

Holy Days

Strangers in an even stranger land.

In case you haven't consulted a Hebrew calendar lately, we are in the middle of Sukkoth (pronounced *Sue COAT*). Even though Sukkoth is also known as The Festival of Booths, this holiday has nothing to do with John Wilkes or Shirley. According to sacred texts, one week after the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, Jews are instructed to build roofless, open-air booths outdoors and hang out there all week pondering the greatness of the universe. Sukkoth may very well prove the biblical origins of other booth-based phenomena such as the Country Fair, Saturday Market and drive-thru espresso.



A Sukkoth booth, called a Sukkah (rhymes with *hookah*), is a simple structure made of sticks and boughs. Jews around the world add their own cultural variations for decorating the Sukkah. In desert regions they use fronds from the date palm, in Spain they use olive branches, in the Northwest we use blue tarps.

We sit inside the Sukkah and reflect on our ancestors' departure from slavery in Egypt and how they had no place to live while they wandered in the desert. They pieced together makeshift structures with whatever they could devise, which is how duct tape was invented.

Inclusiveness and diversity are big themes of the holiday. We are supposed to welcome the stranger, because we were once strangers in a strange land (if you can grok that). The idea is to sit in our Sukkah and think about freedom and faith and life's great mysteries, such as the purpose of our life on Earth – beyond opening doors for cats. We contemplate the impermanence of our dwellings, the eternal nature of the source of life, and why this holiday doesn't take place before the rainy season.

My unlawfully wedded wife and I made a lovely Sukkah and decorated it with corn stalks. Last night we sat there under the stars and prayed for acceptance and respect for all beings while migrating slugs left slime trails on our socks.

Meanwhile, apparently to honor this holiday of extending a welcome to strangers, a coalition of 22 right-wing and religious fundamentalist groups have declared Oct. 12-18 "Marriage Protection Week: A Week Dedicated to Preserving the Sacred Institution of Marriage." This coalition's way of celebrating inclusiveness for all beings is to codify the prohibition on same-sex marriage. Their big push now is amending the U.S. Constitution to say that marriage in the U.S. shall consist only of the union of a man and a woman.

It's silly. Most of them have to be old enough to remember Bob Dylan telling us that the times they are a-changin'. Can't they get onboard with the marriage equality zeitgeist? It doesn't seem to be hurting The Netherlands or Belgium or British Columbia or Ontario (that's Ontario, Canada, lest you thought the southern California airport city was miraculously ahead of its time).

How is heterosexual wedlock threatened by welcoming gay and lesbian couples into the institution of marriage? Why should anyone care who chooses to spend the rest of their life arguing over which way to load the dishwasher? Why should only opposite-sex couples be entitled to unite in holy matrimony? That's a right everyone should have – if they so choose and if they are blessed to find a partner who doesn't mind the way they stack cereal bowls.

Sukkoth tradition teaches us to strive for godliness, to dedicate our every effort to increasing compassion and bringing peace. At a time when war and suffering plague the world, we shouldn't squander our limited attention spans on this stupid "Marriage Protection" smoke screen.

It's so much more productive to bundle up, experience the elements, ponder the cosmic one-ness of it all, and connect with friends and strangers. When you come back inside you can log on to www.hrc.org/millionformarriage/index.asp and sign the petition to support equal marriage rights. And then you can change your socks.

Writer Sally Sheklow lives in Eugene with her partner of 16 years and would like their marriage legally recognized already.

elect. If voters do something stupid, they get to live with their stupidity. Making us live with our decisions lets us learn and grow, mistake by mistake.

This American democracy is holding an election on Nov. 2, 2004. Did you know that you can join the Democratic Party? Not just register as a Democrat, and thus vote in the primary, but become a precinct committee person, able to vote at monthly meetings and become involved in the process at whatever level you choose? They have an office at 329 W. 13th, and a website at dplc.org. Check it out. It is fine and good to be for another party, say, the Greens, but without enough support for the Democrats, the Bush disaster will continue, and that is a fact.

It will take effort, money, and focus to bring this country back to valuing all of its citizens, not just the rich.

*Hugh Massengill
Eugene*

ONLY KUCINICH, DAMMIT

The corporate media giveth and the corporate media taketh away. So I ask Jim Johnson (9/25): Now that mainstream media are serving up Wesley Clark as "likely to win" should we all support him? If we allow the corporate owned media to tell us who is "electable" then we will only get candidates who meet their approval.

I am saddened by the number of articles and letters that say "Dennis Kucinich is a great candidate, but he just can't be elected." It will take a lot of work to get Dennis Kucinich elected, because the corporate media will do everything they can to marginalize his campaign. I checked out Howard Dean's website before he became a mainstream media darling. What I found was the platform of a moderate Republican. Now that Dean has allowed the media to create a following (that he doesn't necessarily deserve) he has flowered up his web site to reflect that following.

Kucinich, on the other hand, has consistently fought the good fight. His website www.kucinich.us is specific and detailed on the issues. You might also want to check out selectsmart.com. On this site respondents answer questions about their political beliefs and are then matched up with the candidate that best meets those views. Under this format Kucinich was the number one choice 45 percent of the time. Bush was a distant second at 15 percent and Dean at 10 percent. There were over 90,000 responses.

I don't just want Bush out of office. I want all of his policies gone too. Kucinich is the candidate who will do that. If everyone who agrees with him votes for him, he can win.

*Thomas Rose
Cottage Grove*

FREE FREE

Oregon eco-defense political prisoner Jeff "Free" Luers is serving an outrageous 22 year sentence for setting fire to three SUVs to protest the destruction of the environment. He is in desperate need of funds to pay for legal fees and to cover other expenses in order to sustain and build upon the campaign for his sentence reduction.

If you can afford to make a donation, please mail checks and money orders (made out to "Free Legal Defense") to Free's Defense Network, PO Box 3, Eugene 97440 or visit www.freefreenow.org to make an online credit card donation.

Free also has a very impressive publica-

tion, which includes writings by and about him, his artwork, and more, that is available from Break The Chains. Call 520-5401 or e-mail breakthechains02@yahoo.com

Recently, Free has been getting a lot of attention from slimy corporate newspapers. Many newspaper articles falsely refer to Free as a "terrorist" and member of the ELF, which he is not and has never claimed to be. Eugene's *R-G* has falsely claimed that the ELF has its roots in the Pacific Northwest, and is attributing practically every single act of property destruction — no matter how minor or random — to a conspiracy of "eco-terrorists." It's important for all people concerned about justice to refute these lies, because they are clearly being made to justify more repressive legislation, harsher punishment for activists, and to give the public the false impression that powerful corporations are the "real victims" in society.

Please write to newspapers in support of Free's appeal or to highlight his case. And please do your part to expose the real criminals: those who believe power and profit is more important than a healthy environment and healthy human beings.

*Steven Gider
Eugene*

GUN VOLTS?

I have recently heard about the Oregon Rangers Association (ORA) and I am writing to strongly voice my opposition to having these individuals carry weapons while performing their volunteer activities. I spend a great deal of time in the Willamette National Forest and I do *not* feel safer knowing that there are vigilantes or a "neighborhood woods watch" carrying guns for my protection. I think this actually reduces my safety.

I applaud the intent of the Rangers to keep the woods safe. I appreciate that they are watching out for people dumping in the woods, that they help stranded individuals, repair vandalized information boxes and assist with search and rescue but, there is absolutely no situation I can think of where these individuals should brandish a side arm. As volunteers, Rangers aren't required to have any training in law enforcement, psychology or in diffusing a volatile situation. Which means they may not know how to handle a stressful encounter, and with guns on the scene the chances for a violent outcome escalate.

I am alarmed that the USFS supports the activity of the ORA when they are carrying guns. Rex Holloway, a Pacific Northwest Region Forest Service spokesman was quoted by Brad Knickerbocker in an Oct. 2 *Christian Science Monitor* article ("Pistol Packin' Citizens Patrol Western Parks") as saying, "We rely on groups like that to do a lot of work on national forests that otherwise wouldn't get done."

I do *not* believe that the Forest Service should rely on unpaid, uncontrolled, untrained, freelance, gun-toting individuals to keep the Willamette National Forest safe. Mr. Emch, the Willamette National Forest supervisor, should be discouraging these individuals, not relying upon them!

*Jennifer Hess
Eugene*

MILK SUCKS

With all the negativity and anger circulating in our world, I would like to make a humble suggestion to reduce the amount of vio-

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