

Sanctifying the Day

Contributed by [Jewish Guy](#)

Source: Velveteen Rabbi

May the light of the candles we kindle together tonight bring radiance to all who live in darkness. May this season, marking the deliverance of our people from Pharaoh, rouse us against anyone who keeps others in servitude. In gratitude for the freedom we enjoy, may we strive to bring about the liberation of all people everywhere. Lighting these candles, we create the sacred space of the Festival of Freedom; we sanctify the coming-together of our friends and family.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ רוּחַ הָעוֹלָם

אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל יוֹם טוֹב

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu ruach ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Yom Tov.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Breath of Life, who sanctifies us with your commandment to kindle the holiday lights.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁחַיָּנוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ

וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנֵן הַזֶּה

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam,

shehecheyanu v'kiy'manu v'higiyanu lazman hazeh.

Blessed are you, Adonai, sovereign of all worlds, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this moment.

First Cup of Wine

[The following sentence is a kabbalistic kavanah, aimed at encouraging us to sanctify and drink our wine with the holy intention of connecting transcendence and immanence, God far above with God deep within.]

I take upon myself the mitzvah of this first of four cups of wine, in the name of the unification of the Holy Blessed One with Shekhinah!

Tonight we drink four cups of wine. Why four? Some say the cups represent our matriarchs— Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah—whose virtue caused God to liberate us from slavery.

Another interpretation is that the cups represent the Four Worlds: physicality, emotions, thought, and essence. Still a third interpretation is that the cups represent the four promises of liberation God makes in the Torah: I will bring you out, I will deliver you, I will redeem you, I will take you to be my people (Exodus 6:6-7.) The four promises, in turn, have been interpreted as four stages on the path of liberation: becoming aware of oppression, opposing oppression, imagining alternatives, and accepting responsibility to act.

This first cup of wine reminds us of God's first declaration: "I will bring you out from the

oppression..."

Kiddush

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בְּנוּ עִם כָּל הָעַמִּים וְרוֹמְמָנוּ עִם כָּל

לָשׁוֹן, וְקִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְתַתֵּן-לָנוּ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּאַהֲבָה שַׁבָּתוֹת לְמִנוּחָה וּמוֹעֲדִים

לְשִׂמְחָה, חַגִּים וְזְמַנִּים לְשִׂשׁוֹן אֶת-יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת הַזֶּה וְאֶת-יוֹם הַמַּצּוֹת הַזֶּה. זְמַן

חַרוּתֵנוּ, בְּאַהֲבָה, מִקִּרְא קִדְּשׁ, זָכַר לִיְצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם. כִּי בּוּ בְּחַרְתָּ וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָּ

עִם כָּל-הָעַמִּים. וְשַׁבָּת וּמוֹעֲדֵי קִדְּשָׁךְ בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרַצוֹן בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְשִׂשׁוֹן

הַנִּחַלְתָּנוּ: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, מִקִּדְּשׁ הַשַּׁבָּת וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַזְמַנִּים.

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheynu melech ha'olam, asher bakhar banu im kol ha-amim, v'rom'manu im kol lashon, v'kidshanu b'mitzvotav. Va-titen lanu Adonai eloheynu, b'ahavah (shabbatot limnucha u-) mo'adim l'simkha, hagim u-z'manim l'sason, et yom (ha-(shabbat hazeh v'et yom) ha-Pesach hazeh, z'man cheruteinu, (b'ahavah) mikra kodesh, zecher l'tziat mitzrayim. Ki vanu vacharta, v'otanu kidashta, im kol ha'amim u-moadim kadshekha (b'ahavah uvratzon) v'simcha uv-sason hin-khaltanu. Baruch atah, Adonai, m'kadesh (ha-shabbat v') Yisrael v'hazmanim.

We praise You, Sovereign of Existence! You have called us for service along with other peoples, and have hallowed our lives with commandments. In love You have given us (Shabbat and) festivals for rejoicing, seasons of celebration, including this (Shabbat and this) Festival of Matzot, the time of our freedom, a commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt. Praised are You, our Eternal God, Who gave us this joyful heritage and Who sanctifies (Shabbat and) Israel and the festivals.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

[After the blessing, drink the wine/juice and then refill.]

Three Questions

Who are you?

I'm Yisrael. I'm a God-wrestler. I'm someone who wrestles with the holy, with the Source of All Being, with my understanding of ultimate reality, and I expect God to wrestle back. I dance with God. I waltz with Torah. I stay up all night grappling with angels, and even if I come away limping, I know I come away blessed. I'm a wandering Aramean, and I'm wearing my traveling shoes. I'm a child of the house of Israel, and my community and I and anyone else who hears freedom's call—are walking into the wilderness together.

Where are you coming from?

I'm coming from Mitzrayim. From the narrow place. From slavery. From constriction. From the birth canal. I'm coming from hard labor. I'm coming from the surfeit of sweetness that lulls me into forgetting the world's imperfections. I've been settling for what hurts, too fearful to risk something new. I'm coming from suffering and isolation. I'm coming from addiction to my work, addiction to success, addiction to separation. I'm coming from "if I stopped working, I'm not even sure who I'd be."

Where are you going?

I'm going to Yerushalayim. I'm going to Ir Shalem, the city of wholeness. I'm going to Ir

Shalom, the city of peace. I'm going where talking to God is a local call. I'm heading toward my best imaginings of community and connection. I'm clicking my ruby slippers with fervent *kavanah* and moving toward the meaning of home. Maybe I'm going to a place; maybe I'm going to a state of mind. Maybe it's an asymptotic progression toward something that can't be reached. Maybe it's the journey that defines me.

I am Yisrael. I am coming from Mitzrayim. And the moon is almost full: tomorrow we're packing our bags. Grabbing the flatbread. And setting out. It's time to go.

When I see the word "Israel"

When I see the word

Israel

I see

Isra-el

wrestles with God

God is

Victorious

When I see the word

I do not see

the chosen few

I see those few who choose

Those few who choose

to wrestle with You,

a contest

in which both wrestlers

are one

and in which the one

is victorious

I see those few who choose,
among the many nations among all people,

those few who choose

to make love

to you

and those who say:

I betroth myself to you

whether it feels like honey

or a thornbush

because even the thornbush

sometimes glows

with fire

of revelation

When I see the world

Israel

I know many claim it as their own

As a title a privilege a status

As if God chose them

they are right in this:

God chooses

but they are wrong in thinking:

only them

God breathes through many begotten sons

and daughters

God wrestles through his glorious perverts

and professors

and as there is only one contestant

for better or for worse...

this wrestling

is an embrace

of recognition

and delight

do you seek God? God seeks you.

Who will you allow

to be victorious?

(—Jay Michaelson)