

RECUSTOM

# THE BEAUTY OF BEGINNINGS

A High Holiday Ritual Booklet

by the Recustom LA Radical Ritual Fellows  
in partnership with Jews of Color Initiative

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# About Us

To cope with the ever-changing world, many of us are seeking connection and meaning in a way that fully reflects our holistic, intersectional, authentic selves. The Radical Rituals Fellowship was designed for Jews of color in Los Angeles to customize and create Jewish rituals, deepen their connection to Jewish traditions, and inspire and engage their communities during the High Holiday season.

For six weeks in the summer of 2024, the seven Radical Rituals Fellows, facilitated by Kimberly Ariella Dueñas, met learn about the High Holiday rituals and share their experiences as Jews of Color. We are proud to present their final creations in this booklet to inspire your own High Holiday practices.



Thanks to  Jews of Color Initiative for supporting this program!

# A Blessing For Beginnings

by The Radical Rituals Cohort

**"Blessed are we  
and the beauty of beginnings"**

[smack your thighs with your hands -- waking up your body,  
accompanied by vocal sounds "oooooOOOOO OOOOooooo" going  
up and down]

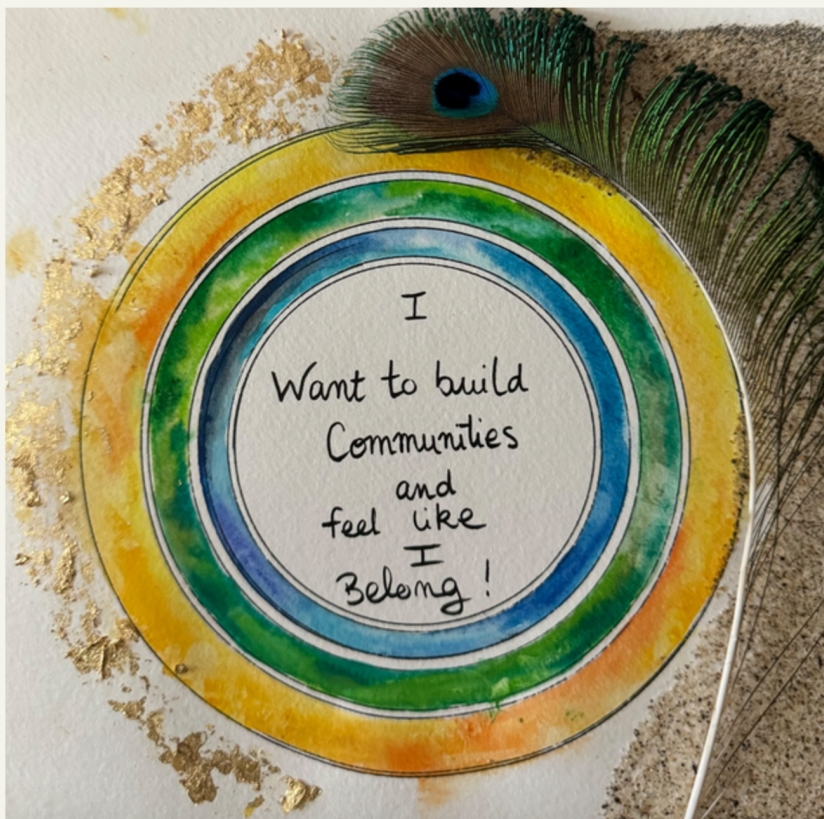
**"We come with humility and new ideas  
with the promise of green bananas\*"**

\*Japanese cultural reference to having time for something to ripen



# High Holiday Totem Affirmation Blessing for the Home

by Nandi Egber



This ritual is about Teshuvah - Returning.

Returning is about reconnecting to our roots—our origins and where we come from—so that we can reflect on what our ancestors left behind and use their wisdom as guidance for the future. It's about coming back to ourselves, to our instinctual dreams and goals, and recommitting to believing in who we are and where we want to go.

As a French Congolese, Ivorian, Martiniquan, and Jewish female artist, my mixed heritage deeply influences my work and shapes how I connect to Judaism and the High Holidays. The thread that ties my diverse roots together is woven through rituals that embrace, respect, and honor family, tradition, and ancestors. Honoring and receiving the past allows me to remember who I am, and to take the necessary steps toward becoming who I aspire to be.

In Ivorian culture, totems are sacred objects or symbols that serve as emblems for groups of people, establishing kinship and connection among them.

In Jewish culture, we place sacred items and blessings, like the mezuzah and Birkat HaBayim, along with symbols like the hamsa, on our doors and walls. These sacred symbols serve not only to ward off evil but also to foster warmth, connection, and strong family bonds in the home.

This High Holiday Totem Affirmation Blessing for the Home ritual blends these two cultural traditions, offering a meaningful way to engage with the High Holidays by reaffirming our identities, purposes, and aspirations for the new Jewish year. By connecting us back to our history, traditions, and family, these rituals ultimately help us reconnect with ourselves.

### **When to do this ritual and who to do it with:**

This ritual is to be done during the High Holidays (On and/or between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur). You can either do this ritual one time, once each day during the Ten Days of Awe, or as many times as you'd like during the High Holiday period.

You can do this ritual alone, or you can do it with friends and family as an activity to do together.

### **Materials you will need:**

1. Heavyweight paper
2. Pencils and pens
3. Watercolor or other coloring supplies, i.e. paint, crayons, markers, etc.\*
4. Watercolor brush or whatever other utensil(s) you will need to use your coloring supplies
5. Optional: a glass of water, if using watercolor or paint
6. Liquid glue
7. Scissors
8. Materials to create a collage, i.e. magazines, fabric, buttons, journals, sand, and/or anything else you would like to use

\*I strongly encourage you to use watercolor, but you are welcome to use whatever is easily accessible for you.

## **How to do this ritual:**

### **Step 1: Set up an intention.**

Examples: "I want to feel connected to others."; "I want to live with more forgiveness."; "I would like to return to my true self."

### **Step 2: Draw a circle in the center of a page of your heavyweight paper. This circle represents a cycle.**

### **Step 3: In the middle of the circle, write your intention.**

### **Step 4: Choose THREE (3) colors from your coloring supplies that evoke the vibration and energy of your intention.**

### **Step 5: With your supplies, say your intention out loud THREE (3) times while you simultaneously paint and/or draw THREE (3) layers around your circle – each layer should be a different color.**

According to some Jewish thinkers, the number 1 represents unity, the number 2 represents duality, and the number 3 represents the mediator between 1 and 2, resulting in a harmonious connection between the two extremes. You are invited to keep this in mind while drawing the three layers – to confidently secure your intention while doing this part of the ritual.

The size of each layer can be up to you – they can either be the same size, or different sizes. You can also say your intention each time however you'd like – maybe one time you say it with your eyes open, one time with your eyes closed, or maybe one time you say it slower than another time. This is up to your personal way of connecting with your intention.

**Step 6: Go through your collage-making materials (magazines, fabric, journals, etc.), and use your scissors to cut out any images, words, colors, etc. that you feel instinctually connected to and that resonate with your intention.**

**Step 7: Place the different items you cut out onto your paper, and around the three layers of your circle.**

You can move things around until you feel joy about the layout and organization of each item.

**Step 8: Once you feel confident about the layout of your items, use your liquid glue to attach each item to your paper.**

You are invited to color in, draw, or leave blank the remaining white space around the items you glued on, around the circle.

**Step 9: Voila! You now have your High Holiday Totem / Blessing for the Home.**

You are invited to hang your final piece up on your wall, carry it with you as you engage in activities related to your intention throughout the year, or do whatever else you feel comfortable to do that keeps you aligned and connected to your intention.

# The Clarity of The Fish

by Shoshana Kozaski

For as long as I could remember, the eye of the fish had great significance in my family of origin. In Moroccan culture, the fish often symbolizes abundance, prosperity, fertility and good fortune. Fish also have spiritual connotations, symbolizing protection. Every Rosh Hashana, my family members would all sit around the festive table and fight for the eye of the fish. Why? Whoever was fast enough to get the eye and eat it in its entirety would have a year filled with clarity.

My ritual is inspired by my Moroccan Jewish roots; however, the fish has great significance also on my Cuban side. In the Cuban culture, fish symbolize various themes, including abundance, nourishment, and community. Given the island's strong connection to the sea, fish often represent the importance of fishing as a livelihood and a source of sustenance. Additionally, in some spiritual beliefs, fish can symbolize transformation and adaptability, reflecting the changing tides of life. For my Cuban Jewish roots, fish meant livelihood as my grandfather, Victor was a fisherman all his life.

I felt a deep connection to the fish, specifically the eye of the fish. The idea of letting go through a ritual of taking your thoughts, fears, feelings, hopes and dreams for the new year and dissolving through water represents or in many ways is similar to Tashlich or Kaparot. The connection of the elements, the casting off to return, to invite and create fresh new connections with the eye of the fish.

**The Gematria of Dag (daled, gimmel) is seven. In Judaism, seven is a powerful number.**

**Creation:**

God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, marking it as a day of rest and sanctity (Shabbat).

**Shabbat:**

The weekly Sabbath is observed on the seventh day, emphasizing rest and spiritual renewal.

**Seven Blessings:**

During a Jewish wedding, seven blessings (Sheva Brachot) are recited to celebrate the couple.

**The Menorah:**

The menorah in the Temple had seven branches, symbolizing divine light and knowledge.

**Seven Days of Mourning:**

The shiva period, a week-long mourning ritual, reflects the significance of seven in grief and healing.

**Seven Species:**

The Torah mentions seven species (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates) that are special to the Land of Israel.

**Seven Readings:**

During certain holidays, like Simchat Torah, there are seven readings from the Torah.

## **Instructions:**

### **Setting the Intention:**

Find a quiet space where you can sit comfortably. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths, allowing your body to relax. As you inhale, envision bringing in light and clarity; as you exhale, let go of any tension or distractions.

### **Visualizing the Fish:**

Imagine a serene body of water, its surface glistening in the sunlight. In this tranquil setting, picture a fish swimming gracefully. This fish embodies clarity and purpose. As it glides through the water, it moves effortlessly, navigating its environment with ease.

### **Reflecting on Attributes:**

Consider the attributes of the fish

- **Adaptability:** Just as the fish adapts to the currents, reflect on your ability to adjust to life's changes. What currents have you navigated this past year?
- **Perspective:** Fish often see the world from below the surface. Allow yourself to gain a new perspective. What truths have you uncovered that bring clarity to your life?
- **Sustenance:** The fish sustains itself and those around it. Contemplate how you can nourish your spirit and those in your community in the year ahead.
- **Connecting with the New Year:** As you visualize the fish, think about the upcoming Jewish New Year. What intentions do you wish to set? Picture the fish swimming towards a horizon filled with light, symbolizing new beginnings and opportunities.



### **Connecting with the New Year:**

As you visualize the fish, think about the upcoming Jewish New Year. What intentions do you wish to set? Picture the fish swimming towards a horizon filled with light, symbolizing new beginnings and opportunities.

### **Setting Intentions**

In this moment of reflection, silently affirm your personal intentions SEVEN TIMES. Personal intentions are different for everyone. For example:

- "I embrace clarity and purpose as I enter this new year."
- "I release what no longer serves me, welcoming growth and transformation."
- Ani Dag B'Myim

### **Returning to the Present:**

Gradually bring your awareness back to your breath. With each inhalation, feel the energy of clarity filling you. With each exhalation, let go of doubts and uncertainties. When you feel ready, gently open your eyes, carrying the clarity of the fish with you into the new year. Embrace the journey ahead with a renewed spirit.

SHANA TOVA!

# Solo Rosh Hashanah Meaning Making

by Erin-Kate Escobar

For the last 14 years, I've celebrated the High Holidays solo, and I've come to love it -- so I want to share with you my ritual for meaning-making at the High Holidays. I've found it to be a gift because I really get to go inward. As a queer, non binary, Jewish and Mexican Person of Color It has been hard to find a spiritual home in just one place. I have found that group events, as a deep empath sometimes I'm distracted by all the humans, and the varied and deep emotions in the room, so it's really nice to make a plan to go inward that really allows me to be in relationship with our ancestors and tune in to my own voices.

This is a great ritual for folks who:

- Don't have or haven't found a belonging yet in a house of worship or synagogue
- Want to carve out a little space for reflection or figuring out what the new year means for them at this time
- Aren't able to take time off to travel to be with friends or family

My ritual looks like this...

## **Prep:**

The month of Elul I start to scan the newsletters I receive or people I follow, or the internet for meaningful drash and texts (books, articles, memes, poetry, podcasts) that are pulling me in asking me to spend more time with them. I put them all in folder so it's something I can come back to as I approach the holiday.

### **Night before:**

- Grocery shop for meals/snacks/ritual foods
  - Sandwich materials for hike
  - A few fav snacks
  - Apples, honey, pomegranate, pumpkin (you choose!)
    - Pomegranate can symbolize the 613 mitzvot and have played role in the sephardic Rosh Hashanah seder - may we be as full of mitzvot (commandments) as the pomegranate is full of seeds). Or a blessing for a new fruit that one hasn't eaten in a while.
    - Pumpkin's bright golden/orange color (sephardi culture) can symbolize happiness and abundance, having a protective thick skin keeping us safe from harm and soft insides that are nourishing.
- Sometimes I feel inspired to make a round challah with raisins sometimes I just buy some cinnamon raisin bread
- Make sure I have the clothes I want to wear for the next day washed/dried/located
- Print out or write down the key questions i'm wanting to focus on or a poem that's pulling me in!

### **Morning of the ritual:**

For me, it's sometimes a homebody day with all the tea and art supplies I can dream of and some years it's a find a great hiking spot.

I like to wake up without an alarm and take an extra moment for personal morning prayer:

Gratitude for this day

Gratitude for this body

Gratitude for arriving here at this time

Gratitude for each breath

I might add additional blessings such as:

### **Modeh/Modah Ani**

(with feminine language for the divines)

מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ, מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם, שֶׁחֲזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחַמְלָה, רַבָּה אֲמוּנָתְךָ

Modah/Modah a-ni l'fa'na'ich

Ru-ach Chai Yah v'ka ye met

Bchem lah rubah e-mu-na-tech

I also appreciate this Modeh Ani [Interpretation by Deborah Waxman](#)

מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ

"Gratitude creates expansiveness."

רוּחַ חַי וְקַיִם

"There is an abiding Spirit that undergirds and animates  
the universe."

שֶׁחֲזַרְתָּ בִּי נִשְׁמָתִי בְּחַמְלָה

"Every morning I wake up is a gift."

רַבָּה אֲמוּנָתְךָ

"The reality that the universe is greater than we can possibly  
understand—whether or not we acknowledge it—orients us  
toward abundance."

"I am grateful, Source of Life, for another day and for the  
possibility of abundance."

Next, I prepare my foods to take with me, enjoy some breakfast and morning tea/coffee and pack my day bag with the following

- Journal & pen
- Print outs or pre-written questions for reflection
- snacks/food
- Sun protection/bug repellent /layers of warm stuff
- First aid kit (just in case)/emergency blanket
- Watercolors, jar of water, a brush and paper

I make my way to a spot with a view that reminds me that I'm not alone in this world and helps me experience a bit of awe. I'm drawn to the mountains, trees, and bodies of water to sit and be with. I observe what it feels like to be alive right now and interconnected to this more extensive web of ancestors, the rocks, the grass, the dirt, the leaves, spider webs, everything.

I don't listen to music, I don't make small talk. I find the silence and just talk with myself and higher power or the universe.

Then I walk a little or sit a little, listen to the sounds that are happening, notice the thoughts passing through, and allow myself to settle into today, this moment.

I bring my thoughts into journaling. These are some of the questions I like to ask myself every year (I think many of these have come from 10Q)

- Where are you right now?
- What have been some significant experiences this year?
- What's something I wish I had done differently?
- What would you like to forgive yourself for?
- Who in your life would like to offer forgiveness to?

- What milestones happened in your family or close friend group?
- What trips did you take this year?
- What world events are going on that are impacting you?
- What spiritual experience(s) did you have this year?
- What something i'd like to achieve in the coming year? why? How will you know if you've achieved it?
- What kind of life improvements happened/did you make? What would you like to improve in the coming year? Any advice that could help?
- What person, cause, or idea to you want to invest into next?
- What's a fear you have? How is it limiting you?
- Next year at this time, how/what do you hope will be different?

Next, I might read a poem. Here's one example:

### **Gatherings/High Holiday version**

by Elliott batTzedek

Gather our strengths  
 and gather our failures  
 Gather our kin  
 and gather our strangers  
 Gather what we love  
 and what we fear  
 Gather what we have done  
 and what we have left undone  
 Gather what we have lost  
 and what we have yet to find  
 Find the courage to proclaim  
 "All we gather is sacred"

Then I like to close with making, playing with paint and finally stopping to get a ritual meal to close out the day. I like to do a solo meal just taking in the texture, tastes, sounds, and notice what it's like to be alive right now.

I include:

- something sweet related to my culture
- Something that connects me to my ancestors
- Something that feels celebratory or special
- Something that feels nourishing

And I don't forget dessert - some fruit and something sweet to dip into!



Finding Portals in each New Year  
(Mixed media, water color and collage 2023)

# The Diaspora Tortoise

by Stephen Nolly

As Jews in the diaspora, we can struggle to find a connection to our homeland. But just like a tortoise in the desert, we take our home with us.

## Inspiration

The inspiration for this practice comes from my intersectional roots as both Japanese and Jewish. My Japanese mother had a practice where we weren't allowed to wear new shoes outside of the house without putting ashes on the soles. The ashes were from incense burned to honor our ancestors. As we walked out into the world, we brought our ancestors with us, and were indelibly connected to them.

## Intention

This is a ritual for CONNECTION and RETURN to one's roots. For all of us who live in diaspora - residing in one place and having origins, or ancestors in another. We can practice this ritual as a reminder of the power of our ancestral homelands, and to bring the memory of our origins into our current homes.

For me, I will practice this ritual calling in my deep connection to the land of Israel at this sacred time of year. I will use this ritual to remind myself that as much as Israel is there to protect me as a Jew, I also have an obligation to be a steward to Israel - including and especially while in diaspora.

For some of us Israel represents the land, for others, it represents our idea of our peoplehood. I invite you to adapt the ritual below to call in whatever homeland or homelands you wish to connect with and honor.



## **Timing & Participants**

This ritual BEGINS at the start of Rosh Hashanah and ENDS at the conclusion of Yom Kippur. You may engage with this practice alone or with others. All who share your connection with your homeland may join in.

### **Step 1:**

- If this is the first time you are engaging in this practice, you will need to collect soil/sand/earth from WHERE YOU ARE. It should be from the place you currently call HOME.
- If you have performed this ritual in years past, you will start by taking your container of earth from previous years.

### **Recite:**

"Today I bring forth soil, to sanctify my dwelling here, where my practice begins, and here, where my practice will lead me."

### **Step 2:**

In the doorstep or outer entranceway to your home, spill out your soil to create approximately one square foot of space, in any shape or form. Let the soil spill through your fingers. Inhale the essential scents of earthiness, minerality, or fragility as you connect with the land.

### **Recite:**

"This my soil from one home to another. I spread it here to celebrate and connect with the land of my roots."

### **Step 3:**

Write the name of your homeland (for me, ISRAEL) in the soil in your native language.

As I write the name, I consider how for me, this square foot of earth is my piece of Israel. It is my homeland. My connection to it is ABSOLUTE through the fact of being Jewish. My physical presence in diaspora, appearance or racial presentation, or blood quantum have no bearing on my legitimacy as a Jew with a connection to the land of Israel. Being Jewish is enough. I am enough.

**In your mother language, honoring the land, say in unison with any participants:**

"This is my land. This is my home. This is my Israel [or name of land]."

**Restore & Rebuild**

At the end of each day, you may find your home soil has been disturbed. Do not be shocked or surprised. Wind may disturb it. An accidental footstep may disturb it. This is to be expected.

At sunset each night, reinforce the edges where your earth has been disturbed. Retrace and rewrite the name of your homeland/Israel. Renew and replenish the earth as needed. You are the guardian and steward of this one square foot of your homeland/Israel. It is your responsibility to safeguard this small piece of soil that connects you to your homeland.

Upon restoration, we say in unison:

"This is my land. This is my home. This is my Israel [ or homeland]."

**Resolution**

On the final night, at the end of Yom Kippur, you will reinforce your square foot of land, retrace the name of your homeland/Israel, and say in unison with participants:

"This is my land. This is my home. This is my Israel [or homeland]."

**Safeguard this land and take it with you.**

Upon restoration, gather the soil in your hands and pour it into a container to safeguard until the next Rosh Hashanah.

Your soil can also be shared with others to bring with them through diaspora. Children can seed their containers from the soil of the parents. Newcomers to the practice can start their tradition through connection with your earth. Go forth as stewards, with your homeland/Israel in your heart.

# Making the Mark

by Elianna Bernstein

This ritual reimagines the traditional practice of tashlich, a ritual that symbolizes casting away the ways we have “missed the mark” in the past year. Using the language of “missing the mark” is a way of acknowledging past mistakes without the punitive connotation conjured by words like “sinning.” The idea of missing the mark also suggests opportunity for improvement and progress, a chance to get closer to our ideal selves. The following ritual plays on this concept with the practice of drawing a target as a metaphor of “making the mark.” It is meant to be practiced at the beach on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, but some find it meaningful to do it during the ten Days of Awe between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the Yamim Nora'im, or even until the last day of Sukkot, except on Shabbat.

## **Setting Intentions:**

Arrive at the beach and find a moment to ground yourself. This can be by taking a dip in the water, sitting in the sand and taking a few deep breaths, or any other way you like to be present in body and mind. Find a stick or other tool for drawing in the sand and draw three large concentric circles. Find three small objects. Think rocks, seashells, or pebbles. You may also choose to use a small token or object that represents your cultural background.

The three circles represent community/the world, the middle represents people who are close to you, the smallest one represents yourself.

Stand or sit in the outer circle and take a minute to think about how you “missed the mark” with each of the groups and how you can improve/contribute more in the coming year. Place a stone or object of choice in each circle as you move through the activity. You can think about specific actions you are not proud of, or take a more general approach guided by the following questions:

- How can I be a better part of the community at large?
- How can I improve my relationships with the people I am closest to?
- How can I be more compassionate to myself?

As you move from outer to inner circle and contemplate the answers, ground your feet or legs in the sand. Feel the ground and the warmth of the sun supporting you.

### **Reflection Practice:**

Next, take a small bag of bread crumbs, representing things you have done in the past year that you have not been proud of. Here is another opportunity to use something that represents your unique background. For example, instead of bread crumbs, you can use salt or another spice– anything that can be easily dispersed in water. Thank G-d or a higher power for giving you another chance to improve in the coming year.

### **Tashlich Prayer:**

If you want, you can use this [traditional tashlich prayer](#), or any alternative that resonates with you.

### **Optional Tashlich Prayer:**

Holy One of Blessing  
Here I am again  
ready to let go of my mistakes.  
Help me to release myself  
from all the ways I've missed the mark.  
Help me to stop carrying  
the baggage of my poor choices.  
As I cast this bread upon the waters  
lift my troubles off my shoulders.  
Help me to know that last year is over,  
washed away like crumbs in the current.  
Open my heart to blessing and gratitude.  
Renew my soul as the dew renews the grasses.  
Amen.  
-Rabbi Judith Beiner

### **Closing:**

Return to your circle. Collect the three objects and return to the outer, largest circle. You will repeat the opening exercise, but instead of asking yourself how you can do better, ask:

- How have I contributed to my community/the world this past year?
- How have I helped/loved the people I am closest to?
- How have I been compassionate to myself?

The goal is to bring the energy of all the good you have done into the new year. You can end the practice by placing your hand on your heart, closing your eyes, and visualizing yourself starting the new year in joy and peace, committed to spreading this very joy and peace to others.

**Alternative practices:**

If you don't have access to a beach, you can do this ritual at home with a sand tray and a bath tub, or at a park! Sand art kits work great too!

Note: To make this practice extra special, you can wear something new for the ritual, such as a new bathing suit/sun hat. This can also be done as a shared experience with a friend or family member. Make the ritual your own by adding or modifying to meet your unique needs!

**Feliz Año Nuevo and Shanah Tovah!**

# Mis Antepasado Mayor:

## My eldest ancestor

A Mikveh inspired ritual for a new year

by Kimberly Ariella Dueñas

My father was born on our family farm in rural El Salvador. He was the fifth generation of a farmer family that had been tending to those same lands for hundreds of years. I wasn't born on that land, yet I feel an inner knowing, a kind of intuitive connection as if that soil walks with my feet. This understanding has given me a unique perspective and relationship with nature. I grew up in California, and as a child, I would spend as much time outside as much as possible. I found the most joy when I went to the ocean - that was my happy place.

I remember in Hebrew school learning about Rosh Chodesh, the new moon, and how our Jewish ancestors interpreted time through the phases of lunation. That felt so familiar and exciting to me, and then I realized, though the worlds within me are from such different places, they speak similar languages in speaking about the earth and celestial bodies.

In the last few years I have been on a personal quest to understand more about my Salvadoran roots, and the ways my Jewish and Central American traditions intersect. I've been blown away at the similarities and the unique differences I have discovered..

One such custom in Mayan tradition, particularly in the concept of stewardship, is this idea that the earth and the



elements are ancestors to us, just like our own great grandparents. They are our older ancestors that continue to play a role in our daily lives. Our living, breathing ancestors that have known everyone before us, and everyone that will come after us. Indigenous peoples throughout our region, being descendants of the Nahua, Pipiles and the Maya, still practice offering thanks and honoring the earth, water, fire and air. These elements are present during communal ceremonies marking equinoxes or eclipses, and can also appear in personal rituals. Art that has long been dedicated to the elements and have been found throughout Latin America, indicating the central role they play in cultural life. The elements are also celebrated as gods in particular contexts, like 'Tlaloc', the God of water and rain.

Over hundreds and thousands of years these traditions have been passed down from generation to generation to maintain the link between humankind and the planet. Our great wise ones knew that without these elements, we simply could not exist, and so like any relationship, we must nurture the earth in a reciprocal relationship. When I've had the chance to visit my ancestral lands in El Salvador, I practice seeing the landscape through these eyes. On a recent trip, I was marking a moment of transition in my life and felt called to immerse myself in the ocean for a mikveh. As I did, I thought about our indigenous ways and entered the water with different kind of reverence and humility.

As we approach the High Holidays, we prepare ourselves for deep reflection and transformation. The practice of Mikveh is customary on the days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur to symbolize this shedding of the old self and the welcoming of the new. My hope though this ritual is to offer Central American wisdom of the land to support others in their moment of transition from one season to the next, from one self to the next.

As the water is our ancestor, it has guidance, it has strength, it holds mystery. Our waters and oceans have so much to offer us, and in the ways we recall the Matriarchs and the Patriarchs - Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Rachel and Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah - during a prayer service, we too can offer gratitude to the elements of our planet that make all life possible.

**When to do this ritual:**

- The short answer - when it feels right during the High Holiday season.
- This can be during Rosh HaShanah to mark the new year, after Yom Kippur to cleanse your soul, during Sukkot to honor the land, or on Simchat Torah to recognize beginning again.

**What do you need for this ritual:**

- Think about the perfect place for you to immerse your body in water. You may or may not be near living waters, so find a place of meaning where you can dip. This can include a pool or even a bathtub - it's all about the intention. Do some research about water sources near you, and if it's accessible, make a plan to go there.
- Collect natural, biodegradable items to make a natural art piece as a gesture of gratitude to the sea or the water that will cleanse you. Some traditions could call this an altar, or a collection of appreciations and symbols. If you're in nature, walk around and collect sticks, stones, leaves or flowers to make an offering of beauty and appreciation to the earth.
- Consider wearing something (for the water) that reflects a part of your identity or symbolizes a way you'd like to bring in the new year.

- Consider if you want to have someone with you/near you or if you would like to do this by yourself.
- Bring an artifact of meaning that represents your intention for the year to come.
- Finally, consider the sources of strength in your life and your lineage. Perhaps you want to invite your ancestors to join you energetically and you can bring an artifact of your identity and culture to be present as a witness with you.



## **How to do the ritual:**

### **Part 1 - In front of the water**

- Arrive at your water source with all the materials you might need and find a spot that feels comfortable to you.
- Gather your natural materials, then on the ground in front of the water / pool / tub, create a work of art that expresses thanks to the water, our ancestor. If you like, the symbol can reflect an intention into the new year. This can be like a mandala pattern - a circle with mirrored designs.
- Once that is complete, take a quiet moment to pause and breathe, look out to the water and thank it for how it heals, creates, renews, regenerates, houses life, and offers peace to us. Thank this ancestor of ours that has been part of the story of life from the beginning of time. Offer anything else you would like to share. You may try to speak to the water (out loud or in your mind) as if it were a familial ancestor you knew personally.
  - At the same time, we can recognize the range of the water's power, how it can also be fierce, powerful and even destructive - we honor the spectrum of Mother Nature's ways, in hopes that by understanding her ebbs and flows, we can also understand ours as humans.
- After we thank, we name our intention. What brings you to the Mikveh on this day? Are you there to cleanse? Renew? Feel supported? Mark the transition? Name your intention, you can say it like..."May I release what no longer serves from the previous year", "May I enter this new cycle of time with strength and clarity", "May I return to nature so I can feel connected to all living things'...

## **How to do the ritual:**

### **Part 2 - Approaching the water**

- When you're ready, prepare yourself to enter the water. As your toes touch the water, acknowledge yourself and celebrate what it took for you to get to this moment. These customs include cleaning the body in preparation for immersion.
- In Jewish tradition, it is customary to fully dip yourself three times, making sure that you are completely submerged. You may keep your same intention for all three dips or think about 3 different intentions.
- According to Jewish tradition, the blessing (below) is said after the first immersion to mark fulfilling the mitzvah, the commandment of immersion.
- You can continue with the second and third immersion.
- Upon concluding your immersions, take a moment to stand in the water or float atop the surface. As you do, attune your senses to the feeling of being held by the living waters. Imagine this ancestor, as old as time itself with all of its wisdom, holding you, carrying you. Thank the water for its guidance, partnership and history. Consider how these same waters have provided for all the generations before you and given life to our planet. Recall the ways the ocean/river/source of water has played a role in your life, and offer gratitude for the ways this element continues to offer healing, life and transformation.
- Take as much time as you want and need with this.

### **Closing your ritual:**

- When you're ready, step out of the water and stand tall facing the water with your face and heart.
- Recite the Shechianu (below), the blessing to sanctify new moments and mark this ritual as a part of your high holiday journey.
- As you close, seal your intention with a hand to the heart so you take it, along with the water wisdom, into the new year.
- Before you change your clothes and change locations, look up at the sky, down at the ground and out to the sea and thank the elements and the ancestors once more for being witnesses on your journey.

### **Suggestions:**

- You can leave your offering design on the ground/in the sand as long as it will not cause harm to the natural environment. It can live there as a gift and perhaps, inspire someone else.
- Following this experience, write about it! Write down the intention / reason around your Mikveh ritual and keep that note handy to be reminded of it throughout the year.
- Begin to think about another time in the year, perhaps around the cycles of the moon or days of meaning, or when you might want to return to this ritual.
- To deepen our relationship with the water, consider exploring your own cultural history, art, poetry, or ritual around water. Learning about the elements deepens our respect and reverence for them.
- Finally, in cultivating a reciprocal relationship, consider how you might participate in a beach clean up or donate to an organization focused on sustainability initiatives and water conservation.

## **BLESSING BANK:**

### **Blessings for Mikveh Immersion**

**(sourced from Mayyim Chayim)**

#### **Traditional Blessing:**

Baruch ata adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam asher kid-shanu  
b'mitzvo-tav v'tzi-vanu al ha-tevilah.

**Blessed are You, Adonai, Ruler of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with mitzvot and commanded us concerning immersion.**

#### **Alternative Blessing:**

Baruch ata adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam asher kid-shanu  
bi-tevilah b'mayyim hayyim.

**Blessed are You, God, Majestic Spirit of the Universe, Who makes us holy by embracing us in living waters.**

#### **Shehecheyanu: A Blessing to mark new beginnings**

Baruch ata adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam she-heche-yanu,  
ve-ki-y'manu, ve-higi-yanu la-z'man ha-zeh.

**Blessed are You, Source of all Life, Who has kept us alive and sustained us, and enabled us to reach this day.**







# Morning “Havdalah” After a Holiday

by Ziggy Valdez

For my ritual I wanted to find a way to have a transition from such a holy time with the rest of our year, and luckily Jews already have a tradition of separating the holy from the everyday, Havdalah. There is something beautiful about ending Shabbat with a ritual around waking up your senses, and leaving with one last taste of the holiness of Shabbat. I wanted to add that to the experience of the High Holidays because it can be really jolting to go back to the secular world after we bare our souls, and being able to transition back could be really helpful in being fully present in our lives. This ritual is written to be done the morning after Yom Kippur but can be adapted for the ending of any holiday.

## **For this Havdalah adaptation you will need:**

- Coffee/hot chocolate
- Dates
- Pan dulce (or any type of sweet bread)
- Candle (you could do scented, unscented tea lights, any candle)
- Incense or spices with an invigorating scent (think mint, citrus)
- If possible go somewhere in nature, I recommend the beach but anywhere outside will do.

Once you have picked your spot, bring your supplies and set them in a way that makes picking up each item easy. Unlike Havdalah done on Shabbat, this one is meant to be done the morning after Yom Kippur, before you go to work.

### Step 1: Coffee

The first thing you'll bless is the coffee. Take the cup in two hands to feel its warmth and recite a blessing before taking a sip.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם מֵאִיר (קרי: מַעִיר)  
לְאָרֶץ וְלִדְרוֹת עָלֶיהָ בְּרַחֲמִים

Praised are You, Adonai, our God, Sovereign of  
universe, who rouses the world and its  
inhabitants in mercy

### Step 2: Incense or spices

Recite the following blessing before smelling:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא מִיְּנֵי בְשָׁמִים

Blessed are you, Lord our God, sovereign of the  
universe Who creates varieties of spices

### Step 3: Candle

Recite the following blessing before feeling the warmth of the fire from a lit candle.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא מְאוּרֵי הָאֵשׁ

Blessed are you, Lord our God, sovereign of the  
universe Who creates the light of the fire

#### Step 4: Pan Dulce Blessing

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם  
מִן הָאֲרֶץ

Blessed are you, Lord our God, ruler of the  
universe who brings forth bread from the earth.

**Before taking a bite of the pan dulce grab a date  
and say:**

May it be your will, God, that hatred will end.

(The word for date looks similar to the word end in  
Hebrew)

Enjoy the coffee/hot chocolate pan dulce, and dates!

Once you have completed this ritual, take a moment to  
think about what bits of sweetness you want to bring  
into your life now that the High Holidays are over, and  
enjoy your year!

Shana Tova!

# Ushpizin | Los Siete Invitados

## אושפיזין

### Sukkot and Día de los Muertos

by Luis Rene Carrillo

Sukkot is a joyous, 7-day festival often connected to being thankful for the fall harvest. It takes place on the 15th Hebrew month of Tishrei. Sukkot also commemorates the 40 years of Jewish wandering in the desert after the giving of the Torah in Mt. Sinai. It is a rejoicing and the only festival in which we are commanded to do just that: rejoice. Sukkot, the plural of sukkah, translates to “huts” or “booths.” Sukkot are temporary dwellings we erect that have open walls and open doors. During this time, we invite friends and new friends to eat, rest, and rejoice.

Ushpizin is Aramaic for “guests,” a reference to the founding figures of the Jewish people who are symbolically invited into the sukkah, along with their divine attributes (a wink at the Sefirot of Kabbalah). For 7 days, a set of biblical figures is invited, and their divine attributes are commemorated.

And.

Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) is a Latin festival celebrating and remembering loved ones no longer with us. The festival is a two-day celebration from November 1 to 2, sometimes around the same time as Sukkot. It is believed

that on Día de los Muertos, the bridge between the natural and spiritual worlds opens so our deceased loved ones can return and visit us. While the festival is usually associated with Mexico, it is celebrated in different Latin countries in various ways. Families commonly gather in cemeteries at night, light candles, and place flowers on the burial sites of their loved ones. One would think this time to be one of sadness. Yet, it is a time when families sing, laugh, dance, eat, and celebrate their ancestors.

A big part of preparing for Día de los Muertos is the creation of temporary ofrendas (altars) in the home. Stemming from the Aztec practice of leaving food and water for the deceased to help them on their journey to the land of the dead, Latin families decorate ofrendas with flowers (often marigolds in Mexico), pictures of deceased loved ones, souvenirs, and loved one's favorite foods. The belief is that the offerings help invite the deceased ancestor from the land of the dead; it is a call that gets louder the more one is remembered.

You can find a more detailed explanation of Sukkot and Día de los Muertos on [Jewtina y Co.'s Jewish Holiday Resources page](#) and [Cultural Ritual Page](#), which served as a primary reference point for this ritual.

I am a Salvadoran Jew and, for years, have been exploring how I can observe Día de los Muertos in a way that honors my Jewish life. During a leadership retreat at Urban Adamah, a peer shared with me the Indigenous belief that when we heal, we heal the 7 generations that preceded us and the 7 generations that will follow us, likely derived from Lakota tribe beliefs. My journey as a Latin Jewish leader in Los Angeles took me to reconnect with my family line and heal the many scars of colonialism, war, racism, misogyny, and immigration.

My ritual aims to honor that process by honoring my ancestors during a time when I am commanded to rejoice.

### **Step 1:**

In the days leading up to Sukkot, reflect on 7 ancestors or deceased loved ones you wish to honor. Will you honor them chronologically based on where they are in your family line? Will you honor them based on the divine attributes and how they embody that trait? Will you honor them next to specific founding Jewish figures? This is your practice and your ritual; lean on what feels authentic.

### **Step 2:**

Create an ofrenda! You can refer to this [Recustom Altar Making Guide](#) or Jewtina y Co.'s [Día de los Muertos guide](#).

### **An ofrenda generally includes:**

- A table
- A tablecloth
- Pictures of loved ones you are remembering
- Their favorite foods and drinks
- Water
- Flowers
- Bread and pastries
- Other personally meaningful objects

### **Step 3:**

Make your ofrenda sacred with a blessing. I use the blessing during Havdalah that marks the separation of the holiness of Shabbat from the ordinariness of the rest of the week.

**Baruch atah Adonai, hamavdil bayn kodesh lechol.  
Blessed are You God, who separates between the holy  
and the ordinary.**

#### Step 4:

It's Sukkot! Use the chart below to structure each day for the Ushpizin ceremony. You can refer to this [booklet by 18Doors for a brief review of Sukkot](#). If you're building a sukkah, consider the symbolism of building it around your ofrenda. If you cannot build a sukkah, consider the power of your ofrenda and how your ancestors/deceased loved ones are connected to you, with or without a temporary dwelling.

Day	Ancestor or Deceased Loved One	Divine Attributes	Founding Jewish Figures
1		<i>Chesed</i> , loving kindness	Abraham & Sarah
2		<i>Gevurah</i> , strength	Issac & Rebecca
3		<i>Tiferet</i> , splendor	Jacob & Leah
4		<i>Netzah</i> , eternity	Joseph & Rachel
5		<i>Hod</i> , glory	Moses & Miriam
6		<i>Yesod</i> , foundation	Aaron & Deborah
7		<i>Malkhut</i> , royalty	David & Ruth

#### Step 5:

Ushpizin. Before the meal, we invite these special guests to join us in the sukkah. Although all the names are mentioned each evening, we make a special call to a special guest each night. If that is your practice, you can refer to this [excerpt by the Rabbinical Assembly](#), which has the Ushpizin blessings in English and Hebrew.

#### Step 6:

Take a moment to reflect on the invitation. Speak about the ancestor or deceased loved one you are remembering. Refer to your ofrenda and share a story, idea, or question about them. Reflect on the divine attribute of that day. How did this person embody that? Think about the founding Jewish figure being honored; what traits do they possess similar to the person you remember?

**Step 7:**

Eat! Rejoice! Your sukkah or home is full of so much love and respect. Acknowledge the power you possess by honoring your ancestors or loved ones. You are the link between them and your future generations. They're with you, always.

**Below is what my ritual looks like in my own practice:**

**Ofrenda:**

- Wooden table
- Maroon tablecloth
- Guineos/Platanos (bananas/plantains)
- Papaya
- Tamarindo (tamarind)
- Sapotes (fruit native Central and South America)
- Jocotes (fruit native to Central and South America)
- Mamoncillos (Spanish limes)
- Salvadoran coffee beans
- Salvadoran Quesadilla (sweet bread)
- Hibiscus flowers
- Flores de Izote (izote flowers)
- Caléndulas (marigolds)
- Pictures
- Grandfather's cufflinks
- Water
- A bottle of Cola Champagne (Salvadoran soda)
- Cohiba, Montecristo, or Romeo y Julieta cigar
- Rum
- Mezcal, raicilla, and/or sotol (spirits native to Mexico)



## My Ancestors & Deceased Loved Ones (Z"L):

Day	Ancestor or Deceased Loved One	Divine Attributes	Founding Jewish Figures
1	Jaime Salvador Carrillo Torres (Father)	<i>Chesed</i> , loving kindness	Abraham & Sarah
2	José Luis García de León y García (Maternal Grandfather, Mexican Army Veteran)	<i>Gevurah</i> , strength	Issac & Rebecca
3	Afredo Carrillo (Paternal Grandfather, WWII U.S. Army Veteran)	<i>Tiferet</i> , splendor	Jacob & Leah
4	SPC Kaleb Loyer & SPC Matthew Hester (Soldiers I served with in the U.S. Army)	<i>Netzah</i> , eternity	Joseph & Rachel
5	Francisco García de León Hidalgo y Costilla (Great Paternal Grandfather, he fought alongside Pancho Villa in the Mexican Revolution)	<i>Hod</i> , glory	Moses & Miriam
6	The women in my family line who did not have agency or a voice during their time	<i>Yesod</i> , foundation	Aaron & Deborah
7	Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (Ancestor, Father of the Mexican War of Independence)	<i>Malkhut</i> , royalty	David & Ruth

## References

- <https://jewtina.org/jewish-holiday-resources>
- <https://jewtina.org/cultural-resources>
- <https://highholidaysathome.com/clip/home-altar-making-guide>
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