

# **Avadim Chayanu**

## ***Once We Were Slaves***

**A Seder for the leather community**

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# Passover

(Pesach) is the retelling of the Exodus story. Haggadah means “to tell.” The story, however, is not a neat narrative with a beginning, middle, and end. It is a combination of questions, rituals, biblical passages, and tales from different moments in history. The structure reflects our lives, which are never a neat narrative, and invites us to bring ourselves and our creativity to the re-telling and re-experiencing of the Exodus. We are obligated to bring our own experience of slavery and freedom to the table tonight, and to include those experiences in the overall narrative.

This is not a new way to tell the story of Passover. Over a thousand years ago, Rambam, one of the greatest Jewish commentators, suggested that in the telling of the Exodus story, one should use experiences and contemporary examples to make it as pertinent as possible. In fact, Rambam’s commentary says that when we get to the part of the Haggadah that begins “Avadim Hayinu” (once we were slaves), the leader of the seder should point to a house slave and tell the children “like him” so that they truly understand.

The festival is also a recognition of the beginning of spring, and at this time, the Song of Songs is also traditionally read. The Song of Songs is the most erotic of all biblical writings, and its poetry is filled with powerful sexual imagery:

*Stamp me  
into your heart,  
Upon your limbs,  
Sear my emblem  
deep  
Into your skin.*

*For love is strong  
as death,  
Harsh as the  
grave.  
Its tongues  
are flames,  
a fierce  
And holy blaze.*

*Endless seas  
and floods,  
Torrents and  
rivers  
Never put out  
love’s  
Infinite fires.*

*“Oh! For your kiss! For your love/ more enticing than wine/  
for your scent and sweet name/for all this they love you.”*

*“Like a mare among stallions, you lure and I am held”*

*“With one flash of your eyes, you excite me/One jewel on your neck  
stirs my ear, O my sister, my bride.”*

*“My love thrusts his hand at the latch/and my heart leaps for him!/  
I rise to open for my love, my hands dripping perfume on the lock”*

*“Man of pleasure - sweet to taste his love!  
Friend and lover chosen for my love.”*

*“Who is she? staring down like the dawn’s eye/  
Bright as the white moon, pure as the hot sun, Frightening as visions!”*

It is beautiful and wild; we recommend the translated text by Marcia Falk. Choose readings which you enjoy, and share them throughout the festival.

## ***Preparing for Passover: Chameitz***

(from Exodus 12:15: Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread . . . you shall remove leaven from your houses.)

DEFINITION: Chameitz is “leavening.” By the first night of Passover, a house should be rid of any products that contain leavening. This is related to the Talmudic restrictions that any product that is used to make bread products (or make bread products rise) must be removed from the house. Most obviously, these include all bread, cereals, and any alcohol that is made from grain.

# Chameitz

Items must then be thrown away, given away, or sold. It is not kosher to simply ask someone to hold onto chameitz items until the festival is over; there must be a transaction, and the original owner must then pay to have the items returned, if wanted. Because Passover is a Jewish holiday, this gift or sale of items cannot take place with another Jew: the items must be given or sold to a person who is not Jewish, or who does not observe the Passover holiday.

This restriction is not just related to food - it is related to all items which touch chameitz. Stoves, sinks, refrigerators are cleaned. Most dishes, silverware, cooking utensils, even tablecloths and towels, are put away in a location that won't be "accidentally" accessed (usually a garage, basement, or locked cabinet) and "kosher for Passover" items replace them for 8 days. Cleaning closets, pockets of coats, car floors, any place where food crumbs might be, are included in this rigorous cleaning.

While this ritual may appear to bring on nothing but exhaustion, it can also help us fully prepare for the Passover festival. For eight days we will put away our normal routines, and do something different. It brings a very experiential moment of harshness, and a time to see how much we normally have in our lives. Perhaps then, at the end of the Festival, when we return to the familiar, it may also be transformed for us.

Transforming this chore may be the first chance to examine our identities both as SMers and as Jews. No one celebrating this festival should be uninvolved in the preparation for it, and that includes the cleaning and the removal of chameitz from a house. Even if a top normally does not do housework, the injunction to participate as though you were relating your own experience as a slave takes precedence in this once-a-year event. Working alongside any slaves in the household, the owner or owners are beginning their journey to the seder table.

**Personal Chameitz.** Chameitz is leavening, the "thing that puffs us up." This includes a putting away of our normal routine, and to prepare a time to experience a taste of freedom. The keeping of a slave is "chameitz," and so a slave may be freed prior to the Passover ritual. Commentary makes it very clear that Jewish slaves are not permitted to participate in the Passover seder. All items that identify the relationship as one that is "chameitz" should be removed. This should not be considered negative; but as a chance to renew. Free people sit at the table together - and determine their future as they examine their past.

## *Bedikat Chameitz (searching for Chameitz)*

The day before Passover begins, your house should be pretty ready to go. The night before the first seder, a ritual search must then begin in what should be a mostly symbolic search for the last components of chameitz. Many families deliberately hide a few pieces of bread around the house for children to locate so that the final rituals can be observed.

We recommend taking this time to remove the final marks of that as well: the items that mark someone as a slave. As all other items that represent the use of chameitz are removed, so should those items that mark a slave be removed ritually. These are chameitz items, like non-kosher pots and pans, which could then be removed to a place where they are not accidentally seen (or used) during the 8-day festival.

This ritual act should be clearly understood by all parties, and offer an

*If chameitz is  
also vanity...  
where is vanity in  
our lives?*

*Is it in a title,  
whether mistress  
or master or  
slave?*

*Is it in the  
clothing, leather  
and latex and  
treasured  
garments that  
signify power or  
the loss of it?*

*Is it toys and  
gadgets, floggers  
and masks,  
clamps and  
chains?*

*What would we  
take with us on  
our way out of  
Egypt?*

One of the many reasons to consider freeing a consenting slave before the holiday is so that when it comes time to get rid of the chameitz, they too, are not "ownerless, like the dust of the earth."  
 Instead, their marks of slavery are put carefully away, saved for the time when they can be returned where they belong.

opportunity to consider one of the following activities:

- putting the items that mark slavery away for 8 days in a locked cabinet
- give the items into the safekeeping of a (non-Jewish) friend who understands the value of your SM relationship
- give the items away in order to fully experience the opportunity to move from slavery to freedom. When the festival is over, purchase new items to mark the start of a new cycle in your relationship

Following the removal of this "relationship aspect," prepare for the final search through the house with the following blessing:

(Hebrew)

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam asher kid'shanu  
 b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al biur chameitz.*

**Blessed is the Spirit of the World who makes us holy with mitzvot  
 and commands us to burn chameitz.**

The final search must be conducted using a candle (for light), a feather (to brush the crumbs), and a wooden spoon (to collect the crumbs for burning). The crumbs are then ritually burned.

We recommend that the slave, bottom, or the submissive partner in the relationship be the one who performs the ritual or says the blessing, as the first act of a free person in the household.

The following is a poem by Hannah Senesh that can be recited at this time:

Blessed is the match/consumed in kindling flame.  
 Blessed is the flame/that burns in the secret fastness of the heart.  
 Blessed is the heart/with strength to stop its beating for honor's sake.  
 Blessed is the match/consumed in kindling flame.

After collection, the following formula is said:

*Kol chaimira vachami'a d'ika virshuti  
 Dachamitei u'd'la chamitei.  
 D'viartei u'd'la viartei.  
 Libateil v'lehevei hefker k'afra d'ara.*

**Every sort of chameitz in my possession, which I have seen or not seen,  
 destroyed or not destroyed, let it be null and void,  
 ownerless, like the dust of the earth.**

If the Search for chameitz is included in a communal setting, we recommend the following invocation, each line read by a different reader:

Reader:

**Why is this night different from all other nights?**

Reader:

**On this night, we gather together to prepare for Passover, joining together as a community to rid ourselves of a different kind of chameitz.**

Reader:

**What do we cleanse ourselves of tonight?**

Alternating readers:

**The exhaustion of cleaning and cooking.**

**The feeling of being the only sadomasochist among Jews;  
the only Jew among sadomasochists**

**The pressure to conform to one image of what  
our relationships should look like.**

**The lingering belief that this tradition doesn't belong to  
people who are in dominant/submissive relationships,  
who use terms like "Owner," "slave," "Master" or "Mistress."**

**The fear that all power is corrupt, and that all surrender is craven.**

All:

**Let us gather all this together like crumbs. Like we are ready to burn.  
Let us enter into this Passover season as if we could cleanse ourselves of all  
that is false, all that is harmful, all that is hateful, all that is fearful..**

**As if God had forever delighted in God's image in each and every one of us.**

**As if freedom had been ours, always, fully – like an open sea.**

*Kol chamira vachami'a  
Libateil v'lehevei hefkeir k'afra d'ara.*

**Every sort of chameitz;  
Let it be null and void, ownerless, like the dust of the earth.**

What does it mean to be owned?

To be ownerless?

Aren't human beings *ha'adam* - of

the dust of the earth -

ourselves?

*The crumbs of  
chamaitz are not  
garbage, to be idly  
tossed out with dust.*

*They are still part of  
what nourished us,  
something that was  
and will be a part of  
our lives.*

*But it's time for  
them to go - and we  
acknowledge how  
important that  
chameitz was with  
ritual and meaning.*

*If only we could  
completely eliminate  
all the crumbs of our  
lives with a wooden  
spoon and a feather.*

# Hadlakat Neirot

## Kindling the Festival Lights

Lighting candles is a traditional way to start all Jewish festivals. A blessing is said over the candles

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu sl'hadlik neir shel yom tov.*

**Blessed are you, Our God, Ruler of the Universe, who makes us holy with mitzvot and commands us to kindle the lights of the Festival.**

This is followed by the traditional blessing said in appreciation of a time and place; a new wonder, a fresh start.

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam shehechaeyanu v'kiy'manu, h'higianu laz'man hazeh!*

**Blessed are you, God, ruler of the world, who keeps us in life, who sustains us, and who enables us to reach this season.**

# Kos Miryam

## Miriam's Cup

We include a Miriam's cup in our seder to remind ourselves of the women who were responsible for the creation of the Jewish people: Yocheved, the mother of Moses, Aaron and Miriam, Batya, the Pharaoh's daughter who saves Moses from the Nile, Miriam, the Prophetess, and Shifra and Puah, the midwives who courageously went against Pharaoh's edict to kill all first-born Hebrew males. In the desert, *mayyim hayyim*, the well of Miriam, followed the Israelites throughout their journey while Miriam was alive and among them.

Miriam's Well was said to hold Divine power to heal and renew. Its fresh waters sustained our people as we were transformed from a generation shaped by non-consensual slavery into a free nation.

The ritual created with Miriam's Cup is the filling of her cup using the water from every participant's own glass. This not only immediately creates a sense of participation in the seder, it also acknowledges that the presence of each person at the table will add something to the seder.

When Miriam's Cup is filled by all of us, we are enacting our hope of refilling the magical healing Well through inclusiveness and collectively.

Participants should pass the Miriam's cup after filling it, or the leader of the seder may personally walk around the table with the cup and hold it as it is filled.

Reader:

**Tonight at our seder, let us remember that we are still on the journey. Just as the Holy One delivered Miriam and her people, just as they were sustained in the desert and transformed into a new people, so may we be delivered, sustained and transformed on our journey to a stronger sense of ourselves, both as individuals and as one people.**

## *The Recitation of the Seder*

(Seder means "Order" as in "Order of Events")

<b>Kadeish</b>	(make holy)
<b>Urchatz</b>	(wash)
<b>Karpas</b>	(fruit of the earth)
<b>Yachatz</b>	(breaking the middle matzah)
<b>Maggid</b>	(telling the story)
<b>Rachtzah</b>	(washing a second time)
<b>Motzi Matzah</b>	(matzah blessings)
<b>Maror</b>	(bitter herbs)
<b>Koreich</b>	(Hillel sandwich)
<b>Shulchan Oreich</b>	(the festive meal)
<b>Tazfun</b>	(retrieving the hidden matzah)
<b>Bareich</b>	(blessing after the meal)
<b>Hallel</b>	(songs of praise)
<b>Nirtzah</b>	(concluding the seder)

All:

**How does the journey begin?**

Reader:

**Once, and then again and again.  
We wake and for the hundredth morning in a row  
and grope in the early silence for the words to describe what is wrong.  
One day, words begin. We are wrenched from the patterns  
that have defined our lives.  
We can no longer live as we have lived.**

All:

**How does the journey begin?**

Reader:

**Once, and then again and again.  
We stop to look, as Moses stopped to see the burning bush,  
and changed his world vision. We stop to look, and wonder  
if there is another path we can take, to bring us from  
a narrow place to a place of possibilities.**

All:

**How does the journey begin?**

*There are those  
who believe we  
live in an age of  
"no rules."*

*No  
"one true way."*

*But when we sit  
down at the  
table and light  
the candles  
and recite the  
order, are we  
blindly  
following  
meaningless  
rules?*

*Or have we  
examined them,  
found them  
worthy and  
embraced them?*

*Do we have the  
ability to look at  
rules with  
respect?*

Reader:

Once, and then again.  
In small, scattered, heroic acts and  
moments of vision until the humming rises and  
disparate voices come together into the cry of a people.  
"A long time after that the king of Egypt died,  
but the Israelites were still groaning under bondage,  
and their cry for help from the bondage rose up to God."  
(Exodus 2:23)

# Kadeish

## *Kadeish: To Make Holy*

Tonight we will drink four cups of wine, traditionally linked to God's four promises to Israel (Exodus 6:6-7): "I will bring you out from under the burdens of Egypt. I will deliver you from bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great judgments. I will take you to be my people and I will be your God."

We will also follow a modern tradition and link these four cups of wine to individuals in our lives who, in their time, have acted as God's partners in fulfilling these divine promises.

### *Kos Rishon: the first cup*

*"I will bring you out from under the burdens of Egypt."*

This first cup is linked to God's promise to bring the Israelites out from under the burdens of Egypt. The word in Hebrew for "Egypt" also means "a narrow place," which we can read today as a place of narrow views, of restrictions on our consciousness and our creativity. To be brought out of a narrow place is more difficult than it sounds: like the Israelites, who had known slavery for 400 years, it can be difficult to understand our own internal "narrowness" or "confinement" until someone "brings us out" into a wider awareness.

With this cup, we will ask one participant at the seder to dedicate this cup to an individual in their lives, or in history, who brought you into an awareness of your life.

**Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam borei p'ri hagafen.**

Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam asher bachar banu mikol am v'rom'manu mikol lashon v'kidshanu b'mitzvotav.

Vatiten lanu, adonai eloheinu b'ahava mo'adim l'simcha,  
chagim uz'manim l'sason et yom chag hamatzot hazeh,  
z'man cheiruteinu mikra kodesh, zeicher litzit'at mitzrayim.

Ki vanu vacharta, v'otanu kidshata mikol ha'amim  
umo'adai kodsh'cha b'simcha uvason hinchaltanu.

**Baruch atah adonai, m'kadeish yisraeil v'haz'marim.**

**Blessed are you, God, ruler of the world, who creates the fruit of the vine.**

Blessed are you, God, ruler of the world, who has chosen us and distinguished us by sanctifying us with the mitzvot. You have lovingly favored us with

Commentary:

*There are three stages of slavery.*

*The first one is being a slave to your own king - a leader with whom you are personally connected and with whom you have a relationship.*

*The second stage is being a slave to a foreign king who has conquered your land.*

*The third, and worst, stage is when you are a slave in a*

*foreign land to a foreign king - as was the case in Egypt. In*

*Egypt, we were*

*"avadim" -*

*slaves. We were slaves to Pharaoh, a foreign king;*

*"b'Mitzraim" - in*

*Egypt, a*

*foreign land.*

(Rachel A. Dulitz & Shira Schlaff)

festivals for joy, seasons and holidays for happiness, among them this say of Pesach, the season of our liberation, a day of sacred assembly commemorating the Exodus from Egypt. You have chosen us, sanctifying us among all peoples by granting us Your sacred festivals in joy and happiness.

**You are Blessed, Holy One, who sanctifies the people of Israel and the festival seasons.**

# *Urchatz*

## *Urchatz: Washing Hands*

We now begin the ritual, placing ourselves at the beginning of our journey from slavery to freedom. The following is an interpretation of feminist reading, as the participants in the seder pass a washing bowl to each other, or as the leader brings the washing bowl around the table to each participant. We do not say the blessing at this time.

Reader:

**From wine, we step back to water. This time not the water of Miriam's Well, but the waters of the ancient Nile.**

Reader:

**The daughter of Pharaoh immerses herself.**

Reader:

**Deep beneath the gentle current, she hears a faint persistent cry.**

Reader:

**She emerges from the water and wipes the droplets from her eyelashes.**

Reader:

**It is then that she spots the basket.  
She is not the only one in the water seeking renewal.**

Reader:

**Fear and context fade away. The daughter of Pharaoh reaches out to Moses and cradles him in her arms.**

Reader:

**We pause to consider the vision: the powerful mistress who reaches out in kindness to the one who has no power. Pharaoh's daughter demonstrates to us that the world is not two dimensional. Masters and slaves are not always evil or always good. Power and kindness can reside within one person. Let us remember that with freedom comes power: and with power comes the responsibility to be kind.**

All:

**Without this reaching out the story would not begin.  
May the water we offer each other now, bring us closer to their embrace.**

# Karpas

## *Karpas: The Fruit of the Earth*

The ritual of karpas includes dipping greens twice into a bowl of salt water.

We remind ourselves that both the tender greens of the earth and the salts of the sea are joined together to sustain life. We remind ourselves that in slavery the salt of our tears released our strength to survive.

Reader:

**Long before the struggle upward begins, there is tremor in the seed.  
Self-protection cracks, Roots reach down and grab hold.  
The seed swells, and tender shoots push up toward light.  
This is karpas, spring awakening growth a force so tough it can break stone.**

Reader:

**Why do we dip karpas into salt water?**

Reader:

**To remember the sweat and tears of our ancestors in bondage.**

Reader:

**To taste the bitterness of society's refusal to celebrate the individuals we are, and the variety of relationships we can have.**

Reader:

**And why should salt water be touched by karpas?**

All:

**To remind us that tears stop. Spring comes.  
And with it the potential for change.**

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam borei p'ri ha'adama.*

Blessed are you God, ruler of the world, who creates the fruit of the earth.

# Yachatz

## *Yachatz: Breaking the Middle Matzah*

Break the middle of the three matzot on the seder table and wrap the larger broken piece in a napkin. Set aside this piece, which is called the *afikoman*.

No prayer is recited before we break the middle matzah on our seder plate. This is a silent act. We realize that, like the broken matzah, we are all incomplete, with prayers yet to be fulfilled. (Harold Schulweis)

Reader:

**Some do not get the chance to rise and spread out like golden loaves of challah, filled with sweet raisins and crowned with shiny braids.**

Reader:

**Rushed, neglected, not kneaded by caring hands, we grow up afraid that any touch might cause a break. There are some ingredients we never receive.**

*Remember that the seder cannot end without that small piece of matzah. Everything has its place, even when broken and lost.*

Reader:

**Tonight, let us bless our cracked surfaces and sharp edges, unafraid to see our  
brittleness and brave enough to see our beauty** (Tamara Cohen)

Reader:

**Reaching for wholeness, let us piece together the parts of ourselves  
we have found and honor all that is still hidden.**

All: **(Sing)**

*Ha lachma - ha lachma anya  
di achalu - achalu avahatana  
b'ara, b'ara d'mitzrayim  
Kol dischfin yeitei v'yeichol.  
Kol ditzrich yeitei v'yifsach.  
Hashata hacha.  
L'shana haba'a b'ara d'yisrael.  
Hashata avdei.  
L'shana haba'a b'nei uv'not chorin.*

This is the bread of affliction our  
ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.  
Let all who are hungry come and  
eat. Let all who are in need come  
and share our Passover. This year  
we are here. Next year in the Land  
of Israel. This year we are slaves.  
Next year, may we all be free.

Commentary:

In the Seder, when we talk about the matzah, we say "*Ha lachma anya di achalu avathana be'ara demitzrayim*" - this is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. The various commentators are puzzled with this idea. The Jewish people ate the matza on their way *out* of Egypt! They baked it as they were leaving and it didn't have time to rise! It was the bread of *freedom*, not of affliction!

The Sforno and the Shlah HaKadosh say that the bread that the Jewish people ate in Egypt was matzah, because the Egyptians did not give them enough time to let it rise. The difference between matzah and regular bread is TIME. Both have the same ingredients, but only one is given time to rise. In this way, the matzah and the slave share the same characteristic - the slave has no time, and the matzah, too, lacks time. The Egyptians stood over the Jews, making them use all of their time under submission and not allowing them to have one free second. So this, indeed, is the *lachma anya* - the bread of affliction- that the Jews ate in Egypt.

So why did God take the Jews out of Egypt as they were attempting to let their bread rise? Why didn't God wait until their bread rose to take them out of Egypt? The Sforno and Shlah explain that this was to show that everything is part of God's divine plan. Even at the time when the Jews were being liberated from Egypt, the Egyptians stood over them to hurry them out. This time however, the hurried baking is one of freedom, not of affliction and slavery. This bread that was the embodiment of slavery has now been completely switched around to symbolize freedom. This shows God's power and the magnitude of the miracle of the Exodus - the very thing that reminded the Jews of slavery was the thing that was switched around to symbolize freedom.

There were two kinds of matzah that are part of the story of Passover- the bread of slavery and the bread of freedom. Perhaps this is why we break the matza into two parts during the Seder, one half for slavery and one half for freedom. We eat the first half at the beginning of the Seder, when we are discussing the slavery and affliction, and the second half at the end, when we are discussing freedom. The bread of affliction is also supposed to be eaten as we recline, to symbolize the duality of the matzah.

(Rachel A. Dulitz & Shira Schlaff)

# Maggid

## *Maggid: The Telling of the Story*

### Arba Kushiyot: Four Questions

*The four questions are usually asked by the youngest person at the table. But they can be asked by anyone with a desire to learn. Since no one should think themselves free from learning, perhaps the oldest or wisest should take a turn?*

This is a rite of passage. We learn our part and take our turn. Wine trembles in our cups, candles flicker, conversation stops. First, we ask the prescribed questions. Then we add our own.

#### **(Sing or chant or just ask!)**

Mah nishtana halailah hazeh mikol haleilot? mikol haleilot?  
Sheb'chol haleilot anu ochlin chameitz umatzah? chameitz umatzah?  
Halaila hazeh, halaila hazeh kulo matzah  
Halaila hazeh, halaila hazeh kulo matzah  
Sheb'chol halilot anu ochlim sh'ar y'rakot - sh'ar y'rakot  
Halaila hazeh, halaila hazeh maror  
Halaila hazeh, halaila hazeh maror  
Sheb'chol haleilot ein anu matbilin afilu pa'am echat? afilu pa'am echat?  
Halaila hazeh, halaila hazeh sh'tei f'amim  
Halaila hazeh, halaila hazeh sh'tei f'amim  
Sheb'chol haleilot anu ochlim bein yoshvin uvein m'subin  
bein yoshvin uvein m'subin  
Halaila hazeh, halaila hazeh kulanu m'subin  
Halaila hazeh, halaila hazeh kulanu m'subin.

How different is this night from all other nights?  
On all other nights we eat chameitz and matzah,  
why on this night do we eat only matzah?  
On all other nights we eat other kinds of vegetables,  
why on this night do we eat only maror?  
On all other nights we do not dip even once, why on this night do we dip twice?  
On all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining, why on this night do we all recline?

### *Avadim Hayinu: We Were Slaves*

*If Jews celebrate the end of slavery every year at Pesach... why did Rav Nachman still keep slaves? What does that mean to us now?*

To start answering the question of why this night is different, we begin the first telling of the story of slavery and redemption. This will be key to this particular haggadah; the telling of our individual forms of slavery, and communal forms; as well as the telling of how we are liberated, and the journey we take to become free.

In the Mishnah (Pesachim 116a) we learn about an incident that happened at the Seder table of Rav Nachman. Rav Nachman was with his slave, Doru, and proposed a question to him: If a master frees his slave and sends him out with gold and silver, what should the slave do? Doru answered that he should thank and praise his former master. Immediately after Doru's response, Rav Nachman started, "Avadim hayinu..." exclaiming that this question and answer had exempted them from saying "Mah Nishtana." Just like

a slave who was freed by his master and sent with gold and silver should praise and thank him, so too, should the Children of Yisrael, who were slaves in Egypt and were freed by their Master "bi'rechush gadol" (with great wealth), should praise and thank God. (Baruch Toledano)

**(Sing)**

Avadim hayinu, hayinu - Ata b'nei chorin u'vnot chorin  
Avadim hayinu - Ata, ata b'nei chorin.  
Avadim hayinu! - Ata, ata b'nei chori, b'nei chorim  
Ata, ata b'not chorin, b'not chorin.

Once, we were slaves - now we are the children of freedom!

Reader:

**To tell the story, we must retell a familiar story to everyone at this table. The story of God bringing us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. The story is so familiar, why retell it?**

Reader:

**First, as a commandment: even if all of us were wise, all of us understanding, all of us old, all of us learned in Torah, it is still commanded that we tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt.**

Reader:

**It is also incumbent within the storytelling that we elaborate on the tale. "V'chol hamarbeh l'sapeir bitzi'at mitzrayim harai zeh m'schubach". And all who elaborate the story of the Exodus deserve praise.**

Choose a tale to tell. Read one from here or tell one of your own. Elaborate upon the story. Make it a good one.

## Ma'aseh: A Tale

Harav Yehuda Amital taught: "*Avadim hayinu le-Far'o be-Mitzrayim* (We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt)." The servitude to which we thereby refer is not necessarily the physical toil and pain. A person who voluntarily puts himself into a situation of hard labor or intense suffering is not a slave but rather, for all intents and purposes, a free agent. On the other hand, if a person is forced against his will to wear royal robes and is unable to remove them, then he is truly a slave despite the magnificent garb, or rather because of it.

The children of Israel, while in Egypt, should have cried out bitterly for the simple reason that they were ruled by Pharaoh, king of Egypt, rather than by God. But sometimes the slave is so deeply immersed in his servitude that he does not mourn over the fact that he is being ruled by others; all his crying is due solely to the intensity of his exertion. This slave has already become, in essence, the material possession of his master; it would never occur to him to question the legitimacy of the master's control over him. All he can hope for is the easing of his workload. This was the pitiful level to which B'nei Yisrael had sunk in Egypt. So complete was their subjugation that their cry was only over their harsh labor. And it was from this situation of degradation that their prayers rose heavenward:

"And B'nei Yisrael sighed from the labor and they cried out, and their cry rose to God from the labor. And God heard their groan, and God remembered the covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob and God looked upon B'nei Yisrael and God knew." (Exodus 2:23-24)

*Tonight we  
remember how  
easy it is to  
confuse genuine  
oppression from  
self-imposed  
oppression.  
To complain about  
raking the leaves  
of the vast forest  
we can't see.*

## Ma'aseh: A Tale

In the second century, there were a group of sages who gathered at B'nei B'rak to discuss the Exodus from Egypt. All were activists in the struggle against Rome, and there is some belief that their Passover discussion was, in fact, a more complex conversation about the need to liberate this new generation of Jews. They talked through the night until their students, standing watch, alerted them with the words: *rabboteinu, higi'azman...* the time has come to recite the morning prayers.

Tonight we remember the subversive courage of teachers of our own generation.

### *Arba'a B'nei/B'not: The four children*

The next four questions are questions traditionally given as images of children. They have been described in various ways: the wise, the wicked, the bewildered and the simple. Or as the smart, the hostile, the innocent and the silent. We will place these questions in the mouths of people at our table, representing familiar questions in our community.

For these purposes, we will use the following: the aware child, the alienated child, the child who is passive, and the child who doesn't believe her voice will make a difference in the narrative.

#### **The first child**

Reader:

**What is the meaning of all of these decrees, laws, traditions that the Eternal One our God has commanded us? What does our shared past demand of us?**

Reader:

**Because this child already understands that keeping the past alive is essential to understanding our present identity, teach them that history teaches us to be fully engaged in community, to learn as much as possible - including our limitations - and then encourages us to search for the answers to those things we do not know.**

#### **The second child**

Reader:

**Why must you keep pushing this old story upon us? It's like all those people who keep talking about the importance of the gay men's leather community in forming our BDSM culture of today. Why are these ancient history lessons so important to you?**

Reader:

**Recognize that the child is saying "To You" and not "To Us." This is a child who stands apart from the community, who has little trust in people around them to help or answer questions. Because of this alienation, she will continue to enslave herself with old prejudices. Without an understanding that we were once slaves and now live in a world of freedom of potential, we will never understand the gifts that our ancestors - of both thousands of years and mere dozens of years - have given us as we sit at this table together. Since this child so easily forgets the struggles of the past, you must set her teeth on edge by saying, "I thank God every day for the lessons of my past."**

*It's easy to say*

*"There are no  
stupid questions."*

*It is harder to  
understand that*

*there are many*

*stupid answers.*

*The questioner has  
given the answerer*

*a precious gift.*

### The third child

Reader:

What is this?

Reader:

Because this child doesn't even realize that the question is, in itself, an essential part of the telling of tonight's story, teach him that the Haggadah is an extended conversation about our journey from slavery to freedom, and that all questions are valuable parts of the text. Teach him that questions are a valid and essential component of our evolution as a people, and as a community. And then, teach ourselves to welcome these questions, and allow our community to question itself.

### The fourth child

Reader:

This child is silent. We do not know if this child is silent because he doesn't know how to speak, is too young, or doesn't believe that his voice will make a difference in the larger discussion.

Before judging this child, remember: the Jewish People were exiled in Egypt. They were spiritually and physically out of their place, cut off from their supernal source. The nature of a slave is that he has no voice, no opinion or independent identity. The slave being is totally subjugated to the will of his master. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, one of the great Jewish thinkers of our time, wrote of this:

Reader:

"Redemption ... is identical with communing, or with the revelation of the word, the emergence of speech. When a people leaves a mute world and enters a world of sound, speech and song, it becomes a redeemed people, a free people. In other words, a mute life is identical with bondage; a speech-endowed life is a free life.

Reader:

"The slave lives in silence, if such a meaningless existence may be called life. A slave has no message to deliver. In contrast with the slave, the free person bears a message, has a good deal to tell, and is eager to convey his or her life story to anyone who cares to listen. The slave has neither a story nor a curious audience. Moreover, the slave is not merely a speechless being, but a mute being, devoid not only of the word, but of the meaningful sound as well.

Reader:

"Before Moses came, there was not even a single sound. No complaint was lodged, no sigh, no cry uttered. Only an agonizing un-human shriek would penetrate the weird silence of the night. The slaves were gloomy, voiceless and mute. The women did not cry when their infants were snatched from their arms; the men kept quiet when they were mercilessly tortured by the slave drivers. Torture was taken for granted. They thought this was the way it had to be."

Reader:

"Even Moses experienced this silence to a degree. As the root soul of the

*There is more to being silent than not speaking.*

*There is more to speech than talking.*

*It is not enough to say that we must communicate.*

*We must tell our stories.*

*And we must listen as well.*

## Why the leeks?

*In life, all of us  
have the capacity  
to oppress and to  
know oppression.*

*Take the leeks at  
the table, and  
whenever words  
such as "treated us  
harshly and  
oppressed us" are  
said, turn to your  
left and strike the  
person next to  
you. Then, when  
you hear the next  
phrase, strike the  
person on your  
right.*

*As you strike and  
are struck, as we  
release ourselves in  
memory and  
laughter, remember  
that switching  
places of power is  
not limited to  
activities of  
pleasure, but is  
part of the pattern  
of history itself.*

Jewish People, his speech was also in exile. "And Moses said to God, O my Lord, I am not a man of words, neither yesterday, nor since Thou hast spoken to thy servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue" (Exodus 4:10).

All this came about because of the Jewish People's subjugation to Pharaoh.

Reader:

Therefore, you must say to the child who asks no questions: "Your questions, when they come, will liberate you." This is how it is, and has always been in our community. From the moment you question whether your life is as it should be until today, every question we ask helps us leave Egypt farther and farther behind.

## *Tzi' Ul'medi: Go Forth and Study\**

Reader:

**Go forth and learn. All who have been oppressed can also oppress.**

Reader:

**Sarah, our Mother, oppressed her Egyptian maidservant Hagar. Sarah was barren and she wanted a child. She gave Hagar, her Egyptian maidservant, to Abraham as a wife. When Hagar conceived and became pregnant, Sarah grew lesser in her eyes. So Sarah oppressed her and Hagar ran away, as it is written:**

*V'ta'aneiha Sarai v'tivrach mipaneyha* (Genesis 16:6)

**And Sarah oppressed her.**

Reader:

**Pharaoh had welcomed Joseph and his family to Egypt, gave them land so they could live in peace. But a new Pharaoh arose who did not know Joseph, and oppressed our people when they dwelled in Egypt. The Egyptians treated us harshly and oppressed us; they imposed hard labor on us, as it is written:**

*Vayarei'u otanu hamitzrim va'yanunu va'yitnu aleinu avoda kasha*

**And the Egyptians ill-treated us, afflicted us, and laid heavy bondage upon us.** (Deuteronomy 26:6)

Reader:

**Why is the same word used for Hagar's oppression at the hands of Sara and for the Israelites' oppression at the hands of the Egyptians? Doesn't the Torah understand that the mistreatment of an entire nation in slavery is different from the mistreatment of one woman by another?**

Reader:

**This comes to teach you that, lest you think that you, as an Israelite, have no Pharaoh in you, remember that even your righteous foremother, Sarai, treated Hagar the Egyptian as the Egyptians treated our ancestors.**

All:

**Go forth and learn: it is easier to oppress than to be responsibly free.**

**"Until all of us are free, none of us is free."** (Emma Lazarus)

\*This portion is taken from the May'an Seder, and is copyrighted material. The entire feminist Seder, with music by Debbie Friedman and evocative, moving text, is a worthy addition to any Jewish household.

We follow our study of Torah with an adaptation of the traditional prayer for study, the Kaddish D'rabanan.

**(Sing or chant the traditional text, or the Debbie Friedman version)**

## *Eser Makot: The Ten Plagues*

We are about to recite the Ten Plagues. As we call out the words, we remove ten drops from our wine cups - not by tilting the cup and spilling some out, but with our fingers. This dipping is not food into food. It is tactile and intimate, a momentary submersion into a Nile suddenly flowing red with blood. We cannot begin our festive meal without this ritual, because we must remember that our freedom was bought with the suffering of others.

Dam	Blood
T'zfardi'a	Frogs
Kinim	Lice
Arov	Beasts
Dever	Cattle disease
Sh'chin	Boils
Barad	Hail
Arbeh	Locusts
Choshech	Darkness
Makat B'chorot	Slaying of the first-born

Reader:

**After the final plague, Pharaoh let the Israelites go. They left Egypt abruptly, only able to pack a few items and unable to wait even for their bread to rise.**

Reader:

**This teaches us: when you are about to leave Egypt - any Egypt - do not stop to think, "But how will I earn a living out there?" One who stops to "make provisions for the way" will never get out of Egypt.**  
(R. Nachman of Bratzlav)

Reader:

**They walked to the shores of the Sea of Reeds. The Egyptians were behind them, ready to destroy them all. But how would they cross the sea? God would provide, they were told, but their eyes told them otherwise.**

Reader:

**Who would lead them across? Not one of the great men listed in the Exodus story. The former Prince of Egypt, a natural leader, was stopped by this great force of nature. His brother, Aaron, his sister, the prophetess Miriam, were**

momentarily stunned. Even as they calmed the crowds by telling them to trust in God, they themselves were unsure. Here, at the shores of the Sea of Reeds, the leaders lost their sense of control.

Reader:

In Egypt, standing before Pharaoh, they knew their staffs would turn into snakes, they knew ahead of time what the plagues would be; they knew that Pharaoh's heart would be hardened. But somewhere, perhaps, they unconsciously began to think that they, themselves, were the ones with this power. Sometimes, even good leaders get caught up in the image of their position to the point of being unable to act. And now, at the shores of the Sea, they hesitated.

Reader:

According to one story, however, an Israelite decided not to wait for the decisions of the leader, but instead, submitted to the trust in this unknown God, and walked into the sea. He walked until the water reached his waist, then his chest, and finally his chin. He continued to walk forward, trusting that the promise of freedom would keep him safe. And as the waters closed around his nostrils, the Sea parted.

Reader:

This man was Nachshon, brother to Aaron's wife, Elisheva. He is not known for any other heroic acts, but certainly he was there, a member of the family. An unknown man who believed that God would deliver them from the bonds of slavery, a man who was not one of the great voices of this liberation movement.

Reader:

The final act of liberation was not taken by a named leader. It was taken by an individual who believed in the message, and rather than talking about it, acted upon it the best way he knew how. Sometimes, we need a Nachshon to simply act, and take us across the sea. Sometimes, we need to *be* Nachshon, and not wait for verbal approval from others, but trust that what we believe is true, and act on our beliefs.

Reader:

When the Israelites cross the sea, barely ahead of the Egyptians, they are kept safe, and God causes the waters to fall upon their pursuers, keeping them safe. As Moses and the people rejoice, "Miriam, the Prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand and all the women went after her with timbrels, dancing."

(Exodus 15:20)

Miriam's Song, by Debbie Friedman - sing with gusto!  
Have drums, timbrels, bells, and other instruments for  
participants to play.

Or, sing any song which celebrates the job of liberation,  
whether from traditional text or modern.

Reader:

**Why, when there was so little time to prepare for escape, did the women pack musical instruments?**

Reader:

**Because they believed that there would be moments ahead worth celebrating.**

Reader:

**Because this was not the first time these women danced and sang.**

Reader:

**Even in slavery, there are some moments of rejoicing, of celebration, even if they are fleeting and constrained.**

All:

**Miriam and the women dancing and singing remind us that even as we leave oppression, we need not leave all of our memories behind. Sometimes, there are memories that give us happiness. These happy memories provide for us the tools for our journey toward liberation.**

### *Dayeinu: It Would Have Been Enough*

This listing of miracles is sung at many seder tables, but what meaning does it hold for us today?

Reader:

**Dayeinu signifies deep acceptance and gratitude. We acknowledge the present moment. In the affirmation of dayeinu, we are fully present to the preciousness of each act of redemption and care - dividing the sea, leading us across, caring for us in the desert.**

Reader:

**We receive each moment individually. This acceptance allows us to move to the next moment and receive the waiting gift. When we greet each moment with conditions, judgments, and expectations - "well, this really isn't quite where we need to be" or "wait a second, this is not what we were promised" or "hey, what's coming next?" - our expectations keep us tense. We are not free. We are not available to receive the next moment. Our fantasies about the past and our desire to control the future cut us off from the wonders of this moment. They shut us in a prison of disappointment and suffering. Dayeinu is a great liberator. It is a jolt into the presence of awe, compassion, attention, and freedom.**

(Sheila Peltz Weinberg)

*Often, when sadomasochists leave unhappy relationships, they will vow to "never do this again," as though the things they once sought were meaningless and always destined to failure. But we should remember the women who packed their timbrels and were ready to sing even after a harrowing chase to the edge of the sea. If you look hard enough, there is joy to be found. And that joy is worth keeping, as you look to the next journey.*

## Dayeinu (sing)

Ilu hotzi hotzianu hotzianu mimitzrayim  
hotzianu mimitzrayim dayeinu  
Day, dayeinu (3x), dayeinu dayeinu (dayeinu)  
Day, dayeinu (3x), dayeinu dayeinu!

Ilu natan natan lanu natan lanu et hashabbat  
natan lanu et hashabbat dayeinu - Day, dayeinu (etc.)

Ilu natan natan lanu natan lanu et hatorah  
natan lanu et hatorah dayeinu - Day, dayeinu (etc.)

Had God taken us out of Egypt but had not divided the sea for us - dayeinu  
Had God given us Shabbat but not enabled to us reach Mount Sinai - dayeinu  
Had God enabled us to reach Mount Sinai but had not given us Torah - dayeinu

Reader:

**Would it have been “enough” to be led out of Egypt and then stranded in the desert? This song suggests that even when our liberation remains incomplete, we must still acknowledge the blessings we enjoy, and we must still take care to use them properly.** (Robert Goldenberg)

Reader:

**As we learn from this liberation: we must work, speak out, strive, and fight for the redemption of all the peoples of the world, as it is written “You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.”** (Exodus 23:9).

Reader:

**From singing Dayeinu we learn to celebrate each landmark on our people’s journey. Yet, we must never confuse these way stations with the redemptive destination. Because it is not yet dayeinu. There is still much work to be done in repairing the world.**

Reader:

**If we speak truthfully about the pain, joys and contradictions of our lives**  
(All respond: Dayeinu!)

Reader:

**If we listen to others with sensitivity and compassion** (Dayeinu!)

Reader:

**If we fight injustice, sexism, racism and homophobia where we live, work, play and study** (Dayeinu!)

Reader:

**If we continue to volunteer our time and work and money** (Dayeinu!)

Reader:

**If we create art, music, dance and literature** (Dayeinu!)

*Wouldn't  
“dayeinu” make  
a great  
safeword?*

*Just a thought.*

This list is adapted from numerous sources, including the May'an Seder

Reader:  
**If we realize our power to effect change (Dayeinu!)**

Reader:  
**If we bring holiness into our lives, homes and communities (Dayeinu!)**

Reader:  
**If we honor our visions more than our fears (Dayeinu!)**

All:  
**Dayeinu, v'lo dayeinu - It will, and will not be, enough**

## *Pesach, Matzah, Maror*

(We do not point to or raise the pesach on the seder plate because it represents a sacrifice that is no longer offered.)

Reader:  
**Rabbi Gamliel said that those who did not mention three things on Passover did not fulfill the obligation to tell the story: Pesach, matzah and maror.**

Reader:  
**Rav Soloveitchik explained how the three symbolic items that are the cornerstone of the seder night, pesach, matzah and maror, help us feel as though we ourselves are slaves leaving Egypt. The three items are a prescription for the slave mentality. A slave is an individual who worries primarily about himself. The mentality of a slave is, understandably, one of self absorbed individualism. The slave is trying to attain a personal freedom. The korban pesach - sacrificial lamb - served to negate this focus on the self. It served to unite, since a sacrifice had to be brought in a group.**

Reader:  
**A slave who is freed is in search of the personal wealth lacking in an enslaved state. The Matzah emphasizes to the slave that a focus on materialistic success is misguided. The matzah tells us: you can be happy with nothing but flour and water. It directs us to focus on what is truly important and to use freedom for loftier pursuits.**

Reader:  
**A slave who has endured a terrible hardship wants nothing more than to forget the whole experience and to erase the past. The Maror tells us otherwise. This slave should retain some of the bitterness to always remember where he came from and thereby appreciate the position he is currently in.**

Leader:  
**The seder includes many contrasting symbols: spring greens in salt water, bitter maror in sweet haroset, death in the shank bone next to the egg, a symbol of life, and matzah, which represents both freedom and the bread of affliction. Why these contrasts?**

*Why does a slave among sadomasochists seek freedom?*

*What do we want when freedom comes whether we like it or not?*

*When we read these descriptions, isn't there a "slave mentality" among masters and mistresses, too?*

Reader:

**Human beings are deeply conditioned to crave the pleasant and the sweet and avoid the unpleasant. However, to be free means relating fully to all experience and choosing how to act because we wish to realize our values and commitments.**

Reader:

**As free beings tonight we embrace all experiences and are not shaken or driven by our fears and our desires to make experiences conform to our expectations.**

Reader:

**We are free insofar as we do not automatically identify pleasant and unpleasant with good and bad, with desirable and undesirable, with true and false.**

All:

**Freedom entails a perspective that is wider than our likes and dislikes.**  
(Sheila Peltz Weinberg)

## *Kos Sheni: Second Cup*

*V'hitzalti etchem mei'avodatam*

"I will deliver you from under their bondage" (Exodus 6:6)

This second cup recalls God's promise to deliver the Israelites from their bondage. With this cup, we honor those who used their own experiences of "narrow places" to empower others to deliver themselves from oppression.

Again, we ask that someone dedicate this cup to a teacher, a mentor; someone who has helped others leave the narrow places life offers.

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam borei p'ri hagafen.*  
**Blessed are you, God, ruler of the world, who creates fruit of the vine.**

# *Rachtzah*

## *Rachtzah (second hand washing)*

This hand washing is to symbolize our readiness to prepare for the act of eating. It is traditional to refrain from speaking between the hand-washing blessings and the blessings over bread. We recommend either waiting in silence for all to wash, or to sing a niggun (a song without words).

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam*  
*asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tizivanu al n'tilat yadayim*  
**Blessed are you, God, ruler of the world, who makes us holy with mitzvot and commands us to wash our hands.**

# Motzi Matzah

## Motzi Matzah

Raise all three matzot, and say this blessing:

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam hamotzi lechem min ha'aretz.*  
**Blessed are you, God, ruler of the world, who brings forth bread from the earth.**

Put down the bottom matzah, lift the broken middle one with the top one for all to see.

Reader:

**Matzah: all the blows of the taskmasters can be seen on your pockmarked surface. Fragile as you are, you have survived unbroken. You remind us of our humble beginnings, and yet you show that the lowly can also become free. You are the symbol of the possibility of change for us all. You are the focal point of the Haggadah, for freedom is the dominion of the free - its gates are open to all.**

Reader:

**Yet free as you are, changed as you are,  
you are exactly the same as your slave self.  
For you watched yourself to prevent contamination  
with the yeast of pride, the lust for wealth, the thirst for praise.  
No leavening was allowed to puff you up artificially, to make you appear to  
be more than your natural self. Simple, plain and flat.  
Matzah, the eternal symbol of freedom, is the antithesis of fine food and  
wine, for freedom lies in the intoxication with the idea, not with the self.**  
(Michael Strassfeld)

Then the Leader says the blessing:

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav  
v'tsivanu al achilat matzah.*  
**Blessed are you, God, ruler of the world, who makes us holy with mitzvot  
and commands us to eat matzah.**

*Recalling Cecilia  
Tan's question about  
power in  
relationships, 'who  
washes whom?'  
Each person at the  
table will hold the  
towel and water cup  
for someone else,  
splashing the tips of  
their fingers with  
water and serving  
them. Each person  
will also be served  
by another.*

*When you bite into  
matzah the first  
time, is this the  
taste of slavery,  
or freedom?*

## Maror: Bitter Herbs

# Maror

Reader:

**This is the way to experience bitterness: take a big chunk of maror, let the burning turn your face all red.**

Reader:

**This is the way to experience bitterness: dig back to a time of raw wounds, remember how it felt before the healing began, years or months or days ago.**

*Slavery is not the only state which may leave us with a bitter taste in the mouth. Perhaps it is the lack of slavery which makes us bitter. Perhaps it is mastery. Perhaps it is all the pains which leave us with nothing but a thirst for understanding "why?"*

Reader:

**This is the way to experience bitterness: hold the hand of a friend in pain, listen to her story, remember Naomi who renamed herself Mara, bitterness, because she "went away full but God brought (her) back empty" (Ruth 1:21)**

Reader:

**How big a piece of maror must we eat to re-experience this bitterness?**

Reader:

**What if I've known enough pain this year already? And what if bitterness is not just a memory for me?**

Reader:

**What if my experience with slavery has filled me with nothing but bitterness?**

Reader:

**And what if I eat the whole root and my tongue catches on fire and my ears burn? Then will I know slavery?**

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al achilat maror.*

**Blessed are you God, ruler of the world, who makes us holy with mitzvot and commands us to eat bitter herbs.**

# Korech

(eat the bitter herbs)

## *Korech: The Hillel Sandwich*

### Commentary:

Within what realm does the symbolism of charoset lie? It's not about the bitterness of slavery like the marror symbolism; and it predates the redemption, so it isn't like matza either. It must be related to slavery, though, because the charoset is dipped in maror.

Recipes for charoset work at making charoset as mortar-like as possible. They used crushed dates, nuts, or chestnuts to get the thickness; they added pears to get the brick color; the Shabbolei Haleket even records a custom of grinding in a little brick into the mixture!

One other ingredient, spices, could also be explained similarly: cinnamon sticks were used in Sephardic communities to symbolize the straw in the bricks.

The image of straw, though, also calls to mind the stage in the slavery where Pharaoh refuses to supply straw to the Jewish brick-makers. This inspires us to suggest that beyond making charoset more life-like, the spices remind us of the straw story and what it added to the Egyptian slavery. This episode signals the beginning of a qualitatively different type of slavery.

Before Pharaoh changed his policy, the Jews suffered as slaves, but at least as slaves who were able to follow the orders of their taskmasters. By denying them straw, yet keeping the same orders for the amount of bricks they must produce, he put them in the no-win situation of one who can't possibly do what is expected of him. Along with

the physical pain of toil, the slave suffers from the loss of human dignity that comes with independence. Part of being *betzelem Elohim* (in God's image) is being self-directed, a free man -- and that was already taken away. Pharaoh went further and took away the possibility of accomplishment. A normal slave can at least be efficient, at least follow orders properly. Now, without straw, he cannot even do that. He was a slave who doesn't even have the dignity of being able to be a good slave. (Rav Eliezer Kwass)

Reader:

**The Hillel sandwich comes at after the moment in the seder when our mouths are still filled with the bitterness of slavery. This tangible moment is a time when we are ready to move away from bitterness, toward freedom. But we must remind ourselves of the catalyst for this decision to move on: thus, the Hillel sandwich combines the maror, the bitterness of slavery, with charoset, which symbolizes the mortar with which the slaves were forced to build idols for Egypt. These symbols of slavery are pressed between matzah, the elusive symbol both of our ancestors' travails and the food that expresses our desire for freedom.**

Reader:

**Sometimes we are tempted to cheat: we want to press more of the charoset into our sandwich than the bitter herbs. But we cheat ourselves when we push away the past, ignore the moment in which we said: "this is slavery, this is bitter slavery, this is not what I want."**

Reader:

**Rabbi Levi reminds us that while the men toiled at making bricks without straw, the women never lost hope. They brought food and water to the fields, and encouraged the men to have sex with them, so as to bring the next generation into the world. R. Levi suggests that the sweetness of charoset is about the Jewish women's and God's way of relating to slavery and the slaves. True, the enslavement was bitter, both physically brutal and psychologically degrading, but the Jewish women didn't lose hope. They helped maintain the dignity of their husbands, and raised a new generation of Jewish children. We dip our maror -- enslavement, in charoset -- hope and caring.**

(All)

**We cannot move forward without remembering all that we learned: the bitterness of a destructive slavery, but one in which we were given charoset, the tools to create, placed together with the reminder of our past and future: matzah.**

(Make the sandwich and eat it.)

*Charoset does resemble mortar - yet it is made with fruit and sweet wine. We could be making charoset with soaked matzah and dry pieces of raw potato, which would also look like mortar. But we make it sweet. So - as sadomasochists - can we claim charoset as the sweetness of slavery? For better and for worse?*

# Shulchan Oreich

## *Shulchan Oreich: the Festive Meal*

It is customary in some communities to begin the meal with hard-boiled eggs, usually dipped in salt water. Eggs represent the renewal of spring and the rebirth of the Jewish people. The roasted egg is also a reminder of the sacrifice which took place in the Temple. Traditional Jews often eat hard-boiled eggs after a burial, which also associates them with loss, and the cycle of life.

## Tzafun

Enjoy the meal!

### *Tzafun: Retrieving the Hidden Matzah*

The meal cannot conclude without the missing half of the broken matzoh. To end the meal, retrieve the afikomen and distribute a small piece to each person.

Afikomen customs vary: the piece is either hidden, or it is “stolen.” The finder of the afikomen demands ransom or pledges in exchange for its return. We recommend that the hunters for afikomen be the individuals who are or aspire to be in the position of servitude. The finding of the afikomen is a learning ritual: learning to ask clearly for what is wanted, and the resulting discussion, agreement, or compromise, is a lesson in how to conduct the relationship individually or communally from that point on.

The dinner cannot conclude until this ritual is finished; the person holding the afikomen is given this brief moment of power, and the opportunity to abuse it or use it wisely. The negotiation is a chance to ask for something personal that will enhance one’s life, or for something that will transform the individual’s relationships with their primary partners, or with the individuals around the seder table. Or, the hosts may just give out a prize. But either way, the afikomen must be found!

“Judgmental”  
is taken to be a  
bad thing these  
days.  
But don’t we  
have to make  
judgements  
when we take  
things like  
slavery and  
mastery into  
our lives?

### *Kos Shlishi: Third Cup*

*V’ga’alti etchem bizro’a n’tuya uvish’fatim g’dolim*

**“And I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments”**  
(Exodus 6:6)

This third cup is linked to the promise from God to redeem Israel with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. As a manifestation of God’s power we recall now individuals who used their power and strength to make real this Divine promise of redemption.

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha’olam borei p’ri hagafen.*

**Blessed are you, God, ruler of the world, who creates the fruit of the vine.**

## *Bareich: Blessing After the Meal*

# *Bareich*

Food is a blessing, and it is required to say the blessing after the meal. It is also a time to acknowledge how the meal was created, and who is involved in serving it, making the meal possible. Before the blessing, pour the third cup of wine, and thank the individuals personally, acknowledging that this is no longer a time to reduce individuals to nameless groups of servants or slaves, but recognize each individual's gift of service. If desired, recite the following blessings in their honor: (Proverbs 31:31)

Give them the fruit of their hands;  
and let their own deeds praise them in the gates.

Before the grace is recited/chanted, it is customary to recite or sing this psalm:

### *Shir Hama'lot*

Shir hama'alot, b'shuv adonai  
et shivat tzi'yon, hayinu k'cholmim  
Az yimalei s'chok pinu ulshoneinu rina  
Az yomru vagoyim  
hig'dil adonai la'asot im eileh.  
Hig'dil adonai la'asot imanu hayinu s'meichim  
Shuva adonai et sh'viteinu ka'afikim banegev.  
Hazor'im b'dim'a b'rina yik'tzoru.  
Haloch yei'leich 'uvacho nosei meshech hazara  
bo'yavo (yavo) v'rina nosei alumotav.

### *A Song of Ascents*

When God restores the scattered ones of Zion, it will be the fulfillment of a dream. Our mouths will be filled with laughter then: our tongues with song. Then the nations will say: "God has done great things for them." God has done great things for us. We rejoice. Carry our captives back, O God, like water coursing through a dry riverbed. Those who sow in tears will reap in joy. Those who plant in sorrow will return with song, sheaves piled high.

(When ten or more are gathered, use the full grace after meals. At a smaller table, you may use a shortened version.)

### *Kos Eliyahu: Elijah's Cup*

Reader:

**At this point in the seder, it is traditional to open the door to welcome the prophet Elijah. In past centuries, during times of persecution by the Crusades, Jews would open their doors and recite the angry plea: "Pour out Your wrath upon the nations who do not know You."**

Reader:

**We open our doors to acknowledge both the hope of redemption that Elijah brings, and the recognition of the anger that has been directed toward us as**

**Jews, as individuals who live lives in opposition to the majority, and to physically demonstrate our desire to become more inclusive, to open the door to the stranger and welcome them to our table, regardless of our differences.**

**(Sing)**

Eliyahu Hanavi, eilyahu hatishbi  
Eliyahu, eliyahu, eilyahu hagiladi.  
Bimheira v'yameinu, yavo eileinu,  
im mashiach ben david. (2x)

Mir'yam han'vi'a oz v'zimra b'yada.  
Mir'yam, tirkod itanu, l'hagdil zimrat olam.  
Mir'yam, tirkod itanu, l'takein et ha'olam.  
Bim'heira v'yameinu, hi t'vi'einu.  
El mei ha'yshua. El mei ha'yshua.

Elijah the prince, Elijah the Prophet, come to us, for you herald the days of the Messiah. Miriam the Prophet, strength and song are in her hand. Miriam will dance with us to strengthen the world's song. Miriam will dance with us to heal the world. Soon, and in our time, she will lead us to the waters of salvation.

# *Hallel*

## *Hallel: Songs of Praise*

(Choose songs from any other haggadah)

## *Counting the Omer*

Commentary:

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

(Baruch Toledanot) In Gemara Makkot (23b) it states, "Rav Chanania b. Akashia said: The Holy One, blessed be He, wished to bestow bounty on Israel, therefore he gave them the Torah and mitzvot in abundance." Rav Itzele asks, what sort of bounty is this? The Torah is full of tedious commands and an abundance of prohibitions which spread themselves over all facets of our lives and intrude upon us day and night, all year round!

Just as being a slave means that one's very eating, sleeping, dressing, and every act are part of his existence as a slave, so too, when the Children of Yisrael submit to "*kabalat ol Malchut Shamayim*" (accepting the yoke of Heaven) one is meant to dedicate one's entire life to the service of God. Rav Itzele carries on by explaining how, on the surface, the feeling of servitude might seem to make one unfortunate, and thus make the fulfillment of mitzvot all the more difficult. Yet, when a person knows that he or she must serve, and realizes the gratitude and praise that we owe our Creator, we do not suffer an inner turbulence. It is the supposedly free person who must struggle with every prohibition

and in every situation, as it says in Mishlei (4:18-19), "The path of the righteous is like the glow of sunlight, growing brighter until high noon, [but] the way of the wicked is like darkness, they know not upon what they stumble."

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

*Baruch ata adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav  
v'tizvanu al s'firat ha'omer.*

**Blessed are you, God, ruler of the world, who makes us holy with mitzvot  
and commands us to count the Omer.**

Hayom yom (\*\*\*) la'omer.  
This is the (\*\*\*) day of the Omer.

### *Kos R'vi'i: Fourth Cup*

*V'lakachti etchem li l'am v'yhayiti lachem leilhim*

**"And I will take you to be my people and I will be your God." (Exodus 6:7)**

The fourth cup is linked to the promise God makes to create a special relationship with the people of Israel. We recall our covenant, and accept this responsibility. This cup is to honor those who are our teachers, and have brought us as individuals into a spiritual relationship, and into our community.

*Baruch atah adonai eloheinu melech ha'olam borei p'ri hagafen.*

**Blessed are you, God, ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.**

# *Nirtzah*

## *Nirtzah: Conclusion*

All:

**How does the journey to freedom continue?**

Reader:

**Risking together what we never imagined possible on our own, we keep walking. The sea rises to our nostrils. Then, with a breath, the waters part.**

Reader:

**Following fire and cloud, we stumble through endless desert. At night we build fragile shelters that sway in the wind. The water is too bitter to drink. Even manna sometimes tastes like sand.**

Reader:

**Some cry out for Egypt, longing to return to slavery, even if it means a bitter existence, because it is a known place.**

Reader:  
**How does our journey to freedom continue?**

Reader:  
**We re-awaken deep yearning: for history and song,  
for learning and connection.**

Reader:  
**We glimpse new possibilities: for our lives and our communities,  
for our families and our world.**

Reader:  
**Some begin to plot change immediately.  
Others sit in the silence and absorb.**

All:  
**For ours is a holy journey. We falter, but will not turn back. Embracing the  
challenge of tradition, we clear new paths to the future.  
Ours is a holy journey, a journey towards new day.**

**(Sing)**  
L'shanah haba'a / L'shanah haba'a  
L'shanah haba'a be'yrushalayim.  
L'shanah haba'a / L'shanah haba'a  
L'shanah haba'a be'yrushalayim.

**Next year in Jerusalem!**

editorial notes from Laura:

This is most of the text of the Leather Seder that Karen and I celebrated in 2001, with some of our very best friends. We have removed the text of entire Debbie Friedman songs, and encourage you to seek them out on your own if you would like to use them. But there is a ton of Passover music which might be used during a seder - have fun looking.

When we tested this Haggadah, we had a table with Jews and non-Jews, secular and religious folks, straight, bi and gay folks, people who hadn't been to a seder in 20 years and people who had been to two just that week and people who had never been to one. I think it was a success. We managed to spend an entire evening combining two things we are very passionate about - our identities as Jews and as sadomasochists. And like any good seder, people stayed way into the evening as the discussions continued.

Here are some notes on using this Haggadah.

This is a purely amateur effort! We've never written liturgy before. Torah scholars and ritual experts will not agree with some of our appropriations - Hebrew speakers will absolutely not like the fact that I didn't have a decent Hebrew typeface, let alone a proofreader for the finished effort. Don't get hung up on the stuff we left out. Instead, feel free to add your own.

We have varied the use of gender pronouns and titles such as master and mistress. (When we used them) Feel free to ignore injunctions or directions which do not address your use of power and responsibility in your relationships, and apply the terms you use most comfortably.

The Haggadah is set up in such a way that a "Leader" is not necessary. Instead, most readings are done by \*any\* reader. We passed the readings around the table, with each person taking a turn. We also thought it was important for everyone around the table to serve and be served; so during the hand washing, everyone took turns holding the bowl and towel for someone else. We also grabbed people in order around the table to actually help serve the meal and clear it away.

The leeks may be placed on the table at the start of the meal, or passed out later. It's fun to have them on the plates (wrap the napkins around them!) and let people wonder what they are for until they get to the point in the meal when they are used. Be sure to rinse the leeks and let them dry out - otherwise you'll end up with sand and grit all over the place.

We are thinking of doing this seder every other year. Let us know if you want an invite for 2003.

This Haggadah contains copyrighted materials from many different authors, historical and contemporary. Every attempt has been made to eliminate complete works of poetry or song which are not part of standard literacy (ie: a thousand years old) and to credit excerpts which we believe reflect fair use quantities of text. You may keep a copy for your own use and reference. This may not be produced in quantities larger than the group around your seder table, or distributed in printed form, whether for free or for any reenumeration. Be a mensch; don't put your own name on this. But feel free to use it as a stepping off place for your \*own\* hagaddah. If you do complete one, please contact LAntoniou@aol.com and send me a copy.

That would be very cool.

For an excellent, feminist seder which we used as a basis for some of this one, see  
The Journey Continues, edited by Tamara Cohen, with music by Debbie Friedman.  
(ISBN 0966710711, \$12)

There is also a CD (with the same title) of Debbie's great Passover music.  
We also used standard readings and prayers from Haggadot from the Reform, Reconstructionist &  
Conservative movements.

All the mistakes are Laura's, and not to be blamed on anyone else.