

Celebrating the New Moon

The moon, so romantic, so sublime, so vital to the existence of us humans, for without the moon there would be no tides, and without tides, life as we know it would not have emerged.

Jewish tradition celebrates this integral element of our existence. The three major Jewish Holidays all begin on the night of the full moon, and every new moon is celebrated as a holiday including the Jewish New Year. The traditional Jewish calendar is lunisolar, meaning that new months are based on the moon but that there are adjustments to compensate for the difference between 12 lunar months and 12 solar months (seven months are added every nineteen years).

Seeing the new moon is ritually celebrated sometime during the 15 days it waxes in a ritual that is traditionally referred to as Kiddush HaLevannah (The Sanctification of the Moon). This ritual is quite racy for monotheistic Judaism, since it draws upon pagan elements, such as the moon's deification and its ability to protect one from the evil eye. Dancing and singing (though not naked 😊) to the light of the moon are also an integral part of this practice.

Without the moon there wouldn't be human beings, so celebrating its cycle in some way is a very natural sentiment. As Jews, the framework for this celebration is already in place, though we may want to adjust the theistic liturgy. In Israel, I was part of a Kiddush Levanah group, and in honor of one of the member's birthday, I formulated an "adjusted" Kiddush Levanah ritual (http://www.religiousatheist.com/new_moon.pdf), in Hebrew of course, though once again I will translate an excerpt so you may get the feel.

Sovereignty by Abraham ben Yitzchaq

The day's crown fades
Its gold weighing upon my forehead
The edges of a dinner jacket swish upon the marble stairs
How the sea cries out its sadness in to the coming night
O daughter of darkness, come quietly,
Sit here at my feet upon the moonlit marble,
So that the wind may sweep through your hair,
Your hair, so black,
The waters thunder and recede
Sit here in silence,
Until your voice breaks

מלכות מאת אברהם בן יצחק
היום ידעה בעטרתמי
יכביד הנזהב על מצחי
שולי מעילי אשטפו על פני מעלות השמש
מה הנמה הים בפאר גגון ארב

בת לילה שקטי לבוא
שבי לרגלי על לבנת השמש
אשא הרוח שערך
ושערך הן שחור
הנה גאו המים –
שבי שקטה
עד אמר קומי רני