

# MIN HA-MEITZAR

## From the Narrow Place

GJC Passover Supplement



*Water Was A Wall* by Rabbi Rebecca Richman

Germantown Jewish Centre, Pesah 5781/2021

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בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדּוֹר חַיִּיב אָדָם לֵךְ אוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלוֹ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם יָם.  
B'CHOL DOR VA-DOR HAYAV ADAM LIROT ET 'ATZMO K'ILU HU YATZA MI-MITZRAYIM.  
*In each and every generation, each person is obligated to  
see themselves as if they personally left Egypt.*

Each spring, we return to the story and ritual of Passover. No matter how hectic or challenging the past year, we ground ourselves in the story of our ancestors' journey from slavery to freedom, a story that is not only theirs but also our own. Reliving their suffering, their departure, their movement, their weariness, and their insistence on survival inspires us as we journey in our day.

The story of Passover is not an individual one. It is the story of a people, a collective. And the story of Passover calls on us to make freedom possible for each and every being on earth. Like our ancestors, we cannot make this journey alone. Together, we feel freedom calling. Together, we leave behind that which has constricted our hearts. Together, we part the waters and trust that there will be dry land on the other side. Together, we dance. And together, we keep moving through the unknown of the wilderness toward all that is yet to be.

Along the way, we pause to acknowledge and praise just how far we have come. This first Germantown Jewish Centre Passover Supplement comes out of a moment of great narrowness and unknown. Members of our community offer these words, teachings, insights, images, and inspiring questions during a pandemic that has kept us inside, physically distant from each other, and unsure of how the world would feel in the future. Without knowing what the other side of the great waters would bring, we have done what our people have done for centuries: we turned to Torah and to each other, sharing our ideas to bring us all comfort and wisdom.

May the words offered here and those repeated at our many and varied seders provide us with an account of the past, a reckoning with the present, and a blueprint for the future. We praise the source of life that brings our hands and hearts together as we continue the journey.



Rabbi Adam Zeff



Rabbi Rebecca Richman

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# ***Bedikat Hametz***

**Clean the house and bless the removal of leaven.**

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## ***Bedikat Hametz - Rabbi Fredi Cooper***

In Mishnah Moed 1:2, we learn: They need not fear lest a weasel or a mole may have dragged it from one house to another or from one place to another because if this were so, it could have occurred from courtyard to courtyard and from town to town and there would be no end to the matter.

So, I bring this teaching to reflect on why I do the things I do to ready myself and my family for Pesach.

First, I must take you back many years. My older daughter had been going to Hebrew school for a year when she was six years old. One Sunday after Purim, she came home with a new “kit” that they had been given and taught about at Hebrew School. The kit consisted of a feather, a spoon, and a candle. Julie was very excited about what she had learned that day and was anxious to “teach me” about the kit that was in her hand. She explained, “Mommy, after we clean everything for Pesach, we are to do this ceremony the night before and we are to say these blessings. This is the manner that we can be sure that we have done everything that is needed to prepare the house for Pesach.” Julie was so excited to be able to tell me about the need for this ceremony and the ins and outs for how to do it, and I promised her that that Pesach we would try to do it just as she had learned.

So, there is where it all began. I hid the ten pieces of *chametz* around the house and at nightfall we lit the candle. Then my husband and two daughters went by candlelight to find the *chametz* that was hidden and place it in a container with the spoon and the feather. We said the blessings that night that said we had collected all of the remaining *chametz* on our property, and in the morning, we burned the *chametz* with care and said the final blessing. We knew we were truly ready for Pesach.

## ***Bedikat Hametz - Rabbi Fredi Cooper (cont)***

As a mother, I learned to do this ceremony from my six-year-old daughter and because she was my teacher it stuck...for all of us. We have continued this custom as part of our family preparation every year. Last year in the midst of learning about a Pandemic, it was just my husband and myself that were home for Pesach. I was not sure what parts of Pesach and its preparation I had the heart to complete. It was such a time of confusion. But the candle, the feather and the wooden spoon came out...just on schedule and somehow it was necessary for know that Pesach was upon us to still do

this ritual. It was just the two of us but we each knew our roles; I hid the *chametz* and my husband found it. All of the blessings were said, the *chametz* was burned and right on schedule we found ourselves ready to welcome in Pesach.

So, I learned that there would be no end to this matter. It still was a crucial part of welcoming Pesach for each member of the family even if we could not be together. Ritual has the power to take our hearts where we need to travel to greet a holiday. It brings with it all of our memories of every Pesach right to the moment that we are inhabiting. This year too, whether we will all be together or not, I know that the candle and the feather and the spoon will help us to welcome Pesach. Those steps together in the dark allow all of us to know we have arrived.

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## ***Bedikat Hametz - Charlie Miller***

*Bedikat Hametz* is more than a clearing out of spoiled grain products; It is an act of faith in the future. *Hametz* does not become *treyf* because it is inedible or lacks nourishment. Consider, rather, that hametz is emblematic of the fortunes of the previous year. In earlier times, emptying your home of these products would have been a statement of optimism that all future needs would be reliably provided for in the new agricultural year. The appearance of the *matzah* during the Seder represents the last of the grain produced during the previous year and “watched” so that there would be enough left

## ***Bedikat Hametz - Charlie Miller (cont)***

for one last meal. From this point on, our ancestors would be sustained by the fruits of the new harvest.

What will be the new harvest in my life, and how will I nurture it to fruition? With that spirit, I now set upon the task to symbolically set aside my preoccupations with events of the past and embrace engagement with the possibilities ahead.

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## ***Bedikat Hametz - Lori Lefkovitz & Rabbi Lenny Gordon***

We are a counting people. *Limnot Yamenu*. We count the days to make them count. Just as we count the Omer of the barley harvest, the days between leaving Egypt and receiving Torah, between Passover and Shavuot, so, too, for many generations women in particular have counted the days between Purim—when we begin cleaning and preparing for Pesach—and tonight, when we declare our cleaning complete with the ritual of Bedikat Chametz.

For these last weeks, we have been in anticipatory time, preparing for the Exodus that we will undertake at the Seder. In the story of this season, the great miracle of freedom is anticipated by acts of women's heroism: the midwives, Shifra and Puah, who defiantly saved babies, Yocheved and Miriam, Moses' mother and sister, enslaved women who saved the liberator as an infant by setting a basket floating on the Nile, and the Egyptian Princess, Pharaoh's daughter, who raised Moses as her son.

As we discard the last crumbs of our own puffery and enslavements in this cleansing ritual and ready ourselves for the main event of Passover, the Seders, let us pause to be grateful for everyone whose quiet courage, whose commitment to sustaining life, whose solidarity across boundaries of class, age, race, and nationality make the miracle of freedom possible. We have counted the days and labored to reach this transition. As we gather and discard our last crumbs, we pray that this spring festival renews us in our common purpose to value and sustain each and every life.

# *Hadlakat Nerot*

Light the candles.

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*Hadlakat Nerot* - Chava Weissler

*Tkhine* for Passover, after lighting candles

*Mahzor Mishlei Yehudah* (Vilna: Widow and Brothers Romm, 1912) 13-14

Translated by Chava Weissler

## Introduction

The following prayer is a *tkhine*, one of the devotions in Yiddish recited by Central and Eastern European Jewish women beginning in the sixteenth century. Collections of *tkhines* were published, but these prayers also appear as additions to prayer books and other devotional works. The prayer translated below is found in a *mahzor*, a special festival prayer book, for Passover.

As in many *tkhines*, this text has a place for the woman to address God as herself, in her own name and as the daughter of her mother. One thing I love about this prayer is that it recognizes the tremendous effort and expense involved in preparing for Passover. Also, the text relates many aspects of Passover preparations to wider themes: eating matzah, for example, is connected to the hope to be saved from hunger throughout the year.

One feature of this text, typical of many later *tkhines*, is the interplay between Hebrew and Yiddish. Each short paragraph begins with a sentence in Hebrew, often echoing phrases from the Tanakh or the prayer-book and continues with an expansion and interpretation of the Hebrew in Yiddish. The Hebrew in bold type, while the Yiddish is in regular type.

This *tkhine* is to be recited on the first and second nights of Passover after kindling the lights.

**You are the Lord God who creates heaven and earth.** You are God, the God who has created the high heavens and the earth with all the creatures found therein.

**From your holy dwelling place, listen to my outpouring of prayer.** Accept, from your holy dwelling place, the prayer I am about to make, and incline your ears to hear the words that come out of my mouth.

**For you perform miracles for us at every moment.** For you, God, work wonders and miracles for us at every moment; therefore, work wonders for me as well, accepting my words, although I know I am not worthy of it.

**You brought us forth from Egypt to be your beloved people.** You took us out of Egypt and brought great plagues and blows upon the Egyptians and you chose us to be your beloved people.

**Therefore, I beseech you that our plea may be sweet to you.** Therefore, I beseech you, compassionate God, that the prayers and petitions that we pray for your holy, revered name's sake, be sweet for you.

**And upon me, your handmaid, who knocks at the gates of compassion, may your mercies stir.** And upon me, so-and-so, your handmaid, daughter of so-and-son, your handmaid, who now comes knocking at the gates of mercy, may your mercies stir, that you may have compassion upon me and upon my husband and upon my children.

**May you remove from among us all severe and wicked [decrees].** May you clean out from upon us, and from upon all your dear people Israel, all that is bad, just as we have cleaned all the leavened foods [*hametz*] out of our houses, as you commanded us.

**And may no illness or injury come upon us.** And just as you protected your children, the people of Israel, from the plagues you brought upon the Egyptians, so may you protect us from all illness and plague.

**And by the merit of our eating unleavened bread, may you protect us from the "bread of affliction".** And by the merit of our keeping your holy commandment to eat unleavened bread for the entire festival--for matzah is called "bread of poverty"--may you protect us for our entire lives from poverty and hunger....

**Look down from the heavens and see the toil of your people.** Lord of the Universe, look down from heaven and see how much work and effort your dear children, the people of Israel, put out to honor the Passover holiday, and how much money they spend for the sake of the holy festival.

**They strive with all their might to fulfill your commandments.** They toil with all their substance to observe the commandment you have commanded them, to remove completely all leaven [*hametz*] from their houses and to eat unleavened bread for all seven days.

**May you, O Lord, have compassion for our toil.** And we pray you, merciful God, that you may have compassion upon our exhaustion and that you may send us an abundance of blessing and success, so that we will earn again the replacement value of what this Passover cost us....

**Remember the merit of your tribes who entered the Sea of Reeds.** Dear God, remember to our credit the merit of the hosts of your people Israel who themselves entered into the depths of the sea and had faith in you that you would save them so that they would not drown.

**And preserve us from drowning in the depths of the sea.** And preserve us and our children from drowning, God forbid, in the depths of the water.

**And may the rivers not dry up during the entire coming summer.** And help us, dear God, that there may be rain at the proper time, so that the water in the rivers may not be diminished in the heat of the coming summer, and that water may not become expensive.

**Please accept with favor my blessing over the candles.** I pray you, dear God, merciful God, that you may accept with good will the blessing I have made over the candles which I kindled in honor of the holy festival....

**And may you enlighten the eyes of my husband and my children in your holy Torah.** And may you enlighten the eyes of my husband and my children in your holy torah, by the merit of my lighting my home with the candles for the festival.

***Hadlakat Nerot - Chava Weissler (cont)***

**And cause light to shine in the darkness of Jerusalem and the Temple. And may you cause light to shine in the darkness of Jerusalem and of the Temple, which have been dark now for a very long time.**

**And may we bring the paschal sacrifice to the fire on the altar. And may we be worthy to sacrifice the paschal lamb upon the fire of the altar, **speedily** in our days, amen and amen, so may it be God's will.**



**Artwork by Yona Diamond Dansky**

**Between the Fires:  
An Invocation for Kindling Candles of Commitment**

We are the generations  
That stand between the fires.

**Behind us**  
The burning crosses lit by hate  
To choke our people in the smoke of terror;  
Behind us the flame and smoke  
That rose from Auschwitz and from Hiroshima.

**Not yet behind us**  
The burning forests of the Amazon,  
Torched for the sake of fast hamburger and fast wealth.  
Not yet behind us, the glare of gun fire  
exploding in our children.  
Not yet behind us –  
the hottest years of human history  
That bring upon us  
Melted ice fields. Flooded cities.  
Scorching droughts. Murderous wildfires.

**Before us** we among all life-forms  
face the nightmare of a **Flood of Fire**,  
The heat and smoke that could consume all Earth.

"Here! The day is coming,"  
Said the Prophet Malachi,  
"That will flame like a furnace,"  
Says YHWH / Yahhhh --  
The Infinite InterBreath of Life --  
Yet for all who revere  
My Interbreathing Name, Yahhhh,  
a sun of justice will arise  
with healing in the beating of its wings,  
its rays, its winds.

***Hadlakat Nerot – Rabbi Arthur Waskow (cont)***

*"Here! Before the coming  
of the great and awesome day  
of YHWH/ the Breath of Life,  
I will send you the Prophet Elijah  
to turn the hearts of elders to their youth  
and the hearts of the youth to their elders,  
lest I come and smite the earth with utter desolation."*

**Here! we ourselves are coming  
Before that great and terrible day  
Of smiting Earth —  
For we ourselves shall turn the hearts  
Of elders and youth to each other  
So that this day of smiting  
Does not fall upon us.**

We ourselves are coming  
To douse that outer all-consuming fire.  
We must light again in our own hearts  
the inner fire of love and liberation  
that burned in the Burning Bush --  
The fire that did not consume the Bush it burned in,  
For love is strong as death --  
Love's Fire must never be extinguished:  
The fire in the heart of all Creation.

It is our task to make from inner fire  
Not an all-consuming blaze  
But the loving light in which we see more clearly  
The Rainbow Covenant glowing  
in the many-colored faces of all life.

Woven by Rabbi Arthur Waskow, The Shalom Center  
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# Kadesh

**Pour the first cup of wine and say a blessing.**

\*\*\*\*\*

**Kadesh – Rabbi George Stern**

## **Reflecting on Gathering**

In Exodus 12:3-4 we read, *“Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household. But if the household is too small for a lamb, let him share one with a neighbor ...”* Today, for most Jews, the Seder is a time for building camaraderie and community with family and friends.

If you have previously done a Zoom Seder, how did that work for you? Who joined who wouldn't normally be with you? What do you remember from their virtual presence that brought a smile to your face? Who was missing? How did that feel? Were you able to appreciate the intimacy of the smaller gathering?

This past Fall, we couldn't invite many people to our sukkot, even though they were outdoors. Imagine that your Seder table is in a sukkah. With whom would you like to share your “lamb” (family, friends, people from the past) tonight? What would you like to say to them? What are you doing to ensure that next year we'll be able to gather in person?

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**Kadesh – Rabbi David Teutsch**

While having four cups of wine at the seder is often ascribed to the four Biblical promises of redemption, the four cups also serve important individual functions at the Seder. The first cup is said over Kiddush,

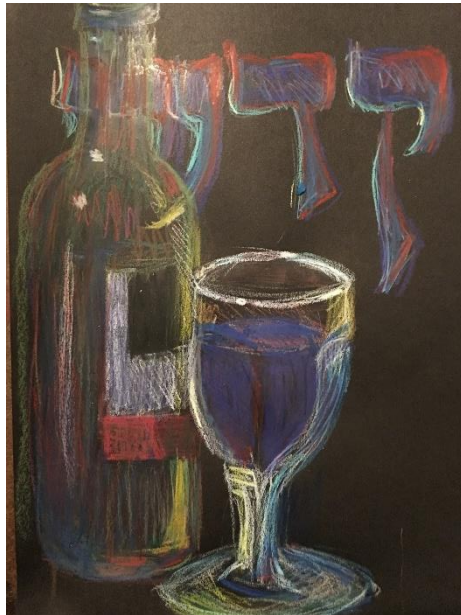
## **Kadesh – Rabbi David Teutsch (cont)**

sanctifying the Seder as a "remembrance of the going forth from Egypt" (*zekher yitziat mitzrayim*). The root of "going forth" (*yud-tzadi-aleph*) is the same root as in *motzi*, as in "brings forth bread." Redemption is not something that happened only once long ago. It is with us still.

The second cup comes after the account of the Exodus in the Seder; it celebrates redemption during the first Pesach in Egypt (*pesach mitzrayim*). The third cup marks the meal, the concrete celebration of the Pesach of the present; it is associated with the redemptive power of the food of the meal

and stands in for all of the Passovers after the first throughout history (*pesach dorot*; literally Passover of the generations). The last cup is associated with the final redemption, the cup of Elijah and messianic days (*pesach l'atid*; the future Passover).

Thus, the cups demarcate the major divisions of the seder--the redemption from Egypt we remember, the redemptive experiences we have every day, and the redemption we hope for in the future. Memory helps us interpret the present and shapes our efforts to bring an optimal future.



**Artwork by Penina Hoffnung**

# *Ur'hatz*

**Wash hands without blessing.**

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***Ur'hatz* – Rabbi Danielle Stillman**

Muslims ritually wash their hands and other parts of their bodies before they pray. If Kadesh signals that we have begun a sacred meal, perhaps the act of washing during Urchatz signals that we have begun a prayer.

Take this moment of washing to set an intention for yourself during this seder. Where do you want to direct your attention this year—on experiencing the ritual foods, on lively discussion of the story, on your seder companions? What will be the thread of prayer that runs through the seder for you?



**Artwork by Leslie Pontz**

As the Seder begins, our hand washing is unadorned, done for us by our leader, lacking even a *bracha*. But the simple act of covering hands with water reminds us of the water that lay before our people at the shores of the Red Sea. At the very moment that Pharaoh's legions were at their backs, our ancestors were paralyzed. They could not return to Egypt, but nor could they imagine a way forward as the sea loomed endlessly before them. It was Nachson, the son of Amminadab who did the simplest, most powerful thing imaginable. He took a step. A single step into the water. The rabbis teach that it was only once his foot touched the waters that they parted, and a ribbon of dry land appeared. There is a teaching that when you are overwhelmed and cannot envisage a way forward, it may be too much to pray that God will show you the way from where you are to where you will end up. What you can pray for, rather, is that God will light the next step...and then the one after that. As we long to leave behind our *mitzrayim*, may we be guided, step by step, to liberation and possibility.

# *Karpas*

Dip a vegetable in salt water and eat.

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## ***Karpas – Miriam Pinsker Von Essen***

Spring is here.

In my undergraduate forest ecology class, my classmates and I set out every week to explore the forests of central New York. Every type of tree, our professor explained, possessed a different life strategy to survive and thrive. “What tree are you like?” he would challenge us to consider. Are you Aspen, eager to experience the sun’s light, allocating your carbon to quickly propel skyward, yet vulnerable to upending? Or are you perhaps Sugar Maple, sometimes lingering mere inches tall for years, rooted on a shaded slope, patiently waiting for a sun-filled opening in the forest canopy?

Trees grow and adapt in myriad ways; yet they all begin the same, as saplings, their bright green leaflets not dissimilar to the parsley we place on the seder plate. Though not without past struggles and future challenges, they represent potential.

What approach will you take to growing this spring?



**Artwork by Allison Pokras**

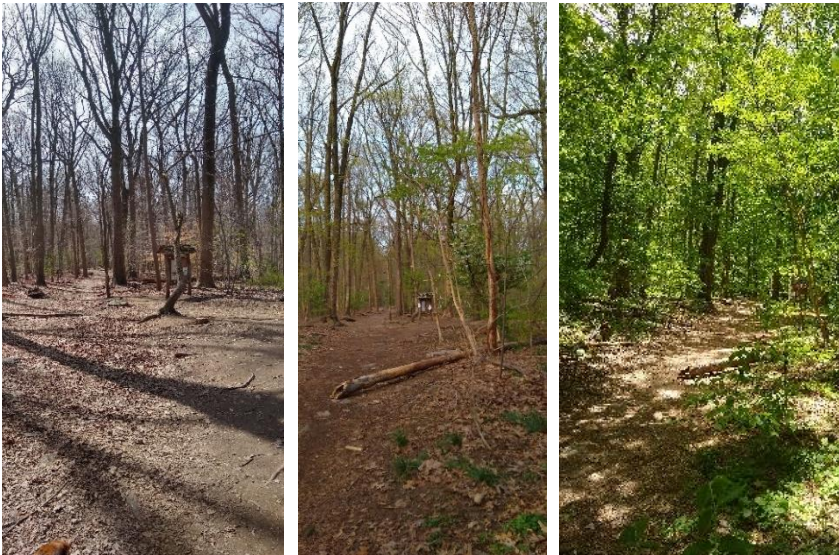
## ***Karpas – Genie Ravital***

One of the gifts of our lockdown time in the spring of 2020 was the gift of slowing down – way down.

On my daily morning walk in Carpenter Woods with Shanti, our beagle, I stopped to take a photo in the same spot every morning for three months. I got to document the miracle of the woods emerging from the hibernation of winter, going through the budding of spring, and then bursting into the abundant green of summer. On our walks, I often chanted *“He Haita; He Hoveh V’tiHiyeh”* – “God was; God Is; God Will Be.”

It was an amazing reminder that – despite all the suffering of humanity in these times – Earth/God is continuing her magic of rebirthing into another cycle of life.

May our Karpas tonight remind us of the steadfast miracle of spring and motivate us to Wake Up to protect the future of humanity and the diversity of life on Earth.



**Photography by Genie Ravital**

# Yahatz

Break the middle of three matzot. Wrap the larger portion in a napkin and hide for the afikoman (dessert).

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## Yahatz – Rabbi Josh Gutoff

During the course of the Seder, we're sometimes cast as slaves looking forward to freedom and sometimes as the liberated people, looking back on the Exodus. This passage speaks to both those roles and raises some interesting questions.

*This is the poor bread...* Here, the matzah is described as slave food, but later on in the evening ("This matzah that we eat, what is the meaning of it?"), the matzah will be described as liberation food, the bread made by the newly-freed Israelites. Are they two different opinions? Two different kinds of matzah? Or has something happened?

*All who are hungry...* We would expect an invitation to come from the free, the wealthy, from those who have plenty. Here, though, it seems that we are still eating "poor bread," we are still enslaved, and yet we are opening our doors. What might that say about the poor - and the rich?

*All who are in need...* At first, this seems to be a repetition of the previous line for rhetorical effect, and "hungry" and "needy" refer to the same people. But perhaps we should read it as, "If you are oppressed, impoverished, and hungry, come and we will provide for you. And if you are free and powerful, you also need some Pesach in your life, and we offer that, too." But, why? What is it that those who are free and comfortable, those with privilege, need from the Seder? What is the Pesach of the empowered?

## **Meditation on the Inner Pharaoh**

Pharaoh is the all-powerful, God like, master of the Empire. The story of liberation is about seeing through and beyond Pharaoh's authority and control.

In meditation we are looking inside our own hearts. There we may encounter the inner Pharaoh as the thought patterns and impulses that urge us to seek complete control, total approval, utter security, perfect relationships. Meditation itself is an exploration of the taste of liberation and the forces that impede that freedom.

You are invited to take a seat. Let your back be upright and plant your feet on the floor. Take a few deep breaths into the nose and out the mouth, allowing the surface tension to release.

\*

Notice any physical sensations that appear in this moment --any place of constriction or pressure. Notice places of heat or warmth or coolness as they appear in the body.

\*

You are using the faculty or tool of awareness to simply notice what is present in bodily sensation.

\*

You can allow your eyes to softly close or you can allow them to soften and gaze a few feet ahead of you toward the ground.

\*

Bring your attention to the sensation of air entering and leaving your body. There is no need to breathe in any particular way. Just notice the sensation of the breath entering the body and then leaving the body.

## **Yahatz – Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg (cont)**

You are not actively doing anything other than observing, noting, becoming aware of the flow of breath. You can note softly to yourself – in breath/ out breath/ in breath/out breath.

\*

Continue with a few more breaths for a few minutes on your own.

You might become aware of other sensations in the body besides the breath – a breeze from the outside, an ache or pain in the legs or arms or other part of the body. You might notice sounds coming and going. This is fine. Just let your attention return again and again to the breath if you become involved in some other object. There is nothing that is supposed to arise or not arise. You are not supposed to feel or think or not feel or not think in any particular way. Just notice what is really happening – without judging it, without running away, without pushing it away.

\*

\*

Observing your entire felt experience – sounds, sensations, and thoughts – see if there is anything permanent and unchanging in your experience.

\*

Observe any desire that might be arising within you to make your experience something solid or familiar or known or “right”.

Notice if you have any discomfort around being with your own experience without knowing “what it is” or “what to do”.

\*

It is human to have difficulty resting in this moment of awareness without trying to make it into something else or push it away. Our inner Pharaoh tells us we could get everything to be under control if we tried hard enough. In contrast, God’s message highlights process, relationship, listening, vulnerability, and faith.

## ***Yahatz* – Rabbi Sheila Peltz Weinberg (cont)**

As we sit we continue to be aware of the fluid nature of our experience – thoughts, sensations, sounds – arising and passing.

Only awareness itself is continuous.

Our awareness is steady, faithful, ever malleable, conforming itself to whatever meets its gaze. It is infinite and spacious. Our awareness sustains us.

What inner Pharaoh blocks your freedom, your inner light, your life force? Can you rest in warm, spacious, open, accepting, awareness itself?

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## ***Yahatz* – Rabbi Marsha Friedman**

*Yahatz*, the breaking of the middle of the three matzot on the Seder plate, is a unique food-based ritual, as it is not accompanied by a blessing. When we think of *yahatz*, we often focus on the utilitarian nature of the act—that the larger of the two broken pieces will be hidden, searched for, and once found will serve as the *afikomen*, the dessert signaling that the Seder is moving toward its conclusion.

But while we are often tempted to “put dessert first,” of equal importance is the fact that the silent performance of the breaking of the *matzah* affords us a moment of inward reflection in what is otherwise a long ceremony of many words. Perhaps we might give ourselves permission to honor the uneven texture of our personal and communal lives, and our own places of vulnerability, just as our *Yahatz* ritual elevates brokenness to a place of honor in the Seder.

# *Magid*

**Pour the second cup of wine, and tell the story  
of fleeing slavery in Egypt.**

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***Magid* – Rabbi Arthur Waskow**

Four new questions for Passover:

Why do we break the matzah in two before we eat it?

Matzah, the pressed-down bread that embodies the "fierce urgency of Now," was both the bread of the oppressed and the bread of freedom.

If we keep the whole matzah for ourselves, it remains the bread of affliction. Only if we share the matzah can it become the bread of freedom. We must break the matzah in two in order to share it with each other.

If we hold all our abundance, our prosperity, for ourselves, the withholding brings forth anger and resentment, guilt, and fear. The abundant bread becomes the bread of affliction. Only if we share our abundance with each other can it become the bread of freedom.

If we gobble all the abundance of our Mother Earth for human society alone, leaving no space for other life-forms, the Earth will choke and curdle. Whatever bread may barely grow will bear affliction. Only if we share our air, our water, with the myriad shapes of life will all this growing birth our freedom.

If we hold our own knowledge, our own wisdom, for ourselves alone, we end up in a Narrowness that enslaves us. Only if we share our wisdom with other traditions, other communities, and open ourselves to learn from them, can our wisdom lead to freedom. [*Mitzrayyim*, the Hebrew word for Egypt, actually means "Tight and Narrow Place."]

If we try to hold the whole land for ourselves, even the Land of Israel, the land will remain a land of affliction. Only if we share it with another people can it become the land of freedom.

And so, at the beginning of the Seder we break the matzah, and at the end of the Seder we share its pieces with each other, to eat the bread of freedom.

2. Why is there an orange on the Seder plate?

Of all the foods upon the Seder plate, only the orange bears the seeds that can grow the next generation of our freedom. The orange first came to us as the newly fruitful gift of those who had been treated as outsiders to our community – – lesbians and gay men, Jews by choice, women, the blind and those whose minds or tongues were stammering.

All these have sown the seeds of creativity. If these seeds flower, they will sow new generations of the unexpected.

Why is there *charoset* on the Seder plate, and why do we linger on its delicious taste?

Because *charoset* embodies the delicious Song of Songs, which itself celebrates the embodiment of love among human beings and love between the earth and human earthlings. All the many recipes for charoset draw on the ingredients named only in the cookbook of the Song of Songs – – wine, nuts, fruit, spices.

We are taught to recite the Song of Songs during Passover in order to remind us that the joy of freedom cannot be celebrated in human societies alone; as in the time of Eden, all Earth must sing for joy. Because in Eden, the Garden of Delight, we humans tried to gobble all the fruitfulness of Earth, Eden ended with an Earth turned stingy and with half the human race subjugated to the other half. Passover calls us to Eden once again, where love and freedom join in fuller celebration.

These are three questions. What is the fourth question?

**That** is the fourth question.

***Asheir G'alanu* -- Claiming Judaism Anew**

It's standard Jewish practice to recite a *b'rakha* before performing a mitzva. Therefore, it seems strange that among the blessings preceding each Seder ritual, we find no *b'rakha* before the *Maggid*. After all, it fulfills a prime *mitzva of Pesach*, the Torah's imperative of *v'higad'ta*, "You shall tell your children..."

The *Chatam Sofer* (Rabbi Moshe Schreiber, d.1839) offered a dual explanation for this anomaly. First, the *b'rakha Asheir G'alanu* ("Who has redeemed us..."), after the "Telling" and before blessing the Second Cup, is actually the blessing for the *Maggid*. And why after, not before? Because this delayed practice is akin to the threefold *mikveh* immersion when one becomes a Jew-by-Choice. The first immersion ritually marks formal entry into the Jewish people; only then can one appropriately say "...Who has sanctified **us** through the mitzvot and charged **us**..." before completing the second and third immersions.

In effect, the *Chatam Sofer* teaches that at our annual Seder we are all Jews-by-Choice. By choosing to immerse ourselves anew in our tradition's story of enslavement and redemption and by physically ingesting its edible symbols we reclaim the right to bless, "...YHWH, **our** God and God of **our** forebears..." And it is only by internalizing the realities of oppression and possibilities for deliverance in our life and times, that we receive again, as Jews, the imperative to actualize those blessings in the world.



**Artwork by Rabbi Bec Richman**

**Asking the four questions if children are not present**

If we are not holding a multigenerational seder, and even if we are having a seder alone, we still ask the four questions. If no children are at the seder, the adults ask the questions. If one is alone, one asks oneself, “Why is this night different?” (Mishneh Torah, Leavened and Unleavened Bread, 7:3).

Asking the four questions ourselves is, as Rabbi Michael Strassfeld teaches, “an opportunity to locate each of the questioning children in ourselves.” In the past year, we have found ourselves asking questions like the four children of the Seder: sometimes, like the wise child, we want to understand; sometimes, like the simple child, we need the flood of information to slow down; sometimes we can’t imagine the next question; and sometimes, like the wicked child, we question authority and declare it does not apply to us. How does asking questions with these different approaches help to bring out the whole story? Which child do you find in yourself right now?



**Artwork by Nina Gordon and Sonia Gordon-Walinsky**

*Maggid* is translated as “narrate,” the imperative to tell the Exodus story, and it is the central task of our seder. *Maggid* also means “one who tells” and refers to the wandering preachers who offered not only Torah stories but also interpretations. This, too, is our task.

In the Haggadah, the story is chopped up and mixed like *charoset*. It loops back and begins again. We interrupt with two dips, four questions, four children, five cups of wine, ten plagues, fifteen holy attributes, and a goat.

As children, we just wanted to know what happened. So many digressions! Even as adults, we yearn for neat narratives. But *Maggid* should puzzle us, challenging us to actively reconstruct the story. Each year, we are all *maggidim*.

Medieval rabbis began in two ways: first, with physical enslavement, “*avadim hayinu*” (“we were once slaves”), and second, with spiritual, “our ancestors were idol worshipers.” And a third beginning: “*Arami oved avi...*,” variously translated as “the Aramean wanted to destroy my father, but he went down to Egypt,” “my father was a wandering Aramean...,” and even, “my father was a fugitive Aramean.” So, who was this? And “*oved*”: lost, causing to be lost? Destroyed? Unclear.

But such debates enrich the tale. The “telling” is never stale.

Some years, *charoset* seems less sweet, *maror* more bitter. Yet we consume the story again, viscerally realizing its meaning for our time. The sensory, complicated *process* of *Maggid* ensures that we remember the past and seek justice in the present.

Alternative 4 Questions (to explore the importance and message of Pesach):

1. Why is Pesach the only holiday with special dietary requirements (laws pertaining to hametz)?
2. Why on Pesach do we re-enact the events of the narrative (through matzah, charoset as mortar, the roasted bone on the seder plate representing the Pesach offering, some Sephardic Jews dress in travelling clothes for the seder)?
3. Why is Pesach the only holiday for which we are commanded to tell the story to our children (Exodus 13:8 “And on that day you shall tell your child, it is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.”)?
4. Why is the Passover Seder the most celebrated ritual among Jews?



**Artwork by Leslie Pontz**

# ***Rohtzah***

## Wash hands with blessing.

**09**   **08**   **07**   **06**   **05**   **04**   **03**   **02**   **01**   **00**   **99**   **98**   **97**   **96**   **95**   **94**   **93**   **92**   **91**   **90**   **89**   **88**   **87**   **86**   **85**



**Artwork by Sonia Gordon-Walinsky**



**Artwork by Rabbi Bec Richman**

***Rohtzah* – Sheila Erlbaum**



**Artwork by Sheila Erlbaum**

This is a huge series of waterfalls over rocks and shrubs on a mountainside done with charcoal vines and a Q-tip smudger.

What does it teach us? One who sows in tears shall reap with joy (Psalms 126:5). As we journey through life, there will be tears to shed as we come crashing over rocks and rough shrubs. But there is also great power and beauty in the journey and the tears help us to flow through the rough patches and keep us moving forward. May we always see the beauty, learn the lessons, and continue to flow through life.

In my line of paid-work (city planning) water is, sadly, as often seen as a problem as it is an asset. In planning, water is something that has to be moved around, situated underground, filtered, responded to during storm events, and, ultimately, safely brought into our homes for drinking, bathing, cooking, and more. So much of what planners do with water is to try to structure its very fluidity into something manageable and usable in our industrial, advanced economic society. The benefits of this project cannot be understated. Running water and proper plumbing has led to radical decreases in disease and enormous increase in ease of access to this essential good.

Amazingly to much of the everyday eye, this system appears to happen invisibly and seamlessly; we turn on the tap, turn off the shower, and the water starts or stops in response. And, yet, all around us, we see where water's essential character -- overflowing, fluid, boundary-escaping -- comes through, reminding us that, no matter how much we plan, nature is still there. The movement of water is not invisible, but it can be starkly plain before our eyes.

One of these examples can be seen close to my home in West Philadelphia in the Mill Creek Watershed. More than a century ago, Mill Creek was sewered -- brought underground -- as part of the residential and industrial development of West Philadelphia. When the planning for this project was underway, the impetus was rapid development, not long-range stability. Sure enough, the landscape above the sewered creek is some of the most volatile land in the neighborhood. In the summer of 2019, the intersection at 43rd and Baltimore developed a massive sinkhole, right above the creek. And, as the decades-long work Ann Whirston Sprin has conducted in the neighborhood shows, houses built on top of the creek are a lot more likely to experience structural deficiencies and faulty foundations -- unstable footing because the land itself was really water.

What these examples (water in sewers that let us live our lives, and water overflowing sewers that cause major infrastructural and social concern) bring forth is our essential dependence on water. In this moment in the seder, we can reflect on the sanctity of water and the way it purifies our spirits at this moment of our collective redemptions. And, we can also reflect on our need to live in relation to water, to be grateful when it helps us, and to respond to its fluidity, rather than seeking to overpower it. This response, to ride the wave of water, is also part of the exodus.

# Motzi, Matzah

**Bless, then break and eat matzah.**

[illegible]

**Matzah baked by Susan Weiss**

## ***Motzi, Matzah – Atenea Rosado***

This prayer is inspired by the blessing of *hamotzi*, and the United Farm Workers labor organizing efforts.

### **Original (English version)**

Praised be the hands of the farm workers who bring bread from out of the earth.

Praised be the lives of those who do backbreaking work in the fields under the sun, from the San Gabriel Valley, to the Wheat Belt, to Lancaster.

Praised be the lives of those who are made to use insecticides and pesticides without ever being able to read the warning label. Always always praise the lives of those who are forced to work with the chemicals that kill la tierra y su vida.

Praised be the children of those who bring bread to our tables. May we join with them to make life beautiful for all.

This bread is an extension of them, and they are an extension of Gxd.

This bread contains their work, and their work contains Gxd's.

### **Translation (Spanish)**

Alabadas sean las manos de lxs campesinos que traen pan de la tierra.

Alabada sea la vida de quienes tienen un trabajo agotador en los campos bajo el sol, desde el Valle de San Gabriel hasta el Valle de Trigo y Lancaster.

Alabada sea la vida de quienes están obligados a usar insecticidas y pesticidas sin poder leer las etiquetas de advertencia. Sean siempre alabadas las vidas de quienes son obligados a trabajar con sustancias que matan la tierra y su vida.

Alabados sean lxs niñxs de los que traen pan a nuestras mesas. Que podamos acompañarles en la construcción del buen vivir para todxs.

Este pan es una extensión de ellos y ellos son una extensión de Dixs.

Este pan contiene su trabajo y su trabajo contiene el trabajo de Dixs.

# Maror

Taste a bitter herb.

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**Maror – Marilyn Kraut**

When we are young, we can be held captive by the expectations that family, friends, community, and culture place on us. We might comply to avoid punishment or gain accolades. We might rebel. We might get stuck somewhere in between. We might not even realize it. Regardless, acting on these expectations will offer hollow rewards, bitter results, because they will not be based on who we truly are or can strive to be. With courage, we can look into our souls, throw off the ties that bind us to others' expectations, and find a path toward freedom to be our true selves.



**Artwork by Rabbi Bec Richman**

**Morals of *Maror***

- The wise child eats the *maror* dutifully following the instructions.
- The wicked child tricks a sibling into thinking that the *maror* is a baby carrot.
- The simple child cannot tell the difference between the *maror* and a baby carrot.
- The child who doesn't know how to ask a question thinks the *maror* is a mistake.

Written around 200 C.E., the Mishnah, an early code of Jewish law, teaches that several species can be served as *maror*: lettuce, chervil, field eryngo, endives, and horseradish. The bitter herbs have to be served fresh or dry and they cannot be boiled or pickled. That means that the horseradish that we buy in jars can't masquerade as a bitter herb. We are obligated to eat the bitter herb raw and unadulterated in as pure a state as possible because only that allows us to develop both empathy and kindness, empathy from tasting the raw bitterness of slavery, and kindness because we become vulnerable and in need of relief from the bitterness.

The rabbis in the Gemara (the commentary on the Mishnah) love to play with words, and they teach in the Talmud, Pesachim 39a, that lettuce - *hassa* in Hebrew - can be served as a bitter herb because of the symbolism of that word: God showed mercy - *haas* in Hebrew - and redeemed us from slavery. Each of us has an opportunity in this brief stage of our seder to feel bitterness, empathy, relief, and anticipation for that moment when bitterness will subside and be replaced with sweetness. Eating *maror* is a deeply moral act of empathy, not the same at all as eating a baby carrot.

# Korech

Eat a "sandwich" of matzah, bitter herbs, and haroset.

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## **Korech – Rabbi Reba Carmel**

*Mizmor L'Mikdash Hillel:* I sing to you a song of gratitude and praise. To you who placed slavery and freedom in the palm of our hands. To you who ask us to remember that liberation is tinged with pain, that bitterness will yield to freedom and that sweetness binds them together. I pray to you that we merit to gain entry to your Mikdash, your sanctuary of divine Torah, where those who are enslaved witness freedom, and those who are liberated have compassion and all are bound together by the intoxicating sweetness that courses through the soul of humanity. Amen.

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## **Korech – Dannetta (Aleeza) Purnell**

### **IT'S ALL ABOUT THE HAROSET**

My first seder was sponsored by a family at the synagogue I was attending when I converted. When we arrived at the portion of the seder at which time we consumed the haroset, I made a comment to those around me referencing how I was feeling guilty because I wasn't sure that I had consumed enough bitters - and therefore that I had not suffered enough. A woman seated across from me, replied something to the effect of "look at that, you've already got the Jewish guilt!"

I have come to realize that the bitter does indeed serve a purpose. This concept has been articulated in many ways. Those who practice the Law of Attraction as articulated by Esther Hicks come to recognize that Step 5 of the manifestation process is the ability to recognize that Step 1, "the contrast", as she refers to it, provides the opportunity for expansion. That is because

## ***Korech – Dannetta (Aleeza) Purnell (cont)***

there is recognition of what one does not want, which uncovers the opportunity to create and manifest the alternate and opposing ideal. Those in recovery communities have a saying that “pain is the touchstone of all spiritual progress”.

After attending a Women in Power conference at the Omega Institute, I once did a lay led sermon in the Unitarian Universalist Church on the topic of turning pain into power. It was a reflection on how strong women have used negative situations to empower themselves and to assist others in doing the same. I believe that the most famously verbalized of this concept is, of course, turning lemons into lemonade.

I have found that in order to find purpose and meaning in the bitter, I must embrace, enhance, and dwell in the sweet. The more it is nurtured, the more it grows. So, I commit to acknowledging the place and existence of the sometimes-painful bitterness metaphorically addressed by the maror; so that I may further nurture, appreciate and expand the sweetness represented in the haroset.



**Artwork by Leslie Pontz**

# ***Shulhan Orech***

**Begin the full meal.**

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## ***Shulhan Orech – Rabbi Nancy Epstein***

Eating the meal is central to the seder. It unites the first part of the seder, which looks to our historical past, with the last part that envisions our messianic future. It elevates the meaning inherent in the words of Pirkei Avot 3:4 “When three eat at the same table and have spoken words of Torah, it’s as if they had eaten at God’s table.” During our seder meal, may we enjoy great nourishment and delight! And may we give thanks for all the hands that produced, delivered, and cooked our food and set our seder table and reaffirm the human right to food and freedom for all!

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## ***Shulhan Orech – Susan Weiss***



I used to sit at the children’s table, a place of playful Seder mischief with siblings and cousins. Catching “behave yourselves” glances from the adults up ahead. Teen years moved me to the center of the seating. I was too young and restless to pay much attention but did my part as requested.

As a young mother with children, I was back to the children’s table to mind the baby and leave if required by infant demands.

Religious study, insight, and maturity brought me to the head of the table with my parents seated next to me as participants. I led the Seder, keeping some of the old traditions but adding and updating the content.

Grandchildren and young cousins took their places at the children’s table.

My children and their spouses seated alongside made up the middle.

Each generation taking their seat in a glorious transition of family, tradition, and love.

Around the table we turn.

# Tzafun

Search for, find, and then eat the *afikoman*.

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## ***Tzafun – Rabbi Cynthia Kravitz***

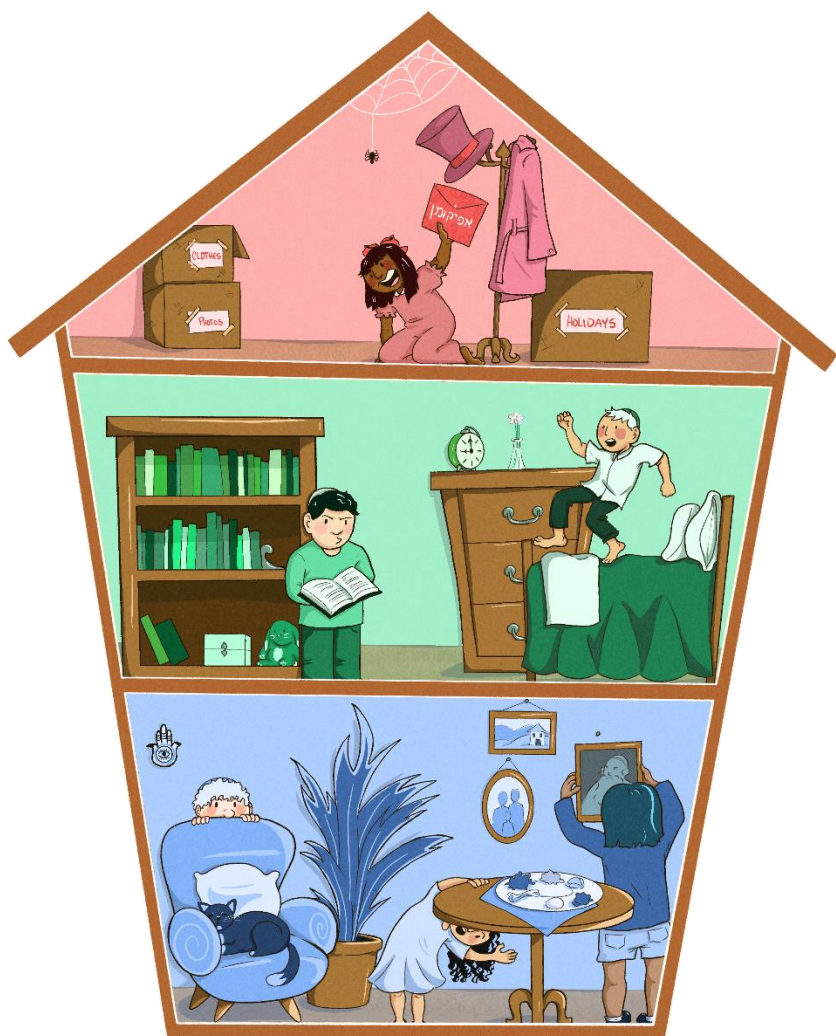
Growing up next door to my Aunt Clare and Uncle Jack z”l was a beautiful gift.

We shared every holiday together. Uncle Jack’s custom for “negotiating” for the Afikoman was to hold his deliberations with the all of us at the Seder table after the meal. One “payment” was a delicious box of Almond Bark. The second payment was one much deeper, affecting me to this very day.

Each of us would share a social justice cause that we were involved with during the year, describing what the organization did and why we were committed to this cause. Uncle Jack and all the family listened to each of us and then in the name of our family seder, Uncle Jack made a contribution to each of the causes that we had shared.

This custom has stayed with me and at every seder, my family continues this beautiful tradition. Our seder was kept relevant and true to the special Passover mitzvah of feeling the pain of others and helping others. And, every Pesach, our family learned more about who we were, what we believed in and who we were becoming. This yearly Pesach seder table discussion was a great way for our family to learn about and keep up to date with “the youngsters” at the table. The adults had a great opportunity to “shepp nachas” in seeing that we had internalized the central teaching of the holiday and what they had taught us.

From this family ritual, we lifted up the power of the unknown (we made a difference in this world in ways that that even we ourselves could never imagine or know), we explored hiddenness (we revealed new things about ourselves to our family), and we played (it was fun to share!). Thank you forever, dear Uncle Jack! z”l for teaching me that observing Pesach is not complete without the action of stretching out our arms to help others.



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Artwork by Uri Clark

# Barech

**Pour the third cup of wine and recite the blessing after meals. Pour an extra cup of wine for the prophet Elijah and open the door of the house to invite in Elijah.**

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***Barech – Mordecai Martin***

It's a very special moment, when we open the door, and summon Elijah the prophet to attend our seder. In some ways, it is the ultimate act of faith and trust in Judaism. Just as we are sure that the Messiah is coming, right this very second, they'll be here tomorrow the latest, *keynahora*, so too, we believe with childlike simplicity that Elijah, the Messiah's foreteller, is just behind that door. Open it and greet him. In my house, this was often my responsibility, as my older sister Julia, who normally would have hogged such a special duty, had been permanently terrified out of it by Jane Yolen's *The Devil's Arithmetic*, which depicts a skeptical young modern American Jewish girl being magically transported to Nazi Germany when she opens the door for Elijah. And indeed, there is something terrifying about this moment. It is when we recite the fearsome prayer, *shefoch chamatecha*, "Pour Out Your Wrath" and wish a swift and vicious end to all those who would and have attacked the Jews. Who are these four nations, traditionally identified with Rome, Persia, Greece, and Babylon, and what did they do to deserve such a fate? For the rabbinical tradition, they are those who deny the greatness of God. And this is what terrifies me. For don't I also, on occasion, bring into doubt the greatness of the Lord? In fact, with my sister's refusal and Jane Yolen's prose echoing in my ears, aren't I already thinking that most common of contemporary Jewish heresies? Where was God when we needed God, in our suffering? In a way, the 17th century Polish rabbi, Naftali Ginzburg, points out that we are not alone. The prophets Jeremiah and Daniel, he says, also revoked God of the title of HaGibor, the Mighty One, and of HaNora, the Awesome One, when they saw the suffering of the People Israel. What's more, says Rabbi Ginzburg, they were right to do so! Because our God is a God of Truth. So, remember, when you have trouble with the theology of "Pour Out Your Wrath," speak up, be honest. For ours is a God of Truth.

Jews in different parts of the world have different customs and emphasize different parts of our shared history. For the B'nei Israel Jewish community in India, they treat Elijah (for them, he is Eliyahu HaNabi - pronounced with a "B") with special veneration. They believe that, when their community left Israel (they imagine after the destruction of the First Temple), they shipwrecked off the west coast of India. The B'nei Israel community holds that Eliyahu HaNabi rescued them and brought them safely to India. As a result, pictures of Eliyahu in his chariot are everywhere in B'nei Israel homes and synagogues, often with prayers. The B'nei Israel also believe that when Eliyahu went to heaven, the wheels of his chariot touched down in Alibagh, about 15 miles south of Mumbai. When we open the door for Eliyahu HaNabi, we are reminded of our relationship to Jews all around the world, of Eliyahu's profound impact on so many Jewish communities, and of the beauty of Jewish diversity worldwide.

**Barech – Penina Hoffnung**

**The Ballad of Serach Bat Asher**

A pastiche, new words by Penina Hoffnung (5778)

To the tune of "I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill" poem by Alfred Hayes, tune by Earl Hawley Robinson, z"l.

*Serach bat Asher, according to Midrashic tradition, was granted eternal life for telling her grandfather Jacob about his son Joseph still being alive and dwelling in Egypt in so gentle a manner that Ya'akov did not die from the shock of the revelation. She is counted among those who went down into Egypt with Ya'akov, and again when they left Egypt. It's said that she helped locate Joseph's bones immersed and buried in the Nile, so they could be repatriated to the promised land as Joseph had requested. Like Elijah, she is said to wander the earth helping the Jewish people when they need it, in quietly modest but crucial ways.*

*I thought The Ballad of Joe Hill because of the commonality of a hero who never dies, and the fitting gentleness of the tune, I like to think that Hayes--who was Jewish--and Robinson would be glad for inclusion in a seder, and that they would be 100% behind the Me Too and Time's Up protest movements.*

## ***Barech – Peninah Hoffnung (cont)***

Before you open up that door for El'yahu ha Navi  
Come learn of Serach bat Asher,  
Erased from history, erased from history.

She was Yakov's granddaughter and he still grieved Yosef's loss.  
From Egypt came some happy news  
But how to tell the boss? But how to tell the boss?

So Serach took up her guitar and sat at Grandad's side  
Crooning gently into his ear,  
"My Uncle Joe's alive, my Uncle Joe's alive."

When Jacob realized what she'd said and why through lullabye  
Said he, "She's saved me from sure death,  
This child will never die, this child will never die!"

And so to Egypt she did go and with her tribe descend  
And four hundred years after that  
She left with them again, she left with them again.

The Midrash is filled with details in every age and stage  
Whene'r Jews needed gentle help  
Serach was wise and sage, Serach was wise and sage.

So not just to Elijah should we raise our glass aloft  
Our world requires heroes  
Whose actions are more soft, whose actions are more soft.

Particularly at this time when the call is for "Time's Up"  
To unsung Serach Bat Asher  
We dedicate this cup, we dedicate this cup.

So tell her story to the world, declare it everywhere  
The love, wisdom, and bravery  
Of Serach Bat Asher, of Serach Bat Asher.

# Hallel

**Pour the fourth cup of wine and then  
recite psalms of praise.**

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***Hallel – Mark Smith***

As soon as I hear a familiar tune from Hallel, I want to sing. When I hear *betse't Yisra'el mimmitsrayim* (Psalm 114:1), I want to sing. To sing the Hallel Psalms (Psalms 113-118) is not only to enjoy singing together, but to sing with a purpose, the very purpose captured by the word Hallel, literally to “praise.” In Hallel for what are we praising God? Many of the themes of Hallel apply all three of the *shalosh regalim*: gratitude to the God who is in heaven (Psalms 113:4-5, 115:3, 16); praise focused on the divine name (Psalms 113:1-2, 115:1, 116:4, 17, 118:10-11, 12, 26); the nations ultimately under God in the wider scheme of things (Psalms 113:3-4, 115:2, 117:1, 118:10). And the emphasis on God’s care for those who have less will resonate for us (Psalms 113:7-9, 115:13, 116:6). Yet two psalms in Hallel focus specifically on the Passover experience: the exodus from Egypt in Psalm 114, in *betse't Yisra'el mimmitsrayim*; and in Psalm 118 we end our Hallel experience with echoes of *Shir HaYam*, “the Song of the Sea,” in Exodus 15: “The Lord is my strength and might, he has become my deliverance” in Psalm 118:14 = Exodus 15:2; and “Your right hand is triumphant” (Psalm 118:15 and 16; compare Exodus 15:6). When we sing Hallel, we can praise God for many things; not the least is that we have life in us to perform our own departure from Egypt with God.

This verse in the Song of Songs has been interpreted as a description of the crossing of the sea:

"O my dove in the crevice of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see you, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet and you are beautiful" (Song of Songs 2:14).

The ancient Aramaic translation on this verse expounds on it:

"And when wicked Pharaoh pursued the people of Israel, the Assembly of Israel was compared to a dove trapped in the clefts of a rock...Then immediately the Assembly opened her mouth in prayer before HaShem and an echo came from the heaven above and this is what it said, 'You, O Assembly of Israel,...show me your face and your worthy deeds and let me hear your voice. For your voice is sweet when it prays in the small Temple and your face is beautiful when you perform good deeds'" (Aramaic Targum to Song of Songs 2:14).

Usually when we think about the crossing of the sea, all of the agency is with God performing miracles and with Moses leading the people. This reading celebrates another aspect of it: the people's ability to rejoice in God's gifts and the people's good deeds. There is beauty in the people's acknowledgment of God: the praise they utter by singing and by praying together; and there is beauty in the people's good deeds, whether those deeds are taking the scary and confusing steps of the early days of the Exodus, or whether the deeds are the love and care that people show for each other in sustaining a community through trauma. In this moment at the sea, in the moment that the people seem trapped but manage to release, God responds to the sweetness and beauty of both: the voice and the face, the singing and the doing.

As we go into Hallel, as we raise our voices in praise, we can imagine an echo coming from heaven, responding in love to the beauty of people raising their voices together in praise of God, and responding to the good deeds that we have seen so much in the past year: the love and care and connection that people have shown in holding families and communities together through this difficult time.

# Nirtzah

Conclude with a song.

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***Nirtzah – Ken Lande***

In our house the reading of the Haggadah involves a protracted discussion of the plagues. Why were there ten? The first nine plagues impacted everyone in Egypt equally, but, the tenth plague was different. There is no recovery from the death of a child, and the tenth plague affected only the Egyptians and not the Israelites. The Egyptians were furious. Egyptian mobs roamed the streets looking for Israelites they could main or kill. Each Israelite house was marked in red making that easy. There was nothing left for the Israelites, but to flee and to do so quickly.

This 3000-year old story applies to us today. The pogroms in eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th century, the destruction of synagogues and Jewish schools and institutions on Kristallnacht, and the recent attack on the U.S. Capitol by furious mobs are reminders that the recital of the Passover story at the Seder is as much about us today as about our ancestors. For my family and me this is very real. I saw the remnants of my school the morning after Kristallnacht, and hid from the Nazi mobs roaming the streets that day. The smears of blood on the doorposts were replaced by yellow stars of David.

The Seder in our house combines the retelling of a 3000-year old story with a contemporary one, one that is new and still unfolding. It begins with the youngest ones in the family asking what will happen this evening and ends with the refrain “Next Year in Jerusalem.” This ending was there long before there was a State of Israel and a realistic possibility of actually going to Jerusalem. What it really said was – during the coming year may you, our youngest, achieve your dreams and aspirations. In our family, the youngest generation, teenagers, runs the second half of the service. It is our way of transferring the mantle to them and they are anxious to take it on.

Each family has its own combination of stories, blending together the experiences, hopes and visions of multiple generations. It is the uniqueness of these family experiences, dreams and aspirations that makes each Seder unique and personal.

The end of every journey—through the wilderness, through the diaspora, through a global pandemic, through political times bad and good, through this seder—is the start of a new one. We have learned and experienced so much on our way. What do we hope for now?

Hope, Rabbi Avi Strausberg cautions, can be dangerous. Pessimists suffer the emptiness of low expectations, while optimists feel the hurt of broken hearts. Hope must root in the hard ground of reality and still reach outward and upward with faith.

Tonight, as we conclude our seder, we dream that the world as it is will become the world as it should be. And we hope that we will help to make it so.



**Artwork by Penina Hoffnung**

# *S'firat ha'Omer*

(Second night) Begin counting the Omer  
(with the blessing).

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*S'firat ha'Omer* – Mark Smith

As one of our last acts together at the Seder, we count the 'omer. But what does it mean to count time? We may consider this question in light of the only place in the Bible where we find counting time; that's in Psalm 90:12. In this verse, the *qahal* asks God: "Teach us to count our days rightly" (New Jewish Publication Society translation). To count time is something we do together; it is not simply an individual act. It is also an act for us to take stock of "the span of our life," as this psalm says earlier in v. 10. But what is the goal? The full verse 12 says, "Teach us to our count days rightly that we may obtain a wise heart." In this act, we begin again; let's embrace the invitation to take in time. Let's take in each day and pause, in the hope of obtaining wise hearts.



Artwork by Penina Hoffnung

Moving from *Mitzraim*, the narrow place—Egypt, specifically, but more broadly understood to be any place of constriction—to a place of *Merchavya*, expansiveness, is the central experience of liberation. Beloved Hallel Psalm 118 expresses this exuberantly: *min hametzar karati ya, anani b'merchavyah*, “From the narrow straits I called to God, and God answered me with expansiveness.”

The journey from *Mitzraim* to *Merchavya*, narrow straits to expansiveness, is reflected in counting the Omer commencing the second night of Passover and continuing until we reach night 49, opening to Shavuot and the giving of Torah.

A group of us, finding ourselves in the narrow restrictions of COVID, decided to count the Omer together by Zoom each evening. This nightly ritual provided connection and companionship in a time of great shock and fear. When our Omer Count culminated, our shared journey felt far from over. We decided to continue counting nightly, first to Tisha B'av. Then to Shemini Atzeret. At that point, we realized even though our counting wouldn't have a specific endpoint, we felt called upon to document each night by continuing our count.

Our group has learned that even in very deep *Mitzraim*, that narrow place, can come surprising and paradoxical *Merchavya*, expansion.

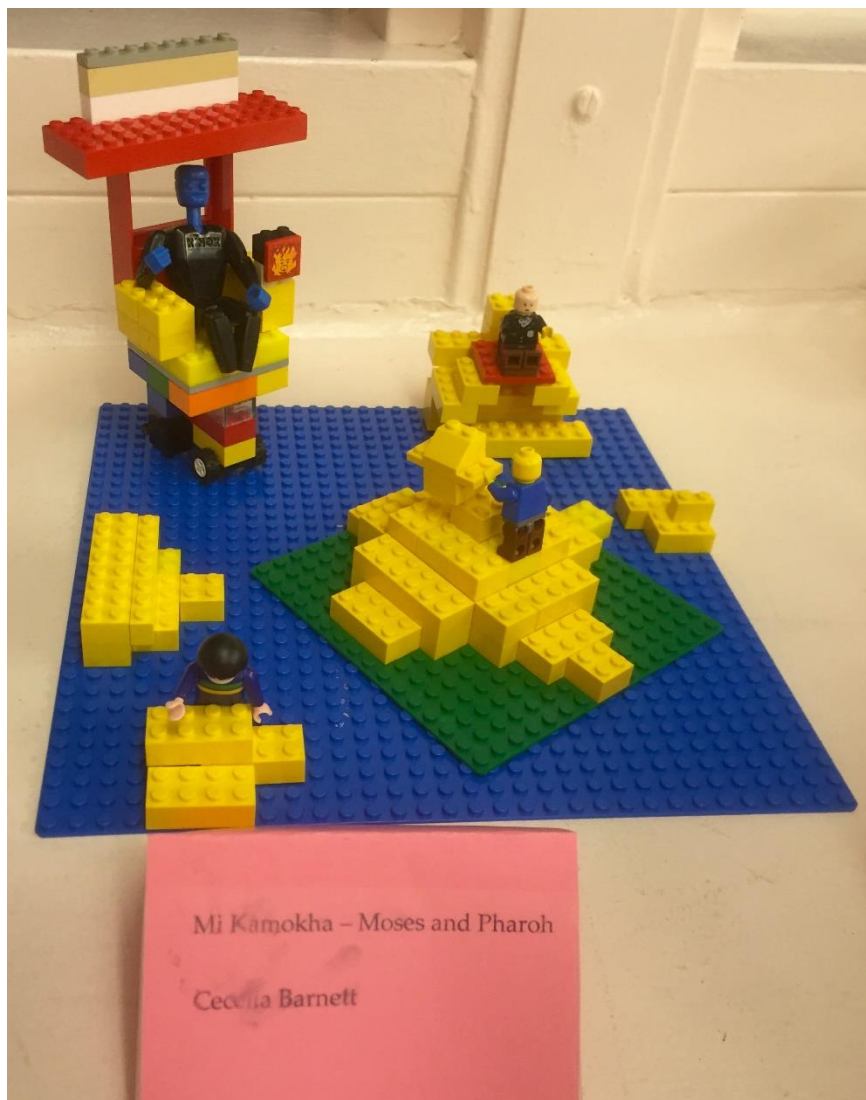
One of us, in the extreme quiet of sheltering in place, discovered a passion for writing poetry. Another, long homebound, marvels at how much her social, professional, and Torah study access has expanded and deepened. A “Countess”, as we call ourselves, mourned a parent's death with loving community stretching far beyond pre-COVID's geographic shiva boundaries.

By Pesach 5781/2021, we will be completing an entire year of counting. We hope at the end of our 2nd Omer cycle, vaccinations will be vanquishing the virus and we can once again experience communal life. How glorious that *Merchavya* will be.

## ***S'firat ha'Omer* – Ivan Rosenberg**

The commandment of counting the Omer gives us a spiritual connection between Pesach and Shavuot. It clarifies in a very experiential way the real object of *zman heruteinu* (the Time of our Liberation). By counting up with anticipation to the *zman matan torateinu* (the Time of the Giving of our Torah), it emphasizes that at the Exodus we were given not only “freedom from” but also “freedom to”. We need to leave enslavement behind, but that is not enough. To be truly free, we need purpose and meaning in life, which the Torah gives us.

# Engaging our Children in Passover



Legowork by Cecelia Barnett, Religious School 2015

## Preparing for Passover by Kathy Amrom

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The Passover Seder is all about questions and the first one your child might ask is, what is Passover? It's best to skip the scary details – human bondage, plagues, blood, and death – and provide an easy to understand summary: "On Passover, we celebrate how God helped the Jewish people become free."

There is still plenty to talk over: who is God and what does it mean to be free? In response to discussions about these concepts, you might encourage your child to make drawings, help them to write down some thoughts or create a poem to share at the Seder.

Reading an age appropriate Passover story book or watching a video will help to familiarize your child with the main characters and events of the Exodus story. Playing Passover music and singing together in the weeks preceding the holiday will familiarize your child with traditional songs and create anticipation.

This year we are challenged with a unique plague, the coronavirus pandemic. Whether you will join family over Zoom or host a gathering for your "pod," there are lots of ways to engage young children in preparations for the holiday and in the Seder itself.

### Removing Chametz

1. A "Chametz Scavenger Hunt" is a great way to teach your child what chametz is in the literal sense. The collection of cereal bits, crackers, cookies, and bread cubes can be used for the ritual burning of chametz.
2. Removing chametz is also an exercise in learning about boundaries and letting go. Your child might choose a specific area of his/her bedroom or play area to clean and organize. Children like to help with simple tasks such as wiping out the inside of drawers or helping to gather chametz stored in the pantry.

## Preparing for the Seder

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### Create a Video to Share Online by Addie Lewis Klein

As part of the prep for your seder, discuss the story with your children, at their own level, and work with them to record a video capturing part of Magid (the story). For young children, help them act out a portion of the story with stuffed animals or other toys, with themselves as the narrator. For older kids, record a tiktok style (super short!) video of some aspect of Magid through song or dance. The plagues and the four children lend themselves to this particularly well. Send the videos to loved ones outside your household before the holiday begins, like a video holiday card, or share them during your zoom seder, if that would work for your group.



Religious School Students, 2017

## **Engage your Child by Sharing Leadership by Yoni Stadlin**

Help your child get motivated and inspired to learn about Passover, specifically the seder, by letting them feel like they are leading the seder. Obviously, there is a parent working right alongside the kid to coach and support them, but a child who can read, can probably be given a significant leadership role.

Here's how I did it with my 6-year old:

1. First we read and went over the story.
2. Then, she did a ton of stuff to help prepare. She helped cook a few dishes, worked on the seder plate...we thought about making matzah, and she set the table. We also had a "meeting" (or two) where we went over the parts that she would be "leading". For each part of the seder, I found something for her to do. It could be as simple as saying "and now we wash our hands," and could be more complex if she knows the bracha and could lead it.
3. She set the table and took a lot of pride in doing so.
4. Leading the seder. She sat at the head of the table. The adult, me, did a lot to get everyone's attention, and fill out/support anything she was leading.

She was so, so proud and told so many people about it. And she learned way more about Passover and the seder than if she had been a passive recipient.

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## **Set the Scene by Kathy Amrom**

Help your child create a little tent or set up some comfy cushions in a corner to recline on during the Seder. Reading and coloring books might come in handy here. If you will be acting out the Exodus story you might want to give some thought to the scenery: a length of blue cloth to represent the Nile river, a basket and doll for baby Moses; blue crepe paper streamers hung from a doorway for the crossing of the sea, a blanket or rug to represent the desert, a few small cardboard boxes for bricks, etc.

## More Activities in Preparation for the Seder

1. Create costumes to wear to the Seder or for a Seder skit. Your child might want to dress as their idea of a traveler, as one of the Passover story actors or one of the Seder plate items.
2. Create puppets for parts of the Seder: The Four Questions, the Four Children, or the actors in the Exodus story. Your child might enjoy creating his/her own little story with stick puppets to present at the Seder.
3. If guests will be wearing facemasks, you can design decorative cloth "overmasks" to wear by using pieces of colored felt, fabric glue and fabric paint. Frog masks might be popular. (Supervision needed here!)
4. Design place cards or placemats.
5. Make colorful dayenu signs to hold up when singing the refrain.
6. Create floral arrangements for the table. Be sure to enjoy the various textures, colors and fragrances.
7. The kitchen is another place to explore all the sensory and gustatory pleasures of Passover with your child. Homemade matzah is a great hands-on project. Shredding fresh horseradish can make bitterness very real. Chopping and slicing might not be a safe activity but measuring and mixing is a lot of fun, especially if you add in taste, touch, and smell.
8. The Seder Plate: Preparing the items for and assembling the Seder plate is a sensory experience that will help to familiarize your child with the important Passover symbols.

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## Counting Down the Order of the Seder by Tamar Magdovitz

I love this fabulous way to teach the order of the seder that we used at Solomon Schechter (now Perelman Jewish) Day School along with the Kadesh Urchatz song.

1. Teach the song the way that you like to sing it, or use the link included to teach a traditional tune: <http://www.sinai-temple.org/passover/00%20Kadesh%20Urchatz.php>

2. Create an “order of the Seder chart” by creating a picture for each step of the seder. Kids or adults can draw the steps or find pictures on the internet. Laminating might be nice, too! Creating and hanging the cards will familiarize your child with the order. As you proceed through the seder, sing the song to find out what is next, and the children can keep track of what step the seder is on in one or more ways:
  - a. Hang the pictures from a string that is hung across the wall or room - clothesline style - and remove cards as the Seder progresses to involve them in the “countdown.”
  - b. Mount the pictures around the room and put a sticky note tag on the current part of the seder.
3. Teach simple hand motions for each seder part to use along with the song, like making a face when putting simulated Maror in your mouth when you say “Maror”; pretend to eat when you say “Shulchan Orech”, the meal; and folding your hands on the table when you say “Nirtzah”, concluding.

**Extra links/resources:**

- Fun sing -along to Kadesh Urchatz from Eli at Jewish Music Toronto. Good to learn tune: <https://youtu.be/n7OzS3CC3EU>
- Emojis from Aish-UK's Facebook site to go with each part of the seder:  
<https://www.facebook.com/aishfb/photos/a.205970406111368/3582127315162310/?type=3>

## Enhancing Your Seder

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### Keep it Active by Kathy Amrom

To accommodate the more active family members or provide some drama for the Zoom screen you might design a “Seder Adventure.” Instead of starting the Seder sitting around a table, you might want to begin in the living room or the basement rec-room where everyone can move around or recline as desired. The room can be set with scenery for the story telling (Maggid) part of the Seder. Participants can be dressed as slaves or travelers and lounge around on pillows covered with decorated pillowcases or sit in a pre-constructed tent. In telling or acting out the story everyone might move to another room set to represent the desert and finally cross through a sea of hanging blue crepe paper strips or a hallway decorated with water and fish murals to freedom and their Seder meal.

### I Spy! Who Am I? by Kathy Amrom

The game “I Spy” can be used effectively to engage children and direct their attention throughout the Seder. (I spy something new and green. What is it?) Alternatively, the game “Who Am I?” can be equally engaging. (I like to go dipping. Who am I?)

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### Enhancing Your Seder by Betsy Richman

Once our oldest grandchild was 5 or 6 years old, we gave her the charge of telling the Pesach story in a play that she and her younger siblings and cousins would create. For the production we provided a bin filled with scarves and jewelry that they assembled for costumes. They all delighted in dressing up for their assumed roles and through the years there were always lively discussions (among themselves) about who would play the various characters, what their dialogue would be, who would wear which costume, and who would be the director. This engaged all of the children and certainly

amused the adults as well! As you might imagine, the dynamics of our productions changed each year with the younger participants wanting more of a voice. As the control shifted it was great to see each child's interest and creativity expressed.

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### Questions and More Questions by Kathy Amrom

Convincing children that the Seder can't go on without more questions is a wonderful way to keep their attention. Here are a few to consider:

- **Kadesh:** What does special mean to you? What makes something special? Urechatz: Why do we use water to wash our hands?
- **Karpas:** What signs of spring have you seen?
- **Yachatz:** How do you share with your friends? If you could invite anyone to come to your Seder, whom would you invite?
- **Maggid:**
  - **Four Questions:** What do you think makes Passover different from all other nights? Four Children: What could you teach a friend about Passover?
  - **Exodus Story:** Miriam helped her brother by watching over him. Can you tell about a time you helped someone?
  - If you had to leave your home in a hurry and could take just one thing, what would you take with you?
  - Why did Pharaoh keep saying NO!?
  - Which plague do you think made the Egyptians the most sad or uncomfortable?
  - Did you ever go somewhere that was new and a little scary to you? What was it like? What helped you to feel comfortable?
  - What do you like to do when you are very happy?
- **Afikomen:** Who found it?!
- **Barech:** Why do we invite Eliyahu even though we can't see him? How can you say thank you to someone without using words? Hallel: What was your favorite part of the Seder?

## Make it Relevant to Today by Karen Schiller Kripke

FAIR TRADE CHOCOLATE: Freedom Never Tasted So Sweet!

*The following piece was written to engage middle and high school students in thinking about the modern-day realities of slavery. You can have each person at the seder read a line or have the teens read it to the elders and discuss how this might affect their behavior in the future.*

The Haggadah urges us to remember that we were once slaves and to see ourselves as though we had been personally freed from slavery in Egypt.

When we read the story of our Exodus from Egypt, we try to “experience” what slavery felt like.

Although we may no longer be slaves, our history moves us to ask the following questions: Where does slavery exist today? Who is enslaved? What is that slavery like for them?

You might be surprised to learn that nearly 300,000 child laborers work on cocoa farms in order to bring us our favorite chocolate treats.

Most of these farms are located in West Africa, which supplies 80% of the world’s chocolate.

Many of these children are forced to work for up to 100 hours a week. They survive dangerous working and living conditions, and they do not attend school or receive an education.

Unfortunately, this is how most of the chocolate that we eat is made. It is often easy to overlook the role we may have on other’s lives.

It requires us to look hard at the individual choices we make on a day to day basis, like the food we eat and the products we use to celebrate our Jewish identity.

One powerful way to support freedom is to choose Fair Trade chocolate, grown with standards that forbid the use of child labor.

Buying Fair Trade is often more expensive because it ensures that the cocoa farms do not use forced child labor, that work and living conditions are safe, and that field workers receive a fair wage for their labor.

With this money, they can provide for their families, send their children to school, and stay healthier.

So instead of buying just any chocolate this year, why not look into Fair Trade brands! Fair Trade chocolate is easy to find. Chains such as Whole Foods or GIANT carry Fair Trade chocolate. Common Fair Trade chocolate brands are: Endangered Species, Equal Exchange, Dagoba Chocolate and Divine Chocolate, which you are eating today!!

Next Passover, may we tell their story and help free those children laboring in the cocoa fields!

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### **Intergenerational Zoom Afikoman Hunt: "What's Different?" by Ronnie Rubin**

When it's time to search for the Afikoman, the kids take a minute to look at the room the grandparent (or other seder participant) is in. The grandparent then turns off the camera and changes one thing (removes, adds, or changes the position of one object). They turn the camera back on and kids then take turns guessing what has been changed. On the last round, the person changing their settings can add in their afikoman as the big change for the kids to "find". The person who guesses correctly has "found" the afikoman. They can do multiple rounds of this with different people changing something in their location. My guess is it is best for the elementary school aged kids.

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### **Sefirat HaOmer – Making Meaning from Counting by Judy Groner**

Children love to count. Counting is even more meaningful now when so many days look the same. That's why counting the Omer is a wonderful family activity...and you can begin it on the second night of Pesach!

Are we counting seven weeks (= 49) or 50 days? Either way, the counting connects Passover to the next holiday, Shavuot, by counting the measure of

grain, “omer,” that was brought to the Temple in Jerusalem during those weeks connecting two of our three pilgrimage holidays. (The third one, Sukkot, takes place after Yom Kippur in the fall.) When we count the Omer, we count two ways:

We count the day.

We count the week (after the first week).

Counting the Omer with your children is fun – and integrates mathematics, calendar skills and celebration of the agricultural roots of Pesach as well as deep spiritual meaning.

### Activities

- Say the blessing together in Hebrew and in English, beginning on the second night of Passover. You can find the blessing in your Haggadah.
- Create an Omer calendar with your family.
- For those interested in discussing the Omer on a more spiritual level, see below for a note on the Kabbalists approach, discussion questions, activities, and some related musical sources.

The Kabbalists assigned to each week a characteristic of God.

1. **Chesed:** Thoughts and deeds of lovingkindness
  - a. What “intention” do you have for this week? What will you do differently?
2. **G’vurah:** Strength, heroism Nafshi (Yishai Ribo and Avraham Fried)
  - a. How will you exhibit your mental strength this week?
3. **Tiferet:** Notice the beauty around you. Shir LaMaalot (Yosef Karduner)
  - a. Make a plan with your family to take a walk in a natural setting.
4. **Netzach:** Prevailing Katan Aleinu (multiple artists)
  - a. Name three ways that you have made adjustments to your life this year.
5. **Hod:** Splendor Amen (Sarit Hadad)
  - a. Has your appreciation of Jewish rituals changed over the past year? If so how? In what ways has it become deeper?
6. **Yesod:** Foundation
  - a. In what ways have you and your family found firm ground to stand on – in a very different and challenging year?

7. **Malkhut:** Majesty, God's Earthly Realm HaShem Melech (Gad Elbaz)
- a. In the seventh week of counting the Omer, we move toward redemption and revelation on Shavuot. How does counting lead to revelation? What is the importance of "keva" – daily ritual activity – and kavanna – aspiring to a higher level of spiritual understanding?

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### **Make it Fun! by Kathy Amrom**

Silly jokes are a fun way to ask more questions and keep everyone giggling, if not groaning. Here are a few to try out:

Q: What's the best cheese for Passover?

A: Matzah-rella

Q: How did the matzah feel about becoming the afikomen?

A: He was pretty broken up about it.

Q: Why do we read the Haggadah at Passover?

A: So we can Seder right words.

Q: What's the difference between matzah and cardboard??

A: Cardboard doesn't leave crumbs in the rug!

Q: What did the grape do when he got stepped on?

A: He let out a little wine

Q: Why did the matzah quit his job?

A: Because he didn't get a raise!

Q: Why wouldn't Moses let anyone use his staff?

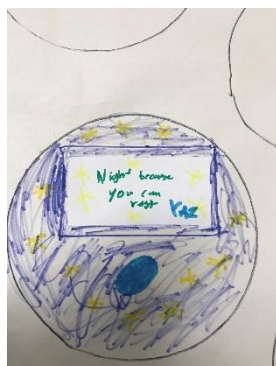
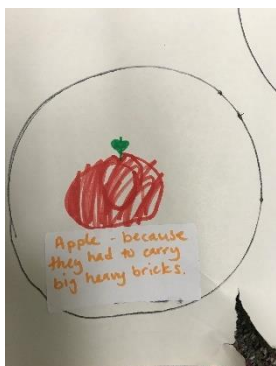
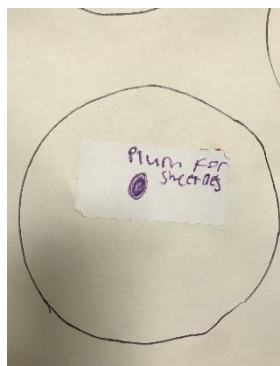
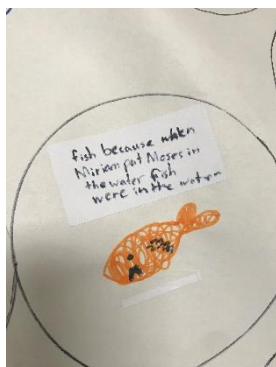
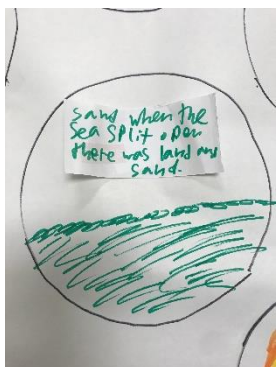
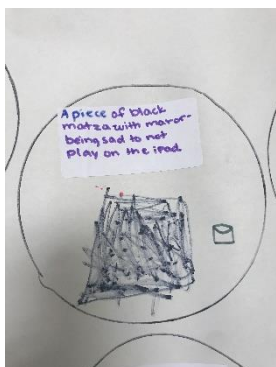
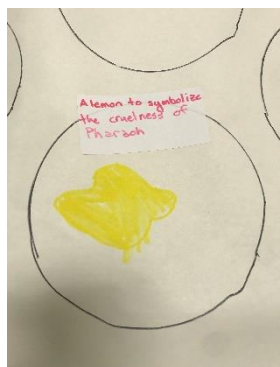
A: He couldn't part with it.

Q: What did the Red Sea say to the Jewish People when it was split?

A: Nothing. It just waved.

Q: What did the Teddy Bear say when he was offered the afikomen?

A: No thanks, I'm stuffed



Artwork by Religious School students, 2017

Germantown Jewish Centre extends much gratitude and appreciation for all who contributed so thoughtfully to this supplement. Thank you!

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