

Four Corners, Four Angels, Ten Stones, Ten Veils



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Abstract

In the form of a series of letters written to my daughter, my ancestors, rivers in Toronto and in my ancestral village, this work draws on the Jewish literary forms of Midrash and Talmudic discourse in which the mundane and the sacred intertwine. This text weaves together personal, domestic, and historical narratives with dreams, spirit journeys, creation stories, poetry, a story I wrote when I was 8 years old, metaphysical time travel, Jewish mysticism, and a series of interdisciplinary artworks.

Using textiles, embroidery patterns and knitting as text, these pieces tell stories about birth, death, exile, diaspora, motherhood, and the creation of personal rituals to recover from ancestral trauma, colonial violence, patriarchal narratives, and disembodiment.

The Sephardi women in the Ottoman empire from whom I descend on my matrilineal line, offer a model for resistance, innovation, and resilience in the face of adversity and oppression from within their own diasporic patriarchal communities. From within the confines of the domestic sphere and despite restrictions which barred them from learning to read, learning sacred language and accessing the public realms, these women invented rituals, original prayer compositions, developed folk healing methods and expressed themselves through singing Judeo-Spanish folk songs and the creation of textiles and embroidery.

Inspired by their example, my research claims agency to re-interpret and adapt Jewish ritual, tapping into its hidden mystical, embodied, and shamanic roots, to address contemporary questions and personal narratives that need healing.

The domestic and cyclical methodology and critical framework of my work emerged out of the restrictions I experienced as a new mother during the COVID 19 pandemic working primarily in fragments of time while my daughter was napping. The construction of embroidered and knit garments were inspired by a methodology called “Wandering Textiles,” a term coined by scholar Mikal Held, to describe the process used by Sephardi women in which they created ceremonial textiles by repurposing and stitching together remnants of domestic fabrics such as pillows, bedspreads, and clothing.

This research makes use of the concept of Tikkun Olam, which translates from Hebrew as “to repair the world” as the basis for a research methodology rooted in healing ancestral trauma through creative practice. Through the interdisciplinary combination of knitting, embroidery, walking, relationship building with rivers, singing, dreaming, performance and video editing, this work images into being metaphysical time travel in which tikkun (healing) across multiple time frames and spaces is possible, while considering what kind of stories are worth transmitting to the next generation.

Acknowledgments

On an unseasonably warm day in early March, I walked down the hill into the ravine to pay one last visit to Etobicoke Creek before my final MFA Thesis exhibition Four Corners, Four Angels, Ten Stones, Ten Veils opened at the OCAD University Graduate Gallery.

The sun was shining brightly on that day and the waters were churning, flowing with an enormous amount of energy in contrast to my previous visit when the black waters were silent and still under a thick layer of ice.

At the waters edge, I gave an offering of tobacco in the way that I have been taught. Giving my respects to the river who has given me so much this year, and to all of the ancestors of these lands.

At the waters edge I gave an offering of sugar.
Sweetness for my ancestors from the Sephardic Diaspora.
It is thanks to their courage and resilience that I owe my life and my daughter's life.

Thank you to my primary advisor Shannon Gerrard, for all of your encouragement along the way and for the reminder that breathing space is important.

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Amen.

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“Hence it is with a certain feeling of urgency that I seek the nature, subject, words of the other story, the untold one, the life story. It’s unfamiliar, it doesn’t come easily, thoughtlessly, to the lips as the killer story does; but still, “untold” was an exaggeration. People have been telling the life story for ages, in all sorts of words and ways. Myths of creation and transformation, trickster stories, folktales, jokes, novels...”¹

Dear Skye Rose,

Before you were born, we went on a perilous journey together. My love, you floated in my belly, only a tiny spark while I planned our return to the land our ancestors had considered home, even after their exile and 500 years of Diaspora.

Like the Fool in the Tarot deck, carrying nothing but a small travellers pouch over my shoulder, I stepped off a cliff into the unknown. Guided by a combination of instinct and whispers from my ancestors, I embarked on a healing journey that would unearth equal parts treasure, horrors, transformation.

My love, I want to tell you a story, about a quest to understand why a tiny medieval village held so much significance for our ancestors that they changed their name to Bejarano, or “from Béjar” after they were sent into exile. And why they continued to speak an ancient Judeo-Spanish language, to practice the customs of medieval Spain, their land of origin and to yearn for their lost homeland 500 years later.

My love, if you stick with me, I will tell you about how this search led me right back here, to uncover truths about this land, the city of Toronto, the traditional territories of the Anishnabeg, the Haudenosaunee, the Huron Wendat and the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Throughout the course of this journey, you were born, and I inherited hand stitched, embroidered and knit textiles from our matrilineal line. To my surprise, I also discovered hidden from sight, from deep within Judaism itself the presence of mystical teachings, dream worlds and the embodiment of the divine in the land and the water that I have known about all along, but never suspected existed within my own lineage.

“We have been lost to each other for so long. My name means nothing to you. My memory is dust. This is not your fault, or mine. The chain connecting mother to daughter was broken and the word passed to the keeping of men, who had no way of knowing.”²

¹ LeGuin, Ursula, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, Anarchist Library 1986

²Diamant, Anita, *The Red Tent*, (prologue) Picador, New York 1997

Dear Etobicoke Creek,

Since moving here, I have begun a ritual of walking beside you. Usually I wait until my daughter is napping, so that I can walk freely and physically remove myself from the endless domestic tasks that await me. I have to walk through an intersection with a gas station on one corner and a giant truck depot on the other corner, it's always windy and loud.

After a few more minutes of walking, I get to the pathway going down a steep hill into the ravine.

I descend into the ravine, in the same way my needle dips below the surface of the cloth when I'm embroidering, in the same way my mind dips into a different realm while I'm dreaming. As I'm walking through the forest path, I often forget for a moment that we are in the city. There is a wall of rock, stacked in layers along your banks, suggesting that you have witnessed the passage of many geological eras.

Since it has become cold out and the leaves have all fallen from the trees, there are less people during the daytime, and I have been listening on my headphones to Ladino folk songs that my mother remembers *her* grandmother singing on the balcony in Haifa while she would knit and sew.

I have since found these songs by searching on YouTube, the mournful Romanzas and Kantigas, reminiscing about life in medieval Spain, and the lullabies sung on the road into exile to help soothe the scared children to sleep. I have been practicing singing these songs along your shores as I walk.

The melodies are strange and unfamiliar in my mouth, but my audience, a flock of sleepy ducks and the sunlight reflecting in your trickling waters don't seem to mind my attempts.

I breathe deeply.

I hear the sound of my boots in the snow in winter as I walk along your shore.



Image 1 Singing Ladino lullabies to sleeping ducks on the banks of Etobicoke Creek, Winter 2022

As I've discovered, lullabies are just as much for exhausted mothers as they are for babies. Rocking my baby girl in my arms for hours during the pandemic when she was a new-born with my eyes closed in the dark and singing lullabies over and over, I have felt like I was soothing myself just as much as I was soothing her.

Singing Ladino lullabies in the forest feels like a strange meeting of times and places, like I am an ambassador, introducing the spirits of my ancestors to the spirits of the ancestors of this place.

Everyone has been through so much. We are all so exhausted, and the land is exhausted too.

I sing Durmé Durmé, a traditional Sephardic lullaby dating back to 1492 and the expulsion of Jews from Spain sung in the Ladino language

Thank you Etobicoke creek, for listening to me sing, for helping me to feel and to find myself again during these strange times.

You can watch this video for a few moments of rest.
Please feel free to return here anytime you need to rest.



Video1 image still of Durmé Durmé video

[Durmé Durmé](#)

Durme Durme
Hijiko de Madre
Durme Durme
Sin Auncia ni Dolor

Sleep Sleep
Mother's little baby
Sleep Sleep
Without worry or pain

Gathering Fragments of Memories: The Fool's Journey

My love, I grew up in Canada; a land that is known by first nations people as Turtle Island. There are many creation stories about the land and all of the beings who are Indigenous to this place. I'd like you to know about them so that you don't think that Canadian history began with the arrival of European explorers 500 years ago. I too have just begun to learn that these stories exist, and so I am trying my best to tell them with as much respect as I can, given that they are stories that I am only reading about in books. Soon I am going to share with you Robin Wall Kimmerer's version of the Skywoman creation story, a story from the Great Lakes region about the first woman and her relationship with Turtle Island. This is what she says about Indigenous stories in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*:

"We are told stories are living beings, they grow, they develop, they remember, they change not in their essence, but sometimes in their dress. They are shared and shaped by the land and the culture and the teller, so that one story may be told widely and differently. Sometimes only a fragment is shared, showing just one face of a many faceted story, depending on its purpose."³

My love, I grew up hearing mysterious fragments of memories about my great grandmother Julie Bejarano after whom I am named. Mama Julia as she was called, still sang medieval Spanish folk songs, spoke an ancient Judeo-Spanish language called Ladino at home and in all of the many countries in which they had resided since their expulsion from Spain; including Bulgaria, Turkey, Italy, Switzerland and Israel.

My love, the name Bejarano is the clue that propelled me on my Fool's journey: a secret message from the past that let me know that in a faraway time and land our ancestors felt like they belonged to a place. Why I'm the one in our family who became obsessed with uncovering their hidden history is a mystery.

Perhaps because I grew up in a secular, English speaking household with the last name Gladstone, I sensed that all of these memories of our ancestors' struggles were going to vanish into the winds of time.

Perhaps, like my Grandfather Arie Ben-Eli who passed away when I was only one year old, I inherited his passion for archeology, his fascination with buried artifacts, and the desire to dig through the rubble of fading memory to locate hidden wellsprings of meaning.

Every summer when I was growing up we visited my Sabta in Haifa. We visited archeological sites, and wild desert landscapes. After these trips, the built urban landscape of Toronto always seemed so fresh and young in comparison.

There weren't layers of thousands of years of civilizations visibly built one on top of the other. My love, I was wrong about that. There have been people living on this land for thousands of years. They just didn't pile urban structures over top of the devastation of previous civilizations.

³ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* A note on Indigenous Stories pg. 386

Skywoman

An excerpt of the Skywoman creation story as shared by Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book Braiding Sweetgrass:

*"A column of light streamed from a hole in the Skyworld, marking her path where only darkness had been before. It took her a long time to fall. In fear, or maybe hope, she clutched a bundle tightly in her hand. Hurtling downwards, she saw only dark water below. But in that emptiness there were many eyes gazing up at the sudden shaft of light. They saw there a small object, a mere dust mote in the beam. As it grew closer, they could see that it was a woman, arms outstretched, long black hair billowing behind as she spiraled toward them."*⁴

The bag as archive. The bag as self portrait.

When you are preparing to give birth, they tell you to have your hospital bag packed ahead of time. That way when you go into labour you can head out the door in a hurry without having to try to figure out all the important things you may need during the most transformative and intense experience of your life.

My love, trying to pack my hospital bag ahead of time was such a stressful part of preparing for your birth. I was so anxious that I would forget something and that I wouldn't be prepared. I kept reading over the list of items that the midwives had suggested, as though it were one of the obscure metaphysical charts in the Kabbalah whose cipher has long been lost.

When I think about our ancestral mothers getting ready to leave their homes forever, and having to literally carry their babies on their backs and drag all their valuable earthly possessions with them, I wonder, how did they possibly decide what to take with them.

How did they possibly decide what to leave behind?

What did they wish they had, while they marched, terrified into their exile, some with crying hungry babies, some pregnant?

⁴ Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass pg. 3 Skywoman Falling. Kimmerer's note on the Skywoman falling creation story is that it is adapted from oral tradition and Shenandoah and George, 1988. Kimmerer's note on Indigenous Stories is as follows: "Traditional stories are the collective treasures of a people and can't easily be attributed with a literature citation to an individual source."

Did they carry water and bread? Did they carry candlesticks and tablecloths? Did they carry a child's favourite toy? A handful of seeds? Their house keys? What coins concealed in seams of clothing? What objects were hidden in pouches, and pockets laced and tied to belts and cloaks. Where did the babies sleep?

What memories, songs and traumas were knotted into their DNA from this march into exile, and passed on through the generations?

My love, these days simply leaving the house for an hour to go to the park is a mind breaking exercise in packing. The “diaper bag” is the size of a suitcase. I have to remember wipes, changes of clothes, diapers, snacks, water, hats, dry socks, bibs, toys, books, keys, mittens, my phone, hand sanitizer and of course N95 masks for everyone so that we don't contract COVID 19.

In reality, many throughout history have fled without bags of any kind, or if they did bring possessions, many of them were lost, stolen or destroyed along the way. In her essay *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*⁵ Ursula Le Guin argues that the true story of humankind can be told, not by tales of conquest, wars and hunting, but by considering the quieter role that containers have had in helping humankind gather, store, and hold important items.

From collecting grains to carrying babies, she argues that the success of humankind would have been impossible without the carrier bag. From the womb, to the purse, to the pocket to the carrier bag, the ability to carry things with us leads to some fundamental philosophical questions:

What are the things worth collecting, what are the things that we most value?

What stories do we need to tell and what is worth carrying with us?

My love, I've been doing this research against a backdrop of a global pandemic, heightening awareness of irreversible climate change, the rise of fascism and anti-semitism in our increasingly polarized world, a deepening awareness of systemic racism and the devastating impacts of colonialism. It's like we are all living through a giant reckoning, where the past is being exposed.

Perhaps we are being given an opportunity to heal and find new ways to move forwards, but I can't help but feel an underlying fear that someday we are all going to be cast out from our homes, into a new type of exile in which there is no dry land, no solid ground and no stable climate in which we will be able to live.

What will happen to you my love?

⁵ LeGuin, Ursula, *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, Anarchist Library 1986

Skywoman ii.

“...When Skywoman arrived here, she did not come alone. She was pregnant. Knowing her grandchildren would inherit the world she left behind, she did not work for flourishing in her time only. It was through her actions of reciprocity, the give and take with the land, that the original immigrant became Indigenous. For all of us, becoming Indigenous to a place means living as if your children’s future mattered, to take care of the land as if our lives, both material and spiritual, depended on it.”⁶

The ultimate carrier bag, of course, is the human body itself.

The body is a carrier bag for all of our most valuable possessions.

Our body is a carrier bag for songs.

DNA

Memories and emotions.

The female body carries babies and milk within it.

Floods

For my part, I am about to bring the Flood - waters upon the earth - to destroy all flesh under the sky in which there is breath of life; everything on earth shall perish.
Genesis 6.12

My love, when we first moved into our new house this summer, there was a micro-tornado that touched down in our neighbourhood. I was knitting in my chair by the window and the branches of the solid old oak tree on our front lawn were flailing around as though they belonged to a little sapling.

*All the fountains of the great deep burst apart,
And the floodgates of the sky broke open.* Genesis 7.12

Large old trees fell all over the neighbourhood and the streets flooded like a river.

⁶ Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass. Skywoman Falling, pg. 8-9

Now whenever it rains hard and there are strong winds my stomach fills with knots and my nervous system goes into some kind of fight or flight response. Fears and anxieties rush in, will we have to go into exile as well? Will our entire civilization be flooded like in Genesis when God regrets his decision to create human beings and decides to destroy them all with a giant flood?

Though after the flood was over, he did regret his actions and say:

*“Never again will I doom the earth because of man; nor will I ever again destroy every living being, as I have done. So long as the earth endures.
Seedtime and harvest,
Cold and heat
Summer and winter,
Day and night
Shall not cease”
-Genesis 8.2*

Small consolation I must say. I think I have trust issues

These days, we are all bracing ourselves for the worst and it seems we are all collectively mentally packing our emergency “to go” bags.

But where could we go next?

Mars? It will probably be even worse there.

In the Mishomis Book, Edward Benton-Banai shares many stories from the Ojibway creation story including the story of the great flood in which the creator decides to

“purify the Earth’s people of their evil ways”.

The turtle

“bore the weight of the new Earth on his back and made life possible for the Earth’s second people.”⁷

If it happens again, who will support and save us this time?

My love, there is a sort of sad question that Jewish people have been asking themselves:

“Do you have your bag packed?”

This question has emerged out of a traumatic history consisting of thousands of years of persecution, exile, diaspora, pogroms, forced conversions, not to mention the annihilation of the majority of European Jewry in the Holocaust.

⁷ Benton-Banai, Edward. The Mishomis Book: The VOice of the Ojibway, University of Minnesota Press, 2010 Chapter 5 The Great Flood pg. 29-30

This has resulted in a Jewish identity rooted in Diaspora and a belief that it isn't safe anywhere; that at a moment's notice, we may need to pick up our bags and flee. This embedded trauma is something that has been passed down in the form of an identity rooted in a feeling of perpetual exile.⁸

No wonder I have trust issues.

Choosing exile and all of its associated dangers instead of conversion and assimilation is another way of holding onto what is most valuable to you. Amongst those who chose exile rather than conversion were our own ancestors.

What were they holding onto?

Daughter, I am here. Writing these words, because our ancestors were among the few who survived in exile.

The Tabernacle

So the Lord God banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken. He drove the man out, and stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the tree of life. -Genesis 3.24

My love, as much as Jewish people have been yearning for various homelands throughout history, they have also designed a religion that is ideal for nomadism, for exile and for wandering. It is a portable religion as is evidenced by the "Tabernacle", known as the "Mishkan", a portable sanctuary built by the Israelites while they sojourned in the desert for forty years after they were freed from slavery in their exodus from Egypt.

God gave Moses very specific instructions on exactly how the Tabernacle should be constructed: using blue, purple and crimson yarns, fine twisted linens, acacia wood and a whole lot of gold.⁹ He also gave directions that a design of cherubim should be embroidered into the curtains. The Cherubim (or the angels) are an extremely important part of the design, protecting the entrance to each level of the sanctuary, including the innermost sanctuary, called the holy of holies in which the tablets were stored.

"The cherubim shall have their wings spread out above, shielding the cover with their wings. They shall confront each other, the faces of the cherubim being turned toward the cover. Place the cover on top of the Ark, after depositing inside the Ark the Pact that I will give you. There I will meet with you, and I will impart to you- from above the cover, from between the two cherubim that are on top of the Ark of the Pact - all that I will command you concerning the Israelite people" Exodus 25.11

⁸ To learn more about epigenetics and the way trauma and the environment shapes our DNA, please see: Lipton, Bruce, H. PHD Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter & Miracles, Hay House, 2008

⁹ Read the Book of Exodus 25 - 31 for a full description for the design of the Tabernacle

My love, the existence of a portable sanctuary where God could dwell on the earthly plane and whose space was delineated and constructed largely out of embroidered curtains is an early precursor to the important role that ceremonial textiles would come to play in the construction of the Torah Ark, and the wrappings of the sacred texts themselves.

As a people who have been in various forms of exile throughout history, the cultivation of a portable space of safety and connection to the Divine seems like an important concept, one that might give us, contemporary people, the encouragement we need to seek and to locate the Divine wherever we find ourselves. To let go of nostalgic or romanticized notions of homelands in order to connect with and advocate for whichever land we find ourselves living upon and within present time.

“Metaphorically, the shrine was an Eden, the place where Adam and Eve experienced an idyllic existence before being expelled into a harsh world, allowing the worshipper to imagine a place of peace and comfort reminiscent of the uterine life of the fetus; a place that provided spiritual nourishment and strength to face the cold realities outside the worship space.”¹⁰

Wandering Textiles as Critical Framework.

“Wandering Textiles” is a term coined by the Sephardic scholar Michal Held which describes the technique used by the Sephardic community in the Ottoman empire, of repurposing and sewing together various pieces of domestic fabrics so as to transform them into ceremonial items.

“When domestic articles were donated to the synagogue, they underwent certain changes to adapt them to their new functions, and thus new compositions were produced. The most useful alteration was to sew several small pieces together, such as wrapping cloths and cushion covers, to make an Ark curtain or Torah mantle. Sometimes the old pieces were sewn onto a new background. Articles of clothing were usually cut up and re-stitched to make the desired ceremonial object. The composition of the new piece was thus based on the motifs that had been used on the old dress, kerchief or cushion... When the fabric background of an embroidered piece disintegrated, the embroidered parts which were still in good condition might be preserved to make new small articles for personal use, such as a bag for the tallit or tefillin”¹¹

Donated pillow cases, embroidered clothing and tablecloths were all transformed and repurposed into the various wrappings for the Torah, creating a fluid and complex blend of functionality and adornment. The “Wandering” nature of the textiles implied a fluidity between the domestic and public sphere that the women themselves were not allowed to experience.

¹⁰ Jill Hammer and Taya Shere, *The Hebrew Priestess Ancient and New Visions of Jewish Women's Spiritual Leadership* c. 2015 Ben Yehuda Press

¹¹ Juhasz, Esther, *Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire: aspects of material culture*. Chapter: Textiles for the Home and Synagogue. Jerusalem, Israeli Museum 1900

Though women were not permitted to attend synagogue or access the sacred texts, their embroidered work was used to adorn them.

Michal Held suggests the use of a key in order to decipher the complex net of meanings embedded in the process of Sephardi handcrafted ceremonial textiles:

“The Breaking up of the word “textiles” into *Text-Tiles*, representing the link between the material (textiles) and its transformation into a virtual set of signs (tiles) that enable a hermeneutic analysis of the way in which the lives of women are experienced and reflected on.”¹²

Perhaps by learning to interpret the design, pattern and materials chosen, we can learn the other story, in the same way that Midrash fills in the gaps when there is too little information.

We can learn to read the text in textiles. We can apply a hermeneutic reading.

Ceremonial Synagogue Textiles

My love, if we are looking for “the other story” then perhaps we need not penetrate the inner sanctuary after all.

The Torah and other religious texts have formed the basis and foundation of the Jewish religion, texts which have all needed to be wrapped, covered and carried in sacred, magical embroidery in order to maintain their purity.

Ceremonial wrappings were used to preserve the purity of the Torah, in the ritual disposal of human bodies, and as talismanic objects to protect women and babies during childbirth.¹³ Within Jewish tradition then, the question of what is of value seemingly can be equated with the need for embroidered ceremonial textiles: protecting and wrapping sacred texts, babies and the dead.¹⁴ Yet many of these very same embroidered fabrics have been neglected in scholarly examination. The imagery, design, context and makers of these objects (who have been primarily if not exclusively women) have been largely forgotten, or deemed unworthy of proper documentation by the dominant art historical discourse.

¹² Held, Michal, *Text-Tiles: Reflections of WOmen's Textiled World in the Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) Poetic Tradition*, Chapter 14 of *Stitching Resistance*, Ed. MARjorie Agosin, Solis Press 2014

¹³ Sabar, Shalom, *Torah and Magic: The Torah Scroll and its Appurtenances as Magical Objects in Traditional Jewish Culture* © Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2009 *EJJS* 3.1

¹⁴ “*Ceremonial Torah coverings were used to carry the Torah from one location to another, to maintain its purity and to prevent anyone from directly touching the Torah itself. Because of the close contact of the ceremonial coverings ie. the Mapah (The wrapper) and the Tik (Case) with the Torah itself, these items were treated with the same respect and dignity as the Torah or other religious objects in regards to the standards and means of disposal upon it being worn out. The dignified disposal of a Torah Scroll involves a burial by the side of a learned scholar of the Law. According to Bracha Yaniv, “Wrappings of scrolls that are worn out may be used for making shrouds for a met mitzvah (a body found by the wayside which the community is obliged to bury if the relatives cannot be found) and this act constitutes their genizah (their dignified disposal)”* Yaniv, Bracha, *Ceremonial Synagogue Textiles From Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Italian Communities*, The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization in association with Liverpool University Press 2019

Yaniv Bracha points out in the preface of her seminal publication on Ceremonial Synagogue Textiles that the current research infrastructure is very limited, only a few random ceremonial textiles have survived, and that most of the visual material that is included in the volume appears for the first time, much of it lacking in relevant data. She acknowledges that the reasons for this varies, and she points to several factors including the fact that most worn out religious items are subject to *genizah*, (burial), their destruction during the Holocaust, as well as varying institutional attitudes towards the need for study and preservation of the remaining objects. I would like to add another reason, being the fact that women's work has never been highly valued.

Perhaps everything we are looking for can be located on the Tabernacle curtains and the ceremonial textiles themselves which were made by women. Could we learn to value textile arts within a ceremonial context to be more than just an accessory, to become the principal sacred object worthy of appreciation and study in its own right? My love, I think that Ursula Le Guinn would agree that the other story, the human story, (the women's story) could be found by looking more closely at these "texts".

These ceremonial coverings, though meant to surround, conceal and protect the sacred texts; considered to contain the core of Jewish teachings, are in fact, in an ironic reversal revealing the inner life of the teachings through the embroidery of symbolic mystical imagery on the outer wrapping where no one thinks to look.

My love, here is a portal into dreamspace that I made using the Wandering Textiles methodology. I made the portal by digitally stitching together photographs of lace patterns and embroidery details that were made by your great-great grandmother in the Diaspora. I also wove a web of song, one that perhaps you may recognize from when I sang to you in my womb, so as to help you (re) enter a metaphorical uterine space.

Portal into Dreamspace



Video 2 Image still of Portal into Dreamspace Video

A note on how to use this Portal.

My love, I am going to tell you many stories. I'm trying to stitch together something whole, something sacred out of many fragments. I've spent a lot of time organizing them into a particular order, but you don't have to read things in the order I've placed them. I've included difficult and painful stories. I've also included love poems, dreams and personal anecdotes. I want you to know about all of them so that you understand everything. Sometimes though it's ok to take refuge, to take breaks or to re-arrange the way you learn things. If there is a section you want to skip over, or come back to later, use this portal to take you to any section. I've included portals, nap breaks and dreamspaces throughout to give you space to breathe, and to replenish yourself along the way.

Talmud

The truth is my love, I've been trying to figure out what kind of wisdom to pass on to you.

In order to do this, I've had to deeply consider what is of value and in so doing, I have opened up Pandora's metaphorical box: unearthing an exponentially expanding amount of wisdom from seemingly infinite epistemological perspectives than it is possible to sift through in a lifetime.

As it turns out, this type of investigation; the digging through the rubble of history, and the mountains of texts and tracts in order to arrive at some sense of knowledge and wisdom is mirrored in one of the most important sets of Jewish documents: the Talmud.

The Talmud¹⁵ is often considered to be a compendium and a multi-generational series of debates on the application of Jewish legal principles across a wide spectrum of topics and areas of life. According to Geoffrey, W Dennis, the arrangement of information in the Talmud is associative rather than categorical and it often "requires the study of multiple tractates in order to find all relevant information on a single topic."

"The function of the Talmud in Jewish life is ultimately more heuristic than normative; later generations study the Talmud's intricate debates over Jewish practice and theology for what these teach about logic, probing analysis, the mustering of evidence, and reasoning, rather than for any conclusive answers. The debates of the Sages entail competing, even contradictory, opinions on a host of subjects without reaching any definitive statement as to which opinion is the authoritative 'answer'... With regards to Jewish beliefs, especially the great contribution of the Talmud is to establish a tradition of preserving and honoring dissenting opinions and a kind of nascent pluralism."¹⁶

Toronto based writer Sheila Heti's novel "How Should a Person Be" too can be situated within a Jewish textual tradition, dating back to the Talmud, in which genres and modes of writing are employed in the service of unceasing inquiry, and in which the metaphysical and the mundane are inseparably interwoven. In the words of the critic Nathan Goldman who has analyzed the lineage and form of Heti's novel "How Should a Person Be"

"You see an explicitly Biblical structure, broken into acts and featuring a protagonist, named Sheila, who describes herself as a failed Moses, striving to solve the question of how to live but remaining empty-handed, turning up no particular commandments"¹⁷

¹⁵ There are two different versions of the Talmuds created by two separate communities in late antiquity: The Jerusalem Talmud and the more authoritative Babylonian Talmud. Both build upon the same core text, the Mishnah, but the commentaries in each are quite different.

¹⁶ Dennis, W. Geoffrey, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic and Mysticism*, Second Edition Llewellyn Publications 2016

¹⁷ Segal, Pahrul, In Sheila Heti's Novel, Critics Could Save the World—or Destroy It Book Review, New York Times 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2022/02/14/in-sheila-hetis-novel-critics-could-save-the-world-or-destroy-it>

Encouraged by the fact that perhaps I don't need to extract any easy answers or definitive truths to pass on either, I have adopted several Jewish literary strategies in the construction of this document for you. By combining biblical, midrashic and Talmudic elements, I have interspersed the mundane and the domestic with the historical, the metaphysical, the dream realm with storytelling and with love in my journey to find out what is of value to pass down to you my love.

While Levitt and Glanzberg- Krainin position the use of the personal voice in the production of Jewish academic texts as being a recent development within Jewish Feminist theory¹⁸, Stephanie Springgay posits intimacy in the research-creation process as a language of institutional subversion.

“...the feltness of research-creation resonates significantly with the ethical and political pull of post qualitative methodologies and practices that aim to dismantle the neoliberal drives that have conditioned research methods that are dependent on prescribed procedures, knowable outputs, and measurable impact.”¹⁹

Drawing on the Indigenous Research Methodology of Shawn Wilson in his book *Research is Ceremony*, I have also opted, as he did, to address portions of this research as a series of letters; to you my daughter, to you my ancestors, and to you, rivers.

Midrash

Midrash is a Jewish literary form, primarily used in Rabbinic commentaries which emphasizes close readings of phrases, words and letters and aims to fill in the missing gaps of biblical texts. Midrash is described by Geoffrey W. Dennis as being at times:

“Daring, eclectic and highly imaginative in its interpretations. As a result it becomes a repository for many fabulous and supernatural traditions.”²⁰

Though most references about Goddess and Priestess centred elements within Judaism have been erased or disguised, there are small hints that remain hidden within the bible. Author's like Diamant use Midrash to expound upon and transform these small clues into a rich narrative about Biblical women's lives and ritual practices in ancient times.

¹⁸ Glanzberg-Krainin, D. and Levitt, L. (2009), *Feminist Theory and Jewish Studies*. Religion Compass, 2009 3: 241-252. <https://doi-org.ocadu.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2008.00131.x>

“...Feminist theory has had a profound effect on the style and genre of academic writing in Jewish studies. Building on the work of Feminist theorists such as Jane Tompkins, Nancy K. Miller, Adrienne Rich and Minnie Bruce Pratt, some more recent works in Jewish studies have argued for the use of the personal voice in the production of academic texts. While again, these works may or may not deal with explicitly gendered texts, the voice and the style of critical engagement and the insistence on not dissociating this individual voice from the larger social structures that mark her or his identities, the ways she or he are interpolated by these structures including issues of race and class, and sexuality make clear that these are most certainly works of Jewish feminist theory.

¹⁹Springgay S. Feltness: On How to Practice Intimacy. *Qualitative Inquiry*. 2021;27(2):210-214. doi:10.1177/1077800420932610

²⁰ Geoffrey W. Dennis, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic, and Mysticism* pg. 285 c.2016 Llewellyn publications

In her novel *The Red Tent*, Anita Diamant uses Midrash to “provide voice, texture and context to what are otherwise very “sketchy biblical descriptions”²¹. In the Bible, mere passing mentions are made of female characters such as “Dinah” who is a skilled midwife and herbalist, and her four mothers, the matriarchs Leah, Rachel, Zilpah and Bilhah who live in a sheep herding family tribe in the desert with the patriarch Jacob and his twelve sons who go on to form the twelve tribes of Israel.

Diamant fills in a vision of these women's lives, who practice an ancient semitic Goddess centred religion, separate from the men. Each month at the time of the New moon, all the women (who menstruate in synchronization with the moon cycle), gather for a few days in a Red Tent, where they rest, tell stories, eat sweets and allow their moon blood to return to the earth.

There are other contemporary Jewish mystics and feminists who are using Midrash to reinvigorate the mystical traditions and to flesh out their origins as containing earth centred elements, female spiritual leadership and post- gender fluidity. Dori Midnight shares a Midrashic version of the Exodus story and the tabernacle in which the curtains are constructed using rainbow unicorn skins, and in which Miriam and the unicorn enter into an amorous tryst.

“The tachash is a creature of holy joy and liberation- a giant, wild, kosher, one – horned, rainbow colored beast who lived in the Yam Supf, the Sea of Reeds. I hope you have at least learned the story about how our people, who had been enslaved in Egypt, crossed the sea to freedom. Did you know that it was the Tachash who guided them safely through the reedy sea? And did you hear the sacred gossip amongst the Queer Ones that it was because the Tachash had a thing for Miriam? Weeeeeeeellllll, when the Jews arrived on the shore, Miriam, who had been in endless dysfunctional organizing meetings basically all her life, was ecstatic. Overflowing with gratitude and joy, she picked up her tambourine and offered a dance and song. The tachash, who was still hanging around on the shore, could not take their giant unicorn eyes off of Miriam, as she traced circles on the sands with her feet.”²²

Rabbi Jill Hammer is another contemporary author, educator, midrashist and ritualist who uses the form of Midrash in her writing. She is the founder of the “Kohenet Hebrew Priestess Institute”, described as a space for “embodied, earth based transformative jewish ritual in which the ancient role of women in Judaism is restored and adapted to the contemporary world.”

In her book “*The Hebrew Priestess*”, Jill Hammer uses a combination of historical research and Midrash to reveal the role of various Hebrew Priestess archetypes from the Weaver, to the Mourner, the Mother to the Witch from ancient times and creates guided spirit journeys to so that readers can connect with these archetypes in contemporary life.

“Shamans and shamanesses all over the world engage in spirit journeys- inner visualizations that work with spirit. Spirit journeys are inner forays to the realm of myth and collective unconscious”²³

²¹Diamant, Anita, *The Red Tent*, Picador, New York 1997

²² Midnight, Dori [miriam and the tachash – Dori Midnight](#)

²³ Hammer, Jill, Shere, Taya, *The Hebrew Priestess: Ancient and New Visions of Jewish Women's Spiritual Leadership*, Ben Yehuda Press 2015

Her most recent book *Undertorah: An Earth-based Kabbalah of Dreams* explores the importance of dreams as a Jewish healing practice.

“In my own Jewish tradition, mystical texts tell that a dreamer’s soul journeys to heavenly realms, contacts angels and demons, and receives counsel or admonishment. The Zohar, a 13th century kabbalistic work, relates that “when a person is asleep in bed, the soul leaves and roams above... as the person awakens, the soul tells about the dream. In other words, the dream is a journey of the soul, in which the soul meets beings, places, and images that offer truth.”²⁴

Spirit Journey as Methodology

My love, while you are asleep, interspersed between knitting and embroidering, stitching and sewing, walking and dreaming, I have been taking breaks to journey into other realms.

These experiences have been ways for me to heal, to rest and to unravel fixed notions of time and space.

I have been exploring the weaver archetype who represents the creative impulse. Through the practice of “spirit journeying” as laid out by Jill Hammer, I have been visiting the sacred Weaver in her inner sanctuary within a sacred enclosure, within embroidered curtains, reminiscent of the the portable dwelling of the Divine. Sometimes I fall asleep, usually on the floor in my studio.

In these realms, I have been able to replenish myself so that I can keep embroidering, or video editing, knitting or writing. So many of my most inspired creative ideas have come as gifts when I return from these journeys, these spaces of deep rest.

God Created the Universe out of the alphabet

God created the universe through 32 mysterious paths consisting of 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet together with ten sefirot primordial powers, associated with the attributes of God.

“He drew them, hewed them, combined them, weighed them, interchanged them, and through them produced the whole creation and everything that is destined to come into being.”²⁵

²⁴ Undertorah, Jill Hammer <https://ayinpress.org/grounding-in-our-dreams/>

²⁵ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/creation-mysticism-fashioning-the-world-from-letters/>

Things that I am stitching together:

When I first started graduate school I was five months pregnant with you my love. I at first felt like maybe I should conceal my pregnant status so that I would be “taken seriously”. Women have been hiding their pregnancies and their mother identity in the workplace, in the art world and in academia for as long as they’ve been in the public sphere.

Since becoming your mother, I’ve realized that trying to work the same way I once did is impossible. The tending to a baby’s needs is repetitive, mundane, wondrous and requires a whole lot of mental processing of daily needs.

Though I’ve sometimes felt tremendous frustration at having to adopt a more fractured, interrupted way of working, I’ve tried to weave it into the cultivation of a woman and baby friendly, (and thus a decolonial and de-patriarchal) way of approaching research. An approach which is more cyclical.

I have been inspired by the strategy of stitching different remnants, pieces and parts together, not only materially in my making process, but also in the way I’ve had to learn to stitch my time together, managing my role as your mother, my academic research and my creative work, all while embroidering knots of love to pass down to you.

Domestic Interlude

My love, I can hear you playing downstairs and it’s almost your nap time. I need to go and make you lunch. I’m getting hungry too. There is a part of me that feels annoyed that I need to stop writing now, especially since the words seem to be flowing better than they have in a while, and also especially since I finally slept well last night and my brain is working properly. But of course, part of your gift to me, as much as I may fight against it sometimes, is that you are teaching me to stop, to take breaks, to rest, to take care of you, and of my body too. In short, you are teaching me about embodiment, and what that ACTUALLY entails. If I can’t stop my work to take care of myself and to take care of you, my own beloved, then what hope do we have to convince the evil multinational corporations to take a break from plundering the earth to let her rest and build her strength up again.

Ok my love, I’m back. We’ve both eaten and you’ve nursed and now you’re going to have a nap for a couple of hours. I had to run upstairs to my office trying to shield my eyes from the big mess in the living room, the crumbs on the counter, and the pile of dishes so that I don’t get distracted from writing, and sucked into restoring order to the house while you sleep.

The image of the bedraggled, exhausted mother doesn’t exactly evoke a sense of heroism within our cultural imagination. Our culture actually has a hard time taking the role of mother seriously. Our work, especially the domestic chores, the mental and emotional labour of

keeping track of having all the right things packed in the bag feel trivial, repetitive, not worth mentioning or acknowledging.

But we're the ones packing the bags. We're the ones keeping track of what we are going to need.

In the tightly knit diaspora communities in Turkey and Bulgaria, Sephardic women were confined to the domestic realm. They lived lives full of ritual and spiritual practices such as divination, herbal remedies "prekantes" (incantations) and sacred food preparation to manage the spirit world, and to take care of the health and wellness of the family and community.

My love, maybe like our ancestors did, I can find ways to transform repetitive domestic tasks and the constant backdrop of low grade anxiety about lack of time and the sense that I am barely managing to stave off chaos, into a sacred practice.

What would life look like if cyclical, nurturing frameworks were adapted to institutional settings such as Academia? What if mastery and knowledge didn't have to come at the expense of our health and wellbeing, didn't have to come presented as an impossible choice between parenthood and professionalism?

My love, this document is my way of being an academic without perpetuating our legacy of shame and hiding. By writing my thesis as a letter to you, I'm refusing to conceal the fact that I am a mother and proclaiming that there is value to be found in the stories of motherhood, value in nurturing and value in working in cycles.

Love Interlude

"Enclosed space is often understood to indicate a female aspect of the material world... The holy spaces of the Jewish people are nested chambers that enclose holy objects... The inner sanctuaries of the Jewish people are uterine" ²⁶

My love, I've yearned for such places, especially these days with all of the world's demons rising up to the surface for all to see. And we can no longer turn our eyes away. Now that we are being told to "learn to live" with COVID 19, there is a new war and the latest climate report is looking very bad. All of this my love is on the "outside" in stark contrast to our inner home life which is filled...

with playing games, singing, dancing, wonder, discovery, laughing, silliness and our red fish named Ruby.

²⁶ Jill Hammer and Taya Shere, *The Hebrew Priestess Ancient and New Visions of Jewish Women's Spiritual Leadership* c. 2015 Ben Yehuda Press p.37

I'm starting to think that the story of the Garden of Eden is probably just a story about God's naked babies growing up. Once Adam and Eve grow up and are no longer children living in a safe magical garden, there is no longer anything their parents (God/ Goddess) can do to protect them from the truth of the world.

Perhaps God wasn't vengeful. Perhaps God was just a trembling parent, standing by helplessly and terrified, watching as his precious beloved children have to go out and face all of the dangers of the outside world.

Now that you are out of my womb in the world, my heart too is on the outside, it feels things it never knew it could feel.

Mother's Love is not a placid, tame thing the way it is usually portrayed.

In her essay Love as the Practice of Freedom, bell hooks says about love:

"In this society, there is no powerful discourse on love emerging either from politically progressive radicals or from the Left. The absence of a sustained focus on love in progressive circles arises from a collective failure to acknowledge the needs of the spirit and an overdetermined emphasis on material concerns. Without love, our efforts to liberate ourselves and our world community from oppression and exploitation are doomed. As long as we refuse to address fully the place of love in struggles for liberation we will not be able to create a culture of conversion where there is a mass turning away from an ethic of domination."²⁷

I am weaving an invisible, expandable love net around you, one that allows you to breathe and move freely, while keeping you safe, keeping your eyes filled with so much light.

It is a garden where you can eat all the fruits.

Your smile is the sun, your laugh is the sound of angels, your soul is a sparkling, fresh pool filled with rainbow fish.

In my spirit journeying, I go through portals, I weave expansive places underneath the roots of the trees, like the underground oceans and crystal caverns in Jules Vernes' Journey to the Centre of the Earth.

In my subterranean world, there is always sky, warmth, calm, love, berries and clear peaceful pools to float in. That way, we will always have somewhere to go if things get too hard in the outside world.

I will meet you there, no matter the time or the space.

²⁷ hooks, bell, Love As the Practice of Freedom, Outlaw Culture, Resisting representations, Routledge Classics, 2006
https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/hooks_Love_As_The_Practice_Of_Freedom.pdf

Tikkun Olam as Time Travel as Research Methodology

Witnessing history and digging into the past can unearth painful things but it can also unearth treasure, and the opportunity for healing the past. There is a concept in Judaism called “Tikkun Olam” that translates from Hebrew as “to repair the world”. Tikkun Olam in contemporary Judaism is generally interpreted as social justice and repair work.

“Tikkun is also useful because of its malleability; it is a conception which can be used to justify the widest range of activities and views. We have also seen that it can easily be lifted out of its original context and transformed into a “normative” Jewish value. A contemporary idea is thus legitimated and rendered all the more significant by clothing it in the garb of tradition, a process as old as “tradition” itself.”²⁸

My love, I’ve personally adopted the term Tikkun as the basis for a research methodology that is rooted in healing ancestral trauma through creative practice. I am claiming agency in my research to re-interpret and adapt Jewish ritual to address contemporary questions and personal narratives that I feel need witnessing and healing. Through the interdisciplinary combination of knitting, embroidery, walking, singing, performative gestures, ritual creation and video editing, I am imagining into being metaphysical time travel in which tikkun (healing) across multiple time frames is possible

Part of my intention with this research has been to bear witness to parts of our own painful histories, events that have brought us to where we live on these lands now called Canada.

Part of the danger of witnessing painful and traumatic events and trying to fill in the details of the real people who experienced them, is that we risk re-traumatizing ourselves. While diving into the stories of the Expulsion of the Jews, and the Residential school system, I’ve shed real tears, I’ve processed wells of grief and I’ve felt tremors and pain in my body. That’s why it’s been important for me in this work, to provide ways to work through and heal any inherited trauma.

Developing a cyclical framework for my creative process has been paramount in the processing and healing of my own inherited neo-liberal capitalist informed behaviours which have surreptitiously shaped subconscious beliefs about personal value being related to productivity.

²⁸ Fine, Lawrence, Tikkun Olam In contemporary Jewish thought [Tikkun Olam | My Jewish Learning](#)

Jewish Shamanism

My love, in my sifting and unearthing, I have come across a brilliant teacher: a former Orthodox Rabbi named Gershon Winkler who abandoned Orthodox Judaism and immersed himself in uncovering the Shamanic origins of Judaism. His writings elucidate the mystical teachings of the Kabbalah for the contemporary Jewish mystic. He positions Judaism within a Shamanic tradition replete with teachings about the four directions, associated spirit animals, guardian angels, directions, elements and earth beings.

According to Winkler, the root of Jewish mystical teachings lies in the notion of the “Magic of the Ordinary” in which access to Shamanic wisdom is found by connecting through our senses with the different elements of the land: The stones, plants, animals and other people.

At last, a version of Judaism which I feel like I can relate to!

Winkler explains that by attuning our awareness to the presence of these earth beings, by moving beyond any distinctions we believe exist between us and them, we begin to erase the boundaries between ourselves and the land, to eventually arrive at the heart of the teachings, encompassed in the statement:

“I am a tree, I am a rock, I am a plant, I am a stone, I am an animal”.²⁹

Furthermore, Winkler points to many biblical instances in which “vision seeking” is inextricably linked to drumming and music making, and that Shamanic visioning is possible only when rooted in the world, and connected to joyfulness.³⁰

In his book *The Jew in the Lotus*, Rodger Kamenetz follows a delegation of Rabbis who travel to India to discuss strategies for surviving in exile with the Dalai Lama and the exiled Tibetan community. Throughout a series of dialogues with the Dalai Lama, the hidden mystical teachings of the Kabbalah and Jewish metaphysics emerges. Even from within the delegation of Rabbis, there is a sense of wonderment and surprise to discover a rich pantheon of imagery related to the Angelic realms as well as elaborate meditation and visualization practices which have remained completely hidden and thus inaccessible to the majority of contemporary Jews.

In his research Kamenetz also explores the phenomenon of Jubus: Jews who have become Buddhists because they didn't know how to access the spiritual wisdom within their own lineages. One of the conclusions of these conversations within the delegation of Rabbi's, was that if the mystical teaching of Judaism were made more accessible, then perhaps so many young Jewish people with a thirst for spiritual practice wouldn't turn towards other spiritual systems such as Buddhism.

²⁹ Gershon Winkler, *Magic of the Ordinary*, published by North Atlantic Books c.2003 Chapter 4 Sorcery pg. 71-72

³⁰ Gershon Winkler, *Magic of the Ordinary*, published by North Atlantic Books c.2003 Chapter 4 Sorcery pg. 71-72

The Dalai Lama and the Rabbis conclude that the quest for a homeland, and resolving the feeling of exile comes down to an existential question related to locating and cultivating a sense of Homeland as an internal space.³¹

Winkler says of finding the inspiration needed to share his revelations regarding the shamanic origins of Judaism:

“I became aware of how this ancient wisdom was so urgently needed for the healing of the planet, for the restoration of her life force in the face of increasing toxins and crud that was beginning to impede her life flow. At the same time, I also became aware of the fact that many of my own people were flocking to shamans of other traditions in a transdenominational quest for personal empowerment and enrichment, and for the expressed purpose of fine tuning their relationship with the earth and her beings. As Rabbi, as spiritual teacher in the Judaic spirit path, it pained me to watch Jewish people flock to these wellsprings not knowing that their own tradition too, is replete with this quality of wisdom. It’s one thing to study the wisdom of other paths in order to augment your own; it’s another thing to study the wisdom of other paths without a clue about the richness of your own. Having braved the taboo against peeking inside my own suitcase, I decided to help others dare to peek inside of theirs and to rediscover the magic of living, the sanctity of the ordinary, alternative planes of consciousness, and so on- from the *Judaic* perspective.”³²

The Magical Headboard for Dreaming

My childhood bed had a magical headboard. Early on I developed a secret method to deeply relax my body which I would use every night before going to sleep. Then I would decide which wooden bar to press on the magical headboard. Each bar was connected to a different location in the dream world, so I had to choose carefully.

Sometimes I would dream of wild animals and strange monstrous creatures climbing out from the ravine. I had many kinds of dreams. The scariest dream though was the recurring dream of the Old Oak Tree.

“Biblical figures such as Jacob and Joseph have dream visions, while Rebecca goes to inquire of the Divine through an oracle. Elijah and Elisha are fed by ravens, make requests of bears, and speak to whirlwinds. Rabbis of the Talmud frequently speak with Elijah or Abraham. The kabbalists imagine trysts with the Shekhinah as part of their prayer and meditation”³³

³¹ Rodger Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet’s Rediscovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India*, Harper Collins, 1994

³² Gershon Winkler, *Magic of the Ordinary*, published by North Atlantic Books c.2003

³³ Hammer, Jill, Shere, Taya, *The Hebrew Priestess: Ancient and New Visions of Jewish Women’s Spiritual Leadership*, Ben Yehuda Press 2015

Recurring Dream: The Old Oak Tree

I am going to visit my cousins who live on a farm. I ask, against my better judgement, as I do each time:

“How is the Old Oak Tree?”

Suddenly I am inside the Old Oak Tree. It is a hollow room. A rope with 12 monkeys stacked one on top of each other hangs down in the middle of the tree and then I am the 13th one, hanging underneath them at the bottom of the rope.

A numberless clock with a face on the wall starts counting slowly. With each number, the rope starts to swing, back and forth. We reach number twelve, the tree opens up and I am flung out.

I start falling and falling, through the sky for what feels like forever.
When I finally hit the ground, I wake up in my bed in panic.
I sit up with a start, my heart is racing.

The Expulsion

My love, the history of Spain is a long and complicated one. I will try to be brief and get to the point where our story begins. Though the Jewish population was always a minority group in Spain, they were completely integrated into Spanish society up until 1391, when a brutal program of religious persecutions, pogroms and forced conversions began to be enacted upon the Jewish population by the Catholic Church. This brought to an end a period known as the “convivencia”³⁴ (or the “co-existence”) in which three religious groups: Christian, Muslims and Jews lived together and flourished in philosophy, medicine, science and literature from the early 8th century until the Expulsion in 1492.

During the next 100 years, over half of the population converted to Catholicism. They were known as New Christians or *conversos*. In her illuminating book about the Sephardic Diaspora, Gerber states:

“The experience of Sephardim raises the issue of acculturation and assimilation as no other Jewish community has. For many centuries Jewish civilization borrowed freely from the surrounding Muslim culture. Even after Jews moved into Christian Spain, their interaction with the dominant culture persisted. When persecutions overwhelmed the Sephardim in 1391 and they were offered the choice of conversion or death, the numbers of converts outnumbered the considerable number of martyrs.”³⁵

³⁴ a term coined by the Spanish philologist Américo Castro.

³⁵ Gerber, Jane S. *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience*, The Free Press 1992

Many of them who continued to practice Judaism in secret came to be known as 'crypto jews'. The Inquisition developed brutal tactics to root out and punish these secret practitioners of Jewish ritual.

Worried about the influence the Jewish population was having on the New Christians, a "Decree of Expulsion" was issued by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand on March 31st, 1492 giving the Jewish population of Spain an ultimatum: either convert to Catholicism or be expelled from the country.

The Decree gave them four months to get their affairs in order and leave the country forever. This forced a rapid attempt at selling their land, holdings and possessions³⁶ Many secured passages to other countries only to be thrown overboard by greedy captains, abandoned on desert islands to be devoured by wild animals and starve to death or met by equal cruelty in other European countries. There are many terrible stories. Any Jew who returned to Spain would be tortured and executed.

Christopher Colombus

My love, the day of the expulsion arrived, July 31st 1492.

That was the same day the Christopher Colombus' ships set sail leaving from the same ports in Spain, alongside the Jews boarding ships into their exile.

Columbus' expedition was emboldened by a "Doctrine of Discovery"³⁷ another issue of the Catholic Church which set in motion the cruel and devastating colonization process of the America's.

What a momentous day in history that would prove to be, setting in motion so many chains of events that are still playing out today as we collectively come to terms with the legacy of colonization.

³⁶ (5) And so that the said Jews and Jewesses during the stated period of time until the end of the said month of July may be better able to dispose of themselves, and their possession, and their estates, for the present we take and receive them under our Security, protection, and royal safeguard, and we secure to them and to their possessions that for the duration of the said time until the said last day of the said month of July they may travel and be safe, they may enter, sell, trade, and alienate all their movable and rooted possessions and dispose of them freely and at their will, and that during the said time, no one shall harm them, nor injure them, no wrong shall be done to them against justice, in their persons or in their possessions, under the penalty which falls on and is incurred by those who violate the royal safeguard. And we likewise give license and faculty to those said Jews and Jewesses that they be able to export their goods and estates out of these our said kingdoms and lordships by sea or land as long as they do not export gold or silver or coined money or other things prohibited by the laws of our kingdoms, excepting merchandise and things that are not prohibited. Clause 5 of the Alhambra decree <https://www.fau.edu/artsandletters/pjhr/chhre/pdf/hh-alhambra-1492-english.pdf>

³⁷ The Papal Bull stated that any land not inhabited by Christians was available to be "discovered," claimed, and exploited by Christian rulers and declared that "the Catholic faith and the Christian religion be exalted and be everywhere increased and spread, that the health of souls be cared for and that barbarous nations be overthrown and brought to the faith itself." This "Doctrine of Discovery" became the basis of all European claims in the Americas as well as the foundation for the United States' western expansion. In the US Supreme Court in the 1823 case *Johnson v. McIntosh*, Chief Justice John Marshall's opinion in the unanimous decision held "that the principle of discovery gave European nations an absolute right to New World lands." In essence, American Indians had only a right of occupancy, which could be abolished.

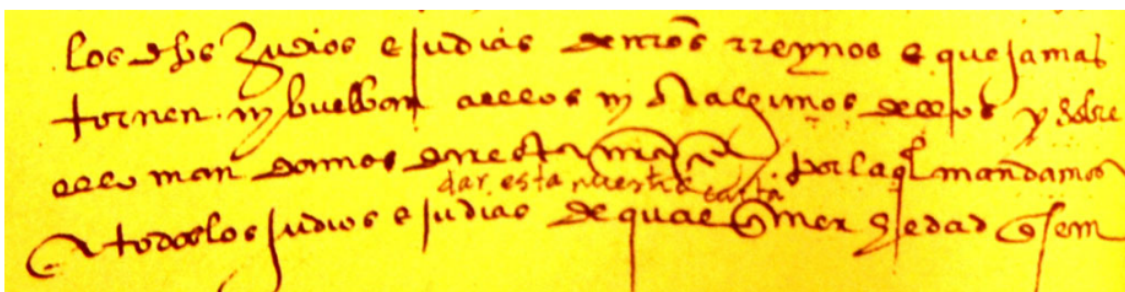


Image 2 The edict of expulsion from the Museo Judio David Melul, Béjar, Spain permanent collection³⁸

"Therefore, we, with the counsel and advice of prelates, great noblemen of our kingdoms, and other persons of learning and wisdom of our Council, having taken deliberation about this matter, resolve to order the said Jews and Jewesses of our kingdoms to depart and never to return or come back to them or to any of them. And concerning this we command this our charter to be given, by which we order all Jews and Jewesses of whatever age they may be, who live, reside, and exist in our said kingdoms and lordships, as much those who are natives as those who are not, who by whatever manner or whatever cause have come to live and reside therein, that by the end of the month of July next of the present year, they depart from all of these our said realms and lordships, along with their sons and daughters, menservants and maidservants, Jewish familiars, those who are great as well as the lesser folk, of whatever age they may be, and they shall not dare to return to those places, nor to reside in them, nor to live in any part of them, neither temporarily on the way to somewhere else nor in any other manner, under pain that if they do not perform and comply with this command and should be found in our said kingdom and lordships and should in any manner live in them, they incur the penalty of death and the confiscation of all their possessions by our Chamber of Finance, incurring these penalties by the act itself, without further trial, sentence, or declaration." ³⁹

³⁸ <https://www.museojudiobejar.com/coleccion/>

³⁹ This is clause 4 of the Edict of expulsion. You can read the rest of it here [The Alhambra Decree-- Edict of the Expulsion of the Jews of Spain \(1492\)](#) (1) King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, by the grace of

Exile

The Jews lamented their expulsion bitterly. They felt ties to the land, culture and place as deeply as though it were a second Jerusalem.⁴⁰ Even now, after the Holocaust has wiped out the majority of the Sephardic community and traditional practices, online Sephardic communities have sprung up around the world, connecting far flung exiles together in online chat communities who communicate primarily in Judeo-Spanish and who maintain threads of connection to their ancestral legacy through the inheritance of those names adapted from Iberian towns. Michal Held says about Judeo-Spanish:

“Having lost its function as a vital tool of communication, contemporary Judeo Spanish used online may be regarded as a metaphoric place, in which an identity is constructed in the absence of an offline Sephardi community.”⁴¹

Gerber describes in an image reminiscent of the portion in the Book of Exodus, that the Rabbis encouraged the women and children to sing and play the tambourine on their walk into exile so as to keep their spirits lifted.⁴²

The tambourine, originally called a ‘timbrel’ or a ‘tambret’ was a nomadic drum originating in the middle east played by the biblical Prophetess Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron who is known for leading the Jews out of their slavery in Egypt into the Red Sea and into the Wilderness.

Miriam led the women out of slavery, dancing joyously, singing songs of rebellion and freedom.

My love, the tambourine has become associated with something tame and innocuous. I wanted to find a way to restore the timbrel’s image to one of nomadic rebellion and joyful freedom. I covered my tambourine in silicone spikes and painted it black.



When it is played, the spikes stimulate an acupuncture point on the palm of the hand known as “The Palace of Weariness”

Image 3 Miriam's Tambourine, leather and wood tambourine, silicone spikes and acrylic paint. 6" x 6"

⁴⁰ Gerber, Jane S. *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience*, The Free Press 1992

⁴¹ Michal Held “The People Who Almost Forgot: Judeo-Spanish Online Communities As a Digital Home-Land, *The Center for Study of Jewish Languages and Literatures*, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem pg. 83

⁴² Gerber, Jane S. *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience*, The Free Press 1992

“A central vortex of energy in qi gong that is recognized in Chinese Medicine as having profound emotional and spiritual effects. The Palace of Weariness functions as a doorway that can open but also close... It is a safe house, a nest where the Heart spirit can go for rest and restoration.”

says Lorie Eve Dechar acupuncturist and alchemist in her book Kigo⁴³

After the great flood in the Book of Genesis, God chose the rainbow as a symbol to remind us that he would never again destroy humankind. My love, I can't vouch for him.

If you need hope, if you need to find a place of safety, I invite you to play this timbrel, to stimulate the Palace of Weariness, and to dance.

May your joy and hope be a form of resistance. May your joy and hope help you to find healing.

Names

My love, the name Bejarano survived for 500 years in the diaspora, but it didn't get transmitted into our family past my Sabta Clara. When Sabta married, she changed her last name to Ben-Eli. When my mother married, she took the last name Gladstone which was actually an invented name. Ralph Gladstone, my paternal great grandfather changed his last name to Gladstone in the 1920's because you couldn't get hired for menial labour with a Jewish last name like Glicenstein in Toronto at that time.

Your father's last name is Pemberton. That name comes from a long line of Pemberton's who lived in a place that still exists somewhere in England. Your last name is Gladstone-Pemberton. Since there is no trace of your Bejarano lineage in your name, I want you to know about your connection to this history.

I've made a carrier bag. Like a butterfly net.

To capture some of these treasured memories before they float away forever in the winds of time.

⁴³ Dechar, Lorie Eve, Kigo, Singing Dragon 2021

Dream: Three pools

It is night. There are three pools of water in a barren landscape. The waters in the pool are clear and they glow from within. Three precious gems are glowing, one at the bottom of each pool. I move closer and to my horror, I become aware that there are also three dead bodies, one floating at the top of each pool.

Suddenly, an army of dark spirits explode out of the pools, thousands upon thousands of spectral, haunted, terrifying figures fly out, seemingly without end, making a shrieking cacophony, filling the night sky.

I awake with a feeling of dread, of doom.

I try to reassure myself: of course these pools will empty out of dark figures eventually. I count all of the horrible things that have happened in the past three years, thinking, is that all of it yet? But they keep coming... Now that the latest Omicron variant has subsided, there's a war in Ukraine. Maternity hospitals are being bombed. Mothers and children are fleeing on trains. The climate report was just released and it's a lot worse than we thought. Australia is being destroyed by angry floods. People are fleeing their destroyed homes. History is repeating itself.

If I love you hard enough, nurse you long enough, laugh and sing with you as long as I can, will you have the strength and resilience to withstand a chaotic future?

Will you be of the generation that rebuilds after the pools are clear?

Return

My love, you have been patient, and have already learned many things. At this point, let us return to the beginning of our tale. The story picks back up again in 2019 and my decision to respond to The Spanish Government's attempt to try to "compensate for past shameful events", by offering citizenship to all who could prove they were the descendants of those Jews expelled from Spain.

One of the acceptable methods of proof was having a last name based on one of the Spanish towns of origin. With Julie Bejarano's birth certificate and naturalization papers from her immigration to Palestine in hand, I planed a trip to see if I could secure Spanish citizenship. And so began our journey back to the "homeland" of our ancestors. The Alhambra decree which wasn't formally rescinded until 1968 stated that even the descendents of the exiled Jews should never return to Spain, or they would be sentenced to death.

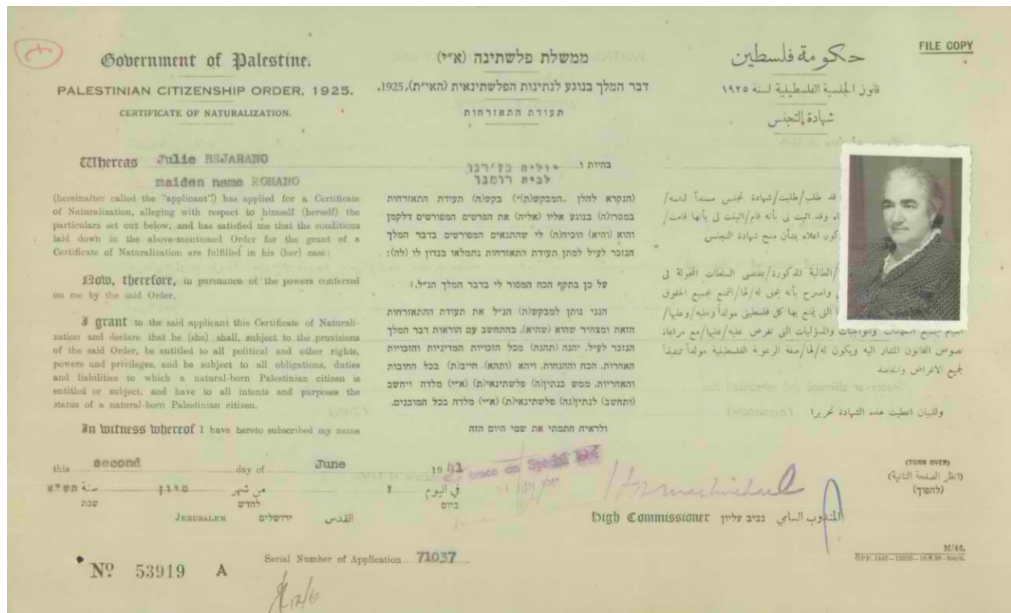


Image 4 Julie Bejarano's naturalization certificate, issued by the Government of Palestine, 1941

Cardinals

Late March 2019. 527 years since the decree of expulsion was issued in late March, 1492.

I've been communicating with the Jewish museum in Béjar.

They want to host me and an exhibition of my work.

Cardinals start landing on branches outside my window

Cardinals are nearly flying into me while I walk down the street.

Flocks of cardinals are in my dreams at night.

Cardinals are flying into my head, as though they are trying to warn me of something.

Your father is in and out of the hospital. I don't know what is going to happen.

More cardinals flying into my head

Night after night.

This isn't the first time cardinals have been trying to get my attention.

The first time this happened right before my friend died.

The second time was right before Uncle Joseph passed away suddenly.

I was terrified.

And then my love, I found out I was pregnant with you.

Could it be that my ancestors were warning me?

About returning to the land of their expulsion

With fragile new life inside of me?

*Red feathers float down and land in the stream
Under a full moon
A flock of cardinals in my dreams
Warnings on red wings
Of tiny sparks and precious things*

Lorie Eve Dechar writes about the symbolism of the Red Bird as the spirit animal of the Heart in Taoist cosmology:

“The spirit of the Heart resembles a Red Bird... We call on the Red Bird to support us when we face the heat of intimacy and love, the Fire of transformation and the riotous blossoming of summer. The Red Bird flies before us as we move into a relationship, as we walk forward into the passion of creativity, as we valiantly strive to know our true nature and shine the light of our self out into the world. It clings to us like a dear friend and shields us from the unnecessary, the dangerous, the unforgiving and the crass. And when it opens its red wings wide to protect our Hearts, the Darkness slips off its feathers like summer rain.”⁴⁴

Poem for Río Cuerpo del Hombre, Béjar, Spain

*At the bend in the river
the ruins of past efforts stand still
abandoned spools of thread and sewing machines*

*the unfolding of the universe sounds like rushing water
twittering bird song and wind in the grass*

*wildflowers burst through factory windows
butterflies spiral in sunlight
my husband asleep in a dark room*

*our child is coming into being in my dark womb
only I walk in the sun
A yellow bird leads just ahead*

*I find feathers on the ground
I throw coins into every fountain*

⁴⁴ Dechar, Lorie Eve, Kigo, Exploring the Spiritual Essence of Acupuncture POints Through the Changing Seasons, Singing Dragon 2021, p. 134

Querida Río El Cuerpo del Hombre, (Dear River)

While we were in Béjar and my daughter was still just a tiny spark floating around in my belly, we walked daily by your side. Your name in English is “The River of the Body of Man”. Each morning I would sit on the floor and eat breakfast in the tiny sunroom looking down at you as you flowed through the valley.

Flocks of black and white magpies would swoop by the window and large storks who slept in giant nests on the roof of church bell towers would fly lazily past. Down below, three stray cats lived in the foundations of what remained of an abandoned stone house on your banks. After breakfast, I would pack snacks to sustain me and my tiny spark of a daughter, go down in the tiny elevator, and walk through the narrow stone streets to the path which led down a hill into the old textile route.

Dear River, the things that you must have witnessed through time. Trees are growing out of the windows now, bright red wild poppies burst out along the edges of the path and at the foundations of abandoned buildings: former textile factories in ruins, inside of which are still visible the remnants of hastily abandoned spools of wool.

In the silence of the morning and the soothing trickle of water flowing, I would pause to rest on the rocks at the side of your body to watch butterflies land on wildflowers in the sunlight as a gentle breeze blew through the grasses.

As I walked, I recalled hearing somewhere that listening to the sound of the wind in the grass is a gateway into another dimension, a divine emanation in the material realm.

One day, a large yellow bird landed on a branch in front of me while I was sitting. I had no idea what kind of a bird it was, but I stood up, I had never seen one like it before. It appeared to look over its shoulder at me and then it flew a short distance away. I felt my heart leap in my chest and my belly fill with excited butterflies, a feeling like falling in love. I walked the short distance to where he had alighted. Then he looked at me again before he flew on a little bit further. This continued on for sometime. After a while I came to a fork in the river where an old sewing machine was tangled up in the rocks.

An accumulation, a knotting, an entanglement of history that you still haven't fully washed away.

How long have you known the tiny purple dragonflies flitting at your water's edge, and the orange butterflies in the white heat landing on wildflowers in the sunshine?

Do you remember my great-great-great-great-great grandmother, did she walk along the river in the sunshine on a quiet morning too sometimes? Do you remember over 500 years ago when my ancestors walked all the way to the edge of town? Did you see them when they stopped at the foot of the hill, to look back one last time? Did you hear the songs that they sang and the tambourines that they played to keep up their spirits as they walked away? Did you collect the tears that they wept as they lamented their exile?



Video 3 Image still from Nani Nani video link

[Nani Nani video](#)

Dear daughter, dear rivers, dear ancestors, dear younger self,

I made this video for all of you so I could fly back into multiple points in time on cardinal wings. I wanted to wrap us all up in a magical shawl full of secret pockets containing protective amulets, and to make all those journeys less treacherous, to help you feel less alone, less vulnerable, less scared. I wanted to channel the healing powers of Sabta's blue shawl, our family inheritance, through time and space, like a virtual textile time machine that can transmit love and protection, that can begin to clear away trauma stored in our bodies and DNA, so as to create healthy pathways into new futures.

The opening scene in this video is of Etobicoke creek. You can hear the water flowing down towards the lake. A figure appears walking first in the river and then along the banks. At first, all you can hear are her footsteps in the rocks. The figure is protected, disguised in a Metaphysical Healing Shawl and wearing an embroidered mask with long fringes, embroidered with protective amulets against the evil eye.

As the figure walks, a drum beat begins, drawing her into a trance state. As she walks along the river, times, boundaries, shift and loosen, the river turns dark and then light again. Day turns to night and then back again. The figure walks both in the river and then along the banks of the river, the river flows in both directions.

Suddenly, the Moss Men appear, marching towards the figure in the river. The outline of a medieval Spanish town starts to come into view, before the scene shifts again. The script of the original decree of expulsion pans across our first glimpse of the fortress walls of the town of Béjar, Spain.

The sound of the medieval Spanish lullaby “Nani Nani” starts to come through as we see my younger self, pregnant with you, daughter, standing at the edge of the fortress, at the path where you, our, ancestors would have looked back for the last time on your way out of town. Your father is filming me.

As I walk along the path in 2019, I look down and I see a floating thistle seed. Thistle seeds are considered good luck, and you can make a wish upon them. You see me making a wish for a healthy and safe birth for you, my daughter. Later when we looked back at the footage, we noticed a purple orb, floating around my feet, a visitation from another dimension and time answering my prayers.

In the next scene, we are back at Etobicoke creek. The cloaked figure is standing underneath the Go train overpass in front of a concrete wall covered in graffiti. On one side there is an anarchy symbol and the words scrawled across proclaim “abolish capitalism”. The figure is holding the black timbrel covered in black silicone spikes. Each time she plays, the spikes stimulates the acupoint The Palace of Weariness on the palm of her hand.

The figure continues walking, along the Cuerpo del Hombre river, along the Etobicoke Creek river, through the Moss Man parade, erasing the boundaries of the exodus, of the walk in exile, wrapping her arms in a protective nurturing embrace around you, creating containers with containers, like a Russian doll.

The concrete Go train wall that serves as the figure’s tambourine playing back drop, merges into another graffiti covered wall. This second wall is the back wall of a church in a courtyard, on the edge of a hill. There is a secret about this courtyard. Some friends that I made in Béjar told me that when they were children, they remembered the courtyard had once been the site of an ancient Jewish cemetery. Now covered in paving stones, there is a quiet bench under some trees where you can sit and listen to the singing birds.

Through digital overlay, visualization, intention and time travel, I offer tikkun olam.... retroactive healing and protection to myself, to you my unborn daughter, and also to you my ancient ancestors during your walk of expulsion. By performing walking and singing rituals along your banks, I intermingle time and space to introduce you to Etobicoke Cree,k to the Cuerpo del Hombre river, while also introducing my exiled ancestors to the original inhabitants of these territories. Let us warm you with a healing shawl knit by your descendents, to soothe you and allay your worries for your offspring in the future. We are of those who survived.

We offer our greetings and respects.

Cemetery Healing Ritual

We go to the buried cemetery on our last day in Béjar. It used to be the Jewish cemetery, but now there is a church built on top. I peer into the fountain attached to the church as I fill my water bottle, I look down and see two dead birds floating in the water: a mother and a baby. We walk around to the back of the church to the quiet courtyard. Your father films me as I crouch on the ground gathering dirt into a ziplock bag.

I feel like I'm gathering the bones and ashes of our ancestors into a little plastic urn that I will smuggle back to Canada with me.

The entire textile operates as an amulet bag, a portable, nomadic tombstone, a gateway to the divine, a place to rest your head in exile. This pillow case is a resting place for them now.



Image 5 Nomadic Cemetery, embroidery on repurposed pillowcase, paint on canvas, Moss and Dirt amulets from Béjar, Spain

I have created ten pockets to represent the ten Sephirot, the ten emanations of God as represented in the Kabbalah Tree of Life.

Each white square is a pocket that is embroidered with a pattern I created based on combining observation of a stone in my collection with a cut-work embroidery pattern from one of my inherited tablecloths.

The whole thing is stitched onto a pillow and pillow case creating another pocket for a satchel of moss collected from the Moss Man parade.

The stones are the stones of respect we place on the graves of our ancestors.

The white squares represent the cobblestones that pave the buried cemetery in Béjar with moss stitching around the edges.

The words of the Ladino lullaby *Durmé Durmé* are painted onto the bottom pocket, which represents the Shekinah, the dwelling place of the Divine Feminine which is also where a satchel of dirt from the cemetery is held now, a peaceful, dignified resting place within a fitting ceremonial textile.



Image 6 installation view of *Nomadic Cemetery*,
photo Laura Findlay

T'Karanto

My love, you were born in a very big city called Toronto which is full of people from all over the world. I was born here too, and so was my father and so was my grandfather. We are considered "Settlers" here now. These are the traditional territories of Indigenous people: the Anishnabeg, the Haudenosaunee, the Huron Wendat and the Mississaugas of the Credit.

My paternal great grandmother Dora, raised 10 children in various houses and apartments around the Kensington Market area in the early 1900's when it was a Jewish neighbourhood full of Ashkenazi immigrants from Belarus, Russia and Poland. My grandfather Russell was born during the Flu Epidemic of 1918. Like I am now, Dora experienced new motherhood in Toronto against the backdrop of a virulent disease.

While I was growing up, I wasn't taught that there was a pre-contact, pre-colonial history of Canada. The government and education system perpetuated the myth about Christopher Columbus having 'discovered' the Americas, thereby ignoring and attempting to erase thousands of years of Indigenous history and local creation stories, not to mention the violence with which their communities, families and lands were torn apart.

I want to tell you about some of the truths I am starting to learn about Toronto. For example the original name of this place was very likely "T'karanto". In the book Indigenous Toronto, Rebeka Tobobondung identifies the most common interpretations of the original meaning of the word T'karanto as referring to trees standing in water and the fishing weirs that were likely present. She points out that all the various interpretations relate to the same story of Toronto being:

*"a place of meeting, a place of plenty, a place of gathering, not only of minds, bodies and spirits, but also fish and the abundance of the place."*⁴⁵

I grew up in a house in the north of the city, backing onto a ravine, formed by a tributary of the Don River. My brother and I would climb down into the ravine and walk along the river bed and under bridges.

The stream was always dried up, but we would walk along a bed of concrete rocks enclosed in a steel net; a hidden pathway and private universe to explore beneath the houses of the neighbourhood.

Foxes, coyotes, deer, skunks and raccoons would all climb up into the backyard to visit us.

⁴⁵ Rebeka Tobobondung and Erica Commanda interviewing Jon Johnson, lead organizer of First Story Toronto, for the chapter 'The great Indian Bus Tour' in the book Indigenous Toronto p.237

Canada / Turtle Island ii.

My love, when I was growing up, every morning at school we would start the day by standing up beside our desks and singing along to the National Anthem which blared into each classroom right before the morning announcements.

Oh Canada, Our home and native land. True Patriot love In all our sons command With glowing hearts We see the rise The True North strong and free From far and wide	Oh Canada We stand on guard for thee God keep our hearts Glorious and free Oh Canada We stand on guard for thee Oh Canada We stand on guard for thee
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While I was singing this in school in the 1980's and 1990's, there were children being removed and separated from their families and communities and forced to attend residential schools in Canada, the last⁴⁶ of which didn't close until 1998.⁴⁷

In the Truth and Reconciliation⁴⁸ report it is stated that:

“ Canada separated (Indigenous) children from their parents, sending them to residential schools. This was done not to educate them, but primarily to break their link to their culture. These measures were part of a coherent policy to eliminate Aboriginal people as distinct peoples and to assimilate them into the Canadian mainstream against their will. Canadian government pursued this policy of cultural genocide because it wished to divest itself of its legal and financial obligations to Aboriginal people and gain control over their land and resources. If every Aboriginal

⁴⁶ 1996 the Gordon school in Saskatchewan, 1998 , St Michael's Indian Residential Schools ,1997 Kivalliq Hall in Rankin Inlet

⁴⁷ “For children, life in these schools was lonely and alien. Buildings were poorly located, poorly built, and poorly maintained. The staff was limited in numbers, often poorly trained, and not adequately supervised. Many schools were poorly heated and poorly ventilated, and the diet was meagre and of poor quality. Discipline was harsh, and daily life was highly regimented. Aboriginal languages and cultures were demeaned and suppressed. The educational goals of the schools were limited and confused, and usually reflected a low regard for the intellectual capabilities of Aboriginal people. For the students, education and technical training too often gave way to the drudgery of doing the chores necessary to make the schools self-sustaining. Child neglect was institutionalized, and the lack of supervision created situations where students were prey to sexual and physical abusers.

⁴⁸ What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation Introduction pg.7 https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Principles_English_Web.pdf

person were “absorbed into the body politic,” there would be no reserves, no Treaties, and no Aboriginal rights.”⁴⁹

After reading about this, if you need a safe place to rest, process this pain and reset your nervous system, here is the portal:



Video 3 Image Still of Portal ii. [video link](#)

[Portal ii.](#)

The Legend of the Moss Men

My love, the village of Béjar, is surrounded by an eighth century Moorish fortress wall. Every year the townspeople host a parade in honour of the Moss men based on this local legend dating back to the 12th century:

⁴⁹ In justifying the government's residential school policy, Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, told the House of Commons in 1883: "When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men."

As the legend goes, a group of Christian knights camouflaged themselves from head to toe in moss that they had collected from the forest. Thus disguised they waited silently in the mountains to reconquer the village. At dawn, they stealthily made their way towards the fortress. The guards fled in terror upon seeing these strange creatures who appeared to be large green monsters wielding giant clubs approaching the gates.

This triumphant moment in the history of the village is celebrated each year in June around the time of the summer solstice when the days are longest, and the town celebrates Corpus Christi. A handful of pre-selected townspeople gather moss from the forest and re-create the mythical costume by binding large tufts of moss to their bodies and fashioning giant moss clubs which they swing around their head as they march through the village.

When I realized that our adventure and my exhibition at the David Melul Jewish Museum in Béjar would coincide with the moss man parade, I was so excited! I had this idea that maybe I could be one of the moss men marching in the parade too. How symbolic and fitting of a performative gesture I thought.

In my mind, I was going on a “reconquering” mission of my own, defying the decree of expulsion by returning to within Spanish borders, a descendent of the exiled, carrying the next generation within me.

The streets of the village have been embellished with colourful sand patterns and as the Moss men march in the parade, onlookers throw dried wild flowers and herbs until the streets are covered in a bed of aromatic herbs and flowers. I surreptitiously gathered moss and flowers off the ground and put them in plastic zip lock bags which I managed to smuggle back to Canada by hiding them inside a jewelry box, even though they looked like illegal drugs.

On June 21st, 2019 at the annual moss man parade in Béjar, Spain, while the townspeople marched through the streets disguised in moss, I marched alongside them with a baby in my belly. As it turned out, even though I wasn’t concealed in moss, something or rather someone was concealed within me...



Image 7 A lone Moss Man walks through the streets of Béjar, Spain, during the annual Moss Man Parade. June 2019

The Rose Garden + The Wishing Well

In *Return to the Fortress*⁵⁰, the book, I describe the day I walked through the village for the first time in 2008, through the white stone streets, past abandoned medieval houses in the former Jewish quarter. I walked in the hot midday sun during siesta when all the stores were closed and everyone was resting inside. The white streets seemed to become even more reflective and brilliant than usual at that time. At the very end of the town, I came to the gate of a quiet rose filled garden surrounded by stone fortress walls. At the entrance to the garden, a towering statue of a moss man stood guard accompanied by a plaque recounting the story of the Legend of the Moss Man. He allowed me entrance and I walked as though into a dream.

Time stood still, there was a dried up wishing fountain and a baby bird, lying dead on the ground near the fortress wall. And yet, the sun dappled through the leaves of a tree, I lay down in the grass beside the rose bushes in a gentle breeze, amid total silence.

I fell asleep and I dreamed.

Image 8 Installation view of “Healing Altar” *Return to the Fortress* Exhibition at Museum of Jewish Montreal, 2019

⁵⁰ The truth is my love, this wasn't my first trip to Béjar. You can read all about my first visit in my book “Return to the Fortress” which I wrote to accompany my exhibition of the same name at the [Museum of Jewish Montreal](#) in 2019.



Israel

My love, the first time I went to Israel with my mother, I was one year old. As soon as we landed I had my first asthma attack. They put me to sleep in an oxygen tent until I could breathe again.

Each year, my mother would take me to Israel and we would spend the summer with Sabta in her apartment on Mount Carmel, with the garden overlooking the zoo, surrounded by a wall covered in multicoloured snail shells and the Mediterranean sea down below.

After Sabta died, and they sold her apartment, we went to Israel less often.

After I finished University, we went on one more trip together. While we were there, we decided to look for Sabta's gravestone. We arrived at the cemetery which stretched on forever in rows and rows of condensed tombstones, bleached out in the hot desert sun.

My mother couldn't quite remember where Sabta was buried. We walked around for a long time before we found her.

We had brought stones with us to place on her tombstone which is a ritual that Jews perform when we go to visit our deceased ancestors. We don't bring flowers, we bring stones, stones that carry some special significance.

Gershon Winkler says that stones, mountains and minerals are all considered life beings related to the “downward” direction. He calls them the “Still Beings” or the “dowmem” and he says the direction of their evolution is earthbound.⁵¹

On this same trip, we went to The Negev Desert, and saw many wonders.

Pillars of white salt reflecting in the sunlight, multicolored sand dunes, and a vast cracked desert floor that we learned was once an ocean. I tried to imagine the dried up scraggly desert plants around us as lush seaweeds swaying at the bottom of the sea.

The Garden of Eden⁵²

“The lord planted a garden in Eden, in the east and placed there the man whom He had formed. And from the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad. A river issues from Eden to water the garden, and it then divides and becomes four branches.” Genesis 2.19

The Deer Spoon i.

written by Julie Gladstone and her dad Howard Gladstone in 1986.

⁵¹ Winkler, Gershon The Magic of the Ordinary. Chapter: The Wheel of the Four Winds pg. 44

⁵² The Torah: The Five Books of Moses: The New JPS Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures according to the original Hebrew text. The Jewish publication society latest paperback edition c. 1999



Image 9 Illustration by Julie Gladstone of Eiluj flying through the air on Bunji the Deer's back, 1986

One morning Eiluj was eating cereal with her Deer spoon that she got when she was a baby. Suddenly to her surprise, the deer jumped off the spoon and right onto the table.

Hi Eiluj, I'm Bunji the Deer and I live on your spoon sometimes and in Deerland sometimes.

I never knew a deer could talk! said Eiluj.

I jumped down from the spoon to meet you, said the deer. I want to ask you something.

What? Asked Eiluj.

I want to ask you to take a ride on my back, said the Deer.

But you're so small, said Lujie, I could never get on your back!

You have a blue star on your shirt, said the Deer.

Right said Eiluj, but what can a blue star do?

Just close your eyes for a second, and you will see, said the Deer.

Eiluj closed her eyes, and in a flash, she was flying through the air on the deer's back!

Eiluj opened her eyes and saw the ground, and her house below her.

Soon the deer flew through the clouds.

On the other side of the clouds, Eiluj looked down and saw a strange forest below.



Image 10 Sad Forest. Illustration by Julie Gladstone, pencil crayon on paper, 1986

This is my home, said the deer.
What is it called, asked Eiluj?

Deerland said the Deer.

They landed on the ground and Eiluj looked around.
The trees looked very sad because they didn't have very many leaves on the branches.
There weren't any birds and it was very quiet.

Where is everybody, asked Eiluj? Who lives here anyway?
This is a special land for deers, said Bunji.
It used to be beautiful and green and had lots of trees with delicious bark and twigs. But not anymore.

Why is the forest so sad, asked Lujie?

Bunji looked around and spoke softly: We don't know, but I wish it was nice again.

Etobicoke Creek and the Toronto Purchase

My love, when you were born, we lived on Markham St. in the Annex near Kensington Market. During the pandemic, we moved away from the Jewish area where my paternal great grandparents raised their family, to the western border of the city, at the edge of Etobicoke creek where we don't know anybody.

Etobicoke creek flows through the basin as part of Toronto's vast ravine system... all that remains of the forests that once covered the area, and that were completely wiped out in the 1840's and turned to farmland.⁵³

At the mouth of the creek is Lake Ontario. The city has launched a new waterfront regeneration project called "Life Thrives at the Water"⁵⁴ to restore the ecosystem from its history of industry which has impacted the health of the waterfronts ecosystem. This is the site where the Toronto Purchase was drafted in 1805.⁵⁵ To the west of the creek is Mississauga, a vast sprawling suburbia filled with endless big box stores. To the north is the QEW, the 427 and the Gardiner Expressway, more box stores, Sherway Gardens shopping mall, fast food restaurants and a lot of car dealerships.

I often try to imagine what the land looked like before the Toronto Purchase was signed. I try to imagine what Toronto would look like now to one of the original inhabitants of the land. I'm sure they would be completely incredulous, not to mention horrified if they saw the towering McDonalds Arches, parking lots, strip malls, highways, buried rivers, deviated streams and ripped up landscapes.

Yom Kippur River ritual

My love, when I was a little girl, I was told that Yom Kippur is the most solemn day of the year. I was told that you are supposed to fast and go to synagogue and pray all day. I was told that you are supposed to ask for forgiveness and right any wrongs that you may have done in the past year. Sometimes when I was little, I would try to fast, just for the fun of it. After sun down, you're not even supposed to have any water. Just get your mouth a little bit wet. I remember we would go to Bubie's house to break the fast and eat bagels and cream cheese and smoked salmon.

⁵³ <https://www.mississauga.ca/projects-and-strategies/city-projects/inspiration-lakeview/history/>

⁵⁴ [WATERFRONT PARKS STRATEGY REFRESH](#)

⁵⁵ A revision of an earlier deal, the treaty handed over land stretching from Etobicoke Creek to Ashbridges Bay. In return, the ancestors of the Mississaugas of the New Credit received 10 shillings (approx \$60). Bolduc, Denise, Gordon-Corbiere, Mnawaate, Tabobondung, Rebeka, Wright-McLeod, Brian, eds. Indigenous Toronto: Stories That Carry This Place, Coach House Books 2021

We would never go to synagogue though. Or pray.

My mother was allergic to religion.

Sometimes my mother and I would walk to the Don River in North York on Yom Kippur
We would cast our worries and wishes into the river with a stone.

We would let go of the past so that the coming year would be sweet.

Birth Story

And to the woman He said,
"I will make most severe
Your pangs in childbearing;
Yet your urge shall be for your husband,
And he shall rule over you."
-Genesis 3.12

Winter Solstice December 21st, 2019.

My love, you had been living in the carrier bag of my body for 9 months and you were scheduled to come out on Monday December 23rd on the second day of Channukah, the festival of lights and miracles. Throughout my pregnancy I spent fifty percent of my time in the bath singing to you, and you swam around and kicked in my belly. We called you little swimmer.

The night before you were born was the first night of Chanukah. We gathered at the Free Times Café on College St. only a few blocks from our apartment. Before you came into the world I wanted you to experience the sound of the Gladstone family playing music which was the sound of my childhood. Everyone took turns singing and playing guitar, your grandpa, Uncle Brian, Auntie Bonnie and Auntie Marci harmonizing, even Uncle Billy agreed to take a turn on stage. How were we to know, this would be our last time getting together as a family for nearly two years. The pandemic was only three months away.

Later that night, a few hours before we were scheduled to go to the hospital for your c-section, no doubt enticed by the sounds of music in the outside world, I went into labour.

All I remember is that the surgeon's nail polish was chipped.
I'd never been more terrified.

I was shaking and crying, feeling alone in a bright surgical room full of doctors and anaesthesiologists who were all sticking tubes and needles into me at the same time and very quickly.

A young nurse with the bluest eyes, seeing my fear, leaned right in, nearly resting her forehead against mine. Her hair and mouth were covered with a mask so all I could see were her eyes, they were kind and watery and pale blue like the sky. She reassured me that the anesthetics were going to work and that I wouldn't feel anything.

When your father came into the room, he was wearing a funny cap and a hospital gown. Apparently I was wearing one too though I have no recollection of anyone putting them on me. I told him, "I'm so scared that the anesthetics aren't going to work and I'm going to feel them cutting into me." He said to me, "sweetie, they already started five minutes ago."

During the surgery, we listened to the song All Is Full of Love by Bjork on repeat on my iphone. In the music video, Bjork is a robot who is making love to another identical Bjork robot.

You were born at 3:51am December 23rd, 2019 at St. Joseph's hospital at the foot of Roncesvalles and Lakeshore Ave.

Fear Not

This is the song shared by Anita Diamant in The Red Tent that the midwives used to ease the fear and pain of labour. Dinah also chants the poem to help her sister in her transition into death.

*Fear not, the time is coming.
Fear not, your bones are strong.
Fear not, good friend, help is nearby.
Fear not, Anubis is a gentle companion.
Fear not, the hands of the midwife are clever.
Fear not, the earth is beneath you.
Fear not, little mother.
Fear not, mother of us all.⁵⁶*

⁵⁶ Diamant, Anita, The Red Tent, Picador, New York 1997

My love, I made a birth story carrier pouch. The stitching and designs tell the story of your birth, and have helped me to heal from my scars and fears. There are stitches of tears and blood, there are amulets against the evil eye, and there are patterns that I borrowed from Mama Julia's embroidery work. The cardinal wings are the guardian spirits from my dreams, they are also the wings of the cherubim that stand guard at the entrance to the inner sanctuary and the garden of Eden.



Image 11 Birth Story Carrier Pouch for repairing birth trauma, telling birth stories, carrying knitting needles and healing songs, with cardinal wings, amulets against the evil eye, acrylic paint on repurposed euro coins, secret pockets with ancestral patterns, embroidery thread on repurposed fabric, and painted canvas, recycled and wool knit belt, cutwork embroidery.

"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light;" and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water. God made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse. And it was so. God called the expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day." -Genesis 1.7 ⁵⁷

⁵⁷ The Torah: The Five Books of Moses: The New JPS Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures according to the original Hebrew text. The Jewish publication society latest paperback edition c. 1999

Skye

My love, you were born without a name.

Before you were born, your father was still very ill. On a day when he was able to get out of bed we went to the Humber river during the return of the Salmon and we sat on my favourite rock in the middle of the river bed. I didn't want to name you after an ancestor; I wanted you to have a new beginning, free from the trauma and struggle that came before you.

There, in the flowing waters we began to compile a list of new names, names of hope.

After the surgery and I held you to my breast, I nearly collapsed from exhaustion. I woke at one point in the night to my entire body shaking uncontrollably. It was dark, and your father was holding you in his arms.

The next day, strangers came in and out of the room, testing things, bringing things, changing the garbage, painkillers, forms, tests, hospital food at very specific and inopportune times. I was just starting to return to consciousness and none of the names we had been considering seemed right. I was getting text messages from everyone in the family, they all wanted to know what name we had chosen for you.

The next day was Christmas. The sun was shining through the window and I was getting lost in your blue eyes, a feeling like floating and freedom. Suddenly, your name came to me, almost like you put it in my head. I said to your father and Sabta who were in the room at the time.

"How about "Skye"?"

And so it was.

Skye Rose Gladstone Pemberton.

"And now you come to me- women with hands and feet as soft as a queen's, with more cooking pots than you need, so safe in childbed and so free with your tongues. You come hungry for the story that was lost. You crave words to fill the great silence that swallowed me, and my mothers, and my grandmothers before them. I wish I had more to tell of my grandmothers. It is terrible how much has been forgotten, which is why, I suppose, remembering seems a holy thing." ⁵⁸

⁵⁸Diamant, Anita, *The Red Tent*, (prologue) Picador, New York 1997

Inherited Textiles

Dear Skye Rose,

When you were a few months old, my mother took me into the spare room, which was my childhood bedroom when I was growing up. She opened up the drawer of the wooden chest and took out a few folded garments that she wanted me to inherit. There was a cream coloured Spanish silk shawl with long fringes and a finely embroidered floral pattern. There was also a cutwork, embroidered linen tablecloth, and a delicate lace circle like a magical spider web. All of these pieces were handmade by my great-grandmother Julie Bejarano who would sing old Ladino folk songs from the diaspora, while she knit and sewed.

The Mediterranean sea below

My mother always said that it's a shame no one ever recorded her singing.

There were large turtles crawling around the garden and a pine nut bush on the sunny side of the house. You could go out the side door next to Sabta's bedroom and crack pine nuts with a small rock and eat them in the sun.

Sabta used to bury glass vases in the garden hoping that with enough time, they would turn into buried treasure, like the rainbow oxidized ancient Phoenician glass that was found by her husband when he went on archeological digs for his marine museum.

Mama Julia grew up in Sofia, Bulgaria. Sabta Clara grew up in Biela, Italy. My mother Ruthi grew up in Haifa, Israel, Mommy (me) grew up in Toronto, Canada

Sabta learned to speak eight different languages.
She too was a famous knitter.

Her blue shawl with the long fringes was a reliable remedy for anything from sadness to the common cold. As a little girl whenever I would get sick or feel sad, my mother would say: "Why don't you get Sabta's blue shawl from the dresser?"

I always wondered where the blue shawl got its power from.

It was truly effective.

I ask my mother in a text message if she still has Sabta's blue shawl which has retained almost mythical proportions in my imagination. She says: "I still have the blue shawl. It still has its magic power, even though it is not in the best of shape anymore."

Skye, we laugh these days and say: "Mommy is getting a masters degree in knitting" It sounds pretty silly actually when you put it that way, but if creating a beautiful garment that has the ability to heal is silly, then I'm totally fine with getting a degree in knitting.

Domestic Interlude ii.

My love, everytime I sit down to write, it isn't long until I hear you calling out for me: "Mommy! Mommy!" You climb up the stairs all by yourself, with a few stops along the way to lie down on the steps and play sleeping bunnies. When you find me, you exclaim... "Milk Time Mommy!" You climb on top of me and then we nurse and act silly for a long time. You are so cute! (But as my ancestors would remind me, you shouldn't compliment a baby as it might attract the evil eye.) I tell your father I'm trying to write my thesis and that he should take you outside. I say, "ok, get dressed and go outside." Daddy says, can you pick her clothes please? I say, no, you pick them. I'm trying to write my thesis. Skye, you usually protest and say, NO! Mommy picks Skye's clothes. So I give in since everyone wants mommy to pick Skye's clothes.

On Fridays I get to sleep in and then when I wake up, I try to sneak downstairs and make my coffee so that you won't notice me coming. I try to sneak back upstairs and get into bed with some books and my computer without you noticing, and without paying attention to the mess you have created since you woke up. My body is so exhausted that it feels like a luxurious compromise to work on my thesis in bed. It isn't long before you find me and bring me all of your stuffed animals.

It's a weird feeling that I'm trying to find time to write this letter to you, you are only 2 years old and it will be many years before you will be able to even understand any of it. I'm torn between writing a letter to you, and being present with you now. There are so many endless hours of singing silly songs and chasing you around, and playing with your little animals and trying to finagle you out of the house to get some fresh air.

My life feels like the myth of Sisyphus sometimes; everyday an endless repeating cycle of cleaning up your little animals and putting away your musical instruments and washing your cup and bib and wiping yoghurt and banana off the counter and picking up little pieces of dried play doh from the carpet, wiping up the crumbs, wiping your tray, putting your bib in the laundry and chasing you around trying to get you into the bath, looking for your soother behind the crib until the end of the day, and spending forever trying to get you to finally fall asleep in your own crib, until I can finally flop down into bed myself and pray that you will sleep through the night so that I can get enough sleep too, to not be a total disaster the next day.

Ok... you are dressed now. Downstairs I can hear daddy saying, "Ok, now all we need are your snow pants and your boots and your hat... no... don't take off your gloves honey!" and I have escaped to my office to try and continue telling you this story.

Where were we?

Oh yes, we were talking about MY Sabta: Clara Bejarano and her magical blue shawl. Clara grew up in Biella, the wool capital of Italy. It's no wonder she became a master knitter. She lived in Israel, but I remember as a little girl when she would come to stay with us, she would stay in her room, the spare room and she would knit and knit. She would knit me fancy sweaters, and she even knit for me a little baby blanket that you are using now, honey! Sometimes I would go in and she would teach me how to knit, how to speak French and how to play Solitaire.

Dream: Archangel Rafa'el.

I dreamed that I was rolling a heavy tire up a hill. Instead of rolling it the obvious and easy way though, I am rolling it sideways, so that it is very awkward and difficult. When I get to the top of the mountain, Archangel Rafa'el is waiting for me. He is inside of a painting. Then a man named Isaac appears on top of the mountain and leans his forehead against mine. We have a real moment of trust and connection.

The sixth-century Isaiah the prophet (Yeshayahu the Vision Bringer) went into the wilderness where he received a vision of the four directions and their attributes which he calls the *ruchot* which translates as the four winds or the four spirits.⁵⁹ The Wind of wisdom and understanding is in the West and its manifestation as a spirit being is Rafa'el who is the healing manifestation.

“Healing is in the West because the west is the place of death, merging, fear, items on the list of major things to overcome in order to heal.”⁶⁰

In the book of Genesis, God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac in a test of faith by binding him to a sacrificial altar.

At the last minute, God saves Isaac.

Perhaps this dream is telling me something about sacrifice. And trust.

The way Isaac leans his forehead against mine in the dream, reminds me of the nurse with the blue eyes in the surgery room, right before you were born.

⁵⁹ Winkler, Gershon. Magic of the Ordinary Chapter 3 The Wheel of the Four Winds pg. 43

⁶⁰ The other 3 winds are: Reflection in the South and Meecha'el, Balance in the East and Gavree'el, Vision in the North and Uree'el. You can read more about the 4 directions and its attributes in Chapter 3 of Magic of the Ordinary,

Catalogue of Space & Time Travel Textiles

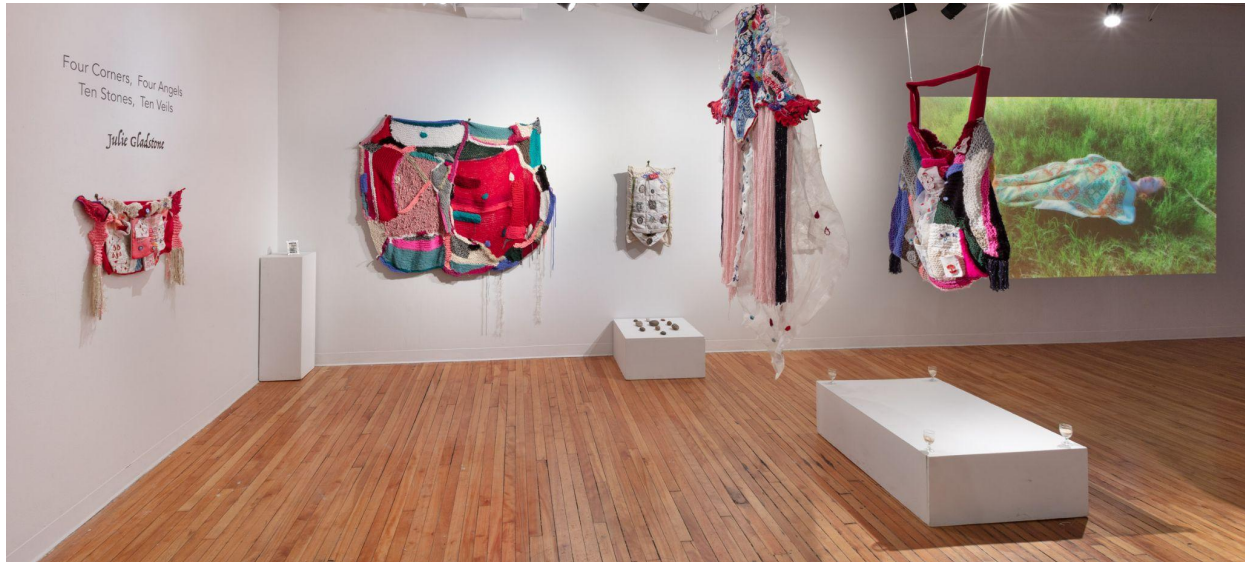


Image 12 Installation view: Four Corners, Four Angels, Ten Stones, Ten Veils, OCADU Graduate Gallery, photo by Laura Findlay

"If it is a human thing to do to put something you want, because it's useful, edible, or beautiful, into a bag, or a basket, or a bit of rolled bark or leaf, or a net woven of your own hair, or what have you, and then take it home with you, home being another, larger kind of pouch or bag, a container for people, and then later on you take it out and eat it or share it or store it up for winter in a solider container or put it in the medicine bundle or the shrine or the museum, the holy place, the area that contains what is sacred, and then next day you probably do much the same again — if to do that is human, if that's what it takes, then I am a human being after all. Fully, freely, gladly, for the first time"⁶¹

Dear ancestors in exile,

I've been sewing, embroidering and knitting for a long time, to repair some of the ruptures and the disconnects in our ancestral transmissions and inherited traumas. These gifts are meant to be healing tools for moving between realms, and connecting with the divine. Like entering into the sacred space within the veils surrounding a hidden sanctuary.

I've made a metaphysical sleeping bag for you to use on the path of expulsion. I imagine it to be a baby carrier, one that is filled with lullabies, stories and healing elixirs. I have made you a magical carrier bag covered in amulets and veils. All of the other ceremonial textiles that I have made for you fit inside this bag, so if you need to leave at a moment's notice, you will have everything already packed inside.

⁶¹ Le Guin, Ursula K. 1986 *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*, Anarchist Press 1986

Each of these items contain stories told through fabric, yarn, knots and the dipping of threaded needles above and below the surface of cloth, like awareness dipping into the subconscious and back up again.

Travellers Bag & Sleeping Bag (for mothers and babies in exile)



Image 13 First side: protection and strength.
with amulets and magic pockets
knit wool and re-purposed ikea curtains
embroidery thread on painted canvas and chiffon,
acrylic paint on crushed tin and lake stones,
acrylic paint on euro coins



Image 14 Second side: healing and renewal.
with amulets and magic pockets
knit wool and re-purposed ikea curtains
embroidery thread on painted canvas and chiffon,
acrylic paint on crushed tin and lake stones,
acrylic paint on euro coins

Travellers Bag Checklist

- 1 metaphysical prayer shawl for time travel
- 1 embroidered veil for dreaming, spirit journeying and receiving creative insights
- 1 carrier bag that wraps around your hips to tell birth stories, resolve trauma and carry knitting needles
- 1 pillowcase with embroidered stones that contains moss and dirt from Béjar. It is also a portable cemetery honouring the memory of our ancestors, so that they can rest in exile. You can rest your head here at night if you are tired.
- 1 Life Line full body shawl to connect to the waters.
In preparation for giving birth and nursing new babies
- 1 quilted carrier bag made of stained unicorn nursing blankets. Cutwork embroidery based on random milk stains which emerged into the form of the Tree of Life and the Ten Sephirot, seemingly by divine coincidence.

Look inside the hidden pockets, you will see that I've included the purple dragonflies and the yellow birds' song echoing through the forest; the sound of secret pool in the woods where the sun reflects and shimmers on quiet afternoons, the stone smooth and warm on your hands, the sound of the fountain trickling in the quiet streets at noon while everyone is sleeping. The cast of the moon on the wall and the colour of the sky at dawn.

May you receive and share the warmth, protection and love where and when it is most needed.



Image 15 Metaphysical Time Travel Shawl. knit wool, eucalyptus, cotton, acrylic and tinsel made with love and healing hands in honour of my Sabta Clara Ben-Eli (Bejarano) and her magical blue healing shawl

"The most revered and powerful garment, an ancient mantle known as the *m'eel ha'tsedakah*, or "Mantle of the Balancing Force" was crudely cut from deer skin and painted with mystical symbols and invocations. This mysterious mantle, alluded to in accounts dating as early as the ninth century B.C.E not only empowers the bearer with supernatural abilities but itself wields powers to alter the ordinary."⁶²

⁶² Winkler, Gershon, *The Magic of the Ordinary*, p. 175, North Atlantic Books 2003

The Deer Spoon ii.

If there's anyone who would know how to fix the forest it's the old man Simon and Merleena, said Bunji. But Merleena is a witch! said Eiluj.
Let's go try to find them to see if we can help the forest.
Ok, we can try, said Bunji. Ok let's go! said Eiluj.



Image 16 Eiluj meets Simon in the Sad Forest, Illustration by Julie Gladstone 1986

The Deer ran through the woods with Eiluj on his back.
Suddenly they saw a very old man standing under a tree, as if he was waiting for them.
He had a black hat, black shirt and was wearing a brown tie and green shoes.

He looked sad.

That's Simon, said Bunji, he lives in the forest.

I'm glad you're here, said Simon.
I saw the blue star, maybe you can help us find Merleena the witch.
So all three of them started on their way to look for Merleena.



Image 17 Merleena the Witch. Illustration by Julie Gladstone 1986

The baby shower and the evil eye

My love, there are some beliefs and traditions that you don't realize you have until you stumble onto them by accident. As we were preparing for your birth, as is the custom in Canada, I wanted to have a baby shower for you. I didn't understand why at first, but when I brought it up with my mother, she kept changing the subject and trying to defer things, saying that we should wait, that in Israel it's considered bad luck to celebrate before the baby is born.

When I started studying the domesticated religion of the Sephardic Women in the Ottoman empire, I eventually came to realize that this belief is but a remnant of an entire spiritual belief system related to the Evil Eye (Ayin Hara) which was largely practiced in the Ottoman empire by the exiled Jews of Spain. (our ancestors included) This system of belief is based upon a notion that there is "limited good" and that one shouldn't brag or celebrate prematurely, lest the spirits catch wind, or a jealous person cast their eye upon you, causing you and your family harm.

Envy and jealousy particularly around pregnancy and babies were considered lethal weapons that attracted the attention of bad spirits who needed to be placated. One of the ways to placate them and to avoid angering them, was to refer to these spirits as “the good among us”, a form of trickery through naming. One should never compliment or praise a baby because it would attract the evil eye and the attention of the “good among us”. Saying things like “what an ugly baby” or spitting for good luck after offering a compliment were just a few of a myriad of ways that you could defer the evil eye and protect the baby’s health.

According to Rosemary Zumwalt the practices against the evil eye formed an elaborate system of ritual practices in the Sephardic Diaspora in the communities who had settled in the Ottoman Empire.

“As the source of malaise, of illness, physical handicaps, mental disturbances, poisoned relationships, and of death, the spirits had to be controlled. This attempt to control the spirits, to maintain a working balance between the world of the spirits and the world of the living, was effected through a complex belief system, a Jewish folk religion. The evil eye beliefs were at the center of an elaborate religious system.”⁶³

This belief system formed the foundation of what Zumwalt and Lévy have termed as a “domesticated religion” of the Sephardim; a religious system developed by the women who considered themselves to be practicing within the realm of Judaism. However, as they were excluded from the public religious life, from learning how to read or learn the sacred texts, the women developed their own folk religion that consisted of herbal remedies, divination and ritual magic.

Rue (ruda) was considered the Queen of all herbs and an ally to women in pregnancy and childbirth. Sprigs of rue would be attached behind the mother’s ears, tucked into the baby’s clothes and placed on the pillow of the newborn at night.

The use of blue beads (Kalina Alvas) and the hamsa (the healing hand) either pinned to the child’s clothing, worn like a bracelet, or strung together with garlic around the neck was also used for protection against the evil eye. One woman recalls the use of a little sack, a “bulsika” in which was placed some salt, garlic and a blue bead. ⁶⁴ Zumwalt also describes the use of curtains that surrounded the bed of the new mother and baby, used to shield them from the “disastrous effects of greed or envy”.

⁶³ Zumwalt, Isaac Jack Levy, Rosemary Levy, *Ritual Medical Lore of Sephardic Women Sweetening the Spirits, Healing the Sick*, University of Illinois Press c. 2002 p.264

⁶⁴ Zumwalt, Isaac Jack Levy, Rosemary Levy, *Ritual Medical Lore of Sephardic Women: Sweetening the Spirits, Healing the Sick*, University of Illinois Press 2002



Image 18 Hamsa, from Museo David Melul in Béjar, Spain's permanent collection.



Image 19 Detail of dreamer's veil: embroidered hamsa (healing hand). Paint on canvas, painted euro coin transformed into an amulet against the evil eye. The evil eye motif is also used in the embroidery

My love, the domesticated religion of the Sephardic Women developed within a very specific set of circumstances. I could devote an entire book to telling you about it. I highly recommend reading the book "Sweetening the Spirits"⁶⁵ which contains the compiled ethnographic research of Rosemary Levy Zumwalt and Isaac Jack Levy Zumwalt, based upon their comprehensive set of interviews, conducted with the elderly remaining survivors who still recall memories of this belief system and its ritual practices.

The writer's point out that they are probably the last ones who will be able to conduct such interviews with Sephardim who will be able to recount memories from their personal experience. These practices are fading into the winds of time, with the memories of the last of the generation who are all in their nineties now.

Due to the complete destruction of the Jewish presence in Spain, the tiny collection at the Jewish Museum in Béjar Spain has been pieced together using seemingly random Jewish items they have acquired from elsewhere. A tallit, an amulet bag and a piece of jewelry with the Hamsa, the sign of the healing hand against the evil eye, have been collected from various countries and times.

⁶⁵ Zumwalt, Isaac Jack Levy, Rosemary Levy, Ritual Medical Lore of Sephardic Women: Sweetening the Spirits, Healing the Sick, University of Illinois Press 2002

Sephardic bedtime prayer ⁶⁶

Ladino version

Kuatro kantonadas ay en esta kaza
Kuatro malahimes, kuatro anjelines
Ke mos guarden de fuego, i de flama,
I de palavra mala, i de muerte
subetania. Amen

English translation

There are four corners in this house
Four angels four angels
May they protect us from fire, and from flame
And from evil speech, and from sudden death.
Amen

The Legend of Miriam's Well Part 1

“At twilight on the second day of Creation, God embedded a precious liquid jewel in the earth, a miraculous well of pure, sparkling water. From one generation to the next, the well belonged to those who knew how to draw up its water. Filled with ‘mayim chayim’, living waters, the well was a reminder to all who drank or drew from it, that Torah, the way of the Jewish people is also a well from which all may drink and be restored.” ⁶⁷

Inventing Rituals

“Within the context of male-orientated religion, women clearly find strategies for constructing a meaningful religious life. Women reinterpret, ignore, borrow, circumvent and shift emphases. But perhaps the most effective strategy available to women is to use the forms of the great tradition to sacralize their own, female life experiences.” ⁶⁸

My love, I've been thinking a lot about rituals and about why we need them. I've also been thinking about who creates rituals and why so many people think that you need to be someone special or to have some special authority to create a ritual.

⁶⁶Zumwalt, Isaac Jack Levy, Rosemary Levy, Ritual Medical Lore of Sephardic Women: Sweetening the Spirits, Healing the Sick, University of Illinois Press c. 2002

⁶⁷ Miriam's Well, Rituals for Jewish Women Around the Year, Penina V. Adelman, Month of Nisan, pg. 69-70

⁶⁸ Sered, Susan Star, Women as ritual experts: the religious lives of elderly Jewish women in Jerusalem Chapter 5 Sacralizing the Feminine: Food Preparation as a Religious Activity Oxford University Press 1996 <https://hdl-handle-net.ocadu.idm.oclc.org/2027/heb.05672>

These are some of my thoughts about it: I think that we need rituals to help us in reframing our ideas. I think that if we have any chance of survival as a species, we need to reframe the concept of homeland from one of ownership, nationhood and national borders to one of relationality and reciprocity.

Aurora Levins Morales, who is a Jewish, Indigenous writer and activist believes we need to move beyond terms like repatriation to concepts of rematriation. She offers an important reminder that in the grand scheme of things, in the broader scope of historical understanding:

“We have all been displaced, we have all been the oppressor and the oppressed at some point.”⁶⁹

In the book *Magic of the Ordinary: Recovering the Shamanic in Judaism*, Gershon Winkler points out that authentic Jewish mysticism, or Kabbalah is anything but doctrine. Rather, he emphasizes that it is based on a process of continual innovation, the adding on of new concepts and techniques throughout history which often conflict with and even deviate from earlier teachings.

“The word *kabbalah* means literally *receiving*. “Receiving” in turn, means being open to the ever flowing river of wisdom and insight, magic and enlightenment, that emanates unceasingly from what the kabbalah calls *Sacred Wellspring*. This is the journey of the River Quest, following your flow of being in search of the wellspring from which you spiral. The eighteenth-century Rabbi Leib, the son of Sarah, would follow rivers to their sources as a rite of bringing resolve and healing to the living and to the dead. Following rivers to their sources could be perceived as kind of a Jewish ‘walkabout’ but it is actually more than that and symbolizes the journey of the explorer of the magic of the ordinary.”⁷⁰

Gerber emphasizes the fact that cultural and spiritual innovation are one of the hallmarks of a people in continuous diaspora.

“Admittedly, in all of the great ages of Jewish history, Jews have freely borrowed ideas and institutions from the broader culture surrounding them, transforming these borrowings to create something both new and compatible with Judaism. When given a modicum of political freedom and tolerance, Jews have engaged in intensive prolonged dialogue with the civilizations of the world. A Jewish culture that did not adapt to new waves of thought would have become frozen in an ancient mold.”⁷¹

And much of the world's Jewish religious community has become frozen in time, take for example the Hasidic communities who still wear the 18th century black coats and hats of the Polish Shtetls, living in the Israeli desert climate, or in the sweltering heat of Toronto summers.

This love letter to you, these videos, these lullabies and these textile pieces are made so as to keep re-locating the sacred wellsprings, so as not to get frozen in time.

⁶⁹ Aurora Levins Morales <http://www.auroralevinsmorales.com/nadie-la-tiene-land-ecology-and-nationalism.html>

⁷⁰ Gershon Winkler, *Magic of the Ordinary*, published by North Atlantic Books c.2003 Chapter 4 Sorcery pg. 71-72

⁷¹ Gerber, Jane S. *The Jews of Spain: A History of the Sephardic Experience*, The Free Press 1992

Dear Etobicoke Creek ii.

Dear river, I see the scraps of construction plastics tangled up in you, the rusted bits of fences wrapped around the trees. Everytime it rains and your waters grow stronger, I see the plastic bags and human debris wind swept through the trees and stuck on rocks along your shores. I see the cigarette packs and the empty beer bottles, the remains of a fire pit, someone who has graffitied the name "Diana" on a large rock at the bend.

I've learned to bring tobacco as an offering whenever I come.

Sephardic women would leave little cups of sugar around their house for the spirits.



Image 20 Installation view: Four Corners, Four Angels, ten Stones, Ten Veils, OCADU Graduate Gallery 2022
In which I placed four cups of sugar as an offering to the spirits to protect the exhibition.

Photo Series: We Are Here Now

Dear ancestors, I've taken a series of photographs to show you where our family has ended up. At least for the time being.



Image 21 Installation view We are Here Now. printed digital photographs. 11" x 14" each. Four Corners, Four Angels, Ten Stones, Ten Veils, OCADU Graduate Gallery, 2022 photo Laura Findlay

I was born in this country that was stolen from other people.

I take to heart Robin Wall Kimmerer's invitation to consider the creation story of Turtle island and the reminder that Skywoman was herself an immigrant who became Indigenous through her "actions of reciprocity and her give and take with the land. She reminds us:

"For all of us, becoming Indigenous to a place means living as if your children's future mattered, to take care of the land as if our lives, both material and spiritual, depended on it."⁷²

Now I am the new ancestor. Though we have come from a history of Diaspora, I have decided to come into relationship with this place where I was born and where my daughter was born.

This is a decision I have been making, despite the fraught history, despite the increasing fragility of the climate, despite the collapsing of ecosystems, despite our own familial history of diaspora.

Despite my fear of the material realm and my fear of impermanence.

⁷² Kimmerer, Robin Wall, Braiding Sweetgrass Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants, Milkweed Editions 2013

This decision isn't arising based on a sense of nationalism, or patriation.

This is a decision to become embodied, and to pay attention.

Even if what I notice is that the land is in pain, and needs help.

So, to all of you who have lived with a sense of displacement, lived in grief and exile, lived in fear, too afraid to get attached to a place, to all of you who have live in crowded urban neighbourhoods without access to land, may I introduce you to the city of T'karanto, the place where I was born. The place where Skye Rose was born. We may not stay here forever, but while we are here, let us release our fear and build a relationship.

I have stitched together textiles made in the diaspora, with the land and the water here. I have draped shawls and tablecloths that you made by hand in the Diaspora over one side of my body, while on one side is the land and the water. My body is the talisman, the ambassador, healed and contained within this ceremonial joining. This series of gestures and photos uses the methodology of Wandering Textiles, stitching together textile with land to create sacred ceremonial carrying cases, a type of tabernacle, a nomadic embodied third being.

Tikkun takes place by this ceremonial joining. A whole made of parts.



Image 22 Performance Still: cutwork embroidered tablecloth by Julia Bejarano on the frozen ground of Bickford Park (Garrison Creek) 2020



Image 23 Video Still. Embroidered Silk Shawl by Julia Bejarano at Grenadier Pond, High Park Toronto, 2020

Knitting as Methodology

These are more of the reasons I took up knitting. It started when I was pregnant with you, Skye.

The way everything happened is pretty unbelievable. Two weeks after I found out I was pregnant, I also got accepted to Grad school. Our first assignment was to work in a medium that was new to us. I had just finished a series of paintings⁷³ of figures cloaked and disguised in the flora, fauna and Sephardic iconography that I had observed during my recent trip to Béjar. In my mind, these figures were camouflaged in prayer shawls composed of elements taken from the earth. I was thinking about the Moss men, and their strategy of using the land itself as a disguise, as a camouflage and as a mode of protection.

⁷³ You can view the work here: <https://museemontrealjuif.ca/event/return-to-the-fortress/>



Image 24 Prayer Shawl with Butterflies, Dragonflies & Amulets
48" x 36" oil on panel, 2019
Return to the Fortress exhibition
Museum of Jewish Montreal



Image 25 Prayer Shawl for Pregnancy
Knit wool, painted lake stones, house keys and seagull feathers, 2019
Return to the Fortress exhibition
Museum of Jewish Montreal

Prayer shawls known as "Tallit" throughout Jewish history have for the most part been the exclusive domain of men and are yet another of myriad examples in which women were forbidden from participation in public spiritual life. Women were not allowed to pray with a prayer shawl or to use tefillin.

Though there have been many reforms that reflect the various waves of feminism in the 20th century, I wanted my research to further challenge the use of a prayer shawl, by removing it from a patriarchal framework, and recontextualizing it as an embodied garment, designed for protection during pregnancy, by reclaiming and revealing the suppressed and rejected elements from within Judaism itself. Elements that have been erased and distorted through time as a result of the process of being whipped into conformity out of fear of persecution. Dr. Ann Llewellyn Barstow, a Professor of History at State University of New York writes

"Women as a gender group suffered a special liability in that they had begun to be identified with Jews. Both groups suffered from being associated with magical practices: making potions and poisons, wearing amulets, possessing the evil eye, sticking pins in dolls, having abnormal knowledge about dreams, fortune-telling, or the magical properties of gems. Rumors circulated about their bodies... they both could turn themselves into animals..."⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Dr. Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze* pg. 63 Harper Collins 1995

Knot Magic

My love, I had long forgotten my knitting lessons from Sabta, so I asked my mother to remind me how to knit. She taught me one stitch, and I picked it up again easily enough. After that, I knit everywhere.

As the semester progressed, and you grew inside of me, I knit everywhere; while lying in bed, watching Star Trek on tv, in class, and at the doctor's office, while sitting in hospital waiting rooms for your father. My knitted disguises expanded and grew along with my swelling belly, covering and protecting you as you kicked, obviously in your watery sanctuary. I covered the belly area with amulets against the evil eye that I made by painting lake stones and house keys.

Now you are born, and all these months during the pandemic while you have been napping, I've been sitting in my chair by the window, tying magical knots. Using knitting needles that once belonged to my own Sabta, I've been knitting, stitching and embroidering, remembering and singing. Linda Rodriguez in her essay Knot Magic describes learning from her Cherokee grandmother how to:

“create a fabric out of one long continuous piece of yarn with only two sticks or one hook. She also taught me that stitches of any kind - knit, crochet or sewing- were all related to ancient knot magic, as was all weaving of cloth or baskets with its interlacing of fibers.”⁷⁵

Sheila Payne, a historian of embroidery patterns points out that in prehistoric times, tattooing the skin with magical symbols was a way to provide protection and interaction with the spirit realm. In its earliest forms then, embroidery on clothing operated as a sort of second skin.⁷⁶ Payne describes the importance of embroidering seams and edges in protecting the boundaries of the body. Evil spirits are kept out of the body by decorating the edges and openings of garments, especially around the neck. Asymmetrical pockets with a lot of patterns have been used widely across cultures to distract and confuse evil spirits; as has the use of pattern, doubling, repeating and strategic locations of symbols. For example, concentric circles are often representative of eyes with many layers of borders offering additional protection.

Mircea Eliade in his book ‘Images and Symbols’ describes the use of knots in binding and releasing and their relationship to power, magic and religion. ⁷⁷ In Witchcraft folklore, the “witches ladder” is a spell constructed by tying a series of knots in a rope or hair. The practice of tying a specific number of knots to effect a magical outcome is also seen in the practice of knotting the fringes of the Tallit. ⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Linda Rodriguez, Knot Magic, Chapter 6 in Stitching Resistance Women, Creativity, and Fiber Arts Edited by Marjorie Agosin c. Solis Press 2014

⁷⁶ Sheila Paine Embroidered Textiles: Traditional Patterns from Five Continents Published by Thames and Hudson 1990

⁷⁷ Mircea Eliade, ‘Images and Symbols, Studies in Religious Symbolism, chapter 3, The God who Binds and the Symbolism of Knots, pages 92- 124, Princeton University Press’.

⁷⁸ The numerical value of the word tzitzit (fringes) is 600. Each of the fringes contains 8 threads and 5 knots, making a total of 613. This number corresponds to the 613 commandments contained in the Torah. It was also noted that in making the fringes one winds the long thread around the other threads between the 5 knots 7, 8, 11, and 13 times respectively. The first three numbers equal 26, which is the numerical value of the Tetragrammaton. The remaining number equals the numerical value of the word ehad (“one”)—the last word in the opening verse of the Shema. (a sacred prayer) The fringes of the tallit thus not only remind the Jew of the 613 divine commandments. [The Tallit: Spiritual Significance | My Jewish Learning](#)



Image 26 Dreamers Veil with Cardinal Wings Installation view: OCADU Graduate Gallery, 2022, photo Laura Findlay
hamsa, milk, tears + blood, embroidery thread on repurposed chiffon and fabric curtains, hamsa (healing hand)
embroidery thread on painted canvas with amulet of dried lavender grown in the garden and quartz crystals,
acrylic paint on euro coins, wool fringe

The High Priestess Tarot Card & The Shekinah (divine feminine)

"The high priestess signifies inner wisdom at its deepest level. She sits before two pillars, representing both the temple of Isis and the ancient Hebrew temple in Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God on earth, in other words, the home of the Shekinah. A veil hangs between the pillars, indicating that we are barred from entering the place of wisdom. The shekinah was indeed said to dwell within the veiled ark of the temple...

Look carefully, and you can see what lies behind the veil and the pillars. And what lies behind is water.... The pool signifies the unconscious and the truth hidden there. The water is motionless, the secrets in its darkest depths, hidden under a smooth surface. For most of us, at most times, the turbulent unconscious remains hidden under a placid layer of consciousness. We cannot enter the temple because we do not know how to go into ourselves"⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Rachel Pollock, on the High Priestess card in the Major Arcana. pg. 38,39 Seventy Eight Degrees of Wisdom: A Tarot Journey to Self-Awareness, Weiser Books 2019

My love, before I took up knitting, stitching and embroidering; I was more familiar with a different type of magical needle: the Acupuncture needle. Having studied Traditional Chinese Medicine, Taoist Alchemy and hands on Reiki Healing. For 10 years I worked as an Acupuncturist, channeling and redirecting subtle energy in human bodies, using an acupuncture needle and my hands. My love, the roles of Holistic Healing Arts and Contemporary Arts have felt like they existed on opposite ends of the spectrum in my life.

Sephardic women stitched together their most valued domestic textiles to create a third object: a ceremonial covering for sacred texts. In the same way, this research has been about stitching together identities and practices which I have kept in isolation from each other due to shame and self censorship.

In order to heal this division, I have come to realize that I needed to ground the practices of embodied healing within an understanding of mysticism and embodiment from within my own lineage.

The Magician Tarot Card

The Magician channels Universal energy down through his magic rod, and directs it through his body, to manifest in the earthly plane. He has on a table in front of him all of his magical tools. Like the Magician, in the making of these textiles, I've been using magical needles to channel Divine energy. I've been tying certain kinds of knots: binding spells of love and protection, while also untying other types of knots; the ones that are bound up in my body, the inherited traumas and ancestral fears.

The Sepher Yetzirah, or the Book of Creation, is an ancient Jewish mystical work that describes God's process of creating the universe. It is a short book, written in Hebrew and composed of brief, cryptic, poetic passages that offer mythic images and directions for meditative practice. The last chapters of the book align the Hebrew alphabet with the Tarot as a path towards Wisdom. In it, the Magician card is associated with the thirteenth path and it is called the *Conductive Intelligence of Unity*.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ "It is the substance of glory, and it manifests truth to every spirit" It is the consummation of the truth of individual spiritual things" No magical work can be accomplished without communication with this path. It is the equilibrating power and the source of volition. It is the spiritual focus of gravitation and the directing force. The Conductive Intelligence is always accompanied by Responsibility. These two ideas stand in direct proportion to each other." Akiba Ben Joseph The Book of Formation - Sepher Yetzirah. Translated from the Hebrew, with annotations, by Knut Stenring Including The 32 Paths of Wisdom, their correspondence with the Hebrew alphabet and the Tarot Symbols. Martino Fine Books Eastford, CT 2019, pg. 57

Life Line



Image 27 Digital photograph, Life Line. Humber River and Lake Ontario

My love, I began the lifeline garment while I was eight months pregnant. I was trying to create a ritual for myself that would help me to build connections. On the one hand to some kind of spiritual lineage, and on the other hand to the land/ place where I live as a settler/ descendent of immigrants.

The performance that I created with this garment is modeled after an orthodox Jewish religious ritual act traditionally performed exclusively by men called "wrapping the Tefillin". You can watch a YouTube⁸¹ video of the ritual being performed if you like. In the ritual, religious men wrap leather bands attached to amulets around their arms and head as a way of connecting with God.

According to the encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic & Mysticism⁸², the Tefillin are the religious article most mentioned in rituals for mystical ascent and for summoning angels.

⁸¹ [How to Wrap the Tefillin](#)

⁸² Geoffrey W. Dennis, The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic, and Mysticism pg. 285 Llewellyn publications, 2016

In my performance of the Life Line ritual, the aim is to connect with the earth, and the life-giving properties of two major bodies of water in our city: Humber River and Lake Ontario. Both of which were just a stone's throw away from the hospital where you were born.

This is a ceremony that I created as a rite of passage, a preparation for a new way of life that was going to arise as I became a mother, in which my studio time and my creative time would be cut into and evolve into new more cyclical repetitive acts. Which would require giving of myself and my time, emotionally, spiritually and physically.



Image 28 Installation view from Four Corners, Four Angels, Ten Stones, Ten Veils exhibition, OCADU Graduate Gallery 2022 photo by Laura Findlay

Wandering Textiles: Stitching Knitting into Abstract Painting

After you were born, knitting became a way for me to work in the short windows that I found while you were napping. I developed a new way to think through the construction of an abstract composition, one that was based on pre-making knitted shapes and colour swatches; arranging them into a composition after they were all made. I could create a soft pile of different coloured shapes and then weave them together to create knitted paintings.

I wondered if a knit abstract painting would be taken as seriously as one that I had made with oil painted on canvas.



Image 29
Shawl with Four Corners (for cemetery)
knit wool, acrylic and nylon embroidered and woven
into oil paint on canvas
16" x 24"



Image 30
Shawl with Four Corners ii (for cemetery)
knit wool, acrylic and nylon embroidered and woven
into oil paint on canvas
16" x 24"

There exist many arbitrary splits within the colonial, patriarchal hierarchy of the arts including a weird belief that if you make something out of paint it is more important than something that is made out of fibre.

My love, our colonial systems were designed to split everything apart it seems.⁸³
To separate and fragment.

Our colonial systems can't seem to handle the fact that art in the form of a beautiful abstract blanket that also happens to help someone to feel warm and safe, for example; that art made as a gift for a child, or a friend could be as important as art that is expensive and made for a wall; or that art could take the form of a beautiful tablecloth, one that is embroidered with loving attention to composition, pattern and craftsmanship, which is meant to be placed on the dinner table, transforming it into a sacred altar.

The dinner table is a portable altar that supports the nourishment and connection of families. The dinner table is a site of transmission of the most important lessons about exile in the Jewish tradition.

In Jewish life, embroidered textiles and knit clothing items have served as the backdrop upon which both private and public religious activity unfolded. Perhaps they were so ubiquitous as to have become largely invisible in the study of material and visual culture until only recently when we are starting to realize the value in such things.

⁸³ The art historian Roger Dunn identifies the primary reasons why the fibre arts have been undervalued throughout history namely: The patriarchal structure of society, The categorization of the Arts in the Western world which gives top rank to those areas of visual creativity practiced by men with advanced education The categorization that denigrates works that had a primarily functional purpose." Dunn, Roger, The Changing Status and Recognition of Fiber Work Within the Realm of the Visual Arts, Chapter 7 in *Stitching Resistance: Women, Creativity and Fiber Arts* Edited by Marjorie Agosin, Published by Solis Press 2014

Seder

Every year we get together with our extended family: all of our cousins, uncles and aunts, and we have a Seder for Passover.⁸⁴ This is a holiday meant to commemorate our Exodus from Egypt into the wilderness and our freedom from slavery. (Remember the story about Miriam and her timbrel?)

We pass around a book called a Haggadah and we take turns reading obscure passages whose meaning seems to be completely lost on us due to the poor translation and narrative style. While we read, there is always chaos as people try to check the hockey score on their phones surreptitiously under the table, or someone starts talking rudely in the middle. The same jokes each year about which of the brothers is the wicked son and which one is the simple son.

The highlight of the Seder is always the singing of the Dai Dai Anu song, which is about the plagues which God sent to the Egyptian people to persuade them to set the Jewish slaves free. Only my mother sings the long verses which are in Hebrew and then everyone joins in loudly and boisterously, laughing at the same time to sing the chorus:

Dai Dai Anu, Dai Dai Anu, Dai Dai Anu, Dai Anu Dai Anu!
Dai Anu translated means: Enough!

We all sing loudly: Enough! Enough! Enough!

Shabbath and the Dinner Table as altar.

My love, even though my mother hated religion, most Friday evenings when I was growing up, we would set the table with great care. Using one of Julie Bejarano's beautiful tablecloths, and sometimes one that my mother had embroidered herself.

We would light the Shabbath candles while reciting blessings over the wine and a braided Challah bread.

The site of transmission of the most important Jewish teachings regarding rest and renewal take place every week at the dinner table.

⁸⁴ Except for the last two years since you were born. You've never been to one of our Seder's because the COVID 19 pandemic has prevented us from gathering with our family.

Gathering Fragments ii. (Stitching Together Narrative)

The technique of gathering fragments and weaving or patching them together to tell a story, despite its frustrations and challenges, also contains a sort of beautiful alignment between form and function. If we go back to looking at Ursula Le Guin's model of the Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction, we can imagine the construction of a carrier bag for all of these fragments of stories, memories and questions, that when stitched together create something solid, something beautiful, something whole.

A container, and a textile that tells a story through it's making and through it's form.

In her essay "Aesthetic Inheritances: History Worked by Hand", bell hooks admits that she struggled for years to find the right words to write about her grandmother's quilt making practice. She says:

"To write this piece I have relied on fragments, bits and pieces of information found here and there, sweet late-night calls to Mama to see if she "remembers when". Memories of old conversations coming back again and again, memories like reused fabric in a crazy quilt, contained and kept for the right moment. I have gathered and remembered. I wanted one day to record and document so that I would not participate in further erasure of the aesthetic legacy and artistic contributions of black women."⁸⁵

Daughter, I too am trying to find the words to write about my great-grandmother's and grandmother's textile pieces, and I am relying on fragments of memories, and fragments of memories of memories. Snapshots of memories, and projections of intention, and many questions.

⁸⁵hooks, bell. *Belonging : A Culture of Place*, Routledge, 2008. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sfu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=359080>. Created from sfu-ebooks on 2020-01-31 10:57:20.

Dear Sabta,

I've been thinking a lot about you and about your knitting. I was wondering if knitting was a spiritual or a meditative act for you? Was it a way to pass the time after Saba passed away and you became sad all the time? When you were knitting the blue shawl, did you know ahead of time that it was going to have magical healing powers?

Did you recite prayers or focus on a feeling of love while you were knitting?

Was it a ceremonial or a mundane ritual? Did knitting help you to feel better too?

I hope that's not too many questions.

Thank you for all of the beautiful sweaters that you made for me when I was little.

This is the only photo we have of you knitting Sabta. It is in my parents' garden in North York, and that is me in the pram. I am one year old.



Image 31 Photograph of Sabta and baby Julie, Toronto 1980

I wanted to let you know that my daughter Skye Rose sleeps under the baby blanket that you were knitting for me in this photo.

I wish you could have met her.

Lots of love.

Dear Mama Julia,

We've never met before, but I have your name.

I'm sure you have been watching over me all of this time.

I hope that you approve of my thesis exhibition which I entitled Four Corners, Four Angels, Ten Stones, Ten Veils. I placed your photo in the corner of the gallery so that you could see everything I've done in your memory.



Image 32 Installation view
Four Corners, Four Angels, Ten Stones, Ten Veils
(framed photo is on the plinth in the corner)



Image 33
photo of Mama Julia knitting

I want to say thank you for the beautiful embroidered shawls, the cutwork tablecloths and the lace work. I feel so grateful to have become the keeper of these textile pieces. Perhaps you never thought of them as art, but I just want to let you know that each piece contains layers of meaning and beauty for me.

My mother told me the story about the headboard of your bed in Haifa, and how there was a secret compartment that you filled with all of your most precious yarns. My mother tells me that when she was a little girl, she used to get in there with her cousin and make a big mess tangling it all up. When I was a little girl, the headboard on my bed was a magical dream portal that could take me to different dimensions while I was sleeping.

I was wondering if embroidery was a meditative or spiritual act for you?

Did embroidery and singing provide a creative portal for you?

Did you ever live somewhere that felt like home?

Lots of Love

Nick Cave's Soundsuits

My love, in my desire to keep you safe, I have been knitting shawls and veils within which you can seek shelter. I have been looking to see what strategies for protection, concealment and the cultivation of safe psychic and emotional spaces have been used by other artists.

Ancestors, I have also been thinking of how to protect you while you are scared in exile.

There is a contemporary American artist named Nick Cave who has come up with some excellent strategies. When I first saw these Soundsuits, I immediately thought of the Moss Men, and how the people of Béjar used moss to conceal their true identities. In the case of Nick Cave, he has stitched together sticks from central park to create a metaphorical space of protection and camouflage.

Nick Cave initially thought of his soundsuits as protective shields capable of masking a person's identity. He made his first soundsuit in response to the Rodney King beatings of 1991. It was made of sticks that he collected from Central Park. When he put it on for the first time, he noticed that it made a rustling sound. In his own words, the soundsuits are:

“full body suits constructed of materials that rattle with movement...like a coat of armor, they embellish the body while protecting the wearer from outside culture.”



Video 4 Image still from Durmé Durmé video link

[Durmé Durmé Video](#)

My love,

The scene opens on the shores of Lake Ontario. It is early morning and the water is calm and lapping gently. Birds are singing. I can't believe that we can live in the city and come here everyday to experience this peace and tranquility. Then the scene darkens, as we pan out to locate the setting, on the Western borders of the city. You can see the CN tower and all the tall beings off in the distance where they meet the trees to create a continuous skyline. T'karonto, where trees stand in the water. Toronto, where buildings meet the water.

A deep, earthy sound arises. Foreboding perhaps. A figure walks into the scene in slow motion, in an X Ray reversal of dark and light. She is barefoot in the grass and she is wearing a pouch around her waist. The figure is me, my love and the pouch is one that I have created. The figure stops walking. She turns around. What is she going to do? Is she going to settle here? The figure decides to stay. She removes Julie Bejarano's cutwork embroidered tablecloth from her pouch, and casts it outwards, where it flutters and undulates in front of her and the lake.



Image 34 Video still from *Durmé Durmé*

The figure is contained between the water and the tablecloth. Its patterns and movement evoke a continuation of the waves in the lake and the wildflowers growing on the bank. The sounds of a Sephardic Lullaby “Durmé Durmé” waft into the scene, as though from a distant place and time. The figure lays the tablecloth down on the ground as we transition to waves lapping at the shore.

The end of one cycle, time passes.

In the next scene, the figure is sitting on the table cloth, she is knitting. She has removed her knitting supplies and a high priestess veil, which she dons as she knits.

The seated figure is entering into a meditative trance state through the knitting process itself. Through the repetitive tying of knots, the figure drops deeply into herself. The knitting itself is simultaneously an act of labour and meditation. In the next scene, we see a figure completely cloaked from head to toe in a knitted shroud, a disguise of some kind, in which she camouflages with the lake behind her.

The figure sitting on the edge of the water, moves in slow motion, beginning a mysterious ritual, involving her own body. She begins to pull out strands of thread from her umbilical cord, and from her breasts, in contemplation of the life which she is nourishing in her womb, and in anticipation of the nourishment she will be required to provide for the baby when it is born. The figure wonders, from where will she draw her own nourishment? From the land and the water, from her own human family, or her spiritual and cultural traditions?

Night turns to day. The figure needs rest. She lies down in the grass, her mother's tablecloth is her blanket. She tries to rest, the grass is itchy. Day turns to night again, lulled by the droning of the Sephardic lullaby, the figure sinks into the watery realms of the subconscious mind. The mother floats in the womb of the lake as the baby floats in the carrier bag of the mother's womb. The shrouded figure continues to pull out the strings from her womb and breasts, she wraps them around her arms and legs, she is trying to enact the Jewish ritual of wrapping the Tefillin, reclaiming what has been considered a male centred prayer ritual.

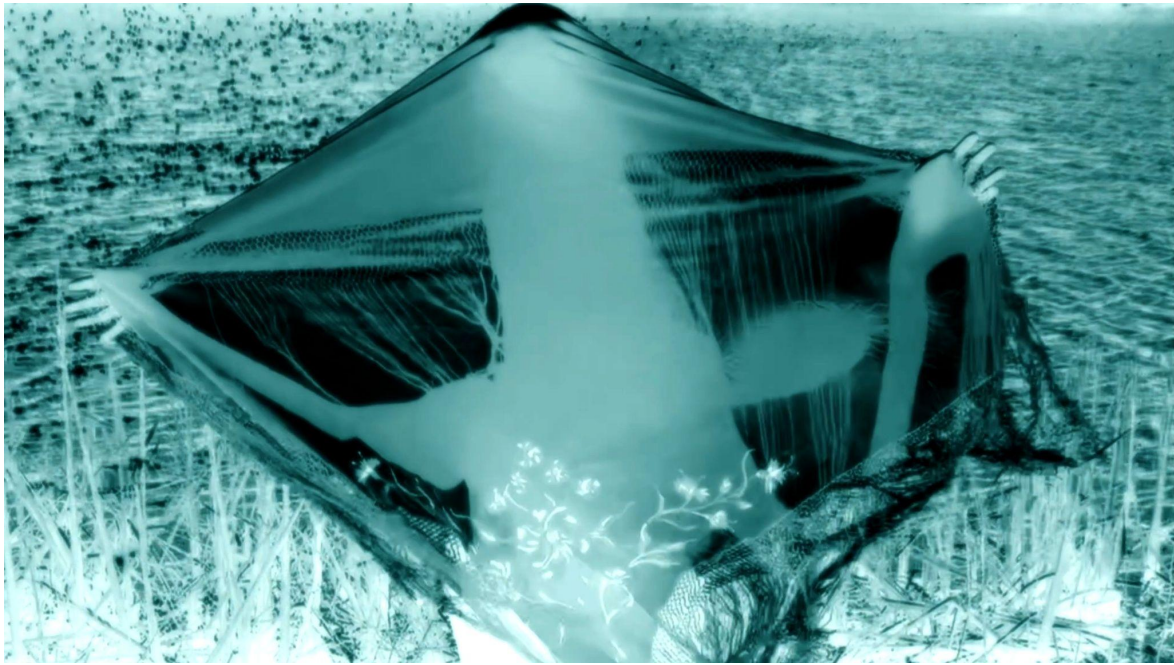


Image 35 Video Still from *Durmé Durmé*

She is trying to create a lifeline of connection to the Shekinah, the divine feminine aspect of God, and to some sense of inherited maternal unconditional love. The figure, somewhat desperately, tries to introduce all of her ancestors' textiles to the places in her city where she feels most connected; Grenadier pond in high park, Lake Ontario at Humber River, Garrison Creek buried beneath the ground in Bickford Park, Lake Ontario at Colonel Samuel Smith Park.

She is trying to weave together a feeling of healing and connection. She is trying to reconcile her sense of belonging, trying to understand what it means to be a Jewish settler, trying to understand what happened here during colonization. Trying to find a sense of strength and wisdom.

After the ritual is done, the umbilical cord has been wrapped around the figure's head. Above and below have been connected, the ancestors have been introduced to the land, the work is done for now.

The figure folds the tablecloth and packs it back up into her travellers pouch.

She gets up and walks away.

She is unsettled.

Ladino Lullabies + ambient soundscapes

Singing folk songs in Judeo-Spanish often accompanied the act of sewing, which often took place beside a window. The image of the sewing Sephardic woman singing and composing prayers in Judeo Spanish by the window was in turn commemorated within these same songs. In her essay “Sewing by the Window”, Talya Alon identifies that

*“The division between the feminine and masculine, domestic and public, is also a linguistic division, codified by the differences between the spoken language and the written language known only to educated men.”*⁸⁶

Singing in turn allowed women to move beyond the domestic sphere and enabled them a form of powerful self expression. According to Edwin Seroussi,

*“Sephardi women of all ages engaged in the active, assertive behavior of singing as a form of resistance, not as passive “vessels” of song transmission... singing of folk songs was one of the most powerful means for the expression of female self-identity in traditional Sephardi societies.”*⁸⁷

Alon identifies the use of Sephardic folk songs Romanzas and Kantigas as belonging to the female sphere, as a source of empowerment within their own domestic sphere, but also as a means to transcend the threshold of the domestic sphere and share female stories through public performance.

My love, inspired by the example of the interdisciplinary creative expression of our ancestors, and of Mama Julia, who we know replicated this trope of the Sephardic women stitching and singing by the window, I wanted this work to combine textiles with sound, and in particular Ladino lullabies.

⁸⁶ Talya Alon, Sewing by the Window: Women in Judeo-Spanish Folk Songs Bar Ilan University, RAmat Gan Israel. Women in Judaism: A Multidisciplinary Journal Volume 14 Number 2, 2017

⁸⁷ Edwin Seroussi, “De-gendering Jewish Music: The Survival of the Judeo-Spanish Folk song revisited” Music and Anthropology 3 (1998) p. 15

I recently discovered a soundscape entitled “lull” made by American artists Mendi and Keith Obadike in 2020. Lull is an eight hour, overnight musical work which is meant to be listened to while you are sleeping. You can listen to it here⁸⁸

“Our title, lull, a sleep temple, points both to a need for a pause, and to “sleep temples,” which are places to rest or dream. Historically, sleep temples were sites in ancient Egypt where people went and entered a sleep-like state for healing and dreaming. In our cultures (Igbo and African-American) dreams are still understood as extremely important. Sleeping and dreaming are understood as a way to connect to something larger than our conscious minds.”

“The concept of imagining the world we want to create is connected to the activity of the relaxed and restored mind. We made “lull” while global political protests were happening in the name of BLM and the pandemic was raging. The common media euphemism for moments of political uprisings is a “period of unrest.” We have never liked that term “unrest” as a replacement for revolution, and we have recently felt the urgent need for rest. We have also specifically felt the need for dreaming, in order to realize personal and social transformation.”⁸⁹

I have been learning, recording and mixing versions of two Ladino lullabies, which go back to medieval Spain. Durmé Durmé and Nani Nani are lullabies which it is said were sung by mothers to their children on their walk into exile, in the Diaspora to calm and soothe them.

Music, drumming and dancing have been employed as a strategy for entering into a dream or trance state throughout Jewish history, for expressing joy, as an act of rebellion and freedom, and for soothing babies in the Diaspora.

Lullaby for dreaming
Lullaby for babies
Lullaby for exhausted mothers
Lullaby to heal the nervous system
Lullaby for the forest
Lullaby for the river
Lullaby for us all

⁸⁸ [Mendi + Keith Obadike: lull, a sleep temple](#)

⁸⁹ 5 Questions to Mendi + Keith Obadike (lull: a sleep temple) [TRISTAN MCKAY](#) on April 28, 2021 at 6:00 am

Things the River Washed Away

*You were born in winter
And I lay in the snow
With my ear to the ground
Listening for murmurs
Of frozen rivers and silent dreams*

*Summer came and
We nursed under the willow trees
Drinking deep from a buried stream
Flowing underground beneath the city*

*If you weep in the grass,
Let your tears soak through the ground
And join the river of tears that runs underneath
That connects us all
So they again can rise in spring
With the four leaf clovers and dandelion wings*

*If you put your ear to the ground
Listen for the whispers that remain
Of a million wishes made
And some that floated away*

*We came to two rivers,
One above and one below
My heart cracked open
Spindles and black things fell
Spirals and wings unfurled
A hologram an eclipse of the moon*

*The things the rivers washed away
A veil of tears in November rain
Petals in the month of May*



Image 36 Detail of Travellers Carrier Bar

Dear Garrison Creek,

During my first spring as a mother, the COVID19 pandemic had just begun and we were in isolation. After my scars had started to heal, we started walking. My daughter Skye would fall asleep as soon as she sensed the movement of the stroller.

We carved out a loop through the neighbourhood that took us through Clinton Public School playground, up the back alley's of the Annex, up to Harbord St. until we reached the bowl of Bickford Park. There we would begin walking around the outer perimeter of the park, on the dirt path which had been carved out of thousands of other park walkers and their dogs, under some young maple trees, overlooking the enclosed dog park section where dog owners could still interact with other humans under the guise of their pet's social needs.

As late March progressed to April and then into May, the crocuses, like messengers of hope, sprung up from the underworld, heralding the possibility of colour returning to the land. At first they just sent up their determined pointy green shoots and then eventually abandoning all restraint, they exploded in a show of cheerful yellows and purples. We glanced at each other, the crocuses cheerful and exuberant, trying to remind me that out of the darkest, coldest ground, seeds are dreaming, turning over all winter long, waiting for that right moment to express life again. I looked back at them, grieving and mildly skeptical, but willing to consider their message.

The path continues along your perimeter, through a thin willow forest growing out of the west side of the bowl. There, a pathway through, and at the bottom, my favourite willow tree, whose trunk branches out in four different directions. I would stand inside the centre of the tree, lean back against one of the trunks, my body becoming the fifth trunk, drawing nourishment from the earth, and from your waters buried deep below the earth now, while I looked up at the sky.

Our path continued through the bowl of the park, where we would nurse under the willow grove, and lie in the grass. That summer I found at least ten four leaf clovers. One day a hawk landed on the branch above us while you were nursing in the clover patch. Sometimes I would lie down in the grass with my ear to the ground, listening for the sound of your buried waters, now audible as a sewer system flowing beneath the park.

Many of us would never know about you at all if it weren't for the artwork of the Indigenous artist Robert Houle. A series of cast bronze frogs and fish are set into the sidewalk tracing the former pathway of you, Garrison Creek, that now flows underground through a series of massive storm sewers. These traces of the creatures that once lived in your waters, are set into the sidewalks among streets and parks, flowing all the way down to the Lake. In the words of Peggy Gale, in an exhibition review of Robert Houle's work,

"These are intimate nudges from a past still there as metaphor, a quietly joyful reminder of the land beneath our feet, its past and present inhabitants."⁹⁰

⁹⁰Peggy Gale, exhibition review of Robert Houle: Sovereignty over Subjectivity Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1999 <http://ccca.concordia.ca/c/writing/h/houle/hou004t.html>

Birth Stories

My love, before you were born, we went for a tour of the Birth Centre, an Indigenous, midwife led birthing centre in Toronto. While we were there, I saw a poster with teachings about breast/chest feeding from an Indigenous perspective. I was reminded that breast milk and blood are connected to the earth's waterways. That milk flows out of the breast like water flows from the ocean, into the river and tributaries.

This is the teaching about Sacred Waters that I learned at the Birth Centre:

Water is the life-blood of Mother Earth, nourishing all of creation.

Breastfeeding is an act of decolonization.

Edna Manitowabi is Anishnaabekwe, a 5th degree Midewewin Elder and teacher and Ogimakwe, (headwoman) of Minwewewigaan Midewiwin Lodge in Wikwemkoong, Manitoulin Island, Ontario. Edna was invited to share these teachings on the water by the Wabano Centre, an Indigenous healing centre in Ottawa. The Wabano centre posted these teachings on YouTube⁹¹.

“The mother is the first teacher by putting her child to her breast, she is letting that new life know nourishment and connection and kindness. A very special grandfather said to me one time: “You know, the first treaty is through a woman.” A mother putting her child to her breast is the first treaty. When she puts her child to her breast, she’s teaching her child, she’s reminding her child about love, bonding, connection and respect. She’s being honest by putting her child to her breast. She’s giving nourishment, she’s feeding her child. Kindness. You’re giving of yourself by being kind. You’re sharing of yourself by being kind. You’re giving life, you’re being true, you’re being honest. That’s the first treaty.”

⁹¹ [Water Teaching with Edna Manitowabi](#)

Nursing Blanket Tree of Life Amulet Bag

Imperfections, cutwork embroidery and Divine Emanations

My love, when you were an infant we nursed constantly. You wanted to be strapped to my body night and day. It was such an intense time for us. I just remember your tiny face seeking my breast in the dark, your open mouth, your eyes shining in the night, so hungry, seeking connection. I was so exhausted, my surgery scars still sore, and was still barely able to move.

Before you started eating food, you would spit up your milk all the time. Although the doctors all said not to worry, that this is normal, Sabta would get so upset each time it happened. She kept trying to remedy things by telling us not to nurse as often. My love, it felt as though our treaty was being challenged. I had to trust my intuition and respond to you and your need for connection and nourishment, even if it made a big mess and upset everyone.

This complex emotional drama was unfolding in the material realm in the form of a series of stained nursing blankets. Each milk stain seemed to document this tension around what is considered an appropriate amount of nurturing. I decided to use your cotton nursing blankets (your own version of a tablecloth) as the ground for my cut-work embroidery and your spit-up stains as the basis for my pattern development.

In contrast to the perfectly organized patterns of Mama Julia's tablecloths, I liked the randomness of cutting away the stained areas to create a narrative around motherhood, nursing and the shame associated with stains and of feeling like an imperfect mother.

I stitched all of the embroidered nursing blankets together to form a patchwork of what initially seemed like random patterns and holes. I was considering the Wandering Textiles Methodology employed in the construction of ceremonial synagogue textiles as I was stitching together the nursing blankets, as well as the notion of textile as text. The text in this case tells the story of each stain and each nursing session that we shared together, mirroring the complexity that exists between the female body and ceremonial textiles within Judaism.

That's when I noticed that through the random cutwork patterns that I had created from your spit up stains while nursing you, I had inadvertently recreated the Ten Emanations of God and the Kabbalah Tree of Life.



Image 37 Sefirotic tree featuring Sarfatti's Commentary on the Great Parchment, image from Ilanot, Map of Gods Data base, University of Haifa copied by James Hepburn, 1606. Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Hunt. Add. E,



Image 38 Tree of Life Nursing Blanket Amulet Bag cutwork embroidery on repurposed unicorn and star pattern nursing blankets. Cutout areas are where there were milk stains resulting in the appearance of the 10 Sephirot: the 10 divine emanations

"Kabbalah has been the dominant expression of Jewish esotericism since the thirteenth century. The fundamental esoteric axiom of the kabbalists is that the Divine is revealed as ten networked sefirot, luminous emanations that express distinct qualities. The light of God that flows through the structured sefirotic array through its endless pathways generates all of reality. This array, the predominant visualization of which has been in the form of a tree, is the kabbalistic map of God. Because the sefirot are thought to generate reality and to respond to its vicissitudes, tikkun, the enhancement and reparation of the cosmos, requires the intentional intervention of the kabbalist.

"⁹²

⁹² Ilanot, Maps of God, Digital Humanities project, Prof. J.H Chajes, University of Haifa http://ilanot.haifa.ac.il/site/?page_id=37

Moss

In the legend of the Moss Men, moss was used as a source of concealment; as a strategy for a military attack undertaken by men. In her book *Gathering Moss*, Robin Wall Kimmerer describes the challenges she encountered while searching for information about Indigenous uses of Mosses in ethnographic reports and dictionaries. She points out that “Even though mosses live in every habitat, and are named by the people, I’m finding scarcely a trace of them in the transcribed notes from the anthropologists.”

As Kimmerer perseveres on her quest to uncover the unique gift of moss and its relationship with human beings, her findings reflect the same challenge that Ursula LeGuin identifies in her essay the Carrier Bag theory of fiction, the need to find the “other story” not the battle story, but the life story, the story of what is carried.

“Then, just at the point when I’m ready to give up the search, I find it. A single entry. You can almost see the blush in the brevity of the statement: “Moss was in widespread use for diapers and sanitary napkins”.⁹³

Just as we have had to put our ear to the ground to hear the sound of the buried river, and we have had to imagine the stories of our great grandmothers, Kimmerer had to look deeply, and read between the lines of “recorded” history in order to uncover the other story. The story that allowed for the well being of women and babies. Kimmerer describes how a woman’s life was also intertwined with mosses during her menstrual period, known as her “moontime” in many traditional cultures. Dry mosses were used as sanitary napkins. Because moontime was considered a time of heightened spiritual power for women in many Indigenous cultures, and women were often in seclusion during this time, she speculates that among the objects in their huts must have been baskets of carefully selected mosses. The use of mosses as diapers has also been minimally described, as of course babies and their care by women have not been the subject of historical documentation for the above mentioned androcentric reasons.

“In this most fundamental aspect of family life, mosses showed their great utility. Babies were packed in their cradleboards in a comfy nest of dried moss. We know that Sphagnum moss can absorb twenty to forty times its weight in water. This rivals the performance of Pampers, making it the first disposable diaper. A pouch filled with mosses was probably as vital to those mothers as is the ubiquitous diaper bag today. The plentiful air spaces in dried sphagnum would wick the urine away from the baby’s skin, just as it wicks up moisture in a bog. The acid astringency and mildly antiseptic properties even prevented diaper rash. Like the coltsfoot, the spongy mosses placed themselves near at hand, right at the edge of the shallow pools where mothers knelt to wash their babies. They came where they were needed.”⁹⁴

⁹³Kimmerer, Robin Wall, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*, Oregon State University Press, 2003

⁹⁴Kimmerer, Robin Wall, *Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses*, Oregon State University Press, 2003

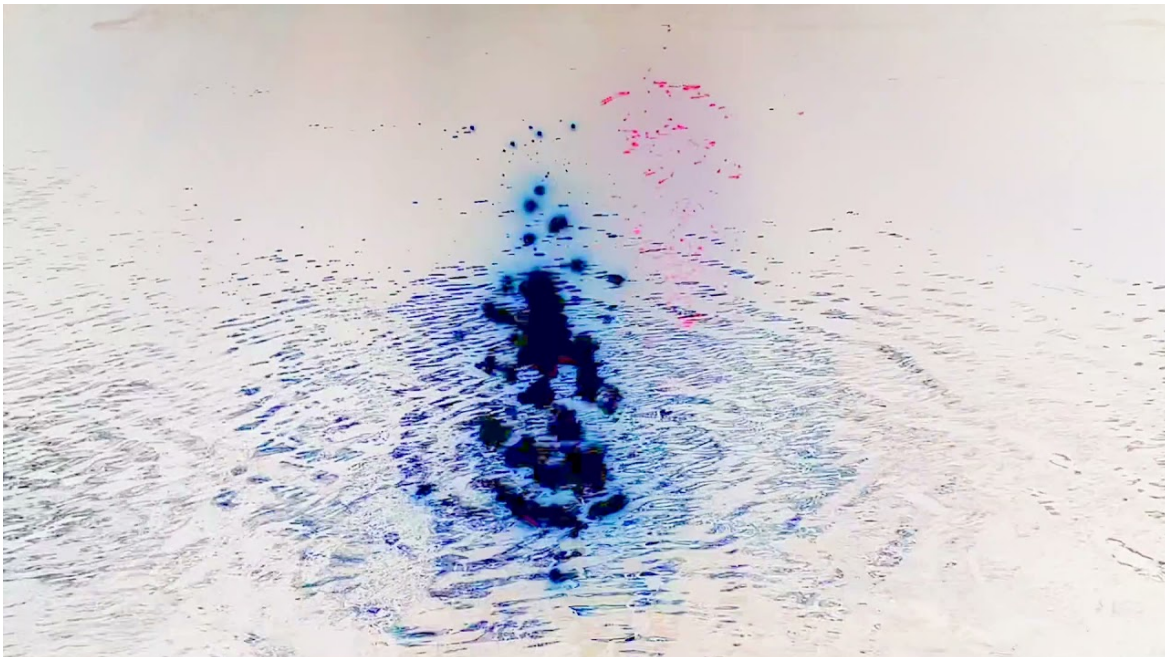
This process of speculation, and filling in the gaps of the history of mosses as used by women and children, reminds me of the Midrashic writing by Anita Diamant in her novel *The Red Tent*.

Stones

My love, I have been collecting stones for as long as I can remember. This is a ritual I have learned from my own mother who also collects rocks, fossils and shells from all over the world and keeps them in bowls on the floor in the living room amongst the sofa, the chairs and the plants. Gershon Winkler says that rocks are powerful medicine in ancient Judaic shamanism. Different stones have different powers. He describes a stone healing ceremony one can perform that includes chanting the following words

“Just as these stones now be cast, so this illness now be cast”⁹⁵

[River Lullaby Ritual Video](#)



Video 5 Image still from River Lullaby Ritual video link

⁹⁵ Stone Healing Medicine described by Gershon Winkler, *The Magic of the Ordinary* p.141, 2003

Dear Etobicoke Creek (Winter Solstice)

On this day in December I feel like I'm in survival mode. Something in my nervous system has been set off by reading the news about the latest COVID variant and I can't seem to get it under control. I can't bear the thought of going into lockdown again, now that things are just starting to open up again. They are saying that everybody is going to get sick now. My body is filled with fear, my solar plexus is seizing up and I can't shake this anxious feeling in my heart. Instead of writing or embroidering this week while my daughter naps, I have needed to visit with you daily. It feels like you're my best friend in these times where we aren't allowed to get close to other people for fear of getting sick and dying, and you are the only place I feel grounded and calm.

As I walk towards you, through the windy noisy intersection wearing my mask and my scarf, I can feel as though my body is trying to purge something already. I descend the hill into the ravine and as always, it is protected from the wind down there. There is a fresh snowfall and the sun is shining gloriously through a pathway in the trees towards the river, like a portal into another dimension. I follow the sunlight which dances and creates green speckles in my field of vision.

Green, I recall someone telling me, is the colour of the ArchAngel Rafa'el.

Green I recall is the colour of the heart chakra, the colour of healing, the colour of love.

As if in a dream I walk to the river's edge and pick up a stone. I hold it in my hand and feel as though the stone wants to help me. I am transferring information into stone. The stone doesn't mind, they know about time being vast and layered.

To these ancient stone beings, blockages, fears and traumatic knots are but loose, temporary accumulations.

They know what to do with them.



Image 39 Etobicoke Creek, Winter Solstice December 2021

They do not mind holding onto them for a while.

I feel that I am imprinting/ transferring ancestral trauma stored in my nervous system to this stone being, this “dowmem” as though I am transferring information onto a flashdrive. After some time, I sense that it is time to release the stone back into the river. I throw the stone and suddenly a melody comes to me, like a river lullaby.

At that moment, a beam of sunlight breaks through the branches of a tree, shining on me and on the spot in the river where the stone has landed. The light beam, like a laser, cleanses, clears, resets.

I walk away from the river lullaby ritual, into the forest into the sunlight. The fresh snow glistens on every branch like brilliant crystals. Spontaneously I start to sing the song [Gracias a la Vida](#) by Mercedes Sosa as I walk through the forest.

Thank you stone beings, thank you river beings.

What can I do now to reciprocate the healing you have given me?

The Deer Spoon iii.

Come, said Bunji, meet my family and friends.

He took Eiluj and ran through the sad forest until they met a group of deer in a clearing in the woods. When they saw Eiluj some of the deers started to run away.

Wait, said Bunji, Eiluj is a friend. Don't be afraid.

The deers came back and Bunji introduced Eiluj to each one.

There was Whitespot, Benji, Eeluge, and Luja.



Image 40 Illustration of Eiluj meeting the Deer. 1986

Emotions

Last week was one of those days, we were both feeling frustrated. Since this latest Omicron wave hit, your babysitter can't come anymore, and all of your programs have been cancelled. We've been pent up in the house for two months and we're going stir crazy.

Being two years old is hard! You are starting to feel big emotions all of a sudden and you don't know what's happening. You push your boundaries with me, and then I get really frustrated too. I don't know how to handle it when you get angry and when you won't listen to me. It triggers something inside of me, that has a lot more to do with me than it does with you who is two years old and are just experiencing big emotions for the first time.

Neuroscientist Dr. Greer Kirshenbaum PHD. writes about what she calls the Nurture Revolution. I read her blog when I need reminders that babies and toddlers demonstrating big emotions is part of their natural and healthy process of development and learning, and that it doesn't mean that there is something wrong with you, that you have behavioural problems, that you hate me or that I'm a bad mother. She says:

"Babies and children can learn to have freeze responses when they have big emotions like sadness, anger and discomfort and we frighten them, shut down their emotions, shame them, dismiss them, or reject them. We might think these babies are regulated "good babies" but they are frozen in fear. It's not the same. In the Nurture Revolution we support our babies in their stress, crying and emotions. We teach them that they can safely have emotions that feel uncomfortable and we will be there for them." ⁹⁶

One particular day I was feeling especially triggered and frustrated, I probably hadn't slept much that night, you'd probably thrown your lunch on the floor on purpose and thrown your spoon away, and were smushing playdoh into the carpet, running away before I could put your shoes on, banging the guitar against the wall... it could have been any of a million different things. I can't remember the exact details anymore, but by the time you went down for your nap, I was a mess.

My mind was racing with indecision on how best to utilize the precious two hours before you were going to wake up again. Should I go to the river? Should I go to the lake? Should I eat lunch, should I lie down on the floor and cry? Should I work on my thesis? I remember putting on my coat and my boots, I couldn't find my headphones and there was a stupid tangle of masks and gloves in my purse. I remember being furious at my scarf which was tangled up in my purse. In a fury, I started walking down the street, heading towards the creek on instinct. It was a windy day which only added to my annoyance. I've always hated strong winds. I felt like the sky was trying to impede my progress. My mask and my scarf and my glasses and my purse all snared around my neck precariously flailing in the wind as I walked past the gas station and the truck depot, as loud construction dump trucks bumped past through the potholes worsened by the mountains of dirty snow and ice that had become permanent fixtures at the intersection.

After about ten minutes of this, I finally arrived at the top of the ravine, the wind had died down and the sun was peeking weakly through the grey Ontario skies.

⁹⁶ The Nurture Revolution by neuroscientist Dr. Greer Kirshenbaum Phd <https://www.nurture-neuroscience.com/freebie>

As I began my descent into the ravine, a small black and white woodpecker stood as though on guard at the top of the hill, hammering into a tree trunk rhythmically.

I stopped and listened for a few minutes until I could feel my own pulse slow down and I finally took a deep breath. I felt a lot like that woodpecker, trying to find nourishment, but just banging my head violently into one obstacle after another.

That's when I made my descent.

I stopped to observe the patterns in the frozen river. There were openings where you could still see the churning dark black waters flowing under the layer of ice. I continued walking in the snow on the narrow trail along the river's edge. That's when I saw them.

Two deer on the frozen river.

Circling around an opening in the ice, perhaps trying to have a drink of water. As soon as I saw them, they also saw me. Their heads perked right up and we stood watching each other for a long time. After a while they started walking back towards the opposite river bank and that's when I noticed, there were three, no four, no five, no six, no seven... nine deer on the shore, on the ravine face and on the top of the embankment!

I could tell that they were hyper aware of me, so I decided to keep walking, but something about our encounter started to work its medicine on me.

I could feel my heart rate de-accelerating, my breath slowing down, and a sense of wonderment filling me up.

I walked on a bit longer, then turned around to start the walk back towards home. Then suddenly, I saw another group of deer. This time there were only three of them. They, too, were circling around an opening in the ice.

The difference was, these deer were not at all afraid of me.

I stood there in amazement as instead of walking away, they started walking towards me. They climbed out of the ravine, crossed the path a few feet in front of me, and then continued on to graze on the small woody grasses sticking out through the snow. They grazed peacefully alongside me on the path for quite some time.

Hello! I say to them, Hello!

The deer look right back at me, without fear,

"Hello!" They respond as they nod their heads at me, before walking off into the forest.

[Singing Nani Nani to the Deer](#)



Video 6 Image Still Singing Nani Nani to the Deer video link

My love, I am reminded of a technique called “Focusing” developed by humanist psychologist and philosopher Eugene Gendlin which I have used many times before to come into conversation and relationship with emotions and uncomfortable or mysterious sensations in my body. I would like to share this exercise with you for times when you may feel overwhelmed by your emotions.

“Imagine that you are in a meadow, at the edge of a forest. As you stand there quietly, you see a shy animal peeking out of the woods. You know that this animal is not dangerous to you, nor you to it, and you would like to help it feel safe with you. What would you do? What mood would you try to create? What would you *not* do? You would not run toward it, shouting. You would be still and patient. If you moved, you would move slowly and gently. You would be attentive to it, interested in it, watching it carefully for signs that it might be OK for you to move a little closer. Focusing is a process of listening to something inside you that wants to communicate with you. And yet, like a shy animal it may first need to discover that you are trustworthy, and that you have created a safe place for it, before it can deliver its message.”⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Cornell, Ann Weiser PH.D, *The Power of Focusing: A Practical Guide to Emotional Self-Healing*. New Harbinger Publications c. 1993 Chapter 3, page 15 This is a technique developed by humanist psychologist and philosopher Eugene Gendlin.

In her book *Kigo*, Lorie Eve Dechar identifies The Two-Headed Deer as the spirit animal of the Winter Season in Taoist alchemy.



Image 41 Two-Headed Deer in Etobicoke Creek 2022

“The Spirit of the Kidneys looks like a Two-Headed Deer. Its name is Mystic Darkness... and although it cannot be seen with the ordinary eyes, Mystic Darkness can be seen with eyes of the Heart, in the white mist of early morning or the gray clouds of twilight, when the vulnerable and easily frightened creature feels safe enough to emerge from hiding. Along with its spirit name, the Two-Headed Deer has a given name: To Nourish the Infant.... The Two-Headed Deer is a creature of opposites. It sees both dark and light, and its two heads look in opposite directions. One head looks to the past of our ancestors and the karmic influences that inform our current situation. The other looks to the future of our children and the nature of the legacy we will leave behind according to how we bring our will to bear on our life force. Holding the key to both memory and will, the Two-Headed Deer is where past and future meet.”⁹⁸

My love, although the deer seemed to arrive at just the moment that I needed a reminder about my emotional life. The words of Ann Weiser Cornell seem to have come through the deer straight into my heart:

“Staying in present time means not being distracted by dwelling on what happened in the past, or on fantasies or fears about the future. It means staying in touch with how you’re feeling in your body right now, even when what you are focusing on is related to the past or the future. Whenever you find you have drifted away from the present, ask yourself, “How am I feeling in my body right now? What am I aware of right now?”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Dechar, Lorie Eve, *Kigo: Exploring the Spiritual Essence of Acupuncture Points Through the Changing Seasons*, Singing Dragon Books, 2021

⁹⁹ Cornell, Ann Weiser PH.D, *The Power of Focusing: A Practical Guide to Emotional Self-Healing*. New Harbinger Publications c. 1993 Chapter 3, page 15 This is a technique developed by humanist psychologist and philosopher Eugene Gendlin and taught by

Cycles: Breaking up the Pandemic Monotony

“In our own time it is said that Miriam’s Well is near those who cast their buckets into any well at the end of the Sabbath, as all wells are filled with those refreshing waters at that time. In this way the well now belongs to us Jewish women as we draw up from the depths of tradition the essentials of our sustenance. In the manner of Miriam after crossing the Sea of Reeds, we have taken up our instruments and begun to sing our songs, to utter the words and tell the stories arising from our longings for the waters of her well. Our spiritual thirst has caused us to search for our heritage and the Torah for ways to drink the clear waters of Creation.”¹⁰⁰

My love, during these pandemic lockdowns, everyday has begun to feel the same, pushing that tire the wrong way, awkwardly up the hill everyday only to have to start all over again the next day. In the midst of all of this, I have started to realize that at the heart of Jewish ritual practice are built in cycles of rest. The new moon (Rosh Hodesh) is identified as a day of rest each month.

The weekly practice of Sabbath too is about taking a day of rest and contemplation each week.

The notion of rest as a radical anti-capitalist act has been gaining momentum. “The Nap Ministry” movement founded by performance artist, writer, theater maker, activist and theologian Tricia Hersey examines the liberating power of naps within a framework of “Rest as Resistance”¹⁰¹ as a tool for community healing and racial and social justice.

Every Friday evening now, we create our own version of Shabbat.
Every new moon now I create my own version of a Rosh Hodesh ritual

These forms of resting, of nurturing, of care have a very different vibe than God’s warning in the Book of Exodus to the Israelites in the Wilderness not to collect Manna on the seventh day or they would be put to death. Although as I have been discovering, there truly are serious consequences when I don’t take the time to rest.

Exhausted Computer, the Mall and A Cure for White Ladies

My love, working on deadlines within an academic institution with a toddler during a Pandemic doesn’t always align conveniently with my need or desire to take a day of rest, or to stay connected with my emotional or physical needs.

¹⁰⁰ Miriam’s Well, Rituals for Jewish Women Around the Year, Penina V. Adelman, Month of Nisan, pg. 69-70

¹⁰¹ “The Nap Ministry was founded in 2016 by [Tricia Hersey](#) and is an organization that examines the liberating power of naps. Our “REST IS RESISTANCE” framework and practice engages with the power of performance art, site-specific installations, and community organizing to install sacred and safe spaces for the community to rest together. We facilitate immersive workshops and curate performance art that examines rest as a radical tool for community healing. We believe rest is a form of resistance and name sleep deprivation as a racial and social justice issue.”

On this day, my exhibition is coming up fast, my thesis paper is due, and I'm feeling the pressure of these deadlines. I'm also exhausted. You haven't been sleeping through the night and a war is brewing. Russia is preparing to invade Ukraine. The UN has also just released the latest climate report. Things are not looking good. I've been plunged into a state of fight or flight anxiety again, in which my apocalyptic fears start to multiply and I find myself mentally preparing our panic room and plans for the devastation that climate change is going to bring: stockpiling batteries, starting a seed bank, installing a generator and a microgreens greenhouse in the basement, getting some chickens... What kind of future am I leaving you in? I can't stop working, I don't have time. And it is during this state of mind that my computer decides to also implode. Hard Drive is full. All kinds of warnings start frantically popping up on my screen. Things are malfunctioning very quickly and finally everything gets completely jammed and stuck and I can't use a single function on my computer. I shut my computer down.

There is nothing I can do.

The next day, instead of sleeping in, or writing my thesis, or going for a walk in the ravine, I drive to Sherway Gardens Shopping Mall, to the Apple Store Genius Bar to see if they can save me.

There is a three hour wait.

My love, I am forced to sit in a chair in the mall, beside a perfectly manicured fountain surrounded by fake flowers underneath a skylight while ambient pop music drifts through the perfectly temperature regulated air. The creek is only five minutes away but it feels like another dimension. I think about the squirrels, the ducks, the deer and all the animals down in there, and wonder what they would think about the mall.

I finally have time now, and I start reading Noopiming, The Cure For White Ladies by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. On each page sometimes there is one sentence. Or two sentences.

I can feel myself starting to breathe. Each idea has space.

As I keep reading, it dawns on me that the animals in the ravine have been forced and contained within ever narrowing channels in the city. Our new nature is this fountain in the mall. As the floods and fires worsen, we have created this illusion of perfection within these sanctuaries of capitalism in which the forces of death seemingly cannot penetrate.

I get a call from the Apple Store. A computer doctor is ready to see us now. We boot my computer back up, and everything seems to be fine again.

The apple genius says, When is the last time you turned it off?

Your computer was probably just tired.

Deer Spoon iv.

Soon they were hungry and tired and it was getting dark. They found some apples on a tree and some wild strawberries and raspberries. They drank water from a fresh stream and then they lay down on the mossy bank to rest. It was not cold and a light breeze blew across them as they rested.

Soon Simon fell asleep and Eilju and Bunji listened to his soft snoring.
He sounds like my dad, said Eiluj and suddenly she stood up.
I should go home! My mom and dad will be worried about me! Take me home, Bunji!

Relax, said Bunji, you can go home anytime you want.
Remember I'm your deerspoon and I live in your kitchen too.

I don't understand, said Eiluj, how can you live in two places at the same time?
I don't understand either, but I do. Right now I'm still on your spoon.

What day is it? Rather, what day was it when you started?
It was Saturday, said Eiluj. Where were your mom and dad?
Sleeping said Eiluj, they sleep every Saturday morning.

Well they're still sleeping, said Simon. He suddenly woke up and sat up as he spoke.

Want to see?

And he quickly took off his hat and showed the inside of it to Eiluj.
Inside there was a sudden light and Eiluj looked down a long tunnel.
She saw her mother and father sleeping.

She saw her mother was having a dream about swimming in a warm ocean.
Her father was climbing a hill in a nice meadow.

She didn't know how she saw their dreams, but at once she stopped worrying about going home.

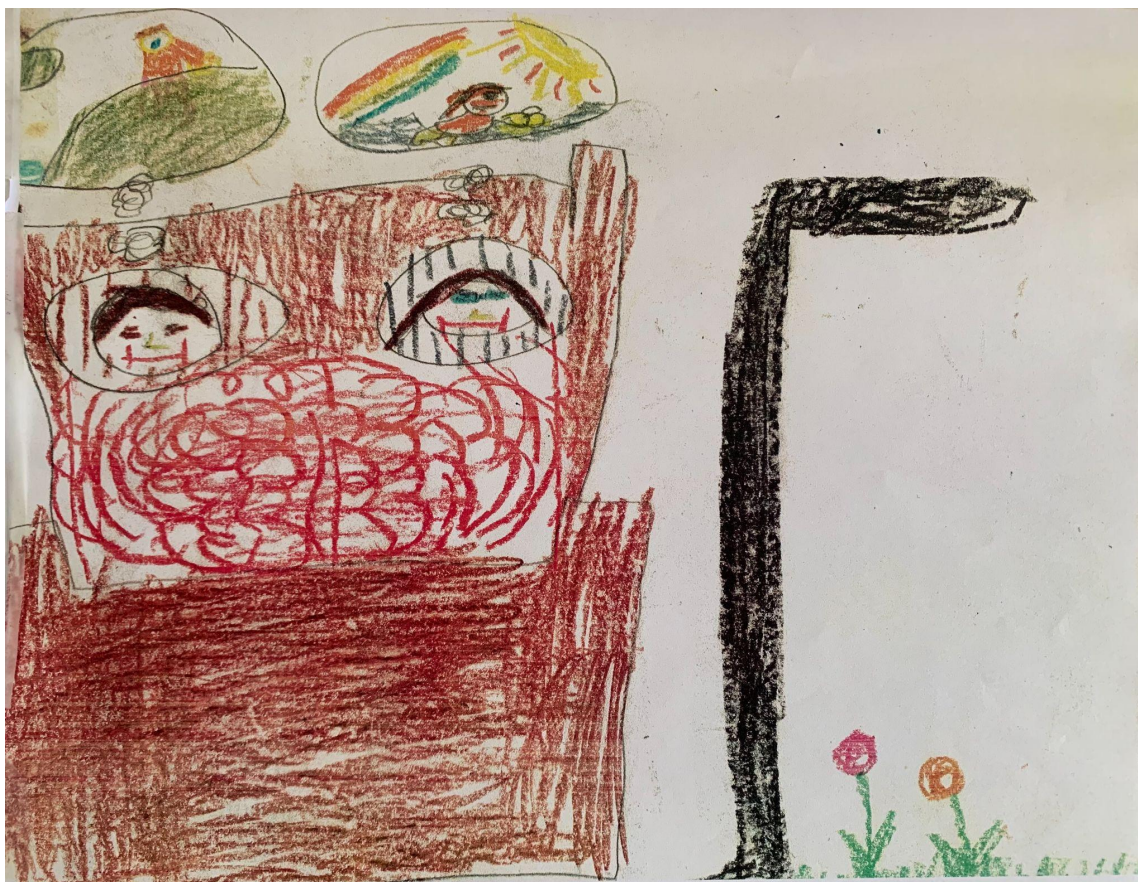


Image 42 Eiluj's vision of her parents dreaming in Simon's magic hat. Illustration by Julie Gladstone 1986

How did you do that? Asked Eiluj.

Oh, that's just my hat, said Simon. It's kind of special.

My father gave it to me a long time ago, when he left deerland.

He said he didn't need it anymore, but that it would help me.

At that time, I didn't know it was special.

Can you tell me about Merleena? asked Eiluj, does she know how to save the forest?

Oh, Merleena, said Simon, now that's a long story. She used to be very respected in the forest.

One day though she just disappeared, and no one has been able to find her since.

The forest has never been the same since then

They say that if we could just find Merleena again, maybe the forest wouldn't be so sad anymore.

Garden of Eden ii.

"To Adam He said,
Because you did as your wife said
and ate of the tree about which
I commanded you...
You shall not eat of it,'
Cursed be the ground because of you;
By toil shall you eat of it.
All the days of your life:
Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.
By the sweat of your brow
Shall you get bread to eat,
Until you return to the ground-
For from it you were taken.
For dust you are,
And to dust you shall return"
-Genesis 3:17

Sky Woman Falling ii.

"Like any good guest, Skywoman had not come empty-handed. The bundle was still clutched in her hand. When she toppled from the hole in the Skyworld she had reached out to grab onto the Tree of Life that grew there. In her grasp were branches- fruits and seeds of all kinds of plants. These she scattered onto the new ground and carefully ended each one until the world turned from brown to green. Sunlight streamed through the hole from the Skyworld, allowing the seeds to flourish. Wild grasses, flowers, trees, and medicines spread everywhere. And now that the animals, too, had plenty to eat, many came to live with her on Turtle Island."¹⁰²

Dream: Braided Sweetgrass in the Pond. Baby named Emma.

I have returned to Garrison Creek but it is completely transformed.
Now, it is a beautiful, lush oasis tucked away behind some hills.

There are three fresh and clear pools of water.

Long braids of sweetgrass are growing out of each pool of water.

I am overcome by the beauty of it all and am filled with gratitude to be able to return to this place. Soon after I find a baby that someone has left behind.

Her name is Emma. I pick her up and she is mine now.

¹⁰² Kimmerer, Robin Wall, Braiding Sweetgrass, p.5 Milkweed Editions 2016

Emma: “Universal” or “whole”¹⁰³

Variants on the name Emma include Ima.

In Hebrew, “IMA” means mother.

The World Tarot Card

Completion, The Tree of Life, Movement, Endings and New Beginnings

“What can we say of an understanding, a freedom, and rapture beyond words? The unconscious known consciously, the outer self unified with the forces of life, knowledge that is not knowledge at all but a constant ecstatic dance of being - they are all true and yet not true.” ¹⁰⁴

Robin Wall Kimmerer says about Sweetgrass:

“Our stories say that of all the plants, *wiingasshk*, or sweetgrass, was the very first to grow on the earth, its fragrance a sweet memory of Skywoman’s hand. Accordingly it is honored as one of the four sacred plants of my people. Breathe in its scent and you start to remember things you didn’t know you’d forgotten. Our elders say that ceremonies are the way we “remember to remember,” and so sweetgrass is a powerful ceremonial plant cherished by many Indigenous nations. It is also used to make beautiful baskets. Both medicine and a relative, its value is both material and spiritual.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Originally a short form of Germanic names that began with the element *ermen* meaning “whole” or “universal”. It was introduced to England by Emma of Normandy, who was the wife both of King Ethelred II (and by him the mother of Edward the Confessor) and later of King Canute. It was also borne by an 11th-century Austrian saint, who is sometimes called Hemma. <https://www.behindthename.com/name/emma>

¹⁰⁴ Pollock, Rachel, *Seventy Eight Degrees of Wisdom: A Tarot Journey to Self-Awareness*, Weiser Books 2019 p.138

¹⁰⁵ Kimmerer, Robin Wall, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, p.5 Milkweed Editions 2016

The Deer Spoon v.

Written by Julie Gladstone 2022

Simon says, if you want to find Merleena, Simply chant these magical words, and then all you have to do is look into my black top hat at this Shiviti¹⁰⁶:

"For it is already established knowledge that all that exists Below spirals into manifestation from Above, spiral upon spiral. And beyond, the existence of the Below is Still Being, Sprouting Beings, Wild Life, and Speaking Being, and that these correspond to the four basic elements. Still Being emanates from the element of the earth, Sprouting being emanates from the element of the waters since it is the rainfall that moisturizes the land that births and sprouts vegetation. Wildlife emanates from the element of the air, and is described as "all that has in it the spirit breath of life" and if not for that spirit breath, which is of the air element, it would die. Speaking Being is the human, whose distinctiveness is by virtue of its soul breath, which emanates from the element of spirit fire, as is written: "a flame of Infinite One is the soul breath of the human. And it is known that the four elements are rooted Above and above the Above, for they emanate from higher than the highest to the point at which you would declare that there are four legions to the Sh'chinah: Mee'chae'el, Gav'ee'el, Uree'el, Rafe'al. Mee'chae'ell is of the element of the water spirit, Gev'ree'el is of the element of the fire spirit, Uree'el is of the element of the air spirit, Rafa'el is of the element of the earth spirit. And these four spirit elementals spiral forth from the four elements, each of which is progressively higher and more spirit, and these higher phases manifest as four archetypal Life Beings: Lion, Buffalo, Human, Eagle. And these in turn, spiral from hidden spirits known as the Four Legs of the Merkavah (chariot) that is in the Realm of Emanation, to the point that you will then declare that the Four Letter of the Singular Name are in turn the root of the root of the roots of the Four Elements. (yod) being of the prima root of the element of the waters, (hey) being the the primal root of th element of fire (vav) being the primal root of the element of wind (hey) being the primal root of the element of the earth, as is known to the Sages of Truth. And there is within each and every plane thousands and then of thousands of further planes without measure, until all that exists returns to its hidden root. And then shall you understand that Infinite One is the Source of Powers in the sky above and in the earth below, and that there is no other, meaning that nothing exists whose existence is external to God, for everything is from It, Blessed Be."¹⁰⁷

Eiluj looks into Simon's hat and sees a type of kaleidoscope, a fractal of beautiful patterns, a stained glass window, emerging out of itself to a mesmerizing sound of human voices.

¹⁰⁶ "Shiviti" according to Wikipedia are "meditative representations of a verse from Psalms. It is crowned at the top by the sacred name of God, followed by the rest of the passage set in the shape of the Temple lampstand. It is used in some Jewish communities for contemplation over God's name". "Those of you who have visited any Jewish shrines know exactly what I'm talking about when I mention charts and mystical diagrams. We call them Shiviti and they often take on the form of an enlarged writing of the Four-Letter name surrounded by verses of Psalms or prayers. The most famous of these is probably [Psalms 67](#) drawn in the shape of a menorah. Others incorporate many mystical ways of reading Divine Names, but that are not meant to be pronounced."#

¹⁰⁷ Sixteenth-century Rabbi Y'shayahu Horowitz in Sefer HaSH'lah HaKadosh ahl Sefer Vayik'ra perek torah-ohr Torat Kohanim. these four letters: yod, hey, vav, hey, together make up the sacred unspoken name of God -the tetra grammaton



Video 7 Image still of Portal in Simon's Hat video link

[Portal in Simon's Hat](#)

As Eiluj stares into the center of the pattern, she realizes that the patterns look familiar, they are the patterns from Mama Julia's embroidered tablecloth and lace spider web.

Suddenly she finds herself transported: she is standing in front of the Old Oak Tree from her childhood dream. All of her new deer friends are there, gathered in front of the old oak tree.

Eiluj goes into the tree without fear or hesitation. The oak tree is warm and cozy and there is a comfortable looking bed inside draped in embroidered quilts and pillows and knitted blankets surrounded by beautifully embroidered curtains.

Eiluj lies down and closes her eyes. She hears the sound of a voice echoing as though from a great distance telling her to choose a button to press on the headboard. Eiluj reaches her hand over head to the headboard, and presses the magic button. She hears an ancient Ladino lullaby, lulling her into deep rest.

Suddenly she finds herself floating out of the bed, out of the tree and into the Sky. Before she has a chance to get scared, Bunji the deer has flown up from the ground and catches her, so that she is sitting on his back. Hold on tight says Bunji, and the two of them fly off into the sky, through space and time into another dimension.

They come to a place where the sky is of a very deep deep blue and the sand and rocks are nearly red. Bunji gently lands on the ground in front of a red stone mountain that is also a sacred temple. Eiluj gets down off the Deer's back and they walk towards the entrance of the temple. The Deer stands closely by her left side and Eiluj places her hand on his back and feels grounded. Suddenly she can also feel that the ArchAngel Ra'fael is floating fiercely behind her, Mama Julia, Sabta and many other ancestors are standing on her right side, there to support her and help her feel safe and loved.

At the entrance to the temple are all of the wise teachers that Eiluj will have the honour to learn from in her lifetime. They motion to her to go inside. There is a courtyard with a bubbling clear pool of water, a wellspring that bubbles up from the very centre of that earth, and that is flowing out to feed four streams that are flowing through the courtyard.

Eiluj is invited to rest and bathe in the waters, like a sacred mikveh for as long as she likes.

After a while she is invited to enter a secret chamber behind the most beautiful embroidered curtains she has ever seen. Inside sits Merleena, High Priestess, Empress and Forest Witch who is knitting a very long blue shawl that flows all around her body, and out through the enclosed space, to join with the four streams in the courtyard.

Eiluj notices that the knit shawl is actually made out of drops of water that Merleena is knitting and knotting together to form the sacred waters of life which in turn form a sacred wellspring of wisdom.

Merleena invites Eiluj to make a wish in the well.

Eiluj closes her eyes and makes a wish.

Merleena pauses and reflects, then she nods her head and says:

Dear Eiluj, if you want to heal the forest, you shall begin by gathering together voices from all different nations. Together you shall gather along the banks of Etobicoke creek river. You shall all take turns teaching each other your songs. Then you shall sing to the creek: you shall sing lullabies, you shall sing songs of freedom, you shall sing songs of joy, you shall sing songs of rebellion.

Then you shall listen deeply, and you shall offer the same healing to the river as it has offered to you. You do not need to be perfect, or pure to give back to the river. Remember the river has nurtured and healed you, even when she has been tired, when she has been divided, when she has been polluted.

Eiluj thanked Merleena deeply.

Merleena said: Remember, you can come back here anytime you wish.

Anytime you are confused, tired or scared, you can always rest in the inner courtyard, bathe in the sacred waters, and make a wish in the sacred wellsprings.

Then Eilju turns around, following the knit river back out through the sacred embroidered curtains.

At the doorway, Bunjie is waiting for her.

Eiluj jumps on Bunjie's back and together they fly away.

Conclusions

“ the original woman was herself an immigrant. She fell a long way from her home in the Skyworld, leaving behind all who knew her and who held her dear. She could never go back. Since 1492, most here are immigrants as well. And here we all are, on Turtle Island, trying to make a home. Their stories, of arrivals with empty pockets and nothing but hope, resonate with Skywoman's. She came here with nothing but a handful of seeds and the slimmest of instructions to “use your gifts and dreams for good,” the same instructions we all carry”¹⁰⁸

Maybe like my mother, gardening will become my new religion.

Dear Skye,

On our flight back to Canada from Spain, we floated in the clouds as you floated in my belly. A liminal space before we transitioned from an ancient homeland, to a new one. As the blue lakes and green forests of Ontario came into view, I remember feeling that it didn't seem so important anymore to seek Spanish citizenship.

I've been searching my whole life for wisdom, sifting through history, mythology and handfults of epistemologies trying to extract grains of wisdom from them all. Because the wisdom from within my own religion has been so hidden, obscured, destroyed, concealed, forgotten, misunderstood, forbidden, off putting and patriarchal, I almost wrote it off completely.

The surprising thing about this journey has been that the more I've tried to invent my own rituals, the more I've come to realize that is exactly what our Jewish ancestors have always

¹⁰⁸ Kimmerer, Robin Wall, Braiding Sweetgrass Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants, Milkweed Editions 2013 p.9

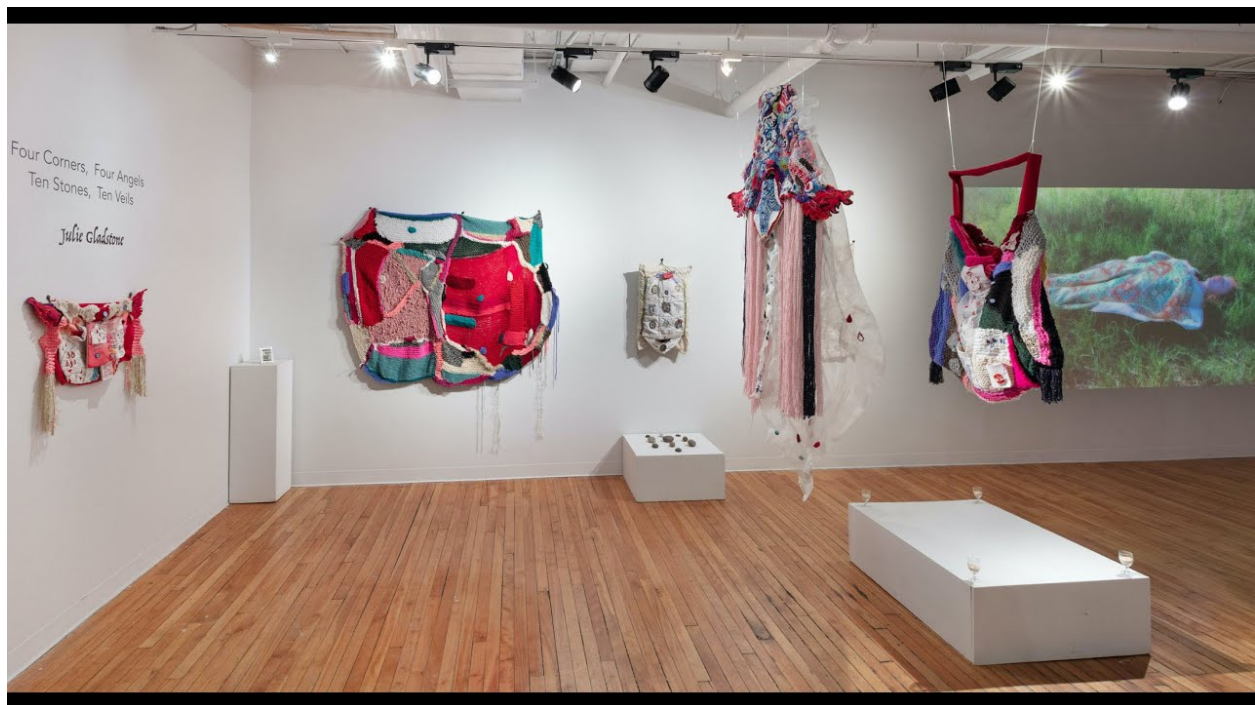
done: creatively adapt to new circumstances and re-locate wellsprings of living waters while in the exile of the driest of deserts.

This is exactly what the Sephardic Women did once they were established in the Ottoman Empire. Excluded by men from reading the sacred texts or participating in public religious life, they invented their own “domesticated” women’s religion.

The more I’ve tapped into a reservoir of living waters from within the hidden wisdom of Judaism itself, the more I’ve realized that at its essence, Judaism is an ever evolving source of nourishment and wisdom rooted in magic and a view of mysticism rooted in non-binary gender frameworks, feminism and earth based spirituality.

By trying to invent my own religion, I couldn’t have been more Jewish.

[Four Corners, Four Angels, Ten Stones, Ten Veils Exhibition walk through video OCADU Graduate Gallery, 2022](#)



Video 8 Image still of Four Corners, Four Angels, Ten Stones, Ten Veils exhibition walk through video link

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Glossary

Ayin Hara The Evil Eye in Hebrew

Cherubim A winged numinous being in the service of God. The Cherubim guard the entry to the Garden of Eden and were a repeated decorative image on the curtain in the Temple.¹⁰⁹

Dowmem The “Stone beings” as described by Gerhson Winkler in Magic of the Ordinary

Hamsa The healing hand

Kabbalah Jewish mysticism, occult and esotericism concerned with uncovering inner meaning. The Term Kabbalah emerged out of medieval Spain and Provence from the 12th century onwards.

Kaporet An element of the original Tabernacle, it was originally the gold lid placed on the ark of the covenant which held the Tablets and the commandments which Moses received from God. Later the Kaporet would come to be re-created in textile form and is found hung in front of the Ark in the synagogue.

Ladino An ancient Judeo-Spanish language spoken by Sephardic Jews which contains elements of medieval Spanish, Hebrew and other languages that were picked up in the Diaspora.

Midrash A Jewish literary form, primarily used in Rabbinic commentaries which emphasizes close readings of phrases, words and letters and aims to fill in the missing gaps of biblical texts.

Mishkan Dwelling place in Hebrew. Otherwise known as the Tabernacle, the portable sanctuary built by the Israelites at God’s direction.

Mikveh The ritual bath used in women’s purification rites. In the context of Rosh Hodesh, the mikveh refers to an activity in which spiritual purification is the aim¹¹⁰

Ojo Malo The Evil Eye in Judeo-Spanish (Ladino)

Saba Grandfather in Hebrew

Sabta Grandmother in Hebrew

Seder The ceremonial dinner which is enacted every spring to celebrate the holiday of Pesach of “Passover” which also translates to “Protection” and commemorates the book of Exodus in which the Israelites are freed from slavery in Egypt. The ceremonial table functions as a sort of

¹⁰⁹ Dennis, W Geoffrey, The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic & Mysticism, Llewellyn Publications 206

¹¹⁰ Adelman, V. Penina, Miriam’s Well Rituals for Jewish Women Around the Year, Biblio Press 1986

educational altar, meant to transmit story of the Exodus. Some of the items include Matzah, which is unleavened bread, representing that the Israelites didn't have time to let their bread rise while they were fleeing from the Egyptian army.

Sephardic Appellation given to the Jews who were exiled from Spain in 1492, derived from the Hebrew word for Spain (Sefarad)

Shekinah The indwelling Presence of God which is everywhere; in Kabbalistic lore, Shekhinah refers to the feminine aspect of the divine.¹¹¹

Tallit A Jewish Prayer Shawl is typically white with blue stripes and has knotted fringes which are meant to remind Jews of their covenant with God. Traditionally worn only by men during prayer. In modern use, women have been wearing the Tallit and creating their own patterns and designs.

Talmud The Talmud¹¹² is often considered to be a compendium and a multi-generational series of debates on the application of Jewish legal principles across a wide spectrum of topics and areas of life. According to Geoffrey, W Dennis, the arrangement of information in the Talmud is associative rather than categorical and it often “requires the study of multiple tractates in order to find all relevant information on a single topic.”

“The function of the Talmud in Jewish life is ultimately more heuristic than normative; later generations study the Talmud's intricate debates over Jewish practice and theology for what these teach about logic, probing analysis, the mustering of evidence, and reasoning, rather than for any conclusive answers. The debates of the Sages entail competing, even contradictory, opinions on a host of subjects without reaching any definitive statement as to which opinion is the authoritative “answer”... With regards to Jewish beliefs, especially the great contribution of the Talmud is to establish a tradition of preserving and honoring dissenting opinions and a kind of nascent pluralism.”¹¹³

Tefilin Also known as phylacteris, tefillin are two leather boxes with straps containing biblical verses which are bound to the brow and left bicep with leather straps during morning prayers. They are meant to be worn as a reminder of God's covenant with Israel. Some early post-biblical literature call refer to Tefillin as ‘amulets’

Tikkun the repair or healing of the spirit, the planet and the universe¹¹⁴

Tikkun Olam The term Tikkun which originated in the Mishna, (the body of classical rabbinic teachings codified circa 200 C.E.) referred to social policy legislation ‘providing extra protection to those potentially at a disadvantage — governing, for example, just conditions for the writing of divorce decrees and for the freeing of slaves.’ Later on in the 16th century, the kabbalist Isaac Luria interpreted the concept in

¹¹¹ Adelman, V. Penina, *Miriam's Well Rituals for Jewish Women Around the Year*, Biblio Press 1986

¹¹² There are two different versions of the Talmuds created by two separate communities in late antiquity: The Jerusalem Talmud and the more authoritative Babylonian Talmud. Both build upon the same core text, the Mishnah, but the commentaries in each are quite different.

¹¹³ Dennis, W. Geoffrey, *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic and Mysticism*, Second Edition Llewellyn Publications 2016

¹¹⁴ Adelman, V. Penina, *Miriam's Well Rituals for Jewish Women Around the Year*, Biblio Press 1986

mystical terms according to the Lurianic interpretation of the Creation story in which “ God contracted the divine self to make room for creation. Divine light became contained in special vessels, or kelim, some of which shattered and scattered. While most of the light returned to its divine source, some light attached itself to the broken shards. These shards constitute evil and are the basis for the material world; their trapped sparks of light give them power...The ‘repair’ that is needed, therefore, is two-fold: the gathering of light and of souls, to be achieved by human beings through the contemplative performance of religious acts. The goal of such repair, which can only be effected by humans, is to separate what is holy from the created world, thus depriving the physical world of its very existence—and causing all things to return to a world before disaster within the Godhead and before human sin, thus ending history. ”¹¹⁵

Torah Instruction in Hebrew. The Torah consists of five books that were given to the Jewish People on Mount Sinai through the Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy

Tabernacle the portable sanctuary built by the Israelites at God’s direction in the wilderness following their Exodus from Egypt.

¹¹⁵ Tikkun Olam: Repairing the World, This phrase with kabbalistic roots has come to connote social justice.
<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/tikkun-olam-repairing-the-world/>

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