



**LIBERATION JOURNEY:
REMEMBERING
& RETURNING**

**A PESACH SEDER
WITH AND FOR
INCARCERATED PEOPLE**



Matir Asurim is looking for art or images to accompany our holiday mailings. Offerings might include: prayers, *Birkhat Ha'bayit* (house blessing), blessings of protection, interactive art, coloring pages, comic strips, shvitim, illustrated depictions of Torah, and other treasures.

Please include a brief (2-3 sentences) description of your work.

Submissions can be sent to
Matir Asurim: Jewish Prisoner Care Network
PO Box 18858
Philadelphia, PA 19143

INTRODUCTION

This Hagaddah was originally written and compiled by Chaplain Orev Reena Katz haKohenet, for the first COVID-19 pandemic seder in March 2020 / Nissan 5780. It was distributed in the federal prisons of southern Ontario, on the traditional territories of the Anishinabek, Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Mohawk, Odawa, and Mississauga of New Credit in Williams, Treaty 57 and 13 territories.

It was lovingly added to and adapted by Sarit Cantor, on behalf of Matir Asurim this year, in 2022 / 5782. While the pandemic is ongoing, much has changed since the time this Hagaddah was first brought into being, just as we each have been changed by the pandemic and by our own journeys towards healing, repair and liberation.

Whether you will have an opportunity to take part in a *seder*, Passover ritual, with others, or whether you will be reading this on your own, our hope is that this Hagaddah is a thread that connects each one of us this Passover. This Hagaddah has been sent to over 40 Jewish community members in more than 30 prisons across Turtle Island (USA and Canada). Each one of us holding this book is connected through the words we read on these pages, the care and *kavannah*, intention, that went into its creation, and through our collective desire for freedom for all.

While Jews across the globe will be celebrating Passover and remembering what it means to be free, Matir Asurim is turning towards each one of you, knowing that you hold such tremendous Passover wisdom and such powerful Torah about the struggles of freedom and liberation. We dedicate our *seder* to you, to wherever these words find you in this moment of your transformation, and to wherever these words may carry you.

We are looking forward to connecting with you more, and, together, embodying the Jewish value and visioning a world where all are free.

With care,

Sarit, Cece, Val, Callie, Laynie, Rena, Meli, Jacob, and all of us at the Matir Asurim: Jewish Prisoner Care Network

Opening Prayer

Long ago at this season, our people set out on a journey.

On such a night as this, Israel went from degradation to joy.

We give thanks for the liberation of days gone by.

And we pray for all who are still bound.

Eternal G!d, may all who hunger come to rejoice in a new Pesach.

Let all the human family sit at Your table, drink the wine of deliverance, eat the bread of freedom:

Soon, in our days

freedom from oppression and freedom from want

freedom from fear and freedom to speak

freedom to learn and freedom to share

freedom to rejoice

Amen.

On These Territories

We offer thanks to You, Creator, Hashem, Adonai, Shekhinah – our G!d of many names for bringing us to this precious, good and spacious land – al erez chemdah, tovah, urchavah. The prisons on Turtle Island stand on the traditional territory of many Indigenous Peoples. People who have been tending land, tending to relationships, holding ceremony and ritual, connecting with one another through sacred practices long before settlers ever arrived here, and who have been leading struggles for liberation and freedom for generations. Though these lands provided redemption to our Jewish ancestors, many of whom made Exodus from oppression and genocide, our presence here created bondage for the Indigenous people whose stewardship and respect had kept it for millennia.

As we celebrate Pesach and eat our traditional bread of affliction, may we allow ourselves to continue to just be with the multitudes and extremes of the past few years. May we be with our solitude, fear and isolation. May we be with the ways of our ancestors who also hid in seclusion to reach freedom. May we commit to coming into wholeness with our fractured histories, repairing the damage in good relationship to land and people, and may we move towards liberation from the vantage point of this ongoing plague.

SEDER סדר: ORDER

Seder literally means order, from the Hebrew לסדר / l'sader, to arrange, and there is a set order to the proceedings:



- Kadesh** – A Toast to Freedom
- Urchatz** – Washing Hands
- Karpas** – The Appetizer
- Yachatz** – Contemplating our Brokenness
- Maggid** – Telling & Retelling the Story
- Rachtzah** – Washing Hands
- Motzei** – Gratitude for Bread
- Matzah** – Bless the Matzah
- Marror** – Exploring Bitterness
- Korech** – Hillel Sandwich
- Shulchan Orech** – Festive Meal
- Tzafun** – Out of Hiding
- Bairach** – Offering Gratitudes
- Hallel** – Songs of Praise
- Nirtzah** – Acceptance



Many sections of this Hagaddah are taken from excerpts of the Love and Rage Hagaddah, as well as the Velveteen Rabbi Hagaddah. All of the alternative blessings for the cups of wine were written by Sarit, and we encourage you to write and recite your own blessings as feels resonant throughout the book. Many of the prayers and texts in here are prayers that have been uttered for thousands of years, by Jews reflecting on their survival, their resilience, their dreams of a free and just world. You may notice that this Hagaddah is incomplete. There are some sections missing, and there are some sections added. Just as no journey to freedom is every fully complete, we invite you to bring yourself into this book with us. Engage as you wish, add your own notes, thoughts, and prayers; may each of our Passover journeys be woven together to collectively fill in the gaps.

KADESH: LET US ASK QUESTIONS

The whole point of the Seder is to ask questions. This is your time to ask about things that confuse you, things you don't understand, or even things you don't agree with. There really is no such thing as a stupid question, especially on Passover.

Questions are not only welcome during the course of the Seder but are vital to the ceremony. Our obligation at the Seder involves traveling from slavery to freedom, prodding ourselves from apathy to action, encouraging the transformation of silence into speech, and providing a space where all different levels of belief and tradition can co-exist safely. Because leaving מצרים Mitzrayim – the narrow places, the places that oppress us – is a personal as well as a communal passage, your thoughts are welcome and encouraged. You might want to have a pen and paper beside you as you go through this Haggadah to take note of thoughts or feelings that emerge.

We remember that questioning itself is a sign of freedom, and we still have our ability to question, even during this era of social distancing, mask mandates, rising fascism, ongoing racism, war in so many forms. The simplest question can have many answers, sometimes complex or contradictory ones, just as life itself is fraught with complexity and contradictions. To see everything in duality: clean or dirty, healthy or sick, good or bad, Matzah or maror, Jewish or Muslim, Jewish or “Gentile”, is to be enslaved to simplicity. Sometimes, a question has no answer, as is so throughout these years of unravel, turmoil, devastation and heartbreak. Why? Why now?



LET US BE CHILDREN

based on a form by Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

The Torah speaks of Four Children: One a *lamden* / *Sharp Student*, one a *chossid* / *High Emotional Quotient*, one a *tamim* / *Good One* and one *she-ayn lo shum sfekut u b'eyot* / *One Who Does Not Doubt or Question*.

The Sharp Student asks, “What are the testimonies, the statutes and the laws which יהוה our G'd has commanded you?” (Deut 6:20) You shall answer this child according to their capacity, their sharpness of wit.

The highly emotional child asks, “[What is] this service to you?” (Exodus 12:26). For them, make an effort to reign in their longings, for they also want to be a part of the integrity and perfection that comes with meaningful rituals. If you are loving to this child, they will understand *devekut* / *cleaving*, and they will get a taste of what it means to feel close to G'd.

The Good child asks, “What is this?” (Exodus 13:14) To them, you shall bear witness from your own experience, that השם is assisting you with ‘a strong hand’, to take you out of bondage, and to take them with you out of מצרים Mitzrayim.

To the One who does not question, you will feed them some *maror* / *horseradish*, so they can feel their experiences from the body, rather than the mind – and so that compassion will be instilled in their heart.

These children live in all of us on Pesach. Let us be in conversation with them. Let us remember together what it meant to hide from a plague, to protect ourselves to the best of our ability. We all have these four faces of our humanity. May we hold them all with compassion. May we look deep into their eyes. May we liberate our suffering here on this night. May we embody all 4 siblings who ask from different places in the self. May our wisdom, our skepticism, our simplicity and our shyness come out and be held.

WHAT IS **ישראל** ISRAEL? WHERE IS **מצרים** MITZRAYIM?

How narrow is our social isolation?

How narrow is our struggle when we need to face it alone?

When found in the liturgy (religious text) **ישראל** Yisrael does not refer to the modern nation/state of Israel, rather it derives from the blessing given to Ya'akov (Jacob) by a stranger with whom he wrestles all night. When the stranger is finally pinned, Ya'akov asks him for a blessing. The stranger says, "Your name will no longer be Ya'akov but **ישראל** Yisrael for you have wrestled with G!d and triumphed."

Similarly, we use the word **מצרים** Mitzrayim, instead of 'Egypt'. Mitzrayim comes from the root **צר** Tzar, meaning narrow or constricted. It can refer to the geography of the Nile valley, but also to a metaphorical state of confinement.

This year, we are all together in **צר**, amidst the ongoing constrictions and negotiations that COVID-19 continues to impose on us, along with the heightened state of war, far-right supremacy, hatred and fear that have ensued, largely catalysed by the pandemic. We are in **צר** every time we believe the lie of separateness, every time we are led to believe that our liberation is a personal endeavour. We are in **צר** when we forget that to survive is to need one another, when we forget that the strongest trees know how to bend. Reading this Hagaddah, you are invited to explore the wisdom of survival from our Jewish ancestors — the knowing of the vast shadows they encountered on their journey from slavery to freedom. This is the **צר** that connects all of humanity across and beyond time.

The Pesach story is also the story of the birth of the Jewish people, and **מצרים** 'Mitzrayim' is the narrow passage we moved through in our birthing as a nation. Leaving **מצרים** mitzrayim also means freeing ourselves.



THE SEDER PLATE

The entire story of the Haggadah is contained in the Seder plate; everything on it symbolizes an aspect of Exodus. Hold the plate up and reflect on each item.

זרוה Zeroah, a roasted bone, which evokes the offering made at the Temple in ancient times.

ביצה Beitzah, a boiled egg, symbolizing the circle of life and death.

מרור Maror, a bitter herb, reminding us of the bitterness of enslavement.

חרסת Charoset, a mixture of fruit, nuts, wine and spices, representing the mortar our ancestors used to build the structures of Mitzrayim.

כרפס Karpas, a green vegetable, symbolizing hope and renewal.

זיתון Zatoun (Arabic), a green olive, symbolizing peace and justice in Israel and Palestine.

חזרת Chazeret, the bitter herb for the “sandwich” we will eat later, following the custom established by Hillel the Elder, as a reminder that our ancestors “ate Matzah and bitter herbs together.”

Many of us who will be using this Hagaaddah, may not have access to a seder plate, or to the ritual items that are called for in this book.

Our spiritual resources are held in ancient wells of creativity and depth. While prisons may limit the physical availability of many Passover ritual objects, below are suggestions for how to create a seder plate within a prison. This is an invitation to connect with these objects in accessible and tangible ways. If you do not have a seder plate, you may consider creating a sacred space with these objects.

זרוה Zeroah: place something that represents sacrifice on your plate. Consider what it means to let go, in order to transform. The “zeroah” can be any object that holds memories of letting go, grief; an offering to that which is sacred in the name of healing and protection.

ביצה Beitzah: Traditionally an egg is used, but any object that represents rebirth and the cycles of life and death can be used. You may wish to cut out a circle from a piece of paper. On one side, write down the four elements: water, earth, air and fire. On the other side, write down a way that you are connecting to each element in this moment. Place the filled-out circle on your plate.

מרור Maror: Traditionally, a piece of horseradish is placed onto the seder plate. Sometimes, romaine lettuce is used when horseradish is not available. Maror invites us to connect with our tears. Our tears invite us to connect with our grief. Our grief invites us to connect with what it is that we truly love. Place an object on the plate that reminds you of what it is that you are fighting for in your own journey for personal and collective liberation.

(Did you know, that if you do not have something bitter to taste, you can simply imagine a bitter sensation filling your mouth and touching your tastebuds and your body will respond as if it is consuming something bitter! Bitterness is a very powerful sensation! And it is actually very good for our digestion!)

חרסת Charoset: Charoset represents our building blocks. The material that our ancestors used that enabled us to survive impossible conditions. Place something on your plate that gives you hope, that sustains you through the hard times, that brings you a little bit of sweetness. You may wish to cut out a triangle from a piece of paper. On one side, make a list of the things in your life that build you up and hold you together.

Matzah: Matzah is used ritually throughout the seder. There are traditionally three pieces of Matzah in the middle of the table. Matzah is known as the Bread of Affliction. It is a hard, rough, and fragile bread. Consider your rough edges, the places where you feel could break at any moment. These are the places that need our love. If you do not have Matzah, a cracker will do. If you do not have a cracker, on a piece of paper, write out your rough edges, the wounds that need tended to in your liberation journey. You can hold onto this paper, and send love to those parts of yourself, every time Matzah is used during the ritual.

Wine: Traditionally we bless and drink four cups of wine over the course of the seder. Wine is a sacred substance that connects us to G!d and to the divine. Since prisons do not allow wine or alcohol, you might want to consider blessing water (another deeply sacred, life sustaining substance). With each cup of “wine” that we bless, you might consider thinking about the sacred, life sustaining substances that move through the earth, connecting us to one another across and beyond time and space.

THE FIRST CUP: SURVIVAL

reflecting on resilience & how we make it through our own צר,
our own narrowness, both internal and imposed, day to day



Passover cup by Hana Geber,
Jewish Museum, New York

בְּרוּכָה יְהוָה שְׁכִינָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מַלְכַת הָעוֹלָם
בוֹרְאֵת פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.

Brucha Yah Shechinah eloheinu Malkat ha'olam borayt p'ri ha- gafen.

Ashkenazi pronunciation, fem.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא
פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu Melech ha'olam boreh p'ri ha-gafen.

Ashkenazi pronunciation, masc.

Blessed is the Source that fills all creation and brings forth the fruit of the vine.

traditional English translation

Blessed are you Shekhinah, who reminds me that I am at once both bound
& free; contained & spilling out. May this blessing uplift my survival as a
devotion to liminality & multitudes. May this blessing surround me, protect
me with the depths of your infinite care.

brakha/blessing of survival written by Sarit

feel free to write & recite your own blessing for survival

URHATZ: WASHING OUR HANDS

We are humans relearning to wash our hands.

Washing our hands is an act of love

Washing our hands is an act of care

Washing our hands is an act that puts the hypervigilant body at ease

Washing our hands helps us return to ourselves by washing away what does not serve.

Wash your hands

like you are washing the only teacup left that your great grandmother carried across the ocean, like you are washing the hair of a beloved who is dying, like you are washing the feet of Grace Lee Boggs, Beyonce, Jesus, your auntie, Audre Lorde, Mary Oliver – you get the picture.

Like this water is poured from a jug your best friend just carried for three miles from the spring they had to climb a mountain to reach.

Like water is a precious resource
made from time and miracle

excerpt from a COVID-19 prayer written by Dori Midnight

This is an important reminder of the many ways, both large & small that we can care for one another & keep each other safe. May we remember this practice as sacred, as we take care of ourselves, of those in our houses and on our ranges, of the staff and families of staff around us.

Wash your hands with the קוונה Kavannah, the intention of keeping safe and healthy.

KARPAS: DIPPING INTO SPRING

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.

Why do we dip כרפס karpas into salt water?
At the beginning of this season of rebirth and growth, we recall the tears of
our ancestors in bondage.

And why should salt water be touched by כרפס karpas?
To remind us that tears will eventually stop. Even after pain, Spring comes.
adapted from Karpas, by Ronnie M. Horn

Take some greens and dip them in the salt water, and say:

בְּרוּכָה יְיָ שְׁכִינָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְלַכַת הָעוֹלָם
בוֹרְאת פְּרִי הָאָדָמָה.

Brucha Yah Shechina, Eloheinu Malkat ha'olam, borayt p'ri ha'adamah.
Ashkenazi pronunciation, fem.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא
פְּרִי הָאָדָמָה.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melekh ha'olam borei p'ri ha'adamah.
Ashkenazi pronunciation, masc.

Blessed is the One, who sustains all life, and brings forth fruits from the earth.
traditional English translation

i witness my tears
and i hold them
...with love



honesty and
tenderness carries
abundant potential
for moisture and
soft strength.

The bitter of the parsley
helps me to taste the
sweetness of care and the
constant balance between
form and force, and emptiness
and
fullness.



i am made of water,
within me their is salt,
in my vessel alone i can carry
the complexities of bitter and sweet,
cool and warm, strong and soft,
sorrow and joy, pain and ease.
amen.

with
love



YACHATZ: LISTENING INTO FREEDOM

Take the three Matzot at the centre of the table and break the middle Matza in 2 pieces. LISTEN to the sound of that breaking. What do you hear afterwards?

Place the smaller piece of Matzah between the two whole Matzot. This small piece is called the **לחם העוני** lechem ha'oni, the bread of affliction. Place the larger half, known as the Afikomen, in a large cloth or napkin, and set it aside.

Let us bless our cracked surfaces and sharp edges, unafraid to see our brittleness and brave enough to see our beauty. Reaching for wholeness, let us piece together the parts of ourselves we have found, and honor all that is still hidden.

The breaking of the matzah reflects the words of the Chassidic Kotzker Rebbe:
There is nothing more whole than a broken heart.

If your own suffering does not serve to unite you with the suffering of others, if your own imprisonment does not join you with others in prison, if you in your smallness remain alone, then your pain will have been for naught.

adapted from the Love & Rage Hagaddah

HA LACHMA ANYA

Uncover the Matzot and lift the Seder Plate. Spend time in witness of this incredible Bread of Affliction.

This is the Bread of Affliction that our ancestors ate in מצרים Mitzrayim. All who are hungry, let them come and eat. All who are in need, let them come and celebrate Pesach with us. Now we are here; next year may we be in the arms of our liberation. Now we are slaves; next year may we be free people.

לַחְמָא עֲנִיָּא דִּי אֲכַלּוּ אֲבֹהֵתְנָא בְּאַרְעָא
דְּמִצְרַיִם. כָּל דְּכַפִּין יִיתִי וְיִיכֹל, כָּל דְּצָרִיד
יִיתִי וְיִפְסַת. הַשְּׁתָּא הָכָא, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּאַרְעָא דְיִשְׂרָאֵל.
הַשְּׁתָּא עֲבָרִי, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין.

הָא

Ha lachma anya di achalu avhatana b'arad'Mitzrayim. Kol dichfin yeitei v'yechol. Kol ditzrich yeitei v'yifsach. Hashata hacha lashanah haba'ahb'ara d'Yisrael. Hashata avdei lashanah haba'ah b'nei chorin.

Ashkenazi pronunciation

Ha lahma anya. Dee achaloo ab'hathana be-ar-a de-misrayeem. Kol dichfeen yethei wi-ye-chol. Kol dis-reef ye-thei wi-yifsah. Hasha-ta hacha. Le-shana ha-ba-a be-ar-a de-yisrael. Hasha-ta hacha abdei. Leshana ha-ba-a be-ar-a de-yisrael benei horeen.

Iraqi pronunciation

This is one of the oldest passages in the Haggadah. It is written in Aramaic, and existed when the Temple was still standing, prior to 70 B.C.E.

THE SECOND CUP: HOPE

reflecting on what keeps us healthy and strong



Passover cup by Hana Geber,
Jewish Museum, New York

בְּרוּכָה יְהוָה שְׁכִינָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מַלְכַת הָעוֹלָם
בוֹרְאֵת פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.

Brucha Yah Shechinah eloheinu Malkat ha'olam borayt p'ri ha- gafen.

Ashkenazi pronunciation, fem.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא
פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu Melech ha'olam boreh p'ri ha-gafen.

Ashkenazi pronunciation, masc.

Blessed is the Source that fills all creation and brings forth the fruit of the vine.

traditional English translation

Blessed are you G'd, G'ddness, creator, you of many names, who returns me to myself in my sorrow & grief; who shows me the power of return; who shows me over & over that there is always a way out of Mitzrayim.

brakha/blessing of hope written by Sarit

feel free to write & recite your own blessing of hope

PESACH, MATZA & MAROR

Rabbi Gamaliel said that those who do not mention three things on Passover, did not fulfill the obligation to tell the story: pesach, matza and maror.

PESACH

Why did our ancestors eat the Pesach offering at their seder?

As a reminder that G-d passed over the houses marked with lambs' blood, as it is written, "It is the Passover offering for G-d, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Mitzrayim and saved our homes."

MATZAH

This matzah, this unleavened bread, why do we eat it?

As a reminder that there was not sufficient time for the dough of our ancestors to rise before the Source of strength was revealed and redeemed us. As it is written, "And they baked the dough which they brought from Mitzrayim into matzot." (Exodus 12:39)

MAROR

This maror, this bitter vegetable, why do we eat it?

As a reminder that the Pharaoh embittered the lives of our ancestors, as it is written, "And they embittered their lives with the hard labor in mortar."

MAGGID: TELLING OUR STORY

Memory is not a static deposit; we continually re-remember; re-tell and recast the Jewish past in light of changing communal experience and changing communal values. We are commanded to tell the Exodus story as though each of us were personally liberated from Egypt. Hasidic tradition holds that not only did God speak the universe into being in the time before time, but God continues to speak us into existence, even now. In our re-telling, we are bringing our collective experiences, our struggles, our joys, our visions, hopes, hesitations, pains, griefs, and luscious imaginations with us along our journeys to freedom. We are following the footsteps of our ancestors & speaking ourselves into a collective expanse of possibility.

adapted from the Velveteen Rabbi Hagaddah

Once upon a time our people went into galut (Hebrew), or golis (Yiddish) – גלות exile – in מצרים Mitzrayim. During a famine, our ancestor Jacob and his family fled there where food was plentiful. Through a complicated set of plot twists, his son Joseph had risen to high position in Pharaoh's court, and our people were well-respected and well-regarded, secure in the power structure of the time.

Generations passed and our people remained in מצרים Mitzrayim. As rulers came and went, a new Pharaoh ascended to the throne. He felt threatened by the strangers in his people's midst, and ordered our people enslaved.

In fear of rebellion, Pharaoh decreed that all newborn Hebrew boy-children be killed. Two midwives named Shifrah and Puah defied his orders, claiming that “the Hebrew women are so hardy, they give birth before we arrive!” Through their courage, a boy survived.

Fearing for his safety, his family placed him in a basket and he floated down the Nile. He was found and adopted, by Pharaoh's daughter, who named him Moshe because min ha-mayim m'shitihu, from the water she drew him

forth. She hired his mother Yocheved as his wet-nurse. Thus he survived to adulthood and was raised as Prince of Egypt.

Although a child of privilege, as Moshe grew he became aware of the slaves who worked in the brickyards of his father. When he saw an overseer mistreat a slave, he struck the overseer and killed him. Fearing retribution, he set out across the Sinai alone.

God spoke to him from a burning bush, which though it flamed was not consumed. The Voice called him to lead the Hebrew people to freedom. Moses argued with God, pleading inadequacy, but God disagreed. Sometimes our responsibilities choose us.

Moses returned to מצרים Mitzrayim and went to Pharaoh to argue the injustice of slavery. He gave Pharaoh a mandate with resounds through history: Let my people go. Pharaoh refused, and Moses warned him that Mighty God would strike the Egyptian people. These threats were not idle: ten terrible plagues were unleashed upon the Egyptians. Only when his nation lay in ruins did Pharaoh agree to our liberation.

Fearful that Pharaoh would change his mind, our people fled, not waiting for their bread dough to rise. Our people did not leave מצרים Mitzrayim alone; a “mixed multitude” went with them. From this we learn that liberation is not for us alone, but for all the people of the earth.

Pharaoh’s army followed us to the Sea of Reeds. We plunged into the waters. Only when we had gone as far as we could did the waters part for us. We mourn, even now, that Pharaoh’s army drowned: our liberation is bittersweet because people died in our pursuit – Pharaoh’s entire army that followed them into the sea. The waters that parted for us closed back on Pharaoh’s army and not one of them remained.

To this day we relive our liberation that we may not become complacent, that we may always rejoice in our freedom. On the night before they were to leave מצרים Mitzrayim, the Israelites were told to slaughter a lamb and paint

their doorposts with its blood, a sign to the destroying angel not to take the first born in those homes. Today we no longer sacrifice an animal, but we do remember that night of terror and hope. That night a people huddled in their homes awaiting the morning, perhaps they thought: “Will the promise to punish the slave masters be fulfilled, or will morning come and leave us exposed, having marked ourselves as rebellious slaves?”

The פסח Pesach, lamb shank on our seder plate, is a reminder that freedom begins when we mark our doors, when we take the risk of speaking up, not yet knowing if others will join us.

adapted from the Velveteen Rabbi Hagaddah

EGYPT INSIDE

Alden Solovy

from This Grateful Heart: Psalms and Prayers for a New Day

This I confess:

I have taken Egypt with me.

I've kept myself a slave to grief and loss,

Fear and anger and shame.

I have set myself up as taskmaster,

Driving myself beyond the limits

Of reasonable time and common sense.

I've seen miracles from heaven,

Signs and wonders in my own life,

Yet I've taken Egypt with me,

Still waiting for the heavens to speak.

G-d of redemption,

With Your loving and guiding hand leaving Egypt is easy.

Leaving Egypt behind is a struggle.

In Your wisdom You have given me this choice:

To live in a tyranny of my own making,

Or to set my heart free to love You,

To love Your people,

And to love myself.

G-d of freedom,

Help me to leave Egypt behind,

To hear Your voice,

To accept Your guidance,

And to see the miracles in each new day.

Blessed are You, G-d of wonder,

You set Your people on the road to redemption.

THE SEA NEVER PARTED

April N. Baskin, Joyous Justice

Passover is *steeped* in meaning, peoplehood, and visions for liberation. As a Black and Cherokee Jewish woman whose ancestors endured and ultimately survived enslavement, there are many, many layers of meaning to the Passover story for me. It has become fairly common in the United States to connect the Black struggle for liberation and the Jewish narrative of achieving freedom from bondage in the Torah. Whether or not the biblical story really happened, it's a core part of Jewish collective identity.

But a few years back, I had a big epiphany: For Black folks in America, the sea never parted. We are still in *Mizrayim* (Egypt or “the narrow place”). While the narratives between Jews and Black folks enslaved in American chattel slavery are often compared, there is a crucial difference: they were never able to escape their enslavers and oppressors nor the systems of enslavement and oppression that held them hostage. So as we enter the Passover season this year, we must acknowledge this reality.

Now, I'm not saying there are no parallels between the stories. Pharaoh finally gave the Israelites permission to leave after the ten plagues, but changed his mind as they were fleeing. The oppressor similarly changed their mind in the States, too. But a key difference here is that the Jews were able to get away from their oppressors, both spiritually and physically. The sea parted, and the Israelites were able to enter, and then the sea closed and created a barrier from their oppressors. They weren't able to grab them and take them back. There was protection. Not only were they set free, but they were then guided by a divinely designated leader. They had access to a new future and a new potential homeland, *and* they had 40 years to wander. Some historical and contemporary rabbinic leaders discuss those 40 years in the wilderness as being critical for the healing for the Jewish people. While surely it was no paradise, I can see it being deeply necessary as someone who has endured significant trauma in my own life and has benefited immensely from trauma-informed healing communities.

American folks of African-heritage have no such equivalent. When we have voter suppression, the prison industrial complex, Jim Crow, and police killings (and unfortunately I could keep going), we see the signs everywhere. We were never given an option to get away from our oppressors, receive any kind of reparations, have our own land and sovereignty (this is all in the context of stolen Native land), or go back to our homelands. What would it have looked like for the Israelites if they had to stay in Egypt after being freed and live next door to the people who used to be their oppressors?

At Joyous Justice, we love to amplify joy and happiness in the work in racial justice. AND, what allows us to do that sincerely and powerfully is being honest about the bad. In order to move through to joy, happiness, peace, *insert positive vibrational state here*, we can't be in denial. Traditionally, we tell the story of Jewish enslavement and liberation from “the narrow place.” If we get *really* clear about the fact that, for many Black folks and other People of Color in America, the sea never parted and they remain in Mitzrayim, in narrow, oppressive space(s), then we have the capacity to heal and move closer to our collective liberation, what might be the *true* Messianic Age. *It's on us* to keep learning and healing and taking action that will liberate *us all*.

Reflection/discussion questions:

1. How does the epiphany that the sea never parted for Black Americans land with you?
2. Why is it important to recognize, process, and move through the ugliness and the bad in order to access joy or whatever positive state we wish to embody?

April N. Baskin is the Founding Director of Joyous Justice, a multiracial community-powered social justice and spiritual transformation organization that seeds and leads systemic change and healing for the Jewish community and beyond. This essay is an adapted version of the episode “The Sea Never Parted” from the podcast she co-hosts with Tracie Guy-Decker called “Jews Talk Racial Justice.”

OUR POWER

Rena Branson

In the Torah, when the Red Sea parts for the Israelites to cross and escape from Pharaoh's army, they sing a song in celebration: Shirat Hayam – the Song of the Sea. It's written that all the Israelites sang together, and the ancient rabbis imagined that infants sang along too; one sage, Rebbe Meir, said that even unborn babies joined in. In this moment, the Israelites were not only celebrating God's power; they were also lifting up their collective power, reclaiming their own voices in song, and every single voice mattered.

This is part of the narrative of our collective past, and it is also a prayer for our collective future. A future where everyone is free, and where every voice can ring out in its fullness and be heard. May Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the Holy Blessed One, give us strength to keep working together to build this world.

Here is a song I wrote called “Our Power,” which includes a line from Hebrew liturgy referring to the Song of the Sea, along with new English lyrics:

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We will not underestimate our power any longer –  
We know that together, we are strong.

Like drops of water shape the rocks  
As they rush down the falls,  
We know that together, we are strong.

שִׁירָה חֲדָשָׁה שִׁבְחוּ גְאוּלִּים לְשִׁמְךָ עַל־שִׁפְתַי הַיָּם יַחַד כָּלָם הוֹדוּ  
*Shira chadasha shibchu ge'ulim l'shimcha al sfat hayam, yachad kulam hodu*

Translation: “Liberated people sang a new song, praising Your name on the lip of the sea. Together, everyone gave thanks...”

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Even though there are walls keeping us apart, I feel connected to you as you read these words. Thank you for being part of this web of Jewish community, as well as part of the bigger tapestry of creation. As an individual, you offer something specific and holy to this picture that no one else can. We all need each other. This Passover, I honor and celebrate our collective power. May we use it for the greatest healing good. L'chaim – to life!



THE TEN PLAGUES

For each plague flick or pour a drop of wine onto the plate.

“...The Holy One sat in judgment over the Egyptians and drowned them in the sea. In that instant, the ministering angels wished to sing before the Holy One, but G'd rebuked them, saying “Those I have created with my own hands are drowning in the sea, and you utter song in my presence?”

Babylonian Talmud. Sanhedrin 39b

The idea of justice embodied in our story is direct and unquestioned—punishment for punishment, murdered children for murdered children, suffering for suffering. The people of מצרים Mitzrayim suffered because of their own leader, who is in part set-up by an angry G-d eager to demonstrate his own superiority. In our story, all of this was necessary for freedom. Jews have been troubled by this for generations and generations, and so, before we drink to our liberation, we mark how the suffering diminishes our joy by taking a drop of wine out of our cup of joy for each of the ten plagues visited on the people of מצרים Mitzrayim.

Dam.....Blood

Tzfardeyah.....Frogs

Kinim.....Lice

Arov.....Wild Beasts

Dever.....Blight
Shichin.....Boils
Barad.....Hail
Arbeh.....Locusts
Choshech.....Endless Night
Makat B'chorot.....Slaying of the First-Born

The Pharaoh of the Pesach story is not just a cruel king who happened to live in a certain country. The Pharaoh that our ancestors pictured, each and every year, for century after century was for them every tyrant, every cruel and heartless ruler who ever enslaved the people of his or another country.

As we packed our bags that last night in מצרים Mitzrayim, the darkness was pierced with screams. Our doorposts were protected by a sign of blood. But from the windows of the Egyptians rose a slow stench: the death of their firstborn.

Ya Shechina, soften our hearts and the hearts of our enemies. Help us to dream new paths to freedom.



DAYENU

Dayenu is a prayer we sing, literally translating to, “enough”. Throughout this chant, we list the many actions G-d took on our behalf: bringing us out of Egypt, carrying us through the desert, giving us the Torah, among many other miracles.

Dayenu is the song of our gratitude. A Jewish philosopher was once asked, “what is the opposite of hopelessness?” And he said, “Dayenu,” the ability to be thankful for what we have received, for what we are.

When there is so little control in our lives, it can feel hard to reckon with what it means for something to have been enough. What does this mean,

“It would have been enough”? Surely no one of these would indeed have been enough for us. Dayenu intends to celebrate each step toward freedom as if it were enough, then to start out on the next step. Dayenu its teaching us to take the impossible feat of freedom and break it up into small, tangible steps. It means that if we reject each step because it is not our whole liberation, we will never be able to achieve the whole liberation. It means to sing each verse as if it were the whole song – and then sing the next verse.

Had God:

Brought us out of Egypt and not divided the sea for us	<i>Dayenu</i>
Divided the sea and not permitted us to cross on dry land	<i>Dayenu</i>
Permitted us to cross on dry land and not sustained us for forty years in the desert	<i>Dayenu</i>
Sustained us for forty years in the desert and not fed us with manna	<i>Dayenu</i>
Fed us with manna and not given us the Sabbath	<i>Dayenu</i>
Given us the Sabbath and not brought us to Mount Sinai	<i>Dayenu</i>
Brought us to Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah	<i>Dayenu</i>
Given us the Torah and not led us into the land of Israel	<i>Dayenu</i>
Led us into the land of Israel and not built for us the Temple	<i>Dayenu</i>
Built for us the Temple and not sent us prophets of truth	<i>Dayenu</i>
Sent us prophets of truth and not made us a holy people	<i>Dayenu</i>
For all these, alone and together, we say	<i>Dayenu!</i>

What does enough mean to you?

What does it mean for you in your journey in healing and transformation?

What does enough mean in this moment?

MOTZI MATZAH: BLESSING OUR BREAD OF AFFLICTION

The Jews left מצרים Mitzrayim in great haste, so quickly that they did not have time to let their bread dough rise. They cooked unleavened cakes of bread, and quickly followed Moses towards the wilderness.

בָּרַךְ אֹתָהּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל אֲכִילַת מַצָּה.

Baruch atah Adonai, eloheinu Melech ha-olam
ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz.

Blessed are You, Compassionate One, who has
given us the blessing of eating this Matzah.

MAROR: TASTING WHAT IS BITTER

There is nothing so immediate than our tongues. We speak, we open, we bless. This powerful taste reminds our bodies of what slavery felt like. It's shocking blast stimulates our senses, and reminds us that we continue to struggle as our ancestors did: towards freedom of spirit, of body and mind. There is so much bitterness, everyday. We don't need a reminder of how difficult life is; especially on the inside. But, isn't it amazing to have a moment to commune through taste with the bitterness that taught our ancestors how to survive the unimaginable?

בָּרַךְ אֹתָהּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר
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Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam,
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tsivanu al achilat maror

Blessed are You, Sovereign of the Universe, who has shown
us paths to holiness, and invites us to eat the bitter herb.

THE THIRD CUP: HONESTY

reflecting on our goals, hopes and ambitions

The third cup represents redemption as the seas split and the Jews begin to see the other side toward freedom. This is a season of change, and our whole world is changing alongside it. How might we re-frame our dreams and aspirations? What is still possible, and what needs a rejig? In this time of renewal, we need to be really honest about limitations and capacities. What are yours?



Passover cup by Hana Geber,
Jewish Museum, New York

בְּרוּכָה זֵה שְׁכִינָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְלַכַת הָעוֹלָם
בוֹרְאֵת פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.

Brucha Yah Shechinah eloheinu Malkat ha'olam borayt p'ri ha- gafen.

Ashkenazi pronunciation, fem.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא
פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu Melech ha'olam boreh p'ri ha-gafen.

Ashkenazi pronunciation, masc.

Blessed is the Source that fills all creation and brings forth the fruit of the vine.

traditional English translation

Blessed are you Divine Intervener, who helps me to feel attuned to my boundaries and my intuition with ease, b'emet.

THE FOURTH CUP: POSSIBILITY

reflecting on our positive options, our wisdom and creating space to imagine

Take a moment and ask yourself, in the face of the immense harshness, inhumanity and disconnection that comes from life inside prisons, are there ways that you can allow room for that which is sacred to flow through you and around you? Can you bring divinity close? What happens when we do not let our imaginations fall prey to the violence of our conditions? What space can be made for possibility, then?

The fourth cup invites us into a space beyond Mitzrayim. Pay attention to your breath here. Let your shoulders drop. Feel your belly and your spine. Consider narrowness, that turns to fear, that turns to contractedness, that turns to vulnerability, that turns to grief, that turns to courage, that turns to connection, that turns to movement, that turns to heartbeats, that turns to breath, that turns to spaciousness. Consider those who walk beside you; those you can see and those you cannot; those who were and who still are. Consider that every time you find home, it has changed and so have you. Consider possibility.



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא
פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.

בְּרוּכָה זֶה שְׂכִינָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מְלַכַת הָעוֹלָם
בוֹרְאָת פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.

Brucha Yah Shechinah eloheinu Malkat ha'olam borayt p'ri ha- gafen.
Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu Melech ha'olam boreh p'ri ha-gafen.
Blessed is the Source that fills all creation and brings forth the fruit of the vine.
Blessed are you, Knower of Truths, who asks me to name my wildest dreams
& shows me all the places they are already alive within me.

BRICH RACHAMANA / בְּרִיךְ רַחֲמָנָא

בְּרִיךְ רַחֲמָנָא מַלְכָּא דְעַלְמָא מְרֵי דְהַאי פְתָא

Brich rachamana, malka d'alma, marei d'hai pita.

You are the source of life for all that is and your blessings flow through me.



TZAFUN: REVEALING WHAT IS HIDDEN

OF BEING

Denise Levertov

I know this happiness
is provisional:

the looming presences --
great suffering, great fear --

withdraw only
into peripheral vision:

but ineluctable this shimmering
of wind in the blue leaves:

this flood of stillness
widening the lake of sky:

this need to dance,
this need to kneel:
 this mystery:



The Seder cannot officially end until we taste the Afikomen. This year, our bites of freedom harken to a future time when mass suffering is eased, and humanity, connection and care is close. In this way, the Afikomen will help us conclude both the ritual, and help us imagine what it means to become whole again. Restore that hidden piece of Matzah you tucked away, and eat it for dessert.

You are the wisdom of this time. You are living in the resilience of isolation, and the knowledge of how to survive in unimaginable circumstances. Take that wisdom, and use it for good. Make our ancestors proud as you stand on their shoulders. You CAN be with the waves of uncertainty, of change, of fear and find a grounded-ness, a flexibility, a laugh, a giggle.

Next year, may we be together in celebration, next year may all humanity be interconnected in justice and freedom.

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Matir Asurim
מתיר אסורים
Jewish Care Network
for Incarcerated People
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