Preparing for Passover during a Plague:
Cleaning & Protection For the Sake of Solidarity & Healing

On Passover we ask, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” Of course, this Passover is different from all other Passovers and begs us to reimagine this holidays' call: “Let all who are hungry, all who are in need, all who are oppressed come celebrate Passover.”

While we cannot open our tables to family and strangers like we have in years past, we can still connect to the liberatory opportunities this holiday offers us. This ritual guide offers remixes on two different rituals for preparing for Passover. Ritual objects are noted in bold. Read through, see what resonates for you, and feel free to do as much or as little as you feel called. Even just printing the beautiful art to hang on the door of your home would be enough! Dayenu!

May these rituals support us to pause and recalibrate in this potent time of moving towards liberation.

Co-created with love by Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, Rae Abileah, Ilana Lerman, & Dori Midnight
with art by Nomy Lamm, Wendy Somerson & Bekah Starr

Ritual: Cleaning Out What No Longer Serves

As the story goes, when the Israelites fled slavery, they left so quickly that their bread did not have time to rise. To mark this exodus, Jewish people forgo bread that rises and only eat unleavened bread during Passover. In preparation, we search our spaces for last years’ crumbs, mining the corners of ourselves for what's old and crusty and not nourishing and symbolically burn the them the evening before the first night of Passover Seder in a ritual called Bediqath Hametz or Bedikat Chametz.

“Hametz is what we are removing. It is the leaven & bread we don’t eat during Passover, and the shmutz that keeps us from being most free. This is our literal and psychic clutter bust… We shed anything that doesn’t serve what matters most to us.”

— From the Liberate Your Seder Haggadeck by Taya Má Shere
INSTRUCTIONS: After sunset the night before the first seder, gather yourself and/or your loves, light a candle, and recite the following blessing:

(Masculine) Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'zivanu al biur chametz.
(Feminine) Brucha at Shechina, Eloteinu/Imoteinu Ruach ha'olam, asher kid'shatnu b'mitzvoteha v'zivatnu al biur chametz.
Blessed are You, our Divine One, Spirit of the world, who sanctifies us with mitzvot and calls upon us to remove chametz.

With this candle lighting the way, you can begin your search for hametz across your whole space. Traditionally, Sephardi Jews use a knife to check all the nooks for any traces of hametz and carry a bowl containing a piece of bread and a little salt as well for protection. Ashkenazi Jews use a feather to sweep the chametz into a wooden spoon. You may also wish to be less literal or seek out what no longer serves you in a meditative way.

A Meditation while you Search:
What old patterns or ways are you ready to release?
  What stories keep you in fear? What is a narrow place you are ready to emerge from?
  What are the crumbs you inherited that you no longer wish to harbor?
  What are the postures that keep you tight and constricted?

Breathe into the silence.
Let your thoughts rise and depart with your breath.

Burning & Releasing What No Longer Serves:
With the hametz (literally or symbolically), stand by the doorway with materials to burn the crumbs.

SAY TOGETHER:
On the eve of the full moon we search our houses by candlelight we search for traces of constriction - the last stale crumbs still on our plate the final shards hiding in our hearts. We search the high places and the low places Inside corners of rooms, pockets of clothing we need to pass on, Inside us for traces of Mitzryim, narrow places. We stand by the doorway of our houses, Connected to the millions of others also in their doorways burning what no longer serves. (Light the hametz on fire)

We breathe
And then we cast the ashes to the wind.
All that rises up bitter
All that rises up prideful
All that rises up in ways no longer fruitful
All hametz still in my possession
May it be an offering to the soil of the earth.

This Passover, may we release what no longer serves us.
Ritual: Casting Protection at the Door

On the eve of the final plague, so the story goes, the Israelites sacrificed lambs and marked the space over their doors with the animal’s blood in order to cue the Angel of Death to “pass over” their homes, sparing their first-born child. That night, the first born of many Egyptian families died. This was the final act that led to Pharaoh releasing the Israelites from slavery.

Even before this global pandemic hit, the plagues of our time were palpable. The cruel detention of immigrants, the inhumane blockade of Gaza, Israeli imprisonment of Palestinian children, the devastating climate crisis. The acute crisis of COVID-19 heightens our awareness of the fragility of our health, our routines, our relationships. This year, we can choose to no longer invest in protection at the expense of other people’s lives. This year, we can mark our doorways with protection but not just for who lives inside. This Passover we practice protection by breathing new life into our enduring commitment to Safety through Solidarity. This year we must pass through this time of uncertainty and danger together, with no one left behind. We lift up our ancestors’ symbols and plants of protection because when we connect with these ancient forms, it is an act of divestment from xenophobia, militarism, policing, occupation, and violence.

Jewish Symbols and Plants for Protection

Garlic: Garlic is one of the primary plants of protection for Jews, traveling with us from the Levant through the diaspora, tucked in our pockets and baskets. It has been treasured in food, medicine, and healing practices for thousands of years by Mizrahi, Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews, and its healing gifts are expounded upon in the Talmud. Many Jews across the world hang braids of garlic in windows, doors, and around our necks as amulets for protection. Garlic supports our immune systems and hearts, teaching us how a strong stink can keep a community well.

Salt: Salt has been used to clear and protect in Jewish traditions for thousands of years. It is used as protection in the Torah and in the Talmud, in which we are advised to rub salt on our feet to purify. Sephardic healers often throw salt on the ground or draw salt circles for clearing and protection. Salt brings together the elements of water and earth and can also represent the sea, tears, grief, and preservation.

Cedar: Cedar has long been held sacred for its medicinal, magical, and spiritual properties in Jewish tradition. In Psalm 92:12 it is mentioned as a symbol for the strength of the righteous and it was used in building the Ark of the Covenant. The word cedar is derived from the Hebrew word katar, to burn, as it was burned as a cleansing incense in ancient Judea.

Hamsa: The hamsa is a symbol that is sacred to both Jews and Muslims, with origins in ancient Egypt. The Hamsa made its way into Jewish culture through Sephardi and Mizrahi tradition, who call upon the Hand of Miriam as an amulet of protection and healing. The Hamsa honors Miriam, the prophetess, who danced in circles of collective liberation as the sea parted to clear the way for the Jews to flee slavery in Egypt. When we invoke the hamsa, we are calling on a paradigm of protection, healing and liberation that is about encircling ourselves in joy, in song, in dance.
INSTRUCTIONS: Marking Our Door

Since this ritual is reimagined from the original story in Exodus, you are welcome to mark your door when it feels right - before, during, and even after Passover.

- Hang garlic or a sprig of cedar at the doorway. Place a line of salt on the doorframe. Gather a bouquet of herbs, onion stalks, anything growing up from the garden. Hang a bar of soap at the door! The idea is to use what you already have. To be playful. To be generous. To be sweet with each other. To keep it simple.
- Here is a collection of beautiful, original, downloadable & printable signs to hang on your door. If you do not have a printer, draw it or make it your Zoom background!

Thank you to these phenomenal artists!

By artist Nomy Lamm, JVP Seattle member and Kohenet @nomyteaches
This is a blessing for our entire community, that the wings above us not be the Angel of Death "passing over" certain houses while taking the lives of others, but instead the sheltering wings of Shechinah, holding all of us close in her embrace. The waters part not just for some of us to pass through, but for all of us, together, raising our hands to be counted on, to do our part, to connect and protect and cleanse and deliver the solidarity that is needed in this time.
Keyn yehi ratzon. May it be so. Download this Image.

[Image Description: A line drawing of large feathered wings hovers over an egg-shaped frame with waves parting on either side, revealing a multitude of hands reaching up toward the words “May we pass through together in safety.”]

By artist Wendy Elisheva Somerson, JVP Seattle member @wendyelisheva
Part of the Jewish Protection Chamsa series with cedar, garlic, and rosemary. Plus Pomegranate so we can face this moment with creativity to build the world to come. Download this Image.

[Image Description: A downward-pointing hamsa with an anatomical heart in the center of the palm with arteries branching out, bulbs of garlic in each of the three fingertips, with garlic scapes curling upward. Cedar fronds branch out on either side, and on top of the curved palm are two crows under a pomegranate tree, with a branch of rosemary bent between their beaks. Typewriter text at the top reads “Open our hearts, clear our lungs, protect our connections.”]

By artist Bekah Starr, JVP member and Kohenet @bekahstarrart
Color it in or add the names of people or places that you wish to send protection to. (Great for kids!) Download this Image.

[Image Description: A line-drawing of a hamsa with a long middle finger, even first and third fingers, and thumbs pointing outward on either side. Within the outline of the hand, waves frame either side of the palm, and a walkway leads to an arch within the central finger. Garlic and rosemary adorns the arch. Above are the words “May we all pass safely through,” and below it, “Passover 5780.”]
SAY TOGETHER:

With this [sign/herb/gesture] we invoke protection for this house and all homes. We pray to you, Shechina, Holy One, for wellbeing, for healing for those who are sick, for care for those most in need, and for healing for this earth.

Please protect the lives and wellbeing of those who live in this house.

Please protect those most vulnerable, those with compromised immune systems, disabilities, the elderly, the precariously employed, those in prisons & detention centers, immigrants, those who are homeless, refugees from war, those who suffer from environmental injustice, those in Gaza and in the West Bank, those facing martial law and brutal repression during this pandemic, those on other margins of social care, and those already battling poverty, war, and occupation.

Protect those on the frontlines of this health crisis ~ the nurses, doctors, health care providers, grocery store clerks, food service employees, sanitation workers, and so many more.

May the source of liberation for our ancestors protect us as we reach across isolation, borders, and fear to tell stories, sing songs, and imagine – and realize – freedom.

Help us remember that self-quarantining is saving lives.

Help us work to protect the lives of all beings on this Earth.

Close with a Song or Poem:

Mimainei by Avra Shapiro and Yael Schonzeit
Dayenu / More Than Enough by Taya Mâ Shere
Be With Me by Koach Baruch Frazier (If you do not want to sing “Yah” you can sing “All”)
Wash your Hands by Dori Midnight - You may wish to wash your hands when you come back inside.

Connect Through Our Doorways on Social Media

Post on your social media platforms and tag us & the artists or email photos to us to post at social@jvp.org.

Instagram: @jewishvoiceforpeace | Twitter: @JVPlive | Facebook: Jewish Voice for Peace
#WePassThroughTogether #SpreadSolidarity #Passover5780

Invitation to Make an Offering

The lamb's blood was an essential offering to ward off the final plague. This year we ask:

What is the offering or sacrifice we make today in order to protect life? Which risks are necessary now to protect life?

This Passover Consider:

- Checking in with elderly neighbors
- **Redistributing** your resources
- Calling elected officials to demand they release people from prisons, jails & detention centers, freeze rent and debt, and ensure a people’s bailout
- Calling government officials to demand they call for the end of the blockade of Gaza & sanctions on Iran
- Donating to organizations focused on supporting those who will be most impacted by the pandemic

Now we are ready to kindle the lights of Passover!