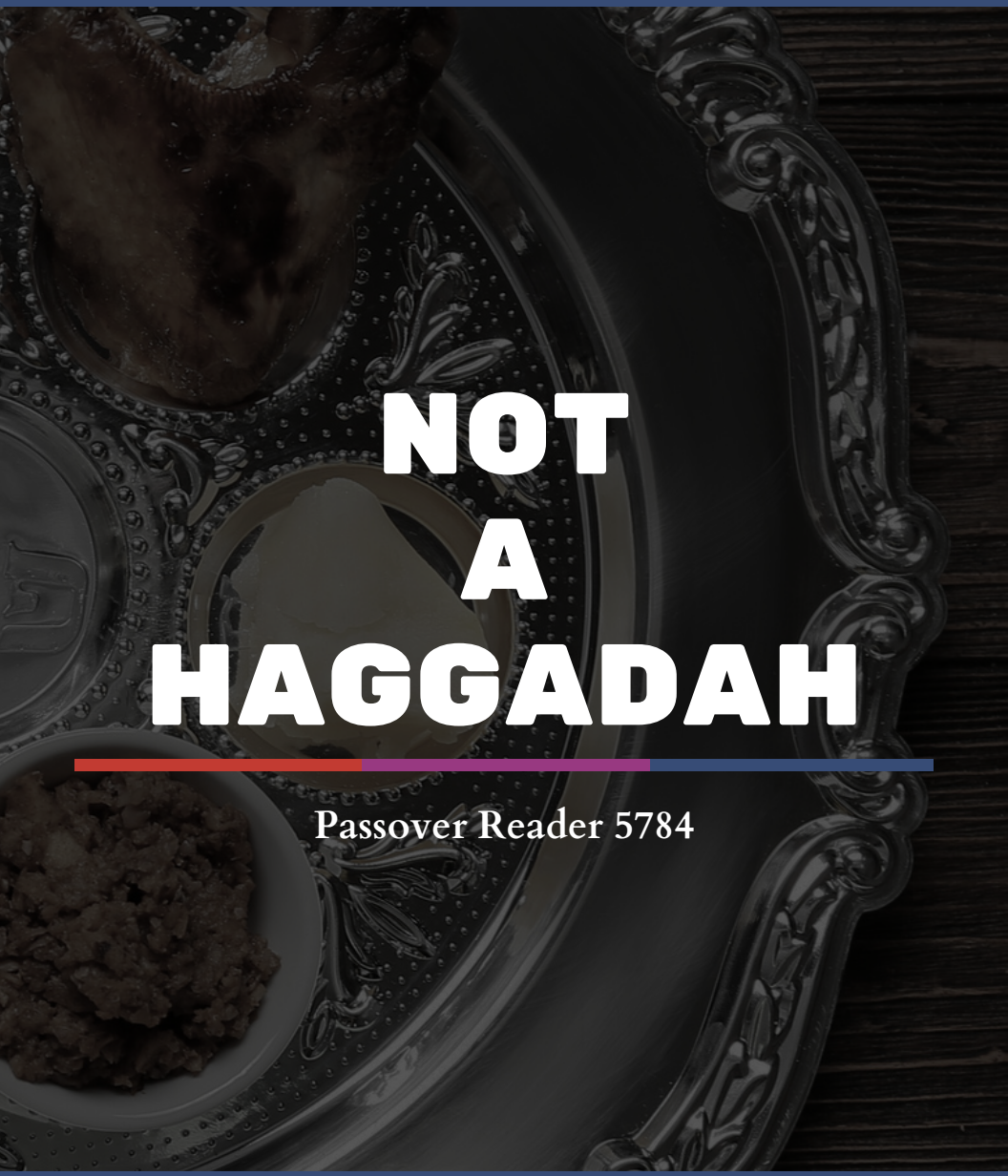

NOT A HAGGADAH

Passover Reader 5784

exploringjudaism

Not a Haggadah

Passover Reader 2024/5784

EXPLORING JUDAISM

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About Exploring Judaism

Exploring Judaism is the digital home for Conservative/Masorti Judaism, embracing the beauty and complexity of Judaism and our personal search for meaning, learning, and connecting. Our goal is to create content and gather Torah based on three core framings: Meaning-Making (Why?), Practical Living (How?), and Explainers (What?).

Exploring Judaism is a project of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) and the Rabbinical Assembly (RA).

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

While every Jewish holiday has rules, some very complex and some more straightforward, we can safely say that no holiday has as many rules with practical significance as Passover. Not only are there rules about *hametz* and *matzah*, but there are also explorations of liturgy, the Haggadah, unlike any other in the Jewish canon.

It is not surprising that in the context of Passover, the Talmud instructs us to study the laws of the holiday thirty days the holiday (BT Pes. 6a). This lead time provides us with a period to settle into the ideas, themes, and preparations for the holiday. These thirty days are full of activity, both spiritual and physical.

This collection is meant to inspire, encourage, and make your Passover more meaningful. In these essays, you can find something to aid in your reflections as you approach the holiday, give you practical steps as you clean your home, *kasher* and prepare, and ideas to bring to your table to give your seder additional "flavor."

We encourage you to grab a stack of Post-It Notes and jump into reading. Put a bookmark on pieces of insight that you want to share with your family, friends, or community. Grab a few pieces of paper and do some reflection and journaling when bidden by the authors in this collection.

We thank our authors and contributors for their wisdom. You can find more Torah at Exploring Judaism online. We invite you to share any errors and feedback on this project!

We hope you have a wonderful and meaningful Passover!

From the Editors,

Rabbi Mordechai Rackover & Rabbi Jeremy Markiz
& Reena Bromberg Gaber

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

My childhood seders were fraught. My father is an accountant, and for many years, Tax Season, which runs until April 30th in Canada, where I grew up, overlapped with Passover. Passover was an important holiday in our family. Despite not keeping kosher or Shabbat, we changed our dishes, removed all *hametz*, and had big seders. But Dad was tired from all those Returns. I was curious and deeply engaged with Judaism. And Mom was in the middle.

As I aged and could engage more fully with Jewish learning, I came, along with my peers, to learn so much that *sedarim* with friends lasted until sunrise. These all-night-seder-ragers included not just four cups but five (like the Maharal). Not just one Afikomen, but two – one before and one after midnight. We wouldn't read Hallel; we would sing and dance. I would kiss my matzah before eating it; the joy of the mitzvah was so precious. The catharsis of eating *Maror* led to tears. For days leading up to the holiday, people would ask – "Are you ready to get out of Egypt?"

And then came the toddlers, and we gave up the all-nighters. And then we had the years of 'We made this in school' seders. Followed by the 'Please, tell us what you learned in school pulling teeth seders.' We are now on the other side of this process, with older children genuinely interested in the text, the tradition, and the conversation.

I feel blessed.

I feel doubly blessed this year for having read and participated in the creation of this book. There are so many insights, much for me, and I hope our readers to consider.

There are various opinions about what to eat, what to say, how to say it, how to prepare, how to be ready, how to engage, and how to bring people along. There are contradictions. There are personal stories and legal explorations: American history and Jewish memory.

I have the feeling that I have been to many people's *sedarim*, and I thank them each for bringing me in and welcoming each of us into their home, as the hungry are welcomed on seder night.

While not mentioned in our articles, we would be remiss if we did not remember that we have family members in captivity even as we

celebrate our freedom. We have family holding arms in defense of our people as we read the Haggadah that points to the days of the Messiah, where weapons will be a relic of a violent past.

We would also be remiss if we did not mention that this Passover, many people suffer from war, hunger, and disease even while we sing Hallel.

One of our authors in this collection reminds us of the dropping of wine from our cup as a reminiscence of suffering beyond our people. With hope, I pray that we can bring healing and redemption to this world with the power of our Passover observance and the force of our songs and prayers.

Blessings for a *Chag Kasher v'Sameach*,
Rabbi Mordechai Rackover
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A Note on Style

As Exploring Judaism grows and creates its own modes of sharing Torah, we try to keep the voices of our writers as distinct as the writers themselves. Each of our teachers has a way to speak, write, and share.

With the above in mind, idiosyncrasies pop up.

- We do not standardize phonetic words., i.e., transliteration
- Oxford Commas may or may not be in use.
- Voice and tense will shift.
- Italics are used for less common Hebrew terms. They may help a reader know that they are not alone in being unfamiliar with a term.

A Note on Hyperlinks

This book is being shared in a variety of formats, including print. We encourage you to head to https://www.exploringjudaism.org/ and check out the physical version of this PDF, if you would like to have a copy at the table with you.

Please note that the print versions of these essays are slightly different.

ON THE SEDER AS A LIVING EXPERIENCE

Rabbi Lauren Tuchman

Not Just Recounting, But Reenacting

On seder night, we embark on a holy commemorative journey through the Haggadah as we move spiritually and temporally from degradation to praise. We do not merely recount by rote our journey out of *Mitzrayim*, Egypt, out of the narrowness to a wide expanse, but we engage in holy reenactment of the experience.

In Mishnah *Pesachim* 10:5, it is taught that in every generation, every single one of us is obligated to see ourselves as though we, too, went out of Egypt. We aren't only recounting the origin story of our ancestors, passed down generation after generation. We are part of the holy collectivity. We are active participants, not passive observers.

The Telling that we ritually experience on *Pesach* is not only about remembering our people's foundational story. Indeed, this story is so central that we are asked to recall it every day of our lives. Jewish liturgy makes mention of it in the morning and the evening. Each holiday is referred to as a *Zecher*—a remembrance—of the exodus. Those who wrap tefillin bind these sacred words to their bodies. It is so central that we access it using as many sensory vehicles as are available to us.

Truly, *Pesach* is such a momentous event in spiritual terms that it is our duty to be actively shaping this experience for ourselves in every generation.

We move from the narrow place to one of wide expanse, a place devoid of G-d consciousness to one suffused with it. We move from a sense of degradation to praise, of owning our own narrative, no longer allowing others to define or shape it for us. We think about what represents *Mitzrayim* in our own lives. What are those things that we cannot seem to free ourselves from? What would it mean for us to find a sense of liberation and possibility after years, perhaps, of feeling weighted down by story, by fear, by expectation that is far greater than we are as individuals yet impacts us so intimately?

In every generation, we are each obligated to perceive ourselves as if we, too, left Egypt. The promises G-d makes to our ancestors,

which we recount on seder night apply to us as much as they did to those who came before. Our physical and social locations as a people have undergone tremendously radical shifts over the generations and continue to do so in our own day.

Pesach has carried our people through trials and tribulations, through times of great joy and ecstasy.

Our calendar, with its emphasis on the spiral of time, encourages us to return, again and again, to the essential theological truth. We, too, were there, a part of the story. We participated in the awesomeness that was the exodus, and as such, we are enjoined to bring its power into our lives; we do so in an embodied way so that it does not become a rote, stultified experience. Ideally, we bring this power with us into how we show up in the world around us.

We know that this leave-taking is multifaceted, as relevant to us on the personal level as it is on the collective. So, how do we actualize this beautiful idea from the Mishnah on a personal level? Maybe we choose one thing this Pesach we yearn to break free from. Maybe we set modest goals for ourselves. My anxiety might not vanish overnight, perhaps, or perhaps this one gnarly habit I have will remain with me. Yet, I can set an intention to embody the liberative possibility of choosing to live or act or show up in a unique way.

I can spiritually imagine and embody a future rich with the possibility of reemergence and rebirth by recalling that I, too, left Egypt, and so did we all. Our *Sedarim* are not meant to be rote, tired exercises in reciting lines that may not have meaning for us. They are, instead, about embodying the theological radicalism of our tradition. We move from degradation to praise, from narrowness to expanse in every generation, in large ways and in small ways.

May it be so.

PASSOVER: AN INVITATION TO GET FREE

Rabbi Kerry Chaplin

Passover, in Hebrew *Pesach*, is the holiday of getting free. The Israelites left slavery in Egypt, and we, too, are individually commanded to get free. As *Rabban* Gamliel teaches: "In every generation, a person must regard themselves as though they personally had gone out of Egypt."

This commandment is not an intellectual exercise. It's personal. It's a spiritual invitation to ask ourselves: "To what or whom am I enslaved? And am I willing to get free?"

These can be scary questions to ask. After all, if I am enslaved to, say, my anger or resentments or my desire for approval, or if I'm enslaved to my work or drugs or alcohol, then what? Once I know what I am enslaved to, I become responsible for what comes next.

And responsibility is scary. But responsibility is also how I get free.

Not everyone is willing to get free. A *midrash*, a rabbinic story, teaches that not all of the Israelites chose to leave Egypt. Not even the majority chose to leave! Only twenty percent of the enslaved Israelites chose to leave Egypt.

In hindsight, we might ask: why didn't they go!? Pharaoh was killing their children and working them cruelly! And they didn't have to do it alone – even God was ready to help them! What could have held them back? Why choose to stay enslaved?

Because they knew slavery, it was all they'd ever known for generations, and no matter how destructive it was, they found comfort in it.

Are you willing to give up the comfort, the reward, that comes from the thing to which you're enslaved?

Am I willing to give up the rush of power that comes from my anger or the pride I feel when I meet my parents' expectations? Am I willing to give up the financial security of a job that deadens my soul?

Spiritual preparation for Passover means asking these questions of ourselves and answering them as honestly as possible.

It is a deep soul-searching that calls on us to look into the nooks

and crannies of our soul to face parts of ourselves we often don't like or don't want to see. Like the search for hametz, when we search our kitchens and couch cushions for leavening and bread products, we also search our souls for the crumbs of slavery – not to dwell there, but to get free.

Pesach is an invitation to get free. How? Be honest, open, and willing.

Below are three self-facilitated rituals to help you get free from enslavement and to prepare spiritually for Pesach.

Journal or draw your answers to these questions:

- To what or whom am I enslaved?
- What is the reward for my enslavement?
- Am I willing to give up that reward to get free?

Clean your home of *hametz* and imagine cleaning out old behaviors and resentments like cobwebs that keep you stuck.

Write down the slavery you are leaving in a few words. Burn it when you burn your hametz or at any time before Pesach (please practice fire safety!). Invite friends or family to do this ritual with you. If you like, you can share what you write with one another. It is powerful to get free as a group.

CLIMATE DISRUPTION AND PASSOVER

Yaira Robinson

One of the things that has always struck me about the Passover story is that it isn't just Israelites who are delivered from Egypt. There are Egyptians and others—a "mixed multitude"—who flee with them. This diverse group of people travel together from here on out. They experience the parting of the Sea of Reeds together, share in the gift of manna in the desert, and stand together at the foot of Mt. Sinai, trembling in awe at shared revelation.

As a person who converted to Judaism, it has always been meaningful to me that our origin story is one of a diverse, inclusive community.

That non-Israelites were part of the refugee exodus from slavery and persecution and that everyone shared in the Sinai moment tells me that all who want to be part of our community are welcome. No, more than welcome—we belong!

During Passover, we are commanded to retell the story of fleeing persecution with the few items of clothes and household items we could grab on our rush out the door, without time even for the bread to rise. In our retelling, we are invited to imagine ourselves in the story as though we are the ones who experienced suffering and were freed, escaping an oppressive, narrow place to seek a new home in a new land.

One of the biggest challenges that our current age of climate disruption presents is that of people being forced to leave their homes, often with the few items of clothes and household items they can grab on their way out the door to seek a new home in a new land.

They now hope for what our ancestors did: a place where they can be free of oppression and threat, where they can find food and fresh water for their families, where they can live in safety and peace.

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency,

> Hazards resulting from the increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, such as abnormally heavy rainfall, prolonged droughts, desertification, environmental degradation, or sea-level rise and cyclones are already causing an average of more than 20 million people to

> leave their homes and move to other areas in their countries each year.

Not everyone who flees their home can or will stay in their country of origin.

The Conservative Movement has developed a Climate Action Plan and is part of the Jewish Climate Leadership Initiative. This brings me hope! Taking action to prevent further climate disruption is something we can all work towards at home and work, in our synagogues and neighborhoods, and in the voting booth.

Some climate disruption is already set in motion, though. The disasters are happening and will continue to come. So, we have a choice.

How will we respond to people who just can't stay in what was their home anymore?

This Passover, let's do more than remember our refugee origin story, imagining ourselves as having been miraculously freed from slavery. Let's challenge ourselves to expand our understanding of what community can be and of who we include in our circle of concern and care. Climate disruption is making some places unlivable, and it is only logical that families will flee.

Where will they go? Who will help them? Where will they find sanctuary and a new home?

There are ways we can work to create a welcome for immigrants and refugees now, and Passover is a great time to begin. Here are some ideas:

- Connect our ancient story of liberation with the journey toward freedom that so many immigrants and refugees experience today. HIAS regularly publishes a Passover Haggadah that you can find on their website.
- As you gather with friends, family, and community members to celebrate, raise the climate refugee crisis as a topic of conversation. Maybe someone you know is already volunteering to help welcome immigrants; maybe talking about it will inspire a next step. It is always more fun to volunteer with others in community!
- Set an extra seat at your Seder to represent a welcome place at

the table for a refugee.

We have lived the refugee story. Our first taste of freedom and peoplehood was as a mixed multitude. May we be among the first to respond to people fleeing oppression and climate disruption today with support, welcome, and the sweet gift of hope.

ON PASSOVER, WE ARE ALL JEWS BY CHOICE

Andi Kahclamat

My first-ever Passover seder as a Jew-by-Choice felt like a missed opportunity to choose G-d.

The Torah tells us to remember our liberation from slavery in every generation as if we were there: "And you will explain to your child on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt'" (Exodus 13:8, Etz Hayim translation).

Putting aside the silliness of beloved modern seder traditions—"plagues" of rubber frogs and boisterous renditions of Had Gadya—we're meant to put ourselves into the shoes (sandals?) of the Israelites as they undergo the unexpectedly painful transformation from an oppressed people to a liberated nation.

Part of the role play is the decision to choose G-d and—maybe even more difficult—accept that G-d already chose us back. On that night, we are all Jews by choice.

Attending my first seder as a conversion student was a wild experience. Reading instructional articles did very little to prepare me for the experience (or for the overwhelming gut-stoppage of Matzah, but that's another story). I had imagined a solemn affair by candlelight, lingering in the bitter saltiness of metaphorical tears, a moment of compassionate grief for the spilled blood of the Egyptians, a soulful *Dayenu* as we truly contemplate the miracles a loving G-d bestowed upon a degraded people.

What I discovered around that table of born-Jews was essentially a dinner party bookended with a few humorous rituals. Don't get me wrong, I will be forever grateful to the family that invited a brand-new baby almost-Jew to their seder. This world doesn't have enough joy in it, and any opportunity for mirth should be seized. But secretly, I found myself disappointed as the host did a speed run through the Haggadah, seemingly bored with the material and anxious to eat.

It felt like we took for granted what the Lord did for us.

As I walked my conversion path, I felt as if I was undergoing my own personal Exodus. I started out operating under generations of trauma and spiritual pain (particularly as a Native American descended from residential school survivors who suffered tremendous religious

trauma). It was painful, but it was all I knew—in a way, it felt safer than the unknown wilderness.

I had been intrigued by Judaism for a long time, but it wasn't until the absolute darkest moment of my life that I understood clearly the journey I needed to take. When I was just 31 years old, my husband died unexpectedly. In the span of 17 excruciating minutes, everything I thought I knew about the world evaporated. Grief draped my being like unbreakable chains.

If you have ever lost someone, you know the scream in your heart for liberation from hopelessness and darkness. Grief hardens its grip against you like the Pharaoh.

Some weeks later, having exhausted the library's entire collection of "girl power!" widowhood books (ugh), I came across a rabbi's essay on rebuilding hope after widowhood, with some imaginative *midrash* around several Psalms. It was the first thing I had spiritually connected with since my husband's death. I found myself on the proverbial shores of the Red Sea, the waves parted in front of me, and I had to choose whether to turn back to the pain I knew—pain that would surely kill me if I returned to it—or trust in G-d to follow an impossible-seeming path to unknown territory.

Since you're reading this, you know what I chose.

To wrap up the metaphor: The rest of the formal conversion process felt a lot like traveling the wilderness, with the *Beit Din* and *mikvah* symbolizing entering the Promised Land … not actually a destination, but just the beginning of a whole new journey of defining and redefining what it means to choose to be Jewish.

Passover is our annual opportunity to remember not just our ancestors' liberation from Egypt, but our own liberation from our personal Egypts. It's our chance to remember all of the moments we chose G-d again, reaffirming the choice to be a Jew. And, hardest of all, it's our chance to remember that G-d chose us then and chooses us still, no matter how unworthy or degraded we may feel.

We will retell our story again "because of what the Lord did for me when I went free."

ALL WHO ARE HUNGRY AND IN NEED, COME CELEBRATE PESACH

Rabbi Daniel Isaak

The unstated magic of the Passover Seder is that the preferred venue is the intimacy of the home. No rabbinic oversight. No synagogue facility. Every Seder becomes a function of the leader's creativity and the engagement of those gathered around the table.

Thus, no two *Sedarim* are alike.

Sure, the Haggadah provides guidance, but while some might extend well past midnight, another will suffice with the barest of basic highlights. Traditional songs may be combined with newly minted silly ones. Some might be entirely child-oriented, while others engage in deep discussions on the meaning of liberation in our time. Each of us invariably brings to the Seder our own childhood memories of Grandpa Joe annually turning beet red when we ate the bitter herbs or Aunt Ellen, whose attention would be exclusively attuned to whether the brisket was dry or overcooked. Would the Matzah balls be floaters or sinkers? Who would find the *afikomen*? We smile as we hear the same family jokes as last year and the year before. Serious, after all, it's the Seder, but hopefully guided with a light hand.

We extend an invitation, "All who are hungry, let them come and eat. All who are in need, let them come celebrate Pesach" at the outset of the proceedings. We fulfill that Mitzvah by including those who might not have a Seder to attend. Many synagogues solicit families willing to host guests, then match them with those hoping to be invited. In this way, we increase the number who can enjoy the sense of celebration with fellow Jews, sing *Dayenu* together, and enjoy a festive meal in a joyous family setting.

Yet, always be prepared for the unexpected.

A number of years ago, after the recitation of the Four Questions, one such guest inquired if she could recite the Four Questions in Hawaiian. Well, of course. After she did so, I asked, "why not?" Being a speaker of Hawaiian, she brought this most unusual translation to our table. She explained that growing up, each year, a family member was assigned to bring the Four Questions in another language. Confident

that while visiting the mainland she would be attending a Seder, she thought to continue this creative family custom. Behold, a new tradition!

So, the Passover Seder becomes a pedagogical evening. Some learn about our Exodus master story. Others consider what it means that in each generation we are obligated to see ourselves as if we personally were liberated from Egypt. Young ones discover that they are welcome to participate in an adult event. We listen as questions are encouraged, as everyone's thoughts are valued, as we fulfill the all-important Mitzvah of hospitality.

Finally, we end as we do only at the end of Yom Kippur and at the Passover Seder: Next year in Jerusalem!

SLAVERY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND FAMILY HISTORY

Rabbi Heather Miller

The Pilgrimage to the South with the Racial Justice Subcommittee of the Social Justice Commission (of the Rabbinical Assembly) was a different type of trip for me than it was for the other participants. As the only Black Jew, there was a lot of emotional preparation that was required for me to visit what is sacred land in an entirely different way.

Our itinerary led us through some of the places where my people, for better or worse, became American. My family history started in the South–according to my "23andMe" results, it is where my Nigerian and West African (including Ghanaian, Senagambian–Fula and Wolof from the New Orleans area) ancestors were enslaved by the 13.4% British ancestry that courses through my veins and that has shown up in the eyes of my youngest child.

For me, this trip was not just an exploration of topics from slavery to mass incarceration and the implications on our Social Justice work as Jews; it was an exploration of my own family history.

Our visit to the Whitney Plantation Museum was visceral. As we were whizzing by tree-filled marshes, all I could think was, "This is where my people ran and hid."

As marshland gave way to fields, my thoughts and physical reactions began to change. I vividly recall a clenching in my chest and my spirit saying, "We're here," minutes before seeing the sign that confirmed that we had arrived. It rained throughout that day, and every time the sky opened up, I wondered if that's when I would have wanted to flee when the sound would have covered my steps. The layout of the plantation demonstrated just how challenging escape would have been; it all became very real, and that was only day one.

After unpacking the layers and complexity of enslavement, doing the math of the monetary value of enslaved people and the relative amount of acreage each body was forced to work, visiting the site of the Clotilda; reading a wall of newspaper clippings advertising and celebrating lynching of Black bodies and visiting the Nation Memorial for Peace and Justice (coined the 'Lynching Memorial') I was pulled into myself and I'm still not quite sure if I have fully re-emerged.

The person that I was prior to this pilgrimage is forever changed.

At several points during the trip, I wondered what this all meant about the work that so many of us have dedicated ourselves to and what it meant about the obligation we carry as a Jewish people.

In 1861, Rabbi Raphall gave a sermon that was also printed on the front page of newspapers, preaching his biblically defended support of the institution of American chattel slavery. When Rabbi Einhorn published a rebuttal and appealed to his fellow Jews not to allow Rabbi Raphall's position to be the voice of American Jewry, he was removed from his pulpit. This history is part of our reckoning.

There's a famous picture that we use of Rabbi Heschel standing with MLK, but we don't talk about the sign in the background advertising a store owned by a prominent local Jewish leader who was staunchly anti-integration. We don't tell the story of the resistance that Jewish leaders received for joining the Civil Rights movement. Those stories are also part of our reckoning.

Part of our trip included a visit to a synagogue in Montgomery, Alabama, where we were treated to the best of Southern hospitality and to stories of the parts of their own history of action and inaction during the Civil Rights movement that they had worked through as a community. "We could have done more" was something that they were honest about, and I think that's an important part of this work. What internal work are we doing both as individuals and as communities that holds us accountable to the part that we played (as actors, bystanders or upstanders) in the painful racial history of our respective countries?

Maimonides and Rabbi Ruttenberg teach us that we have reached the final level of Teshuvah when, in the moment that we are confronted with a similar situation, we respond with all the new learning we attained throughout the process.

Though we are each at different points in this journey, with what we know now, how are we intentionally moving through the world differently? When we recite the Shema, how do we include these learnings in what we teach our children so they grow up with a different set of tools? What is the story we will tell them?

This work is messy, and it is raw, and we will get things wrong,

but in order to move forward in this work, we must do so together, with a commitment to a shared vision that includes these types of actionable reflections. And in order to achieve that vision, we must be able to hold each other's histories and feel mutual obligation and accountability for each other's futures.

If I'm being honest, Pesach is a holiday that I struggle with because of the overlay of my own family history with enslavement and liberation in the United States.

This year, I'm starting a new practice to settle the mourning in my soul.

Upon our return, I said Kaddish for Marthie and Rosetta, two names of enslaved women that we've been able to trace our ancestry back to so far. Marthie had four children by her enslaver, and when he died, she became the property of his son, by whom she had three more. Rosetta had 11 children by her enslaver and one by his son before she died.

It is because of the horrors that happened to their bodies that I get to live freely as a mother, by choice, in mine. Lost were names, languages, cultures, and so much life, and honoring them in this way brings me a level of peace.

In my skin, I wear a future that my ancestors may have not even been able to dream of, and in my heart, I hold their legacy. I do not take either truth for granted and being able to explore all of this through the framework of my Judaism, alongside others who were wrestling in different ways, was a blessing. It was a very powerful four days.

A PASSOVER PREPARATION CHECKLIST

The Exploring Judaism Team

What do you need to do to prepare for Passover?

We know that preparing for Passover can feel like a daunting task. There are so many things to plan for! Food, utensils, guests! With this handy list of preparation steps, you will be fully ready for Passover in no time! You can go through the list in order or find the section by a particular part of the preparation process.

Download the list right here.

Initial Preparations

Realizing that Passover is less than 30 days away - the first step is to breathe. It will be ok. Now, you can begin by writing down your goals for your Passover experience and the Seder if you are hosting one.

What kind of experience do you want to have?

Create a plan to consume perishable hametz items gradually. Your kitchen is full of delicious foods, but not all of them are kosher for Passover. Now is the best time to plan which foods you will eat, and which will be stored and sold.

If you are hosting, reach out to your seder attendees. Make a list of potential attendees and confirm the night and time for the seder and who will come. If you are not hosting a seder, you can check in with your hosts about what you can bring or how to help.

Start talking about Passover and the seder with your household. This is a perfect time to start to talk about this with kids and get people excited about the foods, rituals, and activities that will happen.

Watch a movie or read something Passover related! It doesn't all have to be seder-related to get yourself in the mood. Maybe you'll watch "The Prince of Egypt" or the classic "10 Commandments" with Charlton Heston. Maybe you can review the story of the Exodus in the Torah itself. Or in the Book of Joshua chapter 24 for a digest version.

Identify which Haggadah/ot you're going to use. The Rabbinical Assembly's Feast of Freedom can be purchased on the RA's website. You may want to order early to guarantee you have them on hand, but there are many wonderful Haggadot worth exploring. New ones are published every year.

Kitchen and Home Preparations

Identify where you are going to store the *hametz* that you sell. It i tough to avoid your *hametz* if it is mixed-in with everything else. Finding a cabinet or room to store your *hametz* that is out of the way and won't be seen during the holiday is helpful.

Start cleaning and organizing living spaces. While there will be time for a proper Passover cleaning, this is an excellent opportunity to do general cleaning around the house. Cleaning cabinets and clearing *hametz* will be easier if the house is in good shape. You might even find a lone Cheerio in a couch cushion!

Check your kitchen and storage for Passover-friendly utensils and dishware. Some folks have utensils and dishware that are easily *kashered* for Passover, while others have an entirely different set of dishes. Take some time to inventory what you have, what you might want to switch, and what you want to store. (Learn more about kashrut here.) Some folks will use paper plates, reusable and plastic silverware, or purchase inexpensive serving utensils rather than purchasing an entirely new set of dishes. We should always be conscious of our environmental impact and make thoughtful decisions.

Spiritual Reflecting

Begin to reflect on the meaning of Passover and personal liberation. We recommend three essays in particular, which can be found online, "Passover: An Invitation to Get Free" (also included in this collection), "The Four Children and Racial Justice," and "Spiritually Cleaning the Hametz Within Our Souls."

Take time to journal about your own "Egypt" and personal growth. The word for 'Egypt' in the Torah is *Mitzrayim*. Egypt is a narrow country focused on the Nile. Many teachers interpret the process of leaving Egypt as an escape from the 'narrow places.' We all experience these narrow places in our lives. This is an opportunity to reflect on those challenges and how you might find an "exodus" from them.

Engage in acts of kindness and charity. It says in the Haggadah, "Let all who are hungry come and eat." While this can be a powerful encouragement about who you invite to your seder, it is also a potent reminder that we can and should give *tzedakah* at this time. Traditionally, a collection called – *kimcha d'pischa* – Passover Flour was taken to help purchase the precious Kosher for Passover *shemurah* flour. There are many wonderful ways to provide food and resources

within your community. If you need help figuring out where to donate, ask your local rabbi.

Do some community learning. Many local communities host Passover- or seder-themed study sessions. Check out your local synagogue for more information. You can also find local Conservative/Masorti communities on Exploring Judaism.

Seder Preparation

Confirm attendance and dietary restrictions with guests. So, you know how much food to make (or how much extra you want to have afterward). This is also a great time to consider allergies, alternatives to alcohol, and other such adjustments to suit your guest list.

Plan your Passover menu. Take time to review your favorite (or new) Passover recipes. Then, you can make an initial shopping list. If you want to be extra organized, plan the cooking schedule and "cook and freeze in advance" schedule.

If you're going to cook in advance, be thoughtful about the kosher-for-Passover status of your kitchen. Don't forget that Passover is eight days long! Make sure to plan for the rest of the week, too.

Think about the vibe you want to create for your seder. We recommend three essays, which can be found online: "How to Make a Seder for Everyone" (also included in this collection) and "Why is Diversity Important at the Passover Seder?" "Including non-Jewish guests at our Seder: A reflection."

Begin collecting supplies for activities. Whether or not you are hosting children, there are many ways to gamify and enliven the Seder. Do you need little plastic jumping frogs? Do you need bingo boards? We have a series of articles on engaging children on Exploring Judaism.

Purchase or prepare Passover Seder plate items. Make sure you have all of your Seder Plate items. You will need the roasted shank bone (*zeroa*), egg (*beitzah*), your bitter herbs (*maror*), your apple or date chutney (*haroset*), and your green vegetable (*karpas*). Some plates also include a spot for a bitter vegetable (*hazeret*). Don't forget the Matzah!

It is also a good time to check your Judaica and see if have what you need. Kiddush cups, a seder plate itself, and cups for Elijah and Miriam. If this isn't the year you want to buy any of these – no problem any plates and cups will work.

Kashering and the Final Countdown

Make a *Kashering* plan. *Kashering* can be a big task and it is important to set aside time to plan how you're going to do it. We have a number of guides on *Kashering* on Exploring Judaism and the Rabbinical Assembly publishes a guide each year.

Consume any remaining perishable *hametz* and store the non-perishable *hametz*. Now that we're in the final stretch, it is time to finish eating all of that *hametz* and put the rest of it away. Some folks put it all in one cabinet and tape it shut, while others like to put it in a room. If you plan on taking the *hametz* to the house of the person who is buying it, keep that in mind, too.

Review the Haggadah and create a seder plan. It is generally a good idea to read through the Haggadah and any additional materials you want to share so you can plan. A Seder almost never goes the way you thought it would, so prepare to be flexible. Think about who might be a good fit for each section. Don't forget, we want people to ask good questions! A great conversation is well worth getting "off track."

Now is a great time to assign parts or responsibilities to your guests so they have time to plan and mentally prepare themselves for reading in public. If you have songs you like, you can usually find a version online. You can send those to your guests as a refresher.

Plan the seder table, seating, and other space-related concerns. Depending on your space, you may want to figure how where you are going to do the seder. Will you all be sitting at the table? Will you be sitting on couches or with pillows? Take some time to think through the logistics of your seder experience.

Begin the first day of cleaning and *kashering*. Depending on the size of your kitchen, how much you're *kashering*, and what kind of lead time you like to give yourself, this can be a single- or multiple-day process. It might be good to complete the *kashering* a few days before Passover, so you have plenty of time to cook without undue stressed.

To *kasher* something, it needs to have been cleaned and left unused for a 24-hour period. Setting aside two days might be useful. If you need a guide, you can find them on Exploring Judaism.

Continue with the second day of deep cleaning and *kashering*. With everything cleaned and ready to go, you can ensure your utensils and surfacers are prepared for Passover. It can be good to start this process

early in the day since it can be a bit of a start-and-stop process of waiting for things to boil or heat up.

Prepare non-perishable Passover dishes in advance. If you already have a plan for what food you'll make, and if your kitchen is already *kashered*, it is an excellent idea to make some of the dishes in advance, so you do not have to rush. Putting pre-prepared meals that you can just take out of the freezer will make your week of Passover much easier.

Sell your hametz. We recommend contacting a local congregation and rabbi to facilitate this process. You can find a local Conservative/Masorti congregation on Exploring Judaism. While you are at it, it is also a great time to find out when the last *hametz* can be eaten and plan for lunch tomorrow. Confirm the timing with your local rabbi.

The night before Passover, participate in *bedikat hametz*. On the night before Passover begins (the night before the first seder), there is a custom to inspect your house for hametz using a feather and a spoon. This can be a powerful ritual and a fun one to do with children. You can check out our one-pager on how to do this on Exploring Judaism.

Final preparations and cooking for your seder! You made it! Your seder is about to begin, and you are finished.

HOW TO INCORPORATE KITNIYOT INTO YOUR PASSOVER

Nathalie Ross

Being Sephardi in an Ashkenazi world, especially on Passover

When I moved from Montreal, Canada, to the United States, I was happy to be a passive participant and guest at someone else's Passover Seder. I quickly realized that many of the traditional dishes I grew up with in my Sephardic household (*kofte de prassa* or *yaprekas*) would not be served at a typical American Passover celebration. I sometimes felt like I was "cheating" by including rice or corn in my holiday observance.

I settled in the U.S., married, had children, and chose a Jewish day school to send them to in our small North Carolina town. My kids enjoyed celebrating holidays with their classmates and especially loved the school-wide Seder, where they feasted on Matzah ball soup, and charoset made with apples and walnuts. Humm, apples? In charoset? Where are the dates and raisins, the way my mother always prepared it?

When my oldest kids were in kindergarten, our first night Seder plans fell through, and I was tasked with hosting our family's Seder. I planned my menus, and my kids shrieked that they were excited about Matzah ball soup. Wait, Matzah ball soup? I've never tasted it, let alone made it! To my kids, Passover means brisket, mac' n' cheese farfel, spinach Mina, and jeweled rice. Over time, I have grown accustomed to making Ashkenazi dishes while staying true to my Sephardic identity and foodways. Matzah ball soup is still an acquired taste, but I serve it side by side with Harira, a Moroccan lentil and chickpea soup.

Are you kitniyot curious?

When planning our Passover seder menu (and, if you're organized, your meals for the week), most of us are either team kitniyot or not. We often prepare favorite or customary childhood foods or feel a need to include dishes we think of as "must-have Passover foods" (I'm looking at you, gefilte fish). Many Ashkenazim abstain from kitniyot and consider their Sephardi friends the "lucky ones." However, the Conservative movement removed the prohibition

against consuming kitniyot in 2015. Nonetheless, it is common for Ashkenazi Jews to avoid kitniyot during Passover.
(See more: What are Kitniyot and when can I eat it?: On the 2015 Kitniyot Ruling)

What are kitniyot?

Kitniyot are a category of foods that include legumes (think lentils), pulses (most pea-related items such as chickpeas, soybeans, peanuts), seeds (sesame or poppy, to name two), and cereals (corn, rice, buckwheat, to name a few). Kitniyot are not *hametz* – to be *hametz* a food must contain or be derived from one of the five grains mentioned in the bible -wheat, spelt, barley, oats, and rye.

Traditionally, Ashkenazim strictly avoided kitniyot foods to ensure one did not mistakenly consume *hametz*. Kitniyot have been approved for use during Passover, so why are many of us scared to include these foods in our seder and meals?

First, it might be hard to change our mindset around foods that were once considered "forbidden." If you're reading this, consider it your permission to snack on hummus and carrots during the Seder (no one said you can't nosh while reading the Haggadah) or to reach for popcorn as an easy Passover treat.

Second, if your family hasn't regularly featured kitniyot during Passover, you might be confused about what to include and, more importantly, how to prepare it.

Lastly, sometimes, feeling comfortable with the consumption of kitniyot has much to do with what other people might think, especially in public and communal spaces. In many families, "keeping Passover" is an integral part of religious observance and Jewish identity, and the suggestion that you might be transgressing the *halachic* rules and conventions of the holiday is hard to shake.

At the outset, contact your rabbi or rabbinic authority to clarify whether a food item is permissible. Most "Kosher for Passover" foods in your local or Kosher grocery store will not contain kitniyot, so you must make informed choices and read the nutrition labels of foods you purchase without Passover certification. The easiest way to incorporate kitniyot in your Passover rotation is to stick to single-ingredient items such as rice, corn, and kasha (buckwheat), as well as condiments like

wheat-free tamari or soy sauce and spreads like natural peanut butter.

Incorporating kitniyot in your Passover meals can enrich your Seder and celebrations and expand the variety of dishes you embrace.

This year, consider placing some hummus or baba ghanouj as dips on your Seder table. In addition to your potato kugel, why not try a basmati rice dish topped with fried onions and toasted pine nuts? Do you love kasha? Why not add a cup of cooked buckwheat to your favorite chopped vegetable salad? My favorite easy snack is to place ¼ cup of dried corn kernels in a paper bag and cook on HIGH in the microwave for 3 minutes (or until you hear the popping stop). You can eat it plain or add Kosher for Passover seasonings like onion salt.

Every Passover, I make my grandmother's lentils for the second night of Seder, and there are always leftovers to munch on during the week. My favorite part of these lentils is they can be eaten on their own, with rice, or repurposed as the base in vegan shepherd's pie. Give it a try!

Rosy's Passover Lentils

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups dry lentils, preferably black or green (French lentils are my favorite)
- Two medium white onions
- 4 TBS olive oil
- One can of tomato sauce, 15 oz.
- Optional: 2 vegetable-based, Kosher-for-Passover, bouillon cubes
- 2 ½ cups water

Instructions:

1. In a food processor, crush onions until totally liquified.
2. Add onions and fry lightly in olive oil in a large saucepan until onions develop a slightly golden color and are softened.
3. Add lentils.
4. Add bouillon cubes, if using.
5. Add one can of tomato sauce.
6. Add salt and pepper to taste.
7. Add water and stir.
8. Cover the saucepan with a tight-fitting lid and let it simmer under low heat for approximately 1 hour.
9. Check for consistency and taste, and add water if lentils are not fully cooked and water has evaporated.

*If you have an Instant Pot, preheat it on the Sauté setting and fry the onion until it is soft and lightly golden (3-4 minutes). Close the lid and change the setting to pressure cook on HIGH for 14 minutes. Let the pressure release, check the vent, and open the lid.

Serve warm on its own or with rice. Makes great leftovers!

HOW TO MAKE A SEDER FOR EVERYONE

Rabbi Lauren Henderson

My all-time favorite seder – and my most diverse – was in 2014. I was in rabbinical school at JTS, living in an intentional interfaith community of five women that we affectionately called "The Womb." Our seder that year included all my immediate family members (Jewish and Jewish-adjacent), a number of my Christian and Muslim roommates and their partners, and a bunch of rabbinical students and other Jewish friends.

I was a little nervous that this random group of folks would have a hard time blending – some of these people were deeply knowledgeable about the Passover seder traditions, and others were experiencing seder for the very first time.

But of course, the story of Passover draws on universal human experiences and embeds them within particular Jewish language and rituals – and the Haggadah itself tells us that this experience is meant to be highly personal and relatable:

> In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see themself as if they left Egypt, as it is stated; 'And you shall explain to your child on that day: For the sake of this, did the Lord do [this] for me in my going out of Egypt.' (Exodus 13:8)

We all know something about attempting to leave behind hardship and constriction, even if we haven't known literal slavery in our lives, and it's that lived experience that the seder is trying to evoke.

At that particular seder, after the first cup of wine and the initial introductions, we spent an hour sharing stories of times when we, too, have experienced a sense of being stuck, trapped, enslaved as it were. I remember the story of one person feeling like their career was keeping them inside a never-ending hamster wheel, stuck trying to provide the same quality of life for their family in an increasingly impossible and unfulfilling job market.

Another person shared about their coming out experience and how they gradually had built a life where they could be seen fully as they saw themself.

Turns out, there were universal truths in these stories that

everyone could relate to – and there was a palpable feeling in the room by the time we got to dinner that we had connected to something transcendent and universal. Even the lifelong seder attendees didn't miss the parts of the seder we "skipped." And the seder rituals that we did perform took on new resonance when seen through the lens of the stories that people shared.

So here are a few tips to think about as you're planning your seder this year:

1 - Define a bold purpose for your gathering.

The key to hosting a successful seder "for everyone," as Priya Parker emphasizes in her book, The Art of Gathering, is to articulate a bold purpose in gathering. Not just to say, "This is what we do every year at this time," but to discern why you're gathering right now. Or in other words – *mah nishtanah halailah hazeh*? What's different about THIS particular night this year? What's bringing these particular people to this table?

Are you gathering because this particular group hasn't seen each other in three years, and everyone's making it a top priority to reconnect in person? Is this night about creating or strengthening relationships? Or perhaps about helping your guests breathe new life into ancient rituals that have gotten a little stale?

And practically speaking – is your group adults-only, or are there kids and teens around the table? Are they comfortable reading and/or singing in Hebrew? What supports will make your seder accessible to everyone around your table?

Think about Hebrew and transliteration, sending recordings of songs you might sing out to everyone in advance so they can listen and prepare. Consider setting expectations for your guests in advance for how long the seder will be and what they can do to prepare.

Knowing your purpose in gathering will help you make clearer decisions about what elements of the seder are essential to include and which parts you can skip over – see more on that below.

2 - Map the journey that you want to take people on.

The seder can often feel like a jumbled collection of songs, rituals, and readings that don't quite seem to flow, but if you look closely, the Haggadah spells out very clearly the larger journey that it's taking us on. Just before we bless the second cup of wine, the Haggadah states:

> Therefore, we are obligated to thank and praise…the One who made all these miracles for our ancestors and for us: the Holy One brought us out from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to celebration of a festival, from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption. And let us sing a new song before the Divine, Halleluyah!

The arc of the seder takes us on a journey beginning with our own moments of mourning and suffering and bringing us to a place of hope and possibility. You, as a host, might think about how you want to help your guests connect personally to that journey: perhaps through sharing personal stories of times when they've experienced that kind of transformation or through bringing objects or symbols of that journey that have been meaningful to them.

3 - Highlight the elements of the seder that spotlight the journey and give yourself permission to gloss over or omit the parts that are less relevant.

The Haggadah text isn't meant to be a script where every word must be followed – despite what you may think. Make time in advance of your seder to filter the readings and rituals through your bold purpose and see which ones best serve the purpose in gathering.

If you're choosing a discussion-heavy seder, you might use the four cups as moments to prompt your guests to share a story or respond to a prompt – this "say-der" guide from R' Amichai Lau-Lavie at Lab/Shul is a great starting point. During the extra-long *maggid* (storytelling) section, you might choose to depart from the Haggadah altogether and tell the story of the Exodus by having each person add a line, one at a time.

Include the parts that feel most essential to you, and feel empowered to leave other rituals on the shelf for next time.

4 - Share the load

It takes a team to pull off a seder, so enlist helpers in advance. If you're going to be facilitating conversation at the table, make sure you've got a friend or family member who can oversee the food so you're not scrambling to heat up the brisket right in the middle of the conversation.

5 - Take care of your guests: feed them along the way!

Nobody likes to be hangry during the seder; impatience and hunger put a real damper on deep conversation. After you say the blessing over *karpas* (parsley/green vegetable), feel free to serve copious amounts of vegetables and dips for your guests so they don't starve.

As a seder host, the best thing you can do is to read the room along the way and be willing to pivot as necessary – trust your gut and improvise as needed. May this year's seder(s) be full of connection and deep insight, and may they ignite a spark toward liberation and transformation.

FURY AND FERMENTATION

Rabbi Dan Orenstein

A Hasidic Teaching for Pesach

Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel (1748-1825) was also known as the *Oheiv Yisrael*, "The Lover of the people of Israel." (He was the great, great grandfather of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel.) Stories abound of his gentleness, deep love, and compassion for all his fellow Jews. This is one of them, as retold by Rabbi Moshe Shlomo Friedman, the Rebbe (grand rabbi) of the Boyaner Hasidic dynasty in New York.

Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz was extremely strict about the laws concerning the removal of *hametz*, leavened food, prior to Pesach. The *Oheiv Yisra*el was less strict. One Pesach, one of Pinchas' grandsons came to visit the *Oheiv Yisrael*'s family. Because he observed his grandfather's stringencies so scrupulously and zealously, he got into a great deal of angry conflict with his host's family during the holiday. The *Oheiv Yisrael* finally took the young man aside and said to him, "You should know that anger is a form of *hametz*, which is forbidden all year round."

Should our anger be a form of *hametz* forbidden year-round?

Rabbi Heschel's response to his Pesach guest feels simplistic and dogmatic. Should our anger be a form of *hametz* forbidden year-round? If everything is from God, including our emotions, how could expressing anger be forbidden to us?

We know well (as I suspect did the *Oheiv Yisrael*) that not all expressions of anger are the same. Further, never expressing anger to achieve a state of perpetual equanimity (a spiritual goal of early Hasidism) often risks allowing our anger to build until it explodes.

I think the *Oheiv Yisrael* wasn't forbidding anger outright, but the anger that results from pride and self-righteousness. Let's look a bit more closely at our story.

The *Oheiv Yisrael* playfully but roundly criticized the young man by alluding to a *halachic* (legal) rule that he would certainly have known: *hametz*, which remains in a Jew's possession during Pesach, is forbidden during the rest of the year.

The biblical prohibition against even owning (let alone eating)

hametz on Pesach is so strict that the Talmudic sages forbade the use of this kind of *hametz* for all time. The rabbi was also hinting at a common trope in Rabbinic and later Hasidic literature.

It compares the overly fastidious, arrogant, and angry sides of our personalities—the parts of us that are "puffed up with pride"—to leavened, risen bread. On Pesach, we try to free ourselves from the "spiritual Egypt" of our anger and arrogance to achieve the humility-that-shuns-harshness symbolized by the lowly, unleavened Matzah.

Our teacher was telling his young guest: "Your fastidious religious piety isn't pious; it isn't even religious. You're busy being so holy and angrily judging everyone in my family about *hametz*. Can't you see what the *hametz* of your anger is doing to you and to the rest of us? You think you're celebrating Pesach? Nonsense! You're stuck in Egypt, now and year-round."

Anger is a tricky emotion.

Used to convey our distress to others in the hope of resolution and reconciliation, anger is an effective tool for getting our needs met and building our relationships. Used to overwhelm, distress, or abuse others, it is an effective tool for corroding relationships and destroying ourselves. Our goal should be to express anger properly and in moderation.

In fact, long before Rabbi Heschel lived, our teacher Maimonides taught that "A person should not be wrathful, easily angered, nor be like the dead, without feeling; rather he should [adopt] an intermediate course, i.e., he should display anger only when the matter is serious enough to warrant it, in order to prevent the matter from recurring" (*Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Human Dispositions 1:4).

With its myriad rules for ridding ourselves of *hametz*, Pesach can be a time of stress that leads to unnecessary anger. With its myriad problems—especially during this very tragic year of 5784—life can inflict stress on us that makes us respond with destructive anger. Rabbi Heschel's advice to us this coming Pesach is sound: Anger from a place of love is not the problem. Anger from a place of "spiritual *hametz*" is what we need to always avoid.

A very happy, kosher, and loving Pesach to us all!

ENGAGING KIDS OF ALL AGES IN THE PASSOVER SEDER

Rabbi Rebecca Rosenthal

"They tried to kill us, we won, let's eat" is the world's shortest Passover Seder, and some people think even that is too long. With so many rituals and traditions, lots of Hebrew, and family and friends of many different backgrounds, engaging children (and adults) of all ages in the Passover Seder can feel daunting. Maybe it is just best to finish as fast as you can?

There is another way! With just a bit of prep work, you can engage everyone at your seder, get kids asking lots of questions, and ensure everyone walks away with Jewish memories to last until next year.

There is a magic that comes with everyone being together, and if things get a little crazy if there are spills, or running around the table, or someone forgets the words to the Four Questions, that is all part of the experience.

Especially in this difficult moment for our people, creating core Jewish memories with your family and friends is the kind of thing that helps our children grow up to be proud, committed, and engaged Jews. We can use the story of Passover and the experience of the seder to draw connections between our ancient texts and our modern world. If engaging your children in this ritual seems daunting, read on. There really is something for everyone in the Passover seder.

Here are my top five tips for engaging children in the Passover seder:

1 - Everyone participates (and prepares), no matter your age.

People always do better if they are prepared, so ask your guests to prepare to participate in the seder. Send a question in advance, ask them to bring something, or even ask people to make decorations for the seder table.

You can ask people to learn some songs by sending around videos, and if you have any kids who go to Hebrew School or Jewish preschool, they will definitely enjoy performing The Frog Song (complete with jumping).

Keep a checklist and make sure everyone speaks at least once during the seder. And, as the host, don't do every job yourself. Make a list of everything that must be done during the evening, from pouring the wine to serving the soup to clearing the table, and then let people pick jobs out of a hat or assign the jobs as you see fit.

2 - Feed people constantly.

We know all kids need snacks, and they don't have to wait for the main course. It can feel like a long time until you get to dinner, but after *karpas* (the green vegetable that comes right at the beginning), you can serve appetizers.

Veggies and dip or fruit are an option, you can also put out candy or chocolate, which should keep kids at the table for a little while. Passover is also a holiday where it is ok (even required) to play with your food. One friend of ours attaches the parsley to mini fishing rods and uses them to dip the parsley in the salt water. Another friend chops up lots of different kinds of fruits and nuts (and even some chocolate) and allows people to make their own *haroset*, as long as it resembles the mortar.

When it comes time to remember the plague of hail, I have heard of families throwing mini marshmallows at one another. Finally, there is a Persian custom of lightly (or not so lightly) slapping your neighbor on the back with scallions during the song Dayenu as a reminder of slavery.

3 - Use the table.

Put something interesting on the table, either in the middle or at each individual plate. In our family, we put out lots of different kinds of frogs, puppets, and masks. Perhaps it will inspire someone to ask a question about Passover, the story, or the traditions of your family.

You can also put out puzzles, games, and other activities on the floor and kids can play there when they need a break from the seder.

If your kids have made things for the seder, be sure to use them, and if they haven't, there are many fun Passover crafts you can use with your family to create decorations or props for the seder.

4 - Don't be a slave to the Haggadah.

The Haggadah is meant as a guide and you don't have to read every word to fulfill your obligation to tell the story.

Get many different copies of the Haggadah, either physical copies or on a website like Haggadot.com, and look for readings and retellings that speak to you and share those at the seder. You can get the kids to write a play of the Passover story and perform it or ask your guests to bring something that represents freedom and tell the story of why.

Act out the story using charades or assign every person at the table a character and make them answer questions as that person. Go around the table and have each person tell a part of the story. Require each person to ask a question and give them a piece of candy or other treat as a prize when they do.

And don't be afraid to get up from the table and actually act out the story. Use costumes or props or let your kids perform. As long as your guests are engaged in the story of slavery to freedom, you have done your job.

5 - Let loose.

The point of the seder is to engage people in the questions, both ancient and contemporary, of slavery and freedom. The way you do that is up to you.

Try to find a balance between preparing for the seder and obsessing about every detail. And if your kids run screaming circles around the table while everyone else is trying to talk, as mine have done on more than one occasion, those are memories, too.

THE MAGIC OF *BEDIKAT HAMETZ*

Rabbi Julie Schwarzwald

Passover is almost here.

You have cleaned the house, cleared the *hametz* out of the kitchen, and listened to your family's complaints that there is no food in the house. But finally, Passover starts tomorrow, and we can open the ring jellies and fruit slices.

But wait: There is one more obligation that comes from the Mishnah. Since it involves a treasure hunt with a lit candle and seemingly silly rules, it is perfect for engaging children.

The ritual of *bedikat hametz* is designed to give us a way to say a blessing, declaring that our house is free of all *hametz* or leavened products.

A custom has evolved - to take ten pieces of bread or crackers and hide them around the house. Then, using a feather, find the pieces and sweep them into a wooden spoon. But you have to do it by candlelight, in the dark! And even better, the next morning, you get to burn them.

The opportunities for family fun are endless. You can start by making your own kit. First, you need a candle. A leftover Hanukkah or larger birthday candle is perfect for this. You may want to wrap the bottom with foil to protect hands from dripping wax.

Then you need a wooden spoon. Any plain old wooden spoon that you are ready to get rid of since it will be burned. How about that one that got too close to the stove flame and is still in the drawer?

Next, you need a feather. Send the children out to the yard to look for any bird feathers or go to a craft store and buy one.

Finally, you need a paper bag such as a brown lunch bag. Feel free to have a child decorate the bag any way they want (how about pictures of the Israelites crossing the Sea of Reeds or a Seder plate?). You can find the instructions to print out on Exploring Judaism. Now, it's time to set the scene. Someone needs to hide ten pieces of bread or crackers around the house (or limit it to just the kitchen or just a couple of rooms). If not an adult, maybe there's an older child who is more excited about this. Remember where you hid the pieces to be sure they

are all found! (Some families make a list.)

Hand a child the feather and spoon. Turn off the lights and light the candle. And let the treasure hunt begin! As you find each piece of *hametz*, use the feather to sweep it onto the spoon and then transfer it to the paper bag. (Yes, this is exactly how we are instructed to do this, although you may use any light source, such as a flashlight or multiple candles.)

Once you have found all ten, put the spoon and feather into the paper bag and close it up. Save the bag for the next morning when you will burn it. You can burn it in your fireplace, your grill, or anywhere else.

When my children were young, this was a group event. As they got older, it became a competition for who could find the most. Then, they each hid five for their sibling to find. And you know where this ends up: As they hit their teens, it was only fun if they got to hide it for the adults to find! When you get to this stage, be sure to allow plenty of time because our kids are sneaky!

Following the words on the printout mentioned above, you have now declared that any hametz left in your house is nullified and doesn't count. Bring on the Seder preparation!

For musical accompaniment, check out Eliana Light's song, "Feather Candle & Spoon."

EMBRACING CHANGE: A CALL TO RETHINK THE PASSOVER SEDER PLATE

Rabbi Jonathan Bernhard & Kayla Kaplan

Each spring, as we gather for a Passover seder, our personal narratives, familial customs, and communal history join us at the table in the form of the seder plate.

From the *maror* (bitter herbs), *karpas* (green vegetable), and *haroset* (sweet fruit paste), to the *beitzah* (egg) and *zeroa* (shank bone), each element carries profound significance as we recall the story of our liberation and renewal. The idea of changing the items arranged on the seder plate may feel like a deviation from tradition; however, as our story has continued to evolve over thousands of years, so should our rituals and practices. We navigate this evolution with the blessing of modern sensibilities to honor our traditions in a way compatible with our developing values.

For many of us, a growing awareness of animal suffering challenges the traditional components of the Seder plate. We wish to preserve the meaning and intention behind our rituals while feeling called to change some of the specific forms to better align our actions with our ethics.

During the Passover Seder, we will ask how this night is different from all others, so let's extend that curiosity and ask how this year's celebration can be different from those past. Instead of constraining ourselves to the confines of the Seder plate as it's been taught to us, let us focus on honoring our history—the story of the cruelty we faced as slaves in Egypt—and our present—the knowledge of the cruelty animals raised for food face in today's industrialized agricultural system—and make new meaning and traditions.

Let's start with our past.

The earliest text we have stated that the first seders were simple meals consisting of Matzah, *maror*, *haroset*, and two cooked dishes. The requirement of two cooked dishes—specified as beets and rice—symbolized indulgence and helped fulfill the commandment to rejoice on the holiday. Some scholars speculate that the seder should be vegetarian to not give the appearance, following the Temple's

destruction in 70 C.E., that we were doing the sacrifice outside of and without the Temple. Others suggest that cooked beets and rice were affordable to everyone and made the holiday's joy a communal experience.

Traditionally, the Seder plate has featured a couple of items of animal origin. The shank bone and egg symbolize the Paschal and Festival offerings brought to the Temple when it stood. Both the egg and bone are roasted as a nod to sacrificial offerings that were consumed in fire. Over time, new meanings came to be associated with these items. The shank bone became a symbol of God's strength, that liberated our people, and the egg came to represent birth and renewal.

Today, the reality behind these ritual items is often hidden in favor of the symbolic meaning we've attached to them. In the U.S., 99% of egg-laying and meat-producing animals are raised in factory farms in unnatural and cruel conditions. Kosher animal products are no exception, virtually all of them also come from factory-farmed animals. These agricultural operations don't just harm animals; they also wreak havoc on public health and our environment.

As stewards of tradition, we have the agency to reinterpret these symbols in alignment with our values. For those exploring plant-based alternatives, there are many options to choose from that maintain the seder's symbolism and align with our Jewish values. Consider substituting a roasted beet for the shank bone. For the egg, opt for a white radish, a small and peeled potato, or even a round spring flower. There are many plant-derived options we can choose from that preserve the meaning and purpose of the Seder plate.

Passover beckons us to reimagine our rituals, challenging us to confront the ethical implications of our choices. The option for a plant-based Seder plate is a testament to our commitment to compassion and justice. As we celebrate and re-tell our liberation story, may we extend the same call for freedom to all beings. This year, let us create space for new traditions that honor our values and embrace the diversity of our evolving world.

DIP YOUR KARPAS IN SALT WATER AND HONEY?

Rabbi Jeremy Markiz

Karpas is an iconic part of the Passover Seder, and no one ever skips it. *Karpas* is the third item in the order of operations at the seder, and we are instructed to eat a green vegetable. *Karpas* brings a little nosh early to what could be a lengthy conversation and meal. This vegetable, often parsley (but could also be lettuce), is customarily dipped in salt water, not once but twice.

This custom comes from the Mishnah *Pesachim* 10:3, which says: "They bring it in front of [the person at the Seder table, and they] dip the lettuce until they reach the appetizer of bread [which is *maror*, the bitter herbs]."

What is missing from this instruction? Salt water.

The reason for the salt water is commonly stated in many haggadot, unattributed, as "a way for us to represent the tears and sweat of our ancestors who were slaves in Egypt."

This is a beautiful sentiment. Placing ourselves in the mindset of our ancestors is a key element of the Seder. However, this explanation does not appear in any of the rabbinic sources until the mid-1600s.

The Rambam in the 11th century says that people would use *charoset*, and the earliest reference to salt is in the Tosafot in the 13th century, suggesting that some people used vinegar instead.

In a journal article titled "Our Salty Tears: The History and Significance of an Interpretation of Dipping in Salt Water at the Seder," by Rabbi Zvi Ron, he writes:

> The earliest explanation commonly quoted was offered by R. Aharon Teomim (1630–1690), based on kabbalistic concepts that water represents Chessed [loving-kindness] and salt represents Din [judgement]… However, it should be noted that this should not necessarily be considered an explanation for the custom; it is more properly understood as the kabbalistic meaning behind a ritual.

He goes on to identify various possible explanations over the past three hundred years for the salt water we use at the seder. In particular, he suggests:

In the time of the *Rishonim* and early *Acharonim* (11th to 15th

centuries), when salt water was still recognized as a standard vegetable dip, there was no need to provide a symbolic meaning for the dips.

Which is to say, since we're no longer using salt water as a standard dressing for vegetables, it jumps out to us as an opportunity to interpret and explore this moment in the seder.

In fact, we don't have to use salt water at all.

Instead, we could use anything that jumps out at us as notable and possibly surprising. Enough that "the children will notice and ask" which is the reason the Talmud (*Pesachim* 114b) gives for this moment in the seder at all.

In addition to salt water, our family has introduced honey as one of our dipping options at our seder. Yes, parsley and honey can be a strange flavor combination, but it has become one of my most treasured moments in the seder.

It is important that even in the moments of sadness for our ancestors, at the height of slavery and struggle, and in our own living experience: there are good things to be noticed and to feel grateful for having.

Honey is sweet, reminding us of all the joyous moments in life, the smiles, laughter, and embraces of loved ones.

Honey is thick, teaching us that even though the difficult moments are easier to remember, we should hold tightly to the sweet ones.

Honey lasts almost forever, inviting us to hold on to these positive memories and moments throughout our lives.

While we have integrated honey into our seder, there are so many dipping options one can use to invite other ideas into the meal. Salt water came to us from a history of salad dressings that we transformed into meaning, but it doesn't have to end there. This early moment in the seder calls out for more meaning, question-asking, and delicious ways to start our meal together.

HA LACHMA ANYA — THIS IS THE BREAD OF AFFLICTION

Rabbi Mark Goodman

Normally, when we get to the early part of the Passover seder where we point to the Matzah and say, "This is the bread of affliction," we know what that means, and we nod in agreement.

It's flat, tasteless bread.

It was purportedly created due to the haste of the Israelites fleeing Egypt, who did not have time to rise because they were refugees fleeing oppression. The Matzah is only eaten at Passover, and that holiday specifically and systematically reminds us of what it is like to be in slavery.

It has digestive properties that most of us do not enjoy. When we say, "This is the bread of affliction," generally, we all know what that means.

Looking Differently at the Bread of Affliction

A commentary I read in the Hasidic text "*Ahavat Shalom*," by Menachem Mendel of Kosov, looks differently at Matzah.

The Kosover Rebbe teaches that when Adam and Eve ate in the garden, what they ate wasn't literal food in the sense we know today. God did not make them physically hungry. Rather, the "food" of the garden was spiritual nourishment: soul food.

It was not so much filling as it was "fulfilling." So, too, the manna from heaven—God fed the Israelites spiritual food which sustained them forty years in the desert.

This is the way it is with Matzah.

It, too, is soul food: spiritual nourishment. We eat it at a specific time in order to fulfill a commandment.

It is not the bread of affliction.It is the bread of spiritual elevation. It is a mitzvah. It connects us to God, and our ancestors, and freedom, and holiness.

It may not taste great. That's fine because it is supposed to remind us to be great.

It may not be filling. That's fine because it is supposed to be fulfilling.

MA NISHTANA — THE LIVING ROOM SEDER

Melissa Werbow

"*Ma nishtana halailah ha zeh*." Why is this night different from all other nights?

This question is at the very heart of the seder and many of the seder rituals are designed to provoke its asking in a variety of different ways. Seder night dinner should feel different from the ordinary. We do this with Matzah, with dipping, and symbolic herbs.

In my family, we also do this by changing the location of our seder meal. Both my husband and I grew up with long seders spent sitting at the dining room table, a pillow awkwardly stuffed behind us. But although we would all lean to the left while drinking our wine, you could not call it reclining.

Mishnah *Pesachim* 10:1 instructs us that "Even the poorest of Jews should not eat the meal on Passover night until he reclines on his left side, as free and wealthy people recline when they eat." The Passover meal should feel luxurious and relaxed, like the meals of the richest 1%.

In the time of the Mishnah, those people were the Greeks and Romans who would recline on couches while enjoying good food and debating big ideas. Our seders today are the Rabbis' repurposing of the Symposium of their neighbors to discuss the ideas important to Judaism: To explore the meaning of freedom, to extol the wonders of God, and to celebrate the gift of being Jewish.

It is hard to luxuriate while sitting on stiff dining room chairs (or worse, metal folding chairs brought up from the basement).

We moved our seder to our living room to construct an environment of relaxation and participation. We rearrange the furniture to bring in an extra couch and still have straight-back chairs for those with bad backs and pillows on the floor for the kids who move around throughout the evening. We set up our coffee table with Matzah, salt water, and seder plate and strew occasional tables around the room for people to leave their wine glasses on.

Every year, we host a mix of knowledgeable Jews, curious non-Jews, and everyone in between for our (admittedly) very long seder. But I find people's patience for participating in a long evening of

singing, talking, discussing, and questioning is greatly expanded when they are comfortable. Our living room provides the right environment for a lingering evening.

It also helps that we serve an expanded *karpas* course—adding artichokes dipped in butter, crudities, and dips, and sweet potato fries dipped in ketchup to the traditional parsley dipped in salt water. We find that these nods to the comfort of our guests enhance everyone's seder experience.

Often, the first question of the evening is the exclaim of surprise, "Oh, we're sitting on couches?!?" which is just one more way to ask, "*Ma Nishtana*?"

THE FOUR CHILDREN — BACK TO OUR ROOTS

Rabbi Adir Yolkut

As the youngest of four children, I have always been fascinated by the four children of the Haggadah and the various ways in which those attributes manifest in each of us. As a self-described "good kid," my draw toward the rebellious side has always manifested with a serious interest in the wicked child.

Every year, this child jumps out at me. Maybe I feel aligned with his skepticism and reticence. I think we all have those moments of being ostracized or feeling alienated, so in some way, I get that question he asks: "what is this service for you?" Why do you do what you do?

In some ways, I think it's an important question to ask as spiritual seekers. Are people doing things for the right reason? Is it moral? Is it ethical? Yet, we know from the continuation that this is a fluffy interpretation of the wicked child's questioning, given the continuation of the Haggadah.

We are told that in response to his questioning, we should הקהה את שיניו, blunt his teeth. As traditionally understood, we are supposed to give him a good rebuke and tell him that had he been part of the people in Egypt, he would not have been freed because of his selfish and myopic beliefs. On the one hand, I understand the Haggadah's frustration at his words. He's placed himself outside of our community. He maligns our rituals. He denigrates God. But is this the proper response? Do we think this is a way to bring him back into the fold? Rabbi Yissaschar Dov Rokeach, the 3rd Rabbi of the Belz dynasty, felt similarly to those questions and offered the following teaching that resonates deeply:

It's a little wicked in and of itself to punish the wicked son by blunting his teeth. After all, he came to the seder when he didn't have to come at all. Now the word *Rasha* "רשע" is made up of the outside letters "*ra*" "רע"—evil, with the *shin* "ש" inside. What does this mean? The three lines of the *shin* (or if you want to go matriarchs, use the bottom line as the 4th) symbolize matriarchs and patriarchs. If the shin is on the inside of the *Rasha* that tells you that inside every person is a point that is connected to their past and their foremothers and

forefathers. This child's soul is connected to goodness/godliness.

So, when it says "*hakheh et shinav*," read it as knocking his *shin* loose, the best part of his inner nature. Bring it out from the "ra-wicked." Give this child courage. Tell the child you know he has potential because you know that this child really is holy.

It's a beautiful response by the Belzer Rebbe.

He understands that responding to the wicked child with force and anger will only result in more feelings of being an outsider on a holiday that is one of the most insider of our holidays. We are all drawn together on Pesach, no matter our regularly scheduled Jewish programming.

Whether we self-define as the wicked child or have that title cast upon us, maybe we can learn something from the Belzer Rebbe this year. Instead of castigation, let's try to find the connective "*shin*" in each of us, that part that ties us back to our roots and bring it forward out of the darkness of the toxicity of our lives and into the light.

HOW A SHOW LIKE "SUCCESSION" ILLUMINATES THE FOUR CHILDREN

Rabbi Adam Rosenbaum

The anecdote of the four children at the Passover Seder is one of the most enduring passages of the Haggadah. For centuries, scholars and artists have pored over countless analogies, attempting to explain how a family with a wise child, a wicked child, a simple child, and a child who doesn't know how to ask can deepen our understanding of what it means to teach younger generations of the miracles of deliverance and freedom.

But lest we think that these teachings are a relic of the past, we learn otherwise by just watching a little TV.

The renowned HBO comedy-drama series "Succession," which concluded last year, featured a cast of characters with notable similarities to the scene depicted in the story of the Four Children. Logan Roy, the founder, and aging CEO of media conglomerate Waystar Royco, spends most episodes pondering how best to pass down the keys to his empire. The main contenders are his four adult children, and it doesn't take too much imagination to see each one as a modern (albeit fictional) example of these Seder children.

Kendall Roy: The Wise Child

Kendall Roy, Logan's second-oldest son, could be compared to the Wise Child. Make no mistake: Many times, Kendall appears anything but wise. He repeatedly tries too hard to gain his father's affection, and his failures send him into deep sadness and doubt. Yet Kendall's desire to understand the finer details of how to triumph in the cutthroat corporate world represents a thirst for knowledge worthy of the Wise Child, the one who asks specific questions about how to observe the Seder properly.

Roman Roy: The Wicked Child

Roman Roy, Logan's youngest son, could be understood as the Wicked Child. Or, at least, the Mischievous Child. Like his corresponding Haggadah character, Roman sometimes doesn't know why he's at the table in the first place, and he acts out awkwardly and

obnoxiously. And yet both children stay at the table, somehow still interested in the story's next chapter.

Siobhan Roy: The Simple Child

Siobhan "Shiv" Roy, Logan's lone daughter, can be likened to the Simple Child. This is not a comment on Shiv's intellect, which is clearly top-notch. Rather, just as the Simple Child looks at the Seder table and only asks what this is, Shiv's machinations for power and influence come off as frustratingly elementary compared with the other players.

Connor Roy: The Child Who Doesn't Know How to Ask

This leaves Connor Roy, Logan's oldest son, as the Child Who Doesn't Know How to Ask. Connor has a hard time understanding what he wants, as he's never worked a day in his life. When he haphazardly decides to run for president, the results are as ill-fated as you'd expect. Connor never asks to run Waystar Royco, and if he ever wanted the job, he wouldn't know where to start.

These comparisons are certainly imperfect, and perhaps other "Succession" fans could link these characters better. But the similarities between a modern television drama and an ancient Haggadah anecdote can remind us of the rabbis' consistent ability to communicate timeless ideas about human nature. Simply put, just as one family can produce wildly different personalities, our Seder tables are often equally diverse. And just like the parents of the Four Children, we are tasked with creating lessons that will resonate with various people.

May our Seders have meaningful moments of Succession, passing down the lessons of our past to multitudes of generations.

WHY COULDN'T MOSES ENTER THE PROMISED LAND?

Rabbi Shai Cherry

There is a common misconception that the reason why Moses was not allowed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land involved hitting a rock with his staff for water.

The Torah does use the rock incident as the occasion to inform Moses that he won't make it into the Promised Land, but the Torah does not actually say that's the reason why Moses can't lead the Israelites there. As so often happens, it is only the crash of current events that has allowed me to understand the Torah's deep intention.

There is one other great figure of the Bible who was unable to complete his vision and mission, King David. He was the founder of the Messianic line who purchased the land for the Temple in Jerusalem but was not allowed to build the Temple. Why? Here, the Bible is explicit: He spilled too much blood. He fought too many wars (I Chron. 22:8).

But he fought those wars with God's blessing for the safety and security of Israel. Why would he be punished for that?

Our rabbinic commentators admit what the biblical text omits: King David spilled innocent blood, blood that was unnecessary to spill to secure the victories necessary for Israel to be secure in its land (RaDaK and Malbim). He founded the messianic line, but you can't build a Temple for God by shedding innocent blood.

Could the TaNaKH have revealed about King David what it was unwilling to disclose about Moses? Consider the final plague: God tells Moses that every firstborn in Egypt will be killed. Unlike Abraham, Moses does not argue with God that it would be unjust to murder the innocents with the guilty (I owe this insight to Rabbi David Seidenberg.) The Rabbis made a big deal comparing Abraham, who argued for justice in Sodom and Gomorrah, with Noah, who just sheepishly complied. God said all the firstborns in Egypt were to be slain, and Moses complied without pushing back at all.

Our Rabbis were bothered by Moses' docile compliance, so the midrash assures us that all the firstborns were guilty of rejoicing in the

pain and distress of the Israelites. They got what was coming to them. They weren't innocent! That's what the midrash says. Our Rabbinic sages had a stake in preserving a sense of divine justice. They couldn't accept collateral damage as the price for redeeming the Israelites from bondage.

Why didn't Moses make it into the Promised Land?

Because, like King David, Moses had innocent blood on his hands. He could have challenged God about the need to kill every firstborn. He could have asked if all that bloodshed was necessary to redeem Israel.

Too many Israelites died in bondage, and too many Egyptians died securing our freedom. Moses is remembered as our redeemer—although, curiously, not in the Haggadah where he is not even mentioned. But Moses can't lead us across the river into the Promised Land because the river flows, in part, with the blood of innocent Egyptians.

At this year's Pesach seder, we should use all our fingers, not just our pinkies, to dip into the red and diminish our joy. God willing, like the Israelites, we will prevail, but our joy will be diminished.

B'KHOL DOR VADOR — IN EVERY GENERATION

Rabbi Jacob Blumenthal

"In every generation one is obligated to see oneself as if personally leaving Egypt."

Over the course of the seder, the "order" of the Haggadah narrative can actually seem quite confusing! As we reach this point of the seder, instead of a single chronological recounting of the story of Jewish freedom from slavery, we have instead retold the story a number of times. In several cycles, using various midrashim, rituals, and songs, we have repeatedly gone back "to the beginning" of Jewish history, described the experience of slavery, and then celebrated our people's deliverance to freedom.

Now this climactic passage, "*B'khol dor vador*—In every generation," reminds us that the Jewish experience of history itself is not linear, but a spiral.

Unfortunately, not only should we "see ourselves" as having come out of Egypt, but every generation experiences this phenomenon of slavery and redemption.

At our seders growing up, my father, Werner Blumenthal, *z"l*, would stop the seder at this paragraph and retell his own Exodus story. He would describe his childhood in Stuttgart in the 1930s and his family's experience of ever-increasing isolation and oppression, culminating with the internment of his father and grandfather in Dachau following Kristallnacht. He would then tell his experience of boarding a ship in Hamburg, leaving Germany, and arriving in the United States just before Passover in the spring of 1939. Were it not for a "low number" that granted an immigration interview at the U.S. consulate a few months before, he would not have been alive to tell the tale of his family's escape from the Shoah, nor would I have been privileged to hear it.

And now, following the pogrom of October 7, my generation also has a sense of what it means to face Jew hatred in its most brutal form.

At our seder table growing up we often turned to the commentary of Dr. Marcus Lehman of Mainz, published in Frankfurt in 1918. On this passage, Dr. Lehman comments,

> He who is so enheartened by the ancient admonition as never to forget the first Jewish persecution and its consequences, so that at all times he feels as though he himself had been liberated from Egypt, will never be surprised nor lose his courage in the face of any disastrous change in public opinion.

Dr. Lehman, *z"l*, was writing from a space in which Jews were, in his words, "insignificant and powerless." Even before the horrors that would unfold in ensuing decades, his goal was to place the Haggadah in the context of comfort and inspiration in a time of Jewish persecution.

While the State of Israel restored power to the Jewish people, the massacre of October 7 and the resurgence of global antisemitism in its wake remind us of our continuing vulnerability. In that context, Dr. Lehman's commentary is all the more relevant. In the face of our generation's challenges, "seeing oneself as if personally leaving Egypt," is a call to confidence. Rather than focusing only on enslavement, this phrase calls upon us to remember redemption. Our survival for thousands of years since that "first Jewish persecution" is cause for confidence in the face of the challenges of our own generation's encounter with antisemitism and evil.

In this spirit, the phrase we have recited often since October 7 is both an affirmation and a prayer: Am Yisrael Hai—the Jewish people endure. (See more: Psalms for this Time of Crisis in Israel)

EVERY YEAR WE MUST SEE OURSELVES AS IF WE WERE THERE

Rabbi Amy Eilberg

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאילו הוא יצא ממצרים

B'khol dor vador hayav adam lir'ot et atzmo k'ilu hu yatsa mimitzrayim.

In every generation, we must each see ourselves as if we ourselves had gone out of Egypt.

This sentence, it seems to me, is the central message of the Haggadah. We delve into the story of the Exodus from Egypt each year not out of curiosity, literary interest, or nostalgia. We reenact the story and immerse ourselves in its words, its music, its tastes, and physical sensations in order to experience it—to imagine ourselves there. (When my children were small, we were thrilled when they began to describe the Israelites leaving Egypt in the first person.)

From this principle follows one of the central commands of the Torah, that we are to champion the needs of the stranger, the marginalized, and the oppressed, because we know the soul of the stranger.

We ourselves were there, enslaved by a tyrant in Egypt. This means that when we see someone in our own time suffering from discrimination, dehumanization, or persecution, we must fight for their dignity because we know in our flesh and in our hearts what it is like to be where they are now.

I discovered another layer of this central text on the recent Conservative/Masorti Racial Justice Pilgrimage to the American South, traveling with twenty Conservative rabbis, cantors, and lay leaders. On our four-day journey, we learned far more than one can comfortably know about the history of slavery and ongoing racism in America.

At the Whitney Plantation near New Orleans, a working plantation transformed into a museum of slavery, we were led to deconstruct the euphemistic myths of what slavery was. We looked into the dark spaces where the enslaved people were forced to live. We learned about the barbaric treatment they endured. We read first person accounts of what they and their families suffered.

At the Legacy Museum in Montgomery, Alabama, we experienced with excruciating clarity the fact that slavery never ended in America. After Emancipation, slavery evolved, in stages, into Jim Crow laws and racial terror lynching, then into racial segregation, and in our own time, into mass incarceration of African Americans. We witnessed evidence of each of these stages of the unfolding of slavery in vivid and agonizing detail, until we recognized one undeniably continuous timeline.

Encountering these truths, I thought of the central message of the Haggadah: We must always remember that we were there in Egypt, suffering the plight of slaves, and therefore are commanded to devote ourselves to working on behalf of the oppressed in our own time.

So, too, as a white-presenting American, I must always remember that, although my ancestors were not in this country when these appalling systems were created, I have benefited from the system of slavery.

From the time my Jewish family members arrived on these shores, they surely endured antisemitism, as we do to this day. At the same time, we had the privilege of living in a prosperous country that was literally built with the uncompensated labor of enslaved Africans. My family did not take part in inventing these oppressive systems, but we benefit from them whenever we engage with America's vibrant economy, whose development was heavily dependent on slavery. We profit from the fruits of slavery every day of our lives.

Having come face to face with the horrors of slavery and the systems that succeeded it, I must remember every day that my position in America has been aided by cruel, forced labor, and so I have a debt to repay. I must devote myself to the continuing betterment of the land in which I live, knowing that the sacrifice of my Black siblings and their ancestors has never been acknowledged.

As Jews, we must see ourselves as if we were slaves in Egypt. As Americans, we must remember and atone for the ways in which the system that has advanced our journey in the U.S. has disadvantaged others. As a Jew, I am a descendant of Israelite slaves in Egypt. As an American, I am part of the chain of our national history that includes the horrors of slavery and its aftermath.

Seeing myself in the light of these truths means that I am obligated to help right the wrongs that were done, because I myself am part of the story.

PASSOVER TORAH READINGS: AN EXPLAINER

Rabbi Lauren Tuchman

Though Pesach is thought of as the quintessential home-based holiday, the Torah is read on each of the mornings of Pesach in the synagogue. This article outlines the Torah reading according to the 8-day Diaspora Pesach observance.

The first two and last two days are considered full chag or holiday days, like Shabbat, on which *melachah* or creative labor is prohibited.

The First Day of Passover

On the first day of Pesach, two Torah scrolls are read from. In the first, which serves as the primary Torah reading for the day, Exodus 12:21-51 is read, which describes the preparations made for the Exodus out of *Mitzrayim*. When the first day of Pesach falls out on Shabbat, this reading is divided into seven *aliyot*, as is done on a typical Shabbat. When the first day of Pesach falls out on a weekday, the reading is divided into five *aliyot*.

A second Torah scroll is also read from. The portion read from this scroll is known as the *maftir* portion, which is read before the *haftarah*. On the first day of Pesach, the *maftir* is Numbers 28:16-25, which describes the sacrifices that were brought on the first day of Pesach to the *Mishkan* and subsequently the *Bet Hamikdash*. These are later included in the liturgy of the *Musaf Amidah*.

The Second Day of Passover

On the second day of Pesach, two scrolls are again read from. In the first, Leviticus 22:26-23:44 is read. This portion largely concerns a recounting of the Biblical calendar of holiday observances. Each holiday or *moed* is described.

The *maftir* from the first day is read from the second scroll. Why is the same *maftir* portion repeated?

In the Diaspora, many communities have kept a second day of Yom Tov for many centuries. This is owing to a discrepancy with the calendar. Before the calendar was standardized, months were declared by the citing of the moon in Yerushalayim. Messengers were dispatched across the Jewish world to let communities know the new

month had begun. Often, the messengers wouldn't make it in time.

Thus, it became important to ensure that holidays were observed on the proper date. To alleviate concerns or doubts that holidays were observed improperly, it became the custom to keep the first two days and last two days of holidays as full festivals outside of Israel.

The Intermediate Days of Passover

The third day of Pesach begins a period called *Chol HaMoed*—literally, the weekdays of the festival. We are still in holiday mode, though some of us may go to work or engage in more mundane pursuits. Even still, weekday morning services include a Torah reading. On the first day of *Chol HaMoed*, Exodus 13:1-16 is read from the first Torah scroll, and Numbers 28:16-25 is read again from the second scroll.

On the fourth day of Pesach/second day of *Chol HaMoed*, Exodus 22:24-23:19 is read from the first Torah scroll and the *maftir* portion we've been reading until now is repeated again from a second scroll.

On the fifth day of Pesach/third day of *Chol HaMoed*, Exodus 34:1-26 is read from the first scroll and we repeat, again, the *maftir* from Numbers, read from a second scroll.

On the final day of Chol HaMoed, in addition to repeating our *maftir* from Numbers 28:16-25, we first read Numbers 9:1-14.

Each of these Torah readings connects to Pesach observances. On the fourth day of *Chol HaMoed*, we read about *Pesach Sheni*, or 2nd Pesach, observed on the 14th of *Iyyar* for those folks who were unable to offer the Passover sacrifice in *Nisan* due to ritual impurity, being on a journey, or any number of other reasons.

Often, there is a Shabbat during *Chol HaMoed*. If so, two scrolls are read from. On the first, Exodus 33:12-34:26 and from the second, Numbers 28:16-25. Because each year, Shabbat might fall on a different day of that week, you can check www.Hebcal.com to see how the readings might be adjusted for Shabbat or *Chol HaMoed* any particular year.

The Seventh Day of Passover

The seventh day of Pesach ushers in the second set of holiday dates. In some ways, though we focus a lot on the seder, the 7th and

8th days of Pesach carry incredible spiritual power and potential.

It is understood that the seventh day of Pesach is the day on which the *Yam Suf* or Sea of Reeds split, allowing the children of Israel to cross on dry land. We read this portion of the Torah on that day, Exodus 13:17-15:26.

The Song of the Sea is chanted with a special Torah trope, and it is customary to stand while the Torah reader is chanting this portion. The *maftir* is Numbers 28:19-25.

The Eighth Day of Passover

On the eighth day of Pesach, known as *Acharon Shel Pesach*, we read from the book of Deuteronomy. If this day is a weekday, the Torah reading is Deuteronomy 15:19-16:17. If it falls out on Shabbat, the reading is Deuteronomy 14:22-16:17. This portion also largely describes the Biblical festival calendar. What is interesting here is this portion is read multiple times in Diaspora communities throughout the year. It is read on the second day of Shavuot and on Shemini Atzeret as well.

These Torah portions connect us both to Pesach in its richness and particularity as well as to the festival season broadly, including its sacrifices.

Sacrifices

A note on sacrifices: Many of us tend to think of sacrifices as archaic at best and primitive at worst. We tend to think of the sacrificial system as something we have blessedly done away with. Many do not yearn for its eventual return whenever/however that manifests.

I have come to understand that sacrifices were a way of bringing what was most precious to humans to G-d, as a way of coming close to G-d. I encourage us in this festive time to think about what we might wish to do to draw ourselves closer to G-d.

THE SECRETS OF MATZAH

Rabbi Mordechai Rackover

I am a big fan of Anthony Bourdain, the punk chef who made it big as an author and then television travel show host. I appreciate his honesty, use of metaphor, and vicariously exploring places and tastes through his work that I never would myself. In particular, I am grateful to him for his trip to Egypt.

Season 4, episode 15 (available on Max and other streaming services) of "Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations" finds Tony in Egypt. After time in Cairo, he is hosted on a farm in a rural community. It is from this episode that I learned one of matzah's secrets. The hosts on the farm made bread - really, matzah - the same way it could have been made 3,000 years ago.

Dinner on that farm consisted of duck stew, mallow (a green herb) made into a dip, and flatbread. The flatbread looks identical to handmade round *shemurah* matzah. While Bourdain calls it "*bateo* bread," I have only found it referred to as '*bataw'* bread. This is 'bread bread,' the fundamental bread of the community. The **secret those farmer-cooks shared** – this is the bread that was and is common in Egypt. While matzah is ancient, it is not as unusual today as we might think it to be.

Another reason the show helped me understand matzah was the research I was inspired to do after watching it. There is another ancient Egyptian bread still made today, called '*Eish Shamsy'* –`ayš, in this context, is an Arabic word for 'bread' and *shamsy*, is etymologically like the Hebrew word *shemesh* – sun. This is bread baked without an oven, directly on a hot stone, left out in the elements, and baked in the sun.

One more piece. In a different episode, Anthony is out in a rural environment in North Africa, and he learns that women have been baking bread in outdoor ovens using natural fermentation like sourdough for thousands of years. While I cannot speak to the historicity of his claim, it sure seems likely.

Stepping away from the TV, let's look at biblical texts about matzah. We find a few different tales of where it is served, and several reasons are given for why it is flat and the bread of choice. The first

mention of matzah in the Torah is in the story of Lot (Bereishit 19:3) when he entertains the mystery guests before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It is here that we can put on two different interpretation hats: 1) the Midrashic hat, which says it must have been Passover - that's what some ancient rabbis suggested and 2) the foodie hat, which says matzah is just the simplest, quickest bread, and when guests show up unexpectedly that's what they get.

Most Ashkenazim maintain the custom of having the thinnest possible matzot baked within eighteen minutes from the moment the water comes into contact with the flour. This turns out breads that are nearly identical to *bataw*. Eighteen isn't an arbitrary number; some rabbinic observational science combined with folk wisdom gives us the number that we keep to this day.

What many people have yet to encounter is soft matzah. Soft matzah follows the same rules – eighteen minutes and super-hot baking – but it is not as thin. Soft matzah is common in some Sephardic communities and has made headway in recent years. It is easier to eat - more like a laffa, a pocketless pita - and most likely, much closer to the matzot that the Torah mentions.

Considering this soft matzah allows us to understand the Hillel Sandwich better. Making a sandwich with cracker-thin matzot has always seemed to be a slapstick joke added to the seder: you get all your stuff into a couple of matzot and then bite it while leaning, and it explodes on your holiday clothing. But, if you have soft matzah, suddenly, it makes a lot more sense. If we had the Passover Lamb, this sandwich would be like a shawarma, doner, or taco—ancient fast food.

After Lot, matzah isn't mentioned again until the Torah instructs the Israelites regarding the first Pesach (Shemot 12:8), *Pesach Mitzrayim,* the soon-to-be-liberated slaves, are instructed to eat their Paschal Lamb on matzah with bitter herbs. A meal not very different from the one that Anthony Bourdain had on the Egyptian farm. So, **secret number two** – the food hasn't changed all that much in thousands of years.

The second instruction regarding matzah comes in the context of what should be called '*Chag haMatzot'* – the Festival of Unleavened Bread. During the week that follows Pesach, i.e., the 15th to 22nd of

Nissan, the Israelites are commanded to abstain from *seor* and *hametz*. '*Seor*' is usually translated as 'leavening' and '*hametz*' as 'leavened bread.' But in the Schocken Bible (1995), Everett Fox chose two words – leavening and fermented. I think the distinction is important as it helps us focus on the varieties of leavened products: starters, breads, liquors, and more that existed in the ancient world.

When the Israelites finally get up and leave, their bread is mentioned twice. In Exodus 12:34, we learn that they had to depart in such a hurry that their bread did not have enough time to rise. They wrapped up their kneading bowls and hung them over their shoulders with the dough still inside. Five verses later, in 12:39,

> And they **baked** unleavened cakes of the dough they had **taken out of Egypt**, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

On the surface, one may think that they packed up and left with the dough in the bowl without thinking of the dough – but really, they packed up and left with the dough in the bowl, knowing that it would bake in the sun's heat as they walked out of Egypt. It is mentioned explicitly that they baked; they knew they would be walking for a while and certainly would not have thought that they would have ovens soon. Baking bread in the sun was and is something that one does in that part of the world. **Secret number three** – the dough on their backs baked into bread

In modern Egypt, we find two different breads: *bataw* – a matzo-like flatbread, and *eish shamsy* – a bread baked in the sun. These match up well with the two different breads mentioned in the Exodus narrative.

With current technology, baking bread can be as easy as grabbing some leavening, flour, salt, and water and dumping it all in a machine. Some people turn the difficulty level up by using a starter - a living, fermenting, leavening mass of flour, water, and yeast. In the ancient world, baking bread was work, and it was mysterious. People relied on leaving their flour and water mixture out and waiting for it to leaven without human intervention. They did not know there was yeast in the air. It must have seemed like an unnatural process, miraculous.

A final secret of matzah, is brought out by reading a short passage in the Zohar. The text refers to matzah as 'the Bread of Faith' (2:183b), I think it refers back to what the Israelites left behind: their tried-and-true method of making bread. Bread was the most fundamental food – it made up most of the calories in their diet. When the Israelites left Egypt, they left behind the assurance that their bread would rise. The miraculous unseen yeasts would not travel with them, and there must have been tremendous anxiety and food insecurity. That was an act of immense faith – the belief in God that they would be able to eat, that there was a future where they would again have bread. They left the culture, pun intended, of Egypt.

When you buy your matzot this year, try and set aside a little money to help those who need food. Yes, Passover is expensive, but one of the ways to make it taste and feel better is by helping others escape slavery, hunger, and affliction. Matzah is so commonplace, so easy, that it is the butt of many derisive jokes. I implore us to remember how much meaning is in every simple unleavened bite.

The deepest secret – God is saying, "Leave behind the culture, the yeast, the taste, the certainty, of *Mitzrayim*/Egypt. Leave behind the narrowness of knowing that even though we are slaves, at least we will eat."

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