

THE SUNFLOWERS/Mary Oliver

This Passover, we invite you to place sunflowers or sunflower seeds on your seder plate to show solidarity with the people of Ukraine. Sunflowers are the national flower of Ukraine, and have become a potent symbol of resistance to the recent Russian military invasion. They have been grown in Ukraine since the 18th Century and have been associated with Ukrainian national identity since the early 19th Century. They symbolize unity, life and well-being, and can be seen across the countryside.

Come with me
into the field of sunflowers.
Their faces are burnished disks,
their dry spines
creak like ship masts,
their green leaves,
so heavy and many,
fill all day with the sticky
sugars of the sun.
Come with me
to visit the sunflowers,
they are shy
but want to be friends;
they have wonderful stories
of when they were young -
the important weather,
the wandering crows.
Don't be afraid
to ask them questions!
Their bright faces,
which follow the sun,
will listen, and all
those rows of seeds -
each one a new life!
hope for a deeper acquaintance;
each of them, though it stands
in a crowd of many,
like a separate universe,
is lonely, the long work
of turning their lives
into a celebration
is not easy. Come
and let us talk with those modest faces,
the simple garments of leaves,
the coarse roots in the earth
so uprightly burning.

