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Shema

Hear all you who wrestle with life's meaning: that which is sovereign in the universe, unruled by king or corporation, the breath of life in all things, the web of reciprocity, this is our one and only guide.

Evening Prayer

Blessed are the tides of living that draw my body to rest and my soul to dreaming.

Let me lay the work of the world in the open hands of those still awake to the west of me, place in their palms the sickle and the spade, the needle and the shuttle, the pen and the ladle, the cell phone and the keyboard. Let me lie down in peace, as the mending of life rolls west and westward, hand to hand, village to village, through city after city, across fields and forests, deserts and oceans, moving upstream, against the planetary spin, for the dance of liberation never ceases, but keeps circling the world.

As I lie down, others rise up in a wave of intention and effort that moves in the wake of the sun, along the paths of daylight. So let my sleep be cradled in trust that others will carry what must be carried. Let my rest be unbroken by troubling thoughts or illusions of separation. Let me go down into sleep as into the arms of a beloved.

And let me rise in peace. Let me awaken to the light of a new day, and receive the work for which I was born back into my hands from those to the east of me, transformed by the many who have hammered and stitched and stirred while I slept, and whether the sun shines unveiled or is swathed in cloud, oh, radiant unruly life-force of the universe, may I behold the splendor of your indwelling light, which illuminates the world.

Asher Yatzar: Bless Our Bodies

Blessed is the evolutionary dance of life, which formed the human body in perfect wisdom, made cerebellum and cortex, made the many branching nerves, the bones and their marrows, the muscles and ligaments, the red cells and the white, the myriad hormones singing their

biochemical song of praise, made eyes and ears, capillaries and fingernails, the magnificent heart with its chambers, all the organs and passages, cavities and openings. Blessed is natural selection and the infinite diversity of our shapes and colors, our forms and functions, and blessed is the ability to adapt, for it is well known and obvious that each one of us is made as we should be, that even though openings close, and closures open, even though limbs grow wildly and genes mutate, even though hearts dance to different drummers, lungs labor, bones bend and break, and biochemical signals go awry, even though we age and will someday die, we are infinitely splendid as we are. Blessed are you, life force of the universe, that has made us so varied and resilient.

In Praise of Guidance

Praise be to the life force that grew us from seed, from single cells floating in brine, and through all the miracles of evolution made us human beings, created to live together, created to share food and water, created to carry each other's babies, created to tend and shelter each other. We praise the commandments of our true natures, to honor each other, to honor the earth and all that lives, to seek justice as plants seek the sun. We honor the gift of breath by living this day according to the deep commands of our creation, our original instructions.

V'ahavta

Say these words when you lie down and when you rise up,
when you go out and when you return. In times of mourning
and in times of joy. Inscribe them on your doorposts,
embroider them on your garments, tattoo them on your shoulders,
teach them to your children, your neighbors, your enemies,
recite them in your sleep, here in the cruel shadow of empire:
Another world is possible.

Thus spoke the prophet Roque Dalton:
*All together they have more death than we,
but all together, we have more life than they.*
There is more bloody death in their hands
than we could ever wield, unless
we lay down our souls to become them,
and then we will lose everything. So instead,

imagine winning. This is your sacred task.
This is your power. Imagine
every detail of winning, the exact smell of the summer streets
in which no one has been shot, the muscles you have never
unclenched from worry, gone soft as newborn skin,
the sparkling taste of food when we know
that no one on earth is hungry, that the beggars are fed,
that the old man under the bridge and the woman
wrapping herself in thin sheets in the back seat of a car,

and the children who suck on stones,
nest under a flock of roofs that keep multiplying their shelter.
Lean with all your being towards that day
when the poor of the world shake down a rain of good fortune
out of the heavy clouds, and justice rolls down like waters.

Defend the world in which we win as if it were your child.
It is your child.
Defend it as if it were your lover.
It is your lover.

When you inhale and when you exhale
breathe the possibility of another world
into the 37.2 trillion cells of your body
until it shines with hope.
Then imagine more.

Imagine rape is unimaginable. Imagine war is a scarcely credible rumor
That the crimes of our age, the grotesque inhumanities of greed,
the sheer and astounding shamelessness of it, the vast fortunes
made by stealing lives, the horrible normalcy it came to have,
is unimaginable to our heirs, the generations of the free.

Don't waver. Don't let despair sink its sharp teeth
Into the throat with which you sing. Escalate your dreams.
Make them burn so fiercely that you can follow them down
any dark alleyway of history and not lose your way.
Make them burn clear as a starry drinking gourd
Over the grim fog of exhaustion, and keep walking.

Hold hands. Share water. Keep imagining.
So that we, and the children of our children's children
may live

Do Not Rise

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
where your prayers spread slowly
by aquifer and mycelium,
into the common ground,
or do not spread,
and enrich the soil of
exactly where you are,
then pray.

Psalm 23

If I were a sheep, this earth would shepherd me
and I should not want.

If I were a skylark the sky would lift me high
and I should not fall.

I lie down in the greenest of pastures
cradled in the scent of growing leaves.

I am held in the tumult of the rapids
until I come to still waters

for the true spirit that is in me

is met

in the wild generosity

of the living, untamed world.

It meets me in your smiling eyes,

and in your just rage.

When my soul grows weary I am restored

as sap rising in spring restores the trees,
because we are together,
and because I am made of spirit and earth
and so are you, and the sheep, the lark, the tree, the grass
I am called, tugged, by our entangled rootings
back onto the paths of righteousness.

Even when I am walking in those valleys
that are shadowed by death
without horizon or compass
where I feel most alone and wrong and confused
I will fear no harm. Because you are with me,
there is a rod like a shaft of light.
There is a staff like the shoulder of a friend.
There is an arrow that points the way.

Even when I am surrounded by ill intent,
when danger glints in the shadows
and hate snarls and snaps at my heels,
there is a feast of joy spread before me.
I am anointed as if with sacred oils.
I am veiled in the grace
of being alive, here, now, myself,
with you. My cup is never empty.
It brims over and waters the gardens
of the troubled world.

For there is goodness and mercy enough
for everyone, for all of the days of our lives,
and it is in our hands to plant the seeds of it
in every place on earth, and even among the stars,
so we may dwell in the house of spirit forever.

RACIAL JUSTICE INVOCATION

In the heart of this congregation, we have planted the seeds of racial justice, a handful of grains in the earth of our belief, a place to tell untold stories, a place to draw maps of long journeys, a place to unveil our heartbreaks and look our ignorances in the face. The seeds are only beginnings, possibilities that must be watered, weeded, fed. It means we have to haul buckets, spread manure, and pull up the wickedly thorned thistles of our defenses. It means getting down and dirty. This racial justice initiative is a not yet sprouted garden of unequaled beauty germinating among us, medicinal, nourishing, fragrant, and the seeds begin in conversation, in a cluster of six bare earth plots called affinity groups. There are trowels enough to go around, and each one of you has a place to sit cross-legged on the ground and begin.

Or to change the poem, in the heart of this congregation there is a new song that we can all dance to, and this is its choreography.

We who have hovered at the edges, with our bundles of silence, our cracked rage, our suitcases full of dispossession, our not rocking the boat for fear of drowning, our letting our white cousins massacre our names, our letting our white cousins ask if we are the help, aching to be known, aching to speak our Jewishness in accents you have never heard before, we who are called indigenous, called Black and of color, we Jews beyond the Ashkenazi pale, will step, hobble, roll into the center, unassimilated, fiercely lovely in our unedited truths, bringing all our ancestors speaking all their languages into this room, saying we are not confusing, singing we Jews are a garment of a thousand threads, a coat of 20 million colors, for the heart of the Jewish world lives equally in every Jew, and no one is exotic, and every one of us is Jewish enough, and however we travel through the world is a Jewish path.

We who have held the center, raised the roof beams, wrestled old words into new melodies, carried our treasured scraps of Yiddishkeit next to our hearts, carried our shtetls, our Europe, our ship's passenger lists, our landings in the goldeneh medina, we who walked unknowing into the occupation of other people's worlds, walked unknowing into whiteness that coated us bit by bit like layers of shellac, deadening our senses, we who are etched with the pain of separation from all our others, we settlers hungry for unsettling, we will step hobble, roll outward to the rim of the circle and hold space for our kin, will fast from speaking first, will fast

from being the ones who know, will feast on listening, will let the varnish crack and peel, saying we will not be confused, singing the heart of the Jewish world lives equally in every Jew, and no one is the norm, and every one of us is a real Jew, and traveling together through the world is our Jewish path. And stepping in and stepping out we will weave a dance of justice right here in this room.

There are dance shoes enough to go around, and each one of you has a place to tap your feet, warm up your muscles and move, a place called affinity group. Indigenous people, we have a place. Black people and People of Color, we have a place. Mizrahim and Sephardim we have a place. People with white privilege, we have a place. White parents of children of color, we have a place. Families of color including white co-parents, we have a place. One two three, one two three, dance!

Made Of

We are made of the mineral dust of stars and every molecule of us burns with the memory of vastness and splendor. We are living constellations, minute fiery suns, each of us with our orbiting miraculous worlds, our silent moons, all born from the hunger of atoms to embrace. Our light reaches beyond us, through the beautiful dark, through the universe without end. Everything that exists, has existed, will ever exist in all the unimaginable folded flower of time is holy, and there is nothing ever and anywhere that is not God.

We are made of earth, small seeds, dreams of photosynthesis, curled inside brown husks, made to crack painfully from our shells, to push heavy soil aside, to move, stubborn and fragile toward our destinies, into sun and rain. To break and grow green, break and flower, to be trees of life, and fall broken onto the ground becoming rich humus full green unbroken dreams. Everything that is, we turn into ourselves and give back as soil. Give back as oxygen. What we breathe is each other. Nothing that lives is alone.

We are made of water: salty rivers run in our veins, lymph ebbs and swells, saliva and tears leak into the air and dry. We are always changing: wide seas into clouds, rain into puddles, rivers into muddy fields that run along ditches into the sea. We flow, freeze, boil, rise, disperse, are hurled this way and that. We declare that we are the blue edge of glaciers, the great ocean swell, stagnant teeming ponds, months long tropical downpours, the delicate tracery of frost on a dry leaf, rusty drip of a faucet. We are the shape of what's happened to us. We are caught up in doing, and whirl through our lives, suffering, joyful, filled with doubt. And yet we return to ourselves again and again, to the Self that is all there is. We are made of water, called to find our true level by that great force of love we call gravity. We are made to trust our destination. We are not lost.

Blessing for Zoom Spaces

Blessed are you Shekhina, who dwells everywhere and in no one place, for teaching us the gift of imminence. We gather in time but not space and like mycelium our essence is connection.

This tent we enter is made from the songs of lightning storms and stars that move at the speed of light, a billion tiny waves reaching our shores each second. If there is a holy of holies in each of us, then this act of gathering, the synchronicity of breath, weaves a temple around them, a spiderweb of spiderwebs, a galaxy of galaxies, a chrysalis of transformation whose silk is spun from intention and love. Like the fine-spun threads that spiders pull from their own flesh, these filaments are supple as air and strong as steel. We have no need for stone.

Though we have crafted fine buildings, warm and lovely rooms, and been blessed by the touch of each other's hands, we are not bound by roof beams and paving stones, not even by the minyan of our bodies.

Blessed are you, Shekhina, breath of life, unbounded by geography, through whom we offer each other the sanctuaries of our hearts, the shared and inextinguishable light of our minds. How beautiful are the tents of our people. Come triumphs and troubles, across time and space, in quarantine and in the regathering time beyond, we will dwell in your house forever.

Slichah for a Shmita Year

let them go like birds released from cages
let them go like fruit rinds giving themselves to the soil
let them go like pebbles rolling away underfoot on a steep trail
let them go like crumbs scattered for pigeons
let them go like sweat dripping from our brows

If we have messed up, let it go into the great compost heap
and become the nutrients for new seeds, intentions, blessings
pink blossomed, azure, ripe with tender food.
If others have hurt us, let clean water irrigate the wounds
and let the runoff water effortless gardens
that spring up between the furrows of sleeping fields
between the cracks of unswept sidewalks,
take over the untended lawns.

Let grudges crumble to dust.
Let shame dissolve into loam.
Let each harsh word we hurl at ourselves;
be turned into petals before they land.
Let everything, all of it, be recycled.
Let the trash become jewels we string into necklaces
and drape around each other's necks.

Let us enter the year of fallows

burdenless. loose-limbed,
lie down on the dark earth,
do nothing,
let tiny rootlets emerge from our fingers
let ourselves be covered with moss
and instead of doing
become the sapling students of the elder trees, and
be ourselves into the new year
and *be* ourselves toward the new world that waits
like an autumn bulb packed with unimagined colors
ready to wake and bloom
just under the skin of what is.

Sukkot in Chicago

EAST

This is Red Cedar, tree of dawn, whose smoke is a cleansing incense, whose scented boughs fill the forest with freshness. And this is the place of air.

We thank all the beings that exhale the air we inhale, the great rainforests, lungs of the world, the shimmering plankton, turning sunlight and seawater into oxygen. We thank the wind that brings us rain, and dust, and seed, and the migrating birds.

We give thanks for the voice of Creator in the wind, the breath of God on the waters, ruah chai, the breath of life.

We live in a time in which the sky itself is in danger, ripped apart by the gasses of industry, the smoke of burning trees, the wakes of jet engines. When the heating atmosphere burns up the clouds and the sweet wind is choked with fumes. When heating oceans spawn immense, powerful storms that tear our worlds apart.

So we will become sky protectors, wind guardians, defenders of everything that makes air. We will interrupt the business as usual of pollution, and block the banks from their profits. We will befriend the wind and let it turn our mills and fill our sails. We will join with all the peoples of the earth, and stop the engines of extraction for the sake of breath.

SOUTH

This is persimmon, pechamin, flame colored fruit of autumn, shaped like the human heart, holding the place of fire.

We give thanks for the fire of the sun that gives life to all things.

We give thanks for the sacred fires of memory that hold our stories.

We give thanks for the gift of fire that cooks our food, warms our bodies, keeps us safe, and makes a gathering place. We give thanks for the double candle flame that gathers us to prayer, and the fire of our own hearts.

We say in the words of poet Adrienne Rich
that we are *with the rowboat ice-fast on the shore*
in the last red light of the year
that knows what it is, that knows it's neither
ice nor mud nor winter light
but wood, with a gift for burning.

We live in a time when fire rages uncontrolled across the world, ignited by greed: cattle ranchers and soy planters setting fire to the Amazon. Wildfires sparked by unmaintained cables choking California, Oregon and Washington in smoke. Fires searing through the rainforests of West Africa, and the Siberian taiga. When colonizers try to desecrate the sacred volcano of Mauna Kea, looking at the distant fire of the stars and ignoring the sacred fires around them on the earth.

We who are fire keepers will tend the fires of our people and pass its embers from hand to hand. We children of the burning bush that is never consumed, will keep the flame of spirit alive in us. We will let the sun heat our houses and light our nights. We will use energy wisely, and tend the land with fire, to make ash that feeds the soil, to clear away underbrush. We will interrupt the burning of our ancient ancestors to fuel the endless hunger for more. We will feed the sparks of courage within and between us, and join with all the people of the world, in a blaze of hope and purpose, restore our creative fire and ignite a global culture of reciprocity and generosity as the beating heart of human life on earth.

WEST

This is Willow, tree of the water's edge, whose leaves flow like streams, whose wands are the bones of basketry and longhouses, and this is the place of water. Here by the vast lakes that hold one of every five drops of fresh water in the world.

We give thanks for the rain that falls to earth and fills the rivers and lakes, that makes the corn rise, the fruit swell, the tight bud open into bloom. We give thanks for the quenching of thirst, for washing our bodies clean, for the rivers that move through our flesh. We give thanks for great blue glaciers and tropical downpours, for thundering cascades and delicate dew. We praise the living being we call water, that flows in and out of red veins and green, making a tracery of drops spangling the globe, this wet planet of our birth, this single organism we are. We are made of water's dance.

There is no good English for Mni Wichoni because English has turned a living being always in motion into an object, a noun, but in Hebrew we say mayyim hayim, the living waters.

And yet everywhere water is in danger. Huge dams choke the flow of rivers to make more power for the powerful. Industrial poisons seep into aquifers, gush into the Gulf, spill out of pipelines, spread across pools in the Ecuadorian Amazon, corrode the pipes that now carry

brown sludge to the faucets of Flint. As the world heats, green places go dry, and oceans rise up to drown island nations. Rivers overflow their banks and sweep our homes away. Storm surges wash us into the sea.

Guakía guakiáchi ni. We will love and protect the waters. We will lift up the charter of the Great Lakes Commons, stop pipelines and hydroelectric dams, reforest the naked slopes where roots hold water and branches draw the torrent down. We will get in the way of pillage with these bodies filled with rain. We will join with all the people of the earth to make a new deal that is both green and red, and we will pray for the drops to keep falling.

Send to us the angel Af-Bri, trailing showers to soften the dry face of the wasteland when it is hard as rock, to soothe our spirits and bring us back to life. You who make the wind blow and the rainstorms descend, who kindled the sun and moon and stars, and formed the earth on which we live, grant us water as a blessing and not a curse, for life and not for death, for abundance without thirst, amen.

NORTH

This is maple, shaped like our hands, sweetness in its veins, just beneath the skin, ablaze with colors as varied as the earth itself, and this is the place of earth, soil, rock, clay.

We give thanks to water, fire and ice for grinding rock into dirt. We give thanks to all the creatures who dying, made soil, and to the soil, full of life, erupting into leaf and blade. We give thanks to the ancestors who made the black earth of the Amazon by burying compost and charcoal for thousands of years. We give thanks to our mother who feeds us from her body.

We say the earth is not real estate. The earth is alive. We say the earth has no borders or property lines. The earth is alive.

The Earth holds our ancient dead, and deep under our feet, the graves of our ancestors' ancestors, ancient phytoplankton pressed and simmered over eons into paleo-blackstrap, fossilized sunlight, the thing we call petroleum.

We will not allow the desecration of the dead in the name of money. We will turn our world toward the sun and wind. We will not allow this earth to become a burnt offering to the gods of wealth.

We say the earth is hurting. Eroded hills, dust on the wind, drought turning the fertile ground to cracked and barren wastes. Soil washing into sea, acres disappearing from the gulf coast lands of the Houma, a football field an hour. Islands around the world swallowed up by rising seas and melting ice caps. Soil weakened and leached of nourishment, so it no longer grows crops, and farmers must walk a thousand miles to a border lined with cages trying to find food.

We say we will feed the farmers *and* the soil, open the cages, push back the bulldozers and replant the slopes. We say the earth is the mother of all of us, and no one has the right to possess her. We say we will heal the earth and defend her. We say we will sink our roots into the ground and we shall not be moved. We say the earth is not for sale.

With Nicolás Guillén we say:

Can you sell me the earth, the deep night
of roots, dinosaur teeth and the scattered lime
of distant skeletons?

Can you sell me long buried jungles, dead birds,
fishes of stone, volcanic sulfur, a thousand
million years rising in a spiral? Puedes
Venderme tierra, can you
sell me land, can you?

The earth that is yours is mine.
All of our feet walk it.
Nobody owns it, no-one.

Rivers of Grief/Tents of Kinship

By all the rivers of our many exiles, we have sat down and wept, as we remembered the lands
of our ancestors, the lands that were stolen from us, the places we were stolen and driven
from.

We wept as we remembered birdsong in the meadows of Andalucía and moonrise over
Baghdad, the cold winds of autumn off the steppes and argan trees in the valley of the River
Draa, ripening pomegranates of Jerusalem, apple orchards blossoming in Ukraine.

We wept as we remembered the waterfalls of Yukiyú, the scent of guavas and seawater,
towering trunks of ausubo, guayacán, capá. We wept as we remembered the wild rice beds of
the north, the singing of loons, all the forests and river banks of the Anishinaabe, the
windswept beauty of Lakota grasslands, ribbons of light over ancient homelands in the deep
north, the long ago eastern woodlands of maple and beech, left behind as our peoples were
pushed westward by settlers from across the sea. We wept, remembering the volcanoes and
lakes of the K'iché and Kaqchikel, the rivers and islands of Lenca and Miskito, the desert springs
of the Nahua.

We wept, remembering rainforests and savannas, the red rice marshes of Mali and the tulip
trees of Ghana, the lapping of waves in the mangroves where the Niger meets the sea.

We sat on the ground and wept our grief, and we hung our flutes and drums and the songs of
our hearts upon the willows, for those who carried us away into captivity, those who drove us
at sword point and gunpoint from the lands that our people knew and loved, those who stole
our children and silenced our languages, those who laid waste to the earth, demanded of us
that we sing and dance for them, that we entertain them, that we wear costumes, that we work
the comedy circuit telling jokes that ridiculed our families, that we turn the stories of our

peoples into gift shop souvenirs and mascots for their sports teams, that we get over it, that we assimilate or die, that we be cheerful.

But how can we sing creators' songs when our roots have been torn from the ground that made us, our languages smothered, our children taken away to be raised by our captors in a world of punishment? We begin without words, to sing our grief together.

We are windblown seeds, uprooted a thousand times and blown across oceans to this place. We are from seven days walk north along the lake shore, pushed here by glaciers of greed. We are from the islands south and east of here, brought on wings of storm, and if we all carry grief in the palm of one hand, in the other we hold tight to joy, for we are still here, breathing the air, alive in spite of everything, fulfilling our ancestors' dreams.

No matter how many times we've had to leave our homes, no matter how many burning villages are at our backs, we carry creator's song within us, everywhere we go, praising the beauty of this flowering earth and all its peoples, and rooting ourselves in kinship with each other and all living things. This is the shelter we weave with our hands working together. Our friendships are our beautiful tents, and for this hour, we have pitched them here.

Ma tovu: How beautiful and good are the tents of our peoples.

Ma tovu ohalecha Anishinaabe, mishkenatecha Ysrael.

Ma tovu ohalayech Potawatomi, mishkenatayich Mizrahim.

Ma tovu ohalecha Romanyoti, Mishkenatecha Hochaank

Ma tovu ohalayech Arawaka, mishkenatayech yosh vey teyvel

Passover in New Orleans

FOUR ANCESTORS

Every living thing resists harm. Every living thing fights for its life. Who doesn't long for safety, peace, to be free? But history pounds on us, shapes us, makes the roads we take and the ones we cannot see. Here are four ancestors, four ways to go. Each with their lessons and warnings, each with their word to say, each with a piece of the map to freedom, each one taking us part of the way.

The Ancestor Who Hides

I am the one who bides my time, who hid my face, who changed my name, who put the mezuzah inside the madonna, the orisha in the saint, the archives of the ghetto in a milk can underground. I passed on the knowledge of our history in secret, only lit candles behind shuttered windows, camouflaged my meaning in a layered song, whispered forbidden languages at night, and I saved myself and others through deceit. I lived in a closet, in a cellar, went underground, wore a disguise, changed my accent, my clothes, my food, the way I walked, became someone else each time I left my house. For centuries this is how I survived, keeping only the smallest flame of us alive. I watched and listened, kept a record, carried messages, was a model prisoner, always lowered my eyes, and worked in secret for the common good. I know

how to speak in code, to recognize the others, to make a sign, to infiltrate, to pass as someone else, to save what matters most and leave the rest behind. I choose to live and fight another day, live til I have a chance to get away, carry the seeds of other times within, and wear my secret like another skin. I am alive, but after so long in hiding, who do I know, and who in world knows me? When it's time to open the doors and windows wide, what if I can't find the key? My strength is to reckon up the odds, avoid the battles that I know I'll lose, and even though I count the heavy cost, because we live, not everything is lost.

The Ancestor Who Runs

I am the ancestor who runs, who carries the magic of escape, who knows the borders of captivity, each link of chain, each post. Who stows away, slips under barbed wire, swims the river, disappears into untilled land. I jump the train, head for the hills, go into the swamps, follow the drinking gourd, forge the papers, bribe a guard, dig a tunnel, pay a smuggler, go into exile, carry my life in my pocket, eat where I can. My map is a song, a quilt, a riddle, a name someone said to memorize and not write down. Somebody told me there's a safer place than here, so I navigate by possibility and fear. My strength is to risk my life for something better, to take a chance and leave the devil I know, to break the line, to run for the woods, to cut the rope, no more heigh ho heigh ho and off to work I go. But when I run, who do I leave behind? Who else's lives do I risk? And when I arrive, whose homes lie underfoot, what if my coming makes new refugees? Or do I keep running, never taking root, my promised land just over the horizon, round the bend? I ask you to think outside the box, beyond the borders of your lives. To leave the familiar and take a chance on something new. What if the dream that seems impossible is true?

The Ancestor Who Builds

I am the ancestor who takes root right where I am. I plant food in empty lots, and organize to stop the local dam, the prison over the hill, the incinerator upwind, the neighborhood gentrification plan. Day after day I plant and hoe and weed, fighting to build just a piece of what we need. Each time we win an inch, somebody lives, somebody gets the strength to take the next step and the next. The decent housing we can afford can shelter the dream of something more. I open freedom schools in storefronts, take over city councils, sink a well, start language classes so children will know their elders, make worker coops in the factories and fields, send books and water filters, tents and solar lights. I am a cup of water in a dry land. I am a lantern in the night. I build a little piece of freedom, but is it just for those whose names I know? I rig a shelter from the storm, but am I settling for staying dry, while wind and water rage and others drown? Did I make a country out of other people's pain, learn to accept that their loss was my gain? Working night and day for what seems practical but small, will I forget to plant the seeds of a bigger liberation for us all? Did I cut down the leaves and stems of injustice and leave the root intact? My strength is making hope concrete, making it real, inspiration we can see and touch and feel. The lesson of my junkyard garden plot of food and flowers: each time you win an inch, reach for a mile. Hope builds on hope, and acting powerful builds power. But never settle for a little patch of sun. Push back the shadows til it shines on everyone.

The Ancestor Who Confronts

I am arise you prisoners of starvation, I am the walkout, the strike, the plantation house in flames, the raid on the settler town, the wheelchairs chained to fences, the ones who link arms and won't be moved, the ones who sit down, occupy, block roads, say no. I am the uprising, the overthrow, the revolution in the streets and in the hills. I go face to face, hand to hand, toe to toe. I shout from the rooftops, I hold the line, I make demands. Right here, right now is where I make my stand. Safety will only come when we have won, torn down the palaces, and captured all the guns. If we win, there will be nothing to run away from. If we lose, there will be nowhere on earth to run. My strength is to push back, to break down walls and break the tyrant's rule, to mobilize and fill the streets, to sue them for our future, to beat the drums, to make their everyday impossible, to disrupt, to tell the truth they want to hide, to bring the consequences home. But sometimes I hurl myself right at the wall and break my bones. Sometimes I burn out like a torch. Sometimes I'm hoarse from shouting, and can no longer sing. Sometimes I forget that fighting isn't everything.

SONG OF THE NARROW PLACE

Once I built a warehouse, to store the grain
and keep the hungry in line
Once I built a warehouse, all locked and chained
but none of the grain was mine.

Once I built a pyramid up to the sun
Of brick and mortar and lime.
that cast its shadow on everyone
for a very long, long time.

When Pharaohs send their armies in
they seize the land,
they take our children away.
We're deep in struggles, can't seem to win
working double for half the pay.

Sometimes I at night I dream that we all have enough
of food and shelter and ease,
though times are hard and the living is rough,
sometimes I dream we're free.

RED SEA

This is the place where the way is blocked, the end of the road, the edge of the land where we've been making do, making it through, just getting by from day to day. Here's where we

decide: do we lie down, give up, ask nothing more than to deaden pain, or is this where patience runs out and resignation goes up in flames.

This tumultuous sea is where we choose to act, step off the land, right into the tide, sick and tired of being sick and tired, determined now to reach the other side.

This is when we threw down our tools and walked off the job, walked out of school, voted to strike, sat down in the road, when we spoke the forbidden language at the top of our lungs. This is the moment of enough is enough.

When one child too many was gunned down for breathing.
When crowds marched to the border, demanding return.
When the landlord raised the rent again, and we wouldn't pay.
When the union bosses said accommodate,
but young Clara Lemlich climbed up on a table
yelling strike now, because we will not wait.
When we walked to work in Montgomery.
When we took our boats to Alcatraz.
When we said not in my name, no more.
When we marched against the Viet Nam War.
When children walked out of classrooms in Soweto, in Managua,
last month in their millions all around the world.
When we lost our patience. When our outrage was bigger than our fear.
When we said boycott, sanction, divest. When we said Sí Se Puede. When we said water is life,
we will defend it. When we said Black. Lives. Matter.

At first we'll walk through the muck, hands clasped in a long chain of travelers, leaving the old life behind, everything we learned to live with, put up with, dying of it day by day, the mud of it dragging at our shoes. But as we walk into the water and keep walking deeper and deeper, even though the waves slap at our faces, we'll know this is how it happens. This is how the sea parts, the road opens, this is how things change.

So what is the edge you're standing at? Are you ready to wade into this water now and part this sea? What do you leave behind you, what are ready to push through, what will you not take anymore, what is your destination on the other shore?

WANDERING

When we came to the desert, after all the singing and dancing, we looked around and saw a dry land to the edge of the sky and no roads. We were tired, our feet were blistered, and we carried generations of trauma in our muscles and our bones. We sat in the sand and tried to draw a map of our safety, but the wind blew it away.

We knew we were not alone there but we didn't believe it. Other groups of people passed in the distance, looking for who knows what. It wasn't our business. We had our own problems to solve. We watched them warily. We didn't ask.

We said first things first, pitch the tents, build fires, draw water from Miriam's wandering well. This is the circle of what we can afford to care about. After all, the manna won't last forever, and we were chosen to receive it. We avoided those other tents, the glow of their fires in the dusk. The freedom we were promised was for us, the tribe, the nation, our relatives, the ones whose names we could pronounce. Choosing each other over everyone else, this was our way to leave the bloody past behind, our never again. We were told to cleanse ourselves from the taint of what injustice did to us, and we thought it meant to stand up for ourselves alone, to claim our place, to wave our flag, to make our little ark, to build a homeland of our own, and close the borders—that's the way it's done.

So we didn't make it to the promised land, and we weren't the only ones. Oh, no. We saw them across the canyons, on the bluffs, down the valley, walking in circles just like us, looking for the small way in, losing our ways, trying to find the river's edge, the green mirage that always melted away.

And the ancestor who hides said: Trust no one. We only carry seed for a single field, so keep it concealed.

And the ancestor who runs said: Let's move along, walk faster, cover the ground. All those others would only slow us down.

And the ancestor who builds said: Our tents are our country. We are becoming who we need to be, to build that other home. Then we can learn to keep borders of our own.

And the ancestor who confronts said: Fight whoever is in our way. This the only way to win our place. Anyone who tries to stop us wears Pharaoh's face.

But as we lay under the stars, we heard the wailing of their flutes, and slowly the ache of captivity began to heal. We remembered the women who washed their clothing in the river where we washed our own, how all our backs bent together, to pull the blocks of stone, how we sang in different languages to ease our pain, how the words were different, and the melodies, but the song was the same.

As we remembered, as we wept, as we became accustomed to walking free, slowly the faces of those other travelers began to change, we saw their thirst and weariness, their laughing eyes, their calloused hands. Began to wonder, what are their names? How did we forget them? How did we break apart? We heard how their drumming in the night echoed the beating of their hearts.

Step by step we learned to braid our paths, to trade our stories round the fire. Sometimes we help each other over stones, share water when we find it, handfuls of oasis dates. And sometimes we feel the clutching at our hearts, grow fearful and angry, forget each other and betray.

We sing solidarity together, but we have our doubts. If we're one for all, will the all really be for one?

Everyone chants:

*It is we who plow the deserts; fill the armies they command
Load the trucks and type the memos, harvest crops across the land.
Now we stand outcast and starving, while the budget cuts expand.*

But is our union really strong?

*It is we who wash the dishes, cook the soup and fold the shirts
care for other people's babies, patch up everybody's hurts.
Though your lives depend upon us, still you treat us all like dirt.*

But when push comes to shove, who can we really count on?

But we're making progress now. We see the river far ahead and though we falter, still, we take each other's hands. At last we know we'll get there, though the going's slow. We practice every day how we'll ford the flood, hands around wrists, making a rope from bank to bank, a kinship deeper and more true than blood. What makes us chosen is that we choose each other, moving at the speed of trust, together.

The one who hides, carries the seeds and scrolls for all. The one who runs, runs ahead to scout the way. The one who builds, is organizing teams, the one who fights is fighting for collective dreams. We still lie down among the stones and thorns, but we smell the milk and honey on the breeze.

End of Passover Sequence

A Sweet Year of Struggle

May we have a sweet year of struggle.
May we sing and hear our voices multiplied.
May we find the deep roots of courage in love
and feel it rise in us like sweet maple sap
simmered in the heat of this hard work,
the remaking of the world, until joy sugars our days.

Just as honey is made in the collective of shimmering wings

and sunshine grains of pollen gathered by many,
sin prisa, sin pausa, no hurry, no stopping,
let the joining of hands and hearts
seep from the many compartments of the comb
in a pool of liquid gold
and may the honey of our endeavors
drip, slow and delicious, onto our tongues.

May we have a sweet year of struggle.
May our losses fertilize the fields
into a bumper crop of blossom.
May the squashes flower and bear rich fruit.
May tomatoes and melons blush into flavor.
May all we have suffered turn
into soil. May a million mushrooms rise
from the broken places, and make medicine
for our wounding. May sunflowers clean the earth.

May we embrace the biggest challenges
we have ever faced, draw them close,
find their cracks and infiltrate like spores,
like tiny seeds, like moss.
May we turn our faces to the sun
and let hard times ripen in us,
until we are bursting with juice,
until we are blackberries among the thorns.
May we have a sweet year of struggle. Amen.