

Ben Shahn [Pinterest]

An HIR Social Action Committee Haggadah Companion

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The Four Sons, From "Haggadah" on Wikipedia

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Introduction

Welcome to the HIR Social Action Committee's first ever Haggadah Companion! With Pesach, we enter a period of rebirth, not just in the story of our leaving Egypt and moving toward the future of our people, but also in this year of



2021, a time of rebirth and our own painful and challenging Exodus experience from a year of the Coronavirus pandemic. The world looks a little brighter this year, and we turn our eyes toward the seder in a different state than last year, with more hope ahead, and our eyes widely opened to the needs of social action in a changed world. We hope that these pieces can accentuate parts of your seder evenings or act as windows for reflection during the coming three day yom tov—you can jump around from piece to piece, choose one or two to look at together, or read the whole thing with the associated sections of the seder.

You will find inside pieces that tie to so much of the work our committee is doing—food insecurity (related to our work with [POTS](#)), mass incarceration, healthcare, etc. Our committee has in the past year made an effort to tie words of Torah to social action through our Social Action Divrei Torah, and we hope that effort reverberates here.

Please consider joining us in our efforts in the year ahead, both in [writing words of Torah](#) and in our committee meetings (which you can attend by emailing Michael Goldblum at mgoldblum@buildingstudio.com). We wish you all a meaningful seder, a chag sameach, and some good reads ahead!

Frontspiece, the Szyk Haggadah, from Wikipedia

Urchatz

Hands to Wash in Our Exodus

by Aaron Stayman

As I thought of the various seder sections to select for a piece in this compilation, I felt that the options were so overwhelming-the seder is so full of lessons and hope, perfect for this moment in time when the light is visible ahead of us, but no section felt more right than Urchatz to describe the feeling I have for this Pesach. [Chabad's](#) description of this second part of the seder especially captured my interest when I was looking for more guidance on themes to pull for this piece, as Urchatz is reflective of our current crossroads, as I will explain in a moment-we can “eat certain wet foods with a utensil [as usual]” or “one’s hands [can] be purified first by washing”, noting also that “on the eve of the Seder, we choose the less common (but more ideal) observance to arouse our children’s curiosity,” in this case choosing to wash our hands (without a bracha) rather than eat those wet foods with a utensil.

I have now, by the time this is published, been vaccinated in full thanks to my asthma, and while I am starting to see the light, much like this first hand washing of the evening, I do not yet believe myself to be at a place where I feel as if blessings are fully appropriate (I did say Hatov V'hameitiv after my initial vaccination, though). The pandemic is still here, and we must work to end it as soon as possible, but unlike last Pesach, we understand much better where we are.



From "Different from All Other Nights," Globaltimes.cn

And thus comes my favorite relation to this ritual of hand washing, as Chabad cites, to “arouse our children’s curiosity”. While I am not a child (to most people-I am 31, so maybe to some reading this I am a bit of a child still), my curiosity and my childlike nature certainly shine through at this moment. Yes I have had my vaccine, but now the real work begins for myself and for all of us: will I be more awkward in person with people again? Will the broken parts of society before this pandemic still be broken? Will Kai Fan still do all you can eat sushi nights (that might be a childish ask but it has me both curious and hopeful)?

We must be as children this pesach, seeing the world as it can be anew. Just as this first washing is the beginning of a much longer process, so too is the beginning of the end of this pandemic a moment for reflection, hope, and curiosity. I think of my work and how I do not know how often I will be back in the office as a change of my life, but I also think of the zoning opportunities that might present for affordable housing if my office space, and those of many New Yorkers, is newly cleared. I think of this moment of free vaccinations as a window toward taking care of all US residents as they deserve to be treated by medical practitioners, and the opportunity to work toward a more affordable and equitable medical system. I think of the nursing home Covid crisis we saw in New York and how that might make us think differently about how we take care of the elderly, whether it’s nursing home standards or helping people to better age in their own homes. I think of essential workers and the need to treat them with the dignity we extended through this pandemic, and work toward not just keeping wages up for these heroes in any form, but also ensuring our heroes and workers have basic benefits and rights in their jobs beyond pay.



Eastern European Immigrants in the USA, JWA.org

We are just at the start of a magical moment, a seder like experience where hope and safety lie ahead, with our exodus from one of the world’s most brutal viruses. We will likely make mistakes along the way out of this year’s Egypt, but the promised land can await us if we savor this moment and the wonder it presents us.

Karpas

What Does The Karpas Represent?

By Tao Moran

What is the significance of Karpas on the Seder plate and why does it come first in the Seder?

After washing our hands, we say a traditional blessing over vegetables and we take the Karpas (parsley or celery) and dip twice in saltwater and eat. What is the significance of this vegetable?



"The Birth of Moses," Szyk Haggadah, from Wikipedia

Does Karpas represent spring when Pesach falls? And why does dipping Karpas come first in the Seder? The deeper symbolism of Karpas has a connection to the sale of Joseph into slavery and the Israelites becoming slaves as well as an etymological connection to Joseph's coat of many colors.

"The word karpas is a reminder of the sale of Joseph into slavery, an act that led to the descent of the Israelite people into Egypt. The karpas itself is, therefore, an appropriate introduction to the events recounted in the Haggadah [narrative] -- the enslavement of the Israelites and their ultimate redemption. The word karpas [כרפס] [appears in the Bible

once, in the phrase [ותכלת כרפס חור] hur karpas u'tekhelet] (Esther 1:6).

In this context it means "a fine linen," using a word borrowed from the Sanskrit or Persian kirpas. 1 The Talmud mentions karpas only in this use, and equates it with "fine white wool" [milat levanah, from the Greek méllōs -- sheep] (B. Megilah 12a). The Talmud and early sources about the Seder such as the Mishnah (Pesahim 10) and Tosefta (Pesahim 10) do not use the term karpas with respect to the Passover Seder." (Gevaryahu & Wise, "Why Does the Seder Begin with Karpas?", p. 104)

Why do we dip Karpas not once but twice into saltwater? Many say the saltwater depicts the tears of slavery. But it also depicts the blood used on the threshold of Jewish homes during the Exodus.

European Jews were accused of using the blood of Christian children in their Seder rituals (i.e., the blood libel), and therefore out of fear of such accusations they began to use white wine instead. Therefore, the red-wine tradition persisted only among non-European Jews.

Yemenite and Persian Jews dip the karpas into haroset made of raisin-wine or wine-vinegar.



A German Seder, From "The Pew Jew" Study: American and German Jewry in Comparison, Leo Baeck Inst.lbi.org

Therefore, the origin of our sojourn in Egypt is represented symbolically by the dipping of karpas.” (Gevaryahu & Wise, Why Does the Seder Begin with Karpas”? p. 107)

We begin the Seder by recognizing our condition (going down into slavery) and our redemption, the dipping of hyssop into the blood of the pascal lamb. We relive and recite this story so our children will ask,

3. שְׁבֹכֶל-הַלֵּילוֹת אֵין אָנוּ מִטְבִּילִין אֶפִּילוּ פַּעַם אַחַת
הַלֵּילָה הַזֶּה שְׁתֵּי פְעָמִים

On all other nights we do not dip even once, but on this night twice.

This Passover may we recall the story of our going down into slavery and may we find redemption in our blessings, in our questioning and in our re-enacting the condition of the Jewish people, from slavery to freedom, as demonstrated in our Seder.



Habbani Jews, Wikipedia

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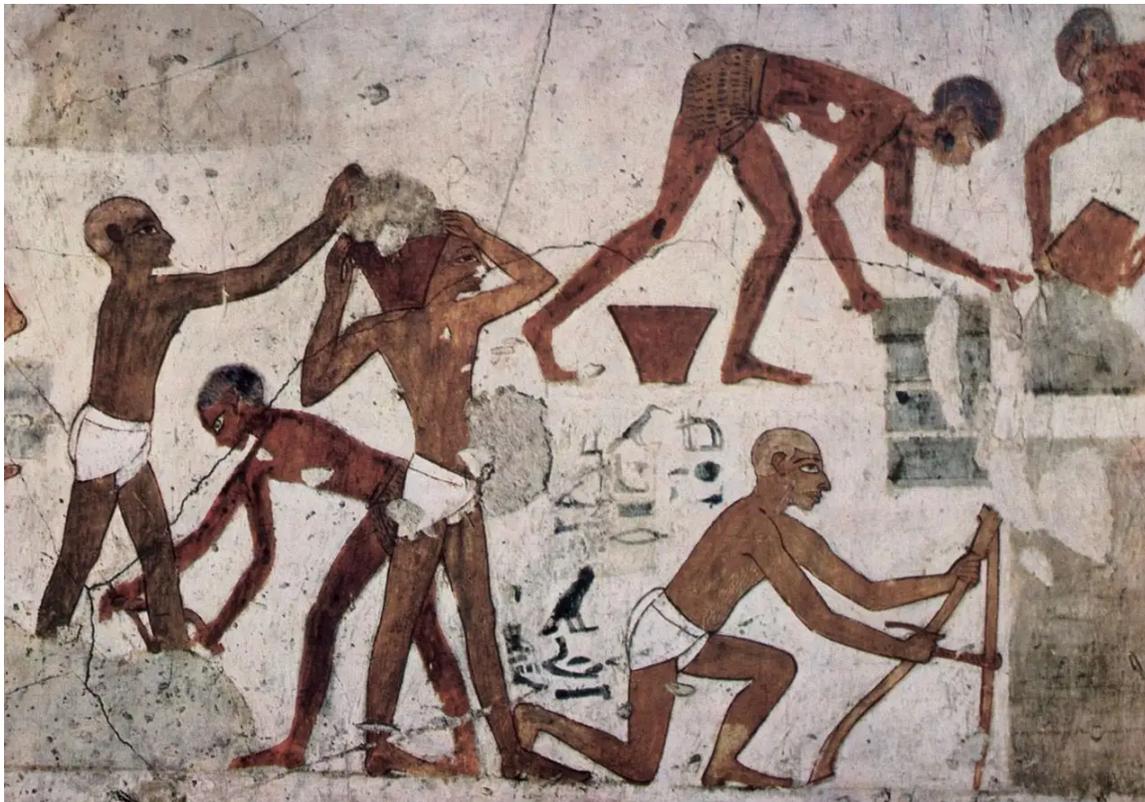
Gilad J. Gevaryahu & Michael L. Wise, “Why Does The Seder Begin With Karpas?”, *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 2, (1999): 104-110

Maggid

Idolatry and political corruption

By Rabbi Dov Lerea

The *Haggadah* treats the *Mah Nishtana* text as an invitation to consider two different types of enslavement. “What distinguishes this night from all others? We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.” This response highlights physical oppression, the abuse of human bodies, the turning of human beings into chattel. That form of slavery has many analogues in contemporary society, the mass incarceration of black men being perhaps the most endemic.



Painting of Workers Making Bricks from the Tomb of Rekhmire, Thebes, Egypt, Art.com

However, the *Haggadah* challenges us to consider another type of slavery. “What distinguishes this night from all others? In our origins as a people, we

worshipped idols.” That is a shocking response! What does idolatry have to do with slavery? The *Haggadah* is telling us that idolatry has everything to do with slavery, for idolatry is an enslavement of the mind, and probably more oppressive than physical slavery and more difficult to liberate. Egypt was the most technologically advanced empire in the world. Their political organization, military prowess, agriculture and religion were all well developed. Nevertheless, Egypt was capable of creating a stratified society built on a cruel system of social control, with *Bene Yisrael* at the bottom. Our ancestors were influenced by Egypt, despite the cruelty. They built a golden calf. The calf enabled them to enshrine the work of their own hands. Korach organized a base to rebel against Moshe; he worshipped opportunities for power. The perennial wars against the Canaanites were essentially struggles against the seductive allure of idolatrous cultures, in which human beings worshipped their own power, their own accomplishments and their own entitlements, in whatever form they were able to manufacture these false gods. Rabbi Yaakov Culi, 18th century Turkey and author of the Ladino commentary *Meam Loez*, wrote a commentary on the *Haggadah*. On the section referencing our idolatrous past, he wrote,

...Avraham did not argue with God when God told him that his descendants would be slaves for four hundred years. Avraham understood that Benei Yisrael would be like silver because silver needs to be purified before making something with it. A silversmith purifies silver by smelting it in a crucible, melting it so that the impurities rise to the surface of the liquid silver. The silversmith heats the silver in a crucible, and when it melts, the silversmith pours out the impurities, called, dross. Egypt was the crucible of Bene Yisrael. The slavery purified them so that they turned back towards Hashem renewed their loyalty to God.

These words are difficult to read. Who can actually rationalize God's decision to enable such cruelty. Read metaphorically, however, R. Culi's words send a powerful message. He is telling us: "Jewish people--remember the Egyptians! Do not be fooled by the allure of money, and power, and material success. You will be redeemed and free one day. You will then run the risk of making the same mistakes the Egyptians made in their society and civilization. Do not become addicted to avarice and lust after money and power. If you do,

you will forget what *Hashem* expects of you: justice, compassion, kindness, and a feeling of responsibility to sustain and care for the world God created for you. Every time you forget, history will place you in a crucible that will force you to return to who you should become.” As we read these words this year at the *seder*, let us reflect on the political culture in America. What roles must Jewish people play in society against leaders who are driven by avarice, motivated to say and do anything to lure their base of power, whose decisions and rhetoric perpetuate cruelty and pain? What actions should Jewish people take to identify the idolatrous abuses of today?



"The Israelites Despoiling the Egyptians" from the Golden Haggadah, via ibw21.org

Daiyenu. Daiyenu. Dai Dai Yenu.

By Bernard Smith

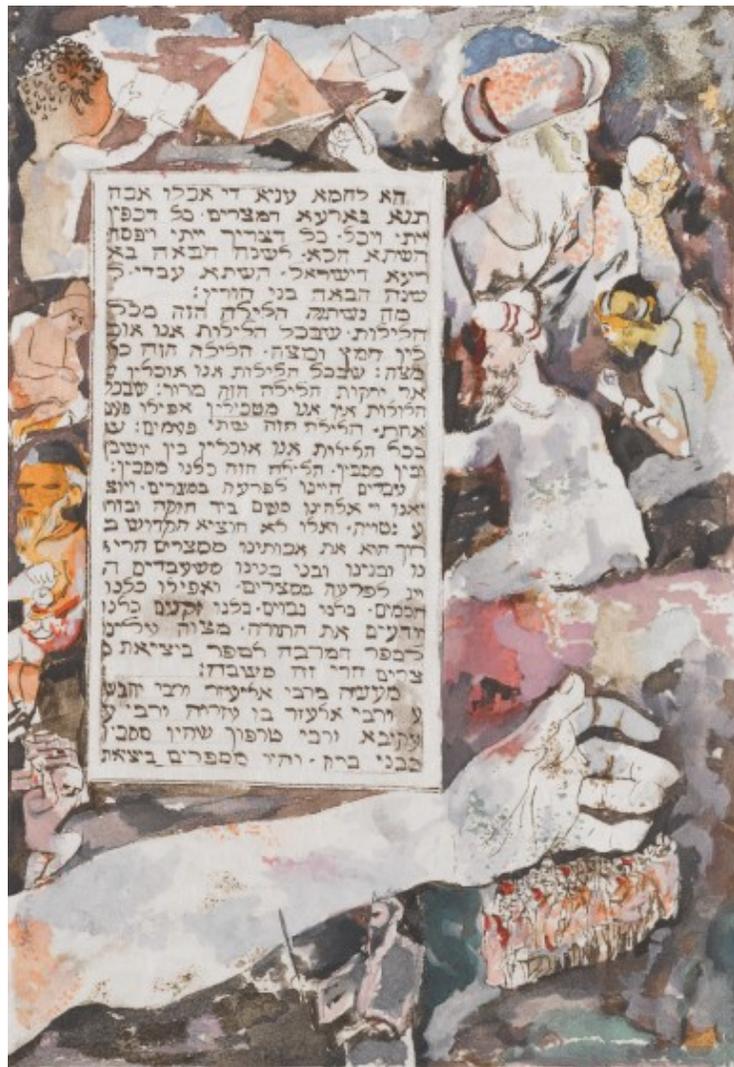
Mah Nishtanah Halaylah Haze? How different is this night from all other nights? Different? Is it really so different for so many of us?

On all other nights you may eat... but 2.2 million residents of New York State are food insecure with 1.1 million food insecure in NY City and food insecurity means they cannot plan on feeding themselves and their family three meals a day.

On all other nights you eat vegetables ...but the food deserts in poorer ZIP coded areas of the city, including the Bronx mean that for many residents they have no access to fresh fruit and vegetables this night and any night.

On all other nights you can sit or slouch however you want ... but for 57,000 people there is no home in which to relax and for 18,000 children there is no space to play because they are homeless in the city.

Ha Lachma Anya – This is the bread of the impoverished, of the oppressed, of the wretched ... This year we are still slaves but next year...next year... So many of us are quite literally still slaves. For them Hashata Avdei is not a metaphor – slaves to our passions, to our goals. For many servitude is real. It's to the will and control of others and unless we do something about it they will continue to be slaves tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow:



Ha Lachma Anya, The Ben Shahn Haggadah, via Wikipedia

The 13th Amendment means that slavery is still legal
in 2021 in the USA and our penal system still ensures that

- Three million, mainly, People of Color are forced to work for pennies in State, Federal and private for-profit prisons;
- Ninety-five percent of those charged with crimes never have their day in court because of plea “bargaining”;
- Have no competent representation or have representation offered by public defenders whose work-load means that they can spend a few minutes skimming their case notes;
- Face a police force often armed with military equipment, incentivized to arrest, many of which have long records of racially biased enforcement.

Next year will they really be Bnei Hurin? With a criminal record will our brothers and sisters have access to public housing? To a vote? To welfare benefits? To student loans? To a job? To their children?

Daiyenu – It’s enough.



Rev.Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, via RAC.org

Maror

Maror

By Ma'ayan Seligsohn

As children, we filled our mouths
slices of bitter white root
ground again and again and again
eyes bright red, tears tumbling out
tongues burnt
trying not to call out for water
salvation
from our hasty choice
we squirmed in pain



Family Zingiberaceae, via weebly.com

*“And they shall eat the meat on this night fire-roasted, with flatbread on **bitter herbs** shall they eat it.”*

And we shall eat, the night before our parole hearing
a sacrifice made of fire-roasted lamb and bitter slavery,
and we feasted and transformed--
worthy of redemption from captivity,
from forced labor and inhumane suffering
our old and our young
sat to feast on lamb and flatbread and bitter herbs before
we ever walked free.

believing our God, of redemptions and new beginnings,
remembered that we were all children of parents
deserved freedom



Bird's Head Haggadah, via Wikipedia

Korech

2020's Hillel Sandwich

By Rick Feldman

This year I am struck by the contrast best symbolized by the tenth 'signpost of the seder', **Korech**, also known as '**The Hillel Sandwich**'. Coming in the position of the final step of the **Seder** before the festive meal, the **Hillel Sandwich** of the matzah – symbolizing freedom and the bitter herbs – symbolizing suffering are emblematic of our struggling in uncertain world torn by pandemic, economic distress, social unrest and political upheaval.

Pandemic

Bitterness: This year we have been shut in, shut down and shut out. Could any of us imagine the level of disruption and suffering that Covid 19 would bring into our world, country, city, communities and personal lives? To witness every day for weeks and months on end the horrible news from every corner of the globe of countless loved ones lost so suddenly. To hear the stories of hospitals in our city reaching capacity and refrigerated trucks placed outside to store the deceased. To read each day the list of members of our shul community and hear the voices of mourners saying Kaddish. Has any family not been touched by heartbreaking stories in this year of grief?

Freedom: A worldwide scientific effort was mounted bringing the development of a new process of creating a vaccine in a record time that even up until a few months ago seemed unlikely. Throughout our country local governments have devised and carried out emergency plans, businesses have banded together to produce the resources needed to protect workers and equip



Bird's Head Haggadah, via Wikipedia

ever changing medical facilities. And individual people have reached deeply into their pockets and donated their time to help those in need. In our city, in the midst of such unprecedented events, each night throughout the Spring thankful people, you and me, climbed out onto balconies and opened windows clapping, banging and cheering in a show of gratitude for the essential workers and volunteers who without fanfare went about the work of everyday keeping the lifeblood of communities, our food supplies, apartment buildings, hospitals, fire, police, sanitation and all the other operations of city government moving forward. And most personally, I will remember this Passover the response of our synagogue rabbinic and lay leadership last Passover – pulling everyone together to volunteer to take care of those in need of all the necessities to assure a safe and meaningful holiday. And continuing throughout the year to find ways to keep us all safe, feed – physically and emotionally, intellectually and spiritually connected.



The Jews Collecting Manna, via "Desert Wild," jewishreviewofbooks.com

Economic Distress

Bitterness: It is hard to quantify the level of economic disruption that has come upon our world in 2020. It was so sad to watch countries closing their borders to foreigners, establishing quarantines and curfews. To reflect on the

uncountable number of folks in our country who were laid off or terminated, businesses derailed, schools closed is chilling. To experience New York City shuttered and laid bare like an empty kitchen cupboard, an eerie silence in our theaters and sports arenas. A hospitality world of restaurants and hotels vanquished to a killer stalking our streets. And to see stores and hear of businesses in our neighborhood clinging to life or losing their leases and families struggling to put food on the table and pay the rent is beyond disheartening.

Freedom: World-wide many governments have responded to these challenges, as well as the health challenges. Data is coming in from around the world showing which countries have been most effective in finding a balance protecting lives and maintaining their economies – countries like South Korea, Taiwan and Lithuania, might have more to teach us than some of our more traditional allies, and we must be opened to consider their experiences as we plan for the tough years ahead. Our government relief checks, and suspending mortgage payments and extending unemployment has at least softened the blows allowing some businesses to survive and families to remain in their homes. And now with the major relief bill hopefully this will shore up municipalities so they can continue to pay their workers, provide additional relief to small businesses, reinvest in their schools and hospitals, and give families a booster shot to flow into the blood stream of their daily activities

Social Unrest

With lockdowns due to the Coronavirus, while others, as for example, in Brazil claimed that the government wasn't doing enough to stop the virus. In our country outrage at the unanswered police killings of numerous Black Americans that began as a whisper in July 2014 with the death of Eric Garner grew through the ensuing years with a stream of grief that called out 'Say their names', and burst into a crescendo with demonstrations reminiscent of the 1960's at the brutal murder of George Floyd, a disabled Black man whose plea for mercy "I can't breathe" rebounded off of the mountains and in the valleys, across the seas and the continents throughout all of our world. A refrain compounded a million times in that it reflected the very same experiences on the lips of millions at home and abroad who forced onto respirators, were suffering and dying from a relentless viral killer.

Freedom: The voice of conscience has pounded on the doors of oppression with increasing determination and focus as this year progressed, From Bulgaria to Belarus, Venezuela to Peru protestors have confronted corruption and political manipulation with voices of outrage. Across America as

many as twenty million people fanned out into the streets over weeks and months of mostly peaceful demonstrations to proclaim "Black Lives Matter". Plain folks from every background who answered a call of conscience to stand together regardless of ethnicity or culture, economic or social position, religious or non-religious affiliation who wanted to let the world know that "We are better than this". In our own community of Riverdale, Kingsbridge, Sputyen Duyvil and Marble Hill peaceful marches and rallies sprang up spontaneously - not the least of which was supported heavily by our Jewish community as a daily show of respect and solidarity at the Bell Tower Memorial. These folks have brought their concerns to the boardrooms and the government halls insisting on systemic changes in hiring policies, policing, health care, housing and food distribution.

They are calling for a \$15.00 minimum wage and a cancelling of student debt which would bring a little restitution to the increasing spread between the wealthy and the poor in our society – so many of whom are black, brown and disabled people.



"Moses Breaking the Tables of the Law" by Rembrandt via richardmcbec.com

Political Insurrection

Bitterness: The United States has now become an example of how radical groups can destabilize their governments through an organized mob with implicit political support, using misinformation and conspiracy theories. We had a national election that gave the winner the most votes ever cast for a U.S. presidential candidate. Yet the results of this election were willfully contested -through every political channel possible, and even then, an unrelenting political agenda sought to 'overthrow the constituted government and seize its powers' thereby challenging 'rule by law' and denying the government that the American voters had ordained by an unprecedented attack on the Congress - at the very moment when the transfer of power was being ratified! The debacle, brought five meaningless deaths to both capitol police and rioters, countless injuries, unimagined hurt to members of our most cherished institutions and sent

shutters of shocking disbelief around the world - if this could happen to the wealthiest and strongest democracy in the world is anybody safe!

Freedom: The congress immediately – that very evening resumed their vote on the peaceful transfer of power installing Joe Biden as the 45th president of the United States. The new president has declared himself a ‘Unity President’ “who seeks not to divide, but unify, who doesn’t see red states and blue states, only sees the United States”. And even Facebook and other social media companies have cut off accounts that promote unsubstantiated rumors and misleading information. Additionally, while a call for a 9/11 style Commission has not made much headway to date, it will surely gain bi-partisan support as more information comes in on the realities of ‘domestic terrorism’ and it’s links to extremist political groups and politicians, as well as law enforcement and military and para-military groups. Closer to home in our neighborhood we are engaged in an exciting local election for City Council in which a competent and intelligent cast of candidates have carried on spirited campaigns that bring out the best of what the democratic process has to offer.

Yes, the Hillel sandwich, the irony of bitterness even in freedom is very much in my mind this Passover season. How to resolve the tension in these two ideas? For this I have a suggestion from an article entitled: **Hillel’s Passover Sandwich: A Dose of Positivity** By Dovid Zaklikowski.

“Hillel viewed the bitter parts of his life, particularly the hardships of poverty that G-d bestowed upon him, positively. So, while his life appeared difficult, he was able to understand that it was G-d’s will and ultimately for a good reason. Therefore, he placed the bitterness (bitter herbs) inside the freedom (matzah) and ate it while reclining.”

Might we learn for Hillel to all consider our blessings in this season of Passover following a year of pandemic, economic distress, social disorder and political disunity. *Acknowledging our loses (bitter herbs), celebrating our freedom (matzah) and preparing to rebuild our communities - which connects us to the third element sometime present in the Hillel Sandwich - the charoset.*

Shulchan Orech

Meal as Ritual

By Michael Goldblum

Grumbling stomachs, overindulgence on the *karpas*: for us the seder's dinner is always too long in coming, a reward for plowing through each and every one of R. Akiva's 250 plagues. Food and family gossip are rewards for the ritual. I can't blame them: it's getting late, the kids can't sit still, some find little relevance in the discussions of wandering Arameans and parsings of biblical verse.

While I share the relief and indulge in the dishing, I know we are missing something in seeing the meal as not of the seder but after it. When we sing the *Kadesh Urechatz* at the start of the evening, that dinner, the *Shulchan Orech* or Arranged Table, is listed as a key sacramental step, given no less significance than kiddush, eating the maror, or telling the exodus story.

I think we can try to find an answer by thinking about the *Pesach* sacrifice of old. Clearly it is more important than we feel it to be today: the Talmud volume devoted to Passover spends most of its pages on detailed discussions of the paschal lamb or goat, telegraphing that the holiday's main event was the offering and the eating of the sacrifice. Our own Passover-induced obsessions - kashering dishwashers, *kitniyot* or not, cleaning the kitchen well enough to



The Passover Sacrifice, from the Sarajevo Haggadah, via Wikipedia

alleviate the guilt - barely get a passing mention. It was a totally different experience.

Imagine the Temple mount: where the golden Dome of the Rock rests today, an imposing, pilastered limestone edifice, squared shoulders shading its broad, open courts and plazas, all paved in the buttery, lumpy yellow stone of Jerusalem. Like a really crazy day at airport security long queues snake back and forth across the open spaces and down the hillside to the east, each man leading his bleating goat or sheep. The excited din of harried men and frightened beasts, the reek of a crowded stockyard, rise from the plaza, where far off above the crowd you can see the high altar, priests busily charring dozens or hundreds of animals at a time: a huge holy barbecue pit, the smoke



washing back over you and the rest of the city. [I imagine the view of the stage at a Springsteen Concert from the cheapest seats, but here the band is literally on fire.]

You finally get to the front of the line, where the team of *cohanim* is in constant motion, their satin bonnets and linen tunics, all white this morning, are by now red top to toe, showered in blood from the slashing, skinning, draining and roasting of thousands upon thousands of animals, quick quick - racing against sunset the afternoon before the seder, just when we are chopping our charoset and shelling the boiled eggs. What a gruesome, fetid, grisly orgy it must have been, a mass sanctified rite steeped in blood and dung, skin and smoke.

Sooner or later you get your goat back, charred whole - no broken bones or rare meat permitted. You carry the smoky carcass back to your hotel in the Old City. The crowds, the expense, and the long temple lines on seder's eve all incentivize you to share your goat with as many people as you can find. Each of you only eats a small shot-glass-sized chunk, a gamy dessert after the meal, like

Solomon's Temple, from "Will the Levites hold a literal blood sacrifice in the last days?" via askgramps.org

the *Afikoman* nowadays. Your goat can yield 40-50 pounds of meat, so if you give every person a paschal quarter-pounder you can easily host a seder for 200: more the medium-sized wedding than a Norman Rockwell family dinner. And no leftovers are permitted: it all has to go tonight, before midnight.

Unlike my family's seders, the meal is not **after** the ritual, it **is** the ritual, embedded at its center, with text and food flowing together, intertwined. Today we split the *Hallel*, with half sung before the meal and half rushed through after benching. But *Masechet Pesachim* 95 recalls that back in the day the psalms of *Hallel* were sung as the sacrificial meal was being eaten: you sing G-d's praises with your mouths full.

Crafted in the melancholy generations after the burning of that limestone temple, after quelled uprisings and dispersion across the region, our seder was designed to recall for our forebears the temple-centered life their grandparents dimly remembered, while forging a transition to a new, decentralized way to be Jewish, where the local synagogue and the individual family took the place of the



temple and nation celebrating in unison. "*Nishalma parim sifateinu*" - "we make up for the bulls with our lips." Instead of offerings of meat we have only words now to give, instead of the one bloody Jerusalem altar we have each our own dining room tables, spread out across

the diaspora. In some ways the covid crisis gives us a little taste of the isolation, the disruption of traditions, the loneliness and the sadness that our ancestors may have felt in the generations after the *churban*: our traditions upended and refashioned in response to an unprecedented apocalypse.

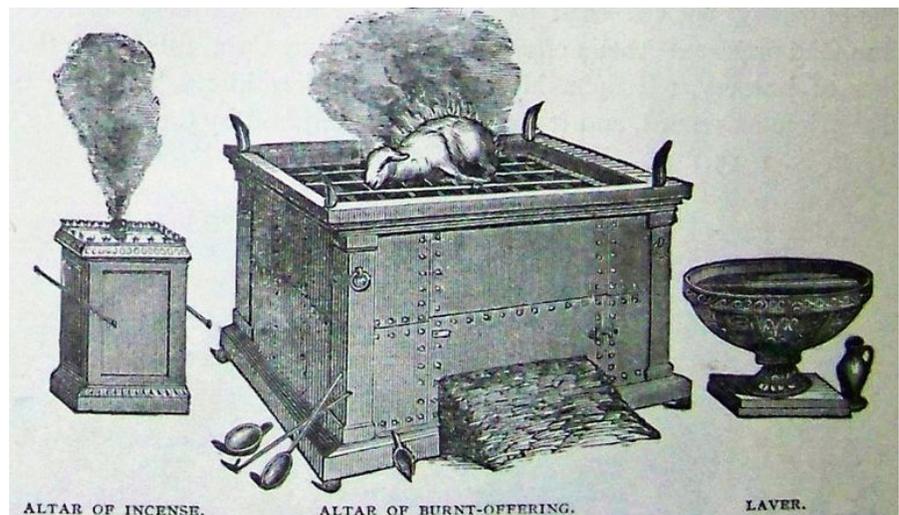
And we indeed employ plenty of words nowadays, in literal lip-service at our seders. But I think it is worth trying to knit back the meal itself, the *Shulchan Orech*, into the ritual, to elevate our dinner as the goat was elevated on the altar

Agnus Dei, by Zurbaran, via museodelprado.es

above the throng, to have our contemporary seder feast bring some distant echo of holiness, some sacred order, and a deliberateness into our decentralized, desacralized lives today.

For one, we can prepare for the meal mindfully. Among the first commandments given to the Jews before Sinai was to choose the paschal goat carefully: it had to be free of any mark or blemish, so it had to be raised and handled gingerly. For those who eat it, we can exercise care in buying ethically-sourced meat, from animals that would have been raised as gently as a paschal lamb. And the more we buy food that was grown organically, the less poison we add to our planet, the more we gingerly treat our world, leaving it unblemished.

We can extend this level of care to the rest of the things we buy for the seder. They can be orgies of waste: plastic plates, tablecloths, containers, and silverware all save us the hassle of cleanup and the cost of separate Passover tablewares, but they will still be here with us, degrading and poisoning long after our great grandchildren are gone.



The Universal Language of Sacrifice, via engedirresourcecenter.com

We all want groaning tables rich with entrees and sides, soups and desserts. How much food do we waste on a night when we are commanded to feed all who come to the door, in a borough where tens of thousands of our neighbors suffer grinding, systemic hunger? Maybe we can recall the weddingsworth of guests fed by our goat by helping POTS feed a few hundred hungry neighbors? Could we nurture our ground, our air and water as carefully as we protected the sacrifice, leaving no mark or blemish as we celebrate our liberation? By treating our seder meal as ritual, every forkful as sanctified as a prayer and the table as sacred as the temple altar, we can infuse even the unscripted parts of the evening with an elevated spirit, making the act of consumption reverential: literally, a hallelujah.