

JEWISH POSTPARTUM

*Through the Stories of Jewish
People of Color in the United States*



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Chapter 1

Introduction



How I Became Interested in Postpartum Care

I am a community organizer, data analyst, and technologist by profession. As part of my commitment to reproductive justice, I once served as the Latinx Program Manager at Planned Parenthood's national office. Years after having my own abortion, I received training as an abortion birthworker, and have since provided emotional support to people before, during, and after abortion. I have also experienced miscarriage.

My mother is Ashkenazi (Eastern European) Jewish, and my father is a mixture of Indigenous and European peoples. She had her coming-of-age ceremony (*bat mitzvah*) in a Miami Beach Reform synagogue, and he grew up Catholic in a rural community in Guanajuato, Mexico.

When I first became pregnant with my child, I grew curious about postpartum rituals and traditions. I was already aware of some Indigenous traditions on my father's side, such as womb-closing, herbal medicine, and nourishing recipes, but wanted to learn more about Jewish practices. One month into my pregnancy and having just started at a Rabbinical school, I reached out to my mother about her own postpartum. She told me that she had quickly resumed work at her parents' printshop, driving forty-five minutes and climbing two flights of stairs each day with her infant (me) in tow. I was saddened by her apparent lack of any – much less distinctly Jewish – postpartum practice.

According to Torah, the postpartum period is meant to last at least 40 days, but little is said about the birthing parent other than a prescribed period of ritual unreadiness (or impurity) and

follow-up offering. Furthermore, while many cultures have a postpartum period that is sanctified, there is little research compiled about Jewish-specific practices that center the experience of the birthing parent. In the groundbreaking book *A Time to be Born: Customs and Folklore of Jewish Birth*, there is a section titled “Welcoming the Newborn,” but only four pages dedicated to “Care of the Mother.” I had to know more.

The Research

My research on Jewish postpartum traditions and rituals covers Torah (the first 5 books of the Hebrew Bible), Rabbinic texts like Talmud (oral law and commentary), Kabbalah (frameworks for Jewish mysticism), historical studies, and contemporary resources. What I learned was then woven into my experience of pregnancy, birth, and postpartum.

With a grant from the Jews of Color Initiative (JoCI), I did oral history interviews with 20 people who live in the United States and identify both as Jewish and a Person of Color. Here, “Jews of Color” and “JOCs” refers to this particular set of co-identities.

The interviews took place in 2021 and 2022. Special focus was given to interviewing Jews of Color holding other marginalized identities, including genderqueer, trans, queer, disabled, neurodivergent, poor, working-class, Jews-by-choice, Jews who experience colorism, and/or Jews who experience infertility. These video interviews, transcripts, and interview summaries are hosted by the University of Colorado Boulder’s Innovations in Jewish Life Collections as part of the “[Jews of Color: Histories and Futures](#)” initiative. The interviews I

conducted center the experiences of JOCs, so that when exploring Jewish reproductive traditions, our stories appear among the first encountered, rather than as an afterthought.

The following collection of postpartum experiences from Jews of Color in the U.S. was created to meet a real need for resources by and for our communities. These stories become a record—something future Jews of Color can return to for spiritual grounding.

There is also an online, multimedia exhibit that accompanies the chapbook, and you can view at <https://roseespinoia.com/jewish-postpartum/>. The exhibit uses artworks, interview clips, a recipe, and poetry to fill the knowledge gap around Jewish postpartum practices — while centering, preserving, and celebrating the postpartum rituals and traditions of Jews of Color who shared their experiences.

The rituals and traditions of JOCs in this chapbook and the exhibit come from three main sources, which sometimes overlap. First, those that come from ancestors both Jewish and non-Jewish, such as doing *mikveh* (ritual bath) or doing a hip closing ceremony. Second, those that come from the world around us, such as hiring a birthworker or having a coordinated meal train. Finally, those that come from the interviewees themselves and are new creations, such as writing their own prayers.

Many people I spoke with shared personal stories of pregnancy loss, infertility, and abortion. This chapbook focuses mainly on postpartum experiences, but I hope future projects will explore those stories more deeply, along with baby naming, *brit milah*

(a Jewish circumcision rite), babywearing, chestfeeding, and the rituals that honor pregnancy and birth.

Organization of the Chapbook

I begin by defining the postpartum period and how interviewees experienced it, and then move into prayers and songs meant to support new parents and their families.

From there, I dive into the harder parts of postpartum: physical pain, healing, and emotional wellbeing. Two chapters in this section highlight how extended family and community can support postpartum families with meals, chores, and other kinds of care.

I close with ritual and meaning-making through *mikveh*, heirlooms that hold memory, and ways to bring postpartum care into your own communities.

At the start of each chapter, I have added background information and some of my own reflections. Many stories touch on more than one theme, and I've placed each one where it fits best. Interviews were edited for clarity.

If you find any typos or inaccuracies in this chapbook, or would like to share the experience you had while reading, please email the curator at espinola.rs@gmail.com.

Tradition & Ritual

For the purposes of this chapbook, I define a “tradition” as an experience a community goes through generation after generation. This can be general, such as a postpartum family receiving help with household chores, or more culturally-specific, such as observing a 40-day postpartum period. Interviewees sometimes have new or unique experiences that they hope will become tradition in subsequent generations.

“Ritual,” as used here, marks a transition and typically involves setting an intention. Some examples are a postpartum hip-closing ceremony, breast/chestfeeding, lighting Sabbath candles, or making a to-do list each morning.

I use “practices” to include both traditions and rituals. In order to create practices that further healing justice, I encourage you to add intention, prayer and mindfulness, meaningful objects, earth-based elements, and the presence of community members.

Every story in this chapbook is Jewish because it comes from a Jewish person. Still, each practice belongs to a specific person, family, or community in a particular time and place. My hope is that readers honor that specificity, and avoid appropriating practices from other lineages. I invite you to talk to people from your own lineage: What’s been passed down? What’s waiting to be remembered?

Reproductive & Healing Justice

[SisterSong](#), a women-of-color reproductive justice collective, defines reproductive justice as “the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities.” This chapbook is rooted in the belief that reproductive justice includes people receiving physical, emotional, and spiritual support during the postpartum period and beyond.

This book is also born from healing justice, and the centrality of using ritual and tradition in that work. Healing justice is a political strategy launched in 2006 by the [Kindred Collective](#) as a “framework for movements to address collective harm and trauma” that builds on Southern resiliency traditions to sustain well being.

May this chapbook help you and your communities examine the ways generational trauma and systemic oppression inform postpartum experiences, not just for Jews of Color, but for any birthing parents. May it give you strength to develop and advocate for spiritual practices that are committed to justice.

Chapter 2

The First Forty Days



What qualifies as the postpartum period varies between cultural traditions, nonprofit service providers, and the parameters set by researchers. In Judaism, the prescribed duration for this period is taken primarily from the Hebrew Bible, with the hows and whys supplemented by later discussions from the Talmud (oral law and commentary).

Hebrew Bible

Leviticus 12 prescribes a postpartum period of 40 days if the child has genital anatomy appearing to be a penis, and an 80-day period if the child has genital anatomy judged to be a vagina. Before the Jerusalem temple was destroyed, the birthing person would bring an animal offering corresponding to their financial means, and the priest would offer it as a sacrifice to G-d. This rite marked the end of the postpartum period and signified that the birthing person was ready to return to normal communal life.

The postpartum separation period is also classified differently in both length and language than menstrual separation (*niddah*). While Leviticus mandates separation of either 40 or 80 days after childbirth, it only requires seven days for menstruation. Postpartum bleeding is called *dam tohar*, or “blood of purification,” while menstrual bleeding is *zavah dam*, or “blood discharge.” These differences point to the postpartum period as a unique state.

Talmud and Later Jewish Thought

The Talmud collects generational discussions from Rabbinic sages about how to interpret and implement Jewish law, whether textual or oral. Its divisions are based on topic. Tractate Niddah, focusing on laws around separation, contains discussions around the difference between *dam tohar* and *zavah dam* (36b), as well as one sage arguing that the uterus contains two different chambers, one for *dam tohar* and one for menstrual blood (35b). There are also debates about how long one must wait to return to sexual activity after childbirth and menstruation; even today there is no single answer as to how long this period of time must last.

In “Jewish Midwives in Late Renaissance Venice and the Transition to Modernity”, Leonard Rothman writes,

“[Birthing people] remained in bed for a time after delivery and at home for a longer period... A [person] in labor entered a protected woman’s world, in which [they were] cared for by [their] midwife and supported by [their] closest friends and relatives... The postpartum return to the community...was **gentle and slow-paced**” (*gender-inclusive language and emphasis mine*).

According to an April 2021 Instagram Live by birthworker [Ariela Sharon](#), Libyan Jews celebrate when the child is 40 days old, with the birthing parent lighting candles to mark the occasion.

La Cuarentena

During my time in organizing spaces, I have met Xicana birth workers who taught me about *la cuarentena*, the 40-day postpartum period observed in Mexican (and broader Latin American) culture. *Cuarentena* comes from the same root as the English word “quarantine,” referring to a 40-day period of isolation or separation. The *cuarentena* is meant to allow the birthing parent to rest while other community members contribute to their care and recovery. Key elements of *cuarentena* include required rest, warm foods, keeping the body warm, healing herbs, and staying home. I tried to stay home for my *cuarentena*, but experienced mood instability though postpartum and I found that leaving the house for walks helped.

When my cousin gave birth, our Mexican grandmother described *cuarentena* as a period to not leave home, except for doctor appointments. She intended to wait until after the *cuarentena* to meet my cousin’s newborn. My grandmother was prevented from leaving her own home due to Parkinson’s, and would need to wait for the postpartum mother and infant to visit after the *cuarentena*.

Despite the Torah defining a specific postpartum period, there are still many Jews who have not heard of the practice. The following accounts from interviewees describe the postpartum period according to various cultural traditions.

Japanese Postpartum Period

In Japan, where my ancestors are from, a lot of women go to their mother's home right after the birth. The mom of the woman who has given birth will care for the mom and the baby. Even though I didn't have my mom come for the first 40 days, I had this incredible woman come and take care of our whole family, actually.

- Kristin

Black Postpartum Period

I'm a person who is Jewish and Black. There's a Black tradition to not leave the house, that I tried to implement, but it wasn't realistic for me. This is also a Jewish thing and Russian thing, I guess. My husband is also Jewish and comes from the former USSR. You can't leave the house, or go outside, for 30 days. You're supposed to stay warm, constantly. Cover your feet. Cover your body. Don't do any lifting. Stay in your bedroom. That lasted a week for me. I was like, "I'm going crazy in this house. I need to get outside." So, that's one of the really, really big things. You're not supposed to take your baby in public for 45 days or something like this, because you don't want anybody to steal the baby's spirit. I roll my eyes, because I'm just like, "Listen. This baby has a contract with G-d, not with these people." My mother-in-law gave me a lot of crap for bringing the newborn, when I needed random breastfeeding things. I was like, "I need to take the baby with me to Target." And she was like, "I'll drive with you, and I'll wait in the car with the baby." I'm like, "So you want

me to just go into Target by myself?” I’m like, “She’s been with me for 10 months. You want me to leave her with you?” I think about those things in particular, like the idea of staying home and this “protective mysticism, evil eye, don’t want any kind of bad things attaching to you or to the baby”, while you’re in this healing state.

- Ahvegyil

Korean Postpartum Period

My mother was alive for the first pregnancy. Korean tradition has all kinds of superstitions, or things you’re not supposed to do. The mom and the baby are not supposed to step outside or be in cold water or cold temperature. You’re supposed to stay inside for the first hundred days, so the first three months. My mother was sick. My mother was really sick. So I didn’t have the advantage of having her be as participatory as normally the Korean mothers are. My mother spoke limited English. My Korean wasn’t that good, despite having studied many years, both in undergrad and graduate school. Ironically my comprehension is really good now, from watching a lot of K-dramas, but it wasn’t as popular back then. So, there’s things that I knew of but didn’t take advantage of, and I really wish looking back that I had.

- SooJi

The Fourth Trimester

After a birth, the first three months are the fourth trimester. You are still separating. Your spirit is torn asunder, literally, into two. In the Jewish tradition, on Shabbat you receive an extra soul. And one of the things we do in Havdalah is we smell spices to revive us, because one of the spirits is leaving our bodies at that time. The Shabbat spirit, or they call her the Queen of Shabbat, is leaving. We smell spices to revive ourselves, and to ground ourselves back into the new week. During the fourth trimester, it's important to have support in revitalizing yourself and grounding yourself.

- Dvora

Intuitive Postpartum Period

I didn't leave my house. It's so interesting. I definitely had postpartum anxiety. I have anxiety to begin with, so I was really worried about it being really, really bad. I had a doula for postpartum, so she was with us once or twice a week for five weeks. I didn't think about how much anxiety I had until a friend had a baby, and she was doing the complete opposite of me, like going out and having people over. Her kid is eight months, and they are going out and having people over every day. I'm like, "That was not my experience." COVID was still very real. There's no way I would have people over. There's no way I was allowing people around my infant child that had zero immune system. We were very, very, very anxious and nervous about that. Our pediatrician was pretty much like that, too. My cousin was visiting town, and our doctor was like,

“Yeah, go outside with masks on.” And then the first time we had people over in November, my friend quarantined so that she could come and stay over for a couple of days. Then we had another friend that visited for an hour. They had their masks on, and I was freaked about them holding my baby. There were just a lot of neuroses around COVID.

- Leah

Jews of Color in the U.S. are helping to revitalize Jewish postpartum practices, partly by reflecting on their own cultural traditions, and by integrating studies from books like Heng Ou and Marisa Belger’s *The First Forty Days: The Essential Art of Nourishing the New Mother*.

Chapter 3

Prayer & Songs



We did a ceremony at home on Shabbat when I was nearly three weeks postpartum, with Jewish prayers I found on Ritualwell.org, like *Hatov V'hameitiv* and the *Shehecheyanu*. [Ritualwell](http://Ritualwell.org) explains,

“Jewish tradition encourages the parents of a newborn to express their joy over the birth of their child by means of blessings to G-d. The blessing of *Hatov V'hameitiv* is unique in that it marks occasions that are considered to bring pleasure to the entire community, and not only an individual. It was customary to recite the blessing of *Hatov V'hameitiv* only for the birth of a son. The blessing of *Shehekheyanu* was recited upon the birth of a daughter, a blessing that marked a new and joyous occasion for the individual. Nowadays that... the birth of a daughter has also become a communal celebration, one can recite either one of these two blessings. There are even some who consider it a religious imperative to recite the blessing of *Hatov V'hameitiv* upon the birth of a daughter. Both blessings are meant to be recited at the time that the happy news is received, namely the time of birth.”

We also recited the *Birkat Ha-Gomel*, a prayer of gratitude said by someone who has survived a dangerous situation. [Ritualwell](http://Ritualwell.org) offers a [Birkat Ha-Gomel with Feminine G-d Language](#), and additional prayers including “[Meditation on Birth](#)“, “[Prayer for \[Parent\] Who Gave Birth](#)“, “[On the Blessing of Children](#)“, and “[A Prayer When a Child is Born](#)“. These prayers should be edited to be inclusive of the birthing parent and their family members’ genders and orientation to the Divine.

Newborns are often celebrated with a *brit* and/or baby naming, but what about the birthing parent? In researching Jewish postpartum rituals, I had a particular interest in healing for the birthing parent. I asked interviewees if there were any prayers that were meaningful to them, and what rituals they'd like to share with other Jews of Color for postpartum. Their offerings are recorded below. These prayers and songs come from interviewees' multiple traditions, the world around them, and their own ritual ingenuity.

Separations Blessing

We said *Shehecheyanu* when they handed me the baby. It was our first time being sort of skin-to-skin together. Then I said, "Let us bless our ancestors; our family; our community; the team at the fertility clinic; the delivery people who brought us our medications each month; our doctor; our OB; Theresa, who did massage for me when I was pregnant with Emi; Elise, our chiropractor; my acupuncturist; Maria, who was our midwife; Susannah, our doula; everyone who sustained us and enabled us to reach this moment that we've waited so long for."

- Kristin

Blessing for Cutting the Umbilical Cord

We created a separations blessing for when we cut the umbilical cord. We did a delayed cord clamping. We eventually cut the cord, and we said, “We praise the Divine, who distinguishes between the holy and the ordinary, between light and dark, inside and outside. For nine months, we were one being, and now we will do everything in our power to guide you into becoming your own being.”

- Kristin

Priestly Blessing for First Latch

We did a priestly blessing for Emi’s first latch. Breastfeeding is a whole journey. It wasn’t like, “Oh yeah, she latched, and then everything was good.” I said, “May you be blessed and protected. May the Divine’s presence shine upon you and shed grace all around you. May the universe wrap you in light and grant you peace.”

- Kristin

Adhan

The *adhan* is a call to prayer in Islamic culture, and typically it’s performed verbally. I’m deaf and I did it in American Sign Language. That’s the first thing my children got to see. It’s the first thing that a child should hear when they come out of the womb, so because I’m deaf, that’s why we signed it for them. It was the first thing that they got to see. When it comes to prayer, we call them *dua* in Islamic culture, and I always call upon the ancestors

from all of my different lineages to be present with me, Ashkenazi, Cherokee, Cambodian. I made sure I did that as I moved into this postpartum journey. I remember the first time I bathed after I gave birth, was when I decided to specifically recite the adhan again. I called on those ancestors to help me through the postpartum period, to guide my choices in my parenting, and to help me to feel connected to my child.

- NoorJahan

Mi Shebeirach

Mi Shebeirach. My go-to thing. Because it was something I didn't have to think of. When I would think of it, and when I would sing it, I would hear my mom's voice, and it was comforting to me, especially with my first daughter. That's one of my mother's favorite songs that she sings. She is very much the person, when she goes to temple, she's going to be the loudest one singing. And she has a great voice. But with my first daughter in particular, our relationship was, I would say as a therapist, pretty codependent. I sought her out a lot for safety and validation. So to hear her voice, it gave me, "I'm okay. I'm safe." Instead of at that time being able to tell myself that I'm safe, and I'm doing what I can do, within my own body. So it was more so her having agency instead of me having agency over my own body. I think again with *Mi Shebeirach*—the prayer for healing—because your body literally is trying to rebuild itself after ten months of creating life, and being a portal to this side. With my second birth, I called my mom after the baby was

born. My mom sang *Mi Shebeirach*. She was like, “Now, you’re in your postpartum time. Now you’re in your healing time. So please take it easy.”

- Ahvegyil

Shehecheyanu & Dayenu

The *Shehecheyanu* was a meaningful one. It’s a prayer of doing something new, and a prayer for the present moment. When I didn’t know what to say, I would say the *Shehecheyanu* in my head. Or say it out loud. Just a way to drop me into this present moment, slow down time, anchor myself, ground myself. Every day was always a first, new experience. I’m pregnant for the first time! What a miracle! I’m like, “He’s—I’m still growing. I made it past the first trimester.” The baby came down and through and out of me, at home, without having to take a lot of other support. I didn’t have to go to the hospital, get induced otherwise. I got to have a natural home birth, and then stay home and have a really smooth postpartum. *Dayenu* is another prayer I say like, “Dayenu. It’s enough. What a miracle.”

- Adi

Blessing for Surviving Childbirth

There is one thing. You say a short blessing giving thanks for having survived childbirth.

- Ayesha

Shema

After my son was born, I sang the *Shema* to him every night as a lullaby all through his childhood.

- Ima Ari

We co-sleep with our children. I was sleeping with the baby, and one of the only things that would help her to go to sleep is I would sing the *Shema* and *Mi Shebeirach*. She would go to sleep. Even now, my car has this feature where it does a microphone thing. The other day, I was driving both my girls, without my husband, and my daughter just was losing it in the back. She's six months now. She was not having fun being in the car. I put the mic on. I started singing. She goes to sleep! It's nice these things have become a part of a ritual for her.

- Ahvegyil

Selecting prayers for naming ceremony

I put together a naming ceremony for Leoni over Zoom, drawing on some of the *Hollekreisch* from Frau Holle in Germany, Ashkenazic traditions, Sephardi traditions, and some of the prayers from the Song of Songs. We wrapped her in a *tallis*. My sister, and then some friends from the community, read things from the Torah to welcome her into our community. Then my husband and I each read a prayer. There was a prayer for me as well. I made sure that my father read something, that he felt comfortable reading as a non-Jew.

- Dvora

Psalm 27

I would sing a psalm or words from a psalm. I would change the melody. I would take two or three words of a prayer. Or I would take one word that I would think of as my in-breath, and then the second word as my out-breath. I did that constantly. I would sing it, and I would sing it so that it's what underscores my life as I walk through the day. Not only during pregnancy, but when I was holding my children. When I was holding them, I was constantly making up new ones or taking a melody from a song, then grafting it onto something else, and just weaving it together like creating new embroidery. I've always felt, especially when I'm afraid or unsure, rather than let the fear engulf me I would manage my chemical wellbeing by song. One song that resonates with me says, "The one thing I ask of you is to be there as the shelter of my life. *Achat sha'alti me'eit Adonai, otah avakesh, shivti b'veit Adonai, kol y'mei chayay.* I ask of you, may I sit, may I dwell in your sanctuary?"

- Mira

Bli Ayan Ha'ra

On my Indian side, the way that they ward off the evil eye for young children, is the mom will draw on them these ugly moles. You'll see this like in baby pictures of my dad. They'll use *kajal*, or black eyeliner. They do that so that when you go out in public, people aren't like, "Oh my G-d,

what a beautiful baby!” Jews would say, “*Bli ayan ha’ra*,” or “No evil eye.”

- Ayesha

Ichigo Ichie

There is a saying called “*ichigo ichie*,” which means, “There will never, ever be a moment like this one.” I’m sure there’s a much more beautiful, poetic way to say it. It’s a Zen phrase, but it’s also sort of poetic. It’s written on a lot of calligraphy scrolls. It’s so difficult to say this when you’re extremely sleep-deprived, or mad, or whatever you’re going through that day with your child that’s hard. I often think about the saying, because it’s so true, that there will never be another day like this. There will never be another moment like this moment. With my child, every moment is so sacred, and hard, and different. They’re going through all these developmental milestones. I try to think about that often.

- Kristin

Creating Songs

Something that my mom used to do for me when I was growing up, and I still remember it, is she would sing a lot to me. For Rio, we have created a lot of different songs for him, and every time I sing to my son, I feel like I’m channeling the sound of my mother’s voice, which was very unique and beautiful.

- Analucía

Prayers for Mikveh

Mayyim Hayyim has a bunch of different blessings on their website. You can also ask them for them at the *mikveh*. I did the prayer they put together for after someone has given birth. I don't remember the prayers. It was just nice to not have to make it up on my own, or to think about it. It was nice to just read the page and follow it. It felt really supportive.

- Alyssa

Heritage Songs

You know when you grow up bathed in a particular way of being, living, and thinking, you just do things without recognizing the source? I don't know what sources were necessarily Caribbean or African-American. A lot of what I did was based on what I learned from my parents and what I learned from my aunts. You learn from your aunts and your grandmother without it necessarily being pegged as specifically African-American.

- Joyce

We have songs that we've developed for our child Rio. We've just kind of created a catalog of different songs. They're not necessarily religious songs. They're songs that we sing to him, in Spanish and in French, our two home languages.

- Analucía

Ritual for Weaning

In the Torah, there are certain times where it's mentioned that when you wean the child, that you do like a big feast for them. It's a big deal. If you think about it, during those times, not all the children made it to that point. The infant mortality rates were much higher then. I was thinking about that because in modern-day Judaism, I feel like there isn't really any tradition around the weaning process. I was looking things up and I came across something that was really beautiful. The last time that you're nursing your baby, you can put the *tallis* over both of you and talk. You can make blessings, and explain that it's the last time. So there is some discussion around it.

- Ayesha

Prayer and song are two key ritual technologies for healing during the postpartum – or any challenging transition. Interviewees shared beautiful examples of prayers and songs that came from their ancestors, as well as ones they created on their own. If there is a prayer you're looking for and cannot find, you are encouraged to create it.

Chapter 4

Physical Pain & Healing



It is essential to discuss the physical aspects of the postpartum period because they are still made invisible in many communities. Below are stories of physical healing and the struggles that come with it. I hope that by lifting the veil on pain, infection, tearing, constipation, and more, readers will be better able to prepare for their own postpartum and support others going through postpartum.

Right after giving birth, I wrapped myself in *rebozos* (long, handwoven cloths), in order to make myself sweat. *Rebozos* are deeply meaningful as Mexican textiles, and I wrapped myself in one *rebozo* gifted to me by my *tía* (aunt).

When I returned home from the hospital, I began a series of self-care and healing practices. I took baths with soothing herbs from Mexican traditions, adding various flowers like chamomile, calendula, and amica. I drank tea with fennel and fenugreek to support lactation. I also utilized herbal tincture recipes – one of which was sent by my cousin – and applied them to my torso. [Ivania Montero](#), a local birthworker, led me in three postpartum ceremonies using traditions from our indigenous Mesoamerican ancestors: hip closing using a *rebozo*, *sobadas* (womb and breast massage), music, and drinking warm liquids.

Note: In reproductive justice spaces, I have encountered Black feminist critiques for “doula” as a term for birthworkers, since the word ούλα/*doúla* referred to a female slave in older forms of Greek. I have chosen to use the term birthworker in this chapbook.

C-Section

I was in a lot of physical pain after the C-section. It was very hard to walk. With my daughter Sofia, I was in the hospital only for a day after my C-section. I demanded to be released, because I'm on a lot of medication for asthma, allergies, and pain. I decided not to breastfeed at all with her, and I went right on my morphine medication again. When you have a C-section, at least the first night, you really can't walk or get out of bed. At Kaiser, they do a room-in kind of thing with the baby. The baby is in the room with you, but you can't get up to get the baby. It's terrible because the baby's crying and crying and crying. You have to call someone. It's the middle of the night, and the nurses don't come right away. You feel very helpless. I just wanted to go home. At home I was going to have a housekeeper who helped, and a postpartum doula who helped at night. Also, because of my Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, I have poor wound healing. My C-section incision only got infected after I gave birth to my second child, but doctors had also been very concerned it would get infected after the birth of my first child. I needed my housekeeper and my postpartum doula to check the incision with me every day, several times a day.

- Aliza

Sitz Baths

I did have a lot of tears when I gave birth to Daniel. I had to have stitches. I had to take care of all that stuff. I don't remember what those things are called, like, sitz bath or something, where you put the water in there, and sit down on that. You try to make sure nothing gets infected, and then eventually get the stitches out. That was a little bit painful, so I wasn't moving around that quickly.

- Theresa

I did it for the first two weeks every day. I took a sitz bath, with astringent herbs to help tighten and tone my pelvic floor, after having the baby, and heal.

- Adi

Hemorrhoids

I had hemorrhoids, which I had never had before. I didn't know what they were. It was excruciating. It was worse than childbirth because I've had really easy childbirth experiences, compared to a lot of people. The hemorrhoids took me out. I felt no connection to spirituality during any of my postpartum experiences. I was just so unhappy, because nothing was like what I thought it would be. People are not warned enough about the things that can go on with you and your body. These are things that you would not expect to happen, have no control over, and you just didn't see coming.

- Antoinette

Pelvic Floor Therapy

I had a natural birth for both kids. I tore for the first one, and they stitched me up. Then I guess they went ahead and cut the same incision for the second. I ended up having to do a lot of physical therapy on my pelvic floor. They don't tell you about that, ever, and prepare you for it. There was a lack of education and preparation. First, there was a lack of education around things that you could have done before to strengthen your muscles, to prepare in advance, and to loosen for a delivery without cutting or making an incision. Then afterwards, there was a lack of education around the repair or the healing that needs to happen. I did physical therapy at the University of Michigan, which was so much fun. There's something called hypopressives, and it's out of a practice that was developed in France. And France, actually, they're light years ahead of us in terms of giving support postpartum. The hypopressive technique worked. I graduated from physical therapy. I still do them every now and again. It's interesting. They can measure the strength of your pelvic floor. I'm the worst person at doing Kegels. They tell you to do that beforehand. I don't know if they should scare you, but if I knew that you actually really needed to do them consistently, maybe I would have done them more beforehand.

- Sooji

Living with Disability

After my first pregnancy, I was able to go to school, work full-time, have a baby, have her bouncing, be single, and manage. I was in my twenties. I just bounced back. Within a year, my body was back to normal. You barely knew, aside from some sagging skin, that I had been pregnant. This time around at age 52, after the C-section, the recovery has been very slow. Sometimes it felt like I was having setbacks. I have been fully disabled. I have not been able to lift things, even my own child has been an effort. I had a walker up until last week. I have had trouble walking. I needed mobility passes to get by for six months. It has been rough. My husband has been working full-time, doing all the housework, and taking care of all the chickens, dogs, and cats, because I could barely get out of bed. It has been rough, accepting that my body has aged and accepting that this too is normal in postpartum. It was good to talk to other women, and hear younger women say that they had been knocked for a loop, too. That this is a non-trivial event. This is really deep.

- Dvora

Connection to Child

Even now, my kid is four and a half. I still feel like my body is changing all the time. I still feel like my body is becoming my own, again. I pick up my kid, and I cook for her, and I play with her and do all the things. So my body is still very much attached to her. But I'm still acclimating.

- Alyssa

Birthworker Support

Sebastian was colicky. There was this period where he would just scream for hours. I had not held a baby since my sister was born when I was seven. I was holding a baby again 30 years later. My doula showed me how to hold him, how to take care of him, and how to bathe him. I was very worried because of the impact of Ehlers-Danlos syndrome on my hands, that I would drop him. We came up with different ways to deal with that. She was just fantastic after both C-sections, being empathetic. She was understanding that I was handicapped and I needed a lot of help. Having someone there in the middle of the night was great. We sang songs to the babies and it was really great.

- Aliza

Lactation Consultant Support

The lactation consultant said that she would check up on me in a couple weeks when I got home from the hospital. So, two weeks later, she called to see how it was going, and she emailed me some resources. Lactation consultants are not necessarily covered by insurance, and I was worried about how much that would be. My doula also was able to help out a bit, which was nice. Then, I started having some issues with it after I wasn't having my doula anymore, so I called and spoke to the lactation specialist at the hospital a couple of times and she was really helpful. So now I always tell new moms, "You're going to need a lactation

consultant. You need that. You need a doula. These are all the people you need to help you in the beginning.”

- Leah

Hip Closing

I did have an abdominal massage. Part of that was done with a bone closing ceremony, which is more like Mexican and South American tradition. I learned about it when I was becoming a doula. I did this course called *Curanderx Toolkit* with a bunch of other folks of color, in Oakland. We're so open when we give birth. All of our joints and our whole body are very open, so it's the idea to close back up. My dear friend Amanda was our doula and is also becoming a rabbi right now. We have this unique connection, where we went to Oaxaca, Mexico together a few years ago, and studied with a midwife and herbalist. I don't have lineage from Mexico. Amanda offered me this bone closing ceremony and abdominal massage, where we wrapped me in these different cloths. A lot of the cloths were actually ones that my mom got me from Poland, and one that my dad got me from Petra in Egypt. I brought in my own cloths that they wrapped me in, to close out the birthing portal, and have my organs massaged back into place. I got that probably two or three weeks postpartum, maybe four? It was emotional for me.

I was so excited to be pregnant, and honored to give birth and experience birth for myself. I don't know how many times I'll get to do that in my life, and it's so beautiful. Birth was also really physically and emotionally challenging in so

many ways. But I didn't want it to be over. I think there was a way that I was like, "Wait! Every day I'm going further away from being raw, fresh, in that experience." During the ritual of the abdominal massage and bone closing ceremony, I got to cry, grieve, and just say "thank you" for getting the chance to experience that. I can always remember being part of that portal. It was important for me to cry and move forward. I'm into the next phase. It's always just a next step. Now I'm in postpartum, and I'm going to be connected with my baby. The birth itself, it happened. Let's honor what it was, and it's time to close it back up. I wanted to stay open, but it felt important on a deeper level to start closing it back up. Amanda sang some Jewish prayers and songs.

- Adi

Message

I went to this woman who specializes in giving massages to pregnant people. I went to her twice, once a couple weeks before I was due, and then a couple months after birth. It was really helpful. She would like, feel around, and was doing pelvic massages, and she would be able to tell the position of the baby. It was just nice to be taken care of.

- Alyssa

Self Care

At some point, my husband was like, “The baby is sleeping. You can go get your nails done.” They kind of massage your feet while doing the pedicure, so that was really nice.

- Ayesha

Returning to Exercise

I grew up in the Philippines. I was raised by my mother’s mother. In the house, people didn’t live alone, like a nuclear family. We lived in a family compound. There were several families of the Rivera clan that lived together. Every year, definitely like at least twice a year, there would be a dance. People would come, and the grownups are all dressed, and it was everything from tango, paso doble, rumba. They just did social dancing. It was also available in school, as folk dance. Eventually I learned about ballet. During pregnancy, my ballet classes were the ones that kept me in community. I had to show up in the morning, and I had my place. I was an experiment in many ways. In my generation, I was the first amongst us to get pregnant and to allow my body to be seen by my peers who were dancing in companies or dancing on Broadway. The acceptance of my growing body was a big deal. It was a big deal for me to be in their company. Then postpartum and after that, my body changed again. It was difficult. I discovered other forms of dance. It brought me back to what was then called modern dance, which involved dancing without shoes, pointe shoes, or ballet shoes. I started doing stuff that was more fluid than what I was professionally trained to do.

Before pregnancy, I had been dancing in the Martha Graham school of thought, for the ensemble and for the company under the tutelage of Yuriko who was one of my mentors. That kind of dance involved a lot of floor work, and rising and falling. After I'd had my children, I was no longer really drawn to that. I was searching for elder women to be around me, and my ballet teacher became one of those people. I had gone back to class and I was like, "Uch, I went back too early to class." I overstretched my feet ligaments. I had her to tell me, "Mira, just wait a while. Wait a bit, a few more weeks, before you come back to class." Or, "Only do this thing. Do it in parallel." Or, "Face the bar." There was a lot of caring in so many ways from her. My craving for elder woman wisdom, I got from her. She became a really intrinsic part of my family.

- Mira

While many people experience physical pain during the postpartum period, it often isn't discussed within extended families and broad communities. Through storytelling, we are able to shed light on the physically painful aspects of postpartum, as well as sources of healing.



Hip Closing Ceremony by Ayeola Omolara Kaplan

Chapter 5

Mental Health & Emotional Support



Mental health and the conversations around emotional support remain challenging for many people. The expectations of the society we live in can add unnecessary pressure or feelings of burden to a postpartum parent.

It took me two or three weeks to connect and feel attached to my child. Because my family has experienced the death of several children, I was reluctant both throughout my pregnancy and early postpartum to connect with my child. I had fears that I would get attached to my child, only to experience that same loss. I didn't understand how my partner and my mother felt so attached to the baby so quickly, when I was struggling.

At one moment, I unraveled. I thought my child and partner would be better off without me present. I thought I should run away. While pregnant, I had made a list of aunts, cousins, and friends who I could reach out for support, and listed what type of support I could ask each person for. I reached out to one of those friends postpartum, and still remember how she soothed me over text messages. I also took advantage of antidepressant medication, and even joined an online support group with other queer and trans birthing parents.

The following stories shed light on a wide array of generational postpartum experiences. I asked research participants, “Emotionally, what was postpartum like?” and “What kind of resources did you have during postpartum?”

Intrusive Thoughts

You have a lot of intrusive thoughts as a new mom, like the worst-case scenario. I remember having my doula over, and she was watching my baby so I could go take rest and nap in the other room. I couldn't nap because I started freaking out in my head. I'm like, "Oh my G-d, what if she just leaves with my baby, and I don't find her, because everything she gave me was a lie? She could change her phone number, and she could have given me a fake name and a fake profile. All the information I give to the police won't be accurate." I did have postpartum anxiety, which at the time you think it's normal thoughts to have. You don't realize just how intense your hormones are during what they call the fourth trimester. I think If I have another kid, I would love to just get past that fourth trimester. It's so intense. You're not sleeping. You're so worried about everything with your little newborn. They're adjusting to the world and to you. There's just a lot happening that I don't think we talk about enough as a society.

- Leah

Anxiety

My daughter was born on a Monday, and by Tuesday my husband had to go back to work. I remember taking her to the doctor on my birthday because she was born four days before my birthday. I was carrying this car seat and feeling like everything is just loose, and jelly, and no real support in my body. I was trying to pump, I was sleep-deprived, and all those things. I had a fear of traveling with a newborn in

the backseat like, “Oh my G-d, what if they stop breathing?” I was so anxious with the first one. I don’t think prior to then that I would ever say that I experienced depression. Those first five weeks, I was home by myself a lot. My husband worked in a restaurant. I would just dread the time. It’s probably why I wasn’t really super attached, because I was probably in some postpartum anxiety. I dreaded the daytime, once it was like 3 p.m., because I knew he would be going to work, and he’d be at work from like three to midnight. It was just such a long day. I remember at that time in particular, forgetting how to talk. I wasn’t talking to anybody. I was just watching TV. I was watching one of those *Criminal Minds* programs or something. I was giving myself intense anxiety, because I was like, “Oh my G-d, all these terrible things can happen to children.” I remember every time my husband would come home, I would just take an hour and be in the shower and I would cry.

- Ahvegyil

Depression

Breastfeeding made me feel like I had a little bit of undiagnosed postpartum depression. It was situational. It was because of the breastfeeding trauma that I had with my first that I felt was happening again with my second. I was just not happy postpartum, with either kid.

- Antoinette

ADHD

After the birth of my second child, I experienced pretty intense postpartum depression. I would cry. My husband's like, "Why are you crying?" I'm like, "I don't know!" There was a lot of guilt around bringing the second child in. Having to share and divide attention, did I mess up our life by doing this? I felt responsible. That passed probably around like three or four months. Once I exited that fourth trimester time period, it was more manageable. I have ADHD, but it manifests in a very anxious way. A lot of how I've coped with it prior to knowing or having this diagnosis was focusing on what's within my control, and actively, full-force, going into whatever project 110%, even if it means I'm not going to sleep. You can't really deal with pregnancy like that! If I work harder, it's not going to expedite the pregnancy. My brain was really at odds. It was a lot of almost learning this new identity, and parting ways with this old version. This version was very much in survival mode, and trying to navigate all the things.

One of the big things is, especially with kids, I get very sensory overloaded. I find myself turning off things constantly, or removing myself constantly, because I'm just like, "There's too much noise." My husband's phone is going off. The tablet's going off. I'm like, "How can you see anything? How could you hear anything?" Explaining this to a partner who has never experienced anything like that is difficult. I will have a full-on, "I feel terrible about this. Why did I lose my cool? Why did I yell or have a human response?" As a therapist, I'm like, "It's okay. We have our

days. We have our moments.” I couldn’t necessarily give myself that kind of grace, especially early in postpartum.

- Ahvegyil

Friend Support

I was really lucky that a friend of mine, who was sort of more like a friend of a friend, decided to come basically be my postpartum doula. She is a Native woman. She has mixed heritage like me. She is Native, Black, and Irish. We became fast best friends. She became my village. I remember grieving with her about, like, “Where’s the village? This isn’t how it’s supposed to be.” And she was like, “You’re right.” I ended up also being there for the birth of her second son and helping her out in return. I could’ve used a lot more ceremony and support from traditional resources. I scraped together what I could with what I knew and who I could find.

- Ima Ari

Time with Extended Family

My father, his wife, and my husband’s mother arrived the same day, two weeks before Rio was supposed to be born. It ended up being the day Rio was born. They stayed with us for a month. We loved that month, being able to have Rio spend it with his grandparents. They didn’t necessarily care for us. They’re much older. They’re in their seventies. They’ve got mobility issues. So in many ways, we kind of cared for them. So we cared for Rio and our parents.

- Analucía

Involvement in Jewish Community

People didn't really understand what you go through as the mother of newborn twins and a toddler. There was a Chabad rabbi that I connected with. I thought initially there might be an issue and a pushback. I was very upfront. I said, "Look, the father of my children is not Jewish. But my children are Jewish because I'm Jewish." I explained to him that I had an Orthodox conversion. We met and talked, and he just seemed to be totally fine with it. He was very – what I would say – mindful of us. For example, if there was an event going on, and it was geared towards younger children, he would be sure to do a personal email, phone call, or text to say, "Hey, we'd love to have you here. I hope to see you at this particular event." That extra little bit of outreach that happened when my children were young was crucial in having us come back into the community, because I had experienced so much pushback and uncomfortable feelings of non-acceptance up until that point. I really wasn't gonna seek that out to go back to that, especially with kids in tow. Chabad was very key in getting us back involved.

- R.C.

I was becoming connected to the Jewish community. I was at the shul with my older child in my arms while singing, "Sunrise, sunset, gently go the years." He didn't want to sit with dad while I was singing, so he brought him up to me. I had to pick him up. I knew a rabbi, and I was participating in the community. It had become clear by then that my husband was clearly on board with raising the kids Jewish.

He had been ambivalent about it with the first one, very ambivalent.

- Joyce

Jewish Readings

Postpartum, I entered the space of a Jewish mother. That's a different space than what I've experienced before. My tradition is doing Torah study on my own, and attending weekly services. Now I'm going to begin Rabbi Telushkin's book, *The Book of Jewish Values*, which is 365 days of thoughts he put together. I like that. I'm thinking deeply about Judaism and gratitude.

- Dvora

Postpartum Birthworker

We were specifically looking for birth doulas and postpartum doulas who were either Jewish or people of color. We paid for the birth doula but my in-laws paid for the postpartum doula since that was a lot more expensive. For the postpartum doula, we interviewed a couple people. We settled on a Mexican-American woman, Maria, who was in the process of also becoming a midwife. Our birth doula was also in the process of becoming a midwife. They both had a lot of experience with birth. It was really fantastic having help after the birth and having somebody who spoke Spanish to me. I felt really, really comfortable with her. Maria actually came back when my second child was born to help out.

- Aliza

Our doula cooked us meals from the book *The First Forty Days*. There were so many first moments that we shared together that were funny. It was a really, really sweet time. Siobhan cared for us. She did all of the things that I was hoping to have. She made chicken and red date soup. She made some teas—chamomile and lavender tea that was cooked in oat milk that was really delicious, with some honey. She made a lot of infusions with herbs. She prepared sitz baths for me. There was this dish that I loved, a black sesame paste. It was kind of a dessert-y thing of black sesame paste with some porridge. In Japanese, it's *okayu*, rice porridge. As someone who loves to cook, and my partner who doesn't cook, it was very nourishing to have somebody else cook really beautiful, delicious food. She also did my child's astrology chart, which was special. We just had a blast together, just the four of us. She's now a good friend. She was at our 100-Day Ceremony. Part of the reason why I built in so much support, and I feel really fortunate that we had the ability to get so much support, is I have a history of anxiety and depression. I was really afraid of postpartum, of all of the things. I was really afraid of feeling unsupported in those early days. Instead, I had this really beautiful experience with Emi. I feel really proud of myself for having known that about myself, and then building in all of these supports. And we can talk about this, too, but there was so much support in the early days, and after, there was not as much support. That hadn't really crossed my mind. Later on, I struggled a bit, but those early days were just so special.

- Kristin

Therapy

I knew I was in labor. The doctor had said there would not be a chance of survival that early, but at that point we didn't know to expect anencephaly. I had to do the birth as a live birth. They had to induce me. I gave birth to this baby, and they said that I could hold the baby if I wanted to, even though it was just gonna be a stillbirth. I wanted to hold them to feel a spiritual connection to that child. I wanted them to know I was there. I wondered if I ever could have a child again. When I found out what had happened later, I remembered thinking, "How could I do that to my child?" I had some really good counseling from a therapist who is Ashkenazi herself. She worked with me when I found out that I was Ashkenazi to process all of this stuff. I felt like my genetic code would never produce a child that would be happy or successful. There was so much unknown from that birth and pain. It took a long time to process it.

- NoorJahan

Support Groups

Locally in Seattle, and it is nationwide, there is something called PEPS, Program for Early Parent Support. They have groups for parents through different life stages, from newborns, waddlers, toddlers, and multiples if you have another child. They have programs for birthing parents and non-birthing partners. It's really good, because it brings parents together who are in a similar stage of parenting. We also have families of color groups here, started through grants. That is amazing because you get to talk to people

who are having similar struggles. They don't have ones for specific ethnic or racial groups, so it's all different people, but then you learn about traditions other people have.

I'm also part of a Black moms group. There's actually one other Jewish Black mama there too. It is incredible to have that connection, and be able to talk about things. It's through these groups I found a Black pediatrician for my daughter, so that I am comfortable. I can't communicate how moving it was when I looked at the chart, and it said, "Leoni is thriving." I never heard that about my first child. He was always worried about me as a parent, because I was young and Black. But here, it was, "Leoni is thriving, and she's growing."

- Dvora

I remember going to a breastfeeding support group which was the only thing besides doctor appointments I did for the first few weeks. It was exactly a week postpartum. I was like, "I have no concept of how I can get someplace at a time." I was so tired and my body was in such transformation and healing mode. Then having to move this little being around. I don't even think we put her in clothes for that first week. We probably put her in her first onesie to go to this breastfeeding support group. The group was so helpful. Everybody else has just gone through the same thing. Some people had three-month-olds. Some people have one-year-olds. Most people had infants, like newborns. It wasn't like I had to look presentable. I could show up in my stretchy pants, with my little pads in my bra

to absorb milk. I could just show up and have spit-up all over me, and be like, “I have no idea what I’m doing.”

- Alyssa

Support for Partner

The other thing is if you have a partner, it’s very important for the partner to have support as well. It’s very important that your partner receive the same level of support that you are, because they are entering a new time, with another spirit in their lives, that they’re not prepared for. And you can’t prepare for it if you’re not pregnant. There’s a certain level of preparation that comes with growing a child. But then the partner needs to have that support to learn how to carry that weight.

- Dvora

Staying Off Social Media

The *ayin ha’ra*, or evil eye in Hebrew, is a really, really big idea in both my Jewish and Indian cultures. We don’t post on social media, because we have the belief that even if people are clicking hearts and likes or whatever, that maybe some of them are genuine, but most likely some or a lot of them aren’t. If there’s a moment where anybody is thinking like, “They’re so lucky. They’re in this happy relationship. They’re having this baby, and I’m having a really hard time with infertility,” or anything like that, it could harm us and harm the baby, G-d forbid. So we’re really, really big *ayin ha’ra* people. Even after I have the baby, we don’t post it on

social media. People who are our true friends, who really know us and who keep in touch with us, they know what's happening in our lives. All random other people, they don't know I've had two kids. It's the idea that you really want to keep your blessings protected. Why would I put my biggest blessings on a pedestal and expose them and potentially harm them?

- Ayesha

While postpartum mental health struggles are cross-cultural, the ways that birthing parents receive and navigate support varies widely. Each circumstance is unique, even within a shared cultural context, and people offering support are encouraged to use these participant stories to help understand some of the ways they can take initiative to supporting postpartum parents.

Chapter 6

Meals



In this chapter, Jewish People of Color discuss the foods they ate postpartum, which came from their ancestors and the world around them. Some are new traditions, created by the interviewees or their community. I asked interviewees, “What foods did you eat during postpartum? Who cooked the food? Do they come from your family? Do they come from elsewhere?”

In a 2021 Kveller article, Rabbanit Jenna Englander writes about the Torah’s Passover story as a metaphor for childbirth. She writes,

“Fascinatingly, there is also breast milk in the story of the Jewish people’s birth. During the years of wandering the desert, G-d provides manna as needed — a white, fatty substance that takes on different tastes and forms depending on the people’s wants and needs. In the Torah, the Jewish people complain of five foods they miss from Egypt: onions, leeks, garlic, cucumbers, and melon. The midrash tells us that the manna, which otherwise can taste like anything the people want, does not taste like these five foods because they are the very foods **that a nursing [person] was instructed not to eat for fear that they were bad for the baby**” (*emphasis my own*).

During my own postpartum, I ate warm foods, especially soups that come from both Mexican and Jewish traditions. Friends dropped off food, and one friend organized a meal train.

Heritage Foods

I did get seaweed soup. That's traditional. You're supposed to eat it for breastmilk. I nursed both children.

- SooJi

Sometimes my mom would make some Mexican food, like some nice rice with a tomato sauce in it, and beans and enchiladas. Sometimes she'd make tacos or a burrito or something quick. Nothing really that involved.

- Theresa

For breakfast, I had plantains and eggs. Plantains are very, very Dominican. For snacks, I had cheese and crackers and fruit. I ate a lot of grapes, strawberries, and mango. And then for dinner and lunch, I would have some kind of chicken and rice, which is very Dominican. Then I would have carrots or broccoli. Or because I had lost a lot of blood after my C-section, I had to have green beans for a long time and take iron pills to replace my blood that I had lost.

- Aliza

By having studied tea ceremony, I gained a little bit of confidence in learning more about my heritage and asking questions. For my child's 100th Day Ceremony, there were special dishes that I made. Honestly, I found most of them on the internet in an English Google search, because I don't speak Japanese. I don't know that I would have had the confidence, or even the foresight, to think about incorporating certain Japanese items or rituals into my child's life, if it weren't for the tea ceremony.

- Kristin

Whenever we have a birthday party or some kind of gathering, my parents are like, “*Arroz con pollo*. That is our contribution.” We had a baby-naming for Ida when she was six months, or three months, at our house with friends and family. That’s when my parents started that tradition. They were like, ‘We make *arroz con pollo*. We are the grandparents that bring *arroz con pollo* to everything.’”

- Alyssa

I also had a pretty rough postpartum because I had trouble breastfeeding. I got sick with mastitis, and it became a recurrent infection. I was really lucky and privileged to have found this doctor who was both a homeopath and an MD. She helped me figure out what I was allergic to. I was allergic to wheat, cow milk, and soy. As a vegetarian, I’d been eating a lot of those. I was able to switch to goat milk, which is much more appropriate to many of my ancestors’ heritage. Also, I can’t have wheat. I think it’s common for a lot of Jewish and Native people, that sugar, dairy, and wheat are just not the thing. On the Native side, a lot of those were the foods that were given as rations and made people really sick, caused a lot of diabetes, heart disease, and all sorts of issues. Still do.

- Ima Ari

Nourishing Postpartum Foods

Postpartum, my mother-in-law had me eating a lot of soup. Like, a lot of soup. And was very much like, “You need to pack on calories. You’re trying to pump and breastfeed and do all these things, and heal your body.” So that was really lovely, to be cared for.

- Ahvegyil

My mom would constantly text, “Okay, do you need anything else? What are you low on? What else can I make for you?” I had read that oatmeal is really good for milk production. She would make me oatmeal blueberry muffins. I could just keep them in the freezer. She was constantly making those for me, which was wonderful.

- Leah

I have lived with chronic anemia for so long. A lot of stews that were brothy were very good for me.

- Analucía

I started to hemorrhage. I was not expecting it at that point. My parents came over to the hospital a few hours later. I remember thinking, “Okay, I need to be strategic about what food I put into my body right now. I need iron. I need to eat chicken livers. But I also want to be able to poop and not get constipated.” Dried prunes and chicken livers were my first meal after Ida was born. And nettle tea.

- Alyssa

Meal Prep for Postpartum

The month before my due date, my mom's task was to fill up my freezer with ready-to-go meals that I could eat on the go, because I had read a lot about how you're not going to have any time to cook or anything. So that was her task. First she thought we were going to do it together. I was like, 'No. I don't have the energy. You can do it.' It wasn't traditional Jewish foods. It was just things that were easy to freeze. She made me a lot of homemade bone broth which was great.

- Leah

Coordinated Meal Train

There was a meal train afterward. It was really nice. In our community, they do a nice meal train for a couple of weeks afterward through our synagogue. That is a really big help.

- Ayesha

Informal Meal Train

People came and would drop off meals and stuff that I didn't ask for, because I didn't even know to ask for that. It was coworkers, actually, who had just recently given birth probably a year before I did. They knew what it was like to be in those early postpartum days. That was incredibly special and meaningful. One friend's husband makes really good empanadas. Another friend, she's Dominican. She made a Dominican meal for us. Her husband made us pulled pork. Another coworker, she made us curry chicken

once, and then she did a burrito setup for us. Everything was delicious, and was great.

- Leah

We had a lot of friends who were neighbors. Our friends who we were living with moved out the day before Rio was born. They were coming over a lot and checking in. They brought us food. So we were cared for, in that sense.

- Analucía

We have a close friend in our community who both times, she called me earlier in the week or something and was like, “Hey, don’t worry about cooking for Shabbat. I’m going to make both your meals for you.” Then I ended up having both of my kids on Shabbat morning, in the hospital. We had all of her food with us in the hospital. That was really nice. I have no idea how she always just manages to do that, but she’s a good friend and always shows up for us in that way.

- Ayesha

Helpers Cooking for You at Home

When my son was born, my in-laws were here. It was somewhat helpful, like, my mother-in-law would cook meals and stuff. But it was also stressful, because it felt like there were more people with needs that needed to be met also.

- Ayesha

During the initial postpartum, I didn't really have to do that much of the cooking and the chores. It wasn't until my mom went home that it became more of my responsibility again.

- Theresa

With my second child, we came home and the second day, my husband's family came in full force. It was beautiful, like something out of movies, something I could have never expected, and truly appreciated and loved. They came in, they cooked, they cleaned, and they provided stuff for the older one. I remember at that time I was eating a lot of chicken and soup, and just—so much stuff. Which was nice, because I finally had an appetite back, versus while I was pregnant with the second one, anytime I'd eat anything, it just made me sick.

- Ahvegyil

What these stories teach us is that it isn't merely what parents are eating that helps them along the postpartum healing journey, it's also how these meals are prepared (namely, by others). The next chapter will give more specific examples of how people can show up and help lighten the load for a postpartum parent.



Breakfast by Ayeola Omolara Kaplan



Dinner by Ayeola Omolara Kaplan

Chapter 7

Support with Chores & Baby Care



This chapter discusses the ways that extended family and community can support with chores and baby care. Given the widespread Jewish tradition of waiting to announce a pregnancy, to name a baby, and to get baby items, perhaps “the most Jewish” tradition in this chapter is needing somebody to set up baby items or purchase items from a registry after birth.

In a course I took on Mexican Birth Technologies, the facilitator [Lucía Echeri](#) explained that during the Mexican 40-day postpartum *cuarentena*, the birthing parent cares for the baby, and everybody else cares for the birthing parent.

In March 2021, birthworker [Ariela Sharon](#) did an Instagram Live titled, “[vayikra birth torah](#).” Sharon described the Hebrew root of *vayikra* (the first word of the book of Leviticus) as meaning “to draw closer,” and that in order for a birthing parent to support a newborn in a way that draws the newborn closer, the birthing parent must first be supported.

I found unexpected support from my own mother, with whom I had a tempestuous relationship throughout my entire life. At a time when I felt unable to support my baby, I was pleasantly surprised when she arrived to help. She supported me by rocking my newborn to sleep, doing laundry, and washing dishes.

The following traditions and rituals may not include prayer or ritual items. They do however involve intention and community support, two key aspects for meaningful healing traditions.

Setting Up Baby Items

When I went into labor, my parents were there! I remember my dad like helping to set up things like the crib and stuff. I was really hesitant to set up anything. I didn't want anything to get totally set up until I knew I had a healthy baby and we were coming home. Because I knew myself well enough that I couldn't face having to take things down if things didn't work out the way we hoped they would. My dad was great. Once I went into labor and we delivered, it was 18 hours. My dad got everything all set up.

- Joyce

Purchasing Items from a Registry

We didn't buy things beforehand. I did create a registry, but I kept it private until after the baby came. I wanted to be really organized and deliberate in the things that we wanted. I knew that after the baby came, we would not have the time to do that. So I created it. But we definitely didn't share it with anyone. It was on a hidden setting until the baby came.

- Ayesha

Sharing Hand-Me-Downs

We had a lot of hand-me-downs. We still get a lot of hand-me-downs. But we had a lot of hand-me-downs at the beginning. We inherited this Moby wrap. It was like, "Okay, great. This is the one that we're going to use. Perfect."

- Alyssa

Staying with Family

We live in an apartment. It's a good-sized apartment, and we really like it. My in-laws live in a really big house, and they have a mother-in-law suite and we would be on the first floor. They invited us to go stay with them. I was a little hesitant about it because with a brand new baby, you want to do the whole new family bonding thing. It made sense, logically speaking, because we wouldn't have to take care of cooking, cleaning, and a new baby. I was grateful for the offer, obviously, but I had to be convinced to do it because it wasn't my own home. I wanted to be at home with my baby. We were only there for a week. We were supposed to be there for two weeks, but I was like, "I want to be in my own space. I want to establish my own rules and my own routine with this new person who's here."

- June

Babysitting & Overnight Care

I think when I took my first walk out of the house, it was a couple of days postpartum. Family stayed with Rio. I walked with my husband and did a nice little walk, even though I was super stressed out that I wasn't near Rio.

- Analucía

My stepmom was really helpful, because she volunteered to spend a couple of nights with the baby. Me and my husband were upstairs sleeping, and she would stay downstairs with the baby. I was just like, "Use the pumped milk first, and if

that runs out, you can use formula. We're going to just sleep tonight." That was really helpful, having her.

- Ayesha

Maybe two or three weeks after I had twins, I got the flu. I felt really bad because I was not able to take care of my kids. My ex had a job and would just go to work. I'm like, "Why don't you call off from work, and help take care of the kids?" He would just make excuses: he's a manager and can't do that. A friend who stayed over at our house for three days, and just helped, and was able to save my sanity and save my kids. She was able to feed them, change them, and all that jazz. I remember when that was going on, I was thinking, "Wow, it's really sad that my partner isn't able to do this for me."

- R.C.

Errands

I had two sisters that lived nearby, so they were able to help with going out shopping and things of that sort. Neither one of them had children at that point, so it was great for them.

- R.C.

Cleaning

We had my parents, my partner's parents, other friends and siblings, and community members coming to drop off food, clean the home, and check in on me. Our home was full. I feel like I was full-time taking care of myself while learning how to have a newborn.

- Adi

Petcare

We had a puppy. I was thinking I would be strong enough to support a puppy. I was on bedrest while pregnant, and then I was recovering postpartum. Some people in our community offer puppy-sitting. That was really important.

- Dvora

Taking Photographs

A friend came over like day one of the baby's life, and took some photos of us, just spontaneously, and I love those.

- Adi

Support can take many forms: chores, errands, meals, and more. What is meaningful and helpful to each person may vary, but the core element is helping to lighten a birthing parent's load.

Chapter 8

Mikveh



Mikveh ceremonies commonly take place at a ritual bath in which a person will immerse their entire body under water several times, saying a prayer after each dunk. These ceremonies typically mark a transition in Judaism.

People approach the *mikveh* with varying traditions and innovations. Rabbinic sources go into great detail about protocol, intent, and even the amount of water that should come from a natural, flowing water source such as a stream or river. The [Queer Mikveh Project](#) works to queer the concept of *mikveh* itself and make it accessible more broadly, especially to those who hold marginalized identities.

Inspired by the Queer Mikveh Project, I did a postpartum *mikveh* in my bathtub with herbs. I read this excerpt from a *mikveh* guide created by [Mayyim Hayyim](#): “I stand here today having given birth to my child; feeling grateful for the miraculous workings of my body. I honor my body for its wisdom and for its ability to nurture the creation of another human being, for sheltering that being, for completing this pregnancy.”

I also wrote a *kavanah* (intention) for my postpartum as a *mikveh*. While reading Jay Michaelson’s *G-d in Your Body* during pregnancy, I felt called to the moment of submersion in a *mikveh* as a symbol, and to my own *kavanah* for the postpartum period I was building towards. I pieced together parts of Michaelson’s writing into this found poem, which I reread throughout my postpartum.

May my postpartum period be a *mikveh*, “bodies immersing in water, connecting with memories more ancient than memory”.

“Transitions are sacred”.

Moving “in between one state of being and another”, “the liminal space when one is neither what one was nor yet what one is to become”. “Before, there is identity, fixed in shape and meaning. Afterward, there will be a new identity, different in content but equally defined. But in between, in the moments of transition and change, there is a namelessness that recalls the ineffable.”

Thank you *Chalchiuhtlicue*, *madre diosa*, mother earth, divine, *shekhinah* for all your blessings. Thank you for this blessing of rest and recovery. Thank you for the blessing of creation.

Thank you for this moment of “possibility”, your building this “shrine to transition”, allowing me to be “naked” and “stripped of signifiers of identity or role”.

The *cuarentena* “shelters, nurtures”. We spend 40 days, a *cuarentena*, because “40 days Moses spent on Mount Sinai, the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the desert, the 40 days of the flood in the story of Noah, and the 40 days between conception and an embryo taking human form”.

During this time we are “in-between, neither ‘before’ nor ‘after’”, “healing and yielding [rather than looking towards] acquisition, activity or production”.

My focus is on the “water, the womb, rebirth” and this little one. May this little one be safe and strong, and confident. May they show me how to support them on their journey.

I’m “paying attention to the sensations of the body”: “[N]othing should be between you and the natural waters”.

I’m “taking [my] time”. I “find the practices at the edge of [my] comfort zone, because there they will teach [me] more than you expect.”

I’m asking “what you would like to let go of, or welcome in”? I take in all your blessings, and breath into earth my “expressing gratitude”.

I’m living a joyous, powerful moment in which I am in the *mikveh*, and I “let the *mikveh* do the work”.

Together we are “forging the bonds of community, friendship, and fellowship”.

Thank you *Chalchiuhtlicue*, *madre diosa*, mother earth, divine, *shekhinah* for all your blessings. I am grateful.

Womblike Mikveh

I went to a *mikveh* at Mayyim Hayyim in Newton, which is this gorgeous *mikveh* space. They just have such a radical, accepting, inclusive way of running a *mikveh*, and inviting people into the *mikveh*. It was something that I knew I wanted to do at some point. I wanted to go there specifically and immerse after giving birth. There’s a *mikveh* guide or somebody in the *mikveh* who kind of checks to see if you have fully immersed. It just felt really

supportive. The space itself, the ceiling droops down. It's like dark wood, maybe panels. The *mikveh* pool itself is tiled in this really beautiful way, so it almost feels womblike. I was in my hormonal early days. I was just like, "This is amazing." Nothing could have been more perfect in that moment to me.

- Alyssa

Mikveh for a Changing Body

During the postpartum period, I really felt the change of my body being a nursing mother: the transition into pregnancy and then out of pregnancy. I went back to the *mikveh*. I went back to the *mikveh* after a certain period of time when everything had come out of me. It's as if you sort of treated it like you had a period. You waited for your period to be done and then you get to the *mikveh*. Going to the *mikveh* was a source of comfort to me. I didn't continue it forever, but definitely after birth for about a year or so, I was a regular visitor of the *mikveh*. The *mikveh* physically was near me so it was kind of like secret society ritual that I would do. I would get there in the evenings. Of course, the *mikveh* lady knew my body was changing. She had known me before. I was searching for the elder women to be around me. There she was! My conversion had been my introduction to the *mikveh*. I converted before getting married. I did all the studies, and then the completion was immersion. Now I accompany people. I'm part of a *beit din*. The *mikveh* is again near me, very, very near me physically. It is very special to accompany people to the *mikveh* not

only for conversion but for those ritual moments before the *bar* or *bat mitzvah* of a child, before a graduation, or sometimes before or after a divorce.

- Mira

Across faiths, people see bodies of water as life-giving, sources of nourishment, and places of cleansing and transition. Visiting or utilizing water can be a deeply meaningful source of postpartum healing.



Mikveh by Ayeola Omolara Kaplan

Chapter 9

Ritual Items & Heirlooms



In creating ritual, it can be helpful to use objects that bring greater meaning and weight to the moment. I set up an altar on a desk in the corner of my living room, and placed various items on it that would help support me throughout pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. One night postpartum when I was struggling, sitting at that altar and looking through the items on it helped me feel strong and supported.

A selection of gifts from loved ones drew on imagery around fertility: blue-and-purple layered soap inspired by *Chalchiuhtlicue* (Mexica deity of fertility, childbirth, lactation, and rivers); a vagina candle; an embroidery loom showing a colorful uterus with beads sewn in; and collages made with plants and glitter during my mother's blessing.

Drawing on Mexican and Jewish ritual traditions, I added sage, Shabbat and Havdalah candles, and an herbal healing cream I had made using a Jewish herbalist's recipe. I also included a piece of cream-colored parchment that I had illustrated with three Hebrew letters: *alef*, *mem*, and *shin*. These "mother letters" are described in the *Sefer Yetzirah* (a pre-Kabbalistic mystic text) as having created the world.

Part of the altar honored my family: a six-generation family tree, photos of my grandparents, and one of my late half-brother Johnathan. Postpartum, I felt Johnathan's presence. It made me feel loved and protected.

Below, participants share stories about ritual items and heirlooms. In addition to prompts on customs, practices, or rituals used postpartum, I also asked about meaningful family heirlooms and histories.

Homemade Herbal Cream

Giving him his first bath felt like a ritual. I am an herbalist, so I also made a homemade cream for him that I put all this love into, so I got to put that on his body for the first time.
- Adi

There's this lotion that has been in my family for a very long time. It uses a lot of ingredients that were very common during Ashkenazi rituals and prayers. This lotion tends to be healing in nature. It helps to open up the veins and it helps with pain. I used that lotion, not only in pregnancy loss, but also during the labor and delivery. We rubbed it on my back to help with the pain from the contractions. I used it postpartum to help with the stretch marks. It's a lotion that's been used for the entire time I can remember. Even as a kid I used to have it used on me. We say a prayer when we make it that relates back to our ancestral line. I won't share the exact recipe because of it being a familial one, but a lot of the stuff that is in it ties back directly to religious texts in Judaism.

- NoorJahan

Hair Coverings

When my sister came after the baby was born, she had come with her head covered as well. She had remarked that when she one day has children, she would want to also do the same, where her head remains covered during birth. And she thought, how cool that was that her culture as an Orthodox Jewish person, and mine as a Muslim person,

could be so similar. She was saying she feels it's because my Ashkenazi roots still tie me to those traditions, even if I identify as a different religion these days. Every time I cover my head, I also feel that connection to my ancestry. When my sister came to do the *aqiqah* ceremony, her head was covered, as it usually is. She had worn one a little more bedazzled than typical. It was really special to see that we were both bedazzled.

- NoorJahan

Amulet

There's a tradition in Iraqi Jewish culture. There's a thing you put over the baby when they sleep, whether they sleep in the crib or not. I have to ask my dad what it's called. I had one growing up, over my bed, that my grandmother from Iraq gave to me when I was born. It's made out of gold. There's these two little balls, this turquoise, and then the hamsa. It says "*Shaddai*" on it. It's a protector. My grandmother gave it to me, and she gave it to all of her grandkids. She didn't have much. They came to Israel and had to leave everything behind, from Iraq. But she had twelve grandchildren, and she bought each one a gold little amulet like this, when we were born. I don't know what happened to my brother's and my sister's. I'm the youngest and we had one that was mine.

When my nephew was born, my sister's baby, we gave mine to him so he could have it. When it was time for my baby to be born, I asked my dad, "Where's the beautiful little amulet that hangs over the crib?" I didn't want to take

it from my nephew, who's only four. We only had one. My dad decided to take on the tradition even more. He went to Israel, and he found one. It's really hard to find a traditional one like this, he said. He asked his brother, who found a way to get one. And he brought it, as the grandfather, to my baby, so that we can continue the tradition. It's placed over where the baby sleeps. He was sleeping between us, so it was in the middle between our beds. This feels like a really big part of our lineage, like one little thing that stuck. And there's a lot in our Iraqi Jewish customs, mostly around food, tea, hospitality, language, dancing, hip-shaking, spirit, and music. But physical tangible things that come from Iraq, I don't have so many lived practices.

- Adi

Remade Magen David Necklace

I had jewelry, some of which was connected to my Jewish ancestry. I had a Hamsa necklace and a Magen David necklace. I remade the Magen David necklace with some turquoise that I had gotten out at a reservation I had visited when I was 16. It was this multi-faith necklace that I made that I wore all the time, from when I was 16 to pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum, and beyond.

- Ima Ari

Red Bracelet for Family Protection

My husband is also Jewish. My husband comes from the former USSR, and to be Jewish at that time in the USSR was not good. They came to America as refugees. While his mother grew up very Jewish religiously and culturally, he grew up more with the cultural piece, because practicing was a big no-no. When my daughter was born, she had to wear a red bracelet. It was really, really important that it was knotted seven times. All three of us wore a red bracelet, my husband, myself, and my daughter. My mother-in-law said some prayers over it, to protect this baby. It might have been in Yiddish. I was just like, “I am so postpartum and so exhausted. I’m not gonna ask.” She said that prayer three times, as each of these bracelets were put on us. You weren’t supposed to take it off until it fell off on its own. At that point it did what it was supposed to do to protect you. I remember with my first daughter, her arms got so chunky that we had to cut it off. It was starting to cut off her circulation.

- Ahvegyil

Thobe & Kufi Cap for Aqiqah Ceremony

For the *aqiqah* ceremony we did after I had given birth to my first child, even though I was a little larger, we still found a way to wear the traditional thobes so I could still feel affirmed in my masculinity. A thobe is long-sleeved, almost like a dress, but it’s more masculine. It’s bedazzled with all these jewels. It’s hand-beaded with all these pretty flowers, so it’s as nonbinary as I could get. During the

aqiqah I rubbed the saffron on my child's forehead. They were wearing their white kufi cap, and I wore mine. My sister was holding them. My sister has her head covered, and she was in more of her traditional Orthodox Jewish attire for religious ceremonies. It's really special because you can see both religions, Judaism and Islam, coming together there to do what our ancestors had dictated for us to do, which is to bless that child in the most authentic of ways for ourselves.

- NoorJahan

Homemade Knitted Items

My late mom was an incredible knitter. She had knitted beanies, shoes, little mittens, and little sweaters when my older nieces and nephews were born. We're talking 15+ years ago. I'm so thankful that my sister-in-law saved a lot of those things. When my sister had her first baby, and then when I had Rio, we were sharing those pieces that were of my mom. My mother is so present with us, and that just made it like a physical thing. It was also really cute because my mom was really close with one of my nieces who has picked up a number of different crafts that my mom used to love. She knitted a little hat for my son. It was very similar to the one my mom knitted for her. I was touched by how similar they were.

- Analucía

Baby Naming Outfit

When my daughters get named, they wear this African print dress that I made, as a nod to our culture on my dad's side. And my mom's side, too.

- Antoinette

Brit Outfit

We had the same outfit that my husband Alfred had for his bris. His mom gave us that, and we used that for my child Daniel's bris as well. That's the one heirloom that we had that we used again, and I still have here. Maybe if Daniel ever has children, and he has a son, can use it for his son's bris. It's a plain, simple little white cotton onesie with a little vest over it. Alfred's mother converted, and I don't know what the traditional clothes are for a bris. The outfit does seem very closely aligned with something that you would see for a baptism. Except it wasn't a long gown because sometimes you use long gowns for baptisms, even for boys.

- Theresa

Similar Clothing Birthing Person Wore as Child

I'm not really close to either of my parents. My mother sent a lot of trinkets. She sent giant boxes of stuff for after the pregnancies with both kids. She sent a little sailor outfit for both kids because she had dressed me in a sailor outfit after I was born. That was really cute. Really cute little cloth booties. I didn't even know, like, "When do they wear shoes? Do infants need shoes?" She sent some dresses for Sofia that were very similar to the dresses that I had when I was little.

- Aliza

Jinbei & Haori Coat for 100-Day Ceremony

For my child's 100th Day Ceremony, we had her in a jinbei, which is a sort of warm-weather children's outfit, which was really sweet. In Japan, they say that there's a rabbit on the moon. Instead of the man on the moon, we can see like the little rabbit's ears. When I was pregnant with my child, we used to call her "bunny." It's a long story, but we sort of received this sign. Now, whenever we see a bunny, we know it's a good sign. Sometimes we see bunnies in our backyard. So, we had this bunny in the moon on her jinbei, which was very special. I wore a haori coat, which is what is worn over a kimono. I have a photo of my paternal grandmother wearing a haori coat in front of a table full of food. When I wear one, I always think of her.

- Kristin

Calligraphy

My mom surprised me with this really beautiful calligraphy, which she does not do. It was really sweet. It sounded like she took a lot of time and care to create this beautiful piece of art, that is Emi's name in *kanji*, which is Chinese characters. She selected the characters for her name, and it means "beautiful painting." Then it says her name in *hiragana*, which is the Japanese alphabet. Chana, which is her Hebrew and middle name, my mom wrote that in *katakana*, which is used for foreign words.

- Kristin

These are some examples of physical objects with deeply personal and cultural meaning that help ground parents in postpartum healing. Readers are encouraged to use these stories as inspiration for items that may be meaningful in their own healing journey.



Head Coverings, Jewelry & Herbs by Ayeola Omolara Kaplan

Chapter 10

Bringing Postpartum Care to Your Community



For Educators

Please teach about Jewish postpartum at your university, synagogue, and in your community. Center the stories of Jewish people of color in students' learning. At the University of Michigan, one professor provides the interviews for students to watch and write a reflection. Please contact me at espinola.rs@gmail.com for a link to the interviews.

For Birthing People

Know that you are not alone. Read the chapters on “Physical Pain & Healing” and “Mental Health & Emotional Support.”

Ask for help. If you have the resources, financial or within your community, seek support from Lactation Consultants, physical therapists, massage therapists, and postpartum birthworkers. Reach out to family, friends, acquaintances, in-person community, and online support groups for emotional support.

Eat. If you're able to, eat foods that are nutritious or have meaning for you.

Create rituals that are meaningful for you. There is a common saying, “postpartum is forever,” though I have been unable to pinpoint the origins. Whether you are forty minutes, forty days, or forty years postpartum, you can create meaningful ritual to mark your transition. Use the prayers we have shared, or write your own. Consider doing mikveh. The [Rising Tide Open Waters Network](#) has a list of mikvehs around the United States and the world that strive to make mikveh inclusive and accessible. Whether you identify as queer or not, consider downloading the [Queer Mikveh Project's Guide](#). Use heirlooms

and ritual items – or create your own. Consider setting a kavanah, or intention, for the moment. Incorporate earth-based elements like water, fire, and herbs. Ritual has a wide range of definitions and above all is deeply personal. For this reason, I suggest you create rituals that are meaningful for you.

Share your stories. Create space for people in your community to share their stories with you one-on-one or in a small group.

For Everybody

Provide support to postpartum families in your community. Bring them a meal – or start a meal train. Offer to hold the baby while they nap – if that’s something they’d like. Take older children to the park, do a grocery run, or take their dog on a walk. If you’re a ritualist, offer to help create a meaningful postpartum ritual. Talk to your communities about postpartum as a sacred time, and the importance of offering support to postpartum families.

Support reproductive justice. Help build a world where every person has the right to birth and raise children with healthy food, healthy air, and healthy relationships. Advocate for wages that cover more than just the bills, parental leave that is long enough for a parent to feel comfortable leaving a baby in the arms of a caretaker, and even better – universal basic income. Organize for universal medicare – inclusive of trans-specific care, homebirth, doula services and abortion care. Support reparations for Black Americans. Support a jubilee year – the time Torah delineates for returning land to its native owners.

Healing justice uses rituals and traditions to sustain our work for justice. Use meaningful ritual – whether going on a hike, doing mikveh, or singing a prayer – to sustain your work for justice. Bring ritual into your community organizing spaces, and justice into your ritual spaces. We must organize for a world in which people can access and practice the spiritual technologies of their ancestors. Commit to a world where every person is able to access healing, and live your values each day.

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