ISRAEL-PALESTINE SHABBAT GUIDE



A Resource From

JEWS FOR RACIAL & ECONOMIC JUSTICE

ISRAEL-PALESTINE SHABBAT DINNER GUIDE FOR GUESTS

A Resource from Jews For Racial & Economic Justice

SETTING THE TABLE

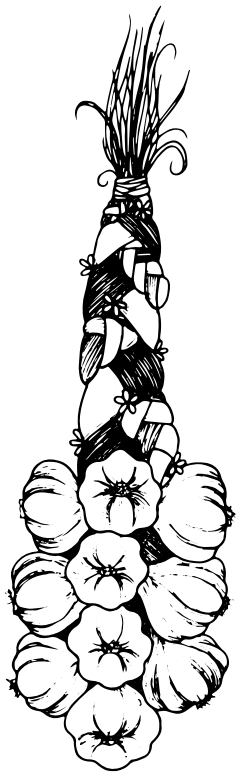
This guide was designed to support members of the JFREJ community coming together over a Shabbat meal to create brave spaces for discussion about Israel-Palestine. At these symbolic shared tables, we embody the JFREJ values of creating the world we want through how we act right now. We suggest having a yahrzeit or Ner Neshama memorial candle/ lamp as a visible reminder of all those we've lost and all the lives still at stake.

How can a vision of a common table help soften our hearts and move us towards a deeper understanding of our shared humanity and collective future?

PREPARING FOR SHABBAT DINNER

You are invited to get ready for this Shabbat and conversation by grounding in our goals, principles, and community agreements. Prepare for the conversation by reading the Learning/Discussion questions and the resources in this guide. If you are joining a gathering in person your host/ facilitators may share additional readings, COVID testing protocols, and might ask you to bring a dish to share potluck style. If you are joining virtually we encourage you to set the table if you can and share in the rituals however works best for you, your beliefs, and your needs.

The rituals and prayers in this guide are intented as a resource to support your Shabbat dinner. Use them as is or as a starting point to designing your own gatherings. If Shabbat rituals and prayers are not a fit for your beliefs you can read Palestinian and Jewish poetry, music, or other teachings to welcome in rest, liberation, and the world to come we are working so hard to create.



Some items you might want to gather are: Shabbat lights (candles or oil
lights) challah or bread, wine or juice, and a meal that brings you comfort.

Our goals for this Shabbat are to:

1. Create a brave space for people to talk about what's happening in Israel-Palestine.
2. To wrestle with the increasingly visible fractures within our communities around Israel-Palestine.
3. Share a meal in community as a way to take care of ourselves and each other, and not allow our hearts to harden while we grieve and organize.
4. Offer some resources to continue deepening your learning and support your conversations on Israel-Palestine.
5. Build support and take action for the following demands: A permanent, lasting ceasefire; hostage and prisoner exchange (which means everyone for everyone); and an end to occupation and apartheid.

JFREJ PRINCIPLES

Tzedek Tzedek Tirdof — *Justice, Justice You Shall Pursue*
Tikkun Olam — *Repair The World*

- We affirm that all the Jews...are Jewish.
- We are the home for Jewish New Yorkers to organize alongside our neighbors and allies to fight for a New York where every community has the freedom, opportunity, and resources to thrive.
- We show up for others and for ourselves. We understand that antisemitism, racism, and other forms of oppression uphold one another, and that our safety lies in solidarity.
- We take care of ourselves and each other.
- We recognize everyone has experience and skills to contribute to our movement.
- We create the world we want through how we act right now. We are committed to being and building a community that is blessedly human; we aim first to prevent harm; we welcome healthy conflict and disagreement; we approach honest mistakes with curiosity and generosity. When harm happens, we commit to teshuvah (repentance) as a roadmap toward accountability and repair. We center and believe survivors.
- We build vibrant Jewish diasporic culture.
- Together we will dismantle the systems and institutions that perpetuate racism, inequity, and injustice, and grow something new and beautiful in their place.

COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

Community agreements can help us navigate the discomfort, grief, and potential for conflict that comes with having difficult conversations. Using these practices and tools we can challenge ourselves and each other with care while recognizing we're all coming from different places of knowing and transforming.

- We strive to create a brave space and ensure the safety of all those present while acknowledging that safety can take time and mean different things to people. We agree to work together towards harm reduction, centering those most affected by injustice in the room.
- Be fully present and listen with intention.
- We are unlikely to solve or resolve anything here tonight, so please share your thoughts with patience and respect.
- Speak from the "I" perspective; suspend judgment of yourself and others.
- Be comfortable and attentive to the role of silence, lean into discomfort, and take risks. Make some mistakes—then let go.
- Accept conflict and its resolution as a necessary catalyst for learning.
- Be candid, and treat the candidness of others as a gift; honor confidentiality.
- Don't rush, give yourselves time to eat, talk, move your bodies, and rest.
- Make space; take space - if you find yourself speaking often, consider stepping back, if you haven't spoken up, consider stepping forward.

Check in: *What is one word to describe how you are feeling going into this Shabbat dinner?*

OCTOBER 7TH AND HOW THE WORLD RESPONDED

On October 7th, 2023, we awoke to news of Hamas' horrific attack, which killed at least 1,139 people, mostly Israeli civilians, and took 240 hostage. Many in our community are connected to victims of the attack. As JFREJ's statement said on October 8th, Hamas's war crimes were neither justifiable nor unprovoked; before this attack, 2023 was already the deadliest year for Palestinians in decades.

Our hearts broke at the loss of life, and at the knowledge that what was to come – what Israel would unleash on Gaza – would be devastating.

We've seen months of ceaseless violence. The Israeli military has murdered tens of thousands of Palestinians, while our elected and communal leaders entrench themselves into positions justifying ethnic cleansing and funding genocidal violence.

Our hearts continue to break over and over as we witness the numbers of those killed continue to rise: over 30,000 as of the writing of this guide in February 2024, over one third of them children. Israel is starving millions more; the extent of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is unbearable. By the time you read this guide, these numbers will be higher; the humanitarian crisis will be even worse; the violence even more unbearable.

Talking about any and all of this is difficult. The flood of misinformation, racism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia feels impossible to navigate. It often feels challenging to commit words to paper at a time when everything is changing quickly. Still, wrestling with this cannot stop us from acting; both/and thinking requires us to move from the overlaps with intention, and into powerful action. And much as our knowledge and analysis has evolved since October 7th, it will continue to do so. We hope you engage this guide with that in mind.

ISRAEL-PALESTINE AS A LOCAL ISSUE

JFREJ is a local organization, and it is clear that **Israel-Palestine shows up in New York as a local issue**. Our opponents use legitimate fears about antisemitism to divide and distract New Yorkers from our goals, and too often, Israel-Palestine is a vehicle for this division. Our closest allies in City Hall and Albany — particularly Black and brown women socialists fighting to build the care economy and dismantle corporate monopolies and the carceral system — are targeted for their support for Palestinian human rights. Public institutions like CUNY are pressured by the right-wing pro-Israel lobby and its aligned activists to repress nonviolent political activity and silence dissent. These are local matters and JFREJ recognizes — and acts on — them as such. We are committed to these strategies for the long-term, including support for the Not On Our Dime campaign to end New York State's subsidization of Israeli settlements.

JFREJ's power is in our **Radical Diasporism**. Diasporism, a term coined by our founding Executive Director, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, takes root in the Jewish Socialist Labor Bund's principle of *doikayt* — hereness — the right to be, and to fight for justice, wherever we are, and "not wanting danger or instability but not wanting to surrender the perspective that diaspora can yield." **Diasporism affirms a vision of safety and thriving beyond militarism, borders, and ethnonationalism.** It is our source of inspiration for organizing locally, with our neighbors, for real democracy and for the collective liberation of all our communities. This is the power that allows us to stay grounded in who we are, while confronting Israel-Palestine's impact on our local work.

Questions for reflection:

- **What sticks out to you when you hear/read this orientation?**
- **What resonates with you? What resonates with this moment?**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Depending on the group one or two of the following questions will help guide conversation:

- How have you been holding the grief of this moment?
- What have conversations in your life been like in recent months?
- Have you struggled to discuss Israel-Palestine at this moment with your family or friends? What has that experience or those conversations been like for you?
- Where have you been finding comfort and community?
- How do your Jewish values guide your perspective for action on Israel-Palestine?
- How do you move forward when you encounter strong disagreement? How is this different in communities where you feel at home?
- Have you felt your heart harden at all towards anyone over these past months? How?
- Have you censored yourself or felt afraid to express a dissenting opinion or ask a question about something? What was it? What stopped you?
- What actions have you taken, and what actions felt meaningful?
- What have you noticed or observed about how Israel-Palestine is discussed in the media, the institutions where you work, or by your friends and family?

ACTION:

- **TAKE ACTION FOR A CEASEFIRE NOW:**

  We must continue raising our voices as anti-war & anti-apartheid Jews. Join us at an upcoming action (see jfrej.org/events) or go to an upcoming action organized by our partners, friends, and neighbors. Check out this toolkit from the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights to take immediate action no matter where you are: jfrej.org/uscpr-toolkit

- **HOST YOUR OWN SHABBAT DINNER OR JOIN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD GROUP:**

  JFREJ members are self-organizing via neighborhood groups to hold hybrid Shabbat dinners and do Havdalah, to come together and discuss what is happening, sit in our discomfort and name our contradictions, and find ways to move forward within our families, Jewish communities, and Left political spaces. Sign up to host a Shabbat and get our Shabbat guide, and sign up to join your JFREJ neighborhood group.

- **JOIN JFREJ!**

  JFREJ is a membership-based organization and home of the New York Jewish Left. All of our work is member-driven and member-led: from choosing campaign priorities to deciding on which candidates to endorse. Membership dues are $36 a year, or $5/month, and sliding scale – anything over $3 per year makes you a member. We ask that everyone give at a level that feels powerful to them, so we can continue to sustain our work from the grassroots. We are a multi-class organization; there is a wide range of giving capacity in our community, and your dues are a tangible way to affirm your commitment to this community. **Join today at www.jfrej.org/member.**

SHABBAT RITUALS AND RESOURCES

Welcome: How good it is to be together

הִנֵּה מַה טּוֹב וּמַה נָּעִים שֶׁבֶת אַחִים גַּם יָחַד

Hinei Mah tov u-ma nayim
Shevet achim gam yachad

Behold how good and how pleasant it is for people to dwell together in unity.

One midrash attributes the destruction and exile of the temple to when goodness among people who dwelled together was replaced by *sin'at chinam*, a baseless hatred, when we sing *"Hinei Ma Tov,"* we reflect on *ahavat chinam*, a senseless love without limitation. We set two symbolic places for the Palestinian people and the Israeli people to represent a common table and a shared humanity. We affirm how good it is to be together and live into our shared humanity, while also holding that those in Israel are able to gather in safety in a way Palestinians cannot.

Alternatives: ***Inclusive Siddur***

The Light of Shabbat: Welcome the spirit of peace

We bless the light as a symbol of the good in the world and in us. We welcome in the spirit of peace and create in this moment the world to come, a place where we can be together and rest in the comfort of our beloved community. We know there is much urgent and important work to be done to achieve an end to violence and a lasting peace in Palestine but we must make peace and break bread together in our own communities, to take care of our bodies and our souls, in order to sustain our efforts towards Justice. We create this space together tonight for peace and restoration.

Let us dedicate ourselves to compassion and Justice and light the candles/lamps of Shabbat.

May the warm glow of the candles/lamps light up our lives and our world. May the good spirit we share and the bread we break together, remind us that we are connected to each other here in this community, and that we are connected to all the people in the world and all the people in Israel-Palestine. Let's take a few minutes to turn to one another and wish each other a Shabbat of Peace. Shabbat Shalom.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל שַׁבָּת

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav vitzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat.

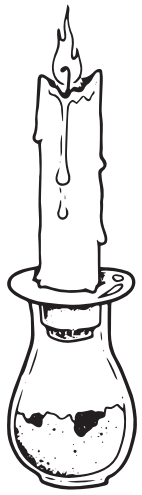
Blessed are You, Lord our God/Spirit/Creator/Presence, Ruler of the universe/Source of Life, who commands us to kindle the light of Shabbat.

Alternatives: ***Inclusive Siddur Candle/Lamp Lighting***

Blessing the Children: Prayer for the Children of the World

Every child matters. We grieve over the loss of every Palestinian child and every Israeli child who has been killed, for all those children who continue to live in terror of violence who have had their childhood and community devastated by war. We cannot let our hearts harden. We must continue to care and act to protect every child, to ensure our governments and our communities prioritize the safety of children and the most vulnerable at all times.

Optional reading:
Prayer for the Children of the World, Open Siddur, 2015



We bless the light as a symbol of the good in the world and in us. We welcome in the spirit of peace and create in this moment the world to come, a place where we can be together and rest in the comfort of our beloved community.

Kiddush: Dedication to Being an Open & Caring Community

We bless our lives by being in community and by sharing our joy, our spirit, and our solidarity, by inviting visitors to join us, by welcoming the stranger, by caring for those in need. Let us bless the wine/juice/water as a symbol of the good in the world and in each of us. Drink a toast "To Life!" *L'chayim!*

If you have wine or juice (or water!) toast and drink together to life.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu,
Melech haolam, borei p'ri hagafen.

Praise to You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Washing Hands

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדַיִם

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam
Asher Kidshanu B'mitzvotav Vitzivanu al Netilat Yadayim

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who has sanctified us through your commandments and has commanded us concerning the washing of hands.

Breaking Bread & Making Peace: A Covenant for a Better World

Breaking bread together, *b'rit lehem*, is an ancient Jewish custom for making a covenant of peace, *b'rit shalom*. Today, we break bread together to transform this world and create understanding, peace, and Justice.

Each time we break bread, let us commit ourselves to a covenant of peace. If you have bread or challah after saying the blessing, each guest can take a piece and eat together.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה׳ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמּוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha'olam ha'motzi lechem min ha'aretz.

Blessed are You,
Lord our God/Spirit/Creator/Presence,
Ruler of the universe/Source of Life,
Who brings forth bread from the earth.

CLOSING RITUALS

We recognize we are a community in mourning and are grieving together. We light memorial candles or lamps at the empty places set for Israeli and Palestinian people. We honor every life lost to war and violence. May their memories be for a blessing and a revolution as we honor the dead and continue to fight for the living.

Mourner's Kaddish in Time of War and Violence

You who make harmony
in the ultimate reaches of the universe,
teach us to make harmony
within ourselves, among ourselves —
and peace for all the children of Abraham,
through Hagar and through Sarah —
the children of Israel;
the children of Ishmael;
and for all who dwell upon this planet.
(All: Amen)

Source: ***Find the full prayer here.***
Alternatives: ***Kaddish Yatom via Ritualwell***

Raising our Voices

Raising our voices (raising our voices)
Higher and higher (higher and higher)
No more (no more) war (war)
We call for a ceasefire (we call for a ceasefire).

Source: ***Sarina Partridge, listen here***

SUMMONS

Last night I dreamed
ten thousand grandmothers
from the twelve hundred corners of the earth
walked out into the gap
one breath deep
between the bullet and the flesh
between the bomb and the family.

They told me we cannot wait for governments.
There are no peacekeepers boarding planes.
There are no leaders who dare to say
every life is precious, so it will have to be us.

They said we will cup our hands around each heart.
We will sing the earth's song, the song of water,
a song so beautiful that vengeance will turn to weeping,
the mourners will embrace, and grief replace
every impulse toward harm.

Ten thousand is not enough, they said,
so, we have sent this dream, like a flock of doves
into the sleep of the world. Wake up. Put on your shoes.

You who are reading this, I am bringing bandages
and a bag of scented guavas from my trees. I think
I remember the tune. Meet me at the corner.
Let's go.

Aurora Levins Morales is a cuir Ashkenazi Boricua writer of poetry, essays, and fiction. A child of blacklisted communist parents, she grew up immersed in social justice movements and the poetry of liberation, and came into public voice as part of the collective eruptions of radical art of the 1970s and '80s. She is the author of nine books, including Medicine Stories, Kindling, Remedios, and Silt. Her poetry is widely used in synagogues and churches, in schools and at rallies, painted on walls and recited at weddings, translated into seven languages and reprinted in dozens of anthologies. She lives at Finca la Lluvia, an agro-poetry project in the western mountains of Boriken, also known as Puerto Rico. The Story of What is Broken is Whole: An Aurora Levins Morales Reader will be published in 2024 by Duke University Press. Find her on Patreon and at www.auroralevinsmorales.com.

Source: https://ayinpress.org/summons/

FAQ

What is JFREJ's stance on Zionism?

TL;DR: We're just generally anti-nationalist!

- Our membership includes staunch anti-Zionists, as well as non-Zionists, people who identify as progressive Zionists, and people who don't identify as anything in relation to Zionism.
- Rather than orienting around Zionism, JFREJ is rooted in Diasporism, a term coined by JFREJ's first Executive Director, Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz as an alternative to Zionism. In her words: *"Where Zionism says go home, Diasporism says we make home where we are."*

What is JFREJ's stance on BDS?

- JFREJ does not currently take a position on BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions). Our members hold a range of opinions on the subject. Our position, and where we all agree, is that there should never be any policy to curtail or penalize dissent non-violent political speech, including BDS.

What is JFREJ's history working on Israel-Palestine?

- See jfrej.org/israel-palestine#the-history

Where should I go if I want to learn more about antisemitism?

- Please check out jfrej.org/understanding-antisemitism and jfrej.org/unravelingantisemitism

Who are JFREJ's partners on Israel-Palestine work, and which Palestinian-led groups are JFREJ accountable to?

- On Israel-Palestine, JFREJ organizes most closely with Jewish Voice for Peace and IfNotNow, which are both in direct relationship with Palestinian groups, and we have a decades-long partnership with the Arab-American Association of New York.

ABOUT JFREJ

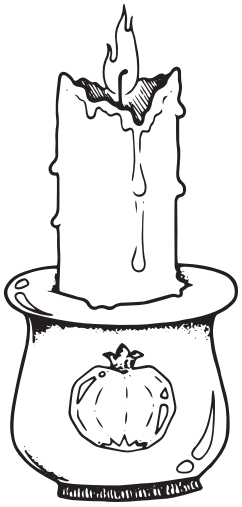
Jews For Racial & Economic Justice is a 6,000-member grassroots organization and the home of New York's Jewish Left. For over 30 years, JFREJ members have organized alongside our neighbors to transform New York from a playground for the wealthy few into a real democracy, free from all forms of racist violence, (with playgrounds for all of us!).

jfrej.org
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THE END

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We cannot let our hearts harden.



ADDITIONAL SOURCES/RESOURCES:

Vent Diagram Activity

- Vent Diagrams: Naming our grief through contradicting truths
- Vent Diagrams: Contradicting truths to hold through crisis and struggle
- Vent Diagrams: Contradicting truths about Israel and Palestine

Ritual and Prayer:

- Rabbis for Ceasefire
- Tkhine for a Free Palestine (collection of prayers via Chava Goodtime & Cindy Milstein)
- Set the tone with Healing music playlists from Let My People Sing!
- Rabbis for Ceasefire: Shabbat for Ceasefire (additional prayer books & recordings
- Optional handwashing exercises: Turn the Tables: Until Justice Rolls Down; Handwashing blessings and meditations sheet (download)

Facilitation resources:

- AORTA - Anti-Oppression Resource & Training Alliance

Recipes:

- Food as a vessel of culture, memory, history at Shabbat dinner
- The Gaza Kitchen
- Middle Eastern, Sephardic and Mizrahi recipes from Brooklyn based New York Shuk
- Recipes to find comfort in from Jewish Food Society

Community agreements:
Recognition and credit for the foundation of some of these agreements to: Brave space concept coined by Micky ScottBey Jones based on work by Beth Strano; Brave Space agreements presentation by Bunny McKensie Mack (they), 2020, community assumptions from AORTA (Anti-Oppression Resource & Training Alliance)

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