

Revenge of Dinah: Rachtzah

Contributed by [JUF Chicago / DePaul - Research Training Internship](#)

Source: Revenge of Dinah: A Feminist Seder on Rape Culture in the Jewish Community

Rachtzah - the act of cleansing one's hands while reciting a blessing – requires a willingness to acknowledge what needs cleaning or updating in one's life. Rape culture impacts everyone in our society - perpetrators, victims, and all of us, of all genders. Rachtzah enables us to confront rape culture through the act of cleaning and blessing ourselves from the impurities of gender norms, toxic masculinity, catcalling, hyper-sexualization, and a culture that permits and normalizes this conduct. Whether we wash hands in solidarity with survivors of rape, or symbolically clean ourselves from own toxic experiences of rape culture, Rachtzah challenges us to take ownership of the ways in which we are not only oppressed by rape culture, **but how we perpetrate it as well.** Without placing blame, Rachtzah enables us to build and sustain an environment where we can address the messages we've internalized.

A young boy who is told to "be a man," and a young girl who is catcalled on the street both share the experience and emotional burden of rape culture. The boy is told, "**Don't cry, be a man,**" because "**Superheroes don't cry,**" and because "**you're tougher than that.**" Such messages reinforce the idea that boys should not express emotion. Instead of asking why Superheroes shouldn't cry, the child believes he isn't normal. "I shouldn't be doing this," he thinks.

A young girl who is catcalled on the street is prey to an older man. She is taught to take safety measures. If she averts her eyes, he'll leave. **It's safer not to respond.** The women in her life are indifferent. She is told "it's a rite of passage into womanhood," like the first ear-piercing and the first time she wore her mother's makeup. The young girl repeats the mantra: take up less space, turn the corner, don't make eye contact. "Men are going to be like this," she thinks. A generation of boys, pounded like kneaded dough into Superman suits, and girls spoon-fed insincere apologies for their presence are bound to lose their identity. The ritual of *Rachtzah* provides a momentary cleansing and helps us imagine what the world would look like if all of us condemned the perpetuation and monetary capitalization of rape culture.

Repeat the consensual hand-washing ritual in Urchatz.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדַיִם

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu be- mitzvotav vitzivanu al ne lat yadayim.

Blessed are You ETERNAL our God, Master of me and space, who has sanctified us with commandments and instructed us regarding lifting up our hands.