

JEWISH SPIRITUAL GARDENING

**Jewish Spiritual Gardening:  
Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice**

Submitted by

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### **Dedication**

To my sweet dad, Walter M. Kane z”l

also known as *Zeidela*,

Who nurtured the seed for my love of gardening.

To my beloved family,

For believing in me.

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## **Jewish Spiritual Gardening: Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice**

### **Chapter 1: Why Jewish Gardening?**

#### **Project Overview**

Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice, also known as Jewish Spiritual Gardening, is a project intended to provide the opportunity to bring *Jewish Mindfulness* to indoor/outdoor gardening through providing tools/practices that combine the spiritual, intellectual, and practical elements to joyfully nourish mind, body, and soul.

#### **Problem Statement**

Under “normal” circumstances, as well as during the pandemic, there are people who feel isolated and those who feel spiritually challenged. There are people seeking to connect, to fill a void, to find purpose, or who simply wish to add a meaningful component to their daily spiritual practice and/or to their current gardening activities. It is important to *experience the moment*, to be present, to sanctify time, to enjoy, and to appreciate our existence.

#### **Overview of Solution**

Jewish Spiritual Gardening is a hands-on project designed to provide the tools to bring meaning and spiritual connection to indoor/outdoor gardening, while creating multi-layered opportunities to connect to others (if desired), to connect to Judaism (to the degree of one’s comfort) while exploring innovative options and practices of mindfulness in daily life. One optional component of this hands-on project involves utilizing a mailable Jewish Spiritual Gardening kit that I created as part of my final project for an inter-seminary entrepreneurship course [run by Center for Jewish Learning (CLAL)]; this

will be addressed further in a later chapter. The course facilitators encouraged me to apply for financial support in order to do a test-launch of my innovation. I was blessed to be awarded two modest grants. Providing an array of Practices to explore is a major component of Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice.

### **Who I Am**

I am an *Eema*; I am both a student and a teacher. I serve as a covering rabbi and cantor; I serve as a Jewish Chaplain; I am a private tutor. I am passionate about learning, teaching, gardening, rabbinic study, and prayer. Years ago, I experienced the personal revelation of spirituality through gardening. I have always been drawn to nurturing—friendships, children, relationships, and yes, plants. As I became aware of the spiritual aspects of my garden experiences, I had the opportunity to process these experiences in several settings over the years—including through seminary theology courses.

I view this project as a viable and valuable opportunity to serve individuals and communities, to explore and enjoy combining gardening and Jewish study in a spiritual context, and an opportunity to reap benefits that nourish mind (study), body (harvesting herbs/veggies), and soul (prayer or related spiritual practice).

### **Spiritual Connection: Gardening with Intention**

The concept of my project grew out of my personal spiritual experiences in the garden. I have always enjoyed being in the garden, as nurturing is part of my nature. The joy of tending to plants, bearing witness to seeds sprouting and eventually harvesting the vegetation, and admiring the beauty of the flowers are just some of the benefits reaped. Although outdoor gardening is an activity that can require great physical effort, there can also be a calm, peaceful, and spiritually uplifting aspect. Over the past thirty-plus years,

my gardens became my place to think, to relax, a place to clear my mind. The benefits of gardening are not strictly relegated to the outdoor setting experience; these advantages can be enjoyed through indoor gardening as well.

At different stages and time periods of tending to gardens, I set different intentions. After moving from an apartment to a house with a yard, my husband and I created a vegetable garden with the intention of growing nutritious and delicious food for our family. Planning, preparing, and planting a vegetable garden also includes the intentions of watering, weeding, and harvesting. Just as I had done in the apartment, I continued to grow plants and flowers indoors, with the intention of home beautification and the simple joy derived from flourishing growth and blooming flowers. When my children were young, I wanted to teach them the joys of gardening and for them to experience the deliciousness of eating vegetables produced by tending to one's own garden. We created a separate, small four-by-four foot veggie garden, set up against the house. I have beautiful memories of my very young son, proudly harvesting and eating broccoli fresh from the *kid's garden*. To this day, my youngest child still enjoys harvesting and eating freshly picked cucumbers and beans from our main veggie garden when she visits.

**Powerful Experiences.** I hadn't anticipated becoming aware of the deeper spiritual connection between my love of gardening and my Jewish spirituality. There are two significant experiences that took place while I was working in the vegetable garden, when the spiritual connection to the Divine Presence was palpable—almost in startling surprise—epiphanies, or possibly realizations. After years of tending to my vegetable garden, weeding for hours at a time, witnessing growth, talking to my plants, getting dirt

underneath my fingernails—no matter that I wore protective gloves—I began to sense that my connection to gardening and nurturing my precious plants was more than the intention of feeding my family and the joy of growing pretty things. I became aware of the connection that, subconsciously, I already knew existed.

Years ago, on a hot sunny day, I had been working in the garden for hours, feeling close to the earth and close to my plants, feeling as if I was in touch with the growth and life of the vegetation that I was supporting. This wonderful feeling of being totally immersed in the world of my garden wasn't unusual; however, an intense and almost indescribable feeling of connection to the Divine washed over me. The feeling was new and yet also familiar. I remember having experienced this joy and exhilaration of perceiving Divine Presence, in quiet moments when looking into the eyes of my infants. I have also experienced this elation at times when leading a community in heightened prayer. In this moment, as the sensation was washing over me, I recall becoming very still, attempting to name or identify the moment. It was overwhelming—in a positive way—as I let myself feel the ground, and then feel the air; sitting amidst the plant life, I allowed myself to become cognizant of what I was perceiving. It seemed to me that I was no longer alone in the garden. It was as if while immersed in my garden work, I was no longer doing the work alone. I perceived a pleasant warmth swirling around me, accompanied by the spiritual sensations—best described as an intense spiritual high—similar to the sensations of joy, exhilaration, and elation that I described above.

Often when working in the garden, I would think of my father ז"ל [of Blessed Memory]. Dad and I had a wonderful relationship; gardening together was just one lovely part of our connective bond. I have sweet memories of preparing soil, planting,

and harvesting brussels sprouts together. Years later, when I had a home, yard, and garden of my own with my husband and children, I would happily share the fruits of our garden with Dad. He would delight in hearing my gardening updates, what I was planting, which veggies were doing well, etc.

One day, while my body and mind were totally immersed in gardening's physical activities, sitting on the garden floor as I worked, aware of both the heat of the sun and the gentle breeze, I suddenly perceived my dad's presence. Whether Dad's essence was really there or not, is a different conversation. What was real in the moment, was that I perceived his presence. I *sensed* his presence. It was an overwhelming experience in which I felt happy—and a bit freaked out at the same time—but mostly happy and full of gratitude, gratitude for being given the experience of feeling that Dad was with me in the garden.

**Partnership.** When I speak of growing vegetables, flowers, and herbs in my gardens, I do not think of myself as actually *growing* the vegetation. I see myself as a facilitator. The Divine is the One Who causes plant life to grow; I am the nurturer, the one who tends. At times it feels that I am being blessed to be in partnership with Hashem. The sensation of feeling blessed to be in this partnership with Hashem is quite palpable and can be overwhelming—in a good way. With each new garden I create, I am inviting the Divine Presence to dwell in Her/His space.

The seminary entrepreneurship course that I was enrolled in when I was developing the beginning concepts of Jewish Spiritual Gardening, had begun the February before pandemic. As a direct response to the necessary communal changes, ideas for my project morphed and grew; with the onset of the pandemic and the necessity

to isolate, I needed to consider outside-the-box options of how to bring Jewish Spiritual Gardening to community. This process led to the idea of mailable kits, with an option to connect via Zoom for those who wished to have extended and/or continued contact with me, and these innovations became integrated into the project. I thought that mailable kits would be a wonderful way to bring calm-through-gardening in the midst of a very daunting time. The simple actions of planting a seed in a single pot, working the soil to prepare a new garden, weeding a bed of swiss chard, watering the newly sprouted bok choy in the small deck greenhouse, or rooting a single cutting in a sake bottle on the windowsill, all have the potential to promote calm and tranquility.

### **What I Seek to Accomplish: Project Intentions**

Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice can support multiple outcomes: emotional, spiritual, social, and functional. The intention is to meet people where they are: to offer support and creative options based on their spiritual needs, what they may seek, and/or may wish to explore. I am looking to foster connections between Jewish spirituality and gardening, utilizing a variety of approaches, methodologies, and educational tools, depending on the factors involved. One approach can be in the form of spiritual-gardening kits that are sent to individuals (especially beneficial during pandemic, and for those who need to isolate). Another option can be to provide access to sources, from Sacred Texts to Folklore Literature, to explore the various Jewish connections to spiritual gardening.

We can also look into ways to create sacred spaces as we pursue connections between Jewish spirituality and gardening. To create one's own Sacred Space—

encompassing the physical aspects as well as the spiritual—with any form of plant life nearby, we can set aside specific locations within our homes or gardens. This space can be designated as a place to ponder, to meditate, to wonder; we can choose to include study and/or spiritual ponderances in memory of a loved one lost. The chosen spaces can be developed by the individual as a sole practitioner, or for exploring in *chevruta* [with a partner]; in addition, one may choose to study privately with me serving as spiritual guide. We can also create communal experiences with other like-minded seekers and explorers if we choose to do so. In time of pandemic/endemic, the created space for *chevruta* and communal experiences can be held virtually on Zoom. An additional intention regarding utilizing these spaces, is to provide an ongoing facilitated support option (as desired) as part of the Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice experience. In a future endeavor, I will explore expanding my project to include partnering with others who would join me in serving as spiritual guides.

An important aspect of *meeting people where they are* is recognizing that people—for a multitude of reasons—experience, process, connect, and understand information in different ways. For this reason, within the Practices of this project, I offer “outside-the-box” spiritual tool options for those who seek alternative spiritual connectors, such as drawing upon candles, incense, herbs, Herbal Wands<sup>1</sup>, and crystals. I seek to cultivate awareness and mindfulness of the settings in which one participates in creating her/his spiritual gardening Jewish connection and learning. Developing this awareness—for example—may be facilitated with light (natural and/or candle), the earth (soil and/or crystals), and/or with scents (floral/herbal and/or incense).

Within this realm of acknowledging the various ways in which humankind relates to spirituality, to religion, and to nature, the desire is to foster spiritual experiences in the garden (be it indoor or outdoor, in one's chosen sacred space), to empower and normalize the inclusion of these outside-the-box tools and practices. These Practices harness prayer, meditation, chanting, and other rituals, with the intention to nurture engagement in various spiritual activities that facilitate connectivity between self, the Divine, and gardening, while also honoring one's preferred G!d/Higher Power terminology. The desire is to manifest these intentions, creating a "judgement free zone"; that is to say, however the spiritual practice develops, as long as it is meaningful to the practitioner, it is considered successful.



## Chapter 2: Confirming the Need for a Jewish Garden Practice

### Uncovering and Identifying Needs and Wants

In order to *meet people where they are*, I conducted interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to uncover people's needs and spiritual desires, such as: is there a need for spiritual fulfillment; are people seeking more; are they satisfied with their current observances; are they already in a good place, and yet at the same time open to and/or interested in expanding or enhancing their current practice. I was reaching out to see what void needed to be filled—and to first determine if there indeed was a void to be filled. The insights gleaned and goals set were inspired by my personal spiritual gardening experiences over many years, further developed and then enhanced by incorporating the interview responses (from several sets of interview processes, the first of which will be discussed below). In line with a spiritual entrepreneurial teaching, I perceived and identified needs and wants, and sought to fill them. The constituent interview process was, in and of itself, a wonderful, eye-opening opportunity to discover that there are a wide variety of needs that can be addressed with my Jewish Spiritual Gardening project.

**Constituent Profile.** The first constituent group to be part of the project's interview process were family and friends; they became my "pilot" constituency group who were slated to receive the First Launch of the Project (discussed in a following chapter). I chose to begin with family and friends due to their accessibility, varied interests, and varied consumer needs. The primary qualifiers to be included: we had an established relationship, they were Jewish, they knew I was into gardening, and they were willing to be interviewed by me! At a later date, in a related—but separate—endeavor I

conducted the interview process again, this time with the intention to investigate the spiritual needs of a more specified demographic. Unlike the initial constituent group, these candidates to be interviewed were referred and unknown to me; our first-time meeting was at the time of the individual interviews.

There are a number of subsequent constituent groups that I will look to serve in the near future to introduce Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice, some of which are composed of specified demographics, and others whose members are of a broad base. These can include (but are not limited to): friends of friends and family (referrals), synagogue communities, JCCs, Sisterhoods, Men's clubs, Hebrew schools, group homes, private clients receiving mental health support, special needs programs, assisted living settings and institutions, neighborhood organizations, adult/senior living and retirement communities, holistic health centers, curiosity shop followers and metaphysical communities.

**Line of Questioning.** At the beginning of each interview, I offered safe boundaries and guidelines, stating that as part of the information gathering process, "I will pose questions regarding your relationship with plants and gardening and your thoughts on spiritual connectivity." I continued to say that the questions are to help me to focus on project direction to determine if there is a niche for Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice, potentially including a learning or study component, and in addition to respecting privacy, our setting is non-judgmental in that "all answers are accepted because they are *your* answers!"

I began with general questions: how they feel about gardening, both indoor and outdoor; do they have plants; if they were to consider adding (more) plants, where do

they have space/where would they want to put them (i.e., would they prefer windowsill gardening, or prefer small outdoor patio gardening, etc.); if they garden, is this a solo or communal activity, or do they engage in both; what is their purpose for gardening (i.e., enjoyment; for food). Then I changed direction and asked their thoughts on spiritual connectivity (letting it be known that from this point on, the line of questioning may seem to be jumping around, or quite random and not connected); which—if any—deity terminology are they comfortable with; would they consider other portals towards spirituality. Taking one more leap, I asked what kinds of (ritual) activity could attract them to seek a Jewish spiritual connection to gardening. I prefaced my closing question with stating that the project focus will be *how Jewish learning can enhance and connect to gardening and spirituality*. And then I asked: “Given the subject matter, what question would you have expected me to ask you that I didn’t ask?” [The interview template of questions can be found in Appendix B.]

**Interview Responses.** The majority of people viewed gardening primarily as a way to feed family and/or as a means to decorate their homes and yards. For some, there were the additional elements of having a sense of purpose and having something else that depended on them. A few stated they enjoyed all aspects of gardening; some said they enjoyed tending and weeding; for others their joy was in starting with small plants and then watching them grow.

All interviewees were intrigued by the concept of combining gardening and a Jewish spiritual connection. Most had not previously considered Jewish spirituality and gardening as having a connection. People expressed curiosity and fascination upon learning that one’s level of observance—or non-observance—is not a determining factor

to engage in, or to reap spiritual benefits through Jewish Spiritual Gardening. They were delighted to learn that there are multiple approaches and methodologies to bringing in Jewish textual support and were interested in further participation. Jewish textual support, for those who would like to include text study as part of their Jewish gardening experience, could include Jewish sources that address and document that the benefits of gardening—and its spiritual benefits—are indeed a Jewish thing. Alternatively, Jewish textual support could simply be receiving poetry or chants that are from Jewish sources. Further participation refers to the option of maintaining a relationship with a facilitator, or support in finding a *chevruta* to experience a gardening spiritual practice with.

**Meeting Needs of the Non-Traditional.** Within this demographic of interviewees, there were those who were exposed to, or currently engaged in some form of Jewish spiritual expression. There were also those who were in process of seeking alternative spiritual avenues, cautiously moving forward in what they perceived to be non-traditional Jewish avenues that included some non-Jewish factors. Their responses indicate a desire for validation and autonomy in making personal choices regarding how one expresses and practices her/his spirituality, while keeping their Jewish identity intact. Through Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice, I seek to address these needs by providing practice options to explore and offering additional support should they encounter intimidation by others who may judge.

### **First Launch of Mailable Kit**

As part of the first launch of the Jewish Spiritual Gardening project (in March 2022), participants received the mailable *JSG kit*. The components included: a grow kit to encourage the tactile, physical engagement with the included seeds, soil, and planter; a

planting guide; hand lotion for skin aftercare; a spiritual guide booklet (offering choices of prayer, poetry, and inspirational quotes); a journal and pen, to encourage spiritual journaling (which can be as simple or detailed as desired); and the option to connect with other participants and/or continued facilitator communication support. The kit also contains suggested access to source material to consider the Jewish connections to gardening and to encourage the exploration of innovative methods to spirituality. I included the Hebrew blessing that is recited before studying<sup>2</sup>, which is a meaningful component of Jewish Study. I also added honey sticks to represent my wish of sweetness as one begins her/his Jewish spiritual gardening journey, along with the Hebrew blessing recited when eating honey and the blessing recited when beginning something new (see Appendix B).

**Proposed Gain Reflections.**

Through features of Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice (which can include the Jewish Spiritual Gardening kit), constituents can meet a variety of the needs that were articulated through the interview research process. The gain reflections vary from person to person and can include components I believe to be important to one's personal spiritual journey. What follows is a sampling:

- Discovering new connections to Judaism and to gardening, enhanced by a meaningful learning experience; being involved in a meaningful and functional activity to occupy one's efforts in times of pandemic; finding comfort and solace.
- To feel supported in difficult times; to feel secure in a place that one creates for herself/himself.

- Sometimes it is okay to be okay with doing an activity on your own, and there are times when we desire a communal experience.
- “Slowing” down time through mindfulness can bring more meaning to one’s existence.
- Opportunity to be innovative in spiritual exploration; to learn a new skill/enhance a current skill; to nurture a sense of accomplishment and purpose; to grow some of your own meal additions or garnishes.
- Experience a sense of support within a new endeavor; know that support is available for as long as needed and/or wanted.

Part of the research process for the initial creation of Jewish Spiritual Gardening was to determine how I would validate that the features of the project would support the actualization of said gains. I believe that various innovative expanded features will serve participants according to their needs, and the potential has grown even further than I initially imagined, as this project has blossomed from the initial spiritual entrepreneurial gardening kit, into Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice, master’s thesis project. Benefits of these expanded features include developing self-purpose and confidence in one’s ability to sustain plant life, while at the same time supporting one’s spiritual connectivity efforts, creating an environment and/or practice space that opens a pathway to the spiritual connection to the earth (also making space for those who experience spiritual struggles) via Jewish education, incorporating a choice of Practices, thereby connecting spirituality to the action of facilitating growth of plant life.

### **Chapter 3: Jewish Spiritual Gardening Practices**

#### **Jewish Spiritual Gardening ~ Designed for All**

People of every and any level of current Jewish practice—or no current Jewish practice—are welcome participants. Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice is open to all Jews; wherever on the Jewish spectrum one falls, or belongs to, all are welcome. You have complete autonomy when it comes to flexibility of time, investing as little or as much as suits your needs, lifestyle, and time that you wish to dedicate to a Practice. No prior Gardening experience is required; both new and seasoned gardeners can reap the benefits through these Practices.

When I first created the Jewish Spiritual Gardening kit, and later began composing the Practices for Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice, the initial target audiences were those who identified as Jewish. The intention for both endeavors is to support uncovering the Jewish spiritual aspects and connectivity to gardening. That being said, I welcome anyone of any faith to include my Practices as part of her/his spiritual journey. This inclusion, along with the related modifications, will be part of a future project of mine that is still in the early planning stage.

Practices can be modified to meet the needs of people of different abilities. When I was the head teacher in a Jewish education program for students with special needs, among other activities, I included gardening and nature projects as part of the spiritual growth process. I successfully brought in prayer, spirituality, and related activities, which resulted in the students experiencing wonderful spiritual connections and accomplishments as we created our own prayerful community.

There is flexibility built into each Practice so that you can enter into any form of gardening, as each can support spiritual immersion within your chosen gardening space, irrespective of the size or type of the garden, whether you choose indoor or outdoor gardening, whether you grow vegetables, herbs, or flowers. Whichever form of gardening you choose, you are engaging in a timeless tradition of sowing, planting, tending to, and reaping. Engaging in these actions and connecting them spiritually to ritual, to the seasons of the year, and to holiday celebrations have long been part of Jewish culture and Jewish practice.

### **Ritual and the Spiritual Connection to Gardening**

In discussing Practices, oftentimes the term ritual comes into play. There are multiple definitions and interpretations of the word ritual. Dictionary.com defines ritual as: 1. an established or prescribed procedure for a religious life or rite; 2. A system or collection of religious or other rites. As part of the research for his book *Hello, Goodbye*, Day Schildkret asked how people define ritual. The responses are as lovely as they are insightful. Here are four responses that sung to me: “It’s a language for meaning-making.” “A meeting place where the spiritual meets the physical. The unseen meets the seen. The formless meets the form, concretizing the sacred.” “Ritual is a mini-journey. You start somewhere, sometimes you have a destination that you seek in the ritual and sometimes not.” “A ritual says I am, or we are, here” (Schildkret, 2022, p13). These beautifully profound definitions support relating to the concept of Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice.

**Contemplative Exercise.** Take a moment to reread each of the above responses one at a time—separately—and allow yourself some time to think about what these four



interpretative responses could mean within your spiritual journey and how you might relate. What kind of “meaning-making” might you envision? The “spiritual meeting the physical” brings to mind a number of interpretations: the physical could be our bodies; our physical connection with the plants that we tend to; and/or the garden soil that we stand on. The spiritual could be the connections we discover through our gardening engagement—a circle of connections between ourselves, the Divine, the essence of the land and of plant life, and so much more. After you have experience with several of the Practices, you might consider returning to this page and repeating this contemplative exercise. If you are so moved, you may wish to journal your thoughts. As you begin each new Practice, you will find that engaging in ritual is more than just performing a new activity. Part of the process and experience is bearing witness to what is around you, and becoming aware of how your observations and actions affect you spiritually.

**Enhancing the Spiritual Connection.** Through tending to a garden—or even to one potted plant—and adding a spiritual practice of most any sort, you are actively creating a link between yourself, nature, and the Divine Presence. Just as ritual enhances our spiritual connection to Judaism, ritual can enhance our connection to gardening. As you discover the Jewish spiritual connections and relevance to nature, to the land, and to plant-life, you can uncover the connection to your Jewish identity. The Practices that follow were designed to support this spiritual journey.

### **Practice: Planning Your Garden**

**Preparing to Prepare.** Before one begins a spiritual practice that involves gardening—of any type—one first needs to do some thinking and a little planning. I think it is exciting that even before one gets into the dirt, the planning of your garden can

become a Jewish spiritual practice! Thinking in and of itself is an action, an accomplishment, and a step forward. In addition to giving yourself the opportunity to ponder how you might like to move forward, taking this time is also an opportunity to relax your body as well as your mind. Relaxing the body and mind is an important part of one's spiritual practice. As an aside, thinking about and planning an activity is an effective way to self-calm to fall asleep at night. While this may seem counterintuitive, by focusing and thinking of one topic or one action, you are allowing all other thoughts to fall away.

You can begin by sitting comfortably in a quiet place within your home or outside; if you are moved to do so you can close your eyes (if doing this practice to fall asleep, lie in your most comfortable position). Take a few deep breaths, breathing in slowly and then breathing out slowly to encourage your body and mind to relax. When you are ready, allow your mind to wander, to visualize, and to wonder. How long and how often you engage in this contemplative thought stage is totally up to you, driven by your time, your needs, and the outcomes.

**Planning.** The various aspects of planning and creating your garden can become part of the Practice itself, through being mindful and experiencing the process as you choose plants, make purchases, plant, and transplant as you decide what type of gardening you would like to incorporate into your new spiritual gardening practice. The difference between (the above) Preparing to Prepare and Planning, is that Preparing to Prepare is a mindfulness exercise in and of itself; while Planning, also a mindfulness exercise, is a step closer toward the actualization of creating your desired garden.

Your garden can be as simple or as complex as you desire. If gardening or plant care is new to you, I recommend beginning on a small scale. This adventure is intended to be a spiritual journey, not an overwhelming planting project! There are several areas to consider, and you might choose more than one method or option within each category. Do you wish your gardening spiritual journey to be a solo practice, a family activity, or a communal activity? You may choose, for example, to begin this journey as a solo practice, and perhaps at a later time invite your family to participate.

**Indoor Garden Type and Location.** Depending on your needs and your space, indoor garden options could include a single potted plant, a windowsill planter, a bottle garden, or even an Aerogarden. Will you choose to place your new indoor garden on a table, on a kitchen countertop, on a windowsill, or perhaps on a plantstand in the corner of your living room? Make note of the light source and how much light will reach your garden. Another important consideration regarding placement is, is there sufficient meditation space to comfortably “be” with your garden? The answer of course is subjective! It depends on your needs and preferences: Do you need space to sit on the floor and spread out, or do you need just enough space to sit on a chair directly in front of your garden? Or perhaps you are perfectly comfortable standing in the presence of your garden. Remember, that with every choice and option that you are going to consider, you can take this as an opportunity to do so mindfully, enjoying the moments of stillness and contemplation.

**Outdoor Garden.** Contemplating the outdoor garden space can be as simple or as complex as you desire (and sometimes can have elements of both!). This contemplation, just as mentioned above, can be in the form of mindfulness relaxation,

taking the time to breathe and visualize, remembering that this is part of your spiritual journey. Will you begin with a small patch of yard? Do you have previously established gardens to choose from? Will you begin with one garden or create multiple spaces? Would using the outdoor back deck that egresses from your dining room feel more accessible? Is the space of an apartment balcony your outdoor option?

**More Questions to Consider.** Will you create space to sit within the perimeters of the garden or keep it small and have space to sit in front of it (if you are new to outdoor gardening, it may be wise to start on a smaller scale). What type of plants do you wish to grow: ground sprawling, vines and climbers that need trellis support, compact, or a combination? What type of garden(s) would you like to grow: tea garden, herb garden, veggies that you like to eat, flower garden, plants known to be easy to grow? Sifting through seed catalogues can be incorporated into the experience of planning and dreaming. In our neck of the woods, seed catalogues begin arriving in January!

With numerous questions to gently contemplate, you may opt to extend this planning stage over a period of time; or perhaps you are of the mindset for a focused *I'm ready to plan my outdoor spiritual garden space!* Depending on your needs and desires, you do not necessarily have to choose between having an indoor or outdoor garden; you can embrace both. All choices are the right choices. Do keep in mind that your geographical location will determine whether your outdoor garden is seasonal or year-round. Whichever type of gardening you choose to be part of your spiritual journey, your garden will be unique, because it will manifest through your facilitation. This will be your unique experience.

**Remember to Breathe:** I presented a lot of questions and options. The intention is not to overwhelm, but rather to provide you with substantive considerations to ruminate on gently and mindfully. Take in a deep calming breath; as you slowly release your breath, allow your imagination to wander through the various scenarios presented. You might choose to reread through the options and questions, or you might prefer to view one at a time, and then close your eyes as you conjure an image and mindfully breathe through your thoughts. Whether you choose to do this practice indoors or outdoors, once or before each new gardening space that you create, you decide the duration of the Practice.

If you are so inclined, I invite you to extend these moments by giving some thought to how this contemplative planning process connects you spiritually to nature and to your Jewish practices. Nature is connected to, or *is* (depending on your belief system), the Divine Presence. You might choose to express appreciation at this time by reciting the blessing for wisdom and discernment. This blessing, known as *Ata Chonein*, is taken from the weekday Amidah—the central prayer of the thrice daily service. Wisdom and discernment are Divine-given attributes that you employ throughout this process of Preparing to Prepare and Planning contemplation.

אתה חונן לאדם דעת, ומלמד לאנש בינה  
 חננו מאתך דעה בינה והשכל  
 ברוך אתה ה', חונן הדעת.

*Ata cho-nein l'adam l'da-at, um'l-meid leh-eh-nosh bi'nah.*

You grace humans with wisdom and teach humanity perception.

*Chaw-nei-nu mei-it-cha dei-ah bi-na v'has-ceil.*

Bestow upon us Your knowledge, insight and understanding.

*Baruch ata Adonai, cho-nein ha-da-at.*

Blessed are You the Grantor of wisdom.

(English translation provided by Erica Brown in an article appearing in MyJewishLearning.com).

When you are ready to transition to another activity, take a breath in; hold for a moment, then gently and fully release the breath.

### **Connecting Jewish Ritual to Planning Your Garden**

**The Month of Elul: Preparing to Prepare.** There are multiple contexts within Jewish life that Jews prepare to prepare, such as preparing for *Pesach*—the holiday of Passover; and preparing for a *simcha*—a celebration, such as celebrating a child becoming a bat/bar mitzvah—being recognized as a Jewish adult. In the weeks (and for some, the months) before *Pesach* arrives, there is much preparation to be done: household cleaning, food shopping, cooking, gathering reading materials for the *Sedarim*—the ritual meals held the first two nights of *Pesach*. Before these actions are performed, first shopping lists are written, household tasks to be done are noted, guest lists are created, meals are planned, potential discussion topics are mulled over. During the year leading up to the celebration of a child becoming bat/bar mitzvah, there is also great preparation and detailed planning, the most important being the child’s experiential education and processing of what should be a personal and amazing journey. In other words, Preparing to Prepare is an essential and beneficial component that precedes the actions to be performed, and can make way for successful actualization.

Another occasion within Jewish life that Preparing to Prepare is called for, is the time period leading up to the holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In the heat of

midsummer, Rosh Hashanah (which begins on the first of the Hebrew month of *Tishrei*), and Yom Kippur (which comes ten days after) may seem far away. In actuality, with summer only being a few months long, the High Holidays are not so distant. It is considered incumbent upon Jews to begin spiritually preparing for the upcoming High Holidays for the full month before Rosh Hashanah begins, that is the Hebrew month of *Elul*. Although preparing for these introspective times during the twenty-nine days of *Elul* leading up to Rosh Hashanah is not specifically prescribed in the Bible or in early rabbinic writings, over time the month of *Elul* became the customary window of opportunity to prepare for this auspicious time. *Elul* overlaps and coincides with part of the Gregorian calendar months of August and September. When *Elul* overlaps with August, it can be even more challenging to bring one's mindset to the High Holidays, which are associated with the fall season. This is just one aspect in which being mindful of Preparing to Prepare is helpful.

The time period beginning with Rosh Hashana, continuing through Yom Kippur (and the four holidays that soon follow of Sukkot, Hoshana Raba, Sh'mini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah) is a very intense time. This is a time period of deep introspection and solemn contemplation; a time of intense spiritual wrestling in which Jews weigh and assess ethical choices made over the course of the past year; review their behavior towards their fellow human beings; and their relationship with Hashem [literally the Name; alternative way to refer to the Divine in speech when not praying, or in writing]. This is also a time when we seek forgiveness for transgressions against other people and against Hashem. The process is part of wholeheartedly reflecting upon *who you are* and *who you want to be*—referring to self-improvement. This is a spiritual undertaking of

such magnitude, that walking into this endeavor “cold” could be overwhelming, and possibly emotionally and spiritually unhealthy. Indeed, even with having the twenty-nine days of Elul to prepare, the High Holidays remain an intense experience. In addition to feeling a certain level of preparedness, taking this time can bring a deeper level of meaning throughout the journey of this season of Holidays.

Preparing for the High Holidays and preparing for your Jewish spiritual gardening endeavors are wonderfully important ways to enhance your experiences in both of these undertakings. Just as preparing for the intensity of High Holidays can beneficially support how you enter Rosh Hashanah, so can attuning your mindset and intentions as you Prepare to Prepare your gardening space.

**Practice: Planting**

Now that you have planned your garden through contemplating the questions offered in the previous Practice, it is time to create your gardening space. Even without having planned everything out, you can still successfully move forward. Perhaps you wrote down your garden plans in list form; sketched out a planting map on paper; or maybe your ideas are still gently swirling in your mind. It may be that based on your personal needs and desires, you have already decided on the type of gardening you wish to do and the type of space you wish to establish.

Which setup have you chosen? Are you thinking outdoor gardening and breaking ground to create a new flower bed, freestanding growbags for veggies, or perhaps several potted plants on your deck or balcony? Or are you thinking indoor gardening with an array of plants on the windowsill, setting up a bottle garden, or would starting with a single potted plant meet your current needs? Do you have an established outdoor garden



that will become your sacred gardening space? Or perhaps you have an existing potted plant in the living room that has room for a few seeds, or an additional plant.

**New Beginnings.** Take a moment to acknowledge this new step in your spiritual journey. Take a breath; gently release the breath. What do you imagine this new gardening space will mean to you? Can you envision the growth of both you and your garden? Take in another breath; release the breath fully and deeply. As you are about to begin, what are you feeling? I invite you to name the sensation and to embrace it.

Gather the needed materials; what you gather depends on the gardening space and type that you have chosen. Whether you are separating grass covered lawn from about-to-be newly tilled soil or filling your new terra cotta planter with potting soil and a storebought plant, you are creating designated space. This is a *Shehecheyanu* moment [Hebrew prayer recited when experiencing a first], a moment that you may wish to include your own words or thoughts of appreciation for being in this place at this time (see Appendix B). The details of what comes next are up to you as far as the physical activity of creating your spiritual garden. I invite you to do each action throughout the process with mindful and deliberate intention, as you plant seedlings in your new outdoor garden, fill the bottles of your bottle gardens with water, or sow seeds in your kitchen windowsill garden.

Every so often, pause or slow down your actions to check in with yourself. Are you remembering to breathe? As you prepare the soil for planting, how does the earth feel beneath your feet and between your fingers? As you transplant seedlings and sow seeds, how does it feel to know that now you have (additional?) lifeforms dependent on you; does it impact how you feel about your role in life—or even just today? Depending

on the intensity of the activity, and the temperature—especially if you are working outside—you may want to pause more often or for longer periods of time (and remember to stay hydrated). It is also perfectly fine if your thoughts are not so deeply esoteric! It is, however, important that you remember to breathe and also to allow yourself to take note of how you are feeling physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Once you have completed the tasks you set out to do, linger in this space that you have created and planted a bit longer. Fully take in the visual of your space. Take in a breath; as you release your breath, feel all the feelings, and think all the thoughts. Let your mood and your feelings determine the duration.

If you are open to the idea, you may wish to include the “out-of-the-box” spiritual tool options that I referenced in my Project Intention. These tools can be incorporated at your discretion and using your own creativity. If the thought of including these implements is too “out there” for you, simply smile and move on to the next paragraph. When I am preparing to set up a new garden, I like to “cleanse” the space. This space becomes a sacred place where I tend to my spiritual growth and well-being, as well as tend to the growth and well-being of my plants. The purpose of cleansing an area can mean different things to different spiritual seekers. For me, my cleansing ritual represents transforming the chosen gardening space from the everyday to the holy. My gardening space becomes a sanctuary of sorts, a sacred place. There are different cleansing methodologies used by practitioners including smoke (burning incense, herbal bundles, or scented candles), sound (voice), and crystal work. Through my Practice of cleansing my gardening spaces, I am inviting (requesting) the *Shekhinah* [Feminine Divine presence] to come dwell with me within my garden space.

## **Planting as a Spiritual Celebration**

The time at which you choose to create your spiritual gardening space, in the case of outdoor gardening, might depend on your geographical location and aligning with growing seasons. Indoor gardening can be anytime in the year that you choose. You might consider aligning your new venture with a new beginning that you are experiencing or to coincide with a life cycle event.

**Connecting to the Jewish New Years.** Another thought to consider is to align creating new gardening spaces with holidays that are (literally) new beginnings. While Rosh Hashanah [meaning head of the year] is known to many as the Jewish New Year, there are actually four New Years on the Jewish calendar. Although not all four are observed in modern times, you might like to choose from any (or all) of the four New Years as a new beginning. Just as with all your gardening practices, these endeavors can become as simple or detailed as you wish. Depending on your gardening space options, if you choose to begin four or more new gardens throughout the year, you might opt for single potted plants, single bottle gardens, or even individual small vases with plant cuttings to create your new spiritual gardening locus. The four Jewish New Years are: 1 Nisan, 1 Elul, 1 Tishrei, and 15 Shevat.

**1 Nisan.** The First of Nisan is the New Year for kings; it is from this date that the years of a king's rule are counted. It is also for counting the months, and for the order of the Festivals as it determines which is considered the first Festival of the year and which is the last. Some consider 1 Nisan to be the third Jewish New Year (Alperin). 1 Nisan begins the month in which Jews celebrate the Exodus from Egypt and the birth of the Israelite Nation.

**Relating to Nisan.** Nisan is a spring month that falls during March-April. With the arrival of spring, your mind might be on thoughts of spring and summer planting. You might consider the month of Nisan to be a time of planning your garden(s). You might view this time as an opportunity to count the months of your planting season as part of your planning, be they months of indoor or outdoor gardening. As Nisan begins, a sense of freedom begins to emerge from within me, an exhilarating anticipation of being outdoors for greater times in the day.

**1 Elul.** The First of Elul is for animal tithes; all animals born before that date belong to the previous tithe year and are tithed as a single unit. Those born after that date belong to the next year. Some consider 1 Elul to be the last New Year on the Jewish calendar (Alperin). When counting from 1 Nisan, Elul is the second of the Jewish New Years.

**Relating to Elul.** Elul is a summer month that falls during August-September. The First of Elul begins the month-long spiritual preparation for the upcoming Holidays. You might like to connect preparing your new First of Elul Garden as part of your personal spiritual preparation. The area of your bottle garden, potted plant, or rooting vase that you set up can be designated as the sacred space you choose to be in while directing your energies and thoughts to what actions of yours belong to last year, and which actions will be part of the coming year.

**1 Tishrei.** Rosh Hashanah begins on the First of Tishrei and is the New Year for the world, the New Year for years, and calculating the years. According to tradition, the world was created on Rosh Hashanah. With Rosh Hashanah meaning “head of the year,”

Tishrei is often referred to as the first month of the year; when counting from Nisan, Tishrei is the seventh month.

**Relating to Tishrei.** During this season of Holidays, beginning with 1 Elul and continuing through 21 Tishrei, Jews engage in deep introspection to reflect on past actions and to consider avenues towards self-improvement. This can be a time to renew, to begin again. You might choose to connect these reflections with beginning a new spiritual garden, perhaps combining the idea that you are creating the foundation for a new world within your gardening space.

Tishrei is an autumn month that falls during September-October. With the arrival of fall, you might be in final harvesting mode; the outdoor gardens may be towards the end of their producing stage; you may have already winterized your outdoor gardens. At this time some people do a full replanting, over-wintering seeds and bulbs in anticipation of vegetation and flowers popping up in early spring. This could also be an ideal time to create an indoor garden. Having flowers or herbs thriving in your home throughout the winter can be spiritually uplifting, as well as be a living reminder of the personal goals and standards that you set for yourself to live by.

**15 Shevat.** The Fifteenth of Shevat is the New Year for trees and for the tithing of the fruit of trees. The New Year for the trees is also known as Tu B'Shevat and is often referred to as the birthday of the trees; "tu" represents the numerical value of fifteen, "b" is a prefix in Hebrew that means "of," and Shevat is the name of the Hebrew month.

**Relating to Shevat.** Shevat is a winter month that falls in January-February. With the arrival of Tu B'Shevat, many of us living in colder climates see this New Year

as a sign that spring is not far behind. The seed catalogue mailings begin pouring in, teasing my itch to plant. As the season approaches the budding of trees and warming of the air, you might view this time as a spiritual rebirth or reaffirmation. You might choose to celebrate this time of year by planting herb or flower seeds in your windowsill garden.

In celebrating Tu B'Shevat, there is a tradition of eating different fruits of the tree and to include at least one new fruit that you have never had before. As part of my celebration of the holiday, I like to harvest seeds from the fruit consumed during the holiday and plant them soon afterward. There is an element of wonder—I wonder if a tree will grow from the seed, and I wonder what it will look like! Over the years in my indoor garden, I have grown date, starfruit, carob, lemon, grapefruit, kiwi, and pomegranate trees. Tu B'Shevat *is* the birthday for the palm, lemon, and pomegranate trees currently thriving in my living and dining rooms!

**Applying the Practice.** Throughout the year when you begin a new garden or add to an existing garden, you might choose to apply the Practice of New Beginnings. Another option could be to have a set of contemplative questions to ponder. For instance, after re-reading the components of the four New Years of the Jewish calendar, continue with the following:

Situate yourself comfortably within the space of your new garden. Take a breath in; release the breath. Allow yourself to mindfully breathe in and out to encourage your mind and body to relax. Review the following questions, one at a time. What does the idea of celebrating the four different New Years mean to you? How does this impact the way you think about how you personally mark time? Does this impact how you think about the way that the Jewish people mark time? What personal meaning might each of

these New Years have for you? Spend as much or as little time with these questions as you wish. When you are ready, take a few minutes and close your eyes, or soften your gaze as you continue to be in your newly planted/created space. Allow any thoughts, feelings, or insights regarding the questions asked and the answers that came to you flow in, out, and around you for as long as you are comfortable. When you decide it is time, take another moment to acknowledge the sacred space you have created, and then consciously take leave of the space.

Should you wish to delve further into questions to ponder and bring text study into this contemplation, I invite you to refer to the Sefaria website (see Cohen in References for the Sefaria URL), which offers the biblical texts, translations, and more questions to ponder. This contemplative study can also be done *in chevruta* [with a study partner].

### **Practice: Weeding as a Practice**

When we set our mind to the activity of weeding, the goal is often simply to rid the garden bed of weeds. With this practice you are adding to the goal and enhancing the task. Yes, it is preferable to rid our precious plants of the nutrient competitors, and to work often to rid the space of the weeds as quickly and efficiently as possible. However, rather than pull at top speed, you are going to consciously slow down the process, which in addition to bringing benefit to your garden plants, mindful weeding can lead to reaping the spiritual and physical benefits of slowing down. Weeding is a vital undertaking to do even before the tending of plants begins, even before the first sprouts of the desired plants appear. Aspects of this practice can be conducted at most every stage of your garden,

thereby paving the way for more opportunities to enjoy the nourishing rewards of this Practice.

**Purpose and Various Applications.** Weeding as a Practice can be utilized for different purposes, achieving different spiritual goals. Weeding can support invoking, welcoming, and summoning calm. Invoking thoughts to flow freely as you weed; welcoming memories of past spiritual experiences, or perhaps welcoming the memory of someone who you would enjoy visiting with you in your garden; summoning calm through prayer or chant. The intentions set can be directly related to the act of weeding, allowing everything else to be cleared from your mind. Even the brief process of choosing a particular garden bed that you intend to weed in, as well as choosing the spot that you will sit, and then eventually the act of placing yourself to be physically seated in your garden, can begin the calming process.

There is a definitive calming aspect in being mindful of what you are pulling, distinguishing between weed and desired plant. Weeding as a Practice can serve as a means to spiritually center yourself, often defined as being in a state of emotional and spiritual equilibrium, being balanced and at peace. Through this action of mindful weeding, you can bring calm to your emotions and soothe your mind by engaging in this physical activity, carried out in a non-stressful way. After all, this Practice involves sitting, which lends itself to being in a physical position to relax and center yourself.

**Beginning the Practice.** As you enter your gardening space, give yourself time to visually take in the space that you are about to tend to; when you are ready, choose the location in which you will weed. If you have the space to do so, seat yourself



comfortably within the garden (or if not, in front of your gardening space). You might choose to sit on a towel, a cushion, or directly on the earth.

**Plant Gazing.** With the vantage point of now being seated, again, give yourself time to take in the space that you are about to tend to. Take note of the plants, allowing yourself time to gaze upon them as a whole unit. Next, regard each plant individually, taking as much or as little time as suits your current mood or inclination. How do they seem to you? Do your plants appear to be thriving? Are they standing tall or are they withering? While this may seem funny or odd, my mind asks if my plants look happy or sad (and it is not unusual for me to express my discovery out loud). Plants are not generally thought of as having feelings, let alone emotions that include happiness and sadness! There is, however, research that indicates plants do have sensory responses to touch and sound; they have the capability to detect and react to light and to certain chemicals and can even become stressed (Nichols). Sunflowers turn towards the warmth of the sun and sweat peas use their tendrils to feel about for support to cling to. I remember as a child being fascinated that when I touched the leaves of my neighbor's mimosa tree, they would fold up! Little did I know at the time that this was for its own protection. A study at the University of Missouri has shown that plants can respond to predatory sounds (Meissen); a study at Tel Aviv University revealed that certain flowers respond to the sound of buzzing bees—as well as recordings of buzzing bees—with increasing the sugar content in their nectar (Nichols). I feel this validates that I talk to my plants and sing in their presence!

When I say that my plants look happy or that they look sad, the happiness or sadness is what I experience upon seeing the health condition of my plants. When I gaze

at the vegetable and flowering plants in my garden, or examine my houseplants on the living room windowsill, I am checking on their condition of wellness. I experience a visceral reaction to my observations, and then take action based on my assessment of their needs. These are my feelings and emotions, and they are connected to my spirituality and my perceived caretaker-partnership with the Divine. Remember to breathe. Breathe in deeply and breathe out gently as you continue to observe and take in the visual of your sacred garden space.

**Growth.** Take note of the growth of your plants. You may choose to first take in the view of your garden's growth as a whole unit, and then focus on each plant individually, allowing as much or as little time that serves your needs in the moment. Do you notice a difference from the last time you looked? Is the difference significant or easily missed? Are there new leaves, new flowers or flower buds? Have any of the plants fruited? Take in a few slow breaths as you allow yourself to absorb and process all that you have just observed. The duration of time that you take note or hold your gaze during these different steps will vary with each time that you do this Practice. Eventually how long you focus on an individual plant (for example) will be determined organically, without having to consciously determine a length of time.

**Soil and Space.** How is the soil around your plants, does it look dry and parched, or does it look moist and tilled, or somewhere in between? Take visual note of the (estimated) ratio of desired plants to weeds. There is no need to actually come up with numbers, the intention is just to become aware of the expanse of the task ahead. Are there only a few sparse weeds that popped up here and there, or have the spaces between your desired plants been filled, leaving your plants tightly surrounded? Now that you

have assessed the volume, look over the weeds individually. Is there a mixed variety of weeds growing, or has just one type decided to take root and take over in your garden? Keeping in mind that weeds are basically defined as undesired plant growth or plants that are growing where you do not want them to be, you may discover that nature—the wind or animals—has planted seeds of wild violets (*Viola Sororia*), lamb's quarters (*Chenopodium Album*), or purslane (*Portulaca Oleracea*). These weeds are all documented as being edible herbage that you might like to transplant to another location, or simply keep in place; you may decide these are indeed weeds and choose to pull them. Please note that you should only ingest herbage that you are confident you have correctly identified what the plant is and whether it is safe to consume in any form (i.e., eating raw, cooked, or in making teas and tinctures).

**Time to Weed.** Intentions are set. Breathe in slowly; breathe out slowly. As you weed, carefully and mindfully choose which plant life you will pull, and which will remain. Acknowledge the leaves and roots of the weeds that you are pulling out. Contemplate the reasons you are pulling. Through this process, you are supporting the health of your vegetation by removing the weeds that compete for the nutrients, the water, and the light your plants need to thrive, while also expanding your spiritual journey. Give attention to the gradual changes to the garden space as you create a clear area around the desired plants. As you pull, take note of how you feel while creating space for your desired plants to grow; allow yourself time to become aware of the different appearance of each plant, now that they are no longer encumbered by weeds.

**Check In.** Check in with yourself and with how you are feeling, remembering to breathe while you move at a gentle, comfortable pace. How are you feeling? Are you

still (physically) comfortably situated? As you free the greenery of their entanglement, do you feel any different than before you stepped into your sacred garden space? If not, that is okay. If you do and if it feels good, allow yourself to linger with these feelings.

Once Weeding as a Practice becomes an established practice, you may find yourself ready to let your mind wander freely as you weed, to allow your thoughts to roam wherever they may go. The repetitive motion of weeding can become a meditative practice, as if it were a physical chant, so to speak. The weeds represent the words of your chant, and your rhythmic motion of weed-pulling serves as your voice. As your motion of weed-pulling becomes rhythmic and steady, you might create—what I have named—a *meditative chant of weeding* sensation, gleaning the same benefits as is possible from a literal meditative chant experience. With time, the motion allows your subconscious to retain and continue the intentions that you set at the beginning of the Practice, which allows you the freedom and the blessing to enter and experience your calm spiritual zone. You may become aware of the sun's warmth against your skin, or the breeze gently rustling the leaves. Your thoughts may drift to wondering what you will make for dinner or what tasks you need to take care of tomorrow, and then drift back to the weed in your hand and wonder what kind it is.

While in the *meditative chant* of weeding (as named in the above context), I often plan the next garden that I want to create. Sometimes the resolution to a challenge—totally unrelated to gardening—that I had been mulling over suddenly comes to me. And then my mind drifts to gardening with my dad z"l, and then think about how he would enjoy the sense of pride his daughter experiences while tending to her gardens. There are also many times that I am moved to sing as I weed, most often singing *T'fillot Shabbat*

[prayers from Shabbat services]. Allow yourself all the seemingly random thoughts that come to you. Weeding can provide the spiritually nourishing outlet that your mind may need and enjoy.

**Breathe and Behold.** When you are ready to stop weeding, relax your hands and place them loosely on your lap. Take a deep cleansing breath in; and slowly release. Take in another breath; and as you gently breathe out, behold the difference you see in the space in front of you. Allow yourself to take pride in the accomplishment. You have given yourself time to relax, to mindfully care for your garden while caring for yourself at the same time. As you survey your plants and the space around them, you might wish to offer a blessing of appreciation or thoughts of gratitude for the blessing of being witness to things that grow. You can choose to use the six word formula that introduces a Hebrew blessing of thanks: *Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam*; or you can use an English translation, which can be translated as: We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe (there are several accepted translations). Then spontaneously add your own thoughts in your own language. Here is one of mine: Blessed are You, our G!d, Ruler of the Universe, Who allows Her people to bear witness. You may choose to offer a blessing of thanks to the Divine (invoking the name, or the descriptor that is in line with your belief system), for the opportunity of spiritual connection while sitting amidst nature. Here are two more of mine: Blessed are You loving G!d, Who fosters our spiritual connections with Nature. Blessed are You, Adonai, Who through the work of my hands (weeding), have granted me this time and consciousness to connect with my garden.

If this is your first time engaging in this Practice, or your first time this season, or the first time using this Practice in this particular space, you might find reciting the *Shehecheyanu* blessing meaningful. Transliteration of the Hebrew blessing: *Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, she-he-che-ya-nu v'ki-y'ma-nu v'hi-gee-yan-nu laz-man ha-zeh*. English translation: We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe, Who has sustained us and brought us to this time. [see Chapter 4: Blessings; see also Appendix B.]

Blessings can be vocalized or recited silently. My personal practice is to recite blessings out loud; I recommend that you do what is most comfortable and natural for you. If you take this opportunity to recite the *Shehecheyanu*, after reciting the blessing allow yourself a few moments to process the wonder and miracle of what you just said. Take a breath in; gently release the breath as you prepare to take leave of your gardening space.

### **Connecting Jewish Ritual to Weeding as a Practice**

**Havdalah.** Havdalah is from the Hebrew verb *l'hav'dil*, meaning to separate or to distinguish. Havdalah is the ritual ceremony that marks the end of *Shabbat* [the Sabbath] and ushers in the new week, ritually transitioning from Sabbath rest to the work week. Ritual objects used during the Havdalah ceremony are a cup of wine (or juice) made from grapes, fragrant spices, and a braided multi-wicked candle; certain blessings accompany the presentation of each item. To sanctify the moment, the blessing over the cup of wine is recited while the cup is raised for all present to see, but the wine is not yet sipped (I raise the cup even if I am doing Havdalah by myself). With the recitation of the blessing over the fragrant spices<sup>3</sup> (which often include clove and cinnamon), the spices are passed around for everyone to draw in the scents and enjoy, signifying the lingering

sweetness of Shabbat and as a sensory reminder that we are transitioning from Shabbat. The light of the Havdalah candle—which was lit at the beginning of the ritual—is the first fire of the week, a reminder that activities not performed on the Sabbath can now be done. The corresponding blessing is recited, and the candle is held high for all to see. We look at the flame through our fingernails, and with our fingers create shadows over the palms of our hands as a personal display showing the distinction between light and darkness. At this time, the cup is passed around so that everyone present can have a sip (or in some circles only the leader partakes). The remaining wine is poured onto a (firesafe) surface and the candle is extinguished as a final song of farewell to Shabbat and wishes for a good week are sung. Some have the tradition of dipping the tips of their pinky fingers into the spilled wine to invoke or pray with the actions of touching their temples for wisdom, their lower sides for fertility, their pockets for financial livelihood, and their hearts for love and long life.

The actions performed and sensations experienced within Weeding as a Practice correlate to Havdalah from several perspectives. Weeding, just as the ritual ceremony of Havdalah, is a form of separation; as you weed in your garden, you are physically taking out specified vegetation to create a transformative space, a space in which plants can thrive in a healthier environment. Through Havdalah, we distinguish between the ethereal space of Shabbat and the routine and ordinaries of the weekday; Shabbat is the healthier environment that supports us physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

**Remembering Shabbat and Havdalah.** Part of recognizing the connection between Weeding as a Practice and Havdalah, is also being aware of the correlations between the Practice's spiritual benefits and anticipating the joys of Shabbat. Within the

Practice I discussed the benefits of invoking, welcoming, and summoning calm through breathing, plant gazing, specific observations, and checking in with how you are feeling; eventually leading to the physical movement of pulling out the plants you want removed from the particular space. The intention for engaging in each of these actions is for spiritual benefit and Jewish connectivity through gardening; intentions are also set for Shabbat preparation, Shabbat, and Havdalah.

Shabbat has six days of preparation, during which work is performed to sustain us financially, physically, and mentally, as well as for the physical preparations for the ethereal twenty-five hours of Shabbat. We also prepare for welcoming Shabbat through meditation and prayer; followed by experiencing Shabbat delight. Beginning a gardening experience requires some thought and preparation even before entering the garden. Then comes the actual creating of the garden (or gardening space). Once established, the garden needs continuous tending to and engaging with in order to support intentions of gleaning delights throughout the entire process.

Consider these additional correlations between aspects of Weeding as a Practice, and Shabbat preparation, Shabbat and Havdalah: Entering the weeding space with intentions of Preparing to Prepare evokes entering the prayer space to set intentions to prepare for Shabbat. Entering the garden, setting intentions of observation to become fully mindful of the action of weeding embodies entering Shabbat with mindfulness and to bring calm. Weeding can represent the work of the week, calling to mind the actions of preparing for Shabbat. Weeding as a calming practice and clearing of the mind echoes singing the *piyyut* [a religious song] *L'kha Dodi*, mindfully invoking the Welcoming of



Shabbat. The act of *plant gazing* to support “taking in” the space conjures singing the beautiful psalms of *Kabbalat Shabbat* [preparing to welcome the Sabbath].

The segment of Time to Weed, mindfully choosing which plant life you pull—distinguishing between weed and desired plant—and which growth will remain, can parallel choosing and then using the ritual objects of spices, the candle and the cup of wine (or grape juice) to be used for Havdalah. Shabbat involves slowing down time in the sense of being mindful of your restful activities and avoiding *non-Shabbas-like* actions; the segment of Breathe and Behold can parallel Shabbat, taking the time to experience, to relax, to enjoy, to just be. Praying in the newly weeded space, your preparatory tasks complete; the space could represent Shabbat.

The observance of Shabbat—in the form that aligns with your personal theology—and engaging with a gardening experience are healthful ways to support your spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional health. Acknowledging the correlation to and experiencing the ritual of Havdalah, along with its perceived and physical separations, beautifully enhances your connectivity to Judaism and to Nature.

### **Practice: Harvesting**

Through Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice, we become aware of the gift that facilitating vegetable growth is. We do not take the process, or the food we reap for granted. We appreciate all that it takes to nurture and support the vegetation: the earth in which the roots form and seek nourishment; the light that warms; the water, which is necessary for photosynthesis—the process in which plants use energy from the sun to create their own food. We appreciate the science of this process, and we appreciate the

miracle of life and their Divine connection. Through our spiritual lens we allow ourselves to celebrate both the process and the resulting bounty.

The Practice of Harvesting can begin even before setting foot in your gardening space, be it your outdoor veggie garden, your deck herb garden, your indoor windowsill garden, or all of the above! Until you are physically in your gardening space, you do not yet know the bounty that will be available to you; there is a sense of anticipation, wonder, and hope. Whether the harvest will be five string beans and one tomato, or a basketful of veggies, you look forward to the satisfying, joyful experience of discovering and picking the day's yield.

**Entering the Garden.** As you enter your garden space, take in the view as a whole. Walk around the garden taking time to scan, letting your eyes wander through the vegetation at whatever pace feels right in the moment. Whether your garden has five, ten, or twenty-five individual plants, take the time to drink in the full picture of the space. Take a breath. If your garden space is a deck herb garden, a potted plant on a living room plantstand, or a grow-box on the kitchen windowsill, allow yourself time to observe and appreciate, and *be* with your garden space. Take a breath. When you are ready, focus on individual plants. Become mindful of your reactions to what you see. Allow yourself to become aware of the smile that forms as you spot that first tomato, blushed with color; take note of how you feel upon seeing a beautiful okra blossom, or a single okra pod that is big enough to harvest and small enough to be tender. Revel in the joy of seeing how tall the cilantro in your deck garden is, or upon realizing that the lettuce in your windowsill garden has become so green and full. Your surprise as you discover the lovely juxtaposition of delicate trumpetlike flowers growing on the robust pineapple sage

(never having seen pineapple sage flowers before!). After taking pleasure in the aural sensory experience as you surveyed fruits ready to be harvested, you are now ready to delight in the tactile experience, combining the visual with the sensation of touch.

**Time to Harvest.** As you choose what to pick, be mindful of the physical characteristics of each fruit, the size, the color, the texture, the perceived weight in your hand, as well as its health appearance. You take the time to make these observations, not with the intention of judgment, but rather with appreciation for the miracle of nature. As you begin to gather, be mindful of the best way to harvest so as not to injure your plant. For example, when picking tomatoes and peppers by hand, they are ready to be harvested when the fruit separates easily from the plant; okra and eggplant should be harvested young and be cut with clippers or a harvesting tool. When picking beans and peas, be sure to use two hands, one to hold the bean or pea, the other to hold the plant to ensure that you do not accidentally tear off connected leaves or pull the plant out of the ground.

Harvesting flowers and herbs also requires being mindful of your gentleness, care, and attention as you handle these plants. Carefully snip the stems to make a clean swift cut so as not to cause additional and unnecessary stress or damage to the plant. If the sunflower you choose to harvest has a thick stem, use sharp hand-held clippers with blades that are longer than the width of the stem, to insure dividing the stem of the flower with one even cut. When cutting roses to bring indoors, you may want to consider cupping the blossom in your palm (with the top of the stem between your fingers) to protect the flower and steady the stem as you use clippers to trim off the thorns. Once you have removed the rose thorns, you can gently grasp the stem and cut with sharp shears in one quick, angled cut.

The care and attention that you give your plants as you harvest their fruits and flowers adds another level of mindfulness to the action of tending to your plants. Being aware of how you care for your plant life nourishes your soul, facilitates bringing good energy into your space and into the world, and fosters and supports your spiritual connectedness.

**Saying Thank You.** Part of the spiritual gardening connecting process is expressing gratitude. With every bean that I thoughtfully separate from its plant, and with every pepper that I gently coax off the stem, I say thank you. You can say this in your mind, or you can declare your gratitude out loud. I find myself smiling—sometimes with a little giggle—because I do say my expressions of thanks out loud! My voice and my attention are directed to the plant as I say *toda raba* [thank you very much]. Sometimes I leave it at that; I said thank you to the plant and expressing my gratitude in that way felt right. Other times I will process further, and with intention deeply think about to what and to Whom it is that I am saying thank you. I am saying thank you to the plants, to the sun, and to the earth; I am saying thank you to Mother Nature and to Hashem, which for me are One and the Same. Whether you express thankfulness quietly in your heart, unabashedly out loud, or somewhere in between is up to you! Let your mood, your comfort level, your heart, and spiritual inclination in the moment be your guide.

This time that you are taking to mindfully select and gather garden bounty is a fitting-opportunity for you to consider what expressing appreciation and gratitude for your garden harvest means to you. Take in a calming breath; and then as you release the breath, begin to think over what saying thank you as you harvest means to you. What is

the appreciation that you are expressing? Is it that the plant(s) grew, that it produced fruit that you can eat, or that the action of harvesting simply brings you indescribable joy? Perhaps you are ready to process what your chosen expression of thanks means to you. And perhaps in a separate stream of consciousness, turn your thoughts towards being mindful of—or perhaps even identifying—to what entity or to Whom you are saying thank you. You can also choose to save this deeper contemplation for another time; follow how you are feeling and what you need spiritually in this moment. There is no urgency to this part of the Practice, *B'ezrat Hashem* [with the Divine's help/support] you will enjoy many occasions to harvest and to reflect.

**Taking Leave of the Gardening Space.** Before entering your gardening space to harvest the day's bounty, you anticipated with wonder what you would find. As you entered your garden, you prepared your mind and your senses for the physical activity of harvesting. Through this process, you created a sacred space, an ethereal place for you to connect and converse with nature and with the Divine. There is a Jewish practice of symbolically entering and leaving the space in which one is going to have a personal conversation with the Divine. Prior to creating this space, we prepare our minds through reciting and singing psalms and prayer; we set intentions so that our heart and soul may be ready to enter this important thrice daily conversation. Standing, with our thoughts focused, we slowly take three steps backward, marking our space to call attention to that through this physical action we are temporarily leaving our currently perceived surroundings. Then with intention, we take three steps forward to humbly enter the presence of Hashem. Through this physical movement and mindset, we are creating sacred space in which to hold this private conversation—known to Jews as the Amidah,

the Standing Prayer. The Amidah, also referred to as *Ha-T'fillah* [The Prayer] is a series of prayers considered to be the core of the Jewish worship service. At the conclusion of the recitation of the Amidah, we take three steps backwards as we symbolically leave our private audience with Hashem.

Now that you have experienced your harvesting practice in your sacred space, it is time to take leave of your garden, to take your three steps back. Stand up; gather the basket with today's harvest; be sure you have anything else that you may have brought with you that you do not wish to leave in the garden space. Just before you step out of the space, allow yourself a moment to feel whatever you are feeling as you once again take in the view of your garden as a whole unit. Take a breath in; gently release the breath as you acknowledge your feelings. Allow yourself this sacred time whether you are taking leave of your outdoor veggie garden, the herb garden on your deck, the grow-box on your windowsill, or the single potted plant growing in your living room. You may even choose to step backwards out of your garden space as an expressive gesture, that although you are taking leave of the garden space, you are not turning your back on your sacred space or the elation of the experience.

**Appreciation Continues:** You can extend and continue the aspect of appreciation for the harvest as a continuation of staying in the same mindful zone that you just experienced in your garden space: as you bring in your harvest, as you wash your newly harvested veggies, as you prepare the veggies to be eaten, and as you prepare them to be stored for later consumption. You may also choose to treat each of these acts as an individual practice of their own, especially in the case that these actions will be performed at a much later time in the day, or on a different day than the harvest. Each

Mini-Practice can include the mindful components of the Harvesting Practice in an abbreviated form.

### **Actions That Follow Harvesting: As Individual Mini-Practices**

Each of the following actions may be thoughtfully conducted with the abbreviated practice of continuing the appreciation: entering the space as you bring in your harvest; as you wash your newly harvested veggies; as you prepare the veggies to be eaten; and/or as you prepare the harvest to be stored for later consumption.

As you enter the space, take in the view of the setting as a whole unit with your harvested veggies and fruits as part of the picture. Take a breath. As you release the breath, allow yourself to again appreciate your harvest while also appreciating that you have the space to bring in, to wash, and to prepare. With intention, take out the kitchen tools that you will use, taking a moment to be grateful for your hands that can harvest, that can hold the colander, the knife, and other kitchen accessories in order to wash and prepare the vegetation. When you are ready, focus on the action(s) you are about to perform, being mindful of how you feel. Take a breath in. As you release the breath, allow yourself to call to mind how you felt when you encouraged the pepper off from its stem, or when you carefully separated tender spinach leaves without disturbing the roots. Be aware of any scent or aroma as you cut or separate veggies; take notice of the vegetation's colors as you wash, removing any soil from your precious bounty. Take note of the textures and intricacies of the different fruits. As you bring in, wash, and prepare, you are allowing yourself to experience the fruits of your labor through multiple senses. With being aware of your breath, your actions, and the sensory experience, you allow

yourself to connect with nature, with the Divine presence, with Hashem (please feel comfortable to use the descriptor that is in line with your belief system).

You may choose to again say thank you for this harvested bounty, either out loud or quietly inside your heart. Your appreciation shows no bounds, whether you harvested vegetables from an outdoor garden, lettuce from the Aerogarden in your library, or chives growing in the yartzeit glass on your windowsill—or all of the above! You may choose to take the time to consider to what or to Whom you are expressing your gratitude, or you may choose to savor that experience for when you are harvesting. When you have completed your task(s), you might choose to express gratitude through the blessings in the segment titled Blessings (see Chapter 4; also Appendix B), or spontaneously compose your own words of thanks as a ritual conclusion of the Mini-Practice(s).

### **Connecting Jewish Ritual to Harvesting**

**The “Break-Fast” of Yom Kippur.** In his book *Seasons of Our Joy*, Arthur Waskow tells us that Philo of Alexandria, a learned Jew who was strongly influenced by Hellenistic philosophy, likened the fast of Yom Kippur to a pause for the purpose of saying a blessing over a meal. Philo believed that the timing of Yom Kippur coming just before Sukkot, the holiday celebrating the harvest, is not coincidental. “The meal is the harvest—the meal of the entire year—so the pause is long” (Waskow, 1982, p. 43).

Before moving on, you may want to pause and sit with this quote for a moment. What thoughts or images does this bring? Perhaps that the meal (the harvest) is to be savored, to be fully enjoyed, to sustain you through the year. Perhaps the moments of saying blessings over the harvest are to be lingered on, recited with depth, not rushed through. Take a deep breath in; gently release the breath as you allow yourself time to ponder the



depth of “The meal is the harvest—the meal of the entire year—so the pause is long,” for as long or as briefly as you wish.

Let’s dive a little deeper. In contemplating Philo’s perspective, we can construct another lovely *kavanah* [intention]. Slowly take in a breath; fully release your breath. Begin with bringing to mind the intensity and depth of your thoughts during Yom Kippur, and then the change of mood and elation that can be experienced during the celebration of Sukkot. If these holidays are not familiar to you, you can frame this as imagining a period of time that you delve into very deep thoughts of introspection and self-assessment. Then imagine that this somber time is followed by celebrations of nature’s bounty while also remembering and connecting to your ancestors. You might choose to use this *kavanah* before or after harvesting in your own gardening space, or at any time you wish to contemplate the Jewish spiritual connections between Judaism and the blessings of harvesting your own vegetation. You might choose to ritually conclude this time of contemplation with a blessing of thanks or of appreciation.

What follows are selected verses from a prayer used by Fabrangen—a *chavurah*-style congregation in Washington, D.C.—that they recite as part of their Yom Kippur service (Waskow, p. 44). I chose verses that would work nicely as expressing gratitude for the harvest.

Blessed are You,  
Adonai our G!d,  
Seed of seeds,  
Root of roots,  
  
Life of all living,  
Who brings the ear of corn to fulness  
And ripens fruit,

Today Your food is spread  
On one great earthly table,  
So we pause before we eat:  
Pause to make the *b'racha*.

Tomorrow we will eat of the harvest;  
All year we will eat of the harvest.

Next spring we will sow from the seed we are harvesting now,  
Next summer we will eat for the strength to turn the soil.

We feast our eyes on the red of Your apples,  
We feast our ears on the rustle of Your cornstalks,  
We feast our hands on the prickle of Your berries,  
We feast our noses on the musk of Your melons,  
We feast our souls on the fulness of Your mercy.

Today we bring You that food which alone You have asked of us:  
Our love.

Blessed are You,  
Adonai our G!d,  
Seed of seeds,  
Root of roots,  
Life of all living,  
Whose food we will eat—  
Tomorrow.

## Chapter 4: Additional Practices

### Blessings

Throughout the Practices there are spaces and periods of time set aside for offering appreciation in one form or another. Your prayers and blessings can be sung or recited out loud; if you are more comfortable reciting inaudibly, do what feels right for you. Feel free to use the blessings in this segment as you wish. If you are moved to express your gratitude spontaneously in your own words, I encourage you to do so! The points in time in which you offer a prayer can be spontaneous and you are not restricted to the moments listed within the Practices.

### Blessings from a Siddur (Prayerbook)

Blessing recited before eating fruit from a tree (grapes are included in this category!):

ברוך אתה הי אלקנו מלך העולם, בורא פרי העץ.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam,*  
We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe,

... *bo-rei p'ri ha-eitz.*  
... Who creates fruit of the tree.

Blessing recited before eating fruit from the ground (vegetables are included in this category!):

ברוך אתה הי אלקנו מלך העולם, בורא פרי האדמה.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam,*  
We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe,

... *bo-rei p'ri ha-da-ma.*  
... Who creates the fruit of the earth.

Upon smelling fragrant shrubs, trees, or their flowers:

ברוך אתה הי אלקנו מלך העולם, ברי עצי בשמים.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam,*

We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe,

... *bo-rei a-tzei b'samim.*

... Who creates fragrant trees.

Upon smelling fragrant herbs, grasses, or flowers:

ברוך אתה הי אלקנו מלך העולם, בורי עשבי בשמים.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam,*

We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe,

... *bo-rei is-vei b'samim.*

... Who creates fragrant herbage.

Upon smelling fragrant edible fruit or nuts:

ברוך אתה הי אלקנו מלך העולם, הנותן ריח בפרות.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam,*

We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe,

... *ha-no-tein rei-ach tov ba-pei-rot.*

... Who places a good aroma into fruits.

**Shehecheyanu.** There is a special blessing for when you experience something for the first time, often referred to as The *Shehecheyanu*. With this blessing we are expressing thankfulness for being alive in this moment to witness the new experiences, firsts that we derive pleasure or benefit from. For example, the *Shehecheyanu* is recited on the first night of a holiday; when putting on a new article of clothing; tasting a new food; putting up a mezuzah; and when beginning a new learning journey. This blessing can also be recited at many different opportunities as part of our Jewish spiritual gardening experience, such as: when you first create a garden, first plant a seed, witness a new sprout peek through the soil, upon seeing the first flower blossom, upon seeing a new fruit on a plant, and the first harvest (even the first harvest of each type of vegetation!), and so much more.

ברוך אתה הי אלקנו מלך העולם, שהחינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam,*

We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe,

... *She-he-che-ya-nu v'ki-y'ma-nu v'hi-gee-yan-nu laz-man ha-zeh*

... Who has sustained us and brought us to this time.

**Six-Word Prayer.** Alden Solovy (liturgist, poet, author, journalist, and educator) created the idea of expressing oneself through Six-Word Prayer. I learned of him and this expression of prayer when I came across his social media page titled Six-Word Prayers. On his page, Solovy offers prompts to inspire people to pray in their own words. Participants created and posted their thoughts, wishes, and prayers in six words meant to stand on their own; participants also wrote in sets of six words. I had been so inspired by this practice that I composed the eulogy for my brother *z"l* in the format of the Six-Word Prayer, and at another time I constructed an assignment for a High Holiday Liturgy course, written entirely in the Six-Word Prayer format.

In Judaism we have *T'fillot* [prayers] that are fixed, meaning that the authored words of the prayers have been established (in most cases printed), and are accessible through a wonderful variety of *siddurim* [prayerbooks]. There is also room for self-expression and creating our own prayer—conversation with the Divine—in our own words. Towards the end of the Amidah, also known as the Standing Prayer, there is a place to offer your own thoughts if desired; I believe this to be an affirmation of the importance and welcoming of offering prayer in our own words.

One of the ways that I offer prayer in my own words, is through speaking in the Six-Word Prayer format. Sometimes these words come to me spontaneously; other times in anticipation of the garden activity that I intend to engage in, I will sit with paper and

pen in hand to see if inspiration will come to me. I composed the following eight Six-Word Prayers to express what I was feeling during different occasions within my gardening space. These can be recited at the beginning of, during, or after the task or intention that brought you into your garden. The words of the Six-Word Prayers can be recited or sung as a chant, repeating the six words at the pace that feels right. You are welcome to include my compositions within your own practices if you like. Although each Six-Word Prayer was composed to stand on their own, they can certainly be combined as you wish and how suits you in the moment.

Breathing in, breathing out, witnessing nature.

Guide my hands, help me nurture.

Bless my role in our partnership.

Planning, sowing, weeding, harvesting, with love.

Thank you for this sacred opportunity.

Thank you for this sacred space.

Tilling soil, planting seeds, nurturing life.

Thank you for today's harvest bounty.

**Prayer From Childhood and *Shehakol*.** There is a blessing often referred to as the *Shehakol*. This blessing is recited over types of foods that do not have their own specific blessing. In other words, if the food or drink you are about to consume does not fall into the category of being fruit of the tree, fruit of the ground, made of flour, or made from grapes, you would recite this blessing, which covers everything else. This blessing can also be recited in the case that you are uncertain of what the appropriate blessing would be.

ברוך אתה הי אלקנו מלך העולם, שהכול נהיה בדברו.

*Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam,*

We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe,

... *sheh-ha-kol n'yeh bid-va-ro.*

... through Whose word everything came to be.

When I was in second grade Hebrew school (the one and only year that I got to attend Hebrew school) my teacher taught us the first blessing I remember learning. I have only recently come to realize that this blessing is a form of *Shehakol*; at least that is my interpretation of it. Although I learned this blessing within the context of eating, it can certainly be used within the context of Jewish Spiritual Gardening, within any of the Practices, and within most contexts. This prayer is simple and so sweet, I still find myself reciting it on occasion.

### **Prayer From Childhood**

Thank you for the world so sweet,

Thank you for the food we eat.

Thank you for the birds that sing,

Thank you G!d for everything.

(Blessings can also be found in Appendix B.)

### **Herbal Wands**

I love growing herbs. At my home I maintain four outdoor herbal gardens and potted herbs indoors. There are many benefits to be enjoyed when growing herbs!

Herbal plants are aesthetically pleasing, have a wonderful aroma, and are used for culinary, health, and ornamental purposes. The aroma of herbs can be enjoyed while they

are growing in your garden, in your home, and when picked fresh and put in a vase as one would do with fresh cut flowers. Benefits can be derived from your homegrown herbs when used fresh, dried, and also when burned.

In my gardens, I grow an assortment of herbs that include multiple varieties within each species because there are so many wonderfully beautiful types of herbs. Every year I grow lavender, rosemary, sage, thyme, mint, citronella, tarragon, chives, marjoram, basil, and oregano; some years I also grow lemongrass, mustard, and curry.

**Spiritual Nourishment.** The action of harvesting these herbs, in and of itself, is an incredible joy. In addition to harvesting my fragrant herbs for enhancing food dishes, making teas, and decorative bouquets, I create herbal bundles that I have named Herbal Wands. The main components of my Herbal Wands are lavender, rosemary, sage, and thyme. Different factors determine the ratio of each herb within each Wand, as well as which additional herbs I will include. The determining factors can range from plant growth and quantity availability to my mood and level of creativity at that particular time. Sometimes I add stalks or leaves of date palm (yes, I have three date palm trees growing indoors); depending on when it is in the growing season, sometimes I include sunflower, nasturtium, or rose petals.

Another factor in choosing which herbs, other greenery, or flowers to include is the intended use for the Wands. I have Herbal Wands hanging on the walls and on ceiling plant hooks throughout my home for their “perfuming” scent, their multi-sensory calming effect, and to visually enhance my sacred spaces with their beauty. When I am working in my outdoor gardens, I light them to ward off insects. I also use my Herbal Wand



creations as part of my personal spiritual gardening Practices, employing them for domain and spiritual cleansing, sanctifying space, and intention setting rituals.

**Practice: Creating Herbal Wands.** The undertakings of harvesting the herbs, sorting and arranging the herbs, combined with the binding of the bundles to create Herbal Wands—as I wrap with concentrated intention—are all part of the spiritual experience. This harvesting and wrapping process has also become a meaningful augmentation of my personal spiritual gardening Practice, and eventually grew into a standalone Practice. The level of holiness and joy is further enhanced when I harvest and wrap during *chol hamoed* [the intermediate days] of Sukkot! Harvesting for, and then creating Herbal Wands from inside the *sukkah*—the traditional temporary dwellings lived in during this Agricultural Festival of Harvest and Thanksgiving—feels that much more auspicious and brings to my soul a heightened sense of connection to my ancestors, Jewish history, and the Divine Presence.

Each action of the harvesting and bundling process is performed with mindfulness and *kavanah*, from the moment you decide to begin, through to the completion of the Practice. You begin gathering your chosen materials, a basket, clippers, and natural wrapping twine; you do so with measured thought. As you approach your herb gardening space, remember to breathe. Enjoy the anticipation of the growth and beauty you will discover. Pause to visually survey your plants as you mindfully consider what you will harvest and place in your basket; all movements are slow and gently deliberate. With each harvest snip, I invite you to say thank you—out loud or in your heart—and process this sentiment in whatever way makes sense to you in the moment.

After you have collected all that you wish for this sitting, situate yourself comfortably in your chosen space. Take a deep breath in, and then breath out; check in with how your body is feeling. Take another breath in, and as you breathe out, if you note any tightness anywhere in your body, allow the tight feeling to loosen as you slowly release the breath. Repeat as desired. When you are ready, with meaningful, contemplative actions, begin separating the gleanings by type of herb and laying them out on the table (or on your chosen work surface). As you estimate and then cut lengths of twine, welcome happy thoughts of anticipation of what you are about to create.

When you are ready, begin choosing and picking up each twig, stem, and herb sprig as you divide your harvest into potential bundles, doing so mindfully and with intention. Give yourself time to visually take in the view of the unformed bundles of herbs that are laid out in front of you. I invite you to visualize how the herbs in front of you will mingle together once they are bundled and wrapped together. Take a breath in. Enjoy the sight. As you gently release your breath, gather herbs into your hand, and with deliberate intention, slowly begin to wrap. Let yourself become aware of how you are feeling as you wrap the natural twine and witness as your fresh cut herbal bundle becomes an Herbal Wand.

At any (or every) stage of this Practice you might wish to include informal blessings of gratitude. You might choose to express your own spontaneous blessings or meditations to acknowledge the worldly entities and spiritual breath that support and brought you to this moment in time. Before taking leave of this space, if you are moved to do so, allow yourself time to sit with your creations. Perhaps recite the *Shehecheyanu* blessing as a concluding meditation (see Appendix B).

### Correlating Herbal Wands to Lulavim

During the holiday of Sukkot [festival holiday celebrating the harvest] we employ a type of herbal bundle—called a lulav—that is held and ritually waved as part of the holiday’s morning services, every day with the exception of on Shabbat [Sabbath]. The bundles are made up of branches and leaves from three specific types of trees: palm, myrtle, and willow. While holding the lulav, we also hold an etrog [citron fruit].

Palm and myrtle have named connections within the Jewish Bible: “On the first day you shall take the product of *hadar* [myrtle] trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before your God יהוה seven days” (Lev. 23:40). The first reference of myrtle in the Bible is in Nehemiah 8:15 regarding the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles (Modzelevich, 2005-2023). An English translation of the Hebrew text: “and that they must announce and proclaim throughout all their towns and Jerusalem as follows, ‘Go out to the mountains and bring leafy branches of olive trees, pine trees, myrtles, palms and [other] leafy trees to make booths, as it is written’” (Nehemiah 8:15). Etrog is indirectly referred to in the Bible with the Hebrew phrase *p’ri eitz hadar* (Lev. 23:40) which literally translated means a fruit of the beautiful tree. The rabbis of the Talmud explained that the fruit of this beautiful tree is referring to the *Citrus medica* (Modzelevich); *Citrus medica* is the scientific name of the citron [in modern Hebrew, citron is the name for any variety of etrog].

The holder that houses the lulav bundle is woven from palm leaves. In the center of the bundle is a closed frond of palm. Three branches of a myrtle tree and two branches of a willow tree are placed on either side of the palm. There are traditions in which the branches are arranged differently. The palm frond should be at least 16 inches. The

myrtle and willow branches are to be at least eleven-and one-half inches long, although a minimum of nine and six-tenths inches is considered acceptable (Adess, 2003/2004, pp. 68, 104). There are other sources that state slight differences in required lengths; there are no maximum limits to length.

When choosing an etrog, people consider the size, the color, as well as the visual appeal. Different authorities use different criteria to determine the minimum size requirement for an etrog to be considered fit for holiday use. One says the etrog must be the size of a nut (but does not say which kind of nut!); another says it should be at least fifty-seven cubic centimeters in size; and yet another says the etrog must weigh at least fifty-seven grams. According to another authority: “It is proper to use an esrog [another pronunciation of etrog] that is significantly larger than the minimum requirement, in order to ensure that even if it [shrinks], it will still remain kosher” (Adess, p.125). There is no maximum size limit of an etrog!

Great thought and study were put into deriving the halakhic requirements [requirements that are in accordance with Jewish law]; figuring out what to look for when selecting a lulav and etrog has already been provided for me. The process of being in a market and thoughtfully choosing each element that I will use to put together a lulav and etrog for Sukkot, is a meaningful experience that connects me to generations before me, as well as to all other celebrants of the holiday. Choosing which herbs to harvest from my gardens when I am preparing to create my Herbal Wands is totally my choice and at my discretion. Harvesting these herbs with mindful intention enhances this wonderfully spiritual experience.

**Personal Connections.** The first time during the Sukkot holiday that I take hold of my lulav (and etrog), recite the appropriate blessing, and wave it in the four compass directions of east, south, west, and north, and then towards the Heavens and the earth, I feel that I am sanctifying and cleansing the space in my sukkah in preparation to pray the Sukkot service. When I take hold of my Herbal Wand and wave it in preparation of ritually using a particular area or space—in my gardens, my home, or my sukkah—the motions are also directed to the four compass directions, to the Heavens, and to the earth; I walk the perimeter of the space and then wave encircling myself within the rings of created smoke and scents of my homegrown herbs.

When I wave the lulav during the religious service in synagogue or in our sukkah at home, the ritual is part of my communication with G!d; along with these motions I am praising the Divine, making petitions, as well as expressing gratitude. In a similar vein, the waving motion of filling the air with the smoke and the aroma of my Herbal Wand is part of my praying to G!d, as I offer praise, make petitions, and express gratitude.

When I hold the lulav and etrog for ritual purposes during my observance of Sukkot I feel very connected to nature and to my Jewishness, especially when doing so in my sukkah. I experience similar sensations of deep spiritual connectivity when I am ritually waving my Herbal wands, whether I am in my sukkah celebrating the holiday or cleansing another sacred space. This connectivity is personally enhanced with using herbs that were grown in (my perceived) partnership with the Divine.

## **Chapter 5: Practice Additions, Variations, and Commentary**

### **Personalized Innovations**

When first becoming acquainted with the various Practices, I recommend that you perform the actions as written. Once you are comfortable with a Practice, feel free to incorporate your own ideas, manifestations, and expressions. The Practices were created to be spiritually nourishing. If a particular movement or step within a Practice does not suit you at the particular moment in time, it is perfectly fine to make changes that will support your needs. The intention of this project is to foster connectivity, intertwining your Judaism—honoring where on the Jewish spectrum you are—with your spirituality, and with the engagement in gardening.

### **Application of Practice Segments Within Other Practices.**

Practices can be used each time that you engage in a particular activity as desired. For example, each time you enter your garden to harvest, you can do the segment within the Harvesting Practice titled Entering the Garden [found in Chapter 3]; you are not limited to only using this segment the very first time that you enter your garden to harvest. As a matter of fact, any time that you will be entering your gardening space to weed, to water, to harvest, and/or to meditate you can implement this segment, or you can choose to include the segment Actions That Follow Harvesting: As Individual Mini-Practices [also in Chapter 3]. Depending on which activity you are engaging in, you will want to make spontaneous adjustments in some of the wording.

You can also utilize segments of one Practice to enhance another Practice. For example, the segment titled Taking Leave of the Gardening Space, also found within the

Harvesting Practice [Chapter 2], can be included as part of any Practice in which you are spending time with your gardening space.

**Quick/short on time.**

Practices can also be abbreviated! Please do not feel that you must always do a deep dive every time. At a future date, I intend to create a supplement that contains an abbreviated version of each Practice. The purpose of creating an abbreviated form of the Practices is to have an alternative for the times when you know that you are going in for a quick harvest, or you know that you do not have the time to engage in a full meditative/mindfulness practice. The beauty of incorporating my innovative practices into your spiritual life is that you can be creative, with allowances for flexibility, and be involved in the process as you wish to do so. You may also opt to leave them as they are. You know yourself and your spiritual needs better than anyone. While I offer these Practices and intentions with the heart and empathy of a Jewish spiritual guide, you ultimately decide what is right for you.

**Alternative Inclusions**

As mentioned within the Practice: Planting, you might elect to include what may be considered non-traditional elements into your Jewish spirituality gardening journey. Candles, herbal bundles, incense, and crystals. While these elements may be perceived as not having a Jewish connection, I believe that they do.

Candles are lit in celebration and observance of Festival holidays; two (or more) candles are lit weekly as part of welcoming Shabbat; a single candle is lit in memory of a loved one on the anniversary of their death, as well as on four additional dates on the Jewish calendar. Bringing in light has intrinsic meaning and application within Jewish

life. I correlate creating and ritually using Herbal Wands to the lulavim that are ritually used on the holiday of Sukkot (discussed in Herbal Wands). I connect the burning of Herbal Wands, herbal bundles, and incense with the aroma of spices for Havdalah and with the scents created by burnt offerings made in the days of the First and Second Temples (it is written in numerous places within the Jewish Bible that these scents were pleasing to Hashem). The Jewish Bible explains the instructions of how the breastplate for Aaron [brother of Moses], as part of “consecrating him to serve Me as priest” (Ex. 28:3) is to be made. These instructions identify the names of the twelve different crystals to be included (Ex. 28:15-21). There are writings that speak of the applications of crystals as a “priestly device for obtaining oracles” (Jewish Virtual Library). In References I have included the URL for an interesting article listed in the Jewish Virtual Library.

### **A Note on Breathing**

Sprinkled throughout the practices are reminders to breathe, to breathe in, and then to breathe out. Yes, *B’ezrat Hashem* (with the help of G!d) we are breathing; breathing is considered an involuntary act. The encouragement to breathe is for the intention of finding calm within, allowing a deeper intake of oxygen, and becoming aware of various aspects of the moment. Aspects that mindful breathing can facilitate the awareness of include: the breath itself; your surroundings; how you are feeling emotionally, physically, spiritually; elements that your senses are receiving and interpreting; a new spiritual connectivity that you may be experiencing; etc. I encourage you to include being mindful of your breath, allowing for deep breaths in, and gentle, slow breaths out—even where this instruction is not listed in a Practice.



**Using An Existing Garden**

As discussed earlier, there are a myriad of choices of garden types that you can create as part of your spiritual gardening journey. You can also use already established outdoor and/or indoor gardens. Although you certainly can use a newly acquired potted plant or newly sowed seeds in a planter, if you already have plants within your home that you would like to transform into your sacred gardening space, that would be just as wonderful. You do not have to wait for a new growing season to begin. I also use these Practices when I am expanding a current garden and on the occasion that I revamp a garden. I have expanded my Memory Garden several times over the past years. More recently, I needed to pull out an entire herb garden (due to needed work) along the back wall of our house; I turned this unanticipated challenge into an opportunity to redesign, replant, and then rededicate this sacred space.

**Practice: Going Outdoors**

If you don't have indoor plants or an outdoor garden—or even if you do have—you can use nature that is outside of your personal living space. Perhaps you have neighboring woods in which you can surround yourself with trees. You might have a beautiful view of a mountainside from your back porch or within a convenient distance. There are breathing, witnessing, and gazing practices throughout Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice, any of which can be applied when you are anywhere outside that you find trees, plants, or flowers growing. These Practices can be experienced and enjoyed without having to connect them to a specific physical gardening activity. With your presence and your mindful thoughts, you create your sacred space within nature's setting.

The following passage authored by Anne Frank *z”l* can be used as a beautiful *kavanah* [intention] for when you go outside seeking to connect with nature:

The best remedy for those who are afraid, lonely, or unhappy is to go outside, somewhere where they can be quite alone with the heavens, nature and [G!d].

Because only then does one feel that all is as it should be and that [G!d] wishes to see people happy, amidst the simple beauty of nature. As long as this exists, and it certainly always will, I know that then there will always be comfort for every sorrow... And I firmly believe that nature brings solace in all troubles. (Frank, A. 1989, as cited in Becker, 2019)

**Alternative to Outdoor Gardening.** If you are without outdoor space for a garden, or simply prefer not to have an outdoor garden of your own, as mentioned above, you may find a world of nature outside of your home. You might seek space in nearby woods, a community park, the common green area within your neighborhood, a tree along a city block.

A lovely option to include in your outdoor experience is the practice of *Forest Bathing*, or *shinrin-yoku* in Japanese; *shinrin* means forest and *yoku* means bath. Forest bathing is more than just taking a walk in the forest. Forest bathing is a beautiful descriptor of a practice in which you immerse yourself in nature and is believed to have a multitude of physical and spiritual benefits. Through the senses of sight, sound, smell, touch, and yes even taste, one can experience benefit by being immersed in nature. A researcher at the Materials Science Institute in Oregon found that looking at certain kinds of natural patterns reduced stress by as much as sixty percent (Li, 2018, p. 176). Can you

envision yourself focusing on the foliage around you, remembering to breathe, and then de-stressing?

It is when we are filled with awe at the sight of nature that we begin to think about things outside ourselves. A sense of awe helps us to slow down and stop worrying. It transforms negative emotions into positive feelings. It gives us pause and brings us joy. (Li, p. 177)

One of the many notes within Dr Li's book *Forest Bathing* that caught my attention is that every Monday he takes his third-year medical students for *shirin-yoku*. This speaks to me of his firm belief in the of the beneficial impact and how being in nature is incredibly grounding. Research performed in Canada has shown that one's sense of connectedness to nature can enhance our capacity for happiness, in the present and as well future (Li, p. 223). The information and ideas within this book are wonderful and I believe can be helpful whether you are actually walking through a forest, have access to a botanical garden, or only have one oak tree to gaze upon in your neighborhood. Forest Bathing can be performed in the privacy of your vast vegetable garden, your four-by-four flower bed, or the mini-herb garden on your windowsill.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

### **Gleanings**

The intention of Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice, as stated in the beginning of this thesis, is to provide the opportunity to bring *Jewish Mindfulness* to indoor and outdoor gardening, through providing tools and practices that combine the spiritual, intellectual, and practical elements, to joyfully nourish mind, body, and soul.

The foundational inspiration for Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice is rooted in my personal experiences and revelations while gardening. My hope is that my Practices will be enjoyed and experienced by others as part of their Jewish spiritual journey and connecting to Judaism.

### **Reflection on What I Learned**

Through the interview surveys that I conducted as part of two separate entrepreneurial research projects, I learned that people were open to the idea of spiritual exploration through gardening. This openness was expressed by those who felt a distant connection to their Jewishness, as well as those who felt tightly knitted to their Judaism, current practices, and level of observance.

As discussed in chapter two, the constituent group interviewed as part of the first research project was composed of family and friends. Some were already into gardening, and some were not; for some, Jewish ritual and practice were a natural part of their lives, and not for others. Within this group I was the connecting link, and they all knew that I am very much into gardening.

People in the constituent group interviewed for the second research project were referred to me. I had not met them prior to our scheduled interview dates; many of them

knew each other, and all agreed to meet with me individually. Within this particular group—although quite diverse regarding their own level of Jewish observance and practices—each person does in fact have a strong Jewish identity. They do intertwine practices of non-Jewish origins within their Jewish observance, as well as interweave practices that they are unaware of the Jewish roots. It quickly became clear to me that everyone in this group has a spiritual sense about her/him and are already accustomed to engaging in rituals to raise the holiness of her/his practices. Through discussing different paths of Jewish spirituality and the various elements that these paths can include, their sense of what constitutes Jewish connectivity expanded.

Assembling and then sending out the first launch of mailable Jewish Spiritual Gardening kits was exciting: exciting as well as validating as I received positive, joyful feedback from the recipients. Many expressed honor and pleasure to be part of my research and were thrilled to learn that they would be receiving a mailing. For some, the JSG kit was their sole current gardening experience; for others, the triple-pot windowsill garden became a new addition to their indoor gardening set up.

For the most part, the recipients chose to keep their new spiritual gardening journey private; however, occasionally I would receive text communications and pictures of their gardens' growth in progress and of the herbs harvested for their tables. Some of the participants communicated to me that they used their new gardens as a focal point for meditation and for contemplating their thoughts on spirituality. This research reinforces that the spiritual needs of individuals varies greatly from one to the other—even among those within the same demographic. Some participants are fine with a simple gardening experience composed of one indoor plant set up and a simple chant or poem to bring

them to a spiritual zone. Others are into a deeper connecting and study process with materials to read and sit with, and also enjoy a more involved gardening experience.

Through both research undertakings, I also learned that there are people within different demographics seeking a sense of peoplehood and belonging who prefer doing so without getting involved with what they consider to be the religious elements of Judaism. Through Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice, I aim to exemplify that one can embrace her/his Jewishness, peoplehood, and belonging in more than one way or fashion. People do not have to choose between one set of practices over another if they do not wish to. There are those of us who embrace and deeply connect with (what some refer to as) traditional prayers and traditional services who also actively connect to Judaism through gardening, meditation, and other out-of-the-box methodologies. It can be just as meaningful to pursue spiritual exploration through one chosen path or through alternative options.

### **In-Reach**

One of my goals is to continue to do in-reach within the Jewish world. I am looking to help foster and support people's connections to their Judaism, their heritage, and Jewish identity through engaging in innovative practices and conversations that are meaningful and commensurate to their spiritual needs. As an empathetic person and as clergy, it is my role to assist others in uncovering which ideas and practices will provide nourishment for their Jewish *neshamot* (souls); also, to help ensure that the chosen path makes sense within their lives and personal belief systems.

**Marginalized Populations.** As part of my in-reach efforts, I wish to connect and be present for those who feel marginalized by their own Jewish communities. This

marginalization often manifests in the loss of Jewish membership, the loss of Jewish souls—people who feel they have no choice but to let go of their Jewish identity and their connection with the Jewish people. For example, there are people who follow earth-based practices and have been openly rejected by their more traditional communities. There are also those who are into alternative practices—practices that are not accepted within their local Jewish communities. As part of the research for a second entrepreneurial seminary course project, I conducted interviews with a population sampling within this demographic. As a result, I learned that a section of the constituency sampling did not realize that many of their practices—theologically-speaking—can coexist with Jewish practices. Many were surprised to learn that not only do they not have to choose between Judaism and their alternative practices, but there are also connections and commonalities that can be found in Biblical studies and within the study of Jewish Folklore. It was a surprise to a number of the interviewees that within Judaism we have traditions regarding blessing the moon! My desired role within this demographic would be as a rabbinic presence. Supporting their need for validation and autonomy regarding their practice choices, I would also be a significant source of counsel concerning Jewish connections. Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice can serve as a natural window to reach out and connect.

### **Planting Seeds**

Judaism is a way of life; it is not a once-a-week commitment. In the same vein, including Jewish practices and traditions in one's life is not an all or nothing obligation! Living Jewish life and engaging in Jewish practices can fall anywhere and everywhere in between. Whether someone identifies as culturally, spiritually, ethnically, religiously

Jewish—or simply as Jewish, Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice supports exploring connectivity to the extent of one’s personal needs and preferences.

I would like to bring Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice to the individual, to the affiliated and the non-affiliated, to Jewish organizations across the spectrum, to coven circles as well as to the sole practitioner. I wish to share my approach with anyone who is open to exploring spiritual journeys through gardening (which allows for a pretty broad scope!), in need of personal theology nurturing, or simply seeking a meaningful way to get into gardening.

At some point in time, I intend to incorporate alternative components to my Practices that include non-Jewish participants, thereby making my Spiritual Gardening Practices accessible to people of any faith, whether identified or not. I had set up the basic plans for this future model during the time I participated as an accepted member of an entrepreneurial cohort in the START<sup>4</sup> program.

### **Fortuitous Inspiration**

I discovered that writing the Practices from the perspective of talking with someone, as if I were sitting face-to-face, personally guiding an individual through each step (as opposed to listing instructions in bullet form), resulted in this writing journey, as well as the written outcome manifesting in a deeper, more personal level than I had initially envisioned. This fortuitous writing style inspired the idea for a future writing endeavor. Eventually I will look to create a supplemental guide to serve as a companion for the current thesis project. The companion will provide an at-a-glance presentation of Gardening as a Spiritual Practice to be used once the practitioner ascertains a comfortable familiarity with a given practice. Perhaps one day to even create a three paneled, tri-fold



laminated reference guide, which would be easily transportable and easily cleaned after use in an outdoor setting!

I have ideas for and drafts of additional Practices that are not yet fully fleshed out. I will look forward to resuming writing and further developing these rituals as the inspirations come to me.

**Fortuitous Benefit.** When I am moved to express my spiritual seekings or tend to the current contemplations of my heart through spiritual rituals in my gardening space, the rituals and words I choose often come about spontaneously. Choosing to write out my spiritual gardening practices in depth has given me the opportunity to transpose my ritual work into a form accessible to others in a more intimate fashion. With carefully choosing my words, in efforts to put on paper concepts that can be challenging to put into words, this writing process allowed me to internalize and glean an even deeper comprehension of my own Practices.

There are times when I engage in spiritual rituals that I have encountered through the writings and published works of others. In particular, I connect with the Practices in Rabbi Jill Hammer's book *Return to the Place, The Magic, Meditation, and Mystery of Sefer Yetzirah* (2020) and also to Hana Matt's<sup>5</sup> meditation practices. Both are inspirational sources that have complimented my personal spiritual practices.

### **Entering the Garden**

Every garden in my yard and within my home was created with a specific purpose in mind, each with its own special meaning. In her book *Gardens for the Soul*, Pamela Woods says "Passionate gardeners often have a special garden that fills them with inspiration every time they visit or conjure it in their imagination" (Woods, 2002, p. 12).

Even though each of my gardens has a particular purpose, a name, and a specialness associated with it, I can still relate to her words. I am passionate about each and every garden and experience a certain kind of spiritual exhilaration upon going into each one. When I enter the vegetable garden, I recall that it was the first garden my husband and I created when we moved into our new home. It is the place in which I became cognizant of the connection between my gardening space, my humble role in the process, and sensing the presence of Hashem and of my sweet dad ז"ל. When I walk in front of the long narrow Memory Garden that stretches along the back fence, I remember that it was created with love. This garden contains transplants from my parents' home of forty-eight years; irises and lilies of the valley from the garden of my dear friend who died of Covid in April 2020, master gardener Jerome Spector ז"ל; and various other plants I have nourished from seed. Each of our nineteen gardens holds a unique spiritual essence and meaningful relevance. As you create and tend to your own special garden(s), may you uncover the joys, ethereal connections, and experience nourishment, as you embark on your personal journey of Gardening as a Jewish Spiritual Practice.

### Notes

1. Herbal Wand: The name I gave to my herb bundle creations, that I make from a variety of herbs grown in my home gardens. The main components of my Herbal Wands are lavender, rosemary, sage, and thyme. See also: Herbal Wands in Chapter 4

2. Hebrew blessing recited before engaging in Jewish study:

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו, במצותו וצונו לעסק בדברי  
תורה

*Baruch Ata Ad-nai, Elokeinu Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitz-vo-tav*

We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe, Who makes us holy with Your  
Commandments

*v'tzi-vanu la'a'sok b'divrei Torah.*

and Commands us to be involved/engaged in the words of Torah.

3. Fragrant Spices for Havdalah: As part of the ceremony of Havdalah, the participants are invited to breathe in and enjoy the aroma of spices. Many people include clove and cinnamon for their strong and beautiful scent. Regarding which spices to use, customs vary! There are places in Israel where people go outside to pick fresh herbs.

4. START: A 10-week Certificate in Spiritual Entrepreneurship course in collaboration with Glean Network, within the umbrella of the Center for Leadership and Learning, also known as CLAL.

5. Hana Matt's meditation practices: Meditation practices shared at the conclusion of Daniel Matt's weekly online Zohar course

The following bio was provided to me by Hana Matt:

"I have been a teacher of World Religions and also Counseling at Graduate Theological Union and The Chaplaincy Institute, Berkeley, California, for 15 years. I have also

worked as a therapist seeing clients individually for 20 years. Plus, I teach the Zohar Course online every week with Daniel.”

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~ Appendix A ~

**Interview Template of Questions for Entrepreneurial Research Project**

All interviews were conducted over Zoom

[Intellectual property of Sherree Beth Bena KaneGraber]

Goals:

- Information gathering
- Combining Jewish Study/Learning with Spiritual Connectivity to Gardening
- Non-judgmental, in that all answers are accepted because they are your answers!
- Questions are to (help me to) focus project direction
- When I pause in between, I am typing answers :-)

**Interview Questions**

- How do you feel about gardening – meaning indoor/outdoor – any kind?  
→
- Do you currently have house plants and/or outdoor plants?  
→
- If you were to have plants, [if you were to have additional plants] where would you have space for them/or where would you want them:
  - Kitchen windowsill gardening
  - Indoor planting (to what degree)
  - Small patio gardening
  - Large patio gardening
  - Outdoor yard gardening→
- Do you prefer planting/gardening solo activity, with others, or either way is good?  
→
- If you garden – what are your reasons? What is it that you like about growing plants or gardening (offer example if they're not sure)
  - Enjoyment
  - Food for family
  - Herbs for cooking→

**Changing direction a bit: Spiritual connectivity**

- What does spirituality, or being spiritual mean to you?  
→
- Have you ever wanted to express / or do you express spiritually outside of a prayerful setting?  
→

- Are there scents/smells, colors, or textures that help you to connect spiritually to an activity? (any activity – study, planting, reading)
  - - If so, which scents/smells, colors, or textures?
      -
    - And to which activity/activities? (study, planting)
- 

**This may feel like a little bit of a jump** from here on out!

- How is prayer – in any shape, in any form – currently a part of your life?
  -
- What/which terminology are you more comfortable with:
  - Higher Power
  - Shekhina.
  - G!ddess
  - Hashem
  - G!d
  - Other:
- 
- Are you comfortable with a “general” Jewish connection when speaking of spiritually connecting activities (or prefer to follow a particular denomination)?
  - 
  - If so, may I ask your preference?
- 

**Still jumping :)**

- What do you imagine that Jewish meditation and Jewish chanting would be?
  - 
  - They do have a place in Judaism and Jewish learning!
- Would you consider other portals—towards spirituality—such as using candles, incense, or herbs?
  - 
  - IF NO→ what other portals might you consider?
  -
- What kinds of (ritual) activity could attract you to seek a Jewish-spiritual connection to gardening?
  - 
  - If someone struggles with the above question: A spiritual connection to gardening could be:

- Including a learning aspect that stirs the mind
- A family activity component
- Community based
- Attached to a particular intention
- Or in honor or in memory of someone

**Questions gleaned from another interview:**

- What is your opinion on the connection between spirituality and gardening?  
→
- Someone expected I would go deeper into spirituality and that I would ask: How do you observe? What makes you spiritual?  
→

**Closing Question:**

The project focus will be: How Jewish learning can enhance and connect to gardening and spirituality.

- Given the subject matter, what question would you have expected me to ask you that I didn't ask?
- →



~ Appendix B ~

**Blessings**

**Blessings from a Siddur (Prayerbook)**

Blessing recited before eating fruit from a tree (grapes are included in this category!):

ברוך אתה הי אלקנו מלך העולם, בורא פרי העץ.

*Baruch Ata Ad-nai, Elokeinu Melech ha-olam,*

We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe,

... *bo-rei p'ri ha-eitz.*

... Who creates fruit of the tree.

Blessing recited before eating fruit from the ground (vegetables are included in this category!):

ברוך אתה הי אלקנו מלך העולם, בורא פרי האדמה.

*Baruch Ata Ad-nai, Elokeinu Melech ha-olam,*

We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe,

... *bo-rei p'ri ha-da-ma.*

... Who creates the fruit of the earth.

Upon smelling fragrant shrubs, trees, or their flowers:

ברוך אתה הי אלקנו מלך העולם, ברי עצי בשמים.

*Baruch Ata Ad-nai, Elokeinu Melech ha-olam,*

We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe,

... *bo-rei a-tzei b'samim.*

... Who creates fragrant trees.

Upon smelling fragrant herbs, grasses, or flowers:

ברוך אתה הי אלקנו מלך העולם, בורי עשבי בשמים.

*Baruch Ata Ad-nai, Elokeinu Melech ha-olam,*

We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe,

... *bo-rei is-vei b'samim.*

... Who creates fragrant herbage.

Upon smelling fragrant edible fruit or nuts:

ברוך אתה הי אלקנו מלך העולם, הנותן ריח בפרות.

*Baruch Ata Ad-nai, Elokeinu Melech ha-olam,*

We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe,

... *ha-no-tein rei-ach tov ba-pei-rot.*

... Who places a good aroma into fruits.

### ***Shehecheyanu***

ברוך אתה הי אלקנו מלך העולם, שהחינו וקימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה.

*Baruch Ata Ad-nai, Elokeinu Melech ha-olam,*

We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe,

... Who has sustained us and brought us to this time.

... *She-he-che-ya-un v'ki-na-un v'hi-gee-yan-un laz-man ha-zeh*

**6-Word Prayer** – I composed each of these eight Six-Word Prayers to stand on their

own:

Breathing in, breathing out, witnessing nature.

Guide my hands, help me nurture.

Bless my role in our partnership.

Planning, sowing, weeding, harvesting, with love.

Thank you for this sacred opportunity.

Thank you for this sacred space.

Tilling soil, planting seeds, nurturing life.

Thank you for today's harvest bounty.

**Recite before drinking and eating foods that do not fit in a specific blessing category:**

ברוך אתה הי אלקנו מלך העולם, שהכול נהיה בדברו.

*Baruch Ata Ad-nai, Elokeinu Melech ha-olam,*

We Praise You, G!d, Ruler of the Universe,

... *sheh-ha-col n'yeh bid-va-ro.*

... through Whose word everything came to be.

### **Prayer from Childhood**

Thank you for the world so sweet,

Thank you for the food we eat.

Thank you for the birds that sing,

Thank you G!d for everything.

### **Blessing for Widsom: *Ata Chonein***

אתה חונן לאדם דעת, ומלמד לאנש בינה

חננו מאתך דעה בינה והשכל

ברוך אתה ה', חונן הדעת.

*Ata cho-nein l'adam l'da-at, um'l-meid leh-eh-nosh bi'nah.*

You grace humans with wisdom and teach humanity perception.

*Chaw-nei-nu mei-it-cha dei-ah bi-na v'has-ceil.*

Bestow upon us Your knowledge, insight and understanding.

*Baruch ata Ad-nai, cho-nein ha-da-at.*

Blessed are You the Grantor of wisdom.



## Glossary

- Amidah:** “The Standing Prayer” is composed of a series of blessings and is the central prayer of the three daily services; named as such because the Amidah is recited while standing. The Amidah is also known as the Shemona Esrei.
- B’racha:** Transliteration of the Hebrew word for blessing.
- B’ezrat Hashem:** With the Divine’s help/support.
- Chatimah:** A signature or a sealing; the chatima refers to the final line of a prayer.
- Chavuruah:** Lit. fellowship; small and intimate participatory congregations or study group, free-standing or part of a synagogue, creatively traditional, egalitarian between women and men and the learned and learning (Waskow, p. 231).
- Chol Hamoed:** The intermediate days of Passover and Sukkot.
- Chevruta:** A study/learning partner; peer guided text study.
- Citron:** A citrus fruit resembling a lemon but larger with little pulp and a very thick rind. Citron in Hebrew is etrog. In modern Hebrew, citron is the name for any variety and form of etrog.
- Etrog:** (esrog) A citrus fruit native to Israel; in English it is called a citron.
- Elul:** The sixth month of the Hebrew calendar year (when counting from the Hebrew calendar month of Nissan). It precedes Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; the twenty-nine days of Elul are used as a time of preparation in anticipation of the upcoming holiday period.
- Fabrangen:** Name of a chavurah in Washington, D.C; modification of *farbrengen*, a coming together of Chassidim to hear their rebbe teach Torah (Waskow, p. 231).

**Forest Bathing:** *Shinrin-Yoku*; Japanese. *Shinrin* means forest and *Yoku* means bath.

**Halakhic requirements:** Requirements that are in accordance with Jewish law.

**Hashem:** Literally “the Name.” Hashem is an alternative way to refer to the Divine in speech when not in prayer; also in certain cases when in written or printed form.

**Ha-T’fillah:** The Prayer; another term referring to the Amidah.

**Havdalah:** Separates; distinguishes. The ritual ceremony that marks the separation of Shabbat [the Sabbath] from the beginning of the work week.

**Herbal Wand:** The term I coined for the herbal bundles that I create from a variety of herbs and plants grown in my gardens.

**Hoshana Raba:** The last intermediate day of Sukkot; the last day of the introspective time period that begins on the First of Elul, continues through Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and concludes with Hoshana Raba. It is believed to be the last day of Divine judgment during this time period.

**Jewish New Years:** The four Jewish New Years: Rosh Hashanah (the First of Tishrei), the First of Nisan (when the Exodus began), the First of Elul, and Tu B’Shevat (the Fifteenth of Shevat).

**Kavanah:** Intention. Concentration, focus or attention; a meditation said preceding an action designed for the purpose of heightening our awareness and appreciation for the act we are about to do. It also refers to spontaneous prayer (as opposed to *keva*, fixed prayer).

**Keva:** The set or fixed text of prayer.

- L’kha Dodi:** The *piyut* (religious poem) Lecha Dodi was written in Tzfat (Safed) in the sixteenth century by the Kabbalist Rabbi Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz. The song uses the image of the beloved or the groom and bride to describe the relationship between the Jewish people and Shabbat.
- Lulav:** (plural lulavim) A bundle of specified plants comprised of branches and leaves from three specific types of trees: palm, myrtle, and willow. The lulav is used as part of the religious observance of the holiday of Sukkot.
- Mezuzah:** Hebrew word for doorpost; colloquially has come to refer to the case that holds sacred parchment and is attached to the doorpost.
- Neshamot:** Souls (singular: *nishama*).
- Pesach:** The holiday of Passover.
- Piyut:** Liturgical poem; liturgical composition. One of several types of liturgical compositions or religious poems.
- Relevance:** The fact or quality of being notable.
- Rosh Hashanah:** “The head of the year.” The Jewish New Year; the first and second days of the seventh month of Tishrei (when counting from the Hebrew calendar month of Nissan).  
“On this day of divine ‘enthronement’ acknowledging [G!d] as its king, accompanied by the blast of a shofar. This is also the anniversary of the creation of the world, which began on the first of Tishrei” (Dennis, 2016, p 364).
- Shabbat:** Hebrew for Sabbath, the Jewish day of rest.
- Sefaria:** Library of Jewish texts online; a non-profit organization offering free access to texts, translations, and commentaries.

**Shekhinah:** Feminine Divine presence. “Presence,” divine immanence; the tenth and last *sefirah*; female partner of *Tif’eret*; also called *Malkhut* (Matt, 2016, p 461).

**Shehechyanu:** The blessing recited when experiencing something new, for the first time,  
or for the first time within a new season.

**Shemona Esrei:** Literally means eighteen, referring to the eighteen blessings of the (Weekday) Amidah, although today it contains nineteen blessings. The Amidah that is recited on Shabbat contains seven blessings.

**Shinrin-Yoko:** Forest Bathing. In Japanese *Shinrin* means forest and *Yoku* means bath.

**Sh’mini Atzeret:** The “eighth day,” which comes at the conclusion of the Festival of Sukkot.

**Siddur:** (plural: *Siddurim*) Prayerbook(s).

**Simchat Torah:** “Rejoicing with the Torah”; holiday celebrating the completing of the  
annual cycle of Torah readings.

**Sukkah:** An outdoor temporary booth that is erected outdoors and lived in during the week of the Agricultural Festival Holiday of Sukkot; a holiday of harvest and thanksgiving. Jews are biblically instructed to dwell in the sukkah during the holiday in remembrance of the booths that the Israelites lived in during the wandering in the wilderness.

**Sukkot:** Festival holiday that celebrates the harvest. Sukkot is one of the three great Pilgrimage Festivals of the Jewish year.

**Talmud:** The collection of Jewish law and tradition consisting of the Mishnah and the Gemara.



**T'fillah:** Prayer

**T'fillot:** (plural of *T'fillah*) Prayers.

**T'fillot Shabbat:** Prayers that are part of Shabbat services.

**Tishrei:** The seventh month on the Hebrew calendar when counting from the month of Nisan (the month of the Exodus from Egypt).

**Toda Raba:** Transliterated Hebrew meaning thank you very much.

**Yom Kippur:** The Day of Atonement, on the tenth day of Tishrei

**z"l:** Abbreviation for *zichrono l'vracha*, meaning of Blessed Memory