

**READING THE HAGGADOT:
EXCERPTS FROM CONTEMPORARY HAGGADOT TO ENRICH YOUR SEDER
5781**

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Jewish tradition commands that we remember the Exodus from Egypt on a daily basis. Why is it a mitzvah for us to recall the enslavement that took place thousands of years ago? We look back with gratitude for God's miracles. We are reminded of the need to appreciate the blessing of our freedom. We are inspired to renew our commitment to the struggle for freedom in our own day. We pray for liberation from the Mitzrayim, the narrow places, in our lives. The Passover seder is that moment when we uniquely focus on these lessons.

Many contemporary Haggadot seek to translate these messages into words that we can weave into our traditional sederim. Included in this booklet are selections from some of these Haggadot which I find especially meaningful. The readings, songs, and thoughts contained herein are intended as a supplement to your Haggadah.

In accordance with the laws regarding use of copyrighted material, these copies are provided free of charge and for educational purposes. I strongly encourage you to purchase the Haggadot referenced.

May you be blessed with a Pesach which is emotionally, physically, intellectually and spiritually liberating.

Rabbi Bonnie Koppell
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BEDIKAT CHAMETZ

1. READING-

Rabbi Moshe Isserles (16TH century, Poland) required that the search for chametz include checking one's pockets. The Kabbalist Isaiah Horowitz added an ethical dimension to this internal audit: check carefully that your pockets contain no funds deriving from theft, robbery or fraud. ¹

2. READING-

Meditation on the Spiritual Yeast: Removing the Evil Inclination from our Hearts

GOD, MAY IT BE Your will, that just as we remove all the chametz from our house and from all that we control, so may You help us to remove all the impure forces from the earth and our evil inclinations from within us and renew our heart of flesh. May all negative forces disappear like smoke. Remove tyrannical governments from the world and all who cause anguish to the Divine Presence. Blow them, away with a spirit of justice, just as you did to Egypt and their idols in those days long ago. ²

3. READING-

Last Passover we took from our homes the leaven, and doubtless most of us resolved to take it from our hearts. The words of the rabbi had impressed us; he had awakened old memories, recalled broken resolutions, and even as he spoke the ferment of the leaven went on within us. How this same old leaven had time and again bothered us, but this

¹ quoted in Zion, Noam and Dishon, David, The Family Participation Haggadah: A Different Night, Jerusalem: The Shalom Hartman Institute, 1997, p. 13

² *ibid.*, p. 14

time we intended to make sure that the chometz had left our lives. Our temporal abode might realize the high density for which it has been ordained. Our suffering brothers learn how near at heart we have their weal or woe. The troubled should find us with a ready ear and responsive voice and hand. Our children should know that to be a Jew is to be the ideal creature of mankind and the real man of God. . . Our children, however, are deaf to our prayers, adamant to our persuasions, but we have been likewise. It has been business, business, all the year round, how much we could earn, how much we could save. The hour that will not return to us so much of the coin of the country is to us an hour lost. On one side of the earth millions are in bondage to a despotic tyrant, fettered hand and foot, but still soul free, loyal in spirit, as loyalty is understood. Here in America, thousands are in soul slavery, bound body and spirit to business; understanding their duty, but deliberately neglecting it. And is this the way we are preparing for our grand mission?

Ray Frank³, Passover sermon 1894 (Ray Frank was one of the first women to preach in an American synagogue when she addressed a congregation in Spokane, Washington in 1890)

4. READING-

The Search for Hametz is not simply a search for leavened bread, but rather an opportunity for us to examine ourselves. On the night before Pesach, when each of us is at home within our walls, where there is no one else around, and we are not troubled by daily affairs, it is then that we can sit alone and confront all of our outstanding obligations to God, saying to our soul: "Let us awaken and arise. . . let us examine our ways and turn away from all our sins. Let us cleanse and purify ourselves and remove our evil ways from God's sight. Let us become allies, my soul, and stand guard together. We will abjure slumber from our eyes day and night. We will not rest, rather, we will be as

³ Geffen, David, editor, American Heritage Haggadah: The Passover Experience, NY: Gefen Books, 1992, p. 3

gatekeepers lest we return to our evil ways. May God be with us as God was with our mothers and fathers".⁴- Rabbi Moshe Alsheikh, 16th century Kabbalist,

5. READING-

May it be your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, that just as we burned the hametz out of our homes today, so You will help us to burn out the evil inclination from our hearts. Please God, remove from our hearts the bad part of our ego, and purify us lovingly, empowering the good sides of our ego. Let our souls shine and be empowered with your light, and be connected to You in the highest holiness, which shall be with us always.- Rabbi Yosef Hayim, Baghdad, 19th century⁵

6. READING-

The *Ari* (Rabbi Isaac Luria, 1534-1572, Safed) hid ten pieces of matzah, symbolic of the ten *s'firot* that constitute the divine emanations by which the universe was formed and that parallel the universe we inhabit. The *R'ma* disagreed, on the grounds that one does not need to worry if no *chametz* is found, because the *mitzvah* is the *searching* not the *finding*.⁶

THE SEDER PLATE

In recent years, the seder plate itself has seen a variety of additions that tie the themes of Passover to social justice issues of the day. Some follow the new tradition, from Dr. Susannah Heschel, of placing an orange on the seder plate in solidarity with

⁴ quoted in Zion, Michael and Zion, Noam, A Night to Remember, 2007: Jerusalem, Zion Holiday Publications, p. 3

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 4

⁶ Hoffman, Rabbi Lawrence A. and Arnow, David, My People's Passover Haggadah Volume One, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008, p. 102

those who are LGBTQ, as well as others who are marginalized. Other additions include fair trade chocolate in support of fair labor practices, a banana for modern refugees, a tomato for farm workers, a pinecone for prison reform, an acorn to acknowledge the indigenous people whose land we inhabit, or an olive in support of Palestinians and hope for peace in Israel. These are just some of the examples showing up on seder plates.⁷

OPENING SONGS

1. SONG-

A PASSOVER SONG- (to the tune of "My Favorite Things")

Cleaning and cooking and so many dishes
Out with the khametz, no pasta, no knishes
Fish that's gefillted, horseradish that stings
These are a few of our Passover things.

Matza and karpas and chopped up kharoset
Shankbones and Kiddush and Yiddish neuroses
Tante who kvetches and uncle who sings
These are a few of our Passover things.

Motzi and maror and troubles with Pharaohs
Famines and locusts and slaves with wheelbarrows
Matza balls floating and eggshell that clings
These are a few of our Passover things.

⁷ Person, Rabbi Hara, Mishkan HaSeder, edited by Jessica Greenbaum, NY: CCAR Press, 2021, p. 35

When the plagues strike
When the lice bite
When we're feeling sad
We simply remember our Passover things
And then we don't feel so bad.

2. SONG-

THERE'S NO SEDER LIKE OUR SEDER- (to the tune of "There's No Business Like Show Business)

There's no seder like our seder,
There's no seder I know.
Everything about it is halakhic
Nothing that the Torah won't allow.
Listen how we read the whole Haggada, it's all in Hebrew
'Cause we know how.

There's no seder like our seder,
We tell a tale that is swell
Moses took the people out into the heat.
They baked the matza while on their feet.
Now isn't that a story that just can't be beat?
Let's go on with the show! (2x)

KADESH

1. READING-

Passover in its most obvious interpretation is a celebration of the liberation of the Israelite people from their bondage in Mitzrayim, the ancient Egypt. Passover at its essence is a celebration of the great mystery of HASHEM as it flows through us and around us: the power of oneness and of wholeness, the truth of the physical and psycho-spiritual liberation that comes to those who acknowledge **WHAT IS**, and then **ASK** and **DO** and **LET GO** and **TRUST**.

Our bodies were slaves in Mitzrayim, *Bayamim HaHem*, in those days, and there may be ways in which we feel as if our physical beings are entrapped now, *Ba Ziman Hazeh*, in a place where we do not want to be: maybe a city or a job or a relationship that doesn't feel right anymore; maybe an illness or a political situation or a style of life.

Our souls were trapped in Mitzrayim, *Bayamim HaHem*, in bodies that were enslaved. And it may be that *Ba Ziman Hazeh* our souls feel entrapped: maybe by our belief systems or by a need to project blame or by the parts of ourselves that we have not yet integrated: maybe an angry part or a jealous part, or a hurt child part or a part that feels controlled or controlling.

And each of us knows our own internal soul reality; each of us knows what our own, personal, body-soul place of bondage, our Mitzrayim, looks like. Each of us knows the ways in which we enslave ourselves, our Chometz. Each of us knows the places in our lives and the parts of our being wherein we would like to have more freedom, more choices. Thus we can have some sense of knowing, *Ba Ziman Hazeh*, right now, what slavery feels like, even if we have never defined it to ourselves in this way.

Each of us can evolve to a place of Acknowledging What Is and of Asking For Guidance and then Doing and Letting Go and Trusting in HASHEM, in the One, in wholeness. And each of us can then emerge from our own, self-generated Mitzrayim, as beings with greater freedom of body and greater freedom of soul.

(Leader) Take a few minutes to relax and to orient yourself to your heart and to the voice of your truth, a voice that can only be heard from within. Look to become better acquainted with the ways in which you enslave yourself, your 'Chometz', and with the parts of yourself that seem enslaved but whose bonds on your heart, you would like to loosen or to shift.⁸⁹

2. READING-

Why lean on the left side? Why not the right side? In the kabbalistic understanding of the Tree of Life, the left side is associated with constriction while the right side is associated with expansion; the left side with judgment while the right side with grace; the left side with tension while the right side with ease. Mitzraim means "The Place of Constriction." God leaned on the Mitzrim and had to put the squeeze on them to release the children of Israel. On the other hand, the Children of Israel were eased out of Mitzraim by the gentle, loving hand of God.¹⁰

3. READING-

Tonight we drink four cups of wine. Why four? Some say the cups represent our matriarchs— Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah—whose virtue caused God to liberate us from slavery. Another interpretation is that the cups represent the Four Worlds: physicality, emotions, thought, and essence. Still a third 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, 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:

⁹ Roekard, Karen G. R., The Santa Cruz Haggadah, CA: Capitola, The Hineni Consciousness Press, 1991, pp. 7-8

¹⁰ Kagan, Michael L., The Holistic Haggadah, NY: Lambda Publishers, 2004, pp. 40-41

becoming aware of oppression, opposing oppression, imagining alternatives, and accepting responsibility to act.¹¹

4. READING-

Redemption is the means by which we "buy back" or "reclaim" something that was originally ours. In this case, we redeem or "take back possession" of our souls, our integrity, and our unique existence. And the only reason we redeem ourselves is because we are worth it. God found the Israelites worth it then and God finds each one of us worth it now. this is why we imagine and act like our enslaved ancestors- to remind us that we are worth redeeming."¹²

KARPAS- THE GREEN VEGETABLE

1. Commentary on Karpas-

What is the spiritual symbolism of Karpas? The Yismach Yisrael tells us that the fruits of the earth that are used to symbolize Karpas originate underground. This Karpas can be compared to people who may be sunk so low that they despair; they assume that they cannot aspire to higher spiritual planes- it is as if they are underground. He believed that in the same way that the plants that become our Karpas sprout from the depths and end up in a holy place, on our Seder table, so too can people rise up even to a place of redemption and holiness.¹³

¹¹ The Velveteen Rabbi's Haggadah for Pesach

¹² Steinberg, Rabbi Paul, Recovery, the 12 Steps and Jewish Spirituality, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2014, p. 106

¹³ Roekard, op.cit., Leader's Guide

2. READING-

- Let the saltwater point to the tears that we have shed to earn our seat at this Seder table
- Let the salt point to the eternal bond of God's covenant with Abraham and us
- Let the saltwater point to the profoundest spiritual longing, the element of water, the ocean. It is the clutching sensation in our stomach that we experience in our longing for fulfillment. It is this, which has been driving us onwards.¹⁴

3. READING-

At seders past, I have felt that the salt water in which I dipped the sprigs of parsley was made from my tears. The bondage of illness has seemed at times so overwhelming that tears were the only possible response. But salt is also a thing of value; because it is a preservative, it is a symbol of permanence, like the covenant that Adonai has made with all of us. The salt water has a marvelous taste.¹⁵

4. READING-

Karpas (parsley that is dipped in salt water during the seder) kavannah (spiritual focus)--time for spring awakening, new directions--renewal and bursting forth of new ideas.

We take this time to honor others who travel with us from other faiths and cultural traditions. We acknowledge the fact that they bring a new perspective to our lives and a legacy of their own that enriches ours. We are grateful for the growth that we have experienced because they are in our lives.

¹⁴ Worch, J. Hershey, The Kabbalist Haggadah, AZ: Spirit of the Desert Productions, 2004, pp. 38-39

¹⁵ Green, Tamara M., "The Outstretched Arm: A Passover Journal", Spring 1995, p. 1

As a plant bursts forth with new energy to bloom, so too we recognize that at this time of Jewish history we are blossoming in different ways. As the garden needs tending, so, too, do our relationships with spouses, in-laws and families of other traditions. Weeding out all that is not necessary and loving, we make room for fresh insight and respect. Welcome those who sit around this table for the first time or the twentieth, bringing new understanding to our discussion.¹⁶

5. READING-

"We are a people who both value tears and are fluent in them. Judaism teaches that tears are what open the gates of heaven. Because when we cry, God remembers us. But also, when we cry, we remember who we are, because when we cry we remember what we care about."¹⁷

Rabbi Rachel Timoner (b. 1970)

YACHATZ- BREAKING THE MIDDLE MATZA

1. READING-

These words, "Let all who are hungry come and eat," must serve as a reminder of our obligation to work for those who cannot participate with us tonight. We remember those in our own community who are homeless, shunned by us as we step around them. We remember those whose lives are oppressed by poverty and who are all too often ignored. We remember those in Africa stricken by drought and famine, unable to provide food for their families. We remember the children who in a world which produces food sufficient to feed all of its inhabitants, continue to die from starvation. All these we remember tonight, and we set aside this empty chair for them as a symbol of our

¹⁶ Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael

¹⁷ Person, op. cit., p. 137

awareness of their suffering. Our freedom is diminished by their continued bondage and desperation.¹⁸

2. READING-

No prayer is recited before we break the middle matzah on the plate. 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. We prepared for Pesach in the night, searching for the hidden leavened bread; we will end the seder in the night, searching the unleavened bread. With the generations that have come before us and with one another, our search begins.

*Harold Schulweis*¹⁹

3. A THOUGHT-

We do not have to decide at this point whether Matzah is a symbol of this or that, for we are about to expand upon the paradox. Not only is it at once so and not so, but in breaking the middle Matzah we also about to split the metaphor, and make a break with all the different forms of known symmetry. There is, impossibly, a 'bigger half' and a 'smaller half'.

A 'bigger' and 'smaller' half, you say?

¹⁸ source unknown

¹⁹ quoted in Levitt, Rabbi Joy, and Strassfeld, Rabbi Michael, editors, A Night of Questions, PA: The Reconstructionist Press, 2000, p. 40

The Universe is not fair. This unpalatable truth is almost a preamble to the Haggadah. The universe is not symmetrical; all is not evenly divided. There is a richer and poorer half. The distribution of assets is not equal. This is one of the mysteries that persist, omnipresent, throughout time. Life, the universe, and everything is not fair. We cannot balance this sorry scheme of things entire, and so it goes. What then was our response as children to the dawning realization that the universe was not fair? Did we have coping mechanisms? We survived, we are here so we must have coped, but did we sacrifice our health or sanity in order to do so? Are we aware how badly we are split? How have we internalized the lop-sidedness of the universe? Or do we see asymmetry as symmetry, the ultimate insanity?

Most probably, as infants, as children we split. We broke into pieces. We hid ourselves away. And this is how we prepared ourselves for life.

Like the hungriest of paupers eating only what we absolutely must, laying aside the greater part for later - when 'time is riper' - we compromised. We accepted this imbalance, bowing to the 'Law of Unfairness' which we were told, must prevail.

Instead of admitting how sad this made us we found ways to rationalize the horrible state of things. We explained our place in Egypt as a natural event. Our alienation and self-loathing was all seen as perfectly natural. The Exile of *Da'at* - Knowing was exactly that. We didn't trust our own readings of things as unfair, so instead we rationalized the world our parents presented as the only possible world. Rather than believe their world insane we accepted our own internal world as flawed. Eventually we too began to accept that things were as they ought to be. We didn't know any more that we didn't know any more. We grew satisfied with the expression of a mere fraction of our

personalities. We went into 'survival mode', subsisting on crumbs of humanness, hiding the greater part of ourselves from ourselves. This is exactly we do with the *Afikomen*.

But spiritual hungers have ways of expressing themselves disallowing the body to ignore them. If I do not acknowledge the God shaped hole in me; I will end up with some ravenous soul and body destroying habit, an addiction to some behavior instead. And so it was in Egypt. The focus of our lives grew narrower as our preoccupation with gnawing hunger grew stronger. We had nothing to spare for our emotional or spiritual growth when all we had went to feed our selfish habits. There were fewer and fewer opportunities to do any fixing, as we chased the 'fix' with growing desperation. In the end it became obvious that we had developed a pathological relationship with the 'bread of our affliction'

We break the middle Matzah because the middle Matzah represents the Great Mothering Principle of the Kabbalistic *Sephirah* of *Binah* - Understanding. We break it to show that in Egypt we had lost the ability to take care of our most basic needs, to 'mother' ourselves.

So, why now? The answer is heartbreaking. The reason this happens before the Haggadah is recited, is because the splitting of the self almost always occurs when we are still in a pre-verbal state. The disorder of our personalities, the shaming and abandonment of ourselves happens when we are still babies, infants. What follows is the story of our lives after the rupture. Since words cannot adequately describe our inevitable, inexorable descent into the blast furnace that was our Egypt, we act it out in this short ritual, we simply break the Matzah, leaving the smaller section on the Seder Plate; we wrap the larger piece in a pillowcase and put it away for *Afikomen*.

Redemption is a lifelong process, but tonight we are gifted with *Mochin D'Gadlut* - Large Mindedness, we are able to take giant steps in our recovery. We have the opportunity to realize, actualize and integrate the whole of ourselves into ourselves. We can do this by eating the *Afikomen* as a symbolic 'last-act' of the Seder. When it is all over we will have achieved reclamation of the 'Self' we abandoned.²⁰

4. READING-

The Pesach story begins in a broken world, amidst slavery and oppression. The sound of the breaking of the matza sends us into that fractured existence, only to become whole again when we find the broken half, the afikoman, at the end of the Seder. The brokenness is not just a physical or political situation. In Hebrew, Egypt is called *Mitzrayim*, reminding us of the word *tzar*, narrow. Thus, in Hassidic thought, *Mitzrayim* symbolizes the inner straits that trap our souls. Yet even here we can find a unique value, as the Hassidic saying teaches us: 'There is nothing more whole- than a broken heart.' Or as Leonard Cohen wrote: 'There's a crack in everything/That's where the light comes in.'²¹

5. READING-

As a social symbol, hiding the middle matzah can also be seen as representative of the ways in which we hide aspects of ourselves, fearing punishment at the hands of an intolerant society. We look forward, therefore, to finding the *afikoman*, to sharing with our community what we've hidden away, and to restoring wholeness.²²

6. READING-

²⁰ Worch, op.cit., pp. 43-44

²¹ Zion and Zion, op. cit., p. 14

²² Hoffman and Arnow, Volume One, op. cit., p. 144

I heard from Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach (of blessed memory), 'We break this *matzah* and hide a part of our selves. Only we know which part we are hiding. It is the part that is our broken heart that we hide and protect as we travel through the Haggadah. And the end of the Seder, we bring out this precious part that has become healed. At this moment we eat the broken piece.' This means we integrate the healing of liberation into our daily lives.²³

7. READING-

We divide the *matzah*, therefore, to show that it has two symbolisms, not one. Now, at the beginning of the seder, it is the bread of affliction. Later, once we have relived the exodus, it becomes the bread of freedom. The difference between freedom and slavery does not lie in the quality of bread we eat, but the state of mind in which we eat it.²⁴

8. READING-

What hospitality is it to offer the hungry the taste of suffering?

What transforms the bread of affliction into the bread of freedom is the willingness to share it with others. Sharing food is the first act through which slaves become free human beings. One who fears tomorrow does not offer his bread to others. But one who is willing to divide his food with a stranger has already shown himself capable of fellowship and faith, the two things from which hope is born. That is why we begin the seder by inviting others to join us. Bread shared is no longer the bread of affliction. Reaching out to others, giving help to the needy and companionship to those who are alone, we bring freedom into the world, and with freedom, *God*.²⁵

²³ Klein, Rabbi Eliahu, A Mystical Haggadah, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2008, p. 45

²⁴, Jonathan, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks's Haggadah, NY: Continuum International Publishing House, 2007, p. 10

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 11

9. READING-

Reader: To our plate that held three pieces of matzah, we now return the second half of the middle matzah. For the oppressed, it is a symbol of hope. For free persons, it is a symbol of the responsibilities of freedom.

The story of the Exodus has brought hope to many peoples as they faced their own struggle for freedom. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968), in the speeches, rallies, and marches of the American civil rights movement, explicitly invoked the story of the Exodus.

(The Exodus) is something of the story of every people struggling for freedom. It is the first story of man's explicit quest for freedom. And it demonstrates the stages that seem to inevitably follow the quest for freedom.

This is the power of the story of the Exodus: it is both a historical story and a contemporary symbol of hope.

Reader: Having washed away the remnants of slave mentality, we acknowledge that, blessed with freedom, we have responsibilities as free persons. As articulated by the great twentieth-century philosopher Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel:

Freedom means more than mere emancipation...Freedom presupposes the capacity for sacrifice...The glory of a free society lies not only in the consciousness of my right to be free, and in my capacity to be free, but also in the realization of my fellow man's right to be free. The issue we face is how to save man's belief in his capacity to be free.

Reader: May the story of the Exodus continue to be a source of hope for all those who seek freedom from persecution and oppression and be a reminder to those who are the beneficiaries of freedom's blessings of the responsibilities they shoulder as free persons.

Together: Tonight we recite again the story of the Exodus and give thanks to God for delivering us from slavery to freedom. As family, friends, and neighbors, we, the beneficiaries of God's compassion, affirm our obligation to join with God and partner with one another to perform *tikkun olam* - doing our part to help repair the world. As free persons, we break the middle matzah into small pieces as a reminder of our responsibilities in a world that is still broken.²⁶

²⁶ Yoffie, Alan S., Sharing the Journey, NY: CCAR Press, 2012, pp. 27-28

The reader breaks the second half of the middle matzah into small pieces.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

1. READING-

To the Editor: Isidor Rabi, the Nobel laureate in physics was once asked, "Why did you become a scientist, rather than a doctor or lawyer or businessman, like the other immigrant kids in your neighborhood?"

"My mother made me a scientist without ever intending it. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school: 'Nu? Did you learn anything today?' But not my mother. She always asked me a different question. "Izzy," she would say, "Did you ask a good question today?" That difference- asking good questions- made me become a scientist."

Donald Sheff²⁷

2. READING-

The order of these questions is significant and can be seen as an abbreviated process of healing into God- like a four step program:

Step 1. Recognize that you are trapped and living the life of a slave. Be willing to deflate your ego (*matzah*). Begin practicing humility. Admit that you cannot do this on your own and allow yourself to turn back to God.

Step 2. Be willing to face the bitter truth (*maror*) of who you are and how you are living your lies. Practice telling the Truth.

²⁷ NY Times, Jan. 19, 1988

Step 3. Do not be afraid to step into the layers of pain that surround the heart. Grieve all the losses and be willing to let the tears (*karpas*) flow. Renew the contact with your heart energy. Let the inner bitterness be miraculously transformed by love into love (*maror* dipped into the *haroset*).

Step 4. Let your over-judgmental self rest by practicing acts of loving-kindness. Let yourself be filled with compassion. Hand over to God the heaviness of your burden and let yourself rest in God's hands, for *HaShem Tzvaot*, (God of the Battle) has promised to deliver if you are willing to be delivered.²⁸

3.A THOUGHT-

Questions, both of wonder and despair, are crucial to our growth as human beings. As Jews we have permission to ask questions, even of God, when we see and experience suffering.²⁹

4.ON RECLINING AND WOMEN-

The Talmud (Pes. 108a) says that a woman should not recline in the presence of her husband, although an "important woman" may do so. . . Rabbi Joseph Caro (*Kesef Mishneh* to Laws of *Chametz* and *Matzah* 7:8) quotes Rabbi Manoah of Narbonne (fourteenth century), who offered the following definitions of the "important woman": (1) a woman without a husband, who is the mistress of the house, (2) a woman who has accomplished much in business, (3) a woman who is the daughter of great ones of the generation, (4) a

²⁸ Kagan, op. cit., pp. 51-52

²⁹ Dickstein, Rabbi Stephanie, *Coping With the Empty Chair at the Seder*, NY: The Shira Ruskay Center of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, p. 3

pious, God-fearing woman, or (5) a woman who has many servants and thus does not ordinarily busy herself with housework.³⁰

BLESSING THE CHILDREN

1. READING-

"To the Wished For Child: On this night of hope, we yearn for the time when you will sit among us and ask your questions.

To the Child Who is Not Present: You are in our hearts tonight, dear one. May you discover many open doors as you continue your journey. And may you return in peace.

To the Child Who is No More- On this night we remember you, beloved one. Your light illumines our path."³¹

MAGGID- TELLING THE STORY

1. A THOUGHT-

The Pesach family gathering is in fact a thanksgiving banquet during which we retell our national salvation. It is also appropriate to weave into the seder, memories of personal deliverance from danger. Invite the family and guests to recall their own family stories of redemption from illness, from danger, or from persecution. Perhaps they can discuss the personal lessons they drew from these crucial events in their lives.³²

³⁰ Hoffman and Arnow, Volume One, op. cit., p. 153

³¹ Elwell, Sue Levy, editor, The Open Door, NY: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2002, p. 11

³²Zion and Dishon, op. cit., p. 33

2. READING- "Let My People Go"

We have dedicated this festival tonight to the dream and the hope of freedom, the dream and the hope that have filled the hearts of men and women from the time our Israelite ancestors went forth out of Egypt. Peoples have suffered, nations have struggled, to make this dream come true. Now we dedicate ourselves to the struggle for freedom. Though the sacrifice be great and the hardships many, we shall not rest until the chains that enslave all men and women be broken.

But the freedom we strive for means more than broken chains. It means liberation from all those enslavements that warp the spirit and blight the mind, that destroy the soul, even though they leave the flesh alive. For people can be enslaved in more ways than one.

Men and women can be enslaved to themselves. When they let emotion sway them to their hurt, when they permit harmful habits to tyrannize over them, they are slaves. When laziness or cowardice keeps them from doing what they know to be the right, when ignorance blinds them so that, like Samson, they can only turn round and round in meaningless drudgery, they are slaves. When envy, bitterness and jealousy sour their joys and darken the brightness of their contentment, they are slaves to themselves and shackled by the chains of their own forging.

Men and women can be enslaved by poverty and inequality. When the fear of need drives them to dishonesty and violence, to defending the guilty and accusing the innocent, they are slaves. When the work people do enriches others, but leaves them in want of strong houses for shelter, nourishing food for themselves and for their children, and warm clothes to keep out the cold, they are slaves.

Men and women can be enslaved by intolerance. When Jews are forced to give up their Jewish way of life, to abandon their Torah, to neglect their sacred festivals, to leave off rebuilding their ancient homeland, they are slaves. When they must deny that

they are Jews in order to get work, they are slaves. When they must live in constant fear of unwarranted hate and prejudice, they are slaves.

How deeply these enslavements have scarred the world: The wars, the destruction, the suffering, the waste: Pesah calls us to be free, free from the tyranny of our own selves. Free from the enslavement of poverty and inequality, free from the corroding hate that eats away the ties which unite humankind.

Pesah calls upon us to put an end to all slavery! Pesah cries out in the name of God, "Let My people go!" Pesah summons us to freedom.³³

3. SONG-

Bang, bang, bang

hold your hammer low

Bang, bang, bang,

give a heavy blow

For it's work, work, work every day and every night.

For it's work, work, work when it's dark and when it's light.

Dig, dig, dig

dig your shovels deep

Dig, dig, dig

there's no time for sleep

For it's work, work, work every day and every night.

For it's work, work, work when it's dark and when it's light.

³³ Kaplan, Mordecai, Kohn, Eugene, and Eisenstein, Ira, The New Haggadah, NY: Behrman House, 1942, pp. 11-13

4. SONG-

Oh listen, Oh listen, Oh listen King Pharaoh
Oh listen, Oh listen, please let my people go.
They want to go away, they work too hard all day,
King Pharaoh, King Pharaoh- what do you say?
No, No, No- I will not let them go.

5. READING-

When you are about to leave Egypt- any Egypt- do not stop to think, "But how will I earn a living out there?" One who stops to "make provisions for the way" will never get out of Egypt. - *Rabbi Nahman of Bratzlav*³⁴

6. READING-

R. Hanoch-Henich of Alexander added: "This was the real meaning of the exile of Israel in Egypt: they learned to tolerate the evil decrees, and became accustomed to Pharaoh" (*Menachem HaCohen*).

7. READING-

One Sunday morning in 1941 in Nazi- occupied Netherlands, a mysterious character rode up on his bicycle and entered the Calvinist Church. He ascended the podium and read aloud the story of the midwives who saved the Hebrew babies and

³⁴ quoted in Levitt and Strassfeld, op. cit., p. 62

defied Pharaoh's policy of genocide. "Who is today's Pharaoh?" he asked. "Hitler", the congregation replied. "Who are today's Hebrew babies?" "The Jews." "Who will be today's midwives?" He left the church, leaving his question hanging in the air. During the war (1941-1945) seven families from this little church hid Jews and other resisters from the Nazis. ³⁵

8. READING-

Iraqi Jews tell the tale that in one country the king was always chosen in a special way. When the old king died, a bird called the "bird of good fortune" would be released. On whomsoever's head it landed, the people would place the crown making him their next ruler.

Once the bird of good fortune landed on the head of a slave. That slave had been a simple musician who entertained at the master's parties. His costume consisted of a feathered cap and a belt made of the hooves of sheep.

When the slave became king, he moved into the palace and wore royal robes. However, he ordered that a shack (a kind of sukkah) be constructed next to the palace and that his old hat, belt and drum be stored there along with a giant mirror.

The new king was known for his kindness and love for all his people -rich and poor, free and slave. Often he would disappear into his little shack. Once he left its door open and the cabinet ministers saw him don his feathered hat, put on his old belt and dance and drum before the mirror. They found this very strange and asked the king: "After all, you are a king! You must maintain your dignity!"

The king replied: "Once I was a slave and now I've become a king. From time to time I want to remind myself that I was once a slave lest I grow arrogant and treat with disdain my people and you, my ministers." ³⁶

³⁵ Zion and Dishon, op. cit., p. 51

³⁶ ibid., p. 27

9. SONG-

Sing:

When Israel was in Egypt's land, "Let My people go" (Ex.5:1).

Oppressed so hard they could not stand, "Let My people go."

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,

Tell old 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's land,

Tell old Pharaoh: "Let My people go."

No more shall they in bondage toil, "Let My people go. "

Let them come out with Egypt's spoil, "Let My people go."

Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt's land,

Tell old Pharaoh: "Let my people go."

10. READING-

The Egyptians speak of Israel here always as a collective, not as individuals. We, too, often speak of those we don't know well as though they were all alike- *the Gentiles, the disabled, the Palestinians, the Blacks*. We would like to think that if the Egyptians had known each of us here tonight, they would never have seen us as aliens, nor would they have been able to afflict us so. It is an ominous reminder of the dangers inherent in ignoring the ways in which members of a group really are alike: in their individuality, and their divinely created humanity.³⁷

³⁷ Roekard, op. cit., Leader's Guide

11. READING-

Liberation is costly. Even after the Lord had delivered the Israelites from Egypt, they had to travel through the desert. They had to bear the responsibilities and difficulties of freedom. There was starvation and thirst and they kept complaining. They complained that their diet was monotonous. Many of them preferred the days of bondage and the fleshpots of Egypt.

We must remember that liberation is costly. It needs unity. We must hold hands and refuse to be divided. We must be ready. Some of us will not see the day of our liberation physically. But those people will have contributed to the struggle. Let us be united, let us be filled with hope. Let us be those who respect one another.

*Desmond Tutu*³⁸

12. READING-

In recalling the suffering of Jewish slaves in Egypt, it is important to remember that this continent was built in part through the enslavement of people who were wrenched from rich, strong cultures of their own. Blacks were brought from Africa to work as slaves in North and South America. Native Americans were enslaved by the Spanish. For centuries in our own country, minorities and women have been the victims of systemic persecution and deprivation. This experience has left scars borne not only by the victims of this oppression, but by our society as a whole. None of us is yet totally free of the effects of having grown up in a racist society. To the extent that we have accepted any form of racism in ourselves or around us, we have all given up some of our freedom, some of our humanity. Passover is an appropriate time to renew our

³⁸ Landsberg, Rabbi Lynne and Sapperstein, Rabbi David, The Common Road to Justice NAACP and UAHC, 1991, p. 3 (back of book)

commitment to the struggle for freedom and to seek to rid ourselves of the vestiges of racism that we carry within us.³⁹

13. READING-

"To be a slave. To be owned by another person, as a car, house or table is owned. To live as a piece of property that could be sold- a child sold from its mother, a wife from her husband. To be considered not human, but a "thing" that plowed the fields, cut the wood, cooked the food, nursed another's child; a "thing" whose sole function was determined by the one who owned you. To be a slave. To know, despite the suffering and deprivation, that you were human, more human than he who said you were not human. To know joy, laughter, sorrow, and tears, and yet be considered only the equal of a table. To be a slave was to be a human being under conditions in which that humanity was denied. They were not slaves. They were people. Their condition was slavery."

*Julius Lester*⁴⁰

14. READING-

"Start with the shame, and end with the praise. When the richest society in human history tolerates hungry children- that's a shame. . . When a society accepts a system of justice (or injustice) which executes the innocent and mentally retarded- that's a shame. When it accepts a racially disproportionate imposition of the death penalty- that's a shame. . . When a society tries to rid itself of social problems by building prison cells instead of rebuilding lives- that's a shame. When a society celebrates ending welfare but leaves the most vulnerable among us without the tools and wages to help lift them out of poverty- that's a shame.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Elwell, *op. cit.*, p. 33

And our sense that these problems are too big and too complicated, our resignation that things will never change- maybe that's the greatest shame of all. Maybe our enslavement today is our inability to dream, to imagine a society and a world which reflects the holiness of every human life. We live in a time without prophets- and if they are speaking among us, we cannot hear them above the commercials. We cannot hear them above the noise in our lives."

*Marc Margolius*⁴¹

15.MEDITATION-

In every generation, every person should feel as though she or he had actually been redeemed from Egypt.

Everyone present at this Passover seder is commanded to see themselves as slaves in Egypt, to live and relive the experience of the Exodus, to feel both the terror and exhilaration as we start out on a journey into the unknown wilderness. As we have read in the Haggadah, we must try to understand what it must have been like, what it is and what it will be like. The eve of Pesach is a night of waiting, a time of anticipation. Who of us knows where or how the journey will end?

Like the Israelites, we dream of freedom and liberation from our own fears, our own Egypts. . .Egypt known as Mitzrayim, the narrow place, the birth canal.

Take a moment to connect with an event you've had in the past year where you have experienced fear, anxiety, or maybe even excitement- as the Israelites experienced in Egypt.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 42

Are there opportunities for leaving this narrow place and entering into liberation and growth?

Pesach is about all of us sitting together around the table, drawing strength from one another to relive the past, to be here in the present, and to make our way into the future. Somehow, we must turn the night of waiting into a time of gathering strength for whatever lies ahead. Together, we can stand at Sinai.⁴²

16. READING-

The idea that a nation of slaves could win its freedom and defeat the most powerful empire in the world was to us not an ancient legend, but an eternal truth.- *Natan Sharansky, Soviet refusenik, prisoner in Siberia and Israeli Cabinet minister*⁴³

17. READING-

Although they may initially seem redundant, the two invitations we issue in *HaLakhma Anya*- "Let all who are hungry come, *kol dikhfin, enter and eat*" and "Let all who are in need, *kol ditzrikh, come and celebrate the Passover*"- in reality are not. *Kol ditzrikh* refers to one who is alone, who has a lot of Matza and wine but no home or family. There are indeed many ways to be included among the *kol ditzrikh*. The invitation to "all who are in need" is not *yeitei ve-yeikhol*, "to eat with us;" rather, it is to spend the Pesach with us, *yeitei ve-yifsakh*, "to celebrate with us." It is an invitation addressed to unfortunate and lonely people. They might be millionaires; it is completely irrelevant. Whoever is in need should come and celebrate. *Ha Lakhma Anya* is the renewal of a

⁴² adapted by Sharona Silverman, Deutsch Family Shalom Center, Temple Chai, Phoenix, AZ

⁴³ Zion and Zion, op. cit., p. 13

pledge of solidarity among the Jewish people- solidarity between individual and individual, and between the individual and the Jewish community as a whole. It is a proclamation that we are one people, and that we are ready to help one another. Pesach night is a time of sharing; if the sense of solidarity, responsibility, unity and readiness to share and to participate are not manifested and demonstrated, the whole Seder becomes meaningless."- Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik⁴⁴

18. READING-

When we tell the Passover story, the Mishnah (M. Pes. 10:4) instructs us to "begin with disgrace and end with praise." The Babylonian Talmud's discussion of this includes a difference between two sages about the meaning of "disgrace." (Pes. 116a) The response of each sage represents a different meaning of the word *avodah*, which can signify worship or religious service on one hand, and physical work on the other. The first sage explained "disgrace" in spiritual terms, with a phrase not overtly connected with the enslavement in Egypt: "At first, our ancestors engaged in false service, *avodah zarah*." The second sage defined disgrace in a physical sense with the words "*avadim hayyinu*, "we were slaves" (Deut. 6:21). The Haggadah's embrace of both sages' positions brings to mind a dictum that highlights the interdependence of physical and spiritual well-being: "Where there is no flour, there is no Torah; when there is no Torah, there is no flour" (M. Avot 3:21).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Zion and Zion, *ibid.*, p. 21

⁴⁵ Hoffman and Arnow, Volume One, *op. cit.*, p. 214 and p. 216

19. REFLECTION-

"Living with freedom is a fundamental purpose of spiritual practice. Training our hearts and minds to restrain our habitual responses so that we can respond in greater alignment with our most strongly held values is an essential aspect of a Jewish spiritual life. It is a way of coming out of Egypt at every moment."- Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg⁴⁶

20. READING-

"The Torah indicates (Exodus 30:12) that it is dangerous to count Jews. Instead, in biblical times, they were each to donate a half-shekel to the maintenance of the sanctuary, and by counting up the donations one could calculate the total population. The lesson is this. Nations usually undertake censuses to know their strength, military or economic. If the Jewish people ever believed that strength lay in numbers, they would be in danger of despair. The Jewish people is small. It always has been. Moses said, "The Lord did not set His affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other people, for you are the fewest of all peoples" (Deuteronomy 7:7). Instead, the Torah tells us not to count Jews but to *count their contributions*. And our contributions, to the world and to one another, have been vast."⁴⁷

21. READING-

Three Questions

There is a Sefardic (Iraqi or Afghani) custom of turning to the person beside you, asking these three questions, and offering the three brief answers. Try this, and see what opens in you.

Who are you? (I am Yisrael.)⁴⁶ Where are you coming from? (I am coming

⁴⁶ quoted in Teutsch, David, Everyday Spirituality, PA: Reconstructionist Rabbinical College Press, 2011, p. 4

⁴⁷ Sacks, op. cit., pp. 26-27

from Mitzrayim.) Where are you going? (I am going to Yerushalayim.)

Meditation: Three Answers

Who are you?

I'm Yisrael. I'm a God-wrestler. I'm someone who wrestles with the holy, with the Source of All Being, with my understanding of ultimate reality, and I expect God to wrestle back. I dance with God. I waltz with Torah. I stay up all night grappling with angels, and even if I come away limping, I know I come away blessed. I'm a wandering Aramean, and I'm wearing my traveling shoes. I'm a child of the house of Israel, and my community and I—and anyone else who hears freedom's call—are walking into the wilderness together.

Where are you coming from?

I'm coming from Mitzrayim. From the narrow place. From slavery. From constriction. From the birth canal. I'm coming from hard labor. I'm coming from the surfeit of sweetness that lulls me into forgetting the world's imperfections. I've been settling for what hurts, too fearful to risk something new. I'm coming from suffering and isolation. I'm coming from addiction to my work, addiction to success, addiction to separation. I'm coming from "if I stopped working, I'm not even sure who I'd be."

Where are you going?

I'm going to Yerushalayim. I'm going to Ir Shalem, the city of wholeness. I'm going to Ir Shalom, the city of peace. I'm going where talking to God is a local call. I'm heading toward my best imaginings of community and connection. I'm clicking my ruby slippers with fervent *kavanah* and moving toward the meaning of home. Maybe I'm going to a place; maybe I'm going to a state of mind. Maybe it's an asymptotic progression toward something that can't be reached. Maybe it's the journey that defines me.

Run that by me again?

I am Yisrael. I am coming from Mitzrayim. And the moon is almost full: tomorrow

we're packing our bags. Grabbing the flatbread. And setting out. It's time to go.

22. POEM-

With *maggid* we tell the story,
The exodus^[SEP] from degradation to dignity,
M'g'nut l'shevach,
From slavery to freedom.

Each of us is to tell this story
and we who do so at length
are surely to be praised.

But this collective story
of the journey from slavery to freedom
is not the entirety of the tale^[SEP]
Each of us bears our own^[SEP]
stories which relate our journeys^[SEP]
our paths to freedom.

If each of us must relate our people's story
all the more so^[SEP]
should we be praised^[SEP]
for continuing the story
adding the individual strands
which make our identity,

which explain our journeys.

To journey is

to prepare,

to leave,

to travel,

to wander and wonder.

To journey is

to arrive,

to accustom,

to question,

to change,

to remain as we were,

yet touched by the journey.

What are our journeys

from slavery to liberation?

From alienation to community

From afar to within

From foreign to familiar

From anxiety to comfort

From narrow spaces to expanse?

As we answer,

we continue maggid.

THE FOUR CHILDREN

1. READING-

What does it mean to be a wise child? It means to be fully engaged in the community, to know the limits of your understanding, to be able to search for the answers to that which you do not know. At different points in our lives, we have been this child-inquisitive, caring, eager to learn and to understand, willing to ask for information we do not have, hopeful that an answer can be found.⁴⁸

2. READING-

To the intellectual child: The "plight" refers to the enforced separation of husbands and wives. The Egyptians decreed that the men should sleep in the fields and the women in the cities in order to decrease their offspring. But the Israelite women would go to the fields and encourage their husbands by saying, "We shall not be enslaved forever; the Holy One will free us." Then they would come together and have children. Thus our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt due to the merit of the righteous women of that generation.

*Exodus Rabbah I: 12*⁴⁹

3. READING-

What does it mean to be a wicked child? It means to stand apart from the community, to feel alienated and alone, depending only on yourself, to have little trust in

⁴⁸ Levitt and Strassfeld, op. cit., p. 50

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 58

the people around you to help you or answer your questions. At different points in our lives, we have been this child- detached, suspicious, challenging.⁵⁰

4. READING-

What does it mean to be a simple child? It means to see only one layer of meaning, to ask the most basic of questions, to be too innocent or impatient to grasp complicated questions. At different points in our lives, we have all been this child- simply curious and innocently unaware of the complexities around us.⁵¹

5. A THOUGHT-

When are you the silent child? When do you find that you can't speak, that words fail you, that you have nothing to say?

*Joy Levitt*⁵²

6. READING-

The word *tam* has many connotations, ranging from stupid, to simple, to innocent, to pious. How would you define this child? Is a person who asks a basic question stupid or just young or curious? Do you ever hold back from asking a question for fear that you ought to know the answer, that the question itself is too simple? In the Torah, Noah, Jacob, and Job are called *tam*. Does this mean they were pious or simple?

*Joy Levitt*⁵³

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 50

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 51

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 51

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 51

7. READING-

Sometimes we are silenced because we become convinced that we have nothing to contribute or that those we might address do not want to hear from us. Sometimes we are silenced because we believe that what we say will make no difference or even perhaps may make things worse. To come out of our silence, we need to recognize that people care about us and value who we are and what we can do. Each of us is sometimes silenced, and each of us can help end the silence of others. - *David Teutsch*⁵⁴

8. SONG-

THE BALLAD OF THE FOUR SONS (tune of "Clementine")

Said the father to his children

" At the Seder you will dine,
You will eat your fill of matzah,
You will drink 4 cups of wine."

Now this father had no daughters,

But his sons they numbered 4,
One was wise and one was wicked,
One was simple and a bore.

And the fourth was sweet and winsome,

He was young and he was small,
While his brothers asked the Questions,
He could scarcely speak at all.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

Said the wise son to his father,
"Would you please explain the laws?
Of the customs of the Seder,
Will you please explain the cause?"

And the father proudly answered,
" As our fathers ate in speed,
Ate the paschal lamb 'ere midnight,
And from slavery were freed.

So we follow their example,
And ' ere midnight must complete,
All the Seder, and we should not,
After twelve remain to eat."

Then did sneer the son so wicked,
"What does all this mean to you?"
And the father's voice was bitter,
As his grief and anger grew.

"If yourself you don't consider,
As a son of Yisrael,
Then for you this has no meaning,
You could be a slave as well."

Then the simple son said simply,
"What is this?" and quietly,
The good father told his offspring,

"We were freed from slavery."

But the youngest son was silent,
For he could not ask at all,
His bright eyes were bright with wonder,
As his father told him all.

Now dear children, heed this lesson,
And remember evermore,
What that father told his children,
Told his sons that numbered four.

Someday you too, when you're parents,
Will tell this story you've just heard,
And your children, to their children,
Will repeat it word for word.

Ben Aronin

9. READING-

When we dwell on being victims, then those memories may either corrupt us or help us grow in empathy for others. Consider the negative effects of suffering: self-pity, dreams of vengeance, self-righteousness and self-blame. Often one loses the ability to feel for others since "I suffered much worse." Yet the Torah seeks to extract positive lessons from our persecution in Egypt: activism, hope, solidarity among victims and empathy for the other, "for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

Compare and contrast Pharaoh's and God's advice to their children below:

Pharaoh's Advice-

Hearken to that which I say to you ...
Harden yourself against all subordinates.
The people give heed to him who terrorizes them.
Approach them not alone.
Fill not your heart with a brother,
Know not a friend,
Nor make for yourself intimates,
Wherein there is no end.
When you sleep,
Guard for yourself your own heart,
For a man has no people.
In the day of evil,
I gave to the beggar.
I nourished the orphan.
I admitted the insignificant,
As well as him who was of great account.
But he who ate my food made insurrection.
He to whom I gave my land, aroused
fear therein. (*Pharaoh Amenemhet, 1780 BCE*)

God's Advice-

When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens. You shall love him as yourself,

for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I, the Lord, am your God who freed you from the land of Egypt (*Leviticus 79:33-36*).

You shall not subvert the rights of your needy in their disputes (*Ex.23:6*).

You shall have one law for all of you. The same for both stranger and citizen for I, the Lord, am your God (*Lev. 24:22*).

When you reap the produce of your land you must not harvest the corners of your field nor gather the fallen sheaves. Leave them for the poor and the stranger. I, the Lord, am your God. (*Lev. 23:22*).

You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers (*Ex.22:9*)⁵⁵

10. READING-

The first letter of each child spells the word "kherut"- freedom.⁵⁶

11. READING-

The Four Children: 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 the questions; the stage at which we can only ask the innocent questions; the rebellious stage, when it's all "Your stuff, no mine!"; to the understanding stage of intellectual maturity. . .

The Four Parents: The types of questions that our children ask are a direct reflection of the kind of relationships that we have built with them.⁵⁷

12. READING-

⁵⁵ Zion and Dishon, op. cit., p. 95

⁵⁶ Kagan, op. cit., p. 58

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 63

We train children at the Passover Seder to ask why, because tyrants are undone and liberty is won with a good question. It is for this reason that God loves it when we ask why.- Rabbi Steven Greenberg⁵⁸

13. READING-

One might identify four generations- since the great emigration of Eastern European Jews to the New World began in the 1880s. The first generation of immigrants is the WISE child who knows and feels comfortable with Jewish tradition. The second generation is the REBEL who in the name of progress and Westernization rejects their parents' Judaism after having imbibed it at home. The third generation is assimilated. There is little knowledge and little resentment, but there is still SIMPLE curiosity about the customs of their grandparents. Finally, a fourth generation, without knowledge or even mild acquaintance, is born. They DO NOT KNOW HOW TO ASK. They might be called "orphans in history" lacking any of the resources of Jewish wisdom against which to struggle and from which to draw personal meaning.- Paul Cowan⁵⁹

14. READING-

One aspect of a *goy gadol*, a great nation, is that it distinguishes itself in the area of righteousness: "*And what goy gadol is there that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as this law?*" (Deuteronomy 4:8). The people as such, as well as the individuals who comprise it, possess a developed sense of and fine sensitivity to justice. Instinctively, they cannot tolerate evil; they hate discriminatory practices and chicanery. If a nation is emotionally capable of approving of injustice, it cannot lay claim

⁵⁸ Zion and Zion, op. cit., p. 26

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 50

to greatness, no matter how powerful it is militarily and economically, or however ingenious it is in matters of science and technology. Real greatness consists in the innate quality of fairness and righteousness, in the spontaneous indignation whenever one is confronted with hypocrisy and selfishness. . . If asked what characterizes Jewish morality, I would answer with a single Yiddish word: *rahmanus*. The English translation of mercy, compassion, sympathy, or empathy do not capture its full meaning. *Rachmanus* refers to the exceptionally tender and warm approach of one individual to another. The word *rahamim* in Hebrew is derived from *rehem*, the womb; it means the love of a mother for her child. The fact that in Egypt the Jews were exposed to all kinds of chicanery and humiliation, the fact that they were treated there like objects, not people, engendered in the Jewish people sensitivity and tenderness toward their fellow man.-
*Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*⁶⁰

15. READING-

What makes the wicked child wicked? The fact that he excludes himself from the community. There are three basic forms of Jewish identity, Mordecai Kaplan (United States, 1883-1986) claims: we can identify as a Jew either by believing, behaving, or belonging. For Kaplan himself, the primary form of identity was belonging. Judaism is the religion of the Jewish people; it emerged out of the life experience of a people, and therefore it is the Jewish people who are responsible to shape Jewish religion in every generation. To exclude oneself from the community is to abandon the relationship that above all makes one a Jew and to forsake the responsibility for the fate of Jews.⁶¹

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 69

⁶¹ Hoffman and Arnow, Volume One, *op. cit.*, p. 187

16. READING-

The Four Daughters⁶²

The daughter who asks: What meaning does my past have for me today?

All: "Why do we gather here only women tonight? Why didn't the Torah count women among the 600,000 men on foot, aside from children, who came out of Egypt?" To her we say: The whole Jewish people left Egypt together, all of them, women and men. Because this daughter understands that Jewish memory is essential to our identity, teach her that history is made by those who tell the tale. If Torah did not name and number women, it is up to her to fill the empty spaces of our holy texts.

And the daughter who wants to erase her difference?

All: Why do you gather here only women tonight? Why must you keep pushing your women's questions into every text? And why are these women's issues so important to you?" To her we say: This is not about exclusion. We are not shutting men out of our lives, but bringing women to a dedicated space to share our stories. Since this daughter so easily forgets the struggles of her mothers and sisters, we invite her to join us in thanking God for the blessing of being a Jewish woman and to remind her that tonight is a time to help empower each other and form the bonds of sisterhood.

And the daughter who does not know that she has a place at the table.

All: "Why do we need to celebrate our feminism in a Jewish context? What is this?" To her we say: Because we deny our history if we forget we are Jews. Because we insult our fore-mothers if we forget we are Jews. Because we rob our children if we forget we are

⁶² E. 55th St. Conservative Synagogue Women's Seder

Jews. Because this daughter doesn't realize that her questions are, in themselves, part of the Seder tradition, and tell her that the insights and questions count as part of the text.

And the daughter who asks questions.

All: To her we say: From the moment Yocheved, Miriam and the midwives questioned Pharaoh's edict until today, every question we ask helps us leave Egypt farther behind. When your questions come they will help liberate you from Egypt. You must learn, so you may teach others.

17.READING-

"It may be that the 'four children' are not different people but successive stages in the development of a child. We begin by being simply unable to ask. We accept the world as given. The next stage in intellectual growth is curiosity (the 'simple son'). We ask questions with no ulterior motive. We simply want to learn. This is often followed by a period of testing and challenging the values we have received (the 'wicked' or adolescent son). The Hebrew word for adolescent, *na'ar*, also means 'to shake off'. The teenage years are ones where we develop our own identity by putting received values to the test. This can sometimes lead to rebellion as a form of self-exploration. The culmination of cognitive growth is 'wisdom', the point at which we have both internalized the value of our heritage and are sufficiently mature to see their objective merits. Although the Haggadah uses the word 'wise', rabbinic tradition preferred the phrase *talmid chacham*, a 'wise disciple'. Wisdom, in Judaism, is not a state, but a process of constant learning. That is why it lies as much in the questions one asks as in the answers. Every answer is

itself the prelude to a deeper question, and thus there is constant growth as we move to new levels of understanding.”⁶³

18. READING-

TO YOU - Lachem. When the defiant (or as per this translation, rejecting) child asks “What does all this mean to you?” we are instructed to answer as follows: “This is done because of what the Eternal did for me when I went out of Egypt.’ To me and not to you; had you been there you would not have been redeemed.” Surely, this reproach serves to alienate the *rasha* even further, deepening the sense of exclusion. As adults it is our obligation to do better with our rejecting children. Let us reach across the divide with an outstretched arm, as God did for the Israelites in their confinement. God heard the Israelites’ cry. Can we hear a child’s silent cry, and reach out to him or her? How can you remind a child that they are part of the social fabric, noticed and cared for? We must invite the troublemaker, the awkward, the confused, the angry, and the lonely into our hearts. (Rabbi Dean Shapiro, b. 1969)⁶⁴

20. READING-

21. **DO NOT KNOW HOW TO ASK -V’she-eino yodei-a-lishol.** The inability to ask is not a character flaw. After all, explains Rabbi Yerachmiel Yisrael Danziger of Poland (1853-1910), the Israelite slaves in Egypt were also unable to recognize the presence of God in their lives or open their mouths in praise or thanksgiving. Nevertheless, they were included in the emancipation from slavery. God does not require eloquence from us in order to deem us worthy of redemption (*Yismach Yisrael*, 1911).⁶⁵

⁶³ Sacks, op. cit., p. 17

⁶⁴ Person, op. cit., p. 47

⁶⁵ Person, op. cit., p. 51

THE WOMEN

1. READING-

We begin our story with the first stirrings of freedom. How was the desire for freedom first aroused? By the midwives, Shifrah and Puah, who resisted Pharaoh's decrees to drown every Israelite boy in the Nile. By Miriam, who watched over her brother Moses to insure his safety. In the face of death, they advocated life.

In the birth waters and in the Nile, these extraordinary women saw life and liberation. Like the coming of spring, they believed in the inevitability of freedom and began the process of awakening their people. The waters of freedom open and close our story, taking us from the Nile to the Sea of Reeds.⁶⁶

2. SONG-

The Ballad of the Five Women"

(may be sung to the tune of "She'll be Coming Round the Mountain" From the Kehilla Community Synagogue haggadah, "A Passover Haggadah". Lyrics by Rabbi Burt Jacobson)

The two midwives wouldn't listen to Pharaoh
Wouldn't drown the Hebrew infants, oh, no no!
It was Shifrah, it was Puah,
Who saved each baby Jew, ah,
Those two midwives wouldn't listen to Pharaoh.

Moses' mother hid him from the evil ones,
For he was her flesh and blood, he was her son.
Yocheved made an ark,

⁶⁶ Levitt and Strassfeld, op. cit., p. 35

Put her baby in the dark,
Moses' mother hid him from the evil ones.

Moses' sister took him to the river Nile,
And she watched as Pharaoh's daughter came in style.

Miriam-she brought her mother,
To nurse her baby brother,
Moses' sister took him to the river Nile.

And the princess brought him up to be a man,
Till away from Egypt Moses ran and ran.
Batya, Batya-she was great,
Joined the Hebrews in their fate,
Yes, this princess brought him up to be a man.

Moses' wife gave him the courage to go back.
If you stay in Midian you'll wind up a hack!
Oh Tsipora, oh Tsipora!
Without her we'd have no Torah,
Moses' wife gave him the courage to go back.

In the ark, Her light upon him it did shine.
Moses sought her presence, for her he did pine.
Oh Shekhinah, soul of Torah,
Now we seek you more and more, ah,
In the ark Your light upon him it did shine!

3. SONG-

Miriam's Song- Debbie Friedman

(Chorus)

And the women dancing with their timbrels

Followed Miriam as she sang her song.

Sing a song to the One whom we've exalted.

Miriam and the women danced and danced the whole night long.

And Miriam was a weaver of unique variety.

The tapestry she wove was one which sang our history.

With every thread and every strand she crafted her delight.

A woman touched with spirit, she dances to the light. (Chorus)

As Miriam stood upon the shores and gazed across the sea,

The wonder of this miracle she soon came to believe.

Whoever thought the sea would part with an outstretched hand,

And we would pass to freedom, and march to the promised land. (Chorus)

And Miriam the Prophet took her timbrel in her hand,

And all the women followed her just as she had planned.

And Miriam raised her voice with song.

She sang with praise and might,

We've just lived through a miracle, we're going to dance tonight.

10. READING-

... Rabbi Sheira Gaon of tenth-century Babylon referred to a custom of putting three cooked foods on the plate: a shank bone, an egg, and a fish item. According to one explanation offered by Rabbi Sherira Gaon, the shank bone and the egg are symbolic of the leadership of Moses and Aaron, while the fish item commemorates Miriam. . . The idea of including fish on the Seder plate finds further support in a midrash that avers that the children of Israel were taken out of Egypt because of the righteousness of the Israelite women, who were associated with fish. According to this midrash, found in Sotah 11b, when the Israelite women drew water from the river, God caused small fish to swim into the water jugs. The women cooked the fish, washed and fed their husbands in the fields, and encouraged them to have children, despite Pharaoh's decree. This midrash seems to fix the idea of feminine righteousness within the maternal and caregiving spheres. It is worth noting, however, that immediately preceding this midrash, Rabbi Samuel bar Nachmani suggests that the Egyptians tormented the Israelites by making the men do women's work and the women do men's work. This gender confusion, though, imposed upon the Israelites as a punishment, allowed the Israelite women to become sexual initiators, thereby denying social convention and Pharaoh's expectations.⁶⁷

THE PLAGUES

1. READING-

The wise child says, "We spill the wine from our cup because our salvation came at the expense of the suffering of others. At the crossing of the sea, the ministering angels wanted to sing praises to God. But God silenced them, saying, 'My children are drowning in the sea and you want to sing before me?' "

⁶⁷ Hoffman and Arnow, Volume One, op. cit., p. 105

The vengeful child says, "We spill the wine from the cup because *our* blood has been spilled. There was a dispute in heaven about how much mercy God should show the Egyptians, until the angel Gabriel showed God a brick from Egypt with a baby entombed in it. 'Master of the world,' he said, 'thus did they enslave the Israelites.' God immediately sentenced the Egyptian and drowned them in the sea."

The innocent child says, "We spill the wine from the cup because our blood was spilled and their blood was spilled. We are all diminished when blood is shed."

The unaware child enjoys spilling the drops.⁶⁸

2. SONG-

One morning when Pharaoh awoke in his bed
There were frogs on his head and frogs in his bed
Frogs on his nose and frogs on his toes
Frogs here, frogs there, frogs were jumping everywhere.

3. READING- "Ten Modern Plagues"

Reader: At Pesach, we examine plagues, not only those of Egypt, but those which plague our own generation.

Discrimination. In many places in the world, even in our own country, people face discrimination because of their race or sex.

Participants: Tonight we affirm that all people should have the right to equal treatment under the law.

⁶⁸ Levitt and Strassfeld, op. cit., p. 61

Reader: **Poisoning of our Earth.** We have polluted our environment instead of protecting it.

Participants: Tonight, we affirm that the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the good earth around us--all these should be humanity's common heritage.

Reader: **Ravages of War.** In too many places, the death and destruction of war never cease.

Participants: Tonight, we affirm that the peoples of the world should be able to live together peacefully both within a nation and across borders.

Reader: **Economic Injustice.** Too often our nation's policies have denied the poor dignity and opportunity, and have left them out on the streets, homeless.

Participants: Tonight, we affirm that even the poorest among us deserve both dignity and the fulfillment of basic human needs, including shelter.

Reader: **Chemical Dependency.** For some people, alcohol or drugs have been abused to the point where people's humanity is under thrall to these chemicals.

Participants: Tonight, we affirm at this Seder that wine must never be more than a symbol of joy and sanctification, must never become a Pharaoh of our own creation.

Reader: **World Hunger.** This year, hundreds of thousands are dying from starvation as famine spreads through many areas in the Third World.

Participants: Tonight, we affirm that no one should ever have to feel the pangs of hunger.

Reader: **Religious Intolerance.** We are reminded that the roots of religious intolerance still run deep in this country.

Participants: Tonight, we affirm that this nation was founded on the principles of freedom and equality for all religions.

Reader: **Unemployment.** Our society has forced degradation upon the millions of the perennially unemployed.

Participants: Tonight, we affirm that being able to earn one's own livelihood is essential to human dignity.

Reader: **Denial of Human Rights.** Oppressive regimes seek to extinguish the light of freedom in many nations.

Participants: Tonight, we affirm that freedom shall never perish for any of God's children.

Reader: **Threat of Nuclear Holocaust and Terrorism.** We have given our children an inheritance of nightmares, the nightmares of a nuclear cloud constantly over their heads and bombs exploding in all corners of the world.

Participants: Tonight, we affirm that our children deserve dreams of a peaceful future.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ source unknown

4. READING-

By spilling a drop of wine, from the Pesach cup for each plague, we acknowledge that our own joy is lessened and incomplete. For our redemption had to come by means of the punishment of other human beings. Even though these acts are just punishments for evil acts, it says, "Do not rejoice at the fall of your enemy". (Proverbs 24:17)

Don Isaac Abrabanel- refugee from Spain, 1492⁷⁰

5. READING

As the Mitzrim drowned in the Sea of Reeds and the liberated people of Israel sang the song, the Talmud relates that the Angels also sang until God abruptly stopped them, "My handiwork, my human creatures, are drowning in the sea and you want to sing a song of praise?" People can sing at that moment of liberation since they are so caught up in the moment that they don't have the perspective to see or to empathize with the sufferings of others. And that's OK. But the angels? They surely have the ability to rise above the occasion and have a broader view of cause and effect! So when we spill our wine this year, we are given an opportunity to transcend the narrowness of our human awareness and become like angels- even higher than angels.⁷¹

⁷⁰ quoted in Zion and Dishon, op. cit., p. 101

⁷¹ Kagan, op. cit., p. 102

6.SONG-

The 10 Plagues of Pesach

(By Gary Teblum, "The Twelve Days of Christmas")

For the first plague of Pesach, Pharaoh came to see

A river that was bloody

For the second plague of Pesach, Pharaoh came to see

Green jumping frogs

And a river that was bloody

For the third plague of Pesach, Pharaoh came to see

Big white lice

Green jumping frogs

And a river that was bloody

For the fourth plague of Pesach, Pharaoh came to see

Wild scary beasts

Big white lice

Green jumping frogs

And a river that was bloody

For the fifth plague of Pesach, Pharaoh came to see

Cows with disease {Pause}

Wild scary beasts

Big white lice

Green jumping frogs

And a river that was bloody

For the sixth plague of Pesach, Pharaoh came to see

Boils causing itching

Cows with disease {Pause}

Wild scary beasts

Big white lice
Green jumping frogs
And a river that was bloody
For the seventh plague of Pesach, Pharaoh came to see
Hail big as golf balls
Boils causing itching
Cows with disease {Pause}
Wild scary beasts
Big white lice
Green jumping frogs
And a river that was bloody
For the eighth plague of Pesach, Pharaoh came to see
Tons of flying locusts
Hail big as golf balls
Boils causing itching
Cows with disease {Pause}
Wild scary beasts
Big white lice
Green jumping frogs
And a river that was all bloody
For the ninth plague of Pesach, Pharaoh came to see
Days of pure darkness
Tons of flying locusts
Hail big as golf balls
Boils causing itching
Cows with disease {Pause}
Wild scary beasts
Big white lice

Green jumping frogs
And a river that was bloody
For the tenth plague of Pesach, Pharaoh came to see
Death of the first born
Days of pure darkness
Tons of flying locusts
Hail big as golf balls
Boils causing itching
Cows with disease {Pause}
Wild scary beasts
Big white lice
Green jumping frogs
And a river that was bloody

7.READING-

What plagues do we escape by ignoring, turning off? . . . It takes a certain kind of belief to recognize that the signs of the times are a true feed-back from the Universe. Here's an analogy: I have a headache. Why did I get one? Because my body wanted to send me a message. I took the extra-strength pain reliever; I, in effect, cut off the communication. 'Head: I don't want you to tell me that you hurt.' What follows is I forget about the root cause because I have numbed the pain. Although it's pain and it's unpleasant, it's better to listen. Must it get to the point where the body has to scream through something more serious before the message gets through? So what plagues are out there that we have turned off? As we discuss these plagues, we can pour out some more wine from our cups, drops for each of our own plagues. May the drops be few, and may there be some wine left in our cups when we are done with this work.⁷²

⁷² Reb Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, <http://www.rzlp.org/worldpress/?p=58>

8. A THOUGHT-

But according to the earliest explanations- from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries- the wine taken from our cups represents the suffering we were spared and that we hope will befall those who hate us.⁷³

9. READING-

There are two forms of exile:

The exile of the body and the exile of the soul.

In Egypt both states of exile

manifested together at the same time.

Through their experience of harsh labor they experienced the exile of the body.

What was the exile of the soul?

Their emotions and consciousness were disenfranchised, fragmented; thus, the soul in exile. Even inner consciousness was constrained and restricted by Egyptian culture. If the Jews were liberated from Egypt through natural forces only physical liberation would be experienced. There would be no spiritual realization. They would actually think counter to the spirit. The attitude would be: 'It is *through* my willpower that I have been freed.' This is why God freed them with signs and miracles that transcended the natural order of things so Israel would cry out: 'This can only be from God!'

The recognition that divine forces catalyzed and activated the Exodus, motivated the nation to *finally* free their minds and to refine their characters. This collective inner work activated a spiritual redemption. This is the meaning of the authors of the Haggadah: 'If God did not bring out our ancestors.' *This means:* if the redemption

⁷³ Hoffman and Arnow, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 45

from Egypt did not also consist of powers transcending nature, then: 'we and our children and our grandchildren would still be in bondage.'

This means- even our minds and character traits would still be in bondage- along with our bodies.⁷⁴- Rabbi Israel of Rizhin, 19th century

10. READING-

Every Jewish ceremony is said over a cup of wine. A wedding, the circumcision, the welcoming in and ushering out of Shabbat and festivals, and most notably the Seder on Passover, are all said over a full cup of wine, which we then drink down.

Why is this? Can't we recite prayers and stay dry? Why do we seem to drink at every opportunity?

There is a power to saying a prayer over a cup. It allows us to drink in the moment. Instead of just saying words out into the open air, we recite our blessings over a cup, the cup absorbs the words, and then we drink it down. We imbibe the holiness.

Under the wedding canopy, the bride and groom drink from the cup of wine, so that the blessings that consecrated their marriage should be internalized and captured. At a circumcision, the baby himself is given a drop from the wine that has absorbed the prayers, so that the holy words should become a part of his being. On each holiday we drink in the messages of the festival, to take along with us when the festival is over.

At the Seder on Passover night, we retell the story of our ancestors who were slaves in Egypt, and sing songs of thanks to G-d who freed them. As we recount this tale, a cup of wine stands at attention, soaking in every word, absorbing every message, capturing every song. This is so that at the end of the story, we can drink down the cup and ingest the moment. We don't just read the Passover *haggadah* text, we imbibe it, we take it

⁷⁴ Klein, op. cit., p. 56

with us. We drink in the freedom, we ingest the miracle. The story of faith and freedom becomes a part of our inner reality.

However there are some words we don't want to ingest. The Ten Plagues, describing the affliction of the Egyptians, represent negative energy that we would rather not bring into our system. So after reading each plague we spill wine from the cup, banishing the forces of punishment and its curses, and leaving the cup with only blessings. The spilled wine should then be discarded, for drinking it would be drinking in the plagues.

Words have impact. Our surroundings absorb our words. Be careful what you say, and be even more careful what you imbibe.

Leave the plagues to wicked oppressors. We should have only blessings. I'll drink to that.⁷⁵

11. READING-

Slavery is an insult to the human condition and it leaves a legacy of bitterness which itself prevents an ex-slave from being fully free of the past. Freedom involves more than just releasing a slave. It means furnishing him or her with the means to begin an independent life. It also involves tangible recognition of the work he or she did while a slave. Without this a slave continues to resent his former owner. With it, they can face one another in mutual dignity and respect. Payment is restitution in the deepest sense of the word, not only financial but also psychological.

Ben Jacob suggests that the phrase 'and you shall despoil the Egyptians' (Exodus 3:22) is a mistranslation. The verb *venitzaltem* means not 'you shall despoil' but 'you shall save' - meaning, 'You shall save the reputation of the Egyptians and their standing in your eyes.' The Torah did not want the Israelites to harbour ill-will toward the Egyptians. Indeed it forbids resentment. 'You shall not despise an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his

⁷⁵ http://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/1814212/jewish/Why-Do-We-Spill-Wine-on-Passover-Night.htm

land' (Deuteronomy 23:8). Only when justice has been done - when a slave receives compensation for his or her slavery - can one let go of the past and shape a new society without lingering animosities.⁷⁶

12. READING-

Today's plagues may be less obvious or dramatic, but are no less insidious...and responsibility for their existence lies on our shoulders. They include: **A**pathy in the face of evil; **B**rutal torture of the helpless; **C**rue! mockery of the old and the weak; **D**espair of human goodness; **E**nvy of the joy of others; **F**alsehood and deception corroding our faith; **G**reedy theft of earth's resources; **H**atred of learning and culture; **I**nstigation of war and aggression; **J**ustice delayed, justice denied, justice mocked...⁷⁷

13. READING-

The Haggadah teaches us that Passover will lead us *mig'nut l'shevach*, from degradation to dignity. This is our hope: that we will create a society and world where all LGBTQ people are equal and seen and accepted and loved. (Rabbi Denise L. Eger, b. 1960)⁷⁸

14. READING-

MORE THAN ONE ENEMY - Shelo echad bilvad. Radical empathy is the ability to empathize with the enemy, the oppressor, the victor. It's the capacity to imagine their feelings despite our own pained and battered state. It is an extraordinary, revolutionary act. It means that oppression hasn't destroyed the victim's humanity. Radical empathy

⁷⁶ Sacks, op. cit., p. 41

⁷⁷ The Velveteen Rabbi's Haggadah for Pesach

⁷⁸ Person, op. cit., p. 58

allows us to move beyond animosity. We Jews are the inheritors of a tradition that acknowledges the suffering of all sides. It invites us to shear God's perception, the ultimate bird's-eye-view, the infinite reality that simultaneously grieves and rejoices, that gathers up the pain of the victim, and soaks up the pain of the perpetrator and, in a move that's so often beyond our human capacity, embraces them both. God cradles them and rocks them, gently, gently, to sleep. (Rabbi Dean Shapiro b. 1969; adapted⁷⁹).

15. READING-

Eileh HaMakkot - These Are Our Plagues

A drop of wine...

for the pharaohs within.

A drop of wine...

for brutality that blots out beauty.

A drop of wine...

for rage that overwhelms our awe.

A drop of wine...

for caring more about the mastery of life than the mystery of life.

A drop of wine...

for the extinction of herds and flocks,
swarms, flights, and shoals of creatures.

A drop of wine...

for the virus of hatred without cause.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 83

A drop of wine...

for the blight of blood-violence and abuse.

A drop of wine...

for silence that lets evil prevail.

A drop of wine...

for the darkness that shuts out the light of reason.

And on this night, this season of hope-

A drop of wine...

for every child in grief and pain,

in this place and in every place:

for you we choose life and blessing-

the death of hunger, ignorance, and affliction.

Rabbi Sheldon Marder⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 91

DAYENU

1. READING-

What does this mean, "It would have been enough"? Surely no one of these would indeed have been enough for us. It 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!⁸¹

When all the workers of the world receive just compensation and respect for their labors, enjoy safe, healthy, and secure working conditions, and can take pride in their work... Dayenu

When governments end the escalating production of devastating weapons, secure in the knowledge that they will not be necessary ...Dayenu

When technology for the production and conservation of energy and our other natural resources is developed so that we can maintain responsible and comfortable lifestyles- and still assure a safe environment for our children...Dayenu

When the air, water, fellow creatures and beautiful world are protected for the benefit and enjoyment of all, and given priority over development for the sake of profit. ..Dayenu

When all people live freely in their own countries, practicing their beliefs and cultures without interference or persecution. ..Dayenu

When all women and men are allowed to make their own decisions on matters regarding their own bodies and their personal relationships without discrimination or legal consequences. ..Dayenu

When people of all ages, sexes, races, religions, cultures and nations respect and appreciate one another. ..Dayenu

⁸¹ New Jewish Agenda, The Shalom Seders, NY: Adama Books, 1984, p. 25

When all children grow up in freedom, without hunger, and with the love and support needed to realize their full potential. ..Dayenu .

When all children, women, and men are free of the threat of violence, and domination; when personal power and strength are not used as weapons. ..Dayenu

When all people have access to the information and care they need for their physical, mental, and spiritual well being. ..Dayenu

When food and shelter are accepted as human rights, not as commodities, and are available to all. ..Dayenu

When no elderly person in our society has to fear hunger, cold, or loneliness. ..Dayenu

When the peoples of the Middle East, and all peoples living in strife, are able to create paths to just and lasting peace. ..Dayenu

When people everywhere have the opportunities we have to celebrate our culture and use it as a basis to work for progressive change in the world. ..Dayenu

If tonight each person could say, this year I worked as hard as I could toward my goals for improving this world, so that one day all people can experience the joy and freedom I feel sitting with my family and friends at the Seder table. ..Dayenu Dayenu⁸²

⁸² *ibid.*, pp. 88-89

2. READING-

Another perspective on Dayenu:

If we could set the priority in our lives to worshipping HASHEM, to worshipping oneness and wholeness. rather than the gods of money, science, power, and pleasure. Dayeanu

If we could remember that each of us is created in the image of HASHEM, if we could treat all living creatures, starting with ourselves, with the loving kindness warranted by being a manifestation of the spark of the Divine. Dayeanu.

If we could only see how short and precious life is and take care of ourselves, without having to be reminded through tragedy or ill health. Dayeanu.

If we could catch ourselves about to speak Loshen Horah, gossip and tale-bearing, and instead, choose to vocally acknowledge that which we usually take for granted. Dayeanu

If we could realize that when we do harm to our neighbors, friends, employees, parents, children, animals, or environment, we are doing spiritual, psychological, or physical harm to ourselves. Dayeanu

If we could learn to see each other as we really are as opposed to projecting memories or images of other people onto each other. Dayeanu

If we could then listen to each other when we share; if we could regularly feel heard and understood. Dayeanu

If we could make it a practice to spend time being with ourselves, honest about the truths of our lives, getting clear about what we want to learn or work on. Dayeanu

If we could give and receive all of the intimacy, affection, support, nurturance, and sex we need on an ongoing basis, to and from appropriate sources. Dayeanu

If we could have fulfilling work, exciting play, creative endeavors, and no boredom. Dayeanu

If the children of the world could receive the good-enough parenting, schooling, and feeding that would allow them to grow into healthy and stable adults. Dayeanu

If the fears of ill-health, loneliness and poverty could be dispelled so that aging would be seen as part of the process of living as opposed to being something to be feared. Dayeanu

If the commitment to lifetime learning, growth, risk-taking and expanded consciousness could become intense enough to allow for a critical mass of awakened, concerned and fully alive human beings to once again walk the planet at the same time. Dayeanu

If we could then see Tikkun Olam, universal healing, in our lifetimes. Dayeanu

If we could go out into the world and share the joyous message of the Haggadah and the redemption and the way we feel tonight celebrating Passover together. Dayeanu
Dayeanu⁸³

3. A THOUGHT-

If things at your seder are slowing down and people seem drowsy, try the Afghani custom of distributing green onions. Beginning with the ninth stanza, "Even if you had supplied our needs in the desert for forty years, but not fed us manna from heaven," the participants hit each other (gently) with the green onion stalks every time they sing the refrain- *Dayenu*.

Perhaps this custom is tied to the biblical story of the Jews who complained about the manna God had given them and recalled with longing the onions in Egypt. "We remember the fish that we used to eat in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the **ONIONS** and the garlic. Now are gullets are shriveled. There is nothing at all. Nothing but this manna to look at." (Numbers 11:5-6) By beating each other with onions we admonish ourselves **not** to yearn for the fleshpots of Egypt and **not** to forget the Egyptian bondage.⁸⁴

4. READING- "Red Sea/Atlantic Ocean"

"Then did God Himself provide them with a Moses who led them through the Red Sea. You, my friends, were also treated as slaves in dark Russia and were also led through the Red Sea, but it was red from the blood which the Russian barbarians have shed of many innocent men, women and children, red from the flames which issued from your burnt houses. Instead of being rewarded as your ancestors were, who left Egypt, you were even robbed of all your worldly possessions; from behind you were pursued by the Czar

⁸³ Roekard, op. cit., pp. 33-34

⁸⁴ Zion and Dishon, op. cit., p. 107

with his officers, and in front of you were confronted by the Atlantic ocean. But instead of a single Moses in Egypt, there were several hundred such founding America, who have not only emancipated you, but are endeavoring to provide for your future."
*Address at Ward's Island, New York, Seder for Immigrants, April 1882*⁸⁵

5. READING-

There is a great confusion, especially in our times, between our 'needs' and our 'wants'. We are always being persuaded that our wants are really our needs. This is the goal of advertising. It plays into our fear of scarcity, of not having enough, our survivor mentality. It is a very unfriendly way of living on this planet. If only we could remember to make our needs our wants.⁸⁶

6. A THOUGHT-

The "*House of Choseness*"? What a strange term for the Temple! God opens the door but we have to choose to go in. Then we become chosen. We choose to turn to God and then God will turn to us. But the truth is that we are all chosen already- we just have to act on it.

"*To atone for our misguided ways.*" This is the essence of Judaism: we are human; we know what we should do; we try; we try harder; we somehow don't quite make it; we fall; we recognize our mistakes; we pray for forgiveness; we resolve not to repeat them; we make the necessary changes in our life so as not to fall into the same trap again; we pray for help; we get up and get on with our lives.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Geffen, op. cit., p. 35

⁸⁶ Kagan, op. cit., p. 113

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p. 114

7. READING-

Contemporary Dayeinu: It is Not Enough!

Leader: We have sung our *dayeinus*, declaring that any of God's blessings in the past would have been enough. But in our day, dare we ever think that there are enough blessings, that no more are needed? For when we look at the world around us and see how much more is needed to perfect the world, we can only say "*lo dayeinu*" - it is not enough.

Readers: Were people of all ages, sexes, genders, races, religions, cultures, and nations to respect and appreciate one another... *lo dayeinu!*

Were all children to grow up in freedom, without hunger, and with the education, resources, love, and support they need to realize their full potential... *lo dayeinu!*

Were all workers of the world to receive just compensation and respect for their labors, and to enjoy safe, healthy, and secure working conditions... *lo dayeinu!*

Were governments to end the escalating production of devastating weapons, secure in the knowledge that they would not be necessary... *lo dayeinu!*

Were our air, water, our fellow creatures, and our beautiful planet to be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of all life... *lo dayeinu!*

Were people to be empowered to overcome addiction... *lo dayeinu!*

Were technologies to be developed for the production of energy and conservation of our natural resources so that all could enjoy responsible and comfortable lifestyles and assure a safe environment for our children and for our children's children... *lo dayeinu!*

Were all politicians to work sincerely for the good of all... *lo dayeinu!*

Were everyone able to make their own decisions regarding their bodies and their personal relationships... *lo dayeinu!*

Were all of God's children to be free from the threat of violence, abuse, and domination... *lo dayeinu!*

Were all people to enjoy access to the education, information, and care they need for their physical, mental, and spiritual health, growth, and well-being... *lo dayeinu!*

Were adequate food, housing, and health care, basic human rights available to all... *lo dayeinu!*

Were no child or elder to fear hunger, homelessness, or loneliness... *lo dayeinu!*

Were the people of the Middle East and all peoples living in strife to create paths to just, secure, and lasting peace... *lo dayeinu!*

Were persons everywhere to have the opportunities to celebrate their faith and culture, and to use them as the basis for life-and liberty - enhancing change in the world... *lo dayeinu!*

Were all able to sit under their vine and fig tree, in their homes and schools, in their synagogues, mosques, churches, shrines, and movie houses, in their work and in their play, and no one to make them afraid... *lo dayeinu!*

All: But the Rabbis taught, "While we are *not* obligated to complete all which must be done, we *are* obligated never to give up." So were we to say that we truly did our part to ensure for others the safety, security, health, joy, freedom, and hope we cherish sitting at this seder table with family and friends, knowing that our work will never be completed and that there is no such thing as enough, we will have earned the right to say...*dayeinu! Dayeinu!*

By Rabbi Donald Rossoff (b. 1953).⁸⁸

HALLEL

1. READING-

This is one of the transitional moments of the Haggadah, when we move from story to song, from prose to poetry, from recitation (Maggid) to praise (Hallel). We have told the story of the Exodus. Now, like the Israelites 3,300 years ago, we sing a song of praise. We lift the cup at this point, fulfilling the words of the Psalm, "I will lift the cup of salvation and call on the name of God" (Psalm 116:13).

Song plays a vital part in Judaism. At the end of his life Moses gave the Israelites the last of the commands - that in every generation we should write a new Sefer Torah. On that occasion he used an unusual word. He called the Torah a 'song' (Deuteronomy 31:9). Words are the language of the mind. Music is the language of the soul. Whenever speech is invested with deep emotion it aspires to the condition of song. Thus we do not say our prayers; we sing them. We do not read the Torah; we chant it. We do not study Talmud; we intone it. Each kind of text, and each period of the Jewish year, has its own melody. Thus, Moses was saying; to transmit Torah across the generations as a living faith, it must be, not just a code of law, but also the song of the Jewish people.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Person, op. cit., pp. 94-95

⁸⁹ Sacks, op. cit., pp. 66-67

PESACH, MATZAH, MAROR

1. A THOUGHT-

Rabban Gamliel said: "Those who do not explain the following three things on Passover have not fulfilled their obligation: Pesach- the Passover sacrifice, Matza- the unleavened bread, Maror- the bitter herbs.

Pesach- What sacrifices would we make for freedom today? What would we leave? How deeply would we look within ourselves?

Matza- Our ancestors had no time to await the rising of the bread. Yet we, who have that time, what do we do to be worthy of our precious inheritance?

Maror- We were slaves in Egypt. . . but now we are free. How easy it is for us to relive the days of our bondage as we sit in the warmth and comfort of our Seder. How much harder to relieve the pain of those who live in the bitterness of slavery today.⁹⁰

2. READING- (Hillel sandwich)

From darkness to light, from slavery to freedom, from winter to spring, and now from bitterness to sweetness. But with the light, there is still darkness in the world. With our freedom, there are still those who are enslaved. It is still winter for some, and life remains bitter for many throughout our world.

Even in our own lives, we live within the tapestry of these contradictions. It is dark, and it is light; we are trapped, and we are liberated; we are cold, and we are warm; we experience pain and joy, just as we have eaten the *maror* with the *kharoset*, taking the bitter with the sweet.

⁹⁰ Congregation Beth El of the Sudbury River Valley, V'TaHer Libenu, MA.: 1980, p. 132

Through this act, we acknowledge the fullness of life, shaded by the gradations of experience; never black and white but a reflection of the full range of possibilities.

*Joy Levitt*⁹¹

3. READING- (matzah)

Before eating chametz in the concentration camp seder, Jews recited a special prayer: "Our Father in Heaven! It is well known to you that we desire to follow your will and celebrate Pesach with matza- strictly avoiding chametz. Yet our hearts are pained that the enslavement prevents us from doing so for our lives are in danger. We are here, ready to observe the positive commandment of "living by your laws" (Leviticus 18:5)- not dying by them. We must take care not to violate the negative commandment, "beware and guard yourself well", lest we endanger our lives. Therefore, our prayer to You is to preserve our lives and redeem us quickly, so that we may observe Your will and serve You wholeheartedly. Amen."

4. READING- (matzah)

The essential metaphor expressed by Matzah is the need for speed and intervention to prevent the normal leavening process from occurring. What became obvious in Egypt was that our thoughts, behaviors and social patterns would only lead us further down the path to slavery and self-destruction. We could not stop ourselves; our wounds had become chronic, acute, and pathological. Our souls were no longer capable of healing themselves. Our whole existence as a people, as family and as individuals was facing the certainty of imminent collapse. We could not wait for ourselves to heal ourselves. Our situation required intervention at every level. Just as the presence of yeast in the dough is a virtual guarantee of leavening, so was the malaise of Egypt in us a virtual

⁹¹ Levitt and Strassfeld, op. cit., p. 84

guarantee of destruction. Just as dough displays symptoms of its progress, a whitening across its face, the development of fissures over its surface and smell of fermentation, so did we Jewish people display all the signs of our process.

Some degenerative diseases can be arrested, some may even be reversed. Most, though, reach a point after which they can neither be arrested nor reversed. So it was with us in Egypt. We had reached that point. Notwithstanding the spiritual awakening we had undergone that night, regardless of the fact we had glimpsed sanity and tasted intimacy, we were very ill and could not wait for intervention, it had to come immediately.⁹²

5. READING- (charoset)

One of the most literal yet inventive representations of charoset was conceived during the American Civil War, when a group of Jewish Union soldiers made a seder for themselves in the wilderness of West Virginia. They had none of the traditional ingredients for traditional charoset handy, so they put a real brick in its place on the seder plate.

*Ira Steingroot*⁹³

6. READING- (maror)

1. Hard work referred to in this context refers to unnatural work. Work that makes a slave bitter because, *e.g.* it is unnecessary work, which involves a person being forced to do things for which he has no talent simply in order to torture him, while not permitting him to do the work to which he may be suited.

⁹² Worch, *op. cit.*, p. 94

⁹³ quoted in Zion and Dishon, *op. cit.*, p. 113

2. Bricks and mortar refers to the bitterness caused by being forced to do work from which the slave will derive neither pleasure nor benefit. He has to watch the work of his hands go unacknowledged and unappreciated.
3. Fieldwork refers to the bitterness caused by being forced to work at tasks that have no foreseeable end or completion. The slave is faced with an unending, unremitting series of tasks whose number grows exponentially. Even as one task is completed it is shown only to be the precursor to a myriad others of ever increasing urgency. Nothing is ever enough, sufficient or adequate. The more work the slave does, the more successfully he completes his task, the more pressured and stressed he is made to become.⁹⁴

7.READING - (matzah)

As a paradoxical symbol of both oppression and liberation, the matzah embodies the creative tension of the seder itself, a complex interweaving of celebrating freedom while identifying with bondage. Those bearing the burdens of suffering, pain and disruption can easily relate to this ambiguity- treatments can be both healing and worse than the disease, care can be helpful and harmful, medical struggles can be both stifling and life-affirming, disease may bring secondary gains alongside weakness and diminishment, and emergence can feel like a curse and a blessing. Just as one must not deny the horror and the loss, one must also not neglect the moments of joy, love, peace and fulfillment.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Worch, op. cit., p. 96

⁹⁵ Weintraub, Rabbi Simkha, "The Outstretched Arm: Seven Healing Lessons of the Matzah", Spring 1997, p. 1

8. READING- (matzah)

The seder ritual seems to have it backwards: One would think that we should first eat the *marror*, the bitter herbs, just as the bitter slavery preceded the liberation, when matzah was created. But in truth, our chronology is not so simple- we need to have tasted freedom to deeply understand oppression. As flat and tasteless as it may seem to our jaded palates, freedom/matzah ought to be savored first- maybe its lingering aftertaste can help see us through suffering and affliction. This matzah-then-marror order also points to the ongoing need to free ourselves, again and again, or more and more, and urges us to confront every form of slavery, at each stage of life. Finally, the marror "sandwich" compels us to integrate its bitterness with the sweetness of the *haroset* (ironic, in itself, since, one would think, these "bricks of slave labor" ought not be sweet!)- and to frame it between two pieces (of) matzah, our "freedom bread."⁹⁶

9. READING- (maror)

As a lesson from our bitter experience in Egypt, where Pharaoh oppressed the Jews with "harsh labor", the Torah forbids a Jew from forcing a slave to do "harsh labor" (Leviticus 25:46). As Maimonides explains: "What is harsh labor? It is labor that has no limit or a job that it is not needed, but rather had been conceived only to keep the slave from resting. . . One cannot say to one's slave: "Dig in this place" if there is no need for it. Even if the command (is) to heat up a cup of water, or to cool one, if it isn't needed it is forbidden." (Mishneh Torah, Legislation regarding Slaves, 1:6) Though he acknowledged that slavery was a legal part of the economic system in the Bible and even in his own era in Egypt, Maimonides recommends that slave owners and by analogy, employers treat those working for them in ways much more humane than even the law

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 8

might allow. "It is pious and wise to be compassionate and to seek justice, not to add to the burden on one's slave and not to cause the slave distress. . . The earliest Rabbis would share the very same foods they ate with their slaves, making sure the slaves ate before the master's own meal. Also the master should never humiliate the slave with violence, physical or verbal, nor should one shout or show anger to a slave. Rather speak always politely and be attentive to their complaints. . . Strive to behave like God showing compassion to God's creatures." (ibid., 9:8)⁹⁷

10.READING- (Hillel Sandwich)-

While we may understand that maturity means accepting that life is the integration of the bitter and the sweet, the sandwich also reminds us that we live our lives 'in-between'. We hang in the balance, alive, but not immortal, sandwiched between a fragile, limited, animal self and our eternal Divine image.⁹⁸

11.READING (matzah)-

The making of matzah (mixing the flour with water, perforating the dough, getting it into the oven) must be completed very quickly- in no more than eighteen minutes. *Chamets*, on the other hand, results from a lengthy, delayed process. (Indeed because of the natural fermenting agents in the air, *anything* left lying around will eventually become *chamets*.) Since the production of *matzah* requires immediacy, no delays, it is associated with the ever fresh, brand-new. Kabbalistic imagery characterizes this as *yesh* ("something") from *ayin* ("nothing"). Matzah symbolizes a continuous renewal of the creative process and of the very work of creation itself. And, therefore, to the

⁹⁷ Zion and Zion, p. 89

⁹⁸ Dickstein, op. cit., p. 12

extent that we internalize this approach of perpetual renewal, we effectively devote ourselves to seeking what is newly born each day.

We don't eat anything else after the *afikoman* because we don't want to dilute or dull the memory of the taste of matzah. We want the novelty of each moment, the literally awesome thrill of "something from nothing," to linger in our mouths throughout the entire year.

Of course, after Pesach ends, we revert to eating *chamets*. And that is why, the Berditchever concludes, we need the 248 performative commandments: to remind us of the reality of God during the rest of the year. A truly radical thought: if the taste of matzah- of the immediacy of God's creative power- could truly stay with us throughout the year, then that would be the only *mitzvah* we would need to remain in the presence of God!⁹⁹

12. READING (matzah)-

This is a very poor bread we eat in this Exile. . . as long as we not have our own home. . . we can only be called guests. . . we sit by strange tables. . .even if the table is broad and affluent. . . the greatest thing we can say is that we are eating very poor bread. . . even the fame that Jews achieve here in these lands can only be called a subtle variation of slavery. . . the souls of the leaders are bound up with others. . . only when we establish our own homeland can we truly be called a free people. . . but what are we doing to attain this noble state of being truly free?¹⁰⁰- Rabbi Israel of Rizhin, 19th century

⁹⁹ Hoffman and Arnow, Volume One, op. cit., p. 204

¹⁰⁰ Klein, op. cit., p. 52

WASHING OUR HANDS

1. READING-

Before eating, we wash our hands, thanking God for the commandment which impels us to mindfulness. What does washing our hands tell us? That we can become clean; that our bodies are sacred and deserving of care. Why wash hands, and not feet, as our Middle Eastern ancestors did? Not just because it's impractical for seder guests to doff shoes, but because hands are the instruments with which we work in the world. It is our hands which plant and write, which caress and create—and also our hands which strike and poison and smash. We wash our hands not to absolve ourselves of responsibility, but to affirm the need to make our hands holy. At this season of freedom and rebirth, we consecrate our hands to the task of building freedom for all who suffer.¹⁰¹

SHULCHAN ARUCH- LET'S EAT

1. READING-

Eggs: The eggs are a symbol of springtime, fertility, the giving of life. We are reminded of Pharaoh's threat to kill newborn Jewish babies, and of the courageous midwives who refused to carry out his orders. The egg also teaches us, "the longer things are in hot water, the tougher they become." Such is the case in the "oppression cooker" of life.

We dip the eggs in salt water to taste the tears which accompany birth and death in times of slavery and freedom.¹⁰²

2. READING-

¹⁰¹ The Velveteen Rabbi's Haggadah for Pesach

¹⁰² New Jewish Agenda, op. cit., p. 78

An egg symbolizes an intermediate stage between the hen and the chick. It is perpetually in a state of *about-to-become-* no longer a hen, not yet a chick. In this way an egg hovers between the generations, just as we constantly hover between who we were and who we will become.¹⁰³

AFIKOMAN

1. READING-

When some of us were children, this moment was the high point of the seder. This was the time we would search for, and always find, the afikoman, a portion of the middle matza that had been hidden at the beginning of the seder. We knew that the seder could not be completed until the afikoman had been found and redeemed with gifts so that everyone could be given a piece to nibble for desert.

Even as children, we knew that it wasn't possible to find everything that was missing in life. As much as we prized the gift we received from our bargaining, it was the hunt that we really loved, running through the rooms and turning everything upside down.

The older we get, the harder the search becomes. We aren't always sure now what we are seeking, what the afikoman means to us, which dessert will bring us a sense of completion and satisfaction. Unlike during our childhood search, there are now fewer loving and reliable coaches in the next room giving us clues. There are no guarantees that we will find what we are looking for. But this we know: it is still the search that is important, the looking, the running, and the turning everything upside down.

*Joy Levitt*¹⁰⁴

2. A THOUGHT

¹⁰³ Hoffman and Arnow, Vol. I, op. cit., p. 101

¹⁰⁴ Levitt and Strassfeld, op. cit., p. 89

One of the most unusual aspects of the seder is that it can't continue until the children find the afikoman. This means that the kids have a lot of power. Can you think of other times when children have that much power? Why did the people who made up the seder want to make children so important to it?

*Sheila Peltz Weinberg*¹⁰⁵

3. ON BIRKAT HAMAZON

I once heard a beautiful explanation from R. Moses Feuerstein of Boston. The key phrase of the verse is *lo ra'iti*, standardly translated as 'I have not seen'. The verb, *ra'iti*, though, occurs twice in the Book of Esther with a quite different meaning. 'How can I bear to watch (*eichachah uchal vera'iti*) the disaster which will befall my people? And how can I bear to watch the destruction of my family?' (Esther 8:6).

The verb here does not mean 'to see'. It means 'to stand by and watch, to be a passive witness, a disengaged spectator'. *Ra'iti* in this sense means to see and do nothing to help. That, for Esther as for the Psalmist, is a moral impossibility. We may not 'stand idly by the blood of our neighbor'. *We are our brother's keeper*.

Translated thus, the verse states: 'I was young and now am old and I have not merely stood still and watched when the righteous was forsaken and his children forced to beg for bread.' Read this way, not only does it make sense, it also emerges from the core of Jewish sensibility. It ends the grace after meals with a moral commitment. Yes, we have eaten and are satisfied. But that has not made us indifferent to the needs of others.

The conclusion of the meal, so understood, echoes the opening of the seder service with its invitation to 'all who are needy - come and eat.' Maimonides writes about the command to rejoice on the festivals: 'And while one eats and drinks himself, it is a duty to feed the stranger, the orphan, the widow and other poor and unfortunate people, for he who

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

locks the doors of his courtyard and eats and drinks with his wife and family, without giving anything to eat and drink to the poor and bitter in soul - his meal is not a rejoicing in a divine commandment but a rejoicing in his own stomach...Rejoicing of this kind is a disgrace to those who indulge in it.' (Hilkhot Yom Tov 6:18).¹⁰⁶

OPENING THE DOOR FOR ELIJAH AND DRINKING FROM THE CUP OF MIRIAM

1. READING-

Medieval folklore suggests a pragmatic reason for opening the door: the fear of spies and informers who might accuse the Jews of drinking the blood of a Christian child or using it for making matza. The Jews wanted to see who might be **eavesdropping** and spreading malicious -in fact, deadly -rumors about the seder.¹⁰⁷

2. READING-

THE CUPS OF MIRIAM AND ELIJAH

DRAWING FROM THE PRESENT / WAITING FOR THE FUTURE

Lift Miriam's Cup and recite: (a cup of water)

In the years of wandering in the desert, Miriam's well accompanied the Israelites. 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, inspiration, and wisdom. She and her waters sustain us as we await Elijah.

¹⁰⁶ Sacks, op. cit., pp. 66-67

¹⁰⁷ Zion and Dishon, op. cit., p. 139

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.

Barukh atah adonay elohenu melek ha'olam shehakol niyeh bidvaro.

Praised are you, Eternal One our God, sovereign of all worlds who creates all things.

or

Nevarekh et ruakh ha'olam shehakol niyeh bidvareha.

We bless the spirit of the world, who creates all things.

Everyone sips from Miriam's Cup as it is passed around the table.¹⁰⁸

3. READING-

A midrash teaches us that a miraculous well accompanied the Hebrews throughout their journey in the desert, providing them with water. This well first appears in the story of Hagar (Genesis 21:19) where we find Hagar stranded out in the desert with her son, Ishmael, with no water left to drink. She lifts up her voice and cries. In response (actually, to the cries of her son) her eyes are opened, revealing a well. The same well was given by God to Miriam, the prophetess, to honor her bravery and devotion to the Children of Israel. Both Miriam and her well were spiritual oases in the desert, sources

¹⁰⁸ Levitt and Strassfeld, op. cit., p. 118

of sustenance and healing. Her words of comfort gave the Hebrews the faith and confidence to overcome the hardships of the Exodus. We fill Miriam's Cup with water to honor her role in ensuring the survival of the Jewish people. Like Miriam, Jewish women in all generations have been essential for the continuity of our people.¹⁰⁹

4. READING-

What an incredible contrast these two images present! We open the door to let Elijah the Prophet, the harbinger of peace, enter, and at the same time we let our anger out and call for the destruction of our enemies and the enemies of God. How can we explain this dichotomy?

Look at the way the Psalmist recommends dealing with our own anger, for we cannot and must not deny our anger. Anger management involves expressing our anger and then handing it over to God. Let the Lord of Justice, the Lover of Righteousness, do what has to be done. It is not for us to wreak revenge upon the ignorant. Holding on to anger is another attachment, another Mitzraim. Those who "call upon the Name of God" are called upon to detach from their anger and by doing so become transformed into God's Peacemakers.

We were abused in every generation- Mitzraim being the archetype- but the Torah teaches us that we must transcend the "normal" or human response of revenge. Mitzraim received the karmic response directly from the Holy One Blessed be She. We are not to hate the Mitzrim for what they did to us, but rather must rise up into a state of compassion for the blindness of God's shadows.¹¹⁰

5. READING-

¹⁰⁹ Kagan, op. cit., p. 131

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 173

We ask that those who with their actions plant the seeds of misery or the seeds of hypocrisy or the seeds of pollution or the seeds of destruction be allowed to see, feel and taste of the fruit of these actions:

Those who instigate wars, who force children out to kill or be killed, to learn a lesson of "it's them or us".

Those who participate in creating untrue reality maps when they lie by commission or omission.

Those who use their religious or political belief systems to create distance and disharmony between themselves and their fellow travelers on planet earth.

Those who trick, cheat or steal from those more helpless than themselves- - the elderly, the widow, the immigrant, the employee.

Those who physically, emotionally or sexually abuse their spouses, children, parents, or animals and then don't even seek psychological help.

Those who first, last and always only think of themselves, who behave thoughtlessly and dishonor the concept of "friendship".

Those who are unwilling to take responsibility; those who are quick to blame others without seeking to understand the part they play(ed) in a given outcome.

Those who self-righteously condemn other countries for doing what they or their country did at another time in history. . . Those who ask other people and other nations to do what they themselves are unwilling to do.

Those who put profit before life. . . those who burn grain rather than give it away; those who cut down the rain forests; those who use animals for cosmetics testing; those who create internal and external pollution; those who make the decisions to allow toxic gases to be emitted in the workplace and hazardous waste to be disposed of in an unacceptable fashion.

Those who are unwilling to change their lifestyle to ensure the survival of the planet.

(Are there any others whose deeds need to be mentioned here?)

And if after tasting the fruit of their actions, they still choose to continue with these actions, then onto them we say SHEFACH CHAHMATCHAH, may an appropriate form of chamah, of wrath, be spilled upon them.¹¹¹

6. A THOUGHT-

IRAQ 2006- Forward Operating Base Sykes- As we began the seder and were introducing ourselves, one participant said- "I'm glad that we are locked in this CONNEX behind closed doors in a relatively secure place, for our own protection." When we opened the door for Elijah, there was a moment of hesitation and a collective intake of breath. Wow! There was a real feeling of risk and some danger, but I decided that it was critical that we open the door and proudly sing Eliyahu HaNavi. We read about other doors in history, flung open by the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusaders, the Nazis. (see below #7) It was a powerful, powerful moment and a huge assertion of freedom in this hostile place.¹¹²

7. READING-

This door could be the Temple door, opened in Jerusalem on the seder night to receive those who came on foot from all around the country to appear in the place where God could be most intimately encountered.

This door could be the door of every synagogue, opened throughout the ages to demonstrate Jewish innocence before the slanderers who spread rumors of terrible things Jews did behind closed portals on the Seder night.

¹¹¹ Roekard, op. cit., pp. 53-54

¹¹² Rabbi Bonnie Koppell, from my Iraqi Journal, 2006, Forward Operating Base Sykes

This door could be the door of every Jewish home, opened before the hostile neighbors to show that the Seder celebration was meant to harm none, but to promise justice for the oppressed- and retribution for the oppressors.

This door has also been opened by our oppressors themselves: by the Spanish Inquisition, taking our people out to false trials and executions; by the SS troops of Hitler, dragging our people from their hiding places or their dining tables; by the secret police of the Soviet KGB, hustling our people off to torture in prison or to the Siberian wastes.

But doors have two sides. We spend some moments now recalling how this door has been opened to throw us into the terrifying night of suffering, but let us also recall how it has been opened to rescue us from that night and hold aloft the hope of suffering's end. May God punish those who have thrown innocents into the void; may God protect those who have saved them.¹¹³

8. READING-

What do we do with the prayer "*Pour out your wrath*"? Is it possible to strike it out of our Haggadah? These awful words! Nowadays there are people who love us. And there are people who don't. But how can we curse even those who hate us with these horrible words? I can't hate. And I won't teach our children to hate. I understand the pain of the Jews, the pain and the fury that went into this prayer hundreds of years ago. The ugly face of anti-Semitism exists today, too, but not to the extent where, God forbid, we should teach our children this prayer. The foolish and the malicious can be condemned. They can be pitied. But we can't hate them- and make God part of this hatred.- *Yehiel Weingarten, 1936*¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Levy, Rabbi Richard, *On Wings of Freedom*, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1989, pp. 95-96

¹¹⁴ Zion and Zion, op. cit., p. 115

9. READING-

Many liberal and feminist Haggadot take issue with the wrathful, adversarial stance adopted in this section of the Haggadah. While we must continue to be vigilant with respect to those who seek to harm us as Jews, we must also be open to the possibilities of mutual understanding. In the Bible, Elijah the prophet, the figure whom we invite to our homes at this point in the Seder, represents an uncompromising, combative attitude with respect to those who reject monotheistic belief. In Malachi 3:24, however, it is Elijah who will reconcile (*v'heshiv*) estranged parents and children. But in the Talmud, Elijah is invoked as the figure who will answer (*meshiv*, a different form of the same verb used in Malachi) open questions and resolve nagging legal controversies. When we welcome Elijah to the Seder, it helps to think of him not only as an emissary of rage and revenge, but as an ambassador of understanding and reconciliation, as a *meshiv kushyot*, "an answerer of questions," and a *meshiv lev avot al banim*, "a reconciler of parents and children."¹¹⁵

10. READING-

Tonight, it is the custom to leave our doors unlocked to show we have absolutely no fear from any temporal body.

We fear only the highest authority. And the highest authority transcends fear. Remember that.

Likewise, may we allow our psychic armor, which is constantly protecting ourselves from negativity, to become unlocked and vulnerable on this sacred night, so we may connect with each other and experience God's love.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Hoffman and Arnow, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 152-3

¹¹⁶ Klein, op. cit., p. 147

11. READING-

In one manuscript from Worms, 1521, there is a unique addition to the Haggadah alongside 'Pour out Your wrath'. It is a prayer of thanks for the righteous gentiles throughout history who, rather than persecuting Jews, befriended them and protected them at times of danger.

Pour out Your love on the nations who have known You,

And on the kingdoms who call upon Your name.

For they show loving-kindness to the seed of Jacob,

And they defend Your people Israel from those

Who would devour them alive.

May they live to see the sukkah of peace spread over Your chosen ones,

And to participate in the joy of your nations.¹¹⁷

12. READING-

At this point in the seder, Jewish communities, beset by persecution during the Crusades, opened their doors and recited the angry plea *Sh'foch Chamat'cha*... "Pour out Your wrath upon the nations who do not know You." In other communities during the same period, the hope for redemption was so intense that families sang to invoke the Prophet Elijah who, according to legend, would herald an era of Messianic peace, justice, and healing. We open our doors now with the need to act on both impulses. The crimes of humanity that we continue to see - mass rape and torture, ethnic cleansing, the destruction of entire cities and cultures - cry out for just retribution beyond our limited capacity. And our longings for peace, for healing of earth, body and spirit, still bring the hope-drenched melody of Eiliyahu Hanavi to our lips. With that melody we bridge our hopes for the future with our commitment to the present. We thus invite to our seders not just Elijah, harbinger of the Messiah, but Miriam,

¹¹⁷ Sacks, op. cit., pp. 69-70

inspiration for the journey.¹¹⁸

13. POEM-

Cup of Elijah

The cup of Elijah holds wine;

the cup of Miriam holds water.

Wine is more precious

until you have no water.

Water that flows in our veins,

water that is the stuff of life,

for we are made of breath

and water, vision

and fact. Elijah is

the extraordinary; Miriam

brings the daily wonders:

the joy of a fresh morning

like a newly prepared table,

a white linen cloth on which

nothing has yet spilled.

¹¹⁸ *The Journey Continues: The Ma'yan Passover Haggadah*

The descent into the heavy

waters of sleep healing us.

The scent of baking bread,

roasting chicken, fresh herbs,

The faces of friends across

the table: what sustains us

every morning, every evening, t

he common daily miracles

like the taste of cool water.- *Marge Piercy*

HALLEL

1. READING-

The Torah never mentions 'joy' in relation to the holiday of Pesach as it does for Shavuot and Sukkot. On Pesach- unlike the other pilgrimage holidays- we do not recite all the Psalms of Hallel (except the first day) because as Shmuel quotes from Proverbs: *In the downfall of your enemy, do not rejoice. We celebrate the Exodus from Egypt, not the downfall of the Egyptians."*

Rabbi Simcha Cohen from Divinsk (Lithuanian Talmudist)

NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM

1. READING-

It is said that Napoleon, passing a synagogue on Tishah B'Av, was struck by the sounds of lament coming from the building. 'What,' he asked one of his officers, 'are the Jews crying for?' 'For Jerusalem,' came the reply. 'How long ago did they lose Jerusalem?' 'More than seventeen hundred years ago.' Napoleon was silent for a moment and then said, 'A people that can remember Jerusalem for so long will one day have it restored to them.' So it has come to pass in our time.¹¹⁹

2. A THOUGHT-

Standing on the parted shores of history we still believe what we were taught before ever we stood at Sinai's foot; that wherever we go, it is eternally Egypt^{[L][SEP]} that there is a better place, a promised land;^{[L][SEP]} that the winding way to that promise passes through the wilderness that there is no way to get from here to there except by joining hands, marching^{[L][SEP]} together.- adapted from Michael Walzer

COUNTING THE OMER

1. READING-

Freedom in Jewish tradition is always yoked to responsibility. Freedom is not some abstract concept- it contains specific obligations, spelled out in detail in the stories, texts and traditions of our people. Beginning with the second night of Pesach, we mark the period of seven weeks that link Pesach to Shavuot through the counting of the

¹¹⁹ Sacks, op. cit., p. 99

Omer.

Shavuot, celebrating the receiving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, is the necessary complement to Pesach, for it alerts us to what may be the essential paradox of the Haggadah; that our ancestors, in escaping slavery in Egypt, willingly accepted the servitude of Sinai. Our ancestors used their new-found freedom to choose whom they would serve, how they would serve, and the means by which they would serve.

*Richard Hirsh*¹²⁰

CONCLUDING SONG: CHAD GADYA

1. READING-

We recited the customary blessings, the Psalms, and to finish we sang *Khad Gadya*, that terrifying song in which, in the name of justice, evil catches evil, death calls death, until the angel of destruction, in his turn, has his throat cut by the Eternal. I loved this naive little song in which everything seemed so simple, so primitive: the cat and the dog, the water and the fire, executioners and victims turn and turn about, all undergoing the same punishment inside the same scheme. But that evening the song upset me. I rebelled against the resignation it implied. Why does God always act too late? Why didn't God get rid of the Angel of Death before he even committed his first murder?

*Elie Wiesel*¹²¹

¹²⁰ Levitt and Strassfeld, op. cit., p. 99

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p. 106

2.READING-

We have downed four cups of wine, the afikomen has been found, and Elijah has left the building. As we yawningly wind down the seder, an oddity catches our weary eyes. We chant '*Chasal Sidur Pesach K'hilchata-we have concluded the Seder according to traditional law*, but discover a deceptive finality that, indeed, many pages still remain in the Haggadah. Why are we told of the end only to find that the book continues? Were the authors mistaken? Perhaps Manischewitz inebriated or matza bloated that confusingly resulted in verses misplaced? On close examination of the remaining text we come across the songs *Adir Hu, Echad Mi Yodaya and Chad Gadya*. After *Chasal Sidur Pesach* we raise our voices in melody, and therein lies a beautiful life message, not a sequential editorial blunder.

At one time or another we all are broken and shattered. Life takes twists and turns that hurl us onto the jagged rocks of sad circumstances. Hearts break. Eyes weep. Stomachs grumble. We all rip *Keriah*. No one escapes tumbling into the chasm of sorrow. When gripped, inevitably, by such misfortune, we despair. Our hope, our vision, our faith is dimmed. Self-pity seduces our spirit and darkness colors our soul. We are convinced, in our dejection, that we will never sing again. But the Haggadah comes along with the emotional cavalry of joyful reassurance and rescues us from our misery.

"Chasal Sidur Pesach"- you think it is the end, but it is not. You think there are no melodies left, but there are. You think you will not celebrate again, but you will.

The Haggadah gives us a gentle, tender embrace, understands our grief, but tells us to turn the page and to sing once again.

*Rabbi Shalom Lewis*¹²²

¹²² quoted in Matzoh Ball Soup, Kramer, Oliver and Kramer, Joshua, editors, NY: Writer's Advantage, 2002, p. 68