

The art of **REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM**

A lot of things are Torah texts.

Often, of course, words are texts—in the sense of being conduits of divine holiness. Sometimes music, experiences, other people can be—Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel famously noted that “what we need...is not textbooks, but textpeople.”

This Repro Shabbat, we encourage you to look to Jewish art as your primary texts. Engage with the included art as sources of Jewish wisdom and learning, much like you would with traditional texts. All of the information that you need can be found in the images themselves, and in your reaction to them.



“WE FIGHT FOR ABORTION JUSTICE NOT DESPITE OUR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, BUT BECAUSE OF THEM.”

- Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg



Be careful in your dealings with the ruling authorities for they do not befriend a person except for their own needs; they seem like friends when it is to their own interest, but **they do not stand by a person in the hour of their distress.**

Pirkei Avot 2:3

Art by Maimonides Nutz (Sophia Zohar)

**What feelings come up for you as you view this piece?
What is your initial reaction?**

**Take a moment to observe the style of Zohar's work.
What do you notice about its subject?**

Zohar purposefully did not portray her subject with gendered physical traits, but, rather, as a neutral body with a uterus. What can you learn from this artistic choice?

**The person in the center of the drawing is surrounded by hands and yet does not have hands of their own.
What does that evoke for you?**

**Take a moment to read the text included in the drawing.
Does that change your understanding of the piece? How?**

AYEOLA OMOLARA KAPLAN ayeola.org @ayeolaomolara

Affordable and accessible abortions for immigrants, queer, trans, and disabled folks, youth, low income communities, incarcerated people, and Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.

Resources and health care for families, children and pregnant people

ABORTION JUSTICE IS A JEWISH VALUE

פיקוח נפש שאיננו חייב
Pikuch nefesh - saving lives
פיקוח נפש

אנשים שחווים סבלנות
People who experience suffering
אנשים שחווים סבלנות



כבוד בריות
Kavod ha'briyot/dignity

Reproductive education that centers LGBTQIA+ folks, disabled people and youth

בריאות
bri' yut+health

Live and raise all of our families in safe and healthy communities

צדק
tzedek justice

NCJΣ National Council of Jewish Women

Art by Ayeola Omolara Kaplan: <https://www.ayeola.org/>

Notice the five Hebrew phrases included in the piece: kavod habriot/dignity, briyut/health, tzedek/justice, pikuach nefesh/saving lives, and tzaar/avoiding suffering. Why did Kaplan include these in her work? How might they connect to the values featured in the corners of the piece: diversity centered reproductive education, safe and healthy communities, resources and healthcare, and affordable and accessible abortions?

What do you notice about the people in the center of the painting?

DRAW - OR DESCRIBE - YOURSELF AS YOU'D LIKE TO APPEAR IN THE GROUP:

A piece from **WE TESTIFY** storyteller Ashley,
from Cleveland, OH:

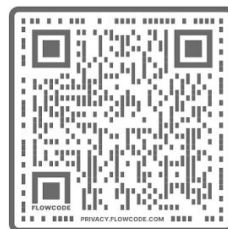
“I had my abortion on April 15, 2016. It was an unplanned pregnancy with someone I didn’t see myself with for a long-term relationship. At the time, I had began working on a pro-choice coalition project and felt lucky to use my degree in a work environment that was both exciting and supportive. I had accomplished a few significant milestones (obtaining my masters, traveling out of the country, moving into my own place) however, getting an abortion felt like my first adult decision, and my first parenting decision. The unplanned pregnancy gave me the opportunity to really think about the path I wanted my life to take, and the life I want to give my future children. I am grateful for my abortion because it was my moment of clarity.”

How does Ashley describe feeling about her decision to terminate her pregnancy? Does this surprise you, or not at all? Why or why not?

She describes abortion as her first adult decision. What was your first adult decision with regards to your reproductive life? How did you feel about it? Was it empowering? Stressful? Did you feel proud? Relieved? Resigned? Frightened? Something else?

What are moments of clarity that you've had around your reproductive life and choices? Where are places where you may still feel, well, less clear?

Learn more about
WE TESTIFY at:
wetestify.org



**Do you have an
abortion story
you'd like to
share?**



“Like many young Jewish people, I slowly drifted away from organized religion after my bat mitzvah. While I was proud of my Jewish heritage, I wasn’t particularly connected to religious observance, and soon, I started to feel quietly agnostic. Religion simply didn’t have any relevance to my life.

...advocating for abortion access has brought me closer to my faith...

I had an unexpected reaction to the story of Shifrah and Puah: I cried. Profusely. As much as I loved reading stories about women like

Miriam, Deborah, and Esther, I always knew that ancient Judaism was heavily patriarchal, so I never felt all that connected to the Torah. Yet the story of these midwives centered the leadership of two everyday women who were, for their time, reproductive healthcare providers! When I reflect on the people I know in the reproductive justice movement, from abortion providers to doulas, from community organizers to abortion fund volunteers, I think about the sacred work of Shifrah and Puah, and I feel strengthened.”

- Excerpts from
“ABORTION ACTIVISM BROUGHT ME BACK TO JUDAISM”
 by Nina Henry

Art featuring the biblical midwives Shifrah and Puah who saved Israelite babies from Pharaoh, and Miriam the prophetess with her timbrel in hand, by Emily K:

<https://emilyk.art/>

Excerpts from "**V'ahavta,**" by Aurora Levins Morales:

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

Another world is possible...

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

Then imagine more...

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

Don't waver.

Don't let despair sink its sharp teeth
Into the throat with which you sing.

Escalate your dreams.

Make them burn so fiercely that you can follow them down any dark alleyway of history and
not lose your way.

Make them burn clear as a starry drinking gourd
Over the grim fog of exhaustion, and keep walking.

Hold hands. Share water. **Keep imagining.**

So that we, and the children of our children's children may live.

Read the
whole poem
and access
her other
work here



MAY WE ALWAYS FOLLOW THE LEADERSHIP OF
THOSE MOST IMPACTED BY THE HARMS OF
REPRODUCTIVE OPPRESSION. MAY WE
LISTEN AND LEARN.

NCJΣ™

National Council of Jewish Women