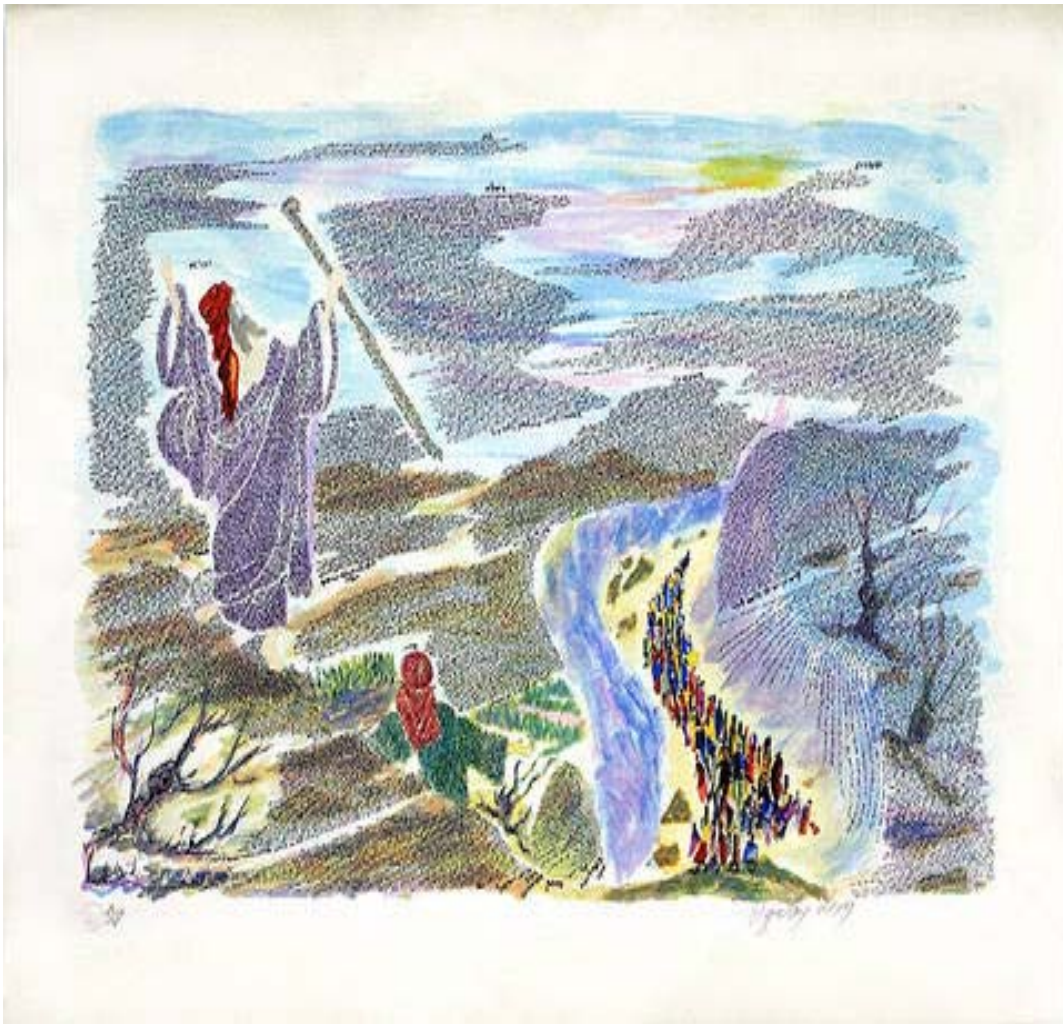


Pesach Haggadah

הגדה של פסח



Preparation for the Seder

As Passover approaches, we go through our homes and discard the *chametz*, food which is leavened (from the Hebrew *l'chimutz*, to ferment). This process symbolizes spiritual house-cleaning: the opportunity to discard the puffery of ego, the non-essentials in our lives. We are not to eat or own *chametz* during the holiday (holy-day) week. We cleanse our homes, our houses of learning, and our pockets. We search with a candle and sweep up with a feather – with illumination, this cleansing is done gently.

The seder plate contains the various symbols of the seder:

- *Zeroa* – a roasted shank bone representing the Pesach lamb sacrifice (Some use a broiled beet for its blood-red color, or even a broccoli stalk – signifying the *zeroa netuyah*, the outstretched arm)
- *Beitzah* – a roasted egg, symbolic of the festival offering, and of re/birth in the circle of life
- *Maror* – the bitter herbs (usually horseradish), symbolizing the bitterness of slavery
- *Charoset* – a mixture representing the mortar used by the Israelite slaves, or (as R. Arthur Waskow teaches) it represents the offsetting spring-time passion of the *Song of Songs*; (Ashkenazic recipe: apples/nuts/wine/cinnamon or Sefardic: dates/nuts/honey)
- *Karpas* – a vegetable, usually green, symbolizing spring growth and renewal (usually parsley or celery sticks; sometimes a potato)
- *Chazeret*, 'lettuce' – another bitter herb (usually romaine).

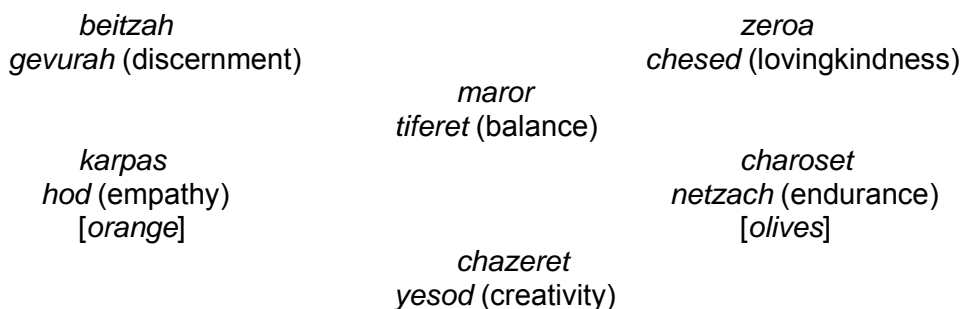
New additions may include:

- *an orange*, representing the inclusion of all genders and sexualities at the table
- *an olive*, representing hopes for a future anointed with peace.

We also have on the seder table:

- candles to burn throughout the seder
- three matzot placed atop each other, covered
- a bowl of salt water, symbolizing the tears and sweat of slavery
- a goblet of wine for Elijah, representing the longing for messianic days
- a goblet of water for Miriam, symbolizing the well that followed her, sustaining the Hebrews through the desert journey
- wine or grape juice for everyone, enough for four symbolic cups apiece
- a pitcher of water and bowl with which to wash our hands

On some seder plates, the items are placed according to the Kabbalistic tree of life:



In that case, the three matzot are placed above the seder plate, representing *chochmah* (wisdom), *binah* (knowledge), and *da'at* (understanding). The plate itself is *malchut* (sovereignty).

Welcome

We begin our journey through the Pesach seder, our journey from slavery to freedom. Through word and song, story and ritual, questions and more questions, we will relive the story of our ancestors' exodus and strive toward our own liberation.

We tell the story not only to preserve the memory, but also to reengage ourselves in the experience. We tell the story because Egypt is not only one physical place. In Hebrew, Egypt – *mitzraim* – means 'the place of constraint'. The Exodus was not just a historical event. It is our path to liberation, too.

In the northern hemisphere, Passover coincides with the beginning of spring: a time for renewal, rethinking, rebirth. We throw open the windows of our houses and we sweep away winter's grit and dust. The story of Passover is a story of liberation and new beginnings; what better time to rethink our own liberation than now, as snow melts and new green appears?¹

May this Passover spring give us the insight to liberate ourselves from that which enslaves us and the courage to step into new lives.

Order! Order!

Seder literally means 'order' and there's a set order to the proceedings:¹

קִדְּשׁ. וְרַחֵץ. כַּרְפָּס. יַחַץ. מַגִּיד. רַחֲצָה. מוֹצֵיא. מַצָּה.
מְרוֹר. כּוֹרֵךְ. שְׁלַחַן עוֹרֵךְ. צְפוּן. בְּרֵךְ. הַלֵּל. נִרְצָה.

<i>Kadesh</i>	Recite the <i>kiddush</i>	<i>Opening to sacred space</i>
<i>Urchatz</i>	Wash the hands	<i>Clear the grime</i>
<i>Karpas</i>	Eat a green vegetable	<i>Open senses to growing green</i>
<i>Yachatz</i>	Break the middle <i>matzah</i>	<i>Separate dessert from need</i>
<i>Maggid</i>	Tell the <i>Pesach</i> story	<i>Tell a tale of spiritual development</i>
<i>Rachtzah</i>	Wash the hands	<i>Raise up the energy in your hands</i>
<i>Motzi</i>	Say a blessing for food	<i>Call forth what nourishes you</i>
<i>Matzah</i>	Bless and eat <i>matzah</i>	<i>Increase faith/prepare to heal</i>
<i>Maror</i>	Eat the bitter herb	<i>Allow the bitter to move you</i>
<i>Korech</i>	Eat bitter herb with <i>matzah</i>	<i>See the sandwich of both sides</i>
<i>Shulchan Orech</i>	Serve the festive meal	<i>Feast and enjoy</i>
<i>Tzafun</i>	Reclaim & eat the <i>Afikoman</i>	<i>Nourish the self with mystery</i>
<i>Barech</i>	Say the grace after meals	<i>Bless all nourishings in your life</i>
<i>Hallel</i>	Recite the <i>Hallel</i>	<i>Sing sacred celebration</i>
<i>Nirtzah</i>	Conclude the <i>seder</i>	<i>Yearning with hope toward the future</i>

קִדְּשׁ KADESH: SANCTIFYING THE DAY

Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.
Blessed is the flame that burns in the secret fastness of the heart.
Blessed is the heart with the strength to stop its beating for honor's sake.
Blessed is the match consumed in kindling flame.

– Hannah Senesch

Lighting these candles, we create the sacred space of the Festival of Freedom; we sanctify the coming-together of our community.¹

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ
לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל (שָׁבֵת וְשֶׁל) יוֹם טוֹב.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
asher kid'sha-nu b'mitz-vo-tav, v'tzi-va-nu
l'had-lik ner shel (Shabbat v'shel) yom tov.*

You are the Source of blessing, *YHVH*, our God, Essence of all creation,
Who has sanctified us with *mitzvot*, and commanded us to kindle the
(Sabbath and) festival lights.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיְּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנֵי הַיּוֹם.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam,
she-he-cheyanu, v'ki-y'manu, v'hi-gi-anu lazman ha-zeh.*

You are the Source of blessing, *YHVH*, our God, Essence of all creation,
Who has blessed us with life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this
day.

FIRST CUP OF WINE

Tonight we will drink not one cup of wine but four, as we recount the journey from exodus to liberation, a journey that stops in many places along the way. Why four? A Kabbalistic interpretation suggests that the cups represent the Four Worlds of the body, heart, mind, and soul. Another interpretation is that the cups represent the four promises of liberation God makes in the Torah: I will bring you out, I will deliver you, I will redeem you, and I will take you to be my people (*Exodus 6:6-7*.) The four promises, in turn, have been interpreted as four stages on the path of liberation: becoming aware of oppression, opposing bondage, imagining alternatives, and accepting responsibility to act.¹

This first cup of wine reminds us of God's first declaration: *V'ho-tzei-ti* – "I will bring you out from the oppression..." This first step is the recognition of slavery, of degradation or narrowness. Until we know the ways in which we are enslaved, we can never be free. We drink this first cup in honor of awareness.¹

Raise a cup of wine and recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַנֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, bo-rei p'ri ha-ga-fen.

You are the Source of blessing, *YHVH*, our God, Essence of all creation, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Drink while reclining.

וְרַחֵץ URCHATZ: WASHING THE HANDS

The symbolic washing of the hands that we now perform recalls the story of Miriam's Well. Legend tells us that this well followed Miriam, sister of Moses, through the desert, sustaining the Jews in their wanderings. Filled with *mayimei chayyim*, waters of life, the well was a source of strength and renewal to all who drew from it. One drink from its waters was said to alert the heart, mind and soul, and to clarify one's understanding of Torah.

In Hebrew, *urchatz* means "washing" or "cleansing." In Aramaic, sister language to Hebrew, *urchatz* means "trusting." As we wash our hands together, let us rejoice in this act of trust, and reflect on the sources of hope and trust we want to bring into the world for ourselves and each other.

This handwashing is purely symbolic and therefore the blessing is unspoken. We can symbolize the uplifting of cleansed hands by raising our hands into the air (as in sign-language applause).¹

(Or, pass the bowl & pitcher around the table, each pouring a few drops of water onto her/his neighbor's hands.)

כַּרְפָּס KARPAS: EAT A GREEN VEGETABLE

Karpas represents spring and new growth, rebirth and the beginning of new life. We taste in this fresh vegetable all the potential in nature and in ourselves. Tonight we celebrate our growth, the flowering of our spirit and of our voices.

We do not taste the vegetable alone. We dip it into salt water, recalling the sweat and tears our ancestors shed during their long years in slavery. We mix bitterness with sweetness, slavery with freedom, past with future. We live with the contrasts because we know that no moment exists without a multitude of combinations – sorrow and joy, pain and comfort, despair and hope.²

Dip the parsley or other vegetable in salt water and recite:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאָדָמָה

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri ha'adamah.

You are the Source of blessing, YHVH, our God, Essence of all creation, Creator of the fruit of the earth.

Eat the vegetable.

יַחַץ YACHATZ: BREAK THE MIDDLE MATZAH

Take the middle matzah and break it into two pieces. Wrap the larger piece in a napkin and set it aside. It will be the afikomen. Place the smaller piece between the other two matzot.

No prayer is recited before we break the middle *matzah*. This is a silent act. We realize that, like the broken *matzah*, we are all incomplete, with prayers yet to be fulfilled, promises still to be redeemed.

We hide part of this broken *matzah* and hope it will be found by the end of our seder meal, for we recognize that parts of ourselves are yet unknown. We are still discovering what makes us whole.

We hide the larger of the two parts of the middle *matzah* because we know that more is hidden than is revealed.²

מַגִּיד MAGGID: TELL THE STORY

Remove the shankbone and the egg (and orange and olive) from the seder plate. Hold the plate up and recite:

הָא לַחֲמַא עֲנָא דִּי אֶכְלוּ אַבְהַתְנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם.
כָּל דְּכַפִּין יֵיתִי וַיִּכּוֹל, כָּל דְּצָרִיךְ יֵיתִי וַיִּפְסַח.
הַשְׁתָּא הָכָא, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּאַרְעָא דְּיִשְׂרָאֵל.
הַשְׁתָּא עַבְדֵּי, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין:

Ha lachma anya, di achalu avhatana, b'ara d'mitzrayim.

Kol dichfin yei-tei v'yeichol, kol ditzrich yeitei v'yifsach.

Hashata hacha, l'shanah haba'ah b'arah d'yisrael.

Hashata avdei, l'shanah haba'ah b'nei chorin.

(This prayer originated in Babylon during the first Exile, and is therefore in Aramaic, not Hebrew.)

We are directed to read this in the local language – such as the English below.)

This is the bread of affliction, which our ancestors ate in the land of *Mitzraim*. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are in need come and take part in the *Pesach* sacrifice with us. Now we are here; next year may we be in the land of Israel. Now we are slaves; next year may we be free.

Put the seder plate down and return the shankbone, the egg, etc. onto the plate.

We know that the “bread of affliction” was *not* matzah. Torah tells us that they baked unleavened bread as they fled Egypt because they didn’t have time to wait for it to rise (*Ex 12:39*). Later, they remember, “in Egypt, we had pots of meat and ate our fill of bread (*Ex 16:3*); we ate fish and cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. (*Num 11:5*)” Perhaps a sumptuous meal is not always preferable to simple fare. We need to look deeper into the story. Tonight we’ll take sustenance together from our sacred story and a sacred meal.

Maggid, the Hebrew word for “story,” is at the root of the word *haggadah*. We are commanded to tell the story of the Exodus as though each of us were personally liberated from Egypt. Hasidic tradition holds that not only did God speak the universe into being at the time before time, but that God continues to speak us into existence even now. In retelling the story of the Exodus, we speak ourselves into our communal past.

Memory is not static, a rote retelling of a prior event. As Jews, we continually remember again; we retell and recast our past in light of changing communal experience and changing communal understanding.

Origins

Once we had two spring festivals: *Pesach*, a lambing holiday, and *Chag Ha-matzah*, a holiday celebrating the year’s first grain. In the second half of the thirteenth century BCE, when tradition tells us our people left Egypt, the two celebrations became one. The name *Pesach* comes from the sacrifice of the paschal lamb, and *matzah* (*‘to drain out’*) came to mean the unleavened bread which represents the haste of our departure.

Passover has four aspects. It is seasonal – rejoicing in spring. It is historical – marking the “birthday” of the Hebrew people. It is a festival of freedom. And it is a ritual of preparation for an ultimate redemption, of which our first redemption was a hint and a promise.¹ We anchor ourselves in the season, recall our founding story, and are challenged to confront the issues of slavery and freedom in the world and in ourselves.

The seder as we know it began to emerge during the Rabbinic period (200 BCE – 200 CE) modeled as a symposium discussing the topic of slavery and freedom; the four questions set the agenda. The Haggadah as we know it, emerged as a formalized telling with Saadia Gaon in the 10th century; it ‘stabilized’ by the 15th and 16th centuries. Within its structure, new versions continually abound, with content mixed from different periods and priorities. We are encouraged to tell and retell the story anew.

The Four Questions

It is traditional for the youngest person at a seder to ask the Four Questions. Each seder the questions are exactly the same. Why do we ask them year after year? To teach them to the newcomers, the new generations, and because as we grow and change, our questions take on new meanings, and the answers to them differ and expand. Because as we grow and change, we understand that there is no one right answer. As we grow and change, a different one among us may be asking the questions for the first time or in a new light.

To ask questions is to acknowledge first and foremost that we do not live in isolation, that we need each other. To ask questions is to signal our desire to grow. By admitting what we do not know, we take the first steps toward greater knowledge and learning. To ask questions is to signify our freedom.²

Fill the second cup of wine.

The youngest child (in years, or “at heart”) chants the questions and/or reads them aloud in Hebrew and/or English, so that they are understood by all.

מַה נִּשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת?

Mah nishtanah halaila hazeh mikol haleilot?

What is different this night from all other nights?

1. שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין חֶמֶץ וּמַצָּה.

הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כָּלוּ מַצָּה:

*Shebachol haleilot anu ochlin chameitz u'matzah,
halaila hazeh kulo matzah.*

1. On all other nights we eat leavened or unleavened bread.
Why on this night do we eat only *matzah*?

2. שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין שְׂאֵר יִרְקוֹת.

הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מְרוֹר:

*Shebachol haleilot anu ochlin sh'ar y'rakot,
halaila hazeh maror.*

2. On all other nights we eat various kinds of vegetables.
Why on this night do we eat bitter herbs?

3. שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אֵין אָנוּ מִטְבִּילִין אֶפִּילוּ פַּעַם אַחַת.

הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה שְׁתֵּי פְּעָמִים:

*Shebachol haleilot ein anu matbilin afilu pa'am echat,
halaila hazeh sh'tei f'amim.*

3. On all other nights we do not dip even once.
Why on this night do we dip twice?

4. שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין בֵּין יוֹשְׁבִין וּבֵין מְסֻבִּין.

הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כָּלָנוּ מְסֻבִּין:

*Shebachol haleilot anu och'lin beyn yoshvin u'vein m'subin,
halaila hazeh kulanu m'subin.*

4. On all other nights we eat either sitting up or reclining.
Why on this night do we eat reclining?

What is different tonight from all other nights?

Often, this is translated as a question – *why is tonight different from all other nights?* – but the Hebrew *mah* means *what*, not *why*. Some traditions suggest that this is a statement not a question – *what* is different tonight from all other nights. The thing that is different tonight is ‘what’: the fact that we are asking questions. Kabbalists identify this questioning as *chochmah* – wisdom – which also spells *koach mah* – the power of what.

1. On all other nights we may eat either *chametz* (leavened bread) or *matzah*; tonight, only *matzah*, that we may recall the unleavened bread our ancestors baked in haste when they left slavery.

Tonight we eat only *matzah* (literally ‘*drained out*’) so that we can take stock of what is essential to us, and recognize our *chametz*, that which has fermented within us and is puffing us up. Then we can choose what to freely embrace and move on from that which is enslaving us. What are the essentials in your life? What are the extras?

By choosing to eat with the intent of spiritual cleansing, we can recognize that which is eating *us*.

2. On all other nights we need not taste bitterness; tonight, we eat bitter herbs, that we may recall the suffering of slavery.

A Hasidic tale tells us that: “The real exile of Israel in Egypt was that they had learned to endure it.”

The transition from enslavement to freedom invariably comes with a taste of bitterness. The experience of slavery may have been bitter in itself, but in addition, the joyful taste of freedom invokes the bitter realization of what was missed, what was irrecoverably lost during that time.

3. On all other nights we needn’t dip (literally *matbilin*, ‘ritually immerse’) even once; tonight we dip twice. In our seder ritual, we dip in saltwater to remember the sweat and tears of our slavery, and in *charoset* to remember the mortar and the bricks which we made in forced labor.

Spiritually, we consider the immersions of the Exodus journey. In crossing the Reed Sea, what must we be cleansed of to leave *Mitzraim* (‘narrowness’) to enter the wilderness (‘*midbar*’) where we can hear God speak? And then, what must we be cleansed of in order to cross the Jordan river, to leave the wilderness and enter the Promised Land?

4. On all other nights we eat sitting up; tonight, we recline, to remind ourselves to savor our liberation.

What does it mean to live in the Promised Land, the Land of Milk and Honey – a place of sustenance and sweetness, where we can live in sacred community? In what ways do we inhabit this life? Do we embrace it, or are there ways that we remain in *Mitzraim* (constraint) or continue wandering in the wilderness? What is the cost of not fully inhabiting the Promised Land when we are there?

Once We Were Slaves

עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ לְפַרְעֹה בְּמִצְרַיִם. וַיּוֹצֵיאֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִשָּׁם.
בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָה,
וְאֵלֵינוּ לֹא הוֹצִיא הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת-אֲבוֹתֵינוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם.
הָרִי אָנוּ וּבְנֵינוּ וּבְנֵי בְנֵינוּ, מִשְׁעֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ לְפַרְעֹה בְּמִצְרַיִם.
וְאִפִּילוּ כְּלָנוּ חֲכָמִים, כְּלָנוּ נְבוֹנִים, כְּלָנוּ זְקֵנִים,
כְּלָנוּ יוֹדְעִים אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה, מִצְוָה עָלֵינוּ לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם.
וְכָל הַמְרֻבֶּה לְסַפֵּר בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם, הָרִי זֶה מְשֻׁבָּח:

*Avadim hayyinu l'far'o b'mitzrayim, v'yotzi-einu Adonai Eloheinu mi-sham
b'yad chazakah u'vizro'a n'tuyah,
v'ilu lo hotzi ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu et-avoteinu mi-Mitzrayim,
harei anu uvaneinu u'vnei vaneinu, m'shu-badim hayyinu l'Pharaoh b'Mitzrayim.
V'afilu kulanu chachamim, kulanu k'vonim, kulanu z'keinim,
kulanu yod'im et-ha-Torah, mitzvah aleinu l'saper b'y'tziat Mitzrayim.
V'chol hamarbeh l'saper bitziyat Mitzrayim, harei zeh m'shubach.*

We were slaves to a Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Eternal One, our God, led us out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Had God not taken our ancestors out of Egypt, then we and our children and our children's children would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. Therefore, even if all of us were wise scholars, all of us were sages, all of us were experienced in the ways of the world, all knowledgeable in Torah, it would still be our responsibility to tell about the Exodus from Egypt.

Whoever expands upon the story of the Exodus from Egypt is worthy of praise.

עֲבָדִים הָיִינוּ עַתָּה בְּנֵי חוֹרֵין

*Avadim hayinu, hayinu atah benei chorin benei chorin
Avadim hayinu atah atah benei chorin
Avadim hayinu atah atah benei chorin benei chorin.*

We were slaves, but now we are free.

“We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.” – Tonight we celebrate our liberation from Egypt. In Hebrew, Egypt, *Mitzrayim*, literally means “the narrow place.” But narrow places exist in more ways than one. Life in Egypt was actually one of prosperity. In the wilderness, the people remember being “in Egypt when we had pots of meat and ate our fill of bread (*Ex 16:3*); we ate fish, and cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. (*Num 11:5*)” The hardship was not scarcity of food but of spirit – being constrained in service to Pharaoh, a false god.

“We were slaves, but now we are free.” – Is this true? Though we no longer labor under Pharaoh's overseers, we may still be enslaved. Do we enslave ourselves to our jobs; our expectations; the expectations of others? To our fears; our ambitions?

Tonight we celebrate our liberation from the narrow place. Let us be mindful of the bondage – internal and external – that keeps us enslaved to false gods. This year, let our celebration of Passover stir us to move beyond these constraints.

And today, people are still oppressed. Until all are free, we are still enslaved. Let us work to improve conditions for everyone.

The Four Children

Four times the Torah bids us tell our children about the Exodus from Egypt. Four times the Torah repeats: “And you shall tell your child on that day” From this, our tradition infers four kinds of children...¹

כְּנֵנֵד אַרְבַּעַת בְּנִים דְּבִרְתָּה תוֹרָה. אֶחָד חָכָם, וְאֶחָד רָשָׁע, וְאֶחָד תָּם, וְאֶחָד שְׂאִינוּ יוֹדֵעַ לְשִׁאוֹל:

The Torah speaks of four kinds of children: one wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who does not yet know how to ask.

חָכָם מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר? מָה הָעֵדוּת וְהַחֻקִּים וְהַמִּשְׁפָּטִים, אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲתָכֶם? וְאֵיךְ אֶתָּה אֹמֵר-לוֹ כְּתִלְכוֹת הַפֶּסַח: אֵין מִפְּטִירֵין אַחַר הַפֶּסַח אֲפִיקוֹמָן:

The Wise One says: “What is the meaning of the rules, laws and practices which God has commanded us to observe?”

You shall tell this child the story of the Exodus and shall teach them Torah, midrash and commentary, down to the last detail.

The wise child can be seen as corresponding to the first of the Four Questions. Tonight we eat matzah, the most basic food imaginable. The essence of wisdom is to get back to the essentials, the understanding of what life is about. Pull back from your ego and see what really counts. That's the wise child.⁶

רָשָׁע מָה הוּא אוֹמֵר? מָה הָעֵבֶרָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם? לָכֶם וְלֹא לוֹ. וְלִפִּי שְׂהוּצִיא אֶת-עַצְמוֹ מִן הַכֶּלֶל, כְּפָר בְּעֵקֶר. וְאֵיךְ אֶתָּה הַקְּהֵה אֶת-שְׁנָיו, וְאֹמֵר-לוֹ: בְּעֵבוֹר זֶה, עָשָׂה יי לִי, בְּצִאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם, לִי וְלֹא-לוֹ. אֵלֹהֵי הָיָה שָׂם, לֹא הָיָה נִגָּאֵל:

The Evil (or alienated) One says: “What is the meaning of this service to you?”

You shall tell this child “I do this because of the wonderful things which God did for me when God brought me out of Egypt.” You shall say “for me,” not “for us,” because in asking what the service means “to you” the child has made it clear that they do not consider themselves a part of the community for whom the ritual has meaning.

This child embodies the second of the Four Questions, representing bitterness. This one is saying “Who needs God?” But that can leave a person trapped in their aloneness, chasing their desires and material possessions, lashing out at others. That is a life of *maror*, bitterness.⁶

תָּם מַה הוּא אוֹמֵר? מַה זֹאת? וְאָמַרְתָּ אֵלָיו: בְּחֶזֶק יָד הוֹצִיאָנוּ יְיָ מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים:

The Simple (or naive) One asks, “What is this?”

You shall tell this child of the deliverance from the house of bondage.

The naive child corresponds to the third question of dipping. The simple one relates to the experiential aspect of Judaism. Unfortunately it's often anti-Semitism that focuses the third child. We dip into salt water which represents the tears of the Hebrews. The major issues compelling many Jews today are the fear of Israel's obliteration and the memory of the Holocaust.⁶

וְשִׂיאָנוּ יוֹרֵעַ לְשֹׂאֵל, אֵת פֶּתַח לוֹ. שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ, בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר:
בְּעִבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה יְיָ לִי, בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם:

The One Who Does Not Know How To Ask

For this one you must open the way.

This child corresponds to the fourth question, of reclining. Being laid back can be a form of indecision. Comfort can offer freedom from necessity, allowing us to pursue higher goals, or complacency can foster apathy. At the seder, we're free and can use the opportunity to direct ourselves toward meaning, if we will engage ourselves.⁶

In truth, each of us is a composite of these four children. To some extent, we're all searching and thinking – like the first child. Yet sometimes we lash out from exasperation or cynicism – like the second child. And sometimes it takes a shocking immersion to arouse us to think and change – like the third child. And at times we are uncomprehending, in a glassy-eyed daze – like the fourth child. These are the four children present in each of us. Which ones will grow within us?

We can also look at the four children as an arc of development. The Wise one, the Alienated one, the Naive one, and the one who doesn't know how to ask. Taken in the opposite order they aptly describe the natural development of the human individual: the stage at which we are too young to even formulate questions; the stage at which we can only ask the innocent questions; the rebellious stage, when it's all “Your stuff, not mine!”; to the understanding stage of intellectual maturity.

But that's not the end of the journey. After the natural developmental path comes the spiritual developmental opportunities. The “stuck-in-the-head” self needs to go through a rebellion against rationalism as an exclusive means of understanding, and perhaps a suspension of dogmatic practice in order to discover the truth behind it. The innocent stage is when the true questions are rediscovered, simple questions that go straight to the heart of the matter. Finally, the point is reached when no more questions are necessary, when comfort and wisdom are found in silence, when the answer is simply, “Because.”³

The Exodus A story in seven short chapters

1.

Once upon a time our people went into *galut*, exile, in the land of Egypt. During a famine our ancestor Jacob and his family fled to Egypt where food was plentiful. His son Joseph had risen to high position in Pharaoh's court, and our people were well respected and well-regarded, secure in the power structure of the time.¹

2.

Generations passed and our people remained in Egypt. As rulers came and went, a new Pharaoh ascended to the throne. He felt threatened by Otherness, and ordered our people enslaved. In fear of rebellion, Pharaoh decreed that all newborn Hebrew boys be killed. Two midwives named *Shifrah* and *Puah* defied his orders, claiming that "the Hebrew women are so hardy, they give birth before we arrive!" Through their courage, a boy survived; midrash tells us he was radiant with light.¹

Fearing for his safety, his family placed him in a basket (*teiva* – ark) and he floated down the Nile. He was found, and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, who named him Moshe because *min ha-mayim m'shi-ti-hu*, from the water she drew him forth. She hired his mother Yocheved as his wet-nurse. Thus he survived to adulthood, and was raised as Prince of Egypt.¹

3.

Although a child of privilege, as he grew he became aware of the slaves who worked in the brickyards of his grandfather. When he saw an overseer mistreat a slave, he struck the overseer and killed him. Fearing retribution, he fled to *Midian* ('from judgment').¹

After raising a family there, one day in the wilderness, he turned aside when he saw a bush that burned but was not consumed. God spoke to him from the burning bush and called him to lead the Hebrew people to freedom. Moses argued with God, pleading inadequacy, but God disagreed. Sometimes our responsibilities choose us.¹

4.

Moses returned to Egypt and went to Pharaoh to argue the injustice of slavery. He gave Pharaoh a mandate which resounds through history: Let my people go! Pharaoh refused, and Moses warned him that Mighty God would strike *Mitzraim* – 'the narrowness'. These threats were not idle: ten terrible blows were unleashed. Only after devastation did Pharaoh agree to let the *Hebrews* leave; literally: 'those who cross over'.¹

5.

Fearful that Pharaoh would change his mind, our people left in haste, not waiting for their bread to rise. (For this reason we eat matzah as we take part in their journey.) Our people did not leave Egypt alone but as a "mixed multitude." From this we learn that liberation is not for us alone, but for all people of the earth. Midrash tells us that even Pharaoh's daughter left, trading her old title (*bat-Pharaoh*, daughter of Pharaoh) for the name *Batya*, "daughter of God."¹

6.

Pharaoh's army chased us to the Sea of Reeds. With nowhere else to go, one brave soul, *Nachshon*, plunged into the waters. Only when he had gone as far as he could go – in up to his nose – did the waters part for us. We mourn, even now, that Pharaoh's army drowned; our liberation is bittersweet because people died in our pursuit.¹

7.

To this day we relive our liberation, that we may not become complacent, that we may always rejoice in our freedom. We remember.¹ Time and again, Torah reminds us that “You shall not oppress the stranger, for you know the soul of the stranger, having been strangers in the land of Egypt.” (*Ex 23:9*)

Let My People Go

When Israel was in Egypt Land, Let my people go.
Oppressed so hard they could not stand, Let my people go.

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt Land, Tell ol' Pharaoh, Let my people go.

Thus said the Lord, bold Moses said, Let my people go.
If not I'll smite your first-born dead. Let my people go.

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt Land, Tell ol' Pharaoh, Let my people go.

As Israel stood by the waterside, Let my people go.
By God's command it did divide. Let my people go.

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt Land, Tell ol' Pharaoh, Let my people go.

The Biblical Telling

אָרַמִי אָבִי וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיִם וַיִּגְדַּל וַיִּבְרַח וַיִּהְיֶה שָׂם בְּמִתֵּי מִעֵט וַיְהִי שָׂם
לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל עָצוּם וְרַב.

My father was a wandering Aramean (Jacob). He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there, and became a great and very populous nation. (*Deut 26:5*)

וַיִּרְעוּ אֹתָנוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיַּעֲבִדוּנוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבָרָה קָשָׁה:

The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. (*Deut 26:6*)

וּנְצַעַק אֶל־יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ. וַיִּשְׁמַע יְיָ אֶת־קִלְנוֹ. וַיִּרְא אֶת־עֲנִינֵנוּ. וְאֶת־עֲמָלָנוּ. וְאֶת לַחֲצֵנוּ:

And we cried out to the Eternal One, the God of our ancestors, who heard our voice and witnessed our suffering, our toil and our oppression. (Deut 26:7)

וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ יְיָ מִמִּצְרַיִם. בְּיַד חֲזָקָה, וּבְזֶרַע נְטוּיָה, וּבְמָרָא גְדוֹל וּבְאֹתוֹת וּבְמוֹפְתִים:

Then the Eternal One brought us out from *Mitzraim* with a **mighty hand**, by an **outstretched arm** and **awesome power**, and by many signs and wonders. (Deut 26:8)

At the mention of each of these three wonders, dip a finger into the wine and a drop is spilled.

... Blood,	Dam	דָּם
and Fire,	va'eish	וְאֵשׁ
and Pillars of Smoke	v'tim-rot asan	וְתִמְרוֹת עָשָׁן

(Joel 3:3)

The Ten Plagues

One way of understanding the plagues (*macot*, 'blows') is as the alchemical process of transformation that it took for the Israelites to leave; to undergo the transition from Mitzraim-ites to Hebrews. They were the blows of destruction to life as they knew it – the dismemberment of their identities as people of the narrow place – until they could let go and walk into a new, as yet unknown, life.

The first three plagues, as described, affect everyone – blood, frogs, lice. To be convinced that it is beyond repair, one must recognize that the River of Life has become the River of Death; flowing with blood, the river stinks. Frogs, a symbol of salvational rebirth, flee the water into homes and die in heaps; renewal is not an option. The problem is at hand, and the land stinks. Lice infest every body, and the realization presses – the problem is upon me. As long as I stay here, I, too, stink. With the fourth plague (*arov* – mixture, or *erev* – evening), awareness emerges of an alternative, and Hebrews ("those who cross over") experience the plague differently from those still stuck in the narrow place. Even so, it takes another six plagues before the Hebrews can act, before they are ready to publicly mark their homes (with blood on the doorposts) and make a sacrifice (of the paschal lamb). The tenth plague ends as we started – affecting everyone – but our response is the difference. Those who are unable to leave *Mitzraim* condemn their children to enslaved life – the death of the first-born (the inheritors). Those who do leave choose the risk of entering the unknown with the possibility of a new life for the next generation.

What do you need to sacrifice in order to leave your narrow place, to be willing to walk into the wilderness?

Midrash teaches that, while watching the Mitzraim-ites (the people of the narrow place) succumb to the ten plagues, the angels broke into songs of jubilation. God rebuked them, saying "My creatures are perishing, and you sing praises?"

As we recite each plague, we spill a drop of wine — the symbol of joy — from our cups. Our joy in liberation will always be tarnished by the suffering it cost.

אלו עשר מכות שהביא הקדוש ברוך הוא על-המצרים במצרים, ואלו הן:

These are the ten plagues that the Holy One, Blessed Be, brought upon the *Mitzrim* in *Mitzraim*, and they are:

At the mention of each of the plagues, a finger is dipped into the wine and a drop is spilled.

Blood	<i>Dam</i>	דָּם
Frogs	<i>Tzfarde'ah</i>	צְפַרְדֵּיִעַ
Lice	<i>Kinim</i>	כִּנִּים
Swarms	<i>Arov</i>	עֲרוֹב
Cattle plague	<i>Dever</i>	דֶּבֶר
Boils	<i>Sh'chin</i>	שִׁחִין
Hail	<i>Barad</i>	בָּרָד
Locusts	<i>Arbeh</i>	אַרְבֵּה
Darkness	<i>Choshech</i>	חֹשֶׁךְ
Death of the First-Born	<i>Makat B'chorot</i>	מַכַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת

Three more drops are spilt upon mentioning the following abbreviated forms:

רַבִּי יְהוּדָה הָיָה נוֹתֵן בָּהֶם סִמָּנִים:

Rabbi Yehuda would give them by their initials:

D-Tza-Ch,

דְּצַח

A-Da-Sh,

אַדָּשׁ

B-A-Cha-V

בְּאַחַב

These plagues are in the past, but today's world holds plagues as well. Let us spill drops of wine as we recite these ten new plagues:¹ It is far too easy to name another ten, or another ten ... May they spur us on toward transformative growth. What do we need to sacrifice for change?

- Apathy in the face of evil**
- Brutal torture of the helpless**
- Cruel mockery of the old and the weak**
- Despair of human goodness**
- Envy of the joy of others**
- Falsehood and deception corroding our faith**

Greedy theft of earth's resources
 Hatred of learning and culture
 Instigation of war and aggression
 Justice delayed, justice denied, justice mocked...

Shechinah, soften our hearts and the hearts of our enemies. Help us to dream new paths to freedom, so that the next sea-opening is not also a drowning; so that our singing is never again their wailing. So that our freedom leaves no one orphaned, childless, gasping for air.¹

Dayenu: It Would Have Been Enough דינו

What does this mean, “It would have been enough”? Surely no one of these would indeed have been enough for us.

Dayenu means to celebrate each step toward freedom as if it were enough, then to start out on the next step. It means that if we reject each step because it is not the whole liberation, we will never be able to achieve the whole liberation. It means to sing each verse as if it were the whole song — and then sing the next verse.¹ Some journeys are communal and may take generations to complete. Then, we strive to take our present steps toward hope on the horizon – toward a future we may not ourselves see.

Had God:

Brought us out of Egypt but not divided the sea for us...	<i>Dayenu</i>
Divided the sea but not permitted us to cross on dry land...	<i>Dayenu</i>
Permitted us to cross on dry land	
but not sustained us for forty years in the desert...	<i>Dayenu</i>
Sustained us for forty years in the desert	
but not fed us with manna...	<i>Dayenu</i>
Fed us with manna and but not given us the Sabbath...	<i>Dayenu</i>
Given us the Sabbath but not brought us to Mount Sinai...	<i>Dayenu</i>
Brought us to Mount Sinai but not given us the Torah...	<i>Dayenu</i>
Given us the Torah but not led us into the land of Israel...	<i>Dayenu</i>
Led us into the land of Israel but not built for us the Temple...	<i>Dayenu</i>
Built for us the Temple but not sent us prophets of truth...	<i>Dayenu</i>
Sent us prophets of truth but not made us a holy people...	<i>Dayenu</i>
For all these, alone and together, we say...	<i>Dayenu</i>

Ilu hotzi hotzianu, hotzianu mimitzrayim, hotzianu mimitzrayim, dayenu
Da, dayenu, da, dayenu, da dayenu, dayenu dayenu
Ilu natan natan lanu, natan lanu et haShabbat, natan lanu et haShabbat, dayenu
Da, dayenu, da, dayenu, da dayenu, dayenu dayenu
Ilu natan natan lanu, natan lanu et haTorah, natan lanu et haTorah, dayenu

בְּכָל-דּוֹר וְדוֹר חַיֵּב אָדָם לְרַאוֹת אֶת-עֲצָמוֹ, כְּאִלּוּ הוּא יֵצֵא
מִמִּצְרַיִם. שְׁנַאֲמַר: וְהַגִּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בַיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר: בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה
יְיָ לִי, בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם. לֹא אֶת-אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בִּלְבַד, גָּאֵל הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ
הוּא, אֶלָּא אַף אֹתֵנוּ גָאֵל עָמָהֶם. שְׁנַאֲמַר: וְאוֹתֵנוּ הוֹצִיא מִשָּׁם.
לְמַעַן הָבִיא אֹתֵנוּ, לְתֵת לָנוּ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם.

In each and every generation, each individual should feel personally redeemed from *Mitzraim*, as it is said: “On that day you will retell to your children, saying: ‘We are doing this because of what God did for me when I came out of *Mitzraim*.’” (*Ex 13:8*) For God redeemed not only our ancestors; God redeemed us with them, as it is said: “God freed **us** from there, that God might take **us** and give **us** the land that God promised to our ancestors.” (*Deut 6:23*)

Redemption – *being valued for whom we truly are* – isn’t a one-time thing that happened to our ancestors in bygone times; it is an ongoing experience, something that can ripple into our consciousness every day. We, too, were redeemed from Egypt (*narrowness*), and we are perennially offered the possibility of living in a state of redemption if only we will open our hearts and our eyes.¹

Hallel – celebration is now

We start the *Hallel*, the praises, before dinner. It alerts us to the fact that the celebration begins here with rejoicing about *Pesach*, *Mitzraim*, the first *Pesach* in Egypt and that first redemption. ... The rejoicing continues through the meal, which marks the present ... and continues beyond the Grace after Meals. It extends to the part of the seder where ... the *Pesach* of the future is discussed. We leave a bit of the celebration for the future.²

Lift the cup of wine.

Therefore we should revere, adore, glorify and praise the One who performed all these miracles for our ancestors and for us. God took us from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to happiness, from mourning to celebration, from darkness to great light, from slavery to redemption.

וְנֹאמַר לְפָנָיו שִׁירָה חֲדָשָׁה, הַלְלוּיָהּ.

V'nomar lifanav shirah chadashah (2x) Halleluyah (4x)

We sing before God a new song. *Halleluyah*.

Set the cup down.

הַלְלוּיָהּ. הַלְלוּ עַבְדֵי יְיָ. הַלְלוּ אֶת-שֵׁם יְיָ.

Halleluyah. Hallelu avdei Adonai. Hallelu et-shem Adonai.

Halleluyah! Singing, celebrate Yah, you who serve the Eternal One,
Praise the name of the Eternal One! (*Psalms 113*)

SECOND CUP OF WINE

The second cup of wine represents God's second declaration of redemption: *V'hi-tzal-ti* – "I will free you from slavery."

We continue the process of liberation as we drink the second cup. We have experienced the awareness of degradation that compelled the Hebrews to resist enslavement. We drink this second cup in honor of redemption, even as we acknowledge the continuing struggle and the unknown road through the wilderness.¹

Raise a cup of wine and recite:

Blessed are you, Eternal One our God, Essence of all creation, who has redeemed us and our ancestors from Egypt, and has enabled us to reach this night in order to eat *matzah* and *maror*. May you, Eternal One, our God and God of our ancestors, make it possible for us to celebrate other holidays and festivals in peace, joyful in the rebuilding of the City of Peace and happy in Your service. We will offer a new song of gratitude for our physical and spiritual liberation. Praised are you, Eternal One, redeemer of the people Israel.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַנֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, bo-rei p'ri ha-ga-fen.

You are the Source of blessing, *YHVH*, our God, Essence of all creation, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Drink while reclining.

רְחִצָּה RACHTZA: WASH THE HANDS

Once again we wash our hands, but much has changed since the seder began. We have passed through the long night of *Mitzraim*, and we stand on the far side of the Sea of Reeds. We now wash our hands to celebrate our crossing the sea, our rebirth as a free people. Now we recite a blessing, for our hands are free to perform acts of holiness, to eat *matzah*, the symbol of liberation.

In this moment of celebration, may this water, symbolically drawn from Miriam's well, cleanse us of all the wounds and pain of *Mitzraim*. For even as we remember the past, we are called to strive for a healing future.

We consecrate our hands to the task of building freedom for all who suffer.²

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל נְטִילַת יָדַיִם:

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu al n'tilat yadayim.*

You are the Source of blessing, *YHVH*, our God, Essence of all creation, Who has sanctified us with *mitzvot*, and commanded us to wash (raise) our hands.

מוֹצִיא / מַצָּה MOTZI / MATZAH: BLESS & EAT

רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל הָיָה אוֹמֵר: כָּל שֶׁלֹּא אָמַר שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים אֵלּוּ בַּפֶּסַח,
לֹא יֵצֵא יְרֵי חוֹבְתּוֹ, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן:

פֶּסַח מַצָּה וּמָרֹר:

Rabban Gamliel would say: those who have not discussed three things during the seder have not fulfilled their obligation. These are:

Pesach (the paschal lamb), ***matzah***, and ***maror***.

Why do we eat *matzah*?

Because during the Exodus, our ancestors had no time to wait for dough to rise. So they made flat cakes without yeast, which could be baked and consumed in haste. The *matzah* reminds us that when the chance for liberation comes, we must seize it even if we do not feel ready. Indeed, if we wait until we feel fully ready, we may never act at all.¹

By choosing to eat *matzah*, we are engaging in the spiritual discipline of focusing our attention on what we take in. By eating this essential essence of bread – with none of the extras (*chametz*) – we dedicate a week to taking stock of what is essential and to reorienting our lives.

Remove all two and a half matzot from the covering. Hold them up and say the two blessings:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ:

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.*

You are the Source of blessing, *YHVH*, our God, Essence of all creation,
Who brings forth bread from the earth.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,
וְצִוָּנוּ עַל אֲכִילַת מַצָּה:

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu
al achilat matzah.*

You are the Source of blessing, *YHVH*, our God, Essence of all creation,
Who has sanctified us with *mitzvot*, and commanded us to eat *matzah*.

Eat from the top and middle matzot while reclining. Eat in silent meditation.

מָרוֹר MAROR: BITTER HERBS

Why do we eat *maror*?

Maror represents the bitterness of bondage. Why do we eat *charoset*? It symbolizes the mortar for the bricks our ancestors laid in Egypt. Though it represents slave labor, *charoset* is sweet, reminding us that sometimes constriction or enslavement can be masked in familiar sweetness.¹

Another interpretation suggests that the sweet apples, nuts and wine of *charoset* represent springtime passion. During *Pesach* we are directed to read the story of *Song of Songs* – a story of mature adult freedom. *Charoset* can remind us of the sweet alternative to enslavement. We may find sweetness in either security or in freedom; we need to be aware of what we are delighting in.

Eating both *charoset* and *maror* together, we remind ourselves to be mindful of life with all its sweetness and bitterness, and to seek balance between the two.

Take the a lettuce leaf or horseradish and dip it into the charoset and recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ
עַל אֲכִילַת מָרוֹר:

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu
al achilat maror.*

You are the Source of blessing, *YHVH*, our God, Essence of all creation,
Who has sanctified us with *mitzvot*, and commanded us to eat *maror*.

Eat the maror and the charoset without reclining.

כֹּרֶךְ KORECH: HILLEL SANDWICH

Take pieces of the bottom matzah and make a sandwich with the lettuce or horseradish. There are some opinions that suggest adding a touch of charoset as well. Recite:

When the Temple still stood, the sage Hillel originated the tradition of eating *matzah* and *maror* together, combining the bread of liberation with a remembrance of the bitterness of slavery. In following his example, we create a physical representation of the holiday's central dialectical tension.¹

Why did our ancestors eat the *pesach* offering during the time of the Temple? As a reminder that the Holy One protected the houses of our ancestors in *Mitzraim*, as it says: It is the ***Pesach*** sacrifice to the Eternal One, who ***pesached*** the houses of the people of Israel in *Mitzraim*, when God afflicted *Mitzraim*, but saved our homes. (*Ex 12:27*)

Eat the matzah & maror sandwich while reclining, as we remember the pesach offering in ancient times.

What about the orange?

A folk tradition claims that someone once criticized Jewish feminism by shouting, “Women belong on the *bimah* (pulpit) like oranges belong on the seder plate!” Hence, many women today include oranges on their seder plates, as a symbol that women belong wherever Jews carry on a sacred life. Women do belong in Judaism, whether on the *bimah* or at the seder table, but that’s not actually how the orange tradition began.¹

In the early 1980s, Susannah Heschel attended a feminist seder where bread was placed on the seder plate, a reaction to a *rebbeztin* who had claimed lesbians had no more place in Judaism than bread crusts have at a seder.

“Bread on the seder plate...renders everything *chametz*, and its symbolism suggests that being lesbian is transgressive, violating Judaism,” Heschel writes. “I felt that an orange was suggestive of something else: the fruitfulness for all Jews when lesbians and gay men are contributing and active members of Jewish life.”¹ In addition, each orange segment had a few seeds that had to be spit out – a gesture of spitting out, repudiating the homophobia of Judaism. To speak of slavery and long for liberation, she says, “demands that we acknowledge our own complicity in enslaving others.”

An orange on the seder plate, then, represents the radical feminist notion that there is — there must be — a place at the table for all of us, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. As Jews we constantly re-create ourselves, and so the symbol of a fruit that carries within, the seeds of its own rebirth.¹

And the olive?

Another new item on the seder plate is an olive. After the Flood, Noah’s dove brought back an olive branch as a sign that the earth was again habitable. Today ancient olive groves are destroyed by violence, making a powerful symbol of peace into a casualty of war.¹

An olive on the seder plate holds an embodied prayer for peace, in the Middle East and every place where war destroys lives, hopes, and the freedoms we celebrate tonight.¹

Traditionally, olive oil was used for light, food and cleansing. The olive symbolizes hope for an anointed future – for a world at peace, awash in spiritual light and sustenance.

שְׁלַחן עֹרֵךְ SHULCHAN ORECH: THE FESTIVE MEAL

Eat the meal with mindfulness, gratitude and joy, for the manner in which you consume will affect the unification of the Holy Name. Each bite can unite the *yod* from the first cup and the *hey* from the second cup, together with the *vav* from the third cup and the *hey* from the fourth cup.³

“Become a person for whom satisfying the needs of the body is a spiritual experience. Some people eat to have the strength to study Torah. Others, more spiritually awakened, study Torah in order to learn how to eat.” – Reb Nachman of Bratzlav³

And thus shall you eat it: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste; it is a Pesach offering to YHVH. (Exodus 12:11)

צפון TZAFUN: AFIKOMAN

After the meal, find the afikoman and distribute it to all who are seated at the table.

When the Temple still stood in Jerusalem, it was customary to make an offering of a paschal lamb at this season. Now we eat the *afikoman* in memory of the offering. *Tzafun* means “hidden,” and the *afikoman* is usually hidden for children to find. Why end the meal this way? Because we want the dinner to end with the taste of essential freedom in our mouths — thus the taste of *matzah*, rather than some unrelated sweet.

But this explains eating *matzah* late, not the charade of hiding it. The hiding works on two levels: it intrigues the kids — and it allows us to affirm our sense of the Hidden and Mysterious. On this theory, we hide the larger half of the broken *matzah* because we are affirming that there is more that is Hidden and Mysterious in the world than any information we can gather.¹

We prepared for Pesach in the night, searching for the hidden *chametz*, leavened bread; we end the seder in the night, searching for the *matzah*, unleavened bread.

With the generations that have come before us and with one another, our search began. We turn to the children to continue the search, as we know the task must be passed into the hands of the next generation. It is there our hope lives on.²

Eat the afikoman while reclining.

בָּרַךְ BARECH: BLESS THE SOURCE OF THE MEAL

בְּרִיךְ רַחֲמָנָה מַלְקָה דְּעָלְמֵי מַרְי דְּהַי פְּתָא.

Brich rachamana, malka d'alma, marei d'hai pita.

You are the source of life for all that is and Your blessings flow through me.

Literally: “Blessed is the merciful one, sovereign of all worlds, source of this bread.”

According to the Talmud, this one-liner is the briefest blessing one can make while still fulfilling the obligation to bless one’s meal.

(The Aramaic and the English can be sung to a variety of melodies.)

Prayer After Eating

I have taken in the light
that quickened eye and leaf.
May my brain be bright with praise
of what I eat, in the brief blaze
of motion and of thought.
May I be worthy of my meat.¹

— Wendell Berry

פֹּתַח אֶת יָדְךָ וּמְשַׁבֵּיעַ לְכֹל חַי רָצוֹן:

Potei'ach et yadecha, u'masbi'a l'chol chai ratzon (x2)

You open Your hand, I open my heart to this abundance (x2)
And all life, all will is satisfied; all life, all will is satisfied.

— Psalm 145

V'achalta, V'savata, Uv'rachta

Chorus: v'a-chalta, v'sa-vata, uv'rach-ta

וְאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַעְתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ

We ate when we were hungry, and now we're satisfied
We thank the Source of Blessing, for all that S/He provides.

Hunger is a yearning, in body and in soul
Earth, air, fire, water, and Spirit makes us whole.

Giving and receiving, we open up our hands
From seed time to harvest, we're partners with the land.

We share in a vision of wholeness and release
Where every child is nourished, and we all live in peace (Amen!)

— Hannah Tiferet Siegel

THIRD CUP OF WINE

The third cup of wine represents God's third declaration of redemption: *V'go-al-ti* – “I will liberate you with an outstretched arm...”

We drink this third cup in gratitude for all the gifts we have been given. The seder reminds us of the gifts of relationships – of friends and family; and of our prosperity – good food and drink. We offer thanks for those and for the greater gift of the ability to challenge, to question, to choose, and therefore to strive for freedom.¹ *Israel* means “one who wrestles with God and with people and is able.” Our greatest gift is the ability to choose to be a holy people.

Raise a cup of wine and recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, bo-rei p'ri ha-ga-fen.

You are the Source of blessing, *YHVH*, our God, Essence of all creation,
Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Drink while reclining.

In Every Generation

The powerful civilizations of Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Rome, and others have each tried to conquer our people, but the small tribe of Hebrews has persisted and prospers today, with influence beyond its numbers, while those ruling empires have succumbed to history.

The promise has been reliable for our ancestors and ourselves, for not only was there once an enemy that tried to destroy us. In every generation there have been those who wished to destroy us, but the Holy One rescues us from their hands.

“A Jew who does not believe in miracles is not a realist.” – David Ben Gurion

In the traditional haggadah, without introduction or explanation, the following account is related:

מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרַבֵּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר, וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ, וְרַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן-עֲזַרְיָה, וְרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא,
וְרַבִּי טַרְפוֹן, שֶׁהָיוּ מְסֻבִּין בְּבֵנֵי-בְרַק, וְהָיוּ מְסַפְּרִים בִּיצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם,
כָּל-אוֹתוֹת הַלַּיְלָה, עַד שֶׁבָּאוּ תַלְמִידֵיהֶם וְאָמְרוּ לָהֶם: רַבּוֹתֵינוּ,
הַגִּיעַ זְמַן קְרִיאַת שְׁמַע, שֶׁל שַׁחֲרִית:

It came to pass that Rabbi Eliezer, and Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Elazar son of Azarya, and Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Tarfon were in B'nei Brak discussing the Exodus from Egypt. They discussed it all night, until their students came to them to say, “Our teachers, the time has come for saying the morning Shema!”

Many questions have arisen about this snippet of text. What were these rabbis doing in B'nei Brak, which was the hometown of Rabbi Akiva only? Why didn't their students join them in celebrating the seder? Why didn't the rabbis themselves notice the rising of the sun?

Context is everything. This story takes place during the rule of the Roman emperor Hadrian, who ordered that the Temple be moved so he could put a temple to Jupiter on the Temple Mount. In the year 123 of the Common Era, a guerilla insurgency began, which resulted in a crack-down by the Roman authorities.

B'nei Brak was the headquarters of the rebellion against Roman occupation, a rebellion of which Rabbi Akiva was a leader. Because of rebel activities, the Roman authorities had forbidden gatherings of Jews, on pain of death. The seder described in this passage was used not only as a chance to discuss the liberation from Egypt — but also to plan a strategy of resistance against Roman occupation. The students were standing guard, ready to caution the rabbis to disband at daybreak, lest they be caught.

This tale may be read as an encouragement to become so joyfully immersed in the seder that we don't notice the passing of time...and it may also be read as a story of how one liberation begets another. Celebrating our freedom from servitude can be a radical act. It was Rabbi Akiva, after all, who famously answered the query, “Which is better, study or action?” with the response, “Study — if it leads to action.”¹

The Jews of Bergen-Belsen had no *matzot* for Pesach in 1944. It was decided that the eating of leaven was permissible and that the following *kavanah* should be recited before meals:

“Our God in Heaven, behold it is evident and known to you that it is our desire to do your will and to celebrate the festival of *Pesach* by eating *matzah* and by observing the prohibition of *chametz*. But our hearts are pained that the enslavement prevents us from eating *matzah*, and we are in danger of our lives. Behold we are ready to fulfill your commandment: ‘And you shall live by them and not die by them.’ Therefore, our prayer to you is that you may keep us alive and save us and rescue us speedily so that we may observe your commandments and do your will and serve you with a perfect heart. Amen.”²

We were slaves in Egypt and slaves in fascist Europe. We resisted and we fought back. We remember the heroism of Jews and our allies – men, women, and children who fought in the ghettos, in the camps, in the forests, on the war fronts. We will be true to their memory by being fighters for freedom and justice in our land and throughout the world.

We remember our glorious brothers and brave sisters who fought so courageously against the Nazis. We remember Hannah Senesch and Haviva Reik, who parachuted behind enemy lines in Hungary and Slovakia to organize resistance and rescue Jews. We remember Vladka Meed, and Chaika and Frumka Plotnitski, who served as couriers and smuggled arms for the ghetto fighters. We remember Rosa Robota, who organized the smuggling of dynamite to blow up a crematorium in Auschwitz. Chaika Grossman, Gusta Drenger, Zivia Lubetkin, Gisi Fleishman, Tosia Altman, Zofia Yamaika, Niuta Teitelboim – these are but a few of the names we know.

We have much to remember.⁴

אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי יִגְמַר לְעוֹלָם
הַחֹל וְהַיָּם רִשְׁרוּשׁ שֶׁל הַמַּיִם
בְּרַק הַשָּׁמַיִם תִּפְלֵת הָאָדָם

*Eyli, Eyli, she-lo yiga-meir l'olam:
Hachol v'hayam, rish-rush shel ha-mayim,
b'rak ha-sha-mayim, t'fi-lat ha-adam.*

O Lord, my God, I pray that these things never end:
The sand and the sea, The rush of the waters,
The crash of the heavens, The prayer of the heart.

– Hannah Senesch

Kaddish

It is our tradition to say *Kaddish*, a prayer of praise and peace, for a loved one who has died. During the Holocaust and throughout history many have died with no one to remember them. Tonight we remember. Tonight we recite Kaddish for those people.⁴

Stand and recite:

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא. בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ וְיִמְלִיךָ מַלְכוּתָהּ
בְּחַיִּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵגְלָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב.
וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלַם וּלְעֵלְמֵי עֵלְמָא
יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל
שְׁמֵהּ דְקֻדְשָׁא. בְּרִיךְ הוּא.
לְעֵלָא מִן כָּל בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירָתָא תְּשַׁבְּחָתָא וְנַחֲמָתָא דְאַמִּירָן בְּעֵלְמָא.
וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:
עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל
(וְעַל כָּל יוֹשְׁבֵי תֵבֵל) וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

*Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba. B'alma divra chir-utei v'yamlich malchutei,
b'cha-yeichon uv'yo-meichon uv'cha-yei d'chol beit Yisrael, ba'agala uvizman kariv,
v'imru: amen.*

Y'hei shmei raba m'varach l'alam ul'almei alma-ya.

*Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpa-ar v'yitromam v'yitnasei, v'yit-hadar v'yitaleh v'yit-halal,
shmei d'kudsha, b'rich hu.*

*L'eila min kol bir-chata v'shirata, tush-b'chata v'nechemata, da-amiran b'alma
v'imru: amen.*

Y'hei shlama raba min sh'maya, v'chayim aleinu v'al kol Yisrael, v'imru: amen.

*Oseh shalom bim'romav, hu ya'aseh shalom, aleinu v'al kol Yisrael,
(v'al kol yoshvei teiveil) v'imru: amen.*

May God's essence be revealed as great and holy throughout the universes which are constantly created with Divine purpose. May the realm of the sacred be established in our lifetime. And let us say: Amen.

May the Holy Name be blessed in all worlds, forever. May it be glorified, exalted, hailed and upraised beyond any song or praise or description we could utter, and let us say: Amen.

May there be all-encompassing peace and wholeness of sacred life for us and all who wrestle with the Unknown, and let us say: Amen.

May the Unity that holds wholeness in the highest and deepest places make peace for all of us, and let us say: Amen.

The Cups of Miriam and Elijah

Raise Miriam's Cup of water and recite:

In the years of wandering in the desert, Miriam's well accompanied the Hebrews. According to tradition, Miriam's well is still with us. Every Saturday night, at the end of Shabbat, its waters flow out into wells everywhere in the world.

While the return of Elijah is left to the future and all its potential, Miriam is present with us always. She is here to provide healing, sustenance, and wisdom. She and her waters sustain us as we await Elijah.

There is still a long journey to freedom, a long while before Elijah can herald the messianic age. Miriam the prophet calls us to work for – not wait for – that day.

She sustains us with the most basic substance on earth – water that cleanses and heals. She lifts our hearts as she leads us once again in song and dance.

Elijah's cup remains untouched by us. But we now drink from Miriam's cup, the nurturing waters of Miriam's well.²

You abound in blessings, God, Creator of the universe,
Who sustains us with living water.
May we, like the children of Israel leaving Mitzraim,
be guarded and nurtured and kept alive in the wilderness,
and may You give us wisdom to understand that
the journey itself holds the promise of redemption. Amen.¹

Drink from Miriam's Cup. It can be passed around the table for everyone to pour a sip for their neighbor.

Elijah's Cup

Fill the fourth cup. Everyone can pour a little from their cups into Elijah's Cup, or fill Elijah's Cup along with the other cups. Open the door for Elijah

It will require all of our efforts together to work toward redemption.

We open our doors and our hearts to welcome Elijah into our homes. Elijah, the eternal wanderer, is given a momentary respite and a drink from his cup before continuing his endless quest for the end of days. Elijah, the eternal companion of the Jewish people, will herald the messianic age.

In the meantime, he reminds us of the hope he carries. He reappears at moments when that hope is tangible – at the seder and at the birth of children.²

The Messiah will not come until he is no longer needed.

He will not come until a day after his arrival.

He will not come on the last day, but on the last of all.

– Franz Kafka

Talmud tells us that the messiah sits at the entrance to the gates of the city amidst the poor, wrapped in bandages, suffering from disease. Like them, the messiah is bandaged from head to toe. When the beggars are ready to change their bandages, they unwind them all at the same time. But the messiah changes them one by one, in order to be ready whenever summoned. (*B. Sanhedrin 98a*)

This suggests that, in fact, the messiah is already prepared to come, waiting to be called. Perhaps it is we who are not yet ready for the arrival; we do not summon.

Perhaps when we find ourselves ready to greet the messiah, we will find that the messianic age has already arrived – among us, in our expanded awareness.

All stand and sing:

אֱלֹהֵינוּ תִּנְבִּיא אֱלֹהֵינוּ תִּתְשָׁבִי
אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ תִּגְלַעְדֵּי.
בְּמַהְרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ יָבֵא אֱלֵינוּ
עִם מְשִׁיחַ בֶּן דָּוִד, עִם מְשִׁיחַ בֶּן דָּוִד.

*Eliyahu hanavi, Eliyahu hatishbi,
Eliyahu, Eliyahu, Eliyahu hagiladi.
Bimherah veyameinu, yavo eleinu
Im mashiach ben David, im mashiach ben David.*

Elijah, the prophet; Elijah, the Tishbite; Elijah, the Gileadite!
Come quickly in our days with the Messiah from the line of David.

מְרִים תִּנְבְּעָה עִז בְּזִמְרָה בְּיָדָהּ
מְרִים טְרַקֵּד עֲתָנוּ לְתַקֵּן אֶת הָעוֹלָם.
בְּמַהְרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ הִיא תִּבְיָאנוּ
אֵל מֵי הַיְשׁוּאָה, אֵל מֵי הַיְשׁוּאָה!

*Miriam ha-n'vi'ah oz v'zimrah b'yadah.
Miriam tirkod itanu l'taken et ha-olam.
Bimheirah v'yameinu hi t'vi'einu
El mei ha-y'shuah; el mei ha-y'shuah.*

Miriam the prophet, strength and song in her hand;
Miriam, dance with us in order to increase the song of the world!
Miriam, dance with us in order to repair the world.
Soon she will bring us to the waters of redemption!

FOURTH CUP OF WINE

The fourth cup of wine represents God's fourth declaration of redemption: *V'la-kach-ti* – "I will claim you for me as a people, and I will be your God."

Awareness, redemption, and gratitude accompanied our first three cups. The fourth cup is the cup of hope: Hope that next year we will all be free, that next year children and parents, neighbors and nations will turn their hearts toward one another. Hope that next year Jerusalem will be a city of peace.¹

The name 'Jerusalem' can be understood as "*Ir-shalom-ayim*" – "city of peace/wholeness of two." May we live in a community of wholeness beyond duality.

Raise a cup of wine and recite:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַנֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, bo-rei p'ri ha-ga-fen.

You are the Source of blessing, *YHVH*, our God, Essence of all creation, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

In celebration, we add another blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁעָשִׂי בֶן / בַּת חוֹרִין.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, she-asani ben / bat chorin.

You are the Source of blessing, *YHVH*, our God, Essence of all creation, Who has made me free.

Drink while reclining.

הַלֵּל HALLEL: PRAISE

From the straits I called to You; You answered me with great expansiveness.
Adonai is mine; I have no fear of what humanity may do.
God is my strength and my song, and will be my salvation.
Open for me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter and offer praise.
This is the gate of Adonai; righteous people enter through it!
The stone the builders have rejected has become the cornerstone.
This is Adonai's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.
This is the day which God has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

— from Psalm 118

נְשַׁמַּת כָּל חַי, תְּבָרַךְ אֶת שְׁמֶךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ.
וְרוּחַ כָּל בָּשָׂר, תִּפְאֶר וּתְרוֹמֵם זְכוּרָךְ מִלְּכֻנֵי תָמִיד,
מִן הָעוֹלָם וְעַד הָעוֹלָם אַתָּה אֵל.

*Nishmat kol chai tivareich et shimcha, Yah Eloheinu.
V'ruach kol basar, t'fa-eir ut'romeim zich-recha malkeinu tamid,
min ha-olam v'ad ha-olam atah eil.*

The breath of all life praises Your name, Yah our God.
And the spirit enlivening all flesh offers praises to You, Eternal;
from one world to the next, You are God.

הַלְלוּ הַלְלוּ הַלְלוּ, הַלְלוּ הַלְלוּ הַלְלוּ, (2)
כָּל הַנְּשַׁמָּה, תְּהַלֵּל יְיָ, הַלְלוּ הַלְלוּיָהּ (2)

*Hallelu hallelu hallelu, hallelu hallelu hallelu (2)
Kol ha-n'shamah, t'haleil Yah, hallelu halleluyah (2)*

*Praise; Every soul breath shall praise God
– from Psalm 150*

יִשְׁתַּבַּח שְׁמֶךָ לְעַד מִלְּכֻנֵי, הָאֵל הַמְּלִיךְ הַגָּדוֹל וְהַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּשִׁמּוֹם וּבְאֶרֶץ. כִּי לְךָ נִאֲדָה,
יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֵלֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ: שִׁיר וְשִׁבְחָה, הַלֵּל וְזִמְרָה, עֲזֵר וּמְשָׁלָה, נִצְחָה, גְּדֻלָּה
וְגִבוּרָה, תְּהַלֵּל וְתִפְאֶרֶת, קִדְשָׁה וּמְלָכוּת. בְּרָכוֹת וְהוֹדָאוֹת מֵעַתָּה וְעַד עוֹלָם.
בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ מְלִיךְ מְהֻלָּל בַּתְּשֻׁבָחוֹת.

*Yishtabach shimcha la-ad malkeinu, ha-el ha-melech ha-gadol v'ha-kadosh bashamayim u-vaaretz.
Ki l'cha naeh, Adonai eloheinu v'elohei avoteinu: shir u-shvacha, hallel v'zimrah, oz umemshalah,
netzach, g'dulah u-gvurah, i'hilah v'tiferet, k'dusha u-malchut. Brachot v'hoda'ot
me-atah v'ad olam. Baruch atah, Adonai, melech m'hulal b'tishbachot.*

All Your works shall praise You, our Creator; the righteous will praise You in joyous song.
We will thank, exalt, revere and sanctify You. It is good to give thanks to You, and
fitting to sing praises to Your name, for You are Eternal from everlasting to everlasting.
Blessed are You, Adonai, sovereign who is praised in song!

ספירת העומר COUNTING THE OMER

Skip this section for a first night seder.

The Counting of the Omer (originally a harvest offering of grain) starts on the second night of Pesach and lasts for seven weeks – 49 days. Remembering the time it took the Children of Israel to get from Mitzraim to Sinai, we count off the days until Shavuot, when we celebrate receiving the revelation of Torah. The Kabbalists identify this mystical journey of seven times seven days as a journey through the Tree of Life.

As we take the time each day to consider its unique combination of energies, we have the opportunity to experience each day of our life as a unique chance to be present, whatever 'energies' the day brings. Each day can be a step toward Sinai, toward our sacred covenant, but the process can't be rushed. We must take it one day at a time, and every day counts.

If the plagues were the process of dismembering life in slavery, then counting the Omer is the process of remembering ourselves in freedom – created in the divine image and members of a sacred community.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו,
וְצִוָּנוּ עַל סְפִירַת הָעוֹמֵר.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam,
asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu
al sefirat ha-omer.*

You are the Source of blessing, *YHVH*, our God, Essence of all creation,
Who has sanctified us with *mitzvot* and commanded us to count the *Omer*.

הַיּוֹם יוֹם אֶחָד לָעוֹמֵר

Hayom yom echad la-omer.

Today is the first day of the *Omer*.

רְבוּנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם... בְּכֵן יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ. שְׂבִיחוֹת
סְפִירַת הָעוֹמֵר שֶׁסְּפַרְתִּי הַיּוֹם. יִתְקַן מֵה שֶׁפָּגַמְתִּי בְּסְפִירַת חֶסֶד שֶׁבְּחֶסֶד
וְאַטְהַר וְאַתְקַדֵּשׁ בְּקִדְּשָׁה שֶׁל מַעְלָה. וְעַל יְדֵי זֶה יִשְׁפַע שְׁפַע רַב בְּכָל
הָעוֹלָמוֹת. וְיִתְקַן אֶת נַפְשׁוֹתֵינוּ, וְרוּחֹתֵינוּ, וְנַשְׁמוֹתֵינוּ. מִכָּל סִיג וּפְגָם, וְלִטְהַרֵינוּ
וְלִקְדָּשָׁנוּ בְּקִדְּשֶׁךָ הָעֲלִיּוֹנָה. אָמֵן סְלָה.

Creator of the universe, ... may it be your will, *Adonai*, our God and God of our ancestors, that in the merit of the Counting of the *Omer* that I have counted today, may there be corrected whatever imbalance I have caused in the *sefirah*:

Chesed of Chesed – the Lovingkindness of Lovingkindness.

May I be cleansed and sanctified with the holiness of Above, and through this may abundant bounty flow in all the worlds. And may it align our lives, spirits, and souls, transmuted all sediment and blemish; may it cleanse us and sanctify us with your exalted holiness. *Amen, Selah!*

Today is the day to consider your quality of lovingkindness. In what manner do you give love ... or receive it? Are you giving with *kavanah* (intentionality), sharing the sacred gift that gives life to you? Are you able to receive the love that is given to you? Do you treat yourself and others with the same lovingkindness? Do you know how to say "yes" – "*hineini*, here I am"?

We conclude the Seder ritual as a rite,
As we understood it and as it was beyond our understanding.
Just as we were blessed to experience it,
May we be blessed to realize it.

Glorious One, who dwells on High,
Raise us up, as a sacred people.
May You soon gather Your beloved throng
Redeemed to Zion in joyous song.³

לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּיְרוּשָׁלַיִם!
לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּיְרוּשָׁלַיִם!
לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּיְרוּשָׁלַיִם!

L'shanah ha-ba'ah b'Yerushalayim!
L'shanah ha-ba'ah b'Yerushalayim!
L'shanah ha-ba'ah b'Yerushalayim!

Next year in Jerusalem!
Next Year in a City of Wholeness!
Next year in a City of Peace!

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- ¹ The Velveteen Rabbi's Haggadah for Pesach; R Rachel Barenblat
- ² A Night of Questions, A Passover Haggadah; R Joy Levitt, R Michael Strassfeld
- ³ Holistic Haggadah; Michael L. Kagen
- ⁴ A Haggadah of Liberation; Kadima, New Jewish Agenda
- ⁵ The Kabbalist Haggadah; R J. Hershy Worch
- ⁶ How do the Four Sons relate to the Four Questions; R Tom Meyer (www.aish.com)

For many of the understandings of Torah, the Exodus, the plagues, Pesach, the seder, I am deeply indebted to the wisdom and teachings of R Alan Ullman.

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