

BURSTING OPEN TO FREEDOM / RAISING YOUR VOICE RADICAL STORYTELLING / NEW YEAR, NEW LIFE

“Remember this day, on which you
went free from Egypt, the house
of bondage, how Adonai freed you
from it with a mighty hand ...”
—Exodus 13:3

“Then Israel sang this song.
Spring up, O Well, Sing to it.”
- Numbers 21:17-18

“This is true freedom: Our ability to shape
reality. We have the power to initiate,
create and change reality rather than
only react and survive it. How can we all
educate our children to true freedom?
Teach them not to look at reality as
defining their acts but to look at their
acts as defining reality.” —Yaacov Cohen



SPIRITUAL ELEMENTS OF NISSAN

Welcome, women, to the first taste of freedom. Nissan is here.

This month, we get redemption squared – vibrant new life in the new year¹ and the fantastical story of our ancestors road to freedom, commemorated with the most commonly observed and radically experiential holiday on the Jewish calendar – Passover!

Remember those tiny seeds you planted during Shevat? Remember how you tended them lovingly, all month long in the spiritual underground? And then, during the next month of Adar, how you gave them sunshine, and water, and joy? This month, those seeds shoot into bloom in all their new, green, freedom-charged glory.

Whether it's a seed hull, a limiting belief, or an unhealthy relationship, Nissan is the month to throw off anything that once kept you small. Like the buds peeking out on every tree, you too are freed to bloom anew.

Passover is Judaism's dramatic blockbuster. Infanticide! Blood rivers! An 11th hour parting of a sea²! And the Passover seder³ is Judaism's ultimate experience of radical storytelling, playing wildly with form and encouraging us to lose ourselves in the story as we pour wine with a joyfully heavy hand.

By reenacting the Israelite's dramatic escape to freedom in an elaborate dinner ritual, Passover makes sure we engage all five of our senses. Why? Because on Passover, we're meant to remember that we left Egypt *personally*.

That we walked with wonder through the miraculously parted Sea of Reeds *personally*. And that we were there to receive Divine teaching in the desert *personally*. Through song and ritual and food and praise and even running wild through the house trying to find the Afikomen, Passover invites expansive freedom into our bodies, souls, and communities.

Since we Jews follow a lunar AND solar calendar system, it makes sense that this sense of expansiveness and freedom matches up with the Spring. Passover and the energy of Nissan propel us to this free version of ourselves and sync us to the rhythms of Momma Earth.

The Hebrew name for Egypt is Mitzrayim, literal translation: "straits" or "narrow places." This poetic naming emphasizes that now is time to leave behind the places that smush our spirits. During Nissan, we burst vibrantly open and become our highest selves.

What would it look like to audaciously leave your narrow places behind? Who's restricting you from your highest self? What would it take for you to let go and know, deep down in your un-ownable bones, there can be miracles...if you believe?

Does this sound daunting? Don't fret; you're not meant to make this journey alone; Nissan is all about telling stories, and what's the point of telling them without an audience to hear? Gather your loves and together revel in expansiveness together. We're Jews; we don't travel alone.

1. Nissan is the first month on the Jewish calendar! It is confusing, but we have four new years as Jews, and this is technically the first of the calendar.

2. They didn't name it "The Greatest Story Ever Told" for nothing.

3. Seder means "order." Any ritual meal in Judaism that has a structure telling us to say a prayer, eat a food, and sing a song, etc all in in specific order is called a seder. There are lots of seders scattered throughout the Jewish calendar, but the Passover seder is for sure the most famous one of all.

4. Aka your personal Pharaoh



HEALING QUALITY OF NISSAN

Speech

Alright, well-spoken woman. It's Nissan. Know what that means? As Melinda Ribner teaches us in her very rad book *Kabbalah Month by Month*, it's time to clear your throat and Be Heard.

The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein famously wrote, "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world." Words are powerful, yo. Judaism acknowledges this fact in the prohibition against cruel speech meant to harm. It's one of the worst offenses in the Jewish tradition. Lashon hara, literally, "evil tongue" limits nizar, or forbidden speech, which includes all gossip, lies, false testimonies, and insults. Part of healing the world means acknowledging the danger and violence in our speech. It means finding ways to speak that heal instead of harm. It's Nissan; purge.

Seeing as Nissan is all about telling stories, here's one about healing speech:

Once upon a time, there was a little boy who was picked on for being Jewish. After this early encounter with violent speech, the little boy grew up to create a method of speaking to others called Nonviolent Communication, NVC. From a very young age, Marshall Rosenberg understood what a difference it makes to "guard one's tongue" and take care with the power of words. The End.

Nonviolent Communication encourages better verbal exchanges by giving us tools to bring more kindness, respect, and empathy to our speech. Rosenberg believed that violence and misunderstandings occur when basic needs go unmet and then are expressed inappropriately. According to his theory, clashes

also occur when we don't hear others' needs and respond callously, cavalierly, passive aggressively, or outright aggressively.

At the center of Rosenberg's method are three values: self-empathy (deep compassion for one's own inner experience), empathy (understanding and communion of emotion expressed by another), and honest self-expression (expressing oneself authentically in order to allow for empathy in the other).

NVC trains us to pay attention, listen closely to what others say, and honor the deep desire we all have to feel heard, clearing away our own judgments and assumptions.

We read the story of Exodus with a keen awareness of speech. Though Moses was born with a speech impediment, he grew up to become the Israelites' spokesman in their quest for freedom. How did Moses do it? What allowed him to speak powerfully and courageously on behalf of his people? Did Moses express his needs clearly and specifically to Pharaoh? Was Moses aware of his emotions and authentic in his requests? It's difficult to know, but Moses' legendary oratory can guide us as we raise our own voices to challenge injustice and speak up for what we truly want.

Which brings us to Nissan's challenge: how can we express ourselves more clearly and compassionately this month? How can we speak up about injustices and make sure that we're heard? What must we say to be free?

PERSONAL JOURNAL QUESTIONS

- In what ways are you enslaved by your own actions, thoughts, and words? By society?
- What's one thing you could leave in Mitzrayim this year to allow yourself to experience freedom?
- In what parts of your body do you feel tightness when you experience difficult emotions?
- What does your soul want and need?
- If you were Miriam, what would you speak up about?
- What does it mean for you to be in a Well Circle?

POSSIBLE WELL CIRCLE PRACTICES

Start in story. If you're this month's facilitator, open your Well Circle with a Nissan-themed prompt. Invite each woman to raise her voice and share.

Some Opening Prompts

- What's enslaving you right now?
- In which ways are you most free?
- In which areas of your life are you feeling heard?
In which areas
are you feeling silenced or disregarded?
- Do you have any requests you want to make but haven't yet been able to vocalize? If so, what's up?

Creating Sacred Containers

When asked deeply personal questions, the act of answering can produce both incredible vulnerability and tremendous power. (Is it such a shock that a lot of the time they're one in the same? Answer: no.)

When someone is expressing her truth, there are two rules for listeners:

1. No interruptions
2. Engage in active, conscious witnessing (that means no distracting comments)

To encourage the creation of a sacred container, invite the teller to say, "Dibarti" when she's through speaking. In Hebrew, it means, "I have spoken." The group can then honor her closure by saying "Shamanu" —

"We heard you."

Nissan Activity: Practicing NVC

Dive into some of the resources that explain the basics of NVC. At this month's Well Circle, share some techniques and practice role-playing with the communication of needs and requests.



WHAT WOULD BIBLICAL WOMEN DO?

Miriam

“Behind every great man, there is an even greater woman.” -Source unknown

Cue Moses’ sister, Miriam. Brave and rebellious, a prophetess and a leader, a dancer and singer, the bringer of a miraculously replenishing source of life to her people,⁵ Miriam was an embodied Wild Woman who took care of business.

Unlike many other women in the Torah, Miriam is characterized not as a mother, but as an independent catalyzer who moved (literally) her nation from slavery to freedom. Miriam was strong AF, and inspired others around her to be the same.

Miriam’s life was a roller coaster. One moment she was a slave, the next a public figure leading the liberation of her people. One moment she was praised and respected as a prophetess, the next she was punished by The Divine with a week of isolation and leprosy. Compared to the huge impact she had, Miriam goes practically unnoticed in the Exodus story. But then again, she was also the only woman in the Torah honored to die by God’s kiss.⁶

Any feminist can see that Miriam was an unmistakably strong leader. But when she lived, (surprise, surprise) Miriam was taken for granted. She saved her brother’s life, but doesn’t appear to have been outwardly revered by him. She galvanized the Israelites, but was never a formal advisor to Moses. The Torah name checks Miriam a whopping four times. Based on her role and impact, it seems she could easily have been mentioned far more.

One thing’s certain: Miriam was a unifier. In the first moments of freedom from bondage, plagues, and extreme suffering in Egypt, Miriam inspired the Israelites to dance. And when they wandered together in the desert, wherever Miriam went, a well sprung up, the center around which the community gathered. Water is life.⁷

Midrash teaches us that whenever Moses spoke, Miriam was the one who got the people to stfu, turn around, and pay attention. When she fell ill with leprosy, a punishment from God for speaking ill of Moses’ new wife, Miriam was unable to move for a week. But her people, including her two brothers,

refused to move on without her. It was during this important time when the desert wanderers were paused that they were able to connect with each other. When Miriam died on the first new moon of the 40th and final year of the Israelites’ desert wandering, she left behind a community ready to take her song and dance righteously forward into the next generation. This month, At The Well challenges all Well Women to embody Miriam. Do you play an instrument? Can you lead people in song? Do you know a game that brings people together? These skills, your skills, are powerful tools for community organizing. Follow Miriam’s example and share them with your people. Start by gathering your sisters for a meeting At The Well. For sure, the unstoppable life of Miriam’s well will spring up around you.

Possible Questions For Miriam If You Were Hanging Out Together In the Sauna or Interviewing Her For a Rad Feminist Magazine to Reclaim Her Lost Story:

- What was going on for you when you watched your baby brother float away down the Nile?
- How did you feel when you watched Moses bring the tablets down from Mount Sinai?
- What prompted you to dance as you were standing in fear, watching the Sea of Reeds cave in on the Egyptians?
- What’s your favorite song?
- Do you feel like you were a bit picked on by God?
- What happened in the seven days you were in the wilderness by yourself?
- What does leprosy feel like?
- Do you feel you overstepped with your words? Would you have asked questions differently if you knew about Nonviolent Communication?
- After recovering from leprosy, why did you choose not to sing again?
- How would you describe God’s presence?
- How do you think women are manifesting your spirit in 5777? What are some lessons based on your light and your shadows that you would share with women today?
- Ok, so was it a timbrel or a tambourine?

5. We’re talking about Miriam’s Well...the inspiration for At The Well’s name!

6. Other biblical figures who died by God’s kiss include Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Aaron, an honor reserved for the righteous.

7. Numbers 21, BT Hullin 92a

THE PERILS OF LOOKING GOOD

Some Ugly Truths About Beauty Products

While wandering in the desert, Miriam was punished by God for questioning Moses' authority. She was isolated for seven days as she suffered from leprosy. Skin continues to be a way that women are "punished" by mainstream cosmetics companies, and an area we need to look at closely. The beauty industry has some dirty secrets that we deserve to know about.

Baruch Hashem for Farah Shamolian and Jessica Assaf, "clean" cosmetics advocates who embody everything we love about Miriam. Farah and Jessica leading the way, waking us up from being slaves to the beauty industry by speaking out and taking action. Here are their thoughts:

Is the pursuit of beauty worth more than an unexamined exposure to dangerous chemicals?

All of the cosmetic products out there —phew!

Here's the deal: cosmetics and personal care products used by millions of Americans aren't screened for safety by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as they should be. Major loopholes allow companies to add unlimited toxic and carcinogenic chemicals to beauty products. We all want to attain beauty and, in particular, good skin.

But at what cost to our health?

The word cosmetic can be traced back to the Greek word, *kosmetikos*, which means "skilled in adornment." It also means, "to make for beauty, especially of the complexion, or beautifying." Every human society has used beauty products and remedies to enhance attractiveness. But today's obsession with looking beautiful has myriad consequences. Research has shown that the chemicals added to beauty products may cause extreme health hazards to those who use them. In the female body, chemical exposure can impact the hormonal system and disrupt normal development at doses far lower than previously thought. Genes and chemicals can even work together to cause disease.

The Environmental Working Group (EWG), whose mission is to protect public health and the environment, released the findings of a study regarding the safety of beauty care products. Comparing approximately 10,000 ingredients found in 7,500 different products against lists of known and suspected chemical health hazards, the research revealed that the FDA was falling tragically short of ensuring consumer safety. Many ingredients found in the products from the study are also used in industrial manufacturing processes — to clean industrial equipment, stabilize pesticides, and grease gears. Of the products tested, the worst offenders were those containing the cancer-causing ingredients coal tar, alpha hydroxy acids and beta hydroxy acids and those containing the hormone-disrupting ingredient, phthalate. One of the most widespread used toxins are phthalates, mainly used in hairsprays, deodorants, nail polishes, and perfumes to make them last longer or stay on the skin longer. Phthalates also prevent mascara from running and keep nails from chipping. According to the Breast Cancer Fund, hundreds of animal studies have shown that phthalates can damage the liver, kidneys, lungs and the reproductive system, primarily of male offspring.

Another prevalent additive found in the products was lead, mainly used in lipsticks. More than 66% of the top name brand lipsticks contain detectable levels of lead. Lipsticks containing the highest levels include L'Oreal, Cover Girl, and Christian Dior.

Cosmetic regulation is fundamental for the health and well being of U.S. citizens. Banning cosmetics and bringing awareness about their harmful aspects have become priorities for different governments around the world. For example, the European Union requires cosmetic products placed on the EU market "must not cause damage to human health when applied under normal or reasonably foreseeable conditions of use."

We no longer need to suffer the plague that quieted Miriam; it's time to start valuing women beyond their beauty and beneath their skin. The first step is to produce safe cosmetics that ensure their target market, women, enjoy healthy lives. Under capitalism, those who benefit from consumerism focus all their attention on how to get people to buy more. For the most part, they don't consider consumers' well being. Overall, we measure a society's "well being" by its level of consumption. The cosmetic industry in its entirety reproduces this focus. Ultimately, these factors have led to an emphasis on physical beauty for unhealthy reasons, which in turn has contributed to seriously skewed notions of true beauty.

Continued

The next time you take a shower, wash your hands, brush your teeth, or put on makeup, turn the product around and read the ingredients. Do your research, and question everything. Our connection to the products we use every single day is deeper than we think. Not only do many women end up using the same products as their mothers, but we actually bear the burden of our mothers' and grandmothers' beauty choices. The average woman has 515 synthetic chemicals in her body. Sixty percent of what we put on our skin is absorbed into our bloodstream. The skin is the body's biggest organ. Babies are being born pre-polluted by these chemicals.

But we have the power to directly influence the market through our buying choices and eventually force companies to reformulate. In the meantime, try an organic, food-grade oil like olive oil or sweet almond oil as a makeup remover, oil cleanser, or moisturizer. Slowly transition to safer products. It's time to create new beauty rituals for the future health of our children and grandchildren.

This article laid out some hard truths, we know. Maybe you're feeling a little freaked and powerless after reading. To combat that, check out cosmeticdatabase.org to learn what's inside your cosmetic products. You have all the power to take your health into your hands.

As consumers, we have the right to know what goes into our cosmetics! I know Miriam would be eager to. Learn more about ways to protect yourself from these hazardous hidden chemicals in the Environmental Working Group's Skin Deep database, an online profile for cosmetics and personal care products and their potential hazards and health concerns. cosmeticdatabase.org



BORDERLINE MAMBO

Rita Dove, 1952

As if the lid stayed put on the marmalade.
As if you could get the last sip of champagne
out of the bottom of the fluted glass.
As if we weren't all dying, as if we all weren't
going to die some time, as if we knew for certain
when, or how. As if the baseball scores made sense
to the toddler. As if the dance steps mattered, or there's a point
where they don't. For instance wheelchair. Heart flutter.
Oxygen bottle mounted on the septuagenarian's back
at the state ballroom competitions—that's Manny,
still pumping the mambo with his delicious slip
of an instructor, hip hip hooray. Mambo, for instance,
if done right, gives you a chance to rest: one beat in four.
One chance in four, one chance in ten, a hundred, as if
we could understand what that means. Hooray. Keep
pumping. As if you could keep the lid on a secret
once the symptoms start to make sense. A second
instance, a respite. A third. Always that hope.
If we could just scrape that last little bit
out, if only it wouldn't bottom out
before they can decode the message
sent to the cells. Of course it matters when, even though
(because?) we live in mystery. For instance
Beauty. Love. Honor. As if we didn't like
secrets. Point where it hurts. Of course we'll tell.

*This poem was submitted by Leora Fridman, a writer and educator living in Berkeley, CA.
Find her work at <http://leorafridman.com>.*

RITUAL PURIFICATION

Burn your inner Chometz

In anticipation of Passover's ritual cleansing and rebirth, Jews scour their homes to remove every last crumb of leavened bread (Chometz), donating or burning things that they find. Spiritually, Chometz is associated with elements of the ego or subconscious that keeps us constricted or bound. Part of our inner work during Nissan is to burn off all our psychological Chometz.

MATERIALS

Pens
Paper or notebooks
Ceramic mug or bowl
Matches

Ask everyone to make a list of fears, attitudes, anxieties, or habits that are in some way keeping them hostage.

Put some blank paper in the ceramic vessel and throw in a lit match to start a little fire. When it's burning, invite each woman in your Circle step up to throw in her "little Pharaohs." (You may want to do this outside.)

As you throw your paper into the fire, recite the following:

"This year I am leaving behind [fill in your words] as I walk towards a more free me."

If you are the Nissan facilitator, encourage everyone to check in with their bodies as they purify themselves of their "narrow thoughts." How does it feel to let go of these limiting beliefs? Is there any tightness in arms, shoulders, chest, stomach, or fists? After letting go, how do sensations in the body shift? Be honest about what the body feels: numbness or other "undramatic" sensations are okay.



MEDITATION AND CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Embodying Passover

This activity was created by Rabbi Sarah Tasman and Julie Emden, RYT-500. Sarah is a lifecycle officiant, mikvah guide, Jewish yoga teacher, and a member of the Shechinah Council for At The Well. You can find her at www.rabbisarahtasman.com.

Julie is Director of Embodied Jewish Learning at Jewish LearningWorks in San Francisco. She offers workshops, retreats and a teacher training in Embodied Jewish Wisdom. Contact her at atjemden@jewishlearningworks.org.

WHY PASSOVER YOGA?¹¹

Passover is a time when we recall our ancestors' Exodus from Mitzrayim. At the seder, we speak of the struggle of the slaves, the bondage they lived through and their journey into freedom. The Haggadah enjoins us every year to see ourselves as having been freed from Egypt ourselves. How do we do that? This yoga practice aims to take that question from the intellectual into the emotional and to ground in the physical. This practice invites us to stop and notice where we feel tightness in our bodies and a longing for freedom in our spirits.

Passover requires a lot of preparation: cleaning, cooking, and bringing all your people together. Let this yoga practice be a time to devote to your own body, spirit, and soul as a way to prepare yourself to welcome others. You can follow the instructions below in a solo home practice, or lead your Well Circle in a session for Rosh Chodesh Nissan. You might even incorporate Passover yoga as an embodied activity at your seder.

OPENING MEDITATION *(to be read by the facilitator)*

Find a comfortable seat. Try an easy pose like (sukhasana) or kneel in hero's pose (virasana). Take a few moments to settle in, perhaps seating yourself on the edge of a folded blanket or block. You can also sit in a chair.

Go ahead and let your eyes close or keep a soft gaze downward. Allow your thoughts to turn inward. Feel your sitting bones underneath you. Lengthen your spine as you lift the crown of your head toward the ceiling. Notice if that gives you more space in the belly and the chest. Roll your shoulders up toward your ears and then release them down your back. As you breathe in, let your belly expand. As you exhale, empty your belly completely. For a few minutes, focus on your breath, noticing the subtle sensations in your body.

Stay here with your breath, continuing to inhale and exhale exploring your Neshama, or soul. In Hebrew we have a few

different words for soul and breath. One of those words is ruach, often translated as "spirit" or "wind." In fact, in the Exodus story, the children of Israel are described as being kotzer ruach, having shortness of breath. Check in with your breath and your spirit. How is your ruach? Your breath? How is the internal weather of your heart and mind? Without judgment, simply notice.

Take a moment to see if you notice where in your body you feel constriction, anywhere you encounter that sense of Mitzrayim. Now, see if you can simply breathe into that place.

When you're ready, slowly begin to open your eyes. As you begin to warm up your body, you might take some simple rounding and caving of your spine, or move your body in any way that feels good. These warm ups bring some fluidity to the joints and spine, easing movement.

11. Judaism has no embodied spiritual practice. No asana, jujitsu, karate, tai-chi, capoeira, etc. But, we do have teachings on the relationship between the body and the soul. So, go ahead twist and turn yourself however you want. Just remember, whenever you're brushing your teeth, stuck in traffic, or moving into downward facing dog, to show up as your complete self, which includes your relationship with The Divine, whatever that means to you.

PASSOVER YOGA PRACTICE

OPENING KAVANAH

You Are Sovereign¹²

The foremost theme for this month and the gift of Passover is movement from slavery to freedom, from constriction to expansion, from reacting to the demands of others to acting from a place of internal sovereignty. Please take on these suggested poses (and those from any body-based practice) with this in mind, and keep your own body's unique needs in mind as you practice this yoga.

Upon receiving the Torah at Sinai, the Israelites camped at the base of the mountain as a community. But each person also heard their own unique message and arrived at their own understanding of Torah and the Jewish tradition. When the Israelites received manna in the desert, the amount each wanderer received was according to their specific and individual needs – no more and no less. Remember, you are the authority and you are sovereign over the gorgeous and entirely unique domain that is your body-soul-heart-spirit being, for this practice and always.

THEME 1: MOVING FROM CONSTRICTION TO EXPANSION

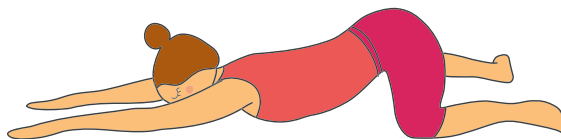
Mitzrayim

When we look at the Hebrew word Mizrayim, we see within it the word tzar, which means “constriction” joined to the word mayim, which means “water.” All of the joints in our bodies are surrounded by water in the form of synovial fluid. As you practice these poses, bring awareness to the fact that the joints (tzar) in our bodies – wrists, elbows, shoulders, hips, knees, and ankles. These enable us to move, but also need mayim. We need softness and fluidity in order to be healthy and strong.

Hip Openers



Cradle the Baby



Frog Pose



Embryo Pose

¹² Kavanah is Hebrew for “intention”

THEME 2: SOFTENING THE HEART

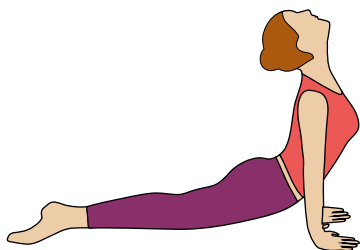
“And Pharaoh hardened his heart...” - Exodus 8:28

As Pharaoh witnessed and experienced the Ten Plagues, we hear over and over that his “heart is hardened.” The language in the text indicates that his obstinacy became habitual. Releasing habitual practices that no longer serve is another theme of Nissan.

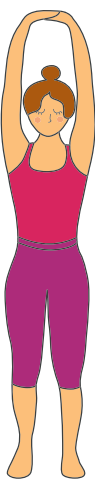
Facing the burning bush, Moses is told to “take off his shoes” (Exodus 3:5). But the Hebrew can also be translated as “unlock

your habits.” Day to day, as we sit and move with postures of leaning over computers and steering wheels, we create a habitual shape in the body that has our shoulders rolling forward and chest collapsing, creating a “closing of the heart.” Heart-opening poses support us in opening our hearts and shoulders, and also bring awareness to the spaces behind our hearts. They provide a counter to the habitual way we move through the world.

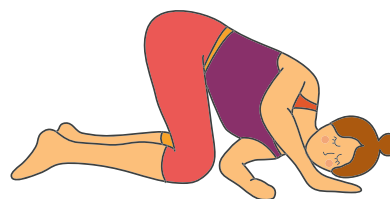
Heart Openers



Upward Dog



Upward Hands Mountain



Thread The Needle

THEME 3: STEPPING INTO THE SEA ON DRY LAND

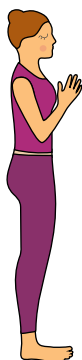
And the Israelites entered the sea on dry land" Exodus 14:29

It's fascinating to think that the sea parted for the Israelites. The text says the Israelites stepped onto dry land b'toch, "inside of," the sea. How could the land be dry if the sea had just parted? Have you ever tried to walk on wet sand just after the waves receded? It's not easy. Yet this is our task in Nissan. How can we find dry land among turbulent waters?

How can we maintain stability and connection in times of change and upheaval? How can we stay upright and connected to what's solid during intense change?

These standing poses can help us feel our own feet solidly rooted. They allow us feel our legs rising up from that foundation as a source of strength and support as we move through the ever-changing world and reach up for our dreams.

Standing Poses



Mountain/Mt Sinai Pose (Tadasana)



Warrior 1 (Virabhadrasana)



Side Angle - Utthita Parsvakonasana

CLOSING KAVANNAH *(to be read by the facilitator)*

Breathe. Let the body and mind settle. Allow your body to begin the powerful work of healing itself by simply allowing yourself to be.

Consider what we can accomplish during this month and during our Passover experiences that will help us, our communities, and the world walk towards symbolic Jerusalem, towards a place that feels like home. The Haggadah reminds us that once we were slaves, but now we are free to move about at our own will. How are you – how are we – moving towards freedom?

The Haggadah also reminds us that not all people are free. We must free ourselves to help others to do that same. We must begin to heal ourselves and then help others heal.

May we all find peace, joy, and movement this Passover. And may we send our blessings to all who are need of freedom and healing.

RECIPE

Roasted Winter Squash with Brown Butter and Crispy Sage

Submitted by Nitza Bernard who has made her home in Portland, where she spends most of her time working the soil and farming flowers, vegetables, and herbs. She feels much gratitude for her vibrant Well Circle and their meeting every new moon.

As a vegetable farmer, I eat with the seasons and rely on the abundance of whatever's being harvested. At this particular moment with spring slowly warming the Pacific Northwest soil, I find myself face to face with a kitchen cupboard overly abundant with this past season's winter squash. Did I mention the squash is overly abundant? This ripe dilemma is perfect for a Passover meal where we speak of leaving Mitzrayim in search of freedom, and renew our commitments to personal, spiritual, and political liberation. Out with the old, in with the new, right?

This Passover, I'll feed my friends and family roasted winter squash with browned sage butter to nourish their bodies and empty my kitchen of a winter gone by! I've found this recipe is best with Sibley squash, a gorgeous oblong shaped heirloom variety that smells like cantaloupe when fresh and tastes like sweet butter when roasted. However, any winter squash (including acorn or butternut) will do.

Ingredients

1 Sibley squash	12 fresh sage Leaves
1 tablespoon olive oil	Salt and freshly ground pepper
4 tablespoons unsalted butter	

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.
2. Cut the squash in half through the stem and core. Scoop out the seeds and stringy bits using a spoon. Turn the squash cut-side-down and slice into 1/2-inch-thick pieces.
3. Rub the squash slices with the olive oil and sprinkle with salt.
4. Arrange the slices in a single layer on a baking sheet or roasting pan and roast for 30-45 minutes until golden brown and fork tender. The sweet smell of roasting is a good indicator of doneness!
5. As you wait for the squash, add the butter into a pan over medium low heat. Slowly melt and brown the butter until it turns a deep golden color. Watch carefully and stir often to keep it from scorching.
6. Roughly chop the sage leaves and add them to the butter and cook until crispy, about two minutes.
7. Arrange the roasted squash slices onto a plate or platter. Drizzle with the brown butter and crispy sage.
8. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
9. Savor that first bite.



SARAH'S INTENTION

A little window into why I share a personal intention: I hope that you're using this material within your Well Circle. I hope that you find spaces to be seen and heard, and that you take time to see others. I cannot, however, expect you all to be truly vulnerable unless I first show my vulnerability. This is why every month I open myself up and pour a little piece of my heart out to you. Thank you for seeing me.

"Freedom! Freedom! I can't move
Freedom, cut me loose!
Freedom! Freedom! Where are you?
Cause I need freedom too!
I break chains all by myself
Won't let me freedom rot in hell."
- Beyoncé, "Freedom"

These are the inspirational words of a Queen. She's calling her people together around a shared vision of liberation. Beyoncé is singing to all black women in America, the ones who have always been at the forefront of civil rights, yet whose voices have been, and are continuously, pushed aside. Although I'm not a black woman, just a Sarah with the curly hair, Beyoncé's words inspire me too. "Freedom" is my personal theme song this Nissan.

The DNA passed to me from my ancestors is the freest it has ever been. No Sarah I'm named for has experienced as much religious freedom as I have in my life. No Sarah I'm named for was born into as much privilege, with as much access to education. No Sarah in my line has ever had as much opportunity as I've been given.

So what does this mean to me? (The "wicked" child asks on Passover)

As the full moon of Nissan rolls around and I commit myself to move into my own expansiveness, I'm tasked with answering this question. The holiday of Passover, a tool, a technology, and a brilliant way to push me each year to grow, helps me remember where I came from, and ensures I never take my

freedom for granted. This Nissan, it's my responsibility to step up and continue on with tradition, answering the wicked child's question.

Trust that I'm over here doing my work. I'm looking at my personal life, my relationship to the land, my body, my speech and mode of expression, and the ways I spend my days to make sure I use my one life as Divinely as possible. For sure this is a place I need to grow, as my own limiting beliefs about myself hold me back all the time from living my life to the fullest. Those thoughts inside my head can be a real drag.

From a global viewpoint, trust that I'm asking these same questions within the context of my identity as an American. I'm calling on my Jewish sisters to step up and ask themselves a version of this same question too. What does liberation mean to us? We don't need to dig far to see we're being called now to step up. To lead like Miriam, to speak up, to find some joy and water-like flow in the process, to offer ourselves as allies to others who are not yet as free (our black sisters, to start), and to make sure our own people are not silenced or threatened.

Once again, Beyoncé says it best, this time at the end of the chorus to "Freedom":

"Hey, Ima keep runnin, cause a winner don't quit on [herself]."

In the context of my life, and during this month of Nissan, I'm committing to keep running too. To push my inheritance forward. Although my DNA is the freest it has ever been, I still have so much more to fight for. I won't let my freedom be in vain. My freedom is inherently linked to others', and it's clear to me I have more work to do since injustice is so clearly in our faces these days.

G-d willing, the person who will one day be named for me, Sarah, will have more freedoms than I do now because her ancestors worked like crazy to make it so.

The following resources were created by women on whose shoulders we stand. We thank them for their work:

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