

**GARLIC**  
**אכיל**

*on the  
seder plate*



***The seder plate is an altar: a gathering place to adorn our tables with symbols of freedom as we re-tell the liberation story of our people.***

This is a living tradition. For generations, we have placed items that are rich in metaphor on the plate as we keep this story alive. Over time we have added new symbols that speak to the injustices of our time, connecting the lived struggles of today with those of our ancestors. Many place an orange on the seder plate in honor of LGBTQIAA liberation, an olive in solidarity with Palestine, and recently a spoon, as a symbol of recognition, love and care for our sick and disabled kin in the midst of ongoing pandemic.\*

In the past few years, many of us have added a head of garlic to remember and honor ancestral expressions of collective care that offer radical possibilities to help us redefine “safety” and “protection” in the face of empire.

***Jews have identified ourselves as “Garlic Eaters” for thousands of years.***

*Dori Midnight*

*Sol Weiss*

**Garlic is braided throughout our sacred texts:** a delight of Shabbat, as medicine for many different illnesses, as amulet. The ancient Israelites ate garlic while enslaved in Mitzrayim for strength. The Talmud teaches that garlic “brightens the face, warms the body, and instills love.” It’s flavor accents many dishes in many Jewish cultures. First grown in the Fertile Crescent, it has traveled with Jews for thousands of years, weaving its way through the diaspora - a flavor present in many dishes in many Jewish cultures.

**Garlic supports, thrives in, and embodies diaspora:** it can travel in hand, pocket, bag, wagon, across land and sea, past the imaginary borders drawn by empire. It carries the dream of generations and exponential possibility: the one becomes many, the many become many more.

***Jewish folk wisdom from throughout the diaspora tells us that cloves of garlic were tucked into pockets and pouches, hung on windows and doors, placed under the pillow in labor, and strung onto necklaces for protection.***

Garlic has abundant medicinal benefits, including supporting heart health, bone health, digestive and immune support. Garlic is life giving - it increases our vitality, fertility, and longevity. Garlic is community medicine- it’s antimicrobial and antiviral properties keep us well. Valued for these gifts through many pandemics and plagues, garlic has supported many of us through COVID-19. (Including a Yiddish plague song from 1918 singing the praises of garlic!) Garlic protects through zesty and pungent stink, keeping individuals and communities well, holding boundaries while also holding us close.

*\*thank you R’Elliot Kukla and Narrow Bridge Candles for teachings about including a spoon on the seder plate.*

Knowing the power of garlic and of our connection to this plant, oppressors have identified Jews as Garlic Eaters as an antisemitic trope, persecuting and targeting us for our affinity and association with it. In the Spanish Inquisition, Jews would be tracked by the scent of garlic cooking and persecuted for its culinary use. Antisemitic propaganda connecting Jews and garlic abounded in Medieval Europe, including images of Jews clutching a bag of money in one hand and a fistful of garlic in the other, and texts that refer to “*Foeter Judaica*”, the Jewish Stink.

Ancestral practices can help us feel and fortify these radical, invisible connections between our daily lives, our bodies, and the imaginal realms, between the living and the dead.

***Domination seeks to sever the webs of life, by separating people from each other, the land, traditions for sustenance and a sense of belonging.*** Violence, obliteration, and the loss of home and connection leaves people vulnerable and afraid, when too often we learn toxic behavior that we think will make us safe: we assimilate, we surveil our neighbors, we hoard wealth, we occupy native lands, we prioritize social acceptance over justice, we build walls, and we rely on the false promises of safety from the state.

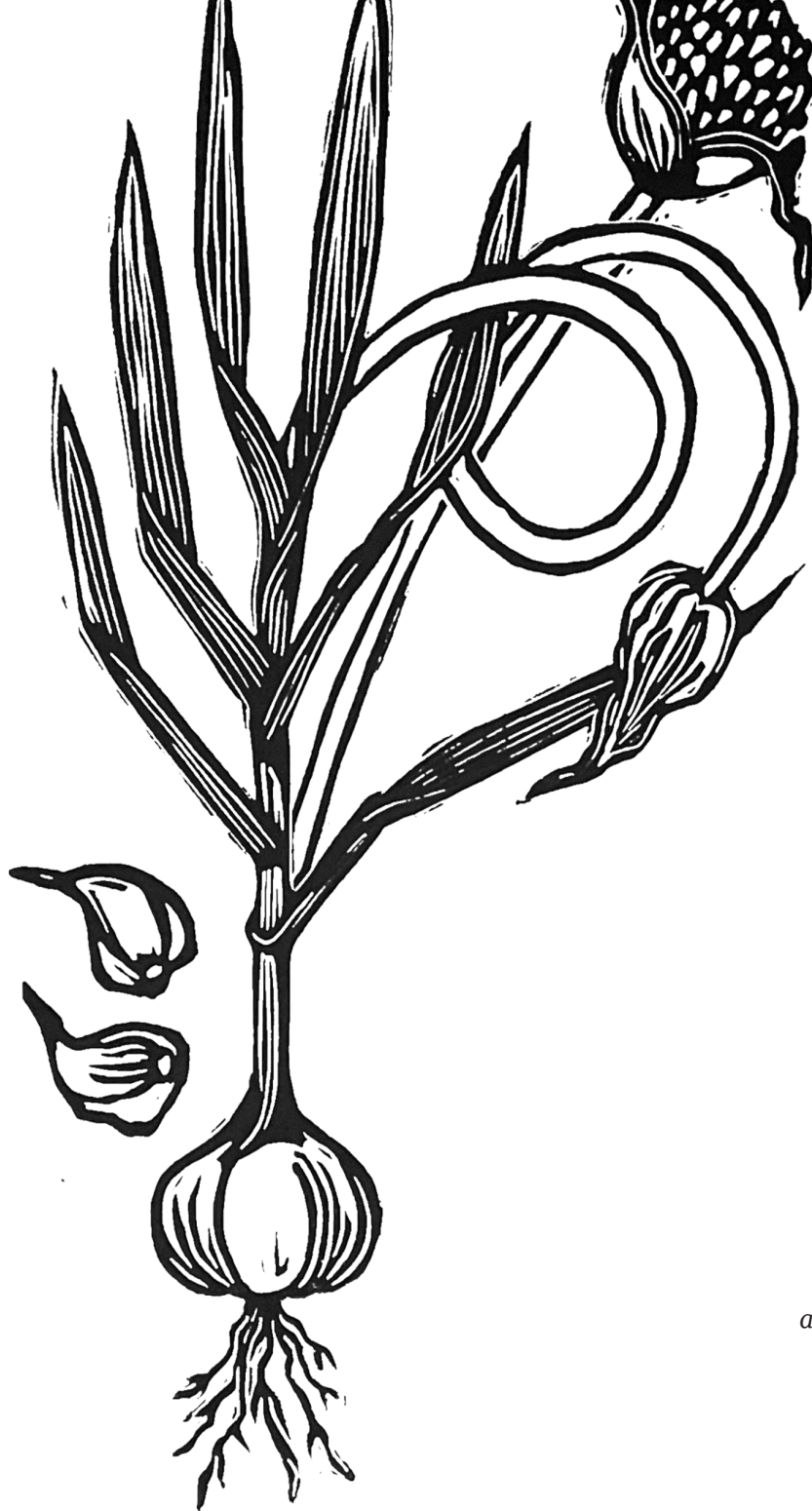


***In the face of separation and oppression, Liberation means countering these behaviors and connecting to that which sustains life.*** We divest from harmful structures and cultivate, remember, and nurture life affirming practices that weave safety and belonging for everyone. Through our medicinal and ancestral relationships with garlic, it teaches us this. That policing, borders, militarism, and nationalism, violent practices based in settler colonialism, don't keep anyone safe. That safety is built through solidarity, through connection, through collective wellbeing.

As abolitionist Ruth Wilson Gilmore says, “*Abolition is about presence, not absence. It is about building life-affirming institutions.*”

***Garlic teaches us life-affirming protection, as a symbol for ancestral healing in service to collective liberation and abolition that holds all life as precious.*** Garlic is Torah, garlic is a community, garlic breathes the magical breath of abolitionist theology and safety through aliveness.

Every year at Pesach, we remember the liberation of our spiritual ancestors and work for liberation for all peoples today. ***We place garlic on our seder plates this year as remembrance, weaving practices old and new for a shared commitment to safety rooted in aliveness and connection, to collective care, and to freedom for everyone, everywhere.***



***As part of your seder, you're invited to hold the garlic from the seder plate and recite together:***

*"At this seder table, we re-enliven traditions of protection rooted in presence, in real aliveness, in unapologetic stink.*

*We release all the harmful structures, internal and external that our ancestors adopted to keep us safe.*

*We release all the ways in which we have hidden to survive, and ways we have sought safety at the expense of others.*

*We release the ways in which we have been separated from our traditions, from ourselves and each other in the maw of neoliberalism, assimilation, forced migration, oppression and collective trauma."*

*We hold that Jews have both colluded with and been harmed by systems of oppression and state violence, and we remember the times in our history that we have found protection and rootedness through connections to plants, stones, letters, prayers, celestial bodies, water, ancestral stories, to each other and to divinity. We commit to doing the same for the liberation of all people for generations to come."*

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