



כנסת הרבנים

Rabbinical Assembly

HAGGADAH SUPPLEMENT

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Last year's Pesah was unprecedented. This year's is...precedented? Perhaps. And yet, in the year of the pivot, we continue to evolve, adapt, and create. Whether your Seder is on zoom, outdoors, with just a few vaccinated friends, or, if you are truly lucky, back together with family after a year apart, we hope you find comfort and inspiration in this Pesah supplement. Included are words to guide your spiritual preparation for Pesah along with readings for the Seder itself. We are grateful to our contributors, and we wish you a *Hag Pesah Sameah!*

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Gatherings

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The people gathered.
They did not assemble in pews,
did not congregate in the foyer.
They did not linger over the oneg table
for another cup of the Sisterhood's famous punch
(which is merely ginger ale and sherbet,
but is magically transformed into a Divine elixir
when consumed in the service of celebrating Shabbat).
The people gathered,
though no cars jockeyed for space in the parking lot;
though hugs and kisses and handshakes were not exchanged—
verbal greetings from afar sufficed.
The people gathered,
as weeks stretched into months
and the months stretched into a year.
Living room sofas and dining room tables
and office desks
became our *mikdashbei m'at*, our personal sanctuaries.
We looked at the assortment of windows,
took an accounting of our community,
welcomed new faces, reconnected with friends from afar.
At times, we lamented the loss
of our old manner of gathering.
But we rejoiced in the new spaces of holiness
that we have been able to construct.
For we have learned, "It is not the places
that confer holiness upon us;
rather it is we
who imbue places with holiness."
So, until we can once again
bask in the holiness
of being physically present with one another,
Let us rejoice in our sacred community
still bound by heart and spirit,
and let us derive strength
from one another.

Ten Minutes Before Seder

Rabbi Gail Labovitz

Coco Chanel is said to have once said, “When accessorizing, take off the last thing you put on.” But no, not for me. The last thing I put on was the necklace.

It’s those last frenzied moments before the start of Passover seder. The table is set with the Passover plates we bought cheap years ago from a now defunct housewares store in New York City, and the plainest stemware you can get four or six to a box. Smells of soup and gefilte fish (yeah, we opened windows while cooking, but still...) and brisket waft from the kitchen and are taken in by the early arriving guests sitting on the couch.

I’m standing upstairs in the walk in closet, deciding what to wear. Food stained, sweat drenched jeans and t-shirt sit in a heap by the laundry basket. No one will remember in a year, or even a month, what I wore. They might remember that homemade gefilte fish from my grandmother’s recipe, or that this year the Hebrew school taught the kids to sing “Who Knows One” in Ladino, or that their child asked an especially astute question. But I will remember that I wore the necklace. I will remember that she is with me still.

Having no sisters, no one objects that I should have the first rights over my mother’s jewelry collection. In the week of mourning, my sisters-in-law and I sit on the floor of my parents’ bedroom with the boxes open before us. We shoo away the children, who are overawed by sparkle and surfaces. We buy them off with scarves and some of the cheaper, costume pieces, send them to other rooms to model for each other, send them away anywhere but here where their exuberance is an unintended wound. What remains are the pieces with stories attached, but the storyteller is not here to share them any longer. Trips to conferences and vacations. Crafts fairs. A studio returned to again and again. What we do know is how my mother distilled the essence of herself, her energy, her determination, her vivacity, into silver and lacquer and precious stones and beads.

I do not love this holiday. I should, shouldn’t I? Shouldn’t I feel something for freedom and liberation? Too much work to prepare, so that I’m always exhausted by the time it starts. After all the leavening is cleared from the house, after the counters are covered and the oven broiled clean and the sink baptized in boiling water, I still do not feel free. I eat my bread of affliction, and wait for redemption that does not seem to come. But my mother – this was her favorite holiday. Something about the full table, full of food and family and friends, energized her where it depletes me.

My mother’s tastes ran to the dramatic. The better pieces are large, bright, distinctive, beyond the standards of what is or is not fashionable. Some are too big, too much, too heavy for me to wear. For me to live up to. This necklace, though, fits just right. This necklace is made of beaten plates of silver overlaid with gold filigree, a round onyx set on the center plate. This necklace lies tight and close on my throat. A kind of choker. Like a Roman slave collar.

But it frees something inside. I stand in the closet wearing an outfit chosen only because it coordinates with the necklace, and I sob. I wish I loved, or even liked this holiday like she did. I wish she were here to be the one making the holiday.

And then, I splash my face with cold water from the sink in the bathroom, and carry my mother with me down to the table.

Blessing for Lighting Third Holy Day Candle

Rabbi Lisa Gelber

Holy Eternal Gd of Life and Love,

On this night of Passover – *Hag HaPesab* - keep us safe in body and spirit. Watch over us as we tell the story of our people and the story of today.

On this night of Telling – *Hag HaMatzot* – let us share our questions and search for responses. May our stories prepare us for the journey ahead.

On this night of Freedom – *Hag HaHerut* – let us imagine liberation from fear and illness, masks and gloves. Let the masters who hold our fate in their hands release us with wise practice and expectations that make for safety.

On this night of Spring – *Hag HaAviv* – let us imagine a future where breath enlivens us and beauty sustains us inside and out. May the signs of a new season bring us hope for change.

Let this flame illuminate our journey. May the song of our ancestors merge with the song of today. May we be blessed with peace and well-being.

Amen



A Light In the Darkness

Rabbi Danny Burkeman

This year, in addition to kindling the holiday lights, we light a yahrzeit candle to remember all that was lost this past year.

In the beginning when there was just darkness, God declared “Let there be light,” and there was light. In an instant the darkness disappeared, and that radiance spread throughout the world. God’s first act of creation was to bring light into the darkness, to illuminate the world. With this candle we follow God’s example, extinguishing the darkness and sharing the light.

Over this past year we have lost so much. It has been a year in which we were forced to live apart from one another, maintaining a social distance to protect ourselves and those around us. It has been 12 months and we have missed so many moments -- times of joy and sadness, when we could not gather together. For 365 days we have woken up each morning with the threat of a pandemic hanging over our heads, fearing the news and saddened by the rising death toll.

Tonight, as we reflect on all that has been lost over this past year, we light this Yahrzeit candle as a sign of our mourning and a commitment to the future.

We light this candle and mourn for the moments that we missed: graduations that could not take place, vacations and summer camps we could not enjoy, lifecycle events that were unrecognizable. So many moments that were cancelled, postponed, or drastically different from what we had anticipated.

We light this candle and mourn for the everyday experiences that were lost: the meals we could not share, the hugs and embraces we could not give and receive, the moments of community and gathering that could not take place.

We light this candle and mourn for all the lives that have been lost: the hundreds of thousands who have lost their lives to this dreadful disease, the countless front-line workers and caregivers who gave their lives so that others could live, all of those who have died in these last 12 months and for whom we could not mourn as we would have wanted.

But we also light this candle as a symbol of hope: despite the separation, we have found ways to come together; in the midst of suffering we have cared for one another; in the shadow of death we have found ways for life to continue.

We take a moment now to name those moments and the people that we have lost, so we can remember.

[Share names of the people who have died and the moments that have been lost over this past year]

[Light the Yahrzeit Candle]

With the candle lit, the light expels the darkness and it joins with countless other candles being lit by our friends and family.

A Kaddish for 2020

Rabbi Raysh Weiss, Rabbi Lily Solochek, Kohenet Shamirah, Rabbinical student May Ye, Rabbi Emily Cohen, Rabbi Noam Lerman (published on RitualWell)

We cannot count the losses of 2020.

We lament the deaths of 2020. 1.8 million from the coronavirus. Deaths of healthcare workers, deaths of incarcerated people, deaths in refugee camps, deaths from homelessness during this pandemic.

We lament the deaths from police violence. Deaths of Black and Brown people. Deaths of trans people, murdered for existing.

We cannot count the losses of 2020.

We mourn time lost from family and friends. Cancelled weddings, funerals in isolation.

We mourn the loss of in-person education for our children and the socioeconomic barriers to education during a pandemic.

We mourn jobs lost, increased hunger and poverty. Evictions and unpayable bills.

We cannot count the losses of 2020.

We cry and we cry out.

We cry out against fascism. Against white supremacy.

We cry out for stolen indigenous land.

We cry out for those whose voices have been silenced.

We cry out for the injustice of our race, gender, socioeconomic class, and location determining how we experience this pandemic.

We cannot count the losses of 2020.

We grieve.

We grieve the damage humanity has inflicted on precious Earth.

We grieve poisoned water, poisoned air, drought and erosion. Floods, hurricanes, wildfires.

We cannot count the losses of 2020.

We grapple with new phrases we've come to say daily: Unprecedented. New normal. Pivot.

Unforeseen. Abundance of caution. Surreal. Isolation. Difficult. Mute & unmute. Technical

difficulties. Silver lining. Streaming. Quarantine & shelter in place & Lockdown. Masks. Misinformation.

We cannot count the losses of 2020.

May the One who makes peace in the heavens give us courage and resilience to make peace amongst our communities, our nations, and our world.

May the anguished learnings of this year lead to building better access for people on the margins of community.

May the memory of this year spark a revolution within us to build a stronger, more just and loving world.

May we know the privilege we hold by being alive as we say, Amen.

Eleven Lessons of Hope and Healing During the Pandemic

Rabbi Danielle Upbin

Saltwater on the seder table symbolizes sadness - tears shed in slavery. In this ritual, we remove a drop of salt water from a cup as we reflect upon the life lessons we have gleaned throughout this long Pandemic year. As we reflect upon the year that past, may we recall the precious lessons that have given new meaning to our lives:

1. **Patience** grows into hope.
2. **Time** with loved ones must never be taken for granted.
3. We are **stronger** than we ever thought possible.
4. **Hugs** and physical contact are irreplaceable.
5. **Gratitude** can re-orient our perspective.
6. **Local businesses** are our neighbors and friends. They need our support.
7. **Nature** is a window into the Divine. Secrets of life and rejuvenation unfolding before our eyes.
8. Our **communities** are fuel for meaning and support.
9. Trust in **healthcare** and **front-line workers**, the backbone of our society.
10. Nothing can replace **Good health**.
11. **Faith** in God will see us through.

Take a moment to share or contemplate your own life-lessons gleaned from the past year.

As we celebrate this night of freedom, healing and hope, may the wisdom gleaned in this Pandemic year be a continual source of inspiration and growth. Amen.

Ha Lahma Anya and Immigration

Rabbi Ben Herman

Every year thousands of migrants come to the border between the United States and Mexico. Some come from as far as Central America on a trek encompassing thousands of miles. They are coming to flee violence and crime and to make a better life for themselves.

Many of these migrants are not aware of the perilous trek through desert that they will encounter if they are successful in entering the United States. When I was in Tucson, AZ, I served as a Board member of Humane Borders, I went into Mexico to persuade people not to cross illegally -- that it was too risky and that they could likely end up dead. Some listened; others persisted. I joined Humane Borders in putting up water stations throughout the Sonoran Desert so that those who crossed in perilous conditions (up to 120 degrees Fahrenheit) could get some respite. These water stations were placed with knowledge and approval of the US Border Patrol and were distributed to migrants. We felt that 9,000 people dying while crossing the desert was far too many -- and knowing from our own tradition how our ancestors crossing the desert were often starved for thirst.

Shortly after beginning the Seder we tell the Passover story. We begin with a prayer in Aramaic (the vernacular of the day), and we pray as follows:

This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. All those who are hungry, let them enter and eat. All who are in need, let them come celebrate the Passover. Now we are here. Next year in the land of Israel. This year we are enslaved. Next year we will be free.

In praying this prayer, known as Ha Lakhma Anya, we recognize three essential truths: First we need to open the door truly attending to invite someone in, with an empty chair at our Seder table. If we do not do this with a full heart, then how can we expect the next time we open the door for Elijah the Prophet to enter heralding the Messiah? Second, we recognize that our lives are incomplete, that something is missing by not being in the Land of Israel. Having had two Israel trips cancelled because of COVID, I can attest that *libi b'mizrah*, my heart is in the east toward Jerusalem. Third, we recognize that we are not free yet. Despite having the comforts of our American living, we understand that true freedom only comes when everyone has what s/he needs, when there is no more hunger, poverty, or homelessness. We pray that next year may we as a collective whole be free -- that each of us will have the necessities for human existence.

May those who are currently migrating, without a place to call home, find their home this year, one in which they will be accepted for who they are and in which they can start a brand new life in our country.

Let All Who Are Hungry

Rabbi Dr. Bradley Shavit Artson

Each year, we gather around our tables, surrounded by friends and family, to recount the tale of our ancestors' miraculous deliverance from Egyptian slavery. As we unpack our Haggadot and look to the classical words of the rabbis and sages of old, it is worth stopping for a moment to examine the very first passage of the Seder ritual.

Immediately after the introductory blessings for candle-lighting, Kiddush, and the Shehehiyanu, we invite the hungry into our midst. Using the same Aramaic words that have been recited for thousands of years, Jewish families uncover the matzot and recite: "This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry, let them enter and eat. All who are in need, let them come celebrate Pesah. Now we are here; next year in the land of Israel. Now we are enslaved; next year we will be free."

What a strange opening line! The Ha Lahma Anya refers to the matzah, but then goes on to address people who aren't even sitting at the Seder table, who aren't even Jewish at all!

Why start the Seder, a chance to recall our history, by this stirring but unrelated call to feed the hungry? What does this have to do with Pesah?

There are two traditional ways of interpreting the Ha Lahma Anya. The first notes that we refer to bodily needs first ("all who are hungry") and to spiritual needs second ("all who are in need"). Both components are essential parts of liberation -- one cannot be free unless there is adequate sustenance and a spirit of liberation. Yet the priority seems to be that one cannot be spiritually free unless freed from the debilitating plague of poverty, hunger, and illness. In the words of the Mishnah, "without bread, there is no Torah." Without material security, it is impossible to attain spiritual depth.

As is often true in Jewish tradition, the opposite interpretation also conveys a significant truth. Notice that in the last two sentences, the order is reversed: first comes spiritual attainment ("next year in the land of Israel") followed by physical freedom ("next year we will be free"). It takes spirit to motivate people to fight for their freedom. It takes vision and insight to stand up against tyranny, whether from a powerful dictator or an irresistible urge. Liberation of the body requires a determination to face the truth, unencumbered by the blinders of convention or of cowardice.

These two views--that physical security must precede spiritual growth, and that a free spirit is the necessary precursor to any lasting liberation--both illumine important aspects of the human situation. Although contradictory on the level of *p'sbat* (literal truth) both are essential components of truth on the level of *midrash* (how truth translates into human living and community).

And both interpretations confirm the sad reality that we are still in *Galut*, still in exile. Not only because we don't live in a redeemed Land of Israel, but because the world is still so distant from the vision of the Torah, still alienated from the attainment of harmonious and compassionate living. Too many go to bed hungry each night, too many still die of illnesses for which there are cures, and too many suffer the deadening blows of bigotry and prejudice from their fellow human beings.

In this world, a world of suffering, disappointment, and pain, the Ha Lahma Anya is a clarion call, summoning the Jewish people to our historic task *le-takken olam be-malkhut Shaddai*, of repairing the world under the rule of God.

All who are hungry may come and eat, but only if we live our lives and structure our society in such a way that the entire human family is cared for. Sadly, that is not the case. In celebrating the liberation from Egyptian slavery, we need to look to ourselves, to recognize that we too often play the role of Pharaoh in the lives of others.

The Ha Lahma Anya reminds us that our proper role model is Moses, the passionate spokesman for the downtrodden and the outcast. Indeed, the Ha Lahma Anya reminds us that our ultimate role model is God, the liberator of slaves and the untiring protector of widows and orphans.

הַשַּׁתָּא הַכָּא – This Year [We Are] Here

Rabbi Peretz Rodman

Hearing binary comparisons or contrasts, we tend to blur our vision of the first part and focus on the second. “The meal was lovely; the dessert was to die for.” “The car is expensive, but in mileage and maintenance, you save a fortune.”

We begin our seder with a public invitation: “This is the bread of misery that our ancestors ate in Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat, all who in need share in our Passover offering.” And then we continue with a statement of binary contrasts: “This year we are here; next year—in the Land of Israel! This year we are subjugated; next year—free!”

Freedom, the promised land—those are what I have always thought about at that moment of setting out on the evening’s journey. My own life’s journey has brought me from a “here” that is elsewhere to Eretz Yisrael. My own navigation of the world has been guided by a desire to help myself and others break free of the bonds of subjugation, in many forms. That is what I have always thought the Seder was meant to inspire.

This year is different.

This has been a year of being *here*. After decades of regular international travel, in 2020 I didn’t once set foot outside Israel. I barely left my city, or even the neighborhoods around my home in Jerusalem. It wasn’t until October that I saw the Mediterranean or visited my daughter where she lives, in Yafo—a 45-minute drive from my home. I haven’t been back there since then. Your story is likely to be very similar.

There is much to be said about being *here*. Within a few minutes’ walk of my home, there are gorgeous vistas of the Old City and, at various seasons, fields of flowers that few of us in the neighborhood ever bother to see. Like so many others, I took to developing our porch garden, planted vegetables and fruits with our very young grandchildren, who live close by and spent many lockdown days at our home. My wife, who teaches elementary school-age children, kept producing new arts and crafts supplies from her burgeoning drawers and cabinets, and our grandchildren developed new skills and new tastes.

Were you too, *here*, so much more since last Pesah? Have you been able to use those limits as opportunities? Were you able to get to know others in your household or vicinity better than you had? Has it enabled you, or maybe forced you, to come to know yourself better than before? Has being *here* helped you understand where you want to go when it's possible to go, and what you want to accomplish there?

My travel, when it resumes, will be more focused, more purposeful—and more precious. My *here* time already feels richer than it did before. This year we are here, and that provides opportunities that we have overlooked for all too long. Being truly present where we are, I now know, should be no less our focus on *Seder* night than where we hope to be next year.

הַשְׁתָּא הַכָּא

הרב פרץ רודמן

כאשר אנחנו שומעים או קוראים השוואה או ניגוד בין שני דברים, נטייתנו הטבעית היא לטשטש בעיני רוחנו את הראשון ולהתמקד בשני: "הארוחה היתה יפה מאד. המנה האחרונה היתה מדהימה." "הרכב יקר, אבל באחזקה ובקילומטראז' אתה חוסך הון תועפות." המנה האחרונה והרכב החסכוני עומדים במוקד, נכון?

את ליל הסדר פותחים בהזמנה פתוחה: "הא לחמא עניא די אכלו אבהתנא בארעה דמצרים. כל דכפין ייתי ויכל. כל דצריך ייתי ויפסח." ואז ממשיכים בצמד ניגודים: "השתה הכא – לשנה הבאה בארעא דישראל. השתא עבדי – לשנה הבאה בני חורין."

החרות, ארץ היעד והייעוד – על אלה תמיד הרהרתי ברגע ההוא של יציאה לדרך במסע ליל הסדר. מסע החיים האישי שלי הביא אותי ממקום אחר אל "ארעא דישראל". הניווט שלי בעולם תמיד קיבל הכוונה מרצון לעזור לעצמי ולאחרים להשתחרר מכבלים ושיעבודים מסוגים שונים. אלה, כך חשבתי, הם בדיוק המחשבות שליל הסדר אמור לעורר בנו.

השנה הזאת שונה.

השנה החולפת, מאז פסח תש"ף, היתה שנה שלמה של "הכא", של "כאן". מי מאיתנו נסע לארץ אחרת מאז ליל הסדר האחרון? אני בקושי יצאתי מעיר המגורים שלי, ירושלים. מעט מאד נסעתי לשכונות אחרות מעבר לפינה הדרום-מזרחית שלי בעיר הקודש. ליפו הגעתי לראשונה בשנת 2020, על-מנת לבקר את בתי ולברך על ראיית הים הגדול, בחודש אוקטובר. מאז לא הייתי שם שוב. הסיפור שלך דומה, מן הסתם.

על הנוכחות "כאן" יש מה לומר, לשבח ולא לגנאי. בחמש דקות הליכה מן הבית אני מגיע לטיילת, עם המראה המדהים של העיר העתיקה מעבר לוואדי ומאחוריה הר הצופים. עשר דקות הליכה ואני יכול לראות שדה תורמוסים באביב ומראי פריחה אחרים בעונות השונות. כמו רבים, השקעתי השנה בגינון במרפסת, יחד עם הנכדות הקטנות, הגרות קרוב אלינו, ששתיים או שלוש מהן בילו כל יום בימי סגר ב"גן סבא וסבתא". אשתי הוציאה מאוצרות ציוד האמנות והמלאכה שלה (היא מורה לילדים בגיל בי"ס יסודי) יותר ויותר חומרים ליצירה והנכדות פיתחו כישורים חדשים וטעמים האמנותי התפתח.

ואתה? בילית גם אתה הרבה יותר זמן "כאן" מאז חג המצות שעבר? הצלחת לעשות מן המגבלות הזדמנויות? למדתם להכיר עוד יותר טוב בני בית ושכנים? האם התנאים המגבילים עזרו לך לגלות לעצמך משהו עליך/עלייך?

שלא ידעת קודם? האם היותרך תקוע.ה "כאן" עזר לך להבהיר לעצמך לאן כדאי לנסוע כשתתאפשר שוב נסיעה וכן מה ברצונך להשיג שם?

כשאתחיל שוב לנסוע, הנסיעות שלי יהיו יותר מכוונות, יותר מרוכזות ביעד ובעיקר – יותר יקרות לי. באשר לזמן ה"הכא" שלי, הוא כבר עשיר יותר ומעשיר יותר מאשר לפני עידן הקורונה. השנה אנחנו כאן. עובדה זו מספקת לנו הזדמנויות שהיו לנו ממילא אבל לא שמנו לב.

השנה המלים "השתה הכא" יהיו במוקד תשומת הלב שלנו בליל הסדר לא פחות מאשר היעד המיוחל של השנה הבאה.

What Will Make the Seder Different?

Rabbi Arielle Hanien (Times of Israel 2019)

Mah Nishtanah halailah hazeh? The familiar question that the youngest child asks at the *seder* is meant to be heard as an invitation to engage in storytelling.

But perhaps the real question is what will make this *seder* different from all others? How can we harness the transformative power of this Jewish ritual when it seems so familiar—when even its questions are ones we can recite by rote? If for generations, natural inquiry gelled into detached-from-wonder questions, how can we get the *seder* unstuck so that it helps us come alive as we celebrate our freedom?

Looking to the evolution of the *seder* itself provides a direction. The ritual of a Passover meal is prescribed in the Torah when, even before we leave Egypt, God instructs Moses to tell us (Exodus, Ch. 12) to eat a roasted meal like the lamb we boldly roasted on our last night in Egypt, along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, recounting the story of our exodus, every year. The ritual of the *seder* comes from the deep imagination of the Jewish Sages who bring this roasted lamb meal into psychodynamic 3-D, transforming the menu into an alchemical recipe for inspiration through embodied experiencing of an intergenerational drama.

The Rabbis imbued the biblically prescribed menu with meaning, and we too can bring a new sense—and our senses—to the food arrayed before us like an experiential palate:

Matzoh, the haggadah reminds us, is about what is essential—bare necessities of survival, that is both a reminder of meager subsistence and poverty (anyone here identify with scraping by as you stretch financially or otherwise?) and yet also of the freedom of getting in touch with that which keeps us spiritually alive, without the clutter of so much else that piles up on us in life.

Parsley reminds us of a new spring, bringing us in touch with hope, even as we taste the salt water that can remind us (privately, if you must) of the taste of our own tears or sweat. Go there, this year, if you can. To your tears, to that place of hurt and not knowing. Parsley, after all, invites us to connect with hope and the promise of a new spring even as we remember how it felt to taste our tears and sweat and sorrow.

Bitter herbs become an opportunity to get out of denial about the pain we suffer. These plants connect us to the kind of pain that can burn us on the inside, like humiliation and shame, powerlessness and rage. You can decide this year if you're going to be bold and allow yourself the unadulterated taste of that bitterness, the kind that can make you turn red and choke up for a moment as the tears begin to emerge.

The Sage Hillel extended permission to make a sandwich, so to the extent you need to, you can chase the deep pain of maror down with the haroset, the sweetest tastes of love.

And whatever your combination of flavors, haroset is a sensory reminder of the earth that veritably blossoms with sweet stickiness—honey, wine, apples, seeds, nuts, dates.... It is a sensory, sensuous metaphor for all kinds of love that nourish and change us and the world. Because after all, haroset (which is not on the menu that God gives us in Exodus, but which the Rabbis read into God's love) is *literally* a blend of love metaphors: the recipes emerge from the Song of Songs, that sacred love poem that is Jewish tradition to recite after the *seder* in this holiday on the first full moon of spring when the world begins to bloom anew as it seems to when we know we are in love.

On this full moon, every person is obliged to see the reality that we ourselves experienced an Exodus (Greek for “exit”) from the oppressive confines of a “narrow place” (the literal translation of the Hebrew word for Egypt, *Mitzrayim*). Tonight, we are enjoined to taste the miracle that we made it through something that hurt so badly we thought it might be the end of us... and the deeper we go into the pain, the sweeter is the taste of our freedom.

The whole experiential ritual occurs in a nourishing frame layered with meaning and emotion.

At the beginning of the evening, we break the middle matzoh and tuck the larger part of it away into hiding, an act of modeling what it is to go into the part of us on the inside and break open what has been constrained. Wine carries us through the meal, one meaningful cup at a time, softening edges and defenses and helps us reach into different dimensions of remembering and sharing our journeys. A story that begins with taste prompts is meant to deepen even as we eat our sustaining meal (when it comes, at last).

But perhaps the most redemptive, significant note of all, is that we don't leave the *seder* without reclaiming the part of us that was broken and hidden (*tzafun*) when we started this ritual meal. The *afikoman* isn't meant to be the blandest dessert; it's meant to be the puzzle piece that we bring back to the rest of us, the wholeness we hold out for even if the *seder* has stretched us past bedtime. We insist on—we even pay the children a ransom to redeem— fulfilling the collective agreement of the *seder* night *not to let ourselves or each other stay broken, invisible, or unredeemed*. How's that for a transformative ritual moment? How sweet will the *afikoman* taste to you this year?

What will make the *seder* night different for you than all other nights?

On other nights, we have to consider the *seder* to be written in the language of instruction. This night, we consider it to be written in the language of invitation.

We follow the lead of the Sages who transformed a biblical menu for the night before a journey into a recipe for journeying through feeling. The *seder* (literally, the order of ritual practices within the framework of a meal) supports our deep desire to get real and go deep in the safety of context—of people we love, of food that will touch us emotionally and spiritually and eventually offer us sustenance for the journey. Now that we know we will get to where we are—free, safe, and comfortable—let's go *into* the experience we lived, even as we taste reminders of how it lives in us. And together, perhaps we can find our hidden parts and redeem them, too.

Hofesh, Heirut, Dror

Rabbi Karen G Reiss Medwed, Ph.D.

Hofesh, Heirut, Dror, there are many words for understanding our journeying out of our enslavement, our physical and our spiritual enslavements. There are also many words describing this journey towards freedom, some which describe our newly attained physical freedoms and some which probe us more deeply to consider spiritual metacognitive global freedoms.

We find one such description offered in the Babylonian Talmud, Rosh HaShana 9b:

דְּכוּלֵי עֵלְמָא דְרוֹר לְשׁוֹן חִירוּת מֵאֵי מְשֻׁמַע דְּתַנְיָא אֵין דְרוֹר אֶלָּא לְשׁוֹן חִירוּת אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוּדָה מָה לְשׁוֹן דְרוֹר בְּמַדְיָא בִּי
דְיָרָא וּמוֹבִיל סְחוּרָה בְּכָל מְדִינָה

The Gemara asks: It is clear that **according to everyone** the term “*dror*” is a word **meaning liberty**. **From where** may this **be inferred**? The Gemara answers: **As it is taught** in a *baraita*: The word *dror* is a term **meaning only liberty**. **Rabbi Yehuda said: What is the meaning of the word *dror***? It is **like a man who dwells [*medayyer*] in any dwelling [*dayyara*] and moves merchandise around the entire country**, i.e., he can live and do business wherever he wants.

This passage from the Babylonian Talmud in the Tractate of Rosh HaShana captures an argument in which the rabbis are seeking clarity on the meaning of the word *Dror*, explaining it as liberty. Rabbi Yehuda offers a very concrete understanding of human liberty – the ability to own a home, engage in any business and be mobile with no limitations.

This definition is sadly apt today, where people are still not free to live in any dwelling, engage in any business freely and be mobile with no limitations or restrictions.

What might it mean to live in a world on a journey towards a sacred vision of liberation, where we challenge our inherent learned racial tendencies as part of our religious responsibility to partner with God to create *tikkun* in our world; where we are religiously obligated to overturn systemic racism in our justice and legislative worlds as part of our sacred partnership with God?

Dror: The language of *Dror* appears to be the encapsulation of liberation. It is a Godly proclamation which releases humanity, land and time from enslavement. Whereas *Hofesh* might lead Jewish people towards the mere promise of our own individual freedoms out of our slaveries and enslavements; *Dror* activates the Jewish people towards a universal obligation to ensure Justice and freedom from systemic racism, from global injustice and from barriers of inclusion.

On this Passover, as we look forward to a celebration from *Avdut* (slavery) to *Hairut* (freedom), what are three ways in which we might commit to a journey towards *Dror*, towards liberation? How might we obligate ourselves this year with the understanding that no one human is free until all humans are free? How might we obligate ourselves to ensure we are uprooting the systemic racism and injustice in our country, in our community, in our schools, in our media, in our circles of friends and workmates?

וּקְרַאתֶם דְרוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ לְכָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל

Let us each ensure we are on a journey of Jewish liberation, ensuring all people have the opportunity to be part of the call for freedom.

תפוז על צלחת הסדר

הרב עדית לב בשם חברות ילתא

מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות?

כל שנה, בערב פסח, קוראים ושרים בבתיים יהודיים רבים ברחבי העולם את ההגדה, וגם את "מה נשתנה", ומה משתנה משנה לשנה?

שנים רבות קפאה ההגדה על שמריה, וכך גם הסדר נותר כשהיה. אני, כילדה, חגגתי את הסדר כמעט ללא שינוי מן הסדרים שחגגו סביי וסבתותיי בבתי הוריהם. אבל העולם השתנה. אני גדלתי בעולם שבו קבוצות שבעבר נדחקו לשוליים החלו להתקרב למרכז. אחת מן הקבוצות הללו היא קבוצת הנשים. ילתא, הקבוצה שלנו, מייצגת את השינוי שמתחולל בעולם סביבנו. רק לפני שנים מועטות נפתחו חדרי בית המדרש עבורנו, והנה אנחנו עובדות בחברה סביבנו כרבות, ויוצרות יצירה חדשה-ישנה כקבוצה. ריטואלים ישנים מתחדשים וחדשים נוצרים, והקול הנשי נכנס לעשייה היהודית. אחד הריטואלים החדשים ישנים הוא סדר נשים, מנהג בן כ-30 שנים המאפשר יצירה נשית חדשה על ריטואל עתיק. זהו מסע של חיפוש ומציאת משמעות חדשה בסדר עתיק, והוספה של טקסים וריטואלים חדשים אליו. זהו חיפוש אחר אמירה נשית ישראלית עכשווית.

יש אגדה אורבנית על רב שאמר: "לאישה על הבימה יש מקום כמו לתפוז על צלחת הסדר". אחת התגובות הנשיות הייתה לשים תפוז על שולחן הסדר, וכידוע, כיום הבימה כבר אינה נחלתם של הגברים בלבד. אניטה דיאמונד כותבת: התפוז על צלחת הסדר הוא סמל, גם עליז וגם מכובד, ליכולתה של היהדות להסתגל ולשגשג. הוא גם מהלל את השפע והמגוון של הבריאה. אחרי הכל, האל אשר ברא את השמיים ואת הארץ ואת המין האנושי בוודאי אוהב מגוון ושינוי – ואל נשכח גם תפוזים. (The Women's Seder SourceBook)

מי ייתן ויהיה זה ערב עליז, מכובד עם שפע מגוון, ועם הרבה תפוזים.

The Arc of the Seder: From Despair to Praise

Rabbi Amy Levin

Several years ago, I was the rabbi of a Masorti/Conservative congregation in Jerusalem. With kids grown and away one year, I was asked if I would agree to run the seder at a shelter for abused women and their children in our neighborhood. Of course I agreed.

That seder was remarkable for a number of reasons. Sadly, domestic abuse exists in every economic level and cultural community in Israel and around the world. For us, that Passover, that meant that the communal meal prepared by the women basically brought the Jewish world to our table – from Moroccan Jewish seder soup to Eastern European gefilte fish, we dined on delicious food from all over the Jewish world.

But for the women at the table, our seder made palpable a message that spoke to each and every one of them in a new, more personal way. The rabbinic sages of the Talmud, as they described what the

seder night was meant to be, decreed that the arc of the seder should be *m'gnut l'shevah*, from despair to praise. In other words, on the seder night we are meant to make the emotional journey of our ancestors from the despair of slavery to the praise of God at our liberation. At the women's shelter that night, every woman at the table identified with that emotional seder journey.

Our ancestors who praised God for releasing them from slavery at the far shore of the Sea of Reeds still faced a long, challenging journey. But now they were going to make that journey in the embrace of a mutually supportive, self-determining community blessed by our Creator. They did not yet know exactly where they were going, or how or where they were going to build their new lives. They did know that they were never going to be subjugated again. They knew they needed to learn how to live as independent, free people.

That is the promise of the seder night for anyone trapped in life of despair.

The Haggadah challenges us each year: In each and every generation, each person is obligated to regard herself as if she or he was liberated from Egypt. For many of us, in the comfort of our own homes, at our seder tables, this is a challenging intellectual exercise. For too many it is a journey they can only pray will be theirs.

We here in Israel wish you and all those you love, a liberating Passover which, God willing, may be the harbinger of your release from the constraints of the COVID pandemic and a year of good health and the love of family, friends, and community.

Ten Pandemic Plagues

Rabbi Danielle Upbin

Passover is the Season of our Freedom, but tonight we recall the ways in which the world is still broken. As a nation and as a world community, we are still in the process of healing and recovery from the virus. In the spirit of the traditional Ten Plagues, this is a ritual of memory, in which we take a drop of wine from our cup as we recite each plague, demonstrating our diminished joy.

Dam (Blood) - Bloodshed and loss of life during the Pandemic.

Tz'fardaya (Frogs) - Contagion of the virus “hopping” from person to person, house to house, family to family.

Kinim (Lice) - The constant itch of fear and anxiety.

Arov (Mixed Beasts) - Behavior like wild beasts, congregating without precautions or concern about spreading disease.

Dever (Animal Disease) - Animals communicating to humans: “We are not for wholesale consumption and destruction.”

Shehin (Boils) - Lesions on Covid-19 patients’ pulmonary system, causing long-term damage.

Barad (Hail) - Bombardment of Pandemic news and fears, dominating all normal conversation for over a year.

Arbeh (Locusts) - Crowds descend on essential supplies, making daily living about foraging instead of nesting.

Hoshekh (Darkness) - Dark times, while improving, still no end in sight.

Makat B’khorot (Death of the Firstborn) - Over two and half million dead worldwide, and counting.

Health Equity and the 10th Plague

Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow

With more than half a million COVID deaths in our country, we have come close to experiencing what the Egyptians experienced with the final plague. An unprecedented number of people have suffered losses, been sick, and died. The tenth plague affected every Egyptian household equally, whereas today COVID deaths are marked by extreme inequity with a much bigger percentage of elders, and Black and Brown people among those lost.

A midrash from Tanhuma Buber (Bo 18:1) responds to God causing the death of all the firstborns across the land, a massive collective punishment.

...all the first-born sons came together and went to Pharaoh. They cried out unto Pharaoh and said to him: Please have this people leave for because of them evil will come over us and over you. Pharaoh said to his servants: Get going and beat those people on the legs.

We know God had hardened Pharaoh’s heart against letting the Jewish slaves leave. Hearing the Egyptian children plead for their lives and be beaten back, it is clear that Pharaoh’s heart was hardened against the suffering of his own people. So too were the hearts of our leaders.

The path out of this pandemic is through social cohesion - as modeled in this Midrash by the firstborns. Coming together is a critical first step made harder by all people not being affected equally.

In understanding the inequity of those lost to COVID, the struggle for the health of elders cannot be separated from the struggle for the health of their caregivers, the frontline employees who put themselves in harm’s way to care for elders – and yet were not protected enough themselves. In hospitals and nursing homes we came together to fight, but we haven’t as a country gotten close to a

unified response. It will take a growing collective spirit to end this plague and also we will need to address the root cause of the inequity.

It is not simply COVID but rather injustice in our society and health care system that has resulted in the deaths of our elders and BIPOC communities. COVID 19 has brought these inequities into sharp relief.

Our experience of the 10 plagues this year will be different. Just as Pharaoh's heart was hardened, resulting in the suffering of vast numbers of Egyptians – one in every household - so too the hearts of our leaders were hardened and allowed for the deaths of our grandparents, and the great-grandchildren of former slaves. Our lack of social cohesion meant that we did not escape Egypt, and the cross generational legacy of slavery and the current structural racism in America was laid bare.

This year, we have learned that pascal blood that is ONLY on OUR lintels will not save us. We are in it together and we will need to find solidarity across society to ensure the health care and well-being of all people. Only this will keep the angel of death from visiting our homes, and the homes of the most vulnerable.

Opening the Door for Elijah

Rabbi Martin S. Cohen

Once the meal ends, things move rather logically forward. We negotiate for the *afikomen* so we can formally conclude the meal, then distribute it among the *seder* guests. We recite Birkat Ha-mazon because the *seder* meal is, after all, a meal...and we always end a formal meal with the Grace after Meals. But then something odd happens, something unexpected and more than slightly unnerving. We rise in our places, someone (this was my personal job as a child) opens the front door, and the assembled pray that God stand up for Israel and deal justly with those nations—and no one at all is thinking of the Egyptians at this point—that have behaved barbarically, harshly, and cruelly towards the Jewish people throughout the millennia and, for many, in our own lifetimes. This custom began in Ashkenaz—in the Rhineland—in the twelfth century or so when the memory was still fresh of the murderous Crusaders who rampaged through Jewish communities and left only misery, barbarism, and loss in their unholy wake. Those who survived their wrath apparently felt the need to respond to what had befallen them and this was what they came up with. That, in and of itself, isn't a problem: we have long memories and the (unmentioned) Crusaders are just stand-ins anyway who represent the rest of our tormentors. But what's the story with the door?

It feels, to say the least, like a bad idea: if the world really is filled with foes and potential foes from whom deliverance is logically to be sought in advance—then how can opening the front door be a good plan? Why aren't we afraid that some latter-day Crusader will barge in and wreak havoc with our families and our guests? We *say* that we are welcoming Elijah the Prophet, but his name is not mentioned—and this omission is so glaring that lots and lots of families sing *Eliyahu Ha-navi*, the hymn from Havdalah, anyway. More to the point, though, is that he never comes. The *seder* invariably wraps up with redemption still firmly in the future. But that door is opened wide year after year nonetheless...to whomever might pass by and want to make trouble. It makes no sense not to worry about that, even less to imagine that it's somehow more likely Elijah will appear at the door to redeem the world than a band of local hooligans will barge in and steal the silver.

And so the open door becomes a symbol, and a powerful one at that. Outside, darkness has fallen. Inside, our homes are filled with light. Logic dictates that we should shut out the darkness and keep the light inside. But we do precisely the opposite and open the door—and we do so precisely as we nod to the dangerousness of being openly Jewish in the world. And so is it, year after year, that the darkness is at least slightly dissipated by the warmth and the luminescence of our homes, of our *seder* tables, of our families. And that simple act of refusing to live in fear and of risking it all to live openly as Jews in an all-too-often hostile world—that act of courage undertaken precisely as we remember the horrors of the past—if anything ever will, *that* is what will bring redemption to the world...and inspire Elijah, its herald, to come to call.

כוס מרים

הרב עדית לב

וְתַקַּח מֵרִים הַנְּבִיאָה אֶחָת אֶהָרֶן אֶת הַתֶּף בְּיָדָהּ וַתִּצְאֵן כָּל הַנָּשִׁים אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּתַפִּים וּבְמַחְלֹת:

(שמות טו, כ)

מרים, אחותם של משה ואהרן, היא אחת מהדמויות המופיעות בסיפור יציאת מצרים. היא מתוארת בספר שמות כנביאה, ומדרשים רבים מספרים לנו על באר מרים. נאמר כי היה זה מקור קסום למים שליווה את בני ישראל 40 שנה בשל זכויותיה של מרים. בדרשה שנשא הרב קלונימוס קאלמיש מפיאסעצנא שנספה בשואה, בגטו ורשה בשנת תש"ב, 1943, בפרשת חוקת על כוחה של מרים, הוא שואל:

מדוע נסמכה הכאת הסלע על ידי משה למותה של מרים ולכך שלא היו מים? כלומר מהו הקשר בין חטא משה למות מרים, ומסביר הרב: כוחה של מרים היה בשל העובדה שקיימה את המצוות למרות שכאישה היא אינה מצווה ובכל זאת עשתה. הרב שלמה פוקס מפרש כי לדעתו של הרבי מפיאסעצנא 'גדול מי שאינו מצווה ועושה' ממי ש'מצווה ועושה', לדעתו כוח תשוקתה העלה את תשוקת העם לעבודת ה' ובתשוקתה זכו לאורות העליונים בעבודת ה'. כוחה של מרים היה בשבירת הנורמות, ולמרות שאינה מצווה היא יזמה עשייה, ובשל כוחה הצליחה להעיר ולעורר את העם. אחד הרעיונות העולים מדבריו של הרבי מפיאסעצנא הוא כי מרים ובארה ממשיכים לתת חיות ימים רבים לאחר מיתתה. [1]

מנהג חדש שמתווסף לשולחן הסדר הוא כוס מרים. כוס מרים מלווה את כוס אליהו, ואנו ממלאות אותה במים כזכר לבאר מרים. הרב שלמה פוקס מפרש את המנהג להוסיף את 'כוס מרים' כניסיון להתחבר לכוחה של מרים ולהכניס בנו חיות. כוס מרים מסמלת, עבורנו, את כל מה שמקיים אותנו במסענו, הגאולה היומית, בעוד שבוס אליהו מסמלת גאולה משיחית עתידית.

נמלא את כוס אליהו

נמלא את כוס מרים

נברך ביחד:

זאת כוס מרים, כוס מים חיים זכר להרווייתנו במסע ממצרים,

ובמסע הממשיך בכל יום ויום.

מרים הנביאה	אליהו הנביא
מרים הנביאה עז וזמרה בידה.	אליהו הנביא אליהו התשבי
מרים תרקוד אתנו להגדיל זמרת עולם.	אליהו אליהו הגלעדי
מרים תרקוד אתנו לתקן את העולם.	במהרה בימינו יבוא אלינו
במהרה בימינו היא תביאנו	עם משיח בן דוד
אל מי הישועה אל מי הישועה	

[1] תודה לרב שלמה פוקס שהפנה אותי לרבי מפיאסעצנא ונתן לי להשתמש בפרושו.

Sefirat Ha-Omer: Making it Count!

Rabbi Dr Bradley Shavit Artson

“You shall count from the second day of Passover, when an Omer of grain is to be brought as an offering, seven complete weeks. The day after the seventh week of your counting will make fifty days.” (Leviticus 23:15-16)

Counting the Omer refers to the biblical commandment to celebrate the new barley harvest, by numbering and counting seven-times-seven evenings from Passover to the subsequent pilgrimage festival of Shavuot, which occurs on the evening after the Omer counting is complete. 49 nights, counting each successive evening in a unique fashion (calling out first the number of days, then the number of weeks and days), we and our ancestors chip away at the long, slow, endless procession of days and nights leading from our leaving Egypt until our arrival at Mount Sinai according to one level of meaning, at the delivery of the barley harvest to the Temple in Jerusalem on another.

And we too, in this age of self-quarantine, sheltering at home in this lengthy pandemic, we are also biding our time, counting our nights, hoping that this journey through coronavirus will lead to a liberation, an emergence into freedom, community, and to breathing easy once again.

Maybe this is the year to take up the practice of Counting the Omer if it is new to you. For those who have been observing this mitzvah in the past, this year can offer a deeper, additional layer of significance in the light of our current isolation.

We, like our ancestors, are on a journey that makes demands of us: to show care for each other, solidarity with our traditions and each other, responsiveness to what is right and proper behavior. Can we use this time of shelter to prepare for the great celebration that awaits us at its conclusion?

What if we think of this period of seclusion as sheltering in a grand, cosmic cocoon? Just as the caterpillar shelters in a self-built container in order to emerge with time as a radiant, beautiful flying beauty, so we can act now so that we emerge at the end better, more resilient, ready to soar in a new way.

Have we been too busy, too social to get our eating to reflect more healthy choices? Maybe this can be a focus of this time in the cocoon of sheltering? Has life made regular exercise impossible? Could this more settled time offer opportunities for calisthenics and walks previously postponed? Good books we've intended to read (or write)? Audio classes to savor? Time with a loved one (face-to-face or online)? A chance to learn with a hevruta (study partner)? Dipping into meditation? Leaning into prayer?

Since we have to endure this period of day-after-day seclusion, let's rethink it also as an opportunity to live mindfully, with intention.

Just as the ancient mitzvah of counting the Omer provides a framework for marking our progress from Exodus to Revelation, so too our time sheltering in place can provide an opportunity for mindful growth, undertaken in a spirit of possibility and hope.

Tomorrow will come. We will survive this pandemic. We will emerge into the light of community and life once more.

Let's make the choices now that will make that re-entry more satisfying, more reflective of our best values and our truest selves.

Let's make the days count!