

Denim Seder-Suggested Supplementary Readings

At the Beginning of the Seder

Domestic Violence

There are some women in our communities who are still struggling to be saved from violent relationships, or have only recently found freedom. Our Passover story of slavery and redemption reminds us of the terrible oppression, that results from domestic violence in the Jewish community and beyond. Victims of domestic violence are finally finding a voice and recognition within the greater Jewish community. What was once imagined to be non-existent in Jewish households is now acknowledged and hopefully will be eradicated soon.

From https://rac.org/sites/default/files/Pesach-%20A%20Season%20for%20Justice_0.pdf

Ha Lachma Anya-The Bread of Affliction

Ha Lachma Anya

This is the bread of affliction, the poor bread, which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.

This is the bread of affliction, that reminds of all whose suffering we do not see

Let all who are hungry come and eat.

Let all who need support find it

Let all who are in want, share the hope of Passover.

Let us reach out to others and share our hope

As we celebrate here, we join with our people everywhere.

We are here for you

This year we celebrate here.

We care about you

Next year in the land of Israel.

We believe you and support you

Now we are still in bonds.

This year the abuse continues

Next year may we all be free.

Next year may we all be free of abuse

The Four Questions

Mah nishtanah ha-lailah ha-zeh mi-kol ha-lailot?

Why is this night different from all other nights?

We know the traditional answers to this question: On this night, we eat matzah and bitter herbs, we dip and we recline. But this is not all, or even most, of what Passover is about.

On most other nights, we allow the news of tragedy in distant places to pass us by.

We succumb to compassion fatigue – aware that we cannot possibly respond to every injustice that arises around the world.

On this night, we are reminded that our legacy as the descendants of slaves creates in us a different kind of responsibility – we are to protect the stranger because we were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Let us add a fifth question to this year's seder. Let us ask ourselves,
What must be done?

This year, this Passover, let us recommit to that sacred responsibility to protect those who need protection, whose suffering is so often ignored.

Let us infuse the rituals of the seder with action:

- When tasting the matzah, the bread of poverty, let us find ways to help the poor and the hungry.
- When eating the maror, let us commit to help those whose lives are embittered by abuse.
- When dipping to commemorate the blood that protected our ancestors against the Angel of Death, let us pursue protection for those whose lives are threatened by violence.
- When reclining in celebration of our freedom, let us seek opportunities to help those who are oppressed, harassed, or abused.

At this season of liberation, join us in working for the liberation of all people. Help us respond to the seder's questions with action and justice.

Source (adapted): <https://www.haggadot.com/clip/4-questions-13>

The Four Children

The Four Children at the Seder Table: Which Child Am I?

As we celebrate this Holiday of Freedom, the ending of slavery, we ask, "Who am I, when I hear of abuse? Who will I choose to be when I know that others are suffering?"

Will I be one who does not ask? Will I close the newspaper or turn off the television, the computer or the mobile device so that I do not hear or see? Will I turn my head and heart away?

Will I ask only simple questions? "What is this?" Will I ask what, but never why?

Will I let the evil impulse, my yetzer hara ask: "What has this to do with me?" Will I let the problem belong only to the victims and the do-gooders? Will I distance myself from those in need? Or will I strive to act in wisdom, to ask: "What are the underlying causes of the problem and what needs to be done to stop the abuse and free the oppressed? What are the laws and what does God expect of me?"

May God open the eyes of those who do not see, the mouths of those who do not ask, and the hearts of those who do not care, and grant us the wisdom to open our hands to our fellow humans when they are in need - the hand of generosity, the hand of support, the hand of peace and friendship.

Source (adapted): <http://rhr.org.il/eng/wp-content/uploads/Rabbis-for-Human-Rights-Haggadah-Supplements-5775-English-American-letter.pdf>

The 10 Plagues

The Passover Haggadah recounts ten plagues that afflicted Egyptian society. In our tradition, Passover is the season in which we imagine our own lives within the story and the story within our lives. Accordingly, we turn our thoughts to the many plagues that affect our society today. Our journey from slavery to redemption is ongoing, demanding the work of our hearts and hands. Here are ten “modern plagues”:

1) Homelessness

In any given year, about 3.5 million people are likely to experience homelessness, about a third of them children, according to the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty. A recent study by the U.S. Conference of Mayors showed the majority of major cities lack the capacity to shelter those in need and are forced to turn people away. We are reminded time and again in the Torah that the Exodus is a story about a wandering people, once suffering from enslavement, who, through God’s help, eventually find their way to their homeland. As we inherit this story, we affirm our commitment to pursue an end to homelessness.

2) Hunger

About 49 million Americans experience food insecurity, 16 million of them children. While living in a world blessed with more than enough food to ensure that all of God’s children are well nourished, on Passover we declare, “Let all who are hungry come and eat!” These are not empty words, but rather a heartfelt and age-old prayer to end the man-made plague of hunger.

3) Inequality

Access to affordable housing, quality health care, nutritious food and quality education is far from equal. The disparity between the privileged and the poor is growing, with opportunities for upward mobility still gravely limited. Maimonides taught, “Everyone in the house of Israel is obligated to study Torah, regardless of whether one is rich or poor, physically able or with a physical disability.” Unequal access to basic human needs, based on one’s real or perceived identity, like race, gender or disability, is a plague, antithetical to the inclusive spirit of the Jewish tradition.

4) Greed

In the Talmud, the sage Ben Zoma asks: “Who is wealthy? One who is happy with one’s lot.” These teachings evidence what we know in our conscience—a human propensity to desire more than we need, to want what is not ours and, at times, to allow this inclination to conquer us, leading to sin. Passover urges us against the plague of greed, toward an attitude of gratitude.

5) Discrimination & Hatred

The Jewish people, as quintessential victims of hatred and discrimination, are especially sensitized to this plague in our own day and age. Today, half a century after the civil rights movement in the United States, we still are far from the actualization of the dream that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. articulated in Washington, D.C., a vision rooted in the message of our prophets. On Passover we affirm our own identity as the once oppressed, and we refuse to stand idly by amid the plagues of discrimination and hatred.

6) **Silence Amid Violence**

Every year, 4.8 million cases of domestic violence against American women are reported. Each year, more than 108,000 Americans are shot intentionally or unintentionally in murders, assaults, suicides and suicide attempts, unintentional shootings and by police intervention. One in five children has seen someone get shot. We do not adequately address violence in our society, including rape, sex trafficking, child abuse, domestic violence and elder abuse, even though it happens every day within our own communities.

7) **Environmental Destruction**

Humans actively destroy the environment through various forms of pollution, wastefulness, deforestation and widespread apathy toward improving our behaviors and detrimental civic policies. Rabbi Nachman of Breslav taught, "If you believe you can destroy, you must believe you can repair." Our precious world is in need of repair, now more than ever.

8) **Stigma of Mental Illness**

One in four Americans suffers from mental illness in a given year. Even more alarming, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, nearly two-thirds of people with a diagnosable mental illness do not seek treatment, and minority communities are the least likely to seek or have access to mental health resources. Social stigma toward those with mental illness is a widespread plague. Historically, people with mental health problems have suffered from severe discrimination and brutality, yet our society is increasingly equipped with the knowledge and resources to alleviate the plague of social stigma and offer critical support.

9) **Distraction**

In this age of constant connectedness, we are easily distracted by an unending barrage of information, much of it meaningless, losing our ability to discern what is most important.

10) **Powerlessness**

When faced with these modern plagues, how often do we doubt or question our own ability to make a difference? How often do we feel paralyzed because we do not know what to do to bring about change? How often do we find ourselves powerless to transform the world as it is into the world as we know it should be, overflowing with justice and peace?

Written in collaboration with Rabbi Matthew Soffer and Coordinator of Engagement and Social Justice Programs Andrew Oberstein of Temple Israel of Boston

<http://www.jfcsboston.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/The%20Wandering%20Is%20Over%20Haggadah%202015.pdf>

Dayenu

In Hopes of Freedom From Abuse For All

Author unknown. Adapted by Hannah Litman and Rachel Novick.

Sometimes, we cannot say *Dayenu*. We have the right to say, “No, this is not enough, I will not settle for this.”

Sometimes, we wish we could say *Dayenu*. What would be enough?

When we can make choices about our own bodies, our own identities, and our own lives,

Dayenu

When courts, law enforcement and mental health professionals stop blaming the victim,

Dayenu

When the Jewish community protects abuse survivors,

Dayenu

When our voices are listened to and believed without judgment or question,

Dayenu

When money and power can no longer protect abusers,

Dayenu

When the community focuses on stopping the abusers instead of blaming us for staying,

Dayenu

When Jewish law and secular law can guarantee our right to safety,

Dayenu

When every person can find true shalom bayit,

Dayenu

When anyone who is in danger can also be in safety,

Dayenu

<https://www.haggadot.com/clip/alternative-dayenu>

Pesach, Matzah, Maror

Rabban Gamliel taught: If on Passover, you do not explain these three things, you have not fulfilled your obligation:

- The Passover Sacrifice – Pesach
- The Unleavened Bread – Matzah
- The Bitter Herbs – Maror

The Passover Sacrifice – What We Gave Up to Survive

In order to survive I sacrificed a great deal.

I sacrificed a dream of happily ever after.

I continue to sacrifice instant gratification of my dreams.

I gave up my home, my belongings, and the city I loved.

I gave up my pet, my little dog.

Initially, we lost nearly our entire support system.

My greatest sacrifice has been full-time motherhood.

But I did not give up my marriage – he did that.

The Matzah – What We Must Have to Survive

Our ancestors did not have time to let their bread rise when fleeing Egypt. The matzah, unleavened bread, reminds us of their haste. It is the minimal sustenance they took with them in order to survive. I found the sustenance I needed to survive in a wide variety of places – from the kind woman at the food bank who treated me like a human being and snuck me soy milk every week, to the Domestic Violence program that helped me find clothes, to the group who paid for my eye exam and glasses. Sometimes a kind word from a stranger, the homeless teenager who wanted to give me her only flower, the Vietnam Veteran who shared his rage at injustice with me, the homeless man who sang me a song and insisted to me that I had worth. Many days it was the animals and the children I encountered who lifted my spirits with their presence and kept me pressing on. I suppose the sustenance that I need to survive is within. I was born with it. It is supported by the understanding of others with similar experiences.

The Maror – What We Need to Remember to Ensure Our Survival

The bitter herbs remind us of the bitterness of slavery that our ancestors endured. Although it is unpleasant to dwell on that part of my past, in remembering the abuse and being mindful of how it began, what it was like, and the effect it has had on my life, I gain the strength and perseverance to not let it happen again. It is my own personal "Lest we forget."

My abuser continues to try to convince me that he has changed, that he is different, kind. non-abusive. If I did not have the memories of being threatened with a gun or a knife, being pushed to the ground, then what would keep me from returning? Remembering is not dwelling. It is taking responsibility.

At some point, remembering my pain will also be a reminder of how far I have come.

<https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/pesach-matzah-maror>

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The 4th Cup of Wine

This cup of wine is dedicated

to the women who do not find themselves
embraced by a community, as we are tonight
women who endure injury, humiliation and
sexual assault and cannot talk about it.

women who suffered unspeakable abuses and did not live to tell.

this is the cup for shattered souls who never dreamed it would happen to them...

the women who stay to protect children, avoid shame,
and bear the burden of *shalom bayit* in a house with no peace.

the women who stay because they have no place to go.

the women who stay because they believe in love.

and the women who escaped, and now struggle to find homes,
build skills, and support their families.

this is the cup for women from whom everything has been taken --

their families, their friends, their homes, their communities,
their dignity, and their lives.

on passover, as we celebrate, as we celebrate liberation, we affirm our commitment
to make all women safe in their homes and in their relationships.

this cup is for the women who find this night is no different from any
other night. they are sisters, they are ourselves, and they are not alone.

-Jewish Women International

<https://www.haggadot.com/clip/fourth-cup-wine-liberation-and-acknowledging-those-still-dark-spaces>