



*Kahal B'raira/*  
Community of Choice

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**Congregation for Humanistic Judaism**

רוּחַ

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In English the words Spirituality and Inspiration share the Latin root for breath. In Hebrew, too, the same word ruach (roo-akh) can mean both *breath* and *spirit* – as well as *intellect* and *passion*. For Secular Humanistic Jews spirituality is not supernatural. It is our connection to feelings, to creativity, and to inspiration – in short, it is what makes us rational humans instead of thinking machines.

## Sources



The materials in this booklet are based on a number of sources, almost invariably with modification. Among these from outside of the congregation are:

Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Gates of Prayer*

Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Gates of Forgiveness*

Ellen Umansky and Dianne Ashton, *Four Centuries of Women's Spirituality*.

The web site of our colleagues at Machar, the Washington D.C. Humanistic Jewish Congregation, and the Northern California SHJ.

The writings of Marcia Falk

Lawrence Kushner, *The Book of Words*.

Yitzchok Kirzner, *The Art of Jewish Prayer*.

Jakob Petuchowski, *Our Masters Taught*.

New Jewish Agenda, *Three Shalom Seders*.

James Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*

The Reverend Martin Luther King

## Coming Together

**This is the religious observance I desire; to loosen all the fetters of wickedness, to untie the cords of lawlessness.**

To let the oppressed go free, to break every yoke.

**It is to share bread with the hungry and to take the wretched poor into our home.**

When you see the naked, clothe them. Do not turn away from people in need.

**As we came out of our mother's womb, so must we depart at last, naked as we came.**

We can take nothing of our wealth to carry away with us.

**When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the corners of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest.**

You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger.

**Then shall your light break forth like the dawn.**

**Praise the world —  
praise its fullness  
and its longing,  
its beauty and its grief.**

Praise stone and fire,  
lilac and river,  
and the solitary bird  
at the window.

**Praise the moment  
when the whole  
bursts through pain,  
and the moment  
when the whole  
bursts forth in joy.**

**Praise the dying beauty  
with all your breath  
and, praising, see  
the beauty of the world  
is our own.**



**One day war will come to an end**

People will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears  
into pruning hooks,

**Nations will no longer rise up against nations**

Neither will they study war any more

**We will adjourn the councils of despair and bring new light into the  
dark chamber of pessimism.**

There will be peace on earth and good will among all people).

**It will be a glorious day**

The morning stars will sing together and the children will shout  
for joy.



**Seek wisdom rather than silver**

**Knowledge rather than choice gold**

For wisdom is better than rubies

No goods can equal it.

**Honored is the one who meditates on wisdom**

**And who reasons intelligently**

Whoever reflects on the ways of wisdom

Will also pursue its secrets

**Pursue wisdom like a hunter**

**And lie in wait on its paths.**

Finding wisdom is sweeter than honey,

And its inheritance sweeter than the honeycomb

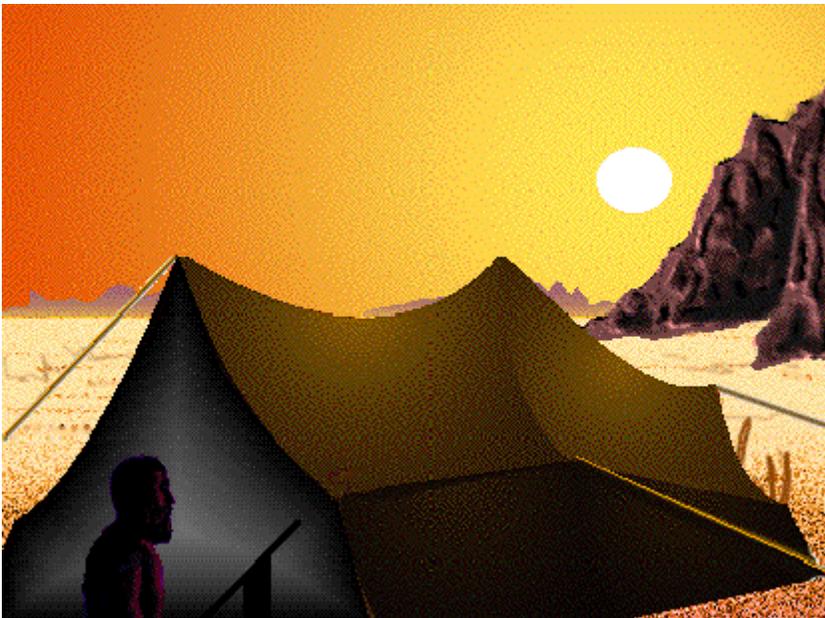
**Those who taste of it will hunger for more**

And those who drink of it will thirst for more.

**We seek righteousness in judgment, and the removal of sorrow and  
groaning from all peoples.**

We honor and seek discerning knowledge,

And understanding.



**How beautiful is the work of our hands.**

**How wonderful is the bread of the earth.**

How glorious are those who bring forth bread from the earth.

**As the fingers of the challah intertwine,**

**So too we join hands in our common humanity,**

**Sharing the fruits of our labor.**

We cherish all that has been created through human effort.

We celebrate the accomplishments of yesterday and today,

Anticipating the possibilities of tomorrow.

**Of all our efforts, of all our accomplishments,**

**We cherish most those reflecting the best we are capable of being**

We seek peace, goodness and blessing, graciousness,

Lovingkindness, and compassion for ourselves,

And for all the children of Israel.

**Whoever lives without blame, and does what is right,**

**And whose heart acknowledges the truth**

**The person who acts thus shall never be shaken.**

It is not our obligation to complete the task of creating a better world

But neither are we free to desist from it.

**Each of us comes to this congregation with different needs**

Some hearts are full of gratitude and joy;

They are eager to confront the day,

To make the world more fair

**And we rejoice with them**

Some hearts ache with sorrow;

Disappointments weigh heavily upon them,

**May our presence and sympathy bring them comfort**

Some hearts are embittered;

They have sought answers in vain;

Life has lost its meaning and value



**May the knowledge that we too are searching give them courage to believe that not all is emptiness.**

Each of us has come to this place

For friendship, for understanding,

And for warmth

**All of us know despair and exaltation; all have moments of weakness and times of strength; all sing songs of sorrow and of love.**

In our common need and striving we gain strength from one another.

We are one in search of life's meaning.

**Again we come to that time which bids us lay aside the burden of care and the anxiety of the daily task.**

In the struggle for the mastery over things material, we often forget the purpose of our life.

**We become enslaved, fettered by new wants, oppressed by new burdens.**

We lose our way. Sadness, anger and despair become our guides.

**Alone, we fear the arrows of ill fortune that fly by day, and the pestilence that stalks by night.**

Coming together, we find in others the strengths that have deserted us.

**They free us from the nets that snare us. They deliver us from darkness.**

They turn our lament into dancing.

**Blessed are those who delight in the way things are, and keep their hearts open, day and night.**

They are like trees planted near flowing rivers, which bear fruit when they are ready.

**In the darkness we light a candle of hope. In pain we light a candle of forgiveness. In loneliness we light a candle of warmth. In gratitude we light a candle of thanks.**

Our separate lights become one, that we may flourish in its glow.



**We gather, as Jews have always gathered, to create precious moments. Let us take pause from our everyday lives to create a special time.**

Let us put aside the fear, anger, turmoil, trials, dissonance, demands, expectations and pace of our daily existence.

**Let the possibilities of this moment be not lost. Let every potential for wisdom, harmony and elation be realized.**

This is a time for an expression of the best in us and all that we can share.

**A time for peace, for contemplation, for introspection, for understanding and for hope.**

It is a time for love, laughter and joy to be shared by family and friends. For giving and getting. For sharing and caring.

**For learning about the goodness of life, for reaffirming our faith and our beliefs.**

Our lives are as fragile and delicate as dancing flames. Yet our quest for life rivals the intensity of those same lights.

**Let us endeavor to appreciate the potential of these sacred moments.**

May we all be blessed with life and love, joy and happiness, companionship, community and peace.

**Let us acknowledge our continual need for the spiritual nourishment that we call hope.**

May this nourishment satisfy us and renew us.

May we be sustained so that we may work for a better life and a better world for ourselves and generations yet to come.

**Let us be grateful for what we have, what we can share and for the way we live.**

And let us all say  
Shalom

## Mi Shebeyrakh

**Mi shebeyrakh avoteinu  
M'kor habrakha l'imoteinu**

May the love we shared  
With those who came before us  
Help us find the courage,  
To make our lives a blessing,  
And let us say, Amen



**Mi shebeyrakh imoteinu  
M'kor habrakha l'avoteinu**

Bless those in need of healing  
With *rufuah shleima*,  
The renewal of body,  
The renewal of spirit  
And let us say, Amen.

## REMEMBRANCE

**The contemplation of death should plant within the soul elevation and peace.**

It should make us see things in their true light. For all things which seem foolish in the light of death are really foolish in themselves.

**To be annoyed because someone has slighted us or has been somewhat more successful in social distinctions, pulled himself somehow one rung higher up the ladder than ourselves**

How ridiculous all this seems when we couple it with the thought of death!

**To pass each day simply and solely in the eager pursuit of money or fame, this also seems like living with shadows when one might take one's part with realities.**

Surely when death is at hand we should desire to say, "I have contributed my grain to the great store of the eternal. I have borne my part in the struggle for goodness."

**And let no man or woman suppose that the smallest social act of goodness is wasted for society at large.**

All our help, whatever it be, is needed; and though we know not the manner, the fruit of every faithful service nourishes humanity.

**Let the true and noble words of a great teacher ring in conclusion upon our ears: "The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts"**

The departed whom we now remember still live on earth in the acts of goodness they performed and in the hearts of those who cherish their memory. May the beauty of their life abide among us as a loving benediction.

**In the stillness of the night, when the outer darkness enters the soul;  
in the press of the crowd,**

We look for hope and peace

**When we walk alone though yearning for companionship;**

We look for hope and peace

**And when in agony we are bystanders to our own confusion**

We look for hope and peace

**We do not ask for a life of ease, for happiness without alloy.**

Instead, we ask to learn to be uncomplaining and unafraid. In our darkness, we yearn for the light, and in our loneliness we discover the many spirits akin to our own.

**We seek strength to face life with hope and courage.**

Let our darkness be dispelled by love, that we may rise above fear and failure, our steps sustained by faith.

**Let us not separate ourselves from the true strength of our community.** We are sustained by the experience and wisdom of old people, the hopes of the young, and the many examples of care and courage which surround us.

**May we lie down this night in peace, and rise up to life renewed.**

And let a time come when morning will bring no word of war or famine or anguish. A time of happiness, of contentment and rest.

**Our life is fulfilled by what we become, not by what we were at birth.**

Endowment and heritage mean much ... and then again, nothing. The essential thing is what we make of them.

**Days are scrolls; write on them what you want to be remembered. We cannot delay death so as to arrange our affairs before we die.**

Existence will remain meaningless until I penetrate it with active love, and in this way discover its meaning for myself.

**We need light when gloom darkens our home. We need fortitude and courage when pain and loss assail us.**

Who among us has not passed through trials and bereavements?

**Some bear fresh wounds in their hearts, and feel most keenly the kinship of sorrow.**

Others, whose days of mourning are more remote, still recall the comfort that sympathy brought to their sorrowing hearts.

**All things pass, all that lives must die. All that we prize is but lent to us; and the time comes when we must surrender it.**

We are travelers on the same road that leads to the same end.



**In the rising of the sun and in its going down,  
We will remember them.**

In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter,  
We will remember them.

**In the opening of buds and in the rebirth of spring,  
We will remember them**

In the blueness of the sky and in the warmth of  
summer,  
We will remember them.

**In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of autumn,  
We will remember them.**

In the beginning of the year and when it ends,  
We will remember them

**When we are weary and in need of strength,  
we will remember them.**

When we are lost and sick at heart,  
We will remember them.

**When we have joys we yearn to share, we will remember them.**

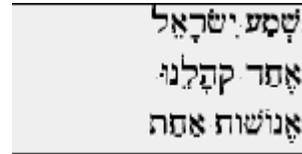
So long as we live, they too shall live,  
For they are now a part of us  
And we will remember

After Rabbi Jack Riemer



*Together:*

Sh'ma Yisrael,  
Ekhad k'halaynu  
Eh-noh-shoot ekhad.



Hear, oh Israel,  
Our community is one,  
Humanity is one.

**Loving life and its mysteries with all our heart and all our spirit and all our strength we take upon ourselves and into ourselves these promises:**

To care for the earth and those who live upon it,  
To pursue justice and peace,  
To love kindness and compassion.

We will teach this to our children throughout the  
passage of the day.

After Marcia Falk

