we travel. We live isolated from those even now facing fires and floods, droughts, disease and dislocation fanned by the flames of forests destroyed, of our climate itself changing.

How do we help each other see such choices as moral decisions, as foundations for sustainability and justice?

What would it take for the purchase of teak or palm oil to be seen as a sin, or the search for sustainably sourced coffee a mitzvah?

How can we wake from our slumber, see the cost of our bargains, move from what is convenient to what is required?

Help us, Breath of Life, to hear the cries of those already in peril, to be moved to act for those yet to come.

Each Yom Kippur, we each search our souls,

Examining our personal faults, striving for self-improvement.

But this very moment, indeed every moment can become a time for collective soul-searching,

Reflecting not just on our individual actions, but also those of society.

What is the moral state of our community? How have we fallen short?

What is the nature of our responsibility to distant forests? Have we considered the fates of threatened indigenous peoples, who for so long and lived in and care for these forests? How have we failed to pursue climate justice?

We, created in the image of the Divine, have the ability –

Which path shall we choose?

Will we shut our ears to the pleas of the earth, the cries of the forests, the fluttering wings of iridescent butterflies or the growls of jaguars, the voices of climate refugees?

Or will we grasp hands across divides, climb from depths of despair, and help shape a better future for the planet and all people?

Today, Breath of Life, help us to reconnect to you, to all life on this planet, to our responsibility to care for others and to the consequences of our actions and inactions.

Help us to see that we are not alone, powerless against a global problem.

May we realize that our cries, though they come from the depths, will be heard.

Our lives, rewoven together, can make a difference.

If, with clear eye and strong heart, we face disaster unflinching,

Strengthened by each other, inspired by the Breath of Life,

It may yet come to pass that we will again stand mountain-strong.

Our dirge turned into dance, sackcloth undone and bound instead with joy (Psalm 30:12).

Ecclesiastes Rabbah (7:28) tells a tale of God endlessly creating and destroying world. Finally, God created this one. The Divine Breath led Adam, earthling, and Eve, Life-giver, through the green and growing garden, and the Voice called to them:

See my works, how fine and excellent they are. Now all that I have created, you see arrayed before you. Think upon this and do not corrupt and destroy my world, for if you do, there is no else to restore it.

That Voice calls to us still, more urgently than ever.

This is our sacred task. Now, let us work for healing, together.

Prayer for the Protection of Forests

“Then shall all the trees of the forest shout for joy at the presence of the Eternal, for God is coming, for God is coming to rule the earth; God will rule the world justly, and its peoples in faithfulness.” (Psalm 96: 12-13)

Our Creator, may we so live our lives that the forests shout for joy! May we grow in wonder at their beauty; grow in appreciation at the diverse life they sustain; and most of all, grow in our commitment to be good guardians of Your earth, as we have been instructed from the beginning. Help us to “raise our voice like a shofar,” (Isaiah 58:1) to speak for the trees and for the web of life they stand at the center of. And help us specially to protect Your Edenic

rainforests from deforestation that degrades and destroys them. Bless us as we strive for justice for all those whose lives are woven into their fabric, especially our indigenous sisters and brothers whose own voices have been so long ignored. This and every day, may we be blessed to become supporters of your Tree of Life.

Prayer for Indigenous Communities

“Let the mountains produce wellbeing for the people, the hills, the reward of justice.” (Psalm 72:3)

O God of Justice, strengthen us so that we become true pursuers of justice. Strengthen our connections with indigenous peoples across our planet. Help us to realize our connection to those of Your children who have so often been exploited and oppressed, whose pleas have been ignored and whose wisdom has been disregarded. Let us learn from and support them as they seek the wellbeing of their people and their lands, including Your majestic rainforests. May they secure the rights they deserve, so that they may live secure lives. Help us to appreciate their guardianship of their environments, and work with them to sustain life upon our planet for generations to come.

Prayer for all whose livelihood depends on the forests

“You bring on darkness and it is night, when all the beasts of the forests stir.” (Psalm 104:20)

M’kor Chayim, O Source of life, Song of the World, open our ears to the symphony of life that stirs throughout Your beautiful forests. Open our eyes to see the many-splendored web that weaves Your creatures into the great forest tapestry, from iridescent butterflies in cloud-covered canopies to the shadow-spotted jaguars prowling among the buttress roots. Open our minds to the wondrous cycles of water, air and soil, the miraculous flow of life itself. Most of all, open our hearts to our own connections to all of this life, so dependent on Your forests, from forest-dwelling peoples to the birds singing amidst the foliage to the ever-present, yet often unseen parade of insects. Help us to understand rainforests not as resources to be extracted but as ancient yet communities to be honored. Give us the strength and wisdom to build a just transition from livelihoods dependent on forest destruction to sustainable economies of mutuality, so that these living cathedrals can inspire for countless generations yet to come.

Prayer for Wisdom in Leaders in Government and Business

"O God, endow the ruler with Your judgments, the leaders with Your righteousness; that they may judge Your people rightly, Your oppressed ones, justly." (Psalm 72:1-2)

Rabbeinu shel Olam, O Teacher of us all, pour out your spirit on all leaders of our society – those elected, those appointed, and those who serve as leaders through their roles in business, culture, and society. May they unite with all who seek to be Your partners L'taken Olam b'Malchut Shaddai – the sacred task of working with You to heal our world. Help them to connect deeply with all of humanity, indeed all of creation, and through those connections to realize their responsibility to rainforests and all threatened ecosystems, to our indigenous brothers and sisters, and to generations to come. Help them to prioritize long-term collective goals above shortsighted self-interests. Most of all, inspire them with visions of a just, verdant, and sustainable future and strengthen them for the hard work of making that vision become a reality.

Prayer for our Shared Responsibility as Consumers and Citizens

"Do not corrupt and destroy my world, for if you do, there is no else to restore it." (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7:28)

O Source of mercy, help all of us, inattentive, distracted and busy as we often are, to awaken both to the wonders surrounding us and to our responsibility for ensuring they not only survive but flourish. Heighten our awareness of the moral consequences of our daily actions and inactions, including our choices about what and how to consume. Share Your wisdom with us, that we may make our choices not because of momentary impulses but due to eternal values. Help us to restrain our envy and pride, so that we may separate desires from necessities, while recognizing the great needs of our fellow human beings. Remind us always of our power, individually and collectively, and strengthen us so that we use that power to move our society and world toward healing, justice, and peace. Help us to overcome the weariness of temporary defeats, to let eternal hope touch our hearts, and to rise once more to do Your will. And through all our choosing and striving, help us to raise the next generation to be wiser, kinder, and more connected to each other than we have been.

Additional Liturgical Resources 1) A prayer that was offered at Standing Rock, alongside the indigenous people working to protect the land there:
<https://ritualwell.org/ritual/hashkiveinu-standing-rock>

2) Environmentally-themed Tu B'Shvat (the Jewish New Year of the Tree) Haggadot:

<https://ritualwell.org/list/five-tu-bshevat-rituals>

<https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/pray-if-earth-matters-tu-bishevat-seder>

<https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/new-year-trees-tu-bishevat-seder-everyone>

3) Environmental versions of the “Al Chet” prayer of confession:

http://www.neohasid.org/stophetheflood/environmental_al_chet/

4) “Tisha B’Av in a Time of Climate Crisis” -- Liturgy for Tisha B’av (the fast day commemorating the destruction of the 1st and 2nd Temples) developed by COEJL and the Shalom Center:

<https://theshalomcenter.org/content/flaming-fire-consuming-everything-tisha-bav-time-climate-crisis>

How* - by Rabbi Daniel Swartz

How lonely sits our world,

This island of life.

She becomes as a widow,
weeping in the night.

Weeping for rainforests burnt,
for shorelines befouled
for oceans turned to deserts,
for mountaintops brought low
to fuel fires of greed and waste.

All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; none did help her.

How

The old anger rises again

My only companion in the rubble of the streets

Past the tatters of once familiar buildings my footsteps echo
Across desert-dry courtyards
How

Forward to the east my eyes look
Hoping to see, feel, hear the stirrings of a breeze
But midsummer heat
A stranger made resident
Lies full on my back
Makes blackened stones shimmer
As I howl to the desiccated shell
That was once my Land
No water for tears

As I walk
My anger at my side
Past limestone valleys
Once smoking with sacrifice
Past tree dry-bones
Where once lived cool forest
Through sooty stone once golden
Into where a garden once blooms where
Next to the wall that somehow remains
Lies a broken doll.
And I kneel beside her and my anger kneels with me
Wrapping its fringes around me
For we know, my anger and I
That howling is of no use
Where no ears remain.

There is no one left to answer the question
How
But if I should awaken
From this vision of flaming fire
Consuming everything
A fatal embrace of heat
If I should awaken
I know I will never stop
Lest the nightmare vision returns

Lest all my anger by for naught
Asking
How

*The Book of Lamentations begins with the Hebrew expression “Eichah,” “how,” as its author struggles to comprehend destruction of community and nation.