



# TOGETHER at the TABLE

REPAIR  
THE WORLD

We live between the world as it is (olam hazeh)- a world filled with injustice and inequity, and the world as it should be (olam habah)- a world where the human dignity of every single person is celebrated and honored. Shabbat dinner offers us a glimpse into the world as should be; the opportunity to create community, deepen relationships and reflect on the week that was. This Shabbat, let's commit to the world we hope to create together.

Breaking bread is a moment of connection around food in many cultures; we must eat, so let's eat together. In many traditions we share gratitude before beginning a meal together; Jewish tradition includes rituals for sharing our gratitude after as well. During a traditional Shabbat (Sabbath) meal, it is customary to start with a blessing over lit candles, wine, washed hands, and finally bread.

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Let's take a moment to slow down and highlight two components of Jewish tradition around breaking bread and giving thanks.

### **Salt**

In many Jewish homes, it is customary to sprinkle salt on challah before eating it, signifying the salt poured over the sacrifices made in the temple. Salt is external to us, but also an integral part of how our bodies function and found in the tears generated by sacrifices we make in our lives. Pour some salt on your challah and take a moment to taste the salt, letting it dissolve in your mouth

*What sacrifices have you, your family, or your communities made to get you here today? What sacrifices have you witnessed others make for a better world for themselves and others?*

### **Bread**

In Jewish and many other traditions and cultures, bread is an essential staple of sustenance and existence. Distribute the bread, and make sure everyone has a moment to savor their piece. Look around the table at the other people sharing this meal with you.

*What kind of work for justice do you engage in? What do you need to sustain you in this work?*



# What does it mean to be here?

## Charlottesville, Virginia

After this past week, the name became shorthand for an eruption of hate and terrorism, racism, anti semitism, and white supremacy in the 21st century. Silently, read the following description of Friday, August 11 to Saturday, August 12 by *The New York Times*:

*"White nationalists gathered on Saturday, August 12, 2017 for a 'Unite the Right' march in Charlottesville, Virginia where they were met by counter protesters. Taunting led to shoving, which escalated into brawling. One person was killed: Heather D. Heyer, 32, a paralegal from Charlottesville.*

*Two state troopers also died on Saturday. Lt. H. Jay Cullen and Trooper Berke M. M. Bates were in a helicopter circling Charlottesville, monitoring the demonstrations, when the helicopter fell and burst into flames. In total, at least 34 people were wounded in the clashes, and Governor Terry McAuliffe of Virginia declared a state of emergency. . . [T]he rally on Saturday was organized in opposition to a plan by local officials to remove a statue of Robert E. Lee, the Confederacy's top general, from Emancipation Park in Charlottesville.*

*Charlottesville had been bracing for the rally, which was planned well in advance. Several hundred white nationalists marched on Friday night, the day before the violent demonstration, chanting racist and anti-Semitic slogans and carrying torches."*<sup>1</sup>

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## Instructions

Ask three people to read one of the following texts out loud. As they are being read, underline any sentences that resonate with you. Out of your underlined sentences, in each of the three texts, choose one to focus on; circle one word in that sentence that jumps out to you. Find a chevruta (a partner) and share your three words with each other. Discuss the guiding questions and share any takeaways with the group.

**A note about Chevruta Learning:** Chevruta literally means "friendship" or "companionship." It is the traditional rabbinic approach to Talmudic study in which a pair of students analyze, discuss, and debate a shared text. Unlike a teacher-student relationship, partnered learning puts each student in the position of analyzing the text, organizing their thoughts into logical arguments, explaining their reasoning to their partner, hearing out their partner's reasoning, and sharpening each other's ideas, often arriving at new insights into the meaning of the text.

## Guiding Questions:

1. What is Moses's initial reaction to the burning bush?
2. What are the dynamics of Moses's and God's interaction?  
Placing yourself in Moses's sandals, how would you respond in that moment?
3. How do Carly Pildis and Reverend Blackman describe the events of Charlottesville?  
How do their faiths inform their experience? Their and their family's racial identities?
4. What was your (emotional, intellectual, and/or physical) reaction to hearing about the violence in Charlottesville?  
How do these texts inform the way you are reflecting on the events today?
5. How do these three different leaders move forward after pivotal events in their lives?

<sup>1</sup>Maggie Astor. "A Guide to The Violence in Charlottesville." *The New York Times*, August 2017.

## Exodus 3:1-4<sup>2</sup>

An excerpt from Exodus, the second book in the Torah, where Moses came upon a burning bush. Moses sees the bush on fire but notices the bush is still in tact, not dying out from the flames. This watershed event sends Moses on his path from being a shepherd in Midian to returning to Egypt to lead his people out of slavery.

### Exodus 3:1-4

(1) Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. (2) An angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. (3) Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?" (4) When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am."

### שמות ג' א'-ד'

(א) וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֶה אֶת־צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתֵנוּ כֹהֵן מִדְיָן וַיָּבֶה אֶת־הַצֹּאן אַחֵר הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הַר הַאֱלֹהִים חֹרֵב: (ב) וַיֵּרָא מַלְאָךְ יְקֹוֹק אֵלָיו בְּלִבְת־אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֶּה וַיֵּרָא וַיִּהְיֶה הַסִּנֶּה בָעֵר בְּאֵשׁ וַיִּהְיֶה אֵינֶנּוּ אָכֹל: (ג) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶסְתַּר־נָא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־הַמַּרְאֶה הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה מִדּוּעַ לֹא־יִבָּעַר הַסִּנֶּה: (ד) וַיֵּרָא יְקֹוֹק כִּי סָר לְרֹאוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹקִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֶּה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי:

## "My Family is Black and Jewish. Here's What Charlottesville Means to Me"<sup>3</sup>

Carly Pildis is a political organizer and advocacy professional based in Washington, D.C. This is an excerpt from an article she wrote which originally appeared in *The Forward* on August 12, 2017.

Today, it was personal. It was the pain of watching men march in opposition to our bi-racial Jewish-Black family. They oppose my life as Jew and the lives of my family members as Black Jews. They find the family life that brings me such joy to be an abomination...This is a new pain. It's a mother's pain, and a mother's terror. How can my child be safe in a country where white men are so filled with hatred? How can my child – both Black and Jewish – thrive in a country where men shout "White Lives Matter!" and "Jews Will Never Replace Us"?

It's how I know that America is both our sanctuary and where our neighbors were brought in chains. It is both our home and a place we can never fully trust. We have more freedom than ever before but the swastika still haunts the doorstep of our synagogue. We love America but wonder if our kids are really safe at our local JCC.

With pain comes strength and determination. With pain comes a fire in the belly and the soul. Like the last weeks of pregnancy, like birth, pain is transformational. I am filled with more fire and strength to fight hatred than ever before.

## "Clergy in Charlottesville Were Trapped by Torch-Wielding Nazis"<sup>4</sup>

Reverend Traci Blackmon is the Executive Minister of Justice & Witness Ministries of The United Church of Christ and Senior Pastor of Christ The King United Church of Christ in Florissant, MO. The following interview was conducted by Amy Goodman, the transcript has been modified into paragraph form below. Rev. Blackmon reflects on her experience as a counter protester in Charlottesville, VA on August 12, 2017.

"The thing that troubled me the most about my encounters this weekend was the fact—I'm from Birmingham, Alabama. I was raised there. I've seen Klan rallies before. The very last Klan rally that I witnessed in person, I was five years old, standing on a sidewalk watching the Klan rally go down the main street of Birmingham, Alabama, in the city. I don't remember my fear. I remember my puzzlement in that moment. And emblazoned in my memory are those hooded sheets that they wore, as some were—road horses and some carried crosses and some carried flags.

What sticks out for me is that we are now in a country and in a time where I witnessed masses of white supremacists walking down the main streets of Charlottesville, Virginia, emboldened enough to take the sheets off. These white people were wearing button-downs and polos and baseball caps. And I began to weep, knowing that it was quite possible that some of the people who were marching with these torches, shouting "Blood and soil!" shouting "You will not replace us!"—a ludicrous notion of white fear that has been strengthened and emboldened by an administration that is filled with hateful rhetoric—And we now have a president who will not even to declare, will not even denounce white supremacy right out. It is unconscionable."

<sup>2</sup> 1985 Jewish Publication Society Translation

<sup>3</sup> Carly Pildis. "My Family is Black and Jewish. Here's what Charlottesville Means to Me." *The Forward*, August 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Amy Goodman. "Cornel West & Rev. Traci Blackmon: Clergy in Charlottesville Were Trapped by Torch-Wielding Nazis." *DemocracyNow*, August 2017.

# Conclude by reading “I look at the world” by Langston Hughes

## “I look at the world,” by Langston Hughes<sup>5</sup>

*Langston Hughes was an American poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist from Joplin, Missouri. Hughes is best known as a leader of the Harlem Renaissance<sup>6</sup> in New York City.*

I look at the world  
From awakening eyes in a black face—  
And this is what I see:  
This fenced-off narrow space  
Assigned to me.

I look then at the silly walls  
Through dark eyes in a dark face—  
And this is what I know:  
That all these walls oppression builds  
Will have to go!

I look at my own body  
With eyes no longer blind—  
And I see that my own hands can make  
The world that’s in my mind.  
Then let us hurry, comrades,  
The road to find.

In this poem, Hughes concludes by looking at his own body and moving forward with the work of fighting injustice. His words echo a biblical cry of presence and ownership- “Hineni”- Here I am. The response “Here I am” is repeated eight times during the Torah.

In Genesis 22:1, God constructs a test for Abraham to prove his devotion to him; he will ask Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. When God calls out, “Abraham,” and Abraham responds, “Hineni”- “Here I am.”

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### Final Reflection Question:

After Charlottesville, how will you respond with joy, love, and action, and say “Here I am”? What do you need from the people around you? Your friends and neighbors? What can you give of yourself to others?

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<sup>5</sup> Hughes, Langston. “I look at the world.” *Poetry Foundation*. 1930.

<sup>6</sup> During the 1920s and 1930s a literary and cultural revolution arose, referred to as the Harlem Renaissance. The movement cultivated a new cultural identity and voice for African Americans through art, music, and literature.