

**Chapter 1 (Shabbat/Sabbath)  
Kast-Keat**

**written by Jessica**

**Quotes to think about**

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“Shabbat is like nothing else. Time as we know it does not exist for those twenty-four hours, and the worries of the week soon fall away. A feeling of joy appears. The smallest object, a leaf or a spoon, shimmers in a soft light, and the heart opens. Shabbat is a meditation of unbelievable beauty.” [p. 2]

“What all this boils down to...is do not create.” [p.6]

“When we cease interfering in the world we are acknowledging that it is God’s word.” [p. 7]

“I remember that, for Jews, the Sabbath shapes all the rhythms of calendar and time; the entire week points toward Shabbat.” [p. 8]

“The Hebrew word for holy means, literally, “set apart.” In failing to live a Sabbath truly distinct from weekly time, I had violated a most basic command: to keep the Sabbath holy.” [p. 9]

“But there is something, in the Jewish Sabbath that is absent from most Christian Sundays: a true cessation from the rhythms of work and world, a time wholly set apart, and, perhaps above all, a sense that the point of Shabbat, the orientation of Shabbat, is toward God.” [p. 10]

“First, is what we might call capitalism’s justification for Sabbath rest: resting one day a week makes you more productive during the other six.” [p. 11]

“Whom is the contemporary Sabbath designed to honor?” [p. 11]

**Questions for Reflection**

Was Sabbath a part of your weekly ritual growing up? What did your Sabbath ritual look like?

What would Sabbath look like with your schedule now?

In today’s modern culture we are bombarded with images in culture to *take a day off* for yourself. How does this cultural mantra coincide with the biblical mandate of Sabbath?

Whom is your Sabbath designed to honor?

### **Suggested Activity**

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This week, plan one day that is going to be your Sabbath. Think about the demands that are on your time. Plan ahead. You may need to adjust your schedule so that you are better able to honor the Sabbath you will have this week. Take the time now to write out what you have to do this week and when you will do it so that you protect the Sabbath days rest.

Next time you meet discuss how your Sabbath went for you. What did you find easy? What did you find difficult? How will you set up your schedule to create Sabbath rest each week?

### **Chapter 2 Quotes to think about [Kasrut/fitting food]**

“Eating attentively is hard for me.” [p.14]

“Keeping kosher cultivates a profound attentiveness to food. Because I kept kosher (the word comes from the Hebrew for “fit” or “appropriate”), I thought about the food I ate. I thought about what I was going to eat, and where I was going to procure it, and how I was going to prepare it. Eating was never obvious. Food required intention.” [p.15]

“If you keep kosher, the protagonist of your meal is not you; it is God.” [p.15]

“The codes of *schechitah* for example – the rules that govern the ritual slaughter of animals for food – insist on compassion. Yes, we human beings have to kill other living creatures in order to eat, but let’s make that killing as painless and humane as possible.” [p.17]

“While Christians are not bound by the particularities of deuteronomic dietary law, we may still want to pay attention to the basic principle that underlies *kashrut*: God cares about our dietary choices.” [p.20]

“Humanity’s first sin was disobedience manifested in a choice about eating.” [p.20]

“Food is part of God’s creation. A right relationship with food points us toward him.” [p. 23]

“I have found myself thinking about what food I put in my body, and where that food has been – in whose hands, in what countries – before it got to my plate.” [p. 25]

“On Sunday morning as I watch my priest lay the communion table for the gathered believers, I remember why eating attentively is worth all the effort: The table is not only a place where we can become present to God. The table is also a place where He becomes present to us.” [p. 26]

### **Questions for Reflection**

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In what ways is “Atkins” different than “Kosher”?

What is your relationship with food like? Is it a fear? A medication? A crutch? An indulgence? A comfort?

What is society’s relationship with food?

Where does your food come from? (Don’t just say the store!)

Who is the protagonist of your meal?

### **Suggested Activity**

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Let us learn to listen to God and our bodies as we seek to be intentional about the foods we ingest. This week, write down what you eat and when you ate it. Take note of what you were feeling. Take note of when you ate. Were you aware of each flavor that flowed from the dish? How many times did you eat out or have fast food? What did you feel like after you ate? How much money do you spend on food? Where does your food come from?

As you journal your “food findings” this week, remember that the goal is attentive eating, not self guilt. Be kind to yourself and your body as you ask questions and reflect while you eat.

### **Chapter 3 Quotes to think about [avelut/mourning]**

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“What churches often do less well is grieve.” [p.27]

“Judaism understand mourning as a discipline, one in which the mourner is not only allowed, but expected, to be engaged.” [p. 28]

“Even the community is not obligated to visit or comfort or feed the mourners, because until the burial, “the death is still happening,” so the work of comforting cannot yet begin.” [p.29]

“During *shiva*, the mourner must not leave his house to go to synagogue, and so the synagogue comes to him, daily services in living room or kitchen or den.” [p. 32]

“This calendar of bereavement recognizes the slow way that mourning works, the long time it takes a grave to cool, slower and longer than our zip-zoom Internet-and-fat-food society can easily accommodate.” [p. 33]

“The rabbis would be quick to point out that we do not observe the calendar of mourning because it is psychologically beneficial, but because it is commanded – and that is true, but why should it be surprising that God commanded something that therapists might now applaud?” [p. 34]

[The Prayer of Kaddish] “Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, extolled, mighty, upraised, and lauded be the Name of the Holy One, Blessed is He, beyond any blessing or song.” [p. 36]

“You do not have to feel praise in the intense moments of mourning, but the praise is still true, and insisting upon it over and over, twice a day every day, ensures that eventually you will come to remember the truth of those praises.” [p. 36]

### **Questions for Reflection**

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When was the last time you went to a funeral? Who was it for? What were you aware of when you were there?

How were you taught to mourn? Is it an individual and private process? Or is it a community pilgrimage?

When was the last time you had to mourn? How long did you let yourself mourn? How long did the community give you the permission to mourn?

Who is mourning around you now? What does it mean to mourn with them?

### **Suggested Activity**

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We do not always allow ourselves to lament. Read Psalm 77. Have one person read this aloud. Then read it again silently to yourself. When you are done reading it, begin writing your own personal lament. You may want to lament something personally in your life. You may want to lament something globally. You may need to lament something like a broken relationship. You could lament many different things. How you choose to write your lament is up to you.

### **Chapter Four Quotes to think about [hachnassat orchim/hospitality]**

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“Few situations make me as uncomfortable as being a newcomer in a church where I know nothing and no one.” [p. 41]

“It [hospitality] is part of what the church is supposed to be: a community of people practicing hospitality.” [p. 43]

“Rabbi Yochanan insisted that practicing hospitality was even more important than praying.” [p. 45]

“Many Jewish communities adopted the idea of serving all their dinner courses at one time; this way finicky guests would not have to suffer through an appetizer or bowl of soup they did not like.” [p 45]

“Our Three-in-One God has welcomed us into Himself and invited us to participate in divine life.” [p. 47]

“We are not meant simply to invite people into our homes, but also to invite them into our lives. Having guests and visitors, if we do it right, is not an imposition, because we are not meant to rearrange our lives for our guests – we are meant to invite our guests to enter into our lives as they are.” [p. 50]

“Cultivating an intimacy in which people can know and be known requires being honest – practicing that other Christian discipline of telling the truth about where we live and how we got there.” [p. 51]

## **Questions for Reflection**

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What does hospitality look like for you? In what ways do you practice hospitality?

Think of a time, person, or place that exhibited intentional hospitality to you. What did that experience look and feel like?

When you first began coming to Mars Hill, what was the hospitality like? How might you help create a hospitable environment for all who are there?

How much do your friends really know you? How much do you really know your friends? How can you help each other tell the truth about where we live and how we got there?

## **Suggested Activity**

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Make a meal together as a house church. Plan who will bring what foods and then actually prepare the meal together. Make sure everyone is involved in some way. Then over dinner, discuss what it was like to prepare and enjoy a meal together. How did you practice hospitality during the process and experience?

## **Chapter 5 Quotes to think about [tefillah/prayer]**

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“...spontaneous prayers are to the liturgy what grace notes are to a musical score: They decorate, but never drown out, the central theme.” [p. 55]

“I am still a little bit uncomfortable with this out-loud-in-plain-view-with-other-people-right-there kind of prayer, but I am trying to learn.” [p.57]

“Scripture instructs Jews to recite the *Shema* – “Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is One” – upon waking and upon retiring.” [p. 58]

“But if rotteness is a danger, it is also the way liturgy works. When you don’t have to think all the time about what words you are going to say next, you are free to fully enter into the act of praying; you are free to participate in the life of God.” [p. 60]

“Sometimes it is great when, in prayer we can express to God just what we feel; but better still when, in the act of praying, our feelings change.” [p.61]

### **Questions for Reflection**

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What does prayer mean to you?

How do you pray?

What forms of prayer are uncomfortable for you? What forms of prayer are very comfortable for you?

Is spontaneous prayer something that is comfortable for you? What do you like about it?

Do you enjoy reciting prayers already written for you? What do you like about it?

Share an experience when you were aware of God’s presence while praying. What colors, tastes, smells, feelings, etc... might you use to describe this time in prayer?

### **Suggested Activity**

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Go to the following website. At the very bottom of the page, click on the time zone that you are located in. Pray the divine hour prayer that is given.

<http://www.explorefaith.org/prayer/fixed/>

### **Chapter 6 Quotes to think about [guf/body]**

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“The desire to diet is not just bad feminism. It is also bad faith, for the biblical story of the body is very different from the bodily stories that *Cosmo* and *Maxim* tell.” [p. 67]

“The history of Christianity and the body is one of anxiety and unease; Christianity has the words to offer a spirituality of the body, but the church hasn’t always spoken those words.” [p. 67]

“Jews link everyday bodily practices, like eating and drinking, to the service of God.” [p. 68]

“Physical pleasure provided a foretaste of eternity.” [p. 71]

“For rabbinic Jews, the human being was defined as a body – animated, to be sure, by a soul whereas for early Christians “the essence of a human being is a soul housed in a body.” [p. 73]

“Bodies are not mere trappings. They are the very stuff of us.” [p. 75]

“Exercising is not merely a capitulation to a fitness-crazy culture, but rather is an attempt at obedience.” [p. 77]

“The irony, I suppose, is that sometimes it may be our very bodily suffering that forces us to inhabit the bodies our culture has helped us alternately vilify and ignore.” [p. 78]

### **Questions for Reflection**

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[Since the body is such a sensitive topic in today’s society, this conversation must be held with great care and sensitivity to the needs of the people in the room. It is important to create a safe space by even acknowledging that this topic can be difficult to talk about and if one does not feel comfortable sharing, they do not have to.]

How aware of your body throughout the day are you?

Has your relationship with your body been positive? Negative? Indifferent?

What have you been brought up to think about in regards to your body? Is it a dwelling place for the soul that someday you will leave? Is it to be mastered and sculpted into a particular form? Is it hurting and full of pain?

In what practices do you engage that help you take care of your body? In what ways might you abuse your body?

Complete the sentence: “I really \_\_\_\_\_ my body.”

### **Suggested Activity**

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Take this time to begin an awareness of your relationship with your body. Throughout the week, take note of your posture, your breathing patterns, how you walk, and what your body feels like clothed and unclothed. What does water feel like on your skin? What do you feel about your body when you wear certain clothes? What about when you eat, how does your body feel after you eat certain foods? Touch different parts of your body. What does it feel like touching your hand? What does it feel like rubbing your cheeks? Begin taking note of all the things that you notice about your body now. How can you appreciate and love your body better?

### **Chapter 7 Quotes to think about [tzum/fasting]**

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“I just don’t really like to do it. To fast, that is.” [p. 81]

“Fasting is meant to take you, temporarily, out of the realm of the physical and focus your attention heavenward.” [p. 83]

“The Gospel of Luke suggests that though perhaps physically weakened from His fast, Jesus was spiritually much stronger for it, and, indeed, the fast helped give Him the moxie to renounce the devil. A curious and paradoxical seeming, even impossible-seeming, lesson; fasting won’t just make you headachy and irritable and ravenous.” [p. 84]

“People who have fasted for years tell me there will come a time when I look forward to fasting – they tell me that there will come a time when I chafe under the church’s insistence that one not fast during Christmas or Easter, season wholly given over to feasting. I am willing to believe that those times may come, but they are not here yet.” [p. 88]

“I can begin to see that Jesus expects us to fast not because He is arbitrary or capricious or cruel, but because fasting does good work on both our bodies and our souls.” [p. 89]

“Fasting is not meant to drag us down, but to still us.” [p. 90]

“When you are fasting and you feel hungry, you are to remember that you are really hungry for God.” [p. 91]

### **Questions for Reflection**

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What are your experiences with fasting?

Why is it so difficult to abstain from food?

How might fasting do a good work on both our bodies and our souls?

Contemplate on how fasting helped give Jesus, “the moxie to renounce the devil.” Why is this so?

How might a fast “still you”?

Do you agree, “When you are fasting and feel hungry...you are really hungry for God?” Why or why not?

### **Suggested Activity**

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This week choose to fast from one meal, one day, or the whole week. Write down what you were experiencing and noticing about your body and emotions. Did you get hungry? Was there a certain time that you became hungry each day? Was it difficult? Was it easy? Discuss this the next time you meet.

### **Chapter 8 Quotes to think about [hiddur p'nai zaken/aging]**

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“So Abraham asked God to “crown him” with age spots and gray whiskers.” [p. 93]

“The aged are not to be dismissed or ignored, but honored.” [p. 94]

“Poetic license firmly in hand, he translates the verse in Leviticus: “You shall rise before and elder and allow the beauty, glory, and majesty of their faces to emerge.” [p. 95]

“It must be acknowledged that this giving care can be burdensome. It can be draining and hard. Perhaps the essential insight of the Jewish approach to caring for one’s elderly is that this care is, indeed, an obligation.” [p. 95]

“Somehow, though, when it comes to caring for the old, we disdain the notion of obligation.” [p. 96]

“I do not look after my Mom because it is consistently easy and delightful. I do it because I am obligated. I do it because of all the years she looked after me. This is sort of holy looking-after.” [p. 97]

“We young folks are supposed to care for and respect our elders-that is the starting point for both Jewish and Christian teachings about the old.” [p. 98]

“Aging is not a process of physical decline.” [p. 98]

“In the Middle Ages, in particular Christians spoke of aging as, in the words of historian Shulamith Shahar, “an opportunity for spiritual elevation.” [p. 99]

“The very old often say they have made their peace with death, but few of us have that equanimity at thirty or forty or fifty. The very process of making peace is part of the opportunity that aging affords.” [p. 100]

“No one who encounters death can deny that it is disordered.” [p. 101]

“Community is, of course, central to Christianity at every life stage – after all, the very life of the Triune God tells us that we are persons only when we are in communion with one another.” [p. 103]

“When our memories fail, it is our community that can tell us who we are.” [p. 104]

### **Questions for Reflection**

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What feelings or emotions arise in you as you think about growing older?

In the culture you were raised, how was aging viewed?

How many elderly friends do you have in your life?

Maybe you are a seasoned person. What experiences with others do you have that have made you aware of your age-both positively and negatively? How would you like to see the community to respond to you?

Why is it difficult for some to be around the elderly (like going to a nursing home)?

Why is it easy for some to want to be around the elderly?

## **Suggested Activity**

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Spend an hour with someone twice your age. Whether it is in person or talking on the phone, just spend time with that person. Ask them to tell you their story. Write down the beauty that this person radiates. Help them celebrate their eldering process. Ask them, if appropriate, what it is like growing older. What they have liked about it and what they have not liked. What wisdom, beauty, strength, etc... can you glean from this person? What wisdom, beauty, strength, etc...can they glean from you?

## **Chapter 9 Quotes to think about [hadlakat nerot/candle-lighting]**

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“There seems to be no surer way to sacralize time or space than lighting a candle, and no quieter quiet than the silence of candlelight.” [p. 110]

“You don’t find candles lit in frenetic houses; you find them lit in house where people are trying to pay attention.” [p. 112]

“We make Advent Wreaths out of seasonal greens and four candles. Each week we light one more candle, edging closer out of the darkness of unredemption and toward the light of Jesus’ coming.” [p. 113]

“Rabbi Michael Strassfeld tells that story when teaching about Chanukah. The light of the *menorah*, he says, “lets us see each other and thereby enables us to help each other on our journeys. Despite the darkness, in [the Chanukah candles’] light we can see clearly from on end of the [the] world to the other.” [p. 115]

“Even when I am just lighting two thin tapers over dinner, I like to think about the light of Christ rectifying the sin by which came death to the world. *The Light of Christ*, I sometimes say to myself: *Thanks be to God.*” [p. 119]

## **Questions for Reflection**

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Do you like candles? Why or why not?

What do candles represent to you?

What do you feel when candles are present?

Do you have candles in the place where you live? Why?

### **Suggested Activity**

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Have each person light a candle. Read Revelation 5:8 and Revelation 8:3. How might our candles help us represent our prayers?

### **Chapter 10 Quotes to think about [Kiddushin/Weddings]**

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“At Jewish weddings, everyone sings and dances and is almost raucous. My friend Shelby once remarked that Jewish weddings are just more fun than Christian weddings, and, on the whole I have to agree.” [p. 121]

“I admit that this is one of the places the Christian church has me forever: The way Christians make marriages makes sense to me. Christian wedding vows insist that marriage is a covenant, not a contract; that if marriage is not inviolable, divorce is still only to be undertaken in the rarest possible circumstances; that God is specially present at the Christian ceremony of marriage, and it is His presence that makes possible the astounding promises people promise; that marriage is, to use church-speak, sacramental.” [p. 123]

“I remember, once upon a time, thinking this was a very grave but profound and insightful way to begin a marriage, this recognition of the possibility of failure.” [p. 123]

“In this nuptial particular, I feel that Christianity tells the best story.” [p. 123]

“The *chuppah* symbolizes the roof of the home the couple will make together, and also the intimate fabric of their bedcovers, and also the sure protection of God’s love.” [p. 124]

“At the heart of weddings – because also at the heart of marriage – is the balance between privacy of marriage and community. Marriage, to be sure, is an intimate matter, the making of a partnership that knits two people together in secret and inside ways.” [p. 125]

“But it is a pernicious myth of modernity that marriage is merely private: Marriage is also a community endeavor.” [p. 125]

“Marriage, after all, is not just a change in individual circumstances.” [p. 128]

“...marriage is a group project, a communal commitment.” [p. 129]

### **Questions for Reflection**

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Think about the weddings you have been to lately...

What was the ceremony like?

Was the wedding more covenantal, contractual or something else?

What do you think about the covenantal language that is used in the Christian wedding?

What do you think about the contractual language that is used in the Jewish wedding?

Have marriages and weddings typically been a more private affair in your experiences or have they been communal?

Do you agree that marriages should be a community affair? What might the appropriate balance of privacy and community look like?

Can you remember a wedding that you have been to that has felt sacramental to you? Why do you think it felt that way?

Can you remember a wedding where something seemed quite different to you, what do you think that was? Do you think that difference was fitting or not appropriate?

### **Suggested Activity**

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Write or draw the different symbols that you have seen used in weddings. Talk about what each of the symbols mean. Are they fitting? Would you use different symbols? What might you change? What do you like? What do they mean?

## Chapter 11 Quotes to think about [mezuzot/door posts]

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*"You shall write them on the doorposts of your house:* In obedience to that verse, Jews purchase special tiny scrolls of parchment on which are calligraphied fifteen verse from the sixth and eleventh chapters of Deuteronomy (the very verses in which the command to *inscribe them on your doorposts* is found)." [p. 132]

"In college (yes, one is commanded to hang a *mezuzah* on one's college dorm room doorpost – anywhere one will be living longer than a month), I purchase a new *mezuzah*." [p. 133]

"One should, whenever possible, beautify one's commandments." [p. 134]

"From Snoopy to silver filigree, almost every *mezuzah* case is decorated with the Hebrew letter *shin*. This three-prolonged letter, which looks a little like the top of a pitchfork, begins the *Shema*, the Jewish prayer, found in Deuteronomy 6:4, that declares the oneness of God: *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the LORD is one.*" [p. 134]

"The *mezuzah* case, then, is not just a decorative item. It is also a restatement of the essence of Jewish faith." [p. 135]

"According to the Talmud, the Jew who wears phylacteries on his arm and fringed *tzizit* on his garments and affixes a *mezuzah* to his door, "is sure not to sin because he has many reminders of God; and these reminders are the very guardian angles who protect him from sinning." [p. 136]

"These objects [crosses] decorate. Like churchly stained-glass windows, they tell stories. They help me remember. They are still not *mezuzot*, though. They do not always ask what I want a Christian home to be like. They do not proclaim to anyone who might pass by that this home is a Christian home." [p. 139]

"Every time I come home I see the sign, and I remember that I claim to actually believe in this God who will preserve my going out and coming in, and I remember that this home is supposed to be a Christian home." [p. 141]

“The sign tells you that I am a person who is trying to be a Christian, and in telling that to you, I am inviting you to hold me to it.” [p. 141]

“It is just the doorway, but this is the beginning of making Christian space out of an ordinary apartment.” [p. 142]

### **Questions for Reflection**

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What are your initial thoughts about mezuzah?

Growing up, were there any signs in your house that declared your faith? How prominently displayed were they?

Do you like this idea of having a sign that declares your beliefs on your door? Or do you recoil at this thought? Why do you think that is?

When Lauren was placing her Mezuzot on her door, she hesitated to display it on her front door because then, “...the whole world will know.” Have you ever felt like this? Why is it so difficult to do this?

Is this idea of mezuzah exciting to you? Do you like the idea of displaying whom you are in an iconic form for others to see? If so, why do you think this energizes you?

Lauren states on the bottom of page 141 that by displaying her sign, she is inviting everyone else who sees the sign to hold her to it. What would it look like if people did this, helped hold each other to the obedience of faith? What might be rewarding from this? What might prove difficult?

### **Suggested Activity**

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Write out a mezuzot for your home. Write out a statement that acknowledges your faith belief. You may want to thumb through the Psalms and write out a verse to put on your doorpost. You may want to use Psalm 121 as Lauren does. Or, maybe, the Shema in Deuteronomy 6. Maybe you will want to use another verse that captures your faith and that would welcome others to “hold you to it.”

After writing your statement, think about where you live. Dorm? Home? Apartment? Other? Where will you put your mezuzot? What does it say to

others? Feel free to embellish your statement so that you can “beautify” it in the space that is fitting for you.

