

Passover Seder Supplemental Readings 5780
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Before Candle Lighting

God of my ancestors: I am about to light the candles to welcome our Festival of Freedom. Help me to grow my appreciation of freedom at this time of physical distancing. As I recite the words of the *Shehechyanu*, may I and my family be privileged to be able to express my joy in being kept alive and thus able to reach another Passover. Amen

Before Urchatz

The washing of hands has become a normal part of our existence on a daily basis, not only minimizing my risk of infection, but of infecting others. May this new mindfulness of the safety of others continue beyond this pandemic and influence me to make careful choices that also impact others.

Karpas

We are poised to soon enjoy the *Shulchan Orech*, the Passover meal. There are so many vulnerable in my community and beyond who do not experience regular meals. How much more so are they challenged during this pandemic? This sprig of parsley will be dipped in salt water, reminding us not only of the experiences of our ancestors, but of the current day experiences of far too many people in this country and around the world. An act of *tzedakah* to support the hungry would be an appropriate *mitzvah* at the conclusion of the first two days of the festival.

Magid

While we annually recite “All who are hungry, come and eat”, alas, for reasons of safety, we are unable to fulfill this *mitzvah*. The concluding words have renewed significance at this time, as we sit in our homes maintaining physical distancing: Now we are enslaved. Next year may we be free.

A New Fifth Question

How is this night different from all other nights? How do we phrase an answer that reflects the realities of our current status, yet offers hope that this period of time is temporary? There are so many possible answers. I offer one, but encourage you to come up with your own: On all other nights we enjoy the freedom to come and go as we please; on this night we are not free to come and go as we please.

Avadim Hayinu

“We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt” begins the next section. Might we now understand a bit more of what slavery is like? The freedoms that we regularly enjoy have been lessened, and we miss them dearly. The pandemic will end. Will slavery end for all humans? Are there people who will still be slaves? How often does the Torah remind us to remember that we were slaves in the land of Egypt? If each of us is to personally see themselves as having left Egypt, in light of our current status, how might we respond to those still enslaved?

V’hi She-amdah

“In every generation there are those who seek to destroy us”. The newest version of anti-Semitism blames the Jews for this pandemic, just as the Jews were blamed for Bubonic Plague. Unlike potential cures of COVID-19, the cure for anti-Semitism is a different type of inoculation. As the song in South Pacific so beautifully teaches us: You’ve got to be taught to “H”. You can also be taught to love.

The Ten Plagues

We remove a drop of wine from our goblets as we recite each of the ten plagues, for we do not gloat over the suffering of the ordinary Egyptians that could have been avoided had Pharaoh softened his heart. Perhaps we now truly understand what it means to suffer through a plague? How might this change our behavior moving forward? As we remove each drop, we finally understand.

L’fichach

The Almighty has gifted us with the capacity to scale sublime heights, if only we would use these gifts wisely. With proper guidance and support, we can overcome this pandemic. But will the lessons learned be put to good use? May we soon be able to praise God for these Divine gifts, as we move “from slavery to freedom, from despair to joy, from mourning to celebration, from darkness to light, and from enslavement to redemption”. Halleluyah.

Rochtzah

Two hand-washings in one meal do not seem unusual anymore. We combine our newly-found mindfulness of good hygienic practices with approaching our tables with clean hands and a pure heart, about to express gratitude to God for causing bread to come from the earth.

Maror

How many social media postings have you read from people complaining about the impositions of a quarantine? Verbal and visual *maror* permeates the Internet. There is also much good out there, but it is covered with too much *maror*. We dip the *maror* of our existence into some *charoset*, to remind us that there is indeed much good happening in our lives, and that we must be grateful, even as we praise the name of God with a *bracha* over the *maror*.

Elijah

Elijah embodies our hopes that this challenging time in our lives will end speedily, that the world will be able to breathe a bit, take stock, and collectively create a better society. The cup of Elijah symbolizes our innermost wishes at this very moment, and invoking a custom that some observe, we pour a bit from our own wine goblet into Elijah’s cup. We demonstrate that we are eager to partner with Elijah to make the world better.

Chad Gadya

The symbolism is so very powerful, as we continue to witness the presence of the Angel of Death taking so many lives during this pandemic. At its’ conclusion stands God, our source of hope and strength. May God speedily work through us to slow the spread and find a cure.

Next Year in Jerusalem

May next year be one where we are free to travel to Jerusalem, our spiritual home. Amen