

A HANUKKAH MAILING FOR JEWS ACROSS AND BEYOND BARS



LOVE YOU SORRY PLEASE FORGIVE ME THANK YOU

WE WOULD LOVE TO INCLUDE
YOUR VOICES, IDEAS,
DREAMS, ARTWORK, AND
YOUR BRILLIANT TORAH IN
UPCOMING NEWSLETTERS.

Please send your contributions for
Tu B'Shvat by January 15

You can also send us writing that
is not directly related to holidays.

Submissions can be sent to:

Matir Asurim: Jewish Prisoner Care Network

PO Box 18858

Philadelphia, PA 19143

WHO WE ARE

12th of Kislev 5783 ~ December 6, 2022

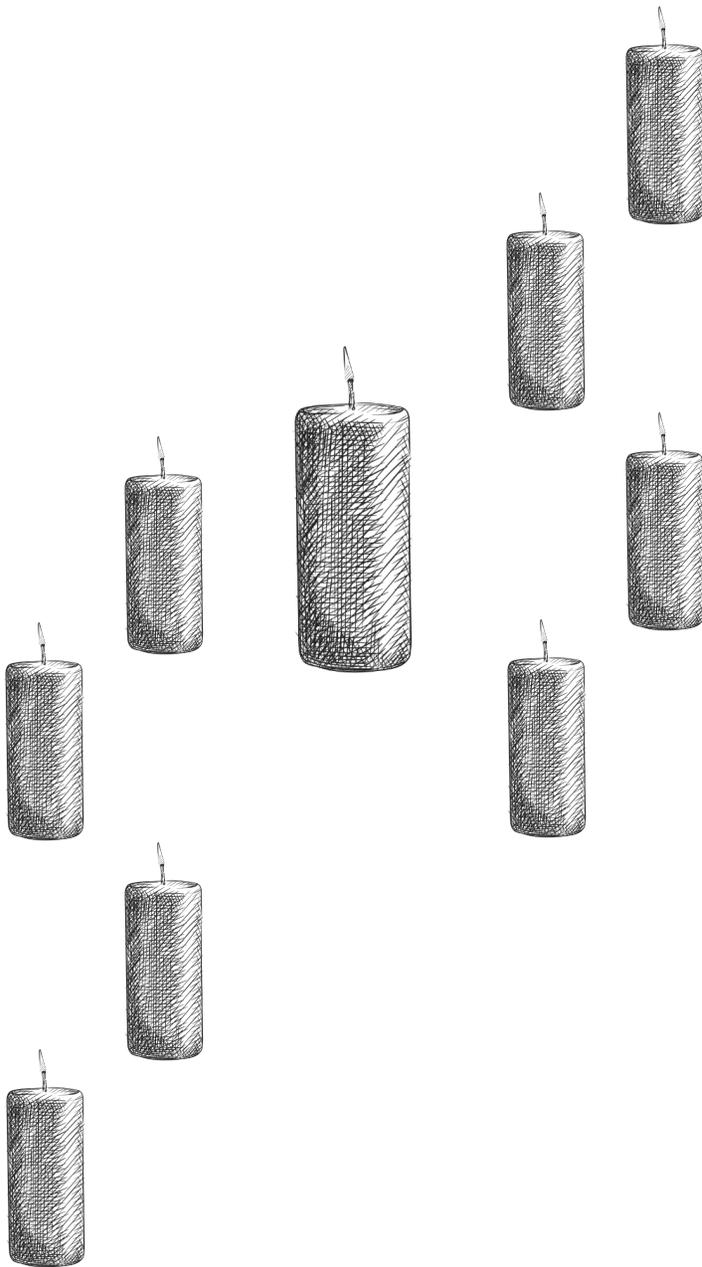
Dear friends,

Chag Sameach! Happy Chanukah!

We are writing to you on behalf of Matir Asurim: Jewish Prisoner Care Network. Matir Asurim literally translates as "The One Who Frees Captives." This phrase from Jewish liturgy refers to God's power to act for freedom and humanity's ability to manifest godliness through working for freedom.

We are a group of advocates, Jewish clergy, loved ones of incarcerated people, and people with direct experience of incarceration. We have been meeting regularly since Tevet 5781/ January 2021, guided by the questions: What are incarcerated Jews experiencing? What support do incarcerated Jews need that is not being met? We know that many Jewish communities have not done enough to support people inside and people impacted by the prison system. Since we began meeting, we have started a penpal program and have been creating these holiday mailings, and have been working on building and deepening our relationships with you. We are really glad to be building community with you, across and beyond prison walls.

We would really love to get your input about how these mailings can be the most supportive to you, and we would also love to include your brilliance and wisdom in future holiday mailings! At the end of this letter, we have included a few forms: a feedback form, so you can let us know what you want to be receiving in these mailings and a penpal interest form, if you would like to sign up to be a penpal. If you have any writing (short essays, reflections, poetry, drawings, etc) related to any of the Jewish holidays or Jewishness in general, please feel welcome and invited to send us your submissions so that they can be included in future mailings. All of the filled out forms can



be sent to us at:

Matir Asurim: Jewish Prisoner Care Network
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Philadelphia, PA 19143

On Chanukah we celebrate that which we believe to be miraculous. We celebrate the miracle of collectivity and joining together to fight against oppressive regimes; the miracle of finding signs of holiness amidst destruction; the miracle of surviving against all odds. The word Chanukah means dedication, given this name to commemorate the Jewish people rededicating themselves to the temple after its desecration. Another miracle of Chanukah lives in the power of dedication. After pain, hardship, struggle and loss, the desire to rededicate ourselves, redefine, and return to our visions and dreams for the world we are yearning for is a miracle worth celebrating. This Chanukah, we are rededicating ourselves to walking alongside lineages of Jewish people who have fought for a world in which all people are free. We are rededicating ourselves to supporting you, our beloved incarcerated Jewish community across and beyond bars. We will be lighting our candles in the name of justice, healing and liberation, holding you in our hearts, knowing that the relationships we are building together are miracles worth celebrating.

We are looking forward to connecting with you, and, together, embodying the Jewish value and visioning a world where all are free.

With care,
Sarit, Chava, Cece,, Val, Callie, Laynie, Meli
and all of us at the Matir Asurim: Jewish Prisoner Care Network

בהוֹךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שְׁעָשָׂה
נִסִּים לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ, בִּימֵי
הֵם בְּזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה

**BLESSED ARE YOU,
ADONAI, COUNSEL OF THE UNIVERSE,
WHO PERFORMED WONDROUS DEEDS
FOR OUR ANCESTORS
IN THOSE ANCIENT DAYS**

Opposite page: *Here* by Jonah Aline Daniel

And as I understand it, all debts are forgiven in the shmita year, and that tradition exists in many other lineages. I just think forgiveness is absent in our society. Most people have never experienced any kind of real apology or forgiveness. We're into permanently stigmatizing people or cutting people out. So to me I'd say my day to day is a lot of helping people in mutual aid projects with conflict, and learning how to balance the intense emergent needs in our community with some kind of sustainable rest practice, decentralized decision making, care, and concern for each other because we're gonna get stressed out at doing work in crisis conditions. Shmita year and shabbat are touchstones in Jewish tradition for that.

Jessica: Thank you so much. That's a very beautiful note to end on. This will be the rest of our lives—Blessed is the Source that we can do it in increasing networks of thick and caring community with each other.

קְבוּרָה אֶת עֵינַי
 הַחַיִּים
 לְחַדְלִיק כּוֹ שֶׁל
 לְדַק וְשִׁפְכָה לִי
 בְּעוֹלָמוֹ

We bless the source of life
 who makes Sacred these flames for
 justice,
 and our capacity to practice the world
 we vision into being



**A BIT OF LIGHT CAN
 DISPLACE A LOT
 OF DARKNESS**



Displacing Darkness by Chava Shapiro, Jewish Zine Archive
 Write JZA PO BOX 381 TUCSON, AZ 85702 for a free zine

I think it's complicated. The more intimate communities are—If we're gonna create intentional communities and live together, we might be more intense about norms. We might have stronger views about shared norms. I don't want to pretend this is easy. Fuck charity models, we're not gonna kick people out for being drug users. All these shitty things nonprofits and social services do. We're gonna interrogate our reasons for thinking people are unacceptable.

What about if we have a really big fight and someone gets hit? Intense shit happens between people all the time. This is where abolitionist values come in. If I do harm you're gonna be like, "Cut it out, Dean. What do you need to stop doing that?" That can include, "Dean, you can't come around if you keep doing that."

But there's a complexity—the need we all have to build safety and respond to harm. But also it is the praxis of mutual aid, which is fundamentally, "How are we gonna hang out together, be in groups, and be perfectly complicated people that we are?" Harm is not going away right away.

Jessica: Maybe just to end, I would love to know if there's something from Jewish tradition or culture, community, ritual that particularly inspires you in mutual aid work, Dean? And bringing us into visions of abolition as we close—what inspires you from Jewish tradition to build community and abolitionist futures?

Dean: I would say, the idea of the shmita year is really helpful to me in terms of the notion that we would all collaborate so we could rest and that the land could rest. What would it take? The idea that we could prepare—right now we need to prepare for our food systems to collapse, energy to collapse—and that's really interesting to me. And that the land could rest

that will be maybe part two. We can talk about those freedom fighters and these beautiful people who were really participating in not just freeing ourselves.

And I think I have one last slide in the handout. This piece from the Talmud about basically that it is—and I think this connects to the Torah of abolition—we do this with each other because its like, the prisoner cannot free himself. The way we are also holding each other's care and liberation.

Jessica: Thank you so much Dori and Dean for blowing hearts and minds. People can show love through the chat. If you have bangs, turn on your video so that Dori: can check those out. One question we got in the chat: How do we create community norms that uphold wellness and don't penalize people? How do we not replicate systems of value and harm when we're creating mutual aid projects and organizing?

[Dean starts to answer, drops of call, Dori picks up.]

Dori: Part of it is—How do we make sure we're orienting around that? I think Dean talks a lot about this in his book. To quote Dean's book, in his book he talks about the ways in which we're in groups, not only do we replicate these harmful structures but we also replicate a lot of harm that happens in family systems. [Dean returns.] Dean, I was just talking about your book!

Dean: Sorry about that I ran out of battery. I was just gonna say a lot of the conversations about mutual aid. In 2020, so many people got politicized, and started doing mutual aid who never had, and I think for so many of those people the really big takeaway was solidarity not charity. We're gonna do this project in our community and we're not gonna say you can't have it unless x,y,z, this kind of like, everything for everyone politics. That's the kind of like, most circulating radical vision that talks about what Ari is talking about.

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WHAT IS CHANUKAH?

Adapted from writing by Aliza Schwartz, Student Rabbi at Lions Gate Retirement Home

Chanukah is the eight-day Jewish holiday that commemorates a story of miracles from the second century BCE, when Jerusalem was ruled by the Greeks - more exactly, by the Seleucid Empire. The Empire was limiting the practices of Jews and forcing Jews to worship Greek gods. The Chanukah story contains within it two distinct miracles:

Miracle #1: The military victory of the Maccabees, the group of Jews who led the revolt against the Greeks and drove the Greeks away. The Maccabees were tiny in comparison to their opponent, yet they prevailed.

Miracle #2: The miracle of light: After the Maccabees defeated the Greeks and gained control of Jerusalem, they went to the Temple to rededicate it. The process of rededication involved resuming the performance of Jewish Temple rituals, which included lighting the Menorah. Miraculously, the one cruse of oil they found in the Temple to light the Menorah (the rest had been destroyed by the Greeks) lasted for eight days - when it was only supposed to last for one!

Of Interest The Talmud asks, “What is Chanukah?” or “For which miracle is the holiday celebrated?” The rabbis answer by emphasizing the miracle of light, without much talk about the military victory. Of course the miracle of light would not have happened had it not been for the military victory, but nonetheless, the rabbis emphasize the spiritual victory of this holiday.

And next slide [shows slide], as well. These are klogmuters, people who did collective mourning and created space for collective mourning. People who would go to bar mitzvah and get the dance party started, this is for people but crying. And this is in the Pale of Settlement. In Sephardic community, there are women called tanyaderas. In Yemen there are wailing women. And so in different diasporic communities people who would hold space, create space, for collective grieving together

I'll just show you the next slide [shows slide], so this is a list of societies actually called Mutual Aid Societies that existed in different places in diaspora, and also in the United States. They have a long history, basically after destruction of the Temple, people would reach a town and create society together.

And what you see, I wanted to end with this—what you really see happen with a lot of these societies, once these groups start to have contact with the US and more Christian hegemony and whiteness, you see it moving into class ascension. The purpose of these groups is to help people to participate in capitalism, to get out of poverty. A lot more hierarchies, very mass values of independence, self reliance, less about collective care, and more about ascending, and then you see a lot more charity models happening, exclusivity and kind of these dangerous tendencies with assimilation into whiteness, Zionism, making these, and then eventually the mutual aid societies. The goal of them is for them to then disappear. The idea is individuals now have no need for them because people are just taking care of themselves.

There are some specific ones listed here I've read about, researched—Sephardic Jewish Brotherhood of America has an amazing history. This is where gemach's would often be based

Next thing I'm going to talk about, these partisan, the people who were throwing their bodies and taking up weapons and

you could just have a lending library of costumes? We should have this with our stones, our remedies, and costumes.

Next we'll look at a couple pictures of sharing food [showing slide]. This is a soup kitchen in Palestine, in the 20th century. Then you have community healers. I've learned so much about Yemenite care workers from Yemeni friends, there are 7 different kinds of community midwives. And this is one of my main areas of work; I will get into this in its very own workshop. We're not gonna go to another Jewish doctor

Community pharmacies, you can go to the next slide. This is a description, in your handout, a description kinda of like a bindle. There is a person whose mom is known as the toothpuller. We really need people. We have so many amazing skills on the left. I know you can all tan the skin of a hide, but no one is going to dental school. We will need rad weirdos who know how to pull a tooth. So just gonna say its not my work to do but I'm sure if you feel a call. Anyway I read this amazing story who is a tooth puller of the community.

Like these local groups who would organize visiting the sick, bikur cholim, invokes a lot of music and clownery. And the traditions, the ideas of visiting the sick, trace back to the Torah, to Abraham when he was recovering from his circumcision when he was 90 years old. God's angelic messengers are not enough - we need to imitate God and be a presence for people who are sick and in pain.

We as people need to visit the sick. There are a lot of cool guidelines, like don't dump in, dump out. There are rules in the Talmud of what you do when you visit sick people. A lot of beautiful collective practices around death care—burial societies, sitting shiva, paying for burials, guarding and washing the bodies.

Which miracle is most resonant for you? As we enter the winter months, a time of more darkness and “hibernation,” what is providing you with light?

There is a debate between Hillel and Shammai, two famous Jewish sages who lived in the last century BCE to the first century CE.

Shammai said that eight candles should be lit on the first night, seven on the second, and so on, until one candle is lit on the last night.

Hillel said the opposite: One candle should be lit on the first night, two on the second night, and so on, until eight are lit on the last night.

Jewish law and custom follow Hillel's opinion. There are several reasons given for why Hillel and Shammai might have each had these opinions. What do you think? How would it change your experience of Chanukah if we followed Shammai's opinion? What meaning would or could it bring?

Fun Fact Reacting to Chanukah's miracle of oil, some Jews have put focus on environmental justice, highlighting energy conservation and taking care of our planet.

Also, on Chanukah, many of us like to play dreidel. The Hebrew letters on the dreidel נ, ג, ה, ש represent an acronym:

נ stands for נס – Neis = miracle

ג stands for גדול – Gadol = big, grand

ה stands for היה – Haya = took place, happened

ש stands for שם – Sham = there

נס גדול היה שם – Neis gadol haya sham = A great miracle happened there!

What miracles do you feel grateful for?

ELEH TOLDOT FELONIOUS: THE ADVENTURES OF FELONIOUS MONK

By Dina-Hasida Mercy

The institutions where I serve have volunteer appreciation events annually (except for during COVID). One lovely feature of this event is an opportunity for each guest to pick a gift from tables of crafts and artwork that have been made by the prisoners. I've been honoured to attend several of these volunteer appreciation events and it was there that this lovely sock monkey came to join my family. I named him Felonious Monk. I originally intended to take Felonious on a trip across Canada to document his adventures re-entering society. Then came COVID. Felonious realizes that he can still have Adventures because, since he is free from prison, life is truly the great adventure.

Felonious is looking forward to making new friends, but he is worried that he will be shunned when people find out that he was in prison. If people could only get to know him before making up their minds! Overcoming his fears of trusting, he has made a new friend! Daryll Duck earns his keep as a dog's beloved chew toy. In this photo, he has had 2 leg replacements and since then, two wing replacements. Pirkei Avot, a rabbinic text, says 'Get yourself a friend.' Felonious is so glad that he has.



are some texts in the handout about, from the talmud that are specifically about these structures, like how money was collected, how it should be distributed, that could be fun to study in a group.

[Another is] the gemach. So this is a gemach, these are some really fun looking friends in Poland; this is a free loan society in Poland. The word gemach is an acronym for gemilut chasadim, and it can be interpreted in a few different ways. Gemach was a free-loan society, where people could borrow money with no interest. The ways that would work is really in line with principles, kinda like hiddur mitzvah, making this easy for people, beauty for people, there's an easeful repayment plan, no interest, and it's based in Leviticus.

And then throughout the diaspora, the gemach was interpreted to mean not just monetary but also lending stuff, so wedding dresses, clothing for weddings, ritual paraphernalia, candlesticks, mezzos, lending libraries for stuff. This was in many many places throughout the Jewish diaspora, and also listed in the US, and still do.

So I'm going to show you this next slide [showing slide]: Here are some examples of some gemach. There's a wedding dress, wedding clothes, fancy gemach. On the right is a costume gemach people could borrow for Purim. On the bottom left is baby stuff, kids clothes. Gemach for milk, bottles, pacifiers, car seats. The gemach on the bottom right is a medical gemach in the city in Florida where my grandma lived—people would bring wheelchairs or different assistive devices. It's very well organized.

I found all this stuff on gemach where people were like, you could get ovulation kits, advice about snake catching and plumbing, these amazing lending libraries. We should all have these things. Why does one person own a bee costume when

It's just like, "Oh, you're just another Jewish body," you know? I mean, I say that not in a terrible way I mean it in a beautiful way. That you're just like you're you're part of a greater body or part of a collective body. Your personal existence is part of a network; it's very like mycelium. I see this very much as like we're fruiting bodies of mycelial network, and this spiritual belonging that we have makes us materially responsible for one another. And I think this concept, this concept has been used and weaponized in Zionism to talk about a nationalism, you know, to to talk about like the ways that like nationalism, and then it gets militarized right so that's one way, and also like, can be interpreted in a very exclusive way. And so the hope is that we actually expand this notion to include all people. All beings, our beautiful earth, and that we feel a sense of connection and responsibility because of a sense of belonging to everyone and everything. In our like expansive aliveness and connection.

These last two concepts that I'll talk about, one is pikuach nefesh, which is like this concept of preserving life. Every law—I mean there's rabbis on this call who could explain this much better than me—but this law is above all other laws, if you can preserve life. And to me this is really about survival, collective survival, taking care of each other for everyone's thriving, everyone's aliveness.

This last concept I referred to with the mitzvah is tikkun olam / olam haba: we are a part of repairing the fabric of the cosmos, dreaming the world into being that we want. Those are some foundational concepts that you can get into and read more about. So I want to move now into giving a few examples.

One example is tzedakah, which probably a lot of people have learned about for better or for worse. This is an expression of giving money within an overall [perspective] of Christian hegemony looks like: charitable giving. But there are specific instructions of dispersing fund daily, public, and weekly. There



Felonious enjoys all the Jewish festivals. For his first Hannukah 'out in the world,' he decided to give away small presents (via his Buy-Nothing group), as many as the number of candles being lit each evening. It was his way of bringing more light into the world. Despite COVID-isolation (it was 2020), he felt the light of community growing within him. Wow!

WE ARE MADE OUT OF CLAY¹ & WE JUST WANT LOVE

by Rena Branson

*There were years when money
was thin & my mother tired but always
spinning like a dreidel²
home from work straight to kitchen
spooning baked beans from
green can onto plate with Hebrew National³
hotdog (mine) & tofu (hers)
sitting eating standing cleaning
migraine crashing sleeping.*

*All the things
I wanted to say to her*

.

*On Chanukah I liked the extra fanfare
candles, song, side by side a little longer & glowing
scraping pooled wax from the window sill.*

*She made sure I got a gift each night
no matter how small
not even our tradition.⁴
I remember the embarrassment
I felt with the opening*

1 A children's Chanukah song contains the lyrics, "dreidel, dreidel, dreidel, I made you out of clay." The first human in Torah was also made of clay.

2 Dreidels are spinning tops used for a Chanukah game. Dreidel is a Yiddish word that comes from "drey," to spin.

3 A brand of Kosher meat

4 Elaborate gift-giving on Chanukah is a relatively recent phenomenon in some parts of the Jewish diaspora, developing in response to the commercialization of Christmas.

Kropotkin talks about mutual aid kind of as a love practice, and I think that this maps on really nicely to that, especially when we're talking about these ideas of gemilut chasadim, these acts of loving-kindness that the Rabbis talk about. More important than tzedakah, more important than giving money is the giving of your time and your energy and your presence. All of this is like practices of love, and it's beautiful because this goes directly against—this can be used to dismantle ideas of charity and charitable giving and ideas of why people participate [in those forms of giving] because actually, this is about love and connection.

The third concept that I want to talk about is kol yisrael areivim zeh ba'zeh, which is usually written in texts as kol yisrael areivim zeh ba'zeh—yisrael meaning the Jewish people. So this is a concept from the Talmud that basically translates to [the idea that] we are each others guarantors. We are responsible for one another. Jews, Jewish people are responsible for each other.

So this is kind of like communal responsibility that's based on belonging that we belong to each other. And this translates into law—Jewish law is codified like practices, right? And so these practices these things, that we're supposed to do for each other like taking care of each other, is based on this idea, because we belong to each other. And the Talmud talks about this passage, you know, if somebody makes a mistake. You know the word is like "transgressor" or "sin"—we are responsible for that.

This concept comes into play like Yom Kippur where it's like, you pray on behalf of people, right? Or you can see it also in the example of a minyan where it's like you have like there's something about like the togetherness that almost like we're interchangeable, which I kind of love and feels like a relief to me at times when it's like you feel a pressure about being an individual.

bells or that if you're gonna make something it's like velvet or embellished with gold, or it's like you know, kind of like maximalism bedazzlement as an expression of an offering to the divine; like making it beautiful.

And that's like a very Jewish concept that you see in many different expressions right? And to me I'm thinking about it in the context of people like doing mitzvot, participating in mutual aid and collective care work and organizing work, and what would it be like to apply the idea of hiddur mitzvah, of enhancing it in beautifying it. So it's like you know not just bringing somebody food but making an amazing meal, and like and just like thinking about our work as an offering of beauty.

Okay, I'm going to go into the next concept, I put Tikun Olam on there. I think about this Kabbalistic rabbi who talks about sort of like that when we do mitzvot, it is actually repairing tears in the cosmos. Which I love the idea that there's like these like tears in the cosmos that empire creates, and that when we are doing our anti-imperialist work, that we are repairing the cosmos. We have the cosmos on our side, you know, I really believe that.

Okay. So the second concept is chesed, which also, kind of like connects to the idea of gemilut chasadim. Chesed is often translated as loving-kindness, but if you read anything about chesed, like, I may think like most things in translation, people like Oh, there's no good English word for for chesed. So the closest thing is loving-kindness.

It's fine and again, gemilut chasadim is practices, expressions of love, which connects to the idea of love: loving your neighbors and yourself, which is expressed in emotional, material, energetic, and physical ways.

And to me this really like, I connect this to if anybody has read *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* by Peter Kropotkin, which Dean introduced to me, it's an incredible book. But you know,

*thinking these TJ Maxx gloves had nothing to do with me
not my style
not feeling known
knowing I was supposed to feel grateful
wishing I had a different present
a different life.*

*In hindsight I think a long hug
would have been the finest
gift of all, or a Chanukiah
with holes wide enough for 8 upright hotdogs plus a shamash,⁵
or a new temple dedicated⁶ to people
knowing themselves & each other
adults listening to children
free healthcare
the abolition of migraines
hotdogs sans nations
idols burning in shop windows
consensual telepathy between all life forms and empire
dropping flat on its plastic side
in 8 days: a miracle
brought to you by TJ Maxx.*

5 A Chanukiah holds 9 candles, one for each of the 8 nights of Chanukah, plus an extra candle in the middle that is used to light the others (called the shamash).

6 Chanukah means dedication, commemorating the rededication of the temple after it was destroyed by Greek forces.

SEASON OF SKINNY CANDLES

by Marge Piercy

A row of tall skinny candles burns
quickly into the night
air, the shames¹ raised
over the rest
for its hard work

Darkness rushes in
after the sun sinks
like a bright plug pulled.
Our eyes drown in night
thick as ink pudding

When even the moon
starves to a sliver
of quicksilver
the little candles poke
holes in the blackness.

A time to eat fat
and oil, a time to gamble
for pennies and gambol
around the table, a light
and easy holiday.

No disasters, no
repentance, just remember
and enjoy. The miracle
is really eight days
and nights without trouble

1 *shames: the middle candle that lights the others every night

like us as humans fulfilling our end of the covenant with God, so like a kind of spiritual obligation. Some people see it performing, mitzvahs as doing good deeds. Some people think about it as for self improvement.

But my favorite way to think about mitzvah is the way that the word mitzvah is connected to this Aramaic root word “savta”, meaning to attach or to join or to bind. It means togetherness. It means connection. So this idea that caring for each other is an act of connection, and whether that is like a connection, because we're tending to the connections to each other, which is like how I experience divinity, or this like connection to divinity.

And I'm really inspired by this ecofeminist Brazilian liberation theologian named Ivone Gebara, who wrote this book called *Longing for Running Water*. And she's really amazing. She talks about God as relatedness. And so like talking about God as relationship, and so like when we experience our relatedness to each other, there's this quote where she says “it is through relational behaviors that we affirm this is divine and we say that on the basis of our fragile, limited contingent and ephemeral experience.” And there's a longer quote from her in the handout.

So just thinking about like the experience that we get to have of the divine that's not about like “oh God loves me” or “I'm a better person, because I'm like doing this mutual aid work” and like, but actually that I'm experiencing divinity by feeling my connections to people, by feeling my grief about what is going on for people like that. Our connections move us to participate in these ways.

And then I wanna say two other little things about mitzvah. There's a concept of hiddur mitzvah, which is usually applied to ritual objects. It means to enhance the mitzvah, to enhance the commandment to use a ritual object and it's often is about like, oh, the the top of the Torah being like pomegranates and

I talked a little bit about these legal motivations: you gotta give the tzedakah (charity), pay taxes. So there was an element of coercion, and about laws around agricultural practices and tzedakah and taxes.

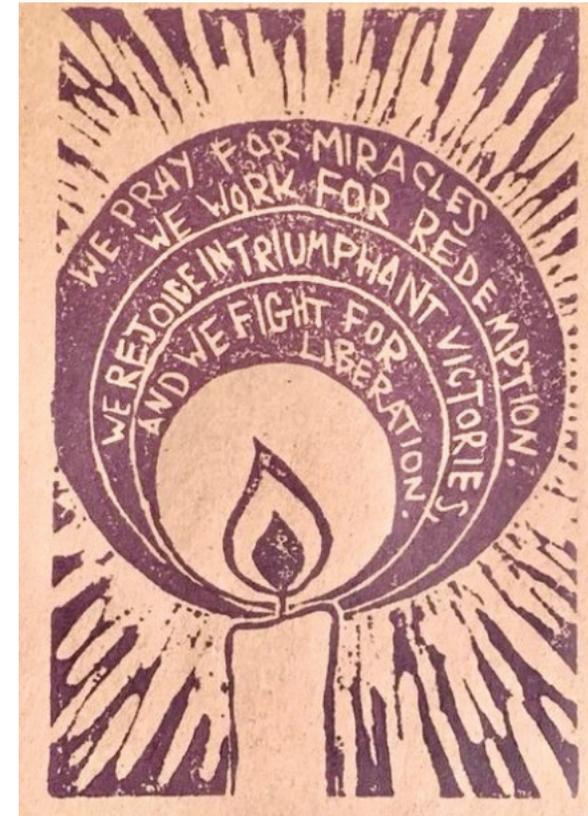
And I want to talk a little bit about some theological spiritual principles, so we'll go to that first. So here are 5 principles that I've been thinking about, or 5 concepts that I've been thinking about in Jewish tradition. These are all in your handout.

The first is mitzvah. The word mitzvah is usually literally translated as commandment. So I kind of broke this down into: So people who are thinking about like, yeah, why like, why do we participate in mutual aid?

And my hope in sharing these is, like, I personally find, like a remedy for burnout is to remember, like to connect to something deep, deeper than myself, or like a deeper than a feeling of obligation deeper than a feeling of like I should, deeper than a feeling of like ethical or moral obligation. So. I'm really curious about what has moved people, and can these things resource us for doing this necessary work? So my hope is like, you know, something will be inspiring and be like, okay, like, then I can connect back to: Why do I do this? Why do we do what we do?

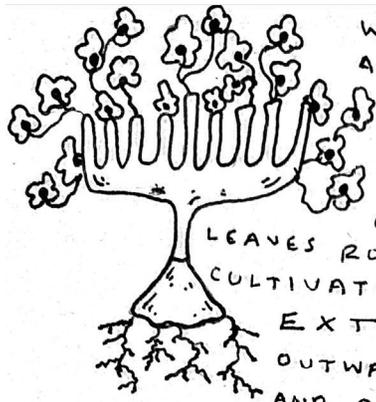
Some people are motivated by the idea of commandment and being like rules, you know. And you know you can. your dirty minds can take that where you want. But I'm just saying some people just like to do things because they like to be told what to do! There's the idea like there's sort of like mitzvah for mitzvah's sake, that you don't do it for a reason, you don't do it for reward; you do it because it's not an end to a means: the mitzvah itself is the reward.

There are some people who understand mitzvah to be about



We pray for miracles by Hannah Lewis

KHANIKE: A PORTAL TO ABUNDANCE



WHILE KHANIKE IS OFTEN
ACKNOWLEDGED AS A FESTIVAL
OF LIGHTS, I ALSO LIKE TO
THINK OF IT AS A PORTAL
INTO A QUIET, WARM, AND
COMFORTING SPACE WHICH
LEAVES ROOM FOR DEEP INTERNAL
CULTIVATION ALLOWING US TO
EXTEND ABUNDANCE
OUTWARDS TO OUR SPIRITUAL
AND PHYSICAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS.
WITH THIS EXTENSION WE ARE ALSO ABLE
TO FILL  OUR INSIDES WITH THE FIRE
OF CARE WORK, PASSION, AND RESILIENCE.
KHANIKE — AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO LITERALLY
AND/OR CONCEPTUALLY LIGHT OUR WAY
ALONGSIDE ONE ANOTHER INTO AN EXPLOR-
ATION OF What IS and What IS Possible.

HOW DO WE FEEL CONNECTION TO ONE ANOTHER
DURING TIMES OF ISOLATION AND HOW DO
WE HOLD ONE ANOTHER'S HANDS AS WE
DREAM OUTSIDE OF THE CONFINES OF LINEAR
TIME AND IMMOVABLE SPACE.

THIS OFFERING IS ONE OF RELA-
TIONSHIP, OF GIVING AND RECEIVING,
OF STRETCHING, OF LIGHT AND
OF FACING THE UNKNOWN — ELEMENTS
WHICH MAKE WAY FOR TRANSFORMATION.

what has moved people? Why were Jews doing these things with each other, other than out of necessity, other than the fact that the state, empire, wherever people were living weren't providing for them? I will talk a bit about that first before other examples.

One reason people were involved in collective care is out of necessity, as acts of resistance. When Dean was talking about coercion and control, there are elements that because it was the law. Because in Jewish law—halacha—there are laws around how much you give, how much money you could make, how you could express how much money you had. There is an element that there have been laws in place around those things.

What I want to focus on tonight is the more spiritual and theological and ethical, which all mashed together and it's hard to pull them apart, these Jewish principles. I'm not going to go into details of the necessity of doing these things, a response to a lack of state support.

Jewish communities were often autonomous and self-governing communities. In Salonica, a town in Greece there was a name of this, 'we take care of each other' because there was a turnover of imperial forces there, La Kolektivita Djudia - the Jewish collectivity - will take care of it. So there was a robust, autonomous Jewish community that survived through empires, through medieval and modern eras, that was a city unto itself.

These expressions as a form of resistance as a direct threat to institutions and that the interest in institutions controlling distribution of wealth, not have that in state hands, as well as an attempt to have agency and break free from the paternalism of banks, which we'll hear a little more about when I talk about free loan societies having institutions in communities that weren't relying on banks, where they can determine stuff around deservability, you know, more around the charity model.

incomplete, imperfect, and in progress. I hope this can be an ongoing conversation that we together can make more rich and make representative of all the people with who we are.

And, at the same time, I want to say it's important to be talking about these things in a way that's not romanticizing, or fetishizing, or projecting onto the past. And important to acknowledge, there's a lot of communities who still maintain these practices, like Hasidic and orthodox communities. Not to talk about it as if it's all lost, and that there are many places where these practices are still thriving.

And a lot of these practices have been lost.

Something that Dean is talking about is, at what point in contact with dominant forces did our practices of collective care, which were out of necessity and acts of resistance, get turned into nonprofit or charity models? Or things that were about funneling people more into participating in capitalism and pursuing the American dream or individualism? Like charity models which were based on Christian hegemony, really seeing the way in which the destruction of the commons, accusations of witchcraft (especially for Jews and Jewish women and Jewish healers), and the effects of Christian hegemony on ways that we were in connection with each other and took care of each other out of necessity and in defiance to oppressive, destructive, dominant forces—all of these things happening concurrently.

As part of this, our work of imagining other ways we can do this, I find it helpful to look at times when people had these different systems and structures, and thinking about: what does it look like? Especially I think one of the things Dean and I talked about—and I think this also has to do with burnout and how many of these mutual aid projects interfacing being up against forces where we can feel hopeless, exhausted, and really burned out—I'm interested in examples, but also interested in

WE HONOR THIS TIME OF BOTH EASING INTO THE DARKNESS AND COOLNESS OF WINTER, AS WELL AS BREATHING LIGHT INTO THE PATHWAYS AHEAD WHICH ARE FLOODED WITH UNCERTAINTY AND SHADOWS. INSPIRED BY TENANTS OF BOTH KABBALAH AND DAOISM, WE HONOR THAT IN THIS SPACE OF UNKNOWN AND RICH EMPTINESS, THERE IS A DULCART ROOM FOR SPONTANEITY, FLUIDITY, DREAMS, AND GROWTH — THE SACRED ^{***} BALANCE BETWEEN

FORM + FORCE,

EMPTINESS

+ FULLNESS

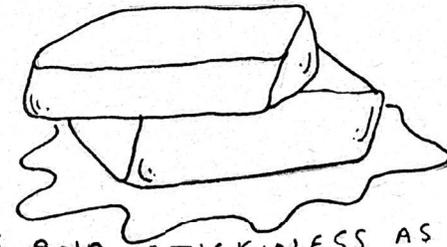
WARMTH LIKE CINNAMON

MELTING SOFTNESS LIKE BUTTER

[INSPIRED BY CH 11 OF THE DAO DEJING BY LAOTZU]



THE VESSEL AND THE EMPTINESS W/IN THE VESSEL, ALL SACRED AND NECESSARY.



SWEETNESS AND STICKINESS AS FLEXIBLE AND AS STRONG AS HONEY —

TOGETHER WE EXPLORE THE SPECTRUM BETWEEN LIGHTNESS AND DARKNESS.



ON THESE NIGHTS OF KHANIKE, WE DO NOT
NEED PHYSICAL CANDLES TO KNOW THAT
WE ARE DREAMING ALONGSIDE ONE ANOTHER
IN RITUAL, IN CARE, IN COMFORT, DISCOMFORT,
IN FEAR, IN JOY, IN GRIEF, IN SOLACE, IN THE
CHANGING OF THE SEASONS, IN THE PRESENCE
OF ALL OF EARTH AND G-D'S ELEMENTS ALIVE
AND FLOWING THROUGH THE VESSELS AND
PATHWAYS OF OUR BEAUTIFUL PHYSICAL
VESSEL /CONTAINER STORING OUR BRIGHT
AND ABUNDANT SPIRITS. THIS DIVINE EBB
AND FLOW THAT LIVES WITHIN US WILL
WARM AND LIGHT OUR PATH AS WE SWIM
INTO THIS SACRED TIME OF STRETCHING, OF
DREAMING, OF REFLECTING, OF LIGHT
TURNING TO DARKNESS AND DARKNESS TURNING
TO LIGHT - IN BEAUTIFUL TIMELESSNESS
AND INTERDEPENDENCE. HONORING ALL THAT
YOU ARE AND ALL THAT WE ARE TOGETHER.
WE DO NOT NEED PHYSICAL DREIDELS TO SPIN
LIKE THEM, TO PLAY LIKE THEM, TO SPREAD THAT
DELIGHTFUL SPONTANEOUS MOVEMENT WHICH HAS
ACTED AS A SOURCE OF STRENGTH, BLISS, AND
SILLINESS FOR OUR ANCESTORS + LOVED ONES
PAST, PRESENT, AND FOREVER STRETCHING INTO THE
BEYOND. LET US SPIN LIKE DREIDELS INTO
THIS TIME OF ABUNDANCE AND SUPPORTED -
REFLECTION ... HANDS EMBRACED, ARMS OUTSTRETCHED
WITH LOVE AND WARMTH.

AMEN



I have a spider that's been living on my porch, an orb weaver spider, that every night builds a web and takes it down in the morning. I was thinking about how I can only see it in a certain light. And it felt like: oh, this is, these expressions of collective care create these threads. And this web that we are in, and the way we tend to each other; some might call this interdependence, some might call it relatedness and some of us experience this as divinity. This is maybe what we call God or whatever name you use for your experience of divinity.

And I really feel like the binary that has happened between centuries between magic and organizing, between healing and activism? I don't experience that binary. And I think there's a lot lost in that binary. I do experience and understand these things as magic, as collective care. And I see the ways that they are expressions of resistance and the way that they can take down the structures that we want to tear down.

Some of what I'll be sharing is from Torah and Talmud; some of it is from historical texts from the middle ages to the present. Because of white supremacy and ashkenormativity, there's a lot more information written about Jews from Pale of Settlement, Ashkenazi jews, from a particular time period, 1912-1914, of these shtetls, one of which my great grandparents are from. I also read a lot of these books about pinkes, which are record books in the shtetls. They are also considered holy objects. I could do a whole thing talking about pinkes, but everything that happened was in there, and so there's a lot to learn about these local groups that were taking care of each other.

And part of my family is also sephardic and so I have been doing a lot of research from the places my family is from.

There's a lot that's missing. I talked to a lot of different friends, read a lot of books, but I just want to acknowledge that this is

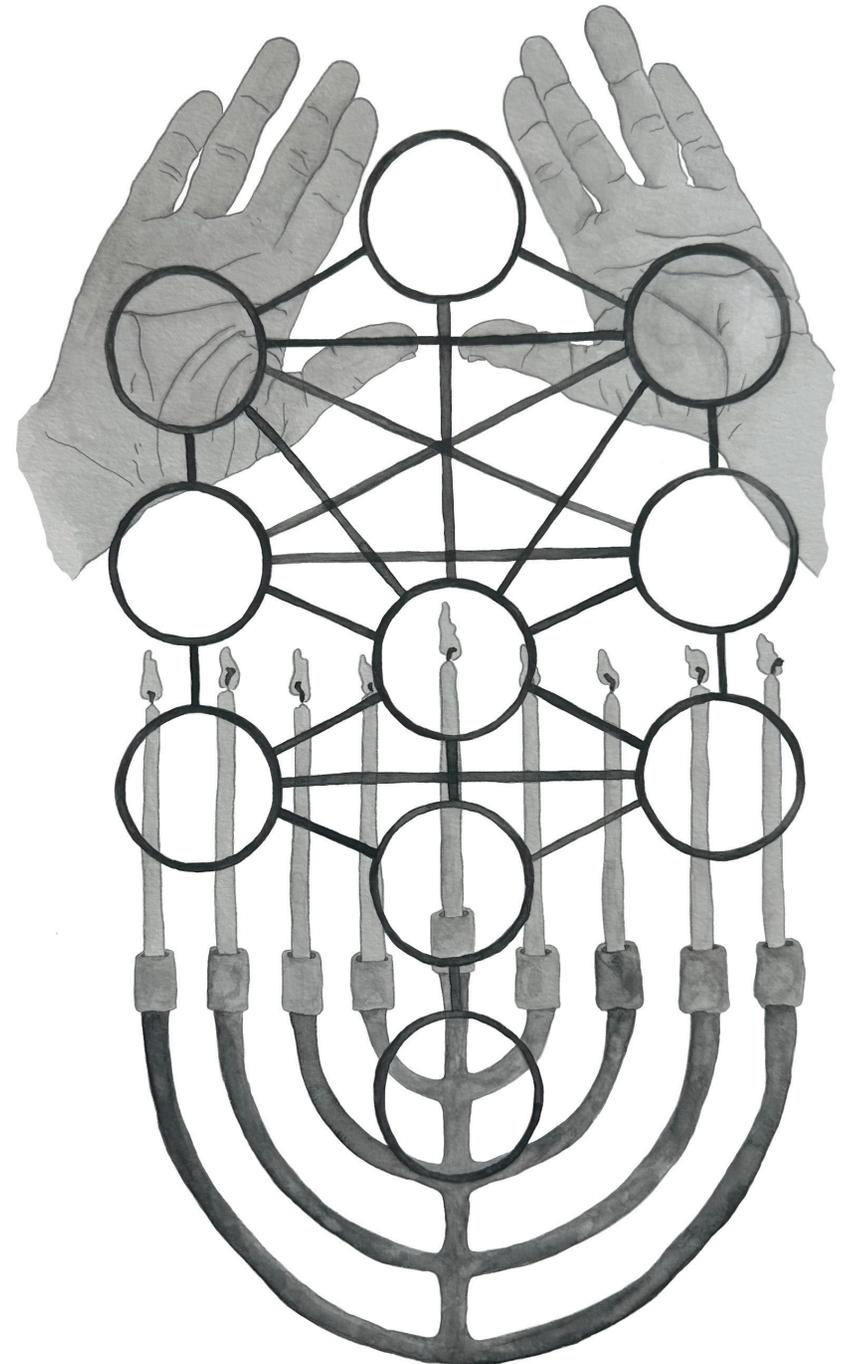
in other places this is more people would anticipate knowing what's going on, who is getting the gossip, and kind of where you would see where the intersections of someone like Binele, knowing who is needing want and being in care with each other

And a lot of these groups also were intergenerational. Children were involved in a lot of the groups up through old people. And then most of these groups, there was transposing them into the US upon immigration with a huge decline in these groups up until the 40s.

I've been learning about these things and researching these things thinking about this history because I do community healing work, and have been doing, reading about, learning about, practicing, like Dean said, thinking about protection magic; and really understanding these ways that we've organized care, community care around the evil eye—these expressions of collective care. I see them in these contexts of the evil eye, or ideas about demons that can be understood in many different ways. But seeing the ways we understood that we have an effect on each other, and then the way we care for each other in that context.

So Jews, like many people, have all of these examples of creative survival strategies and adaptations, and really, it wasn't until fairly recently that we had a concept of individuals and individuality, and healing was held in this very collective way. And practice was concerned with the collective and lived in a certain kind of communal way.

I guess Dean and I have talked about our work over the years; this has been a place of fun overlap and sparkly conversations. A lot of my work I do with my eyes closed doing intuitive healing with people. And as I've been reading about these things and listening to these stories, from people, from books, I started to see these practices create a web.



Chanukah Kabbalah

8 MEDITATIONS FOR 8 NIGHTS

by Chaplain Julie

Chanukkah is a time to connect with the Creator of Light, the light within us, and the light of the world. The holiday is a reminder to take spiritual actions that will dispel the darkness of the world with light.

Here are 8 practices for creating more light in the world:

1. Destruction: Sometimes things and relationships are destroyed. Sometimes we are the destroyer, the victim or simply the witness, and sometimes all three. From destruction we notice impermanence, fragility, pain, release, joy, liberation or even death. After the Temple was destroyed, there was still hope for the Jewish people.

Spiritual Action: Take an honest assessment to witness what has been destroyed. What feelings come up when you think about the destruction?

2. Rebuilding: After assessing the destruction, we have the opportunity to rebuild in body, mind and spirit. No matter how big the damage is, with dedication, perseverance, and effort, we can rebuild with loving intention. Rebuilding faith and community was achieved after the Temple's destruction.

Spiritual Action: What has been destroyed that I want to see rebuilt? What are some realistic steps to take to begin the rebuilding process?

3. Leadership: Courage and focus can help get us through dark times. Being a leader who brings about change requires empathy, communication, good decision-making, and resilience. Like the shamash or helper candle on the

of Judaism, are far removed from any form of self-gain or self-promotion in the community. They are fundamental values, vital to the survival of the community and through its charitable societies they have led to people getting the help they need ever since the middle ages. Thus it is that in the community of Ioannina there are many records of charities. Hevra Kedoshah, an honorary brotherhood of volunteers who oversaw the burial of the dead, was one of the first, as was Bikur Holim, a charity that arranged visits and care for the sick and needy. The community saw that children had canteen at school and there was also Aruhat Aniyim, which distributed school books, stationery and clothing...Then there were charities that supported young mothers and provided dowries for young women of little or no means (Hevra Nose Yetumot).

During the Turkish occupation, Pidyon Shevuyim, a charity that collected for the liberation or purchase and release of Jewish slaves, proved absolutely necessary and was active over a wide area. There were also community institutions such as Beth Yeshua v' Rachel care home for the elderly."

Dori: And I see there are a lot of people with ancestors from here. So beautiful and so sweet!

The picture here is of the Home for the Elderly. This is from a historical society. This is very common, very typical of local societies that you would find in most Jewish communities throughout the diaspora. Some were more formalized and some were more loosey goosey networks of kin and people.

The main things you see people taking care of is food, shelter, financial support, education, care for young people, old people, pregnant people, sick people, poor people, dead people. And throughout Jewish diaspora, in different time periods, some of these would be more structured like with elections. And

Binele, the Rebetsin, an old yidene, a widow, conducted the kheyder (school) for girls. In the shtetl, people would call Binele the zaddekes (holy woman) and with good reason. Every Friday at twelve, she could canvas the shtetl from house to house and collect challah and fish for poor people for the Sabbath... She would also exorcize the evil eye and give sgules (ritual remedies) and procure different remedies for all sorts of illnesses...On Tisha b'Av, she would sit on an overturned washtub and the women would sit around her on the ground, wailing.

So, I wanted to start with Binele. This account is from *The Jewish Dark Continent: Life and Death in the Russian Pale of Settlement* by Nathaniel Deutsch.

I wanted to start with Binele because this is a beautiful example of how individuals would participate in daily life of collective care. Here we see Binele making sure people have food, doing healing work, leading and making space for collective grief. And accounts like this are not unusual. All different ethnographic studies, folktales, you see people doing acts of care for each other. I love this beautiful story, and how she's doing it all.

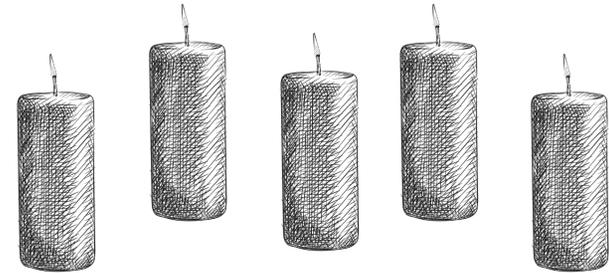
Now we're going to go to Ioannina. So, this is a description of community societies in Ioannina, which was a large Jewish community that was, through when it was under Ottoman rule and into when it's now under what is present day Greece, with large Romaniote Jewish community as well as Sefardi, and was a really thriving Jewish community up until the 1940's when most of this community were sent to Auschwitz and were killed in the Nazi Holocaust.

There's some words in here that are transliterated Hebrew, but I'm curious if someone else would like to read this out loud?

Ryn: [READING] Charity and solidarity, the cornerstones

menorah, as leaders we can serve others to help increase their light and ours, as well.

Spiritual Action? What do I stand for, and how can I show my leadership? Make a list of the values or core beliefs you are passionate about. What are some ways that people will see your behaviors and actions in alignment with your values and beliefs?



4. Community: There is a power in numbers. We are stronger together. Community reminds us that we're never truly alone. Together, we can accomplish great things, like advocating for change or rebuilding after destruction.

Spiritual Action: Who are the people you feel safest with, and how can you nurture these relationships? Do something kind someone you are grateful for.

5. Dedication: Dedicating yourself to something can help connect you with the Source of Light and give you a sense of purpose. The lesson of Chanukkah is to be proud of who you are. There is nothing wrong with having pride in your work or being proud of yourself. Know that you matter, and your time, energy and intentions are sacred. The word Chanukkah means dedication because when the Maccabees (the Jewish fighters who led the revolt) overcame Greek oppression, they rededicated the Second Temple and themselves to Jewish ideals.

Spiritual Action: What gives your life meaning? Dedicate a task to make it special in honor of someone you respect. Consider how you can have a positive impact for yourself, your family and your community.

6. Faith: When we have faith, we can change the world. Faith in ourselves, faith in humanity, faith in the Source of Light. Faith is complete trust or confidence. The Maccabees had faith that they could fight the most powerful army of the ancient world, and you can do hard things, too! Faith can carry us through transitions and difficult times.



Spiritual Action: What would you like to have more confidence or trust in? Offer a prayer or meditation to call in more faith around something you're hoping for.

7. Miracles: A miracle can't be explained by science or natural law. Miracles are beyond reason and transcend limitations. To experience a miracle is to believe in the Great Mystery that anything is possible, like the Chanukkah story of the oil that miraculously lasted for eight nights. Just like this small but mighty amount of oil, how can we stretch ourselves to do good in the world and trust that goodness will also come to us?

I think about the Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) Deadly Exchange campaign to stop US law enforcement from training with Israeli forces, that campaign slogan has been "Safety through Solidarity", and Dori's work is so deeply about that, about safety through accompaniment, not being isolated, mutual practice.

Dori and I talk about what is magic. Even if you don't think magic is real, magic is just, by having an amulet system in our community, we are making a set of shared values about theft. It's really interesting to think about people's shared beliefs, how they can relate to producing solidarity and shaping our behavior in ways that include norms, and that we don't enforce through punishment but through a more complex set of caring and loving and including and also intervening. Which I think transformative justice requires. That's also on my mind as I think about what Dori is going to share.

I'm going to stop there and turn it over to Dori to make this really Jewish.

Dori: You know you already made it really Jewish Dean. It's already really Jewish, and I could listen to you forever. No one wants you to stop, don't stop.

Here I go. I'll take it from there. Thank you so much, Dean. Thank you all.

I'm Dori Midnight, here on the unceded homelands of Pocumtuc and Nipmuc people in Western Massachusetts. This is such a beautiful, wonderful, such an easy thing to say yes to this invitation. Dean and I are both, I guess, somewhat of, I don't know if we're nerds or workaholics, and getting to also do a work project together has made it so we get to talk even more.

We'll start with Binele. I'll read this to you:

useful. We can see all that mutual aid or not, it can just be how things are when you're not stuck, how we are, in relationships of extraction. It's also useful for thinking about the radicalness of any project trying to create autonomous pathways to basic needs. Also for all of us it is interesting to think of connection between care and control. I say this because there are a lot of people who still have a fantasy that we can have a caregiving state.

I disagree with that.

I'm interested in returning to collective self determination around basic necessities of care, and I think we can think about that care and control, dynamically, when thinking about the big infrastructures we live under now, before profit food and energy, but also we know it inside our families. The connection between care and control, inside our families, inside religious communities...We think so often how care is coercive in family, in church, in state and then start to ask, what is it to make care truly based in free association and mutuality? How might various times and places and practices in Judaism help us imagine that? How is hierarchy a problem in that, something that undoes that? And I think also like, as an abolitionist thinking about transformative justice, and as an anarchist, I'm not looking for a world where there no norms. I want us to have community norms against rape, or towards not letting anyone go without what they need, against hoarding or pollution.

What does it mean to build community norms built bottom up instead of top down? Where can we see that practice? I'm going to the bigger questions that Dori's examples will bring up.

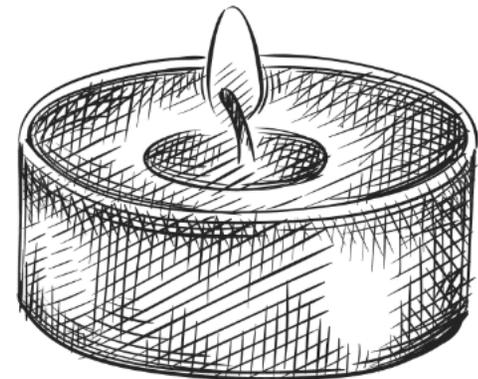
I also just want to say, I think Dori's work, which I don't know we'll fully go into today, but on Jewish Protection Magic is so relevant to this.

Spiritual Action: Noticing the blessings that come your way, like sparks of light, what are some miracles that you've experienced in your life? Make a gratitude list of big or small miracles that you're grateful for.

8. Self-determination: Chanukkah is a celebration of religious freedom and self-determination. It's a reminder for us to consider the ways in which we advocate for and take care of ourselves, especially in the face of hardship. Some even say that more important than the miracle of the oil, the Chanukkah message of winning the war against the Greeks because of self-determination is the greater story. Self-determination means you have a strong sense of your strengths, needs and interests, as well as your limitations. It comes with a good sense of self-confidence and self-esteem, which isn't always easy for someone who's been fighting oppression and oppressive systems for a long time.

Spiritual Action: What are your strengths and limitations, and how can you use those to advance towards your goals?

Happy Chanukkah!



JEWISH TRADITIONS & FUTURES OF MUTUAL AID: CONVERSATION WITH DEAN SPADE AND DORI MIDNIGHT AT MATIR ASURIM

On November 20th, Matir Asurim organized our second public event as a fundraiser for our work. All of the proceeds that were raised at the fundraiser were split between Matir Asurim and the Trans Asylum Seeker Support Network, a group that is dedicated to freeing transgender and queer asylum seekers from ICE detention and supporting them once they're in the US to lead thriving, joyful lives.

We held this event because convening spaces to learn, reflect and build skills together is an essential part of Matir Asurim's work, both as abolitionists and as Jews, and we are excited to include you all in our learning by sharing the conversations from the event with you.

The event was called, "Jewish Traditions & Futures of Mutual Aid: Conversation with Dean Spade and Dori Midnight at Matir Asurim".

Dean Spade is a community organizer, writer, activist and has been working to build queer and trans liberation based in racial and economic justice for the past two decades. He is a professor at the Seattle University School of Law and most recently published the book *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the next)*.

Dori Midnight is a community care practitioner, ritual leader, writer, and deep listener oriented towards healing and liberation. For over 20 years, she has practiced intuitive healing and woven rituals in reverent collaboration with plants, the seen

sharing, solving conflict between each other, an orientation of not centralizing decision making or creating hierarchy. What would it take for more of us to have practice for these things? So we're not doing only explicit mutual aid projects, but also we'd be ready when anything pops off, either right in front of us, or when the next uprising pops off, to quickly organize using those kinds of principles. I often talk about mutual aid as projects, but I'm also talking about maybe a skill-set and type of social relations that is very different from the dominant one we're trying to all get practiced in.

So thinking about what Dori will be talking about about in Jewish Traditions across time, I also want to say, when Dori and I talked about this together and talking to others about other contexts besides Jewish practice, we want to think about how to understand mutual aid, the way everyone did everything before capitalism, colonialism, the invention of private property disrupted all of that, and the way that domination works. A central function of domination is to produce surplus for some and poverty for others, and to control people by controlling basic necessities that were once shared.

So I can't get housing, very easily, without going through the housing market, I can't get electricity without going through however the grid works, I am unlikely to have food through a food system not based on fossil fuels. We become beholden by getting all of our basic necessities throughout their systems. We can look at times and places where people either still were more autonomous for some of those needs or became, made themselves, escaped parts of an enforced system of getting their needs met.

That's the question, but noticing the creep of capitalism, colonialism, white supremacy, that creep, we can look in so many different traditions and lineages to see times and places where people got their needs met another way. And it can be

today in terms of talking about mutual aid now – conversations in 2020 when the term mutual aid really mainstreamed, there was a beautiful proliferation of mutual aid projects associated with COVID and the uprisings. When I am trying to talk about mutual aid projects, people try to say everything is mutual aid and I've tried to encourage us to think more about mutual aid as people's intentional work to organize resistance, not just the value of mutuality and sharing for purposes of getting clear, destroy systems that are ending our lives quickly. But I don't mean to say that in the way to erase the fact that we are of course seeking new social relations and people learn those new social relations in lots of contexts but through mutual aid practices and apply them.

I'm really obsessed with mutual aid where we throw our bodies between state and folks they are targeting – trying to get enough people to encampments so they don't get raided, surrounding folks who ICE have come to arrest and not letting them do it, peeling cops off of others.

How many of us does there need to be? What kind of boldness do we need to feel to have those skills? I remember a time when I went to a protest with people and afterwards, not in context of the protest, I was arrested for using the bathroom and the only other person from the protest in the bathroom tried to peel us out, and as soon as cops came to arrest us they arrested all of us. These aren't skillful actions that stop the arrest but what kind of vibe were we in together that we wouldn't let anyone go alone?

I was just reading a part of Cindy Baruch Milsteins' book, Deciding for Ourselves, an article about a neighborhood in Barcelona. It was just about when people are working together, living in ways where they have an orientation against the police, about

and unseen, and in service to personal and collective healing.

Both Dori and Dean have been friends and supporters of Matir Asurim's work from the beginning. They both offer frameworks about mutual aid and transformative ways to offer care that has been a major influence on our work. Part of why we are having these public conversations is to continue thinking about creative ways that we can transform who our Jewish community includes and how we can relate to one another in good and responsible ways. We are holding big questions about how to create structures for our incarcerated community member's voices and power to be heard and amplified and be influential. We are asking questions about how to create a culture of care for each other and not replicate the cultures of harm that we say we are working to end.

Here is a slightly abridged version of the transcript from the event (we kept in all of the content of the conversations and edited out some of the intro and closing remarks, for the sake of fitting it into the mailing. If you would like to be sent the full transcript, write to us and we can mail it to you!) We would love to hear your thoughts or responses or any questions that may come up for you.

May these ongoing ideas, conversations and dreams for a liberated world be uplifted by Kislev and by the power of miracles and community care that Chanukah infuses into our work.

EVENT TRANSCRIPT:

Jessica: Welcome everyone! Thank you to all my good friends for being here. We are so excited to come together today. My name is Jessica, as a point of access, I'm a white person with curly gray and brown hair in front of a white background with some plants. And I'm an organizer with Matir Asurim: Jewish

Care Network for Incarcerated People.

We open all of our meetings by spiritually calling in all of our members, especially those currently incarcerated. So I want to invite people to call to mind anyone they want to invite into the space and affirm we are here together in spirit and solidarity. We dedicate our learning today towards creating a world without prison walls, a world in which all are free. We affirm that this world is holy and is possible.

Our ancestors knew that the source of Life and Sacredness in our world wants and creates freedom. It is in this spirit of abolitionist Divinity that we say:

Baruch atah Hashem Elokeinu Chei ha'olamim Matir Asurim

Blessed are You, Divine One, Life-Giver of the Universes, Who releases the imprisoned.

And in your space, I invite you to say amen in whatever language works for you.

Dean: Thank you so much. Really grateful to the organizers, the interpreters, captioner, and to Dori for collaborating on this. I usually live in Duwamish land, but today I'm in Portland, Oregon. The way Dori and I talked about this is maybe I would define the term mutual aid and a little bit of context that I think will move us into what Dori wants us to share about traditions and histories of mutual aid in Jewish practices. We will discuss and hear people's questions and talk about them, and we also have a handout that is still a work in progress. We want people to be able to follow up with this stuff, it's incomplete by nature.

So I define mutual aid for purposes of conversation about mutual aid now as the part of social movement work, if we think of social movement work as an ecosystem that has lots and

lots of kinds of work in it: sabotaging pipelines, sometime we're burning police stations, sometimes we're trying to decriminalize something through law. Mutual aid is the part of our movement work where we meet each other's basic survival needs - food, clothing, healthcare, companionship, transportation and in my view it only counts as mutual aid as opposed to charity and social services if it is based in a shared understanding that that systems of domination are to blame for crisis, not the people in crisis, and if it comes with an invitation to collective action.

So if systems are producing these crises in our lives, the way we fix that is to destroy those systems, not fixing people who are in crisis. A typical framework in charity and social services is individualizing the crisis. You need to get sober or go through our budget programs so you can someday be on the waitlist for housing that is kind of like jail. Or other frameworks that try to sort deserving and undeserving poor people and send a message that the current system of distribution is mostly fair and we do a little tinkering for a few people in crisis but its okay that so many people live with precarity and have their lives shortened by [inaudible]. Mutual aid is opposite of charity, which is the main model people have heard of in US. Mutual Aid is different than that I like to think of its as oppositional, resistant, threatening to existing systems. Part of broader social movement system about having 100s of millions of people fighting back at systems that exist and harm we're facing, rather than keeping people in their places. Charity and social services, all critiques people have heard - they're a career, shaped by funders, having a limited horizon of transformation, limited to funders, rich people in the government, aka our opposition, decide are acceptable activities. Mutual aid is mostly unpaid, very autonomous from those kinds of structures, but not exclusively.

One thing that's interesting for purposes of our conversation