



# BATHTUB PANDEMIC POEMS

unfiltered reflections  
on a worldwide pandemic  
from a bathtub in Portland, Oregon

by

## ALICIA JO RABINS

2020 OREGON LITERARY FELLOW



Award-winning writer, musician and Torah teacher Alicia Jo Rabins applies her knowledge of ancient wisdom to the strange new reality brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. Each night, after a long day struggling to balance work and home-school with her kids, she runs a hot bath and writes a poem -- an open-hearted, accessible reflection on the universal feelings of uncertainty, distance, and longing for connection that characterize this moment in time.

**"RAW & BEAUTIFUL & VITAL"**

- OREGON PUBLIC BROADCASTING

**"investigates the great mysteries with a light touch"**

- SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

Rabins' first collection of poetry, *Divinity School*, won the 2015 APR/Honickman First Book Prize and was a finalist for the Oregon Book Award. *The New York Times Book Review* highlighted her second collection, *Fruit Geode*, a finalist for the 2018 Jewish Book Award. Her work has featured on Oregon Public Broadcasting and on top literary podcasts, *Commonplace* and *Between the Covers*. Rabins tours internationally as a violinist/singer and ritualist from her home base in Portland, Oregon.

WWW.ALICIAJO.COM

## **PASSOVER 5780**

as our ancestors  
painted their doorposts  
with lamb's blood  
stayed inside and held  
their children close

we wash our hands  
wipe down our shopping carts  
and keep our kids  
off the playground  
for the first time in their lives

in this plague spring  
when the leaders fail us  
we try to keep each other  
alive we are midwives  
of solitude and survival

when a baby is born  
a mother touches the membrane  
between life and death  
and is forever changed  
as we are changed

by this shadow  
which approaches  
closer every day  
what is there to do  
but lift up what we love

chanting pass over us,  
angel of death, pass over  
us all, turn back into the myth  
you used to be before  
you became the news

**"[her poems] walk the line between  
mythic and contemporary"**

- THE FORWARD

## **ON BREATHING**

I'm OK during the day, but at night I get scared,  
Which makes it hard to breathe, which is a symptom  
Of the pandemic, which is what scares me.  
Well played, anxiety, my old friend. You've always  
Warned me something like this might happen.  
You're a gift from my ancestors who survived plagues,  
And worse. They wove you into my DNA to warn me,  
So that I too might survive. Now that it's happening,  
Anxiety, I don't need you any more. I need  
The ones who gave you to me. Hear me, ancestors  
Who lived through danger times: I'm ready for you now.  
All these years I've carried your worries In my bones.  
Now I need your love, your thousand-year view.  
Tell me it's going to be OK. Remind me you made it  
Through, and we will too. Teach me to breathe.

## **CONNECT**

[WWW.ALICIAJO.COM/PANDEMICPOEMS](http://WWW.ALICIAJO.COM/PANDEMICPOEMS)

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