

SHAVUOT

וכל העם רואים את הקולות
ראת הלפידים



cover image:

Hugo Steiner-Prag, And all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning (Exodus 20:15). From the portfolio "Designs for a Machzor," 1963, based on a design from 1936; Jewish Museum Berlin, accession 2002/229/11.

19th of Iyar 5782 ~ May 20, 2022

Dear friends,

Chag Sameach! Happy Shavuot!

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
PO Box 18858
Philadelphia, PA 19143

On Shavuot we celebrate receiving our Torah. The Torah is our creation story. We chant it out loud each week together in our communities,, repeating the sacred stories over and over. These stories become a part of us, we can see ourselves in them, ground ourselves in their layered, powerful lessons. At times we might question these stories, grapple with them, feel comforted by them – as Jews, the mightiness of Torah permeates each of our lives in countless ways. In this mailing, we have included reflections, poetry, and teachings about Shavuot. Please know that while you read these words, we are celebrating alongside you, remembering that Torah exists on the page and it also exists inside each one of us. Here is to another year of celebrating the miracle of Torah in all of its depth and complexity and to the profound ways it connects us to one another.

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, Cece, Val, Callie, Laynie, Rena, Meli, Jacob,

and all of us at the Matir Asurim: Jewish Prisoner Care Network

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SHAVUOT שבועות

Compiled by Aliza Schwartz, Student Rabbi

Shavuot שבועות is the Jewish holiday that celebrates the anniversary of G!d giving the Torah to the Israelites at Mount Sinai – a very important anniversary. It is also an important holiday agriculturally, as it marks the wheat harvest in Israel.

The date of Shavuot is directly related to the date of Passover: Shavuot occurs 50 days after the first day of Passover. The Torah instructs us to count the days between the holidays – called the *Counting of the Omer*. The counting represents our anticipation and spiritual preparation for the giving of the Torah. On Passover, we were liberated from Egypt. On Shavuot, we were given the Torah, and we became a people in covenant with G!d.

- ✿ Some say that the *reason* G!d freed us from Egypt was to give us the Torah, to make us His people. What do you think about this?
- ✿ What does the anniversary of the giving of the Torah mean to you, in your life personally? If we think about Torah as either *the literal* Torah or as *life wisdom*, what does it mean to be ***open and spiritually prepared*** to receive life wisdom on this day (and every day)?

Rashi, a famous medieval rabbi and commentator, says that “the commands of the Torah should be to you each day as something new, as though [G!d] had only given them to you for the first time on the day in question” (from Rashi’s commentary on Exodus 19:1).

- ✿ What does it mean to study Torah like it is new *each day*? To study it as if *each day* we are receiving it anew from Mount Sinai?

The story of the giving of the Torah is fascinating. Let us look more closely at a couple specific aspects of it.

✿ In Exodus 24:3, we read, “Moses went and repeated to the people all the commands of the LORD and all the rules; and all the people answered with one voice, saying, ‘All the things that the LORD has commanded we will do!’”

➤ Here (as well as previously in the story) we see the Israelite people giving *consent* to accepting G!d’s laws. Does the consent of the Israelite people feel important to you here? If so, why?

➤ One could make an argument that the Israelite people were actually *coerced* into consent: After all, they had just been brought out of slavery in Egypt, and their survival in the desert seemingly depended on G!d’s will. What do you think about this?

➤ Commentators often speak about the fact that the people answered “with one voice.” What does this mean to you, that we said “yes” to G!d’s laws *all together in one voice*?

✿ In Exodus chapters 19 and 20, we read a description of the dramatic scene at Mount Sinai when G!d was giving the Torah. There was thunder and lightning, a loud shofar, the mountain was smoking... it was an experience that we can imagine as overwhelming for the senses. Exodus 20:15 is a fascinating verse describing the scene, and it begins, “All the people saw the sounds [thunder]...”

➤ “All the people *saw the sounds?!’*” How do you *see a sound*? What do you think the Torah is trying to convey here?

➤ One possibility is that the Torah is trying to convey that there was *sensory overload* in this moment – peoples’ senses were overwhelmed. If that is true, what does that mean about the power of G!d or of G!d’s presence? About the power of Torah?

revelation

rena branson

to feel language expand from its crinkled husk
to billow and fill us up with embodied knowing
to trust in poreless trust
that you know exactly what i mean
that i know exactly what you mean.

SHAVUOT TEXT STUDY

Laynie Soloman

Shavuot celebrates the mythic moment of the Jewish people receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai. According to one tradition in the Talmud (below), G!d held the mountain over the Jewish people's heads and forced them to accept the Torah.

I. Talmud, Tractate Shabbat Page 88b

It says in the Torah (in Exodus 19:17), “And they stood in the bottom of the mountain [of Sinai].” [What does it mean that they stood in the bottom of the mountain?] Rabbi Avdimi the son of Chama the son of Chasa said: This [strange formulation of *in the bottom of the mountain*] teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be G!d, held the mountain over them like a barrel and said, “If you accept the Torah, it is good. And if not, here shall be your graves.”

Rav Acha Bar Yaakov said: From here there is a great claim against the Torah [i.e. how can the covenant of the Torah be everlasting if the Jewish People did not accept it willingly!]

Rava said: Even so, they accepted it again [willingly] in the days of King Ahasverosh in the story of Purim. There in that story, it says [regarding the festival of Purim, which was established by Mordechai], (Esther 9:27) “The Jews upheld and accepted.” Why include both words “upheld” and “accepted”? Along with their acceptance of this new holiday from Mordechai, they accepted all of the other commandments, this time without being under duress.

Questions:

- ✿ Is there a moment when you’ve “accepted” Torah?
- ✿ What do you think it means to “accept” Torah willingly?
- ✿ Do you think it’s important to “accept” Torah willingly? Why or why not?



In some Jewish communities, the Shabbat before Shavuot is known as the “Shabbat Kallah” (“Bridal Shabbat”), playing on the idea that Shavuot is like a wedding between G!d and the Jewish people. In many traditional Jewish weddings, a marriage contract called a “ketubah” is read. In this poem, the author imagines that the Torah is the marriage contract between G!d and the Jewish people.

II. Ketubah Le’Shavuot (abbreviated translation), Piyyut (Poem) composed by Israel Najara (1550–1625)

Friday, the sixth of Sivan, the day appointed by the Lord for the revelation of the Torah to His beloved people... The Invisible One came forth from Sinai, shone from Seir and appeared from Mount Paran unto all the kings of the earth, in the year 2448 since the creation of the world, the era by which we are accustomed to reckon in this land whose foundations were upheld by God, as it is written, ‘For He hath founded it upon the seas and established it upon the floods’ (Psalms 24.2).

The Bridegroom [God], Ruler of rulers, Prince of Princes, Distinguished among the select, Whose mouth is pleasing and all of Whom is delightful, said unto the pious, lovely and virtuous maiden [the people of Israel] who won His favor above all women, who is beautiful as the moon, radiant as the sun, awesome as bannered hosts: Many days will you be Mine and I will be thy Redeemer.

Behold, I have sent thee golden precepts through the lawgiver Jekuthiel [Moses]. Be thou My mate according to the law of Moses and Israel, and I will honor, support, and maintain thee and be thy shelter and refuge in everlasting mercy. And I will set aside for thee, in lieu of thy virginal faithfulness, the life-giving Torah by which thou and thy children will live in health and tranquility.

This bride [Israel] consented and became His spouse. Thus an eternal covenant, binding them forever, was established between them. The Bridegroom then agreed to add to the above all future expositions of Scripture, including *Sifra*, *Sifre*, *Aggadah*, and *Tosefta*. He established the

primacy of the 248 positive commandments that are incumbent upon all... and added to them the 365 negative commandments. The dowry that this bride brought from the house of her father consists of an understanding heart that understands, ears that hearken, and eyes that see.

Thus the sum total of the contract and the dowry, with the addition of the positive and negative commandments, amounts to the following: 'Revere God and observe His commandments; this applies to all mankind' (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The Bridegroom, desiring to confer privileges upon His people Israel and to transmit these valuable assets to them, took upon Himself the responsibility of this marriage contract, to be paid from the best portions of His property...

All these conditions are valid and established forever and ever. The Bridegroom has given His oath to carry them out in favor of His people and to enable those that love Him to inherit substance. Thus the Lord has given His oath. The Bridegroom has followed the legal formality of symbolic delivery of this document, which is bigger than the earth and broader than the seas. Everything, then, is firm, clear, and established...

I invoke heaven and earth as reliable witnesses.

May the Bridegroom rejoice with the bride whom He has taken as His lot and may the bride rejoice with the Husband of her youth while uttering words of praise.

Questions:

- ✱ How is the relationship between G!d and Israel like a marriage?
- ✱ What do you think about the idea that the Torah is a marriage contract?

GOD QUEERS THE MOUNTAIN

Rabbi Mónica Gomery

The last time I taught the story about the mountain, I tented my fingers into a mountain. *See what I did there?* and people laughed, then leaned closer, to consider the base of the mountain, thumb touching thumb, or to consider the peak where my fingers rested triangularly together. In the story, God raises the mountain over the people, either lifting it to hover or flipping it by inverting the triangle, plunging the heavenly peak toward the earth.

To be a human being is to walk that bridge slung between what is mortal and what is sky.

We call that story “Mountain Like Cask” or “Mountain Like Rooftop” or “The Threat of the Law.” But I’m thinking let’s call it *God Queers the Mountain*. Master of Inversions, insisting the world is capable of being in ways we never saw coming.

One student says, *If God flipped the mountain, then something is falling off of the mountain toward the people*. This had never occurred to me, and now I imagine the landslide of rocks, branches and scripture, pouring down the face of the upside-down mountain at the people who stand there and tremble, try to keep their palms open.

To be a human being is to encounter debris.

To be human is to keep breathing as the gifts and the threats of the mountain hurl toward you.

At the reading, the trans novelist talks about rewriting Norse and Greek myths. Someone asks *what is it about the mythic and fabulist that so populates the queer imagination?* Someone else responds *archetypes, belonging, new roots*. Later that night a friend asks me, *Why did it feel like it mattered so much when you made the mountain with your hands?*

We are slung to the mountain. When it flips we flip, when it trembles we tremble. When it takes a new body, when it transforms its shape. When it is lonely, or stable, or wise.

To be queer means to listen for the stories of ancestors and find yourself stacked up against trees, boulders, breathing the breath of the mountain, the inverted mountain.

FROM THE EXODUS, TO THE RISE OF ABOLITION

William Dickson and Rabbi Jessica Rosenberg

William and Jessica became penpals in Fall 2021 through Matir Asurim. In the process of getting to know each other, they discussed what abolition means to each of them, and how they root it in and relate abolition to Jewish tradition and text. Here is an excerpt of their conversation and reflection on abolition and Jewishness in this season.

William: I define abolition as a coordinated systemic and cultural effort to shrink and eliminate the use of prison and jail in order to replace systems of punishment and caging with rehabilitation and community-based solutions. Jessica, let's see if we are on the same page with this subject. If we abolish prisons, that means we will no longer incarcerate people as a way to protect public safety. Abolition means defining safety by making sure that all people have access they need to things such as education, healthcare, and economic opportunities in order to thrive. It's been proven in other countries around the world that when society addresses problems with the system – such as poverty, racism and inequality – individuals respond better and cause less harm. Abolition does not mean no consequences or accountability. When people do end up hurting or stealing from others, we use restorative justice practices instead of punishment. That means finding out why the harm was caused and giving the person the opportunity to make it right. There still can be consequences for harm, but consequences are only put in place to maintain health and safety, and not for punishment, which is ineffective. Things such as restorative justice circles, rehabilitation, or paying restitution would be used instead of locking people up, and those can be evaluated on a case-by-case basis according to what the person who caused harm and what the person who was harmed want and need.

As a Jew, shall I not see abolition similar to the exodus from Egypt? The Passover pilgrimage festival and the story of Exodus being one of my favorite *regalim*. The Pharaohs, the persecution, the labor for unfair wages, how and what to be taught, the constant violence. Not the same, but similar!

Jessica: In the Exodus story, we read of a system of oppression so complete and all consuming that it shaped everything around it. In many moments I learn about the Exodus story from looking around at the overwhelming scope of the prison system today. Carceral logics, the ideas that flow from and back into punishment instead of accountability, seem all encompassing. And yet we are still dreaming and working for another world. We are actively imagining abolition, and then building practices and tools like the restorative justice circles that you describe, that will get us there. When we read the Exodus story, then, we know that our ancestors were resisting slavery, loving and caring for each other, honoring each others' uniqueness and creativity within a system that tried to erase them.

William: I am really with you on how you view abolition in connection with Spiritual practice. This is core. Spiritual Understanding is highly needed as a foundation. In order to address accountability, it's dealing with not always placing the blame on the offender. Once the Offender takes responsibility, and is accountable for his actions. There is a word I like to use "Criminogenic." It means to make crime and condemn people of committing the crime for profit. Does that sound familiar? (like arresting someone that's addicted to drugs, sending them to prison, then releasing them on parole with a stipulation that they cannot leave 100 miles out of the county; with only \$200 dollars gate money; but released to a drug program that's in the middle of a high risk drug area, in order to arrest that person again for the same crime). So, do you see the problem? Also, if you owe restitution in California, you cannot be paroled out of that state, or leave the county the crime was committed in (unless you're married), so, if you don't have any family members home or a wife. "They" have just created one more homeless person, released back in the same area your crime was committed. And the cycle starts all over again. And No one! ever takes accountability for the root of the situation. So it's easy to lose track of who really is the one placing the blame, and not being responsible.

Jessica: As we head into Pesach, as we head into Counting the Omer, as we look towards Shavuot, your teaching about accountability lights the way for me to a daily practice of abolition. Your writing and questions makes me ask

the question: how are we taking responsibility for each other, every day? It makes me think about abolition as the seemingly small, everyday practices of supporting each other. Resourcing each other, and holding each other accountable for our responsibilities to each other, before, during and after we harm each other. My prayer is that every year, the journey from Pesach to Shavuot can support us to take every day acts of liberatory care, care and compassion that frees us from fear of each other and of ourselves. Acts of responsibility for ourselves and each other, so that each person's holy Torah can be revealed.

WHAT IS TORAH?

Laynie Soloman and Sarit Cantor

In Hebrew, all words have three-letter roots. The word Torah comes from the Hebrew root yod (י), reish(ר), yod (י). When we put those letters into combinations with different sounds (vowels), the root takes on a new meaning, but still preserves some aspect of its core. You can think of these different vowels as outfits, helping the root come to life in a new place or context.

The following is a selection of dictionary entries that show the root yod, reish, yod and Torah's various verbal outfits. The italicized words are definitions. You don't need to know anything about Hebrew or roots beyond this to explore what's below!

תּוֹרָה / TORAH noun f.

- 1) *teaching, law; in general- the Jewish law, Religion.*
- 2) *definition, designation; character, nature.*

יִרָה , יִרַ / YOD RESH HAY, verb.

- 1) *to permeate, penetrate; to shoot forth.*
- 2) *to throw, shoot.*

In causative form (i.e., “to cause to ____”) - הוֹרָה / HORAH

- 1) *to permeate.*
- 2) *to point, aim, shoot, cast.*
- 3) *to point out, to direct, teach, instruct, to decide.*

Based on these definitions, how would you define Torah?

If we consider these definitions of Torah: to permeate, to point, to shoot forth, the essence of how we understand Torah can be so much more expansive than the scrolls we read from each week. If Torah is that which

permeates, it is like our breath, our words, the air that surrounds us and holds us through each moment. If Torah is that which shoots forth, directs us, it is a compass, it is movement connected to internal knowing.

The following contribution (on page 14) is an exploration of dreams as Torah. As we are told, the Torah was transmitted from Hashem at Sinai, but we also know that Torah does not stop on the page. It permeates through time and space, beyond this realm, beyond this world. The transmission of Torah did not stop at Sinai, it is transmitted each time we feel in our guts that we know something is true, it is transmitted through prayer and trust and relationship. The following is an invitation to consider our dreams as one way to connect with G!d's holy presence in our lives. When we are forced to live in a world of separateness, within realities of state violence, dispossession, isolation: we will always have our dreams. We will always have our permeating, visionary wisdom to shoot forth and to surround us. Our dreams, our visions, our internal compasses are the ongoing transmission of Torah. Listening to our dreams is a sacred Jewish act and part of how we continue to survive.

ANCESTRAL HEALING IN OUR DREAMS

Rabbi Jill Hammer

*An excerpt from **Undertorah: An Earth-Based Kabbalah of Dreams**
released by Ayin Press on February 24, 2022*

“Death, in tribal cultures, initiates a metamorphosis wherein the person’s presence does not ‘vanish’ from the sensible world (where would it go?) but rather remains as an animating force within the vastness of the landscape, whether subtly, in the wind, or more visibly, in animal form . . . The familiar human embodiment dies and decays to become part of the encompassing cosmos.”

— David Abram

In the 1930s, a young Jewish girl named Tola Pszenica contracted scarlet fever. One night her fever rose to such a degree that doctors did not believe she would survive. A *minyan* of her relatives stood at her bedside, praying.

That night, Tola dreamed that her great-grandmother and namesake, Tobe Sure, came to her with some beautiful ripe plums, saying: “Eat these nourishing plums, my dear, and you will soon be well again. Don’t be afraid.” Within the dream, the girl ravenously bit into the fruit. Her fever broke that night.

While the girl had never seen her great-grandmother, when she described the details of what the woman was wearing, her grandfather exclaimed that he knew exactly the garment Tola was describing. He searched his belongings for the brown jumper, and Tola confirmed it was exactly the article of clothing she had seen in the dream.

A Sephardic Jewish mother in Edirne tells a similar tale, in which her father came to her in a dream to offer a cure for her sick child:

“One day he had a big [infected sore] on his head. He was a year old by then. I put him in a *kunika de aire* [a cradle covered with netting]. My father appeared in a dream. And the toilet was far from the house. I would put a large pot in the house, and all the children would urinate in it, because in the winter they couldn’t go out. My father is telling me ‘Take the pot, put a rag inside, put it on his head, and he won’t have anything else.’ And I took it without saying a word . . . I got up in the morning, the child is sleeping, the child is not crying . . . he was okay. When the doctor came, he confirmed that urine was the best thing [for that ailment].”

The ancestors often come to us in our dreams. Like other dream guides, they are messengers from the cosmos, citizens of the underground temple, elemental beings—part of everything, and still very much part of our lives. They bring us healing, comfort, wisdom, and love. People around the world report their beloved dead appearing to them in dreams, sometimes at the moment of death, and sometimes long afterward.

THE PEAR TREE: MY DREAM JOURNEY WITH MY FATHER

My father, of blessed memory, died a few years ago. He was eighty-three and had lived a full life, though I wanted him to stay longer.

He was a dentist, yet his true passions were woodworking, fixing broken things, and caring for his land. He was a beloved presence in my life, and we took great joy in one another. A few months before he died, I had a dream that let me know his time was short.

I am at my parents’ house. I haven’t brought them gifts and I feel badly. My mother shows me a tiny withered plant in a pot, maybe an orchid. The plant has lovely pale pink flowers and a magnificent smell. I am astonished by how fragrant it is.

I go out on the deck with my father. Near the deck, there is an enormous, magnificent pear tree in bloom. My father keeps

pointing at the tree and telling me to look. I say that I see the tree and it is lovely, but he tells me to go closer.

When I walk across the deck to its edge, I see white pear flowers strewn all over the lawn.

In my dream, I feel inadequate to properly gift my parents, yet they have gifts for me: they are showing me the story of their lives.

During my visit, it becomes clear that the plants and the people are the same. My mother is the tiny, withered but fragrant orchid.

She, it turns out, will remain alive for years to come even with her frail body.

My father is the pear tree with falling blossoms. (The tree in that spot in waking life is a sycamore, but my father did also tend pear trees.) I am awestruck by the beauty and majesty of the tree.

Yet my father insists I walk close enough to see the carpet of pear blossoms on the grass. He wants me to see that the flowers are falling—his life is coming to an end. And he wants me to see that the flowers are beautiful even when they have fallen. Life is no less wondrous because it ends. My father is showing me the entire cycle, from seed to growth to death. That was his way in life, to love the earth and to accept the real.

A few months after the first dream, a week before my father's death, I dreamed another dream:

My father is having his second bar mitzvah. I am reciting the prayers. He gets up and gives a speech about how we should all love one another. I am full of joy to be with him at this event.

Later, while I am in bed, I get a phone call from him, thanking me. He sounds happy.

Then, I get another telephone call. My dad tells me he needs help getting home. I ask where he is and he says he's in the park, calling from a store. He sounds weak. I tell him I will come right away and he should rest and wait for me.

I throw on clothes and rush out the door to find my father. I think that he must have been enjoying the fresh air.

There is a little-known Jewish custom that when a person reaches the age of eighty-three (thirteen plus seventy) they may have a second coming of age, a second bar or bat mitzvah. My father never had such a ceremony—indeed, he spent very little time in synagogue at all—but he was eighty-three when he died. In my father's dream "bar mitzvah speech," he is telling me the sum total of his life's wisdom, which is that we must love one another.

He is, in a sense, coming of age, completing his journey in this body. He is happy and he thanks me (a detail that still moves me).

In the second part of the dream, my father is frail and needs help "to get home."

It is clear the "home" is not his physical home but his soul's home: wherever he is going next. He asks me for help, and I immediately rush out to find him.

Yet when I had this dream, I didn't immediately realize what it meant: that my father was imminently dying. This is still heart-breaking for me. I saw my father two days before his death, and I assured him that I loved him, but I am not sure I helped him "get home" in the way he requested in the

dream. It wasn't easy for my father to talk about dying, and I never wanted to distress him by bringing it up. Looking back on it, I wish I had made more space for him to try.

My dreams of my father offered me comfort and healing in my grief; they let me know my father had lived the purpose of his life and that he was grateful to me for loving him. Yet after my father's death, I struggled a great deal with the end of my second dream. I was close with my father and at peace with him, but it was painful for me that I hadn't been there when he died, that I hadn't understood the message of the dream.

It was also not comforting that my father's dream of his own death, which he shared with me a few weeks before he died, was a troubling one. In his dream, soldiers were planning to plant a bomb in his body, even as he protested. My father knew, in spite of the obscuring medical language all around him, that his living body was approaching its end. That dream reflected his experience of Western medicine, in which his body was treated as a broken machine rather than as a dying person.

Yet my father also had another, kinder vision of his death. A few weeks before he died, as he waited for surgery, sedated and half asleep, my father began to tell me what he was seeing. "I saw a woman dressed in green, eating a salad," he told me. "The salad had olives in it, and the olives were jumping up and down. One of the olives got away, and you tried to catch it, but I said: 'Let it go, Jill!'"

In this dream, my father is receiving healing as death approaches. He perceives a woman in green—we might call her a Green Woman, a human embodiment of the green and vibrant earth. One of her "olives" gets away. The word "olive," as my wife later pointed out, sounds like "I'll live." The olive, of course, is my father.

When I try to stop the olive from vanishing out of the salad, my father tells me to "let it go." When I feel back into that moment, I think my father is saying: "Let me go." His dream is a message that life comes and goes,

and we must both accept this as part of our human condition. This waking dream held the healing that he needed, and that I needed, to move forward.

When I think of my father's vision, I am comforted. I know he would not want me to dwell on his last days, or on what I did not do. He would want me to think of his bar mitzvah party and of how he told me about the importance of love. He is in the care of the Green Woman now, and what he wants me to remember is how much we loved each other. For me, my father is and will always be the pear tree—the luxuriant, blossoming body of a life fully lived.

DO NOT RISE

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This is my call to prayer:

do not rise, do not brace your feet, calves, knees,
thighs, your whole tired selves to push
against gravity, against rest;
and do not rise in spirit,
hurling yourself skyward, but instead
lie down. Sink.

Open wide your hard working hands
and let go of all striving.

Let yourself fall
gently and completely
to earth.

Go down into the holy roots of being
and let your prayers spread slowly
by aquifer and mycellium,
into the common ground,
or not spread
and enrich the soil of
exactly where you are,
then pray.

This poem is part of the Rimonim Liturgy Project, a forthcoming collection of liturgy that is fully inclusive of Indigenous Jews and Jews of Color, rooted in global, diasporic Jewish cultures, is in accountable relationship with local indigenous people wherever we're located, and recognizes and responds to the danger and opportunity of our ecological crisis.



Matir Asurim is looking for art or images to accompany our holiday mailings. Offerings might include: illustrated prayers, *Birkhat Ha'bayit* (house blessing), blessings of protection, interactive art, coloring pages, comic strips, shvitim (meditative images of the name of Hashem), illustrated depictions of Torah, and other treasures.

Please include a brief (2-3 sentences) description of your work.

Honorariums will be provided for selected artwork.

Deadline for submissions is July 15, 2022



Submissions can be sent to

Matir Asurim: Jewish Prisoner Care Network

PO Box 18858

Philadelphia, PA 19143