



romemu
JEWISH LIFE, ELEVATED



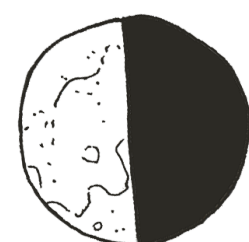
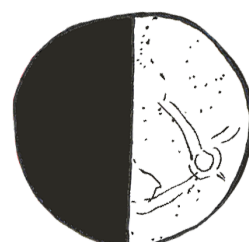
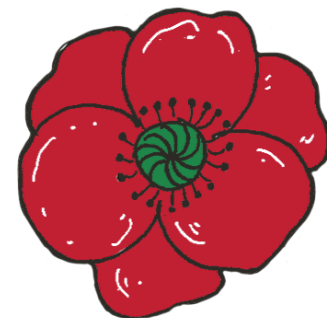
Romemu Passover Companion

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We are delighted to share this collection of thoughts, meditations, songs and stories from Romemu clergy and staff with you.

If this past year has taught us anything, we need community and the light of Torah more than ever before, and as we remember the freedom of our people from Egyptian bondage, it is our hope that this collection will help you embody that freedom and allow for an Exodus of your mind, body, and soul.



Jeffrey Cahn, Executive Director



Contrary to the other three hundred days of the year, when you're running and doing and building and constructing, **the Jewish holidays provide a kind of in-built way to pause and to gather yourself and regenerate.**

Our lives can become so full of activities and to-do tasks that, in some sense, the soul becomes overwhelmed. We need to defragment our souls. We can be pulled in so many different directions, but the holidays help that part of us that needs meaning and connection and great purpose.

Holiday rituals are ancient technologies that carry contemporary wisdom.
Judaism works.



THE PEOPLE OF THE DOOR

By Rabbi David Ingber,
Romemu Founder and Senior Rabbi

One could argue that the most important ritual piece of the Seder table is not at the table itself, but rather, the door.

The re-telling of the story of Exodus, the step called “Maggid”, begins with an open door invitation:

הָא לַחֲמַא עֲנִיא דִּי אֶכְלוּ אֲבֹהֵתְנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם. כָּל דְּכָפִין
יִיְתִי וְיִיכֹל, כָּל דְּצָרִיק יִיְתִי וְיִפְסַח. הַשְּׁתָא הָכָא, לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה
בְּאַרְעָא דִּישְׂרָאֵל. הַשְּׁתָא עַבְדִּי, לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין.

This is the bread of destitution that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Anyone who is famished should come and eat, anyone who is in need should come and partake of the Pesach sacrifice. Now we are here, next year we will be in the land of Israel; this year we are slaves, next year we will be free people

Before we even begin the story of the night, we recall the door, a portal to that which is outside, to that which is separate. We become immediately aware of the difference between where we stand safely indoors and what lies beyond our Mezuzot, and that realization can be frightening. This feeling of occupying a liminal space, of course, is not new. In the final plague of Egypt, as the Angel of Death made its way across Egypt, the Israelites were commanded to remain indoors after painting their doorposts with the blood of the lambs of their Passover offering, the deity of Egypt, represented by the shank bone on our seder plates.



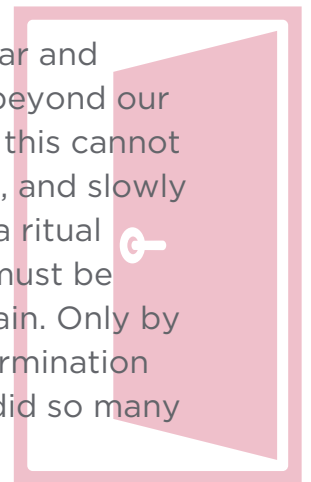
וּלְקַחְתֶּם אֲגַדַּת אֶזוֹב וּטְבַלְתֶּם בַּדָּם אֲשֶׁר בַּסֵּף וְהִגַּעְתֶּם אֶל-
הַמַּשְׁקוּף וְאֶל שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת מִן הַדָּם אֲשֶׁר בַּסֵּף וְאַתֶּם לֹא
תֵצְאוּ אִישׁ מִפֶּתַח בֵּיתוֹ עַד בֹּקֶר

Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and to the two doorposts. None of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning

Aware of the destruction taking place beyond their doors, the Israelites sat in their homes for four days waiting for G-d's call to exit, and one can only imagine the fear in their patience as they stood by their doors.

It goes without saying that this year more so than most, we can all relate to that fear. Over the past year as we sheltered in place, the simple action of opening doors became fraught with anxiety. Leaving our homes knowing that someone in an elevator could unintentionally pass an invisible plague from a shared surface, from a hello, became insurmountable. We had to wear masks, placing a door, so to speak, between our inside and our outside. These new realities gave us a heightened sense of where the inside and outside meet, and an increased fear of the unknown.

However, on this night of freedom, we are tasked with overcoming this fear and stepping outside like the Israelites of the Exodus story, inviting what lies beyond our doors inside, and engaging with that which we do not yet know. Granted, this cannot be done literally this year, but as vaccinations increase across the country, and slowly but surely our world begins to reopen, our moment at the door deserves a ritual moment in which we imagine what it would take from us and what fears must be surmounted, in order to leave our isolation and engage with the world again. Only by standing at the precipice of these two worlds with intentionality and determination can we move forward and experience true freedom, just as the Israelites did so many years ago.





TASTE THE STORY... TELL THE STORY...

By Rabbi Dianne Cohler-Esses,
Associate Rabbi & Director of Lifelong Learning

Passover: A Night of Feasting on Story
Opening Prompts

The night of the seder is not a night of boring abstract history lessons. Quite the contrary. This night is supremely personal, a night in which each one of us is to move from utter darkness (afelah) of enslavement to light (orah) of freedom, from degradation (genai) to praise (shevach). The trajectory is clear. We are to travel from the narrow place of Mitzrayim to the expanse of the Wilderness-- as the psalmist says:

מִן־הַמִּצָּר, קָרָאתִי יְהוָה; עֲנָנִי בַמֶּרְחֹב יְהוָה

From the narrow place I called to you. You answered me with Divine expanse. (Psalm 118)

This invitation is tantalizing. But transformation is a big ask. The question is how? How do we actually move from darkness to light, from narrowness to expanse?

The Haggadah is clear about the answer; Haggadah itself means “The Telling”. On the seder night the alchemical process of moving from slavery to freedom happens through telling our story. The Torah commands us no less than four times to tell the story, the first time in Exodus 13:8:

וְהַגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ, בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר: בִּעֲבוּר זֶה, עָשָׂה יְהוָה לִי,

**And on that day you shall tell your child,
for this God has taken me out of the Land of Egypt.**



But on this night the road from enslavement to freedom is even stranger, even more radical than pure storytelling. Tonight we literally eat our people's story -- in all it's raw and cooked, salty and sweet, smooth, watery and fire-roasted forms. We ingest tears and mortar and bitterness and freedom. And so, by the end of the seder, we've become the very story we are telling. We embody slavery and freedom through telling and tasting and chewing and digesting; we metabolize the story through our very guts.

This page is a guide to symbolic seder foods and telling your story—*your* story, because this is a decidedly personal night. It is written in the Hagaddah (quoting a line from the 2nd century mishnah in Pesachim 10:5) that in every generation each of us is obligated to see ourselves as if s/he/they personally had left Egypt:

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו כאלו הוא יצא

ממצרים

In each and every generation a person must view themselves as though they personally left Egypt

So tonight, tell your story in a way so that it connects viscerally with the collective story, with the sacred story of Israelite enslavement and freedom.

Move from your own private constricted space to the place of God's expanse, to Merchav Yah.

Suggested activity:

Use each of the seder foods as a prompt. Below you will find a variety of prompts/questions for each food. Assign a food to each of your seder guests, or a few of your guests in advance and ask them to choose one or more prompt for their selected symbol. When it comes time to eat or use the food in the seder, have them share a story or even a slice of experience related to the food in advance of eating it. And then, once a story is told, you can eat the story!





RAW

Karpas - Crisp vegetable

As you crunch on celery or romaine lettuce or chew on fresh parsley think of the call of spring, of rebirth. This call goes beyond the call of a people's sacred story, and even goes beyond the human story, it goes to the call of the forces of nature - the forces of liberation embedded in the earth itself that informs all stories, collective and personal.



What is your experience of spring? Of rebirth? How are you sprouting or blossoming at this moment? How are you not? How is the world being reborn at this moment? How is it not?

Connect your story to the story of the birth of the people of Israel coming through the narrow straits of slavery to redemption.

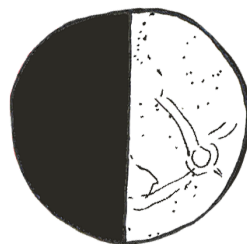
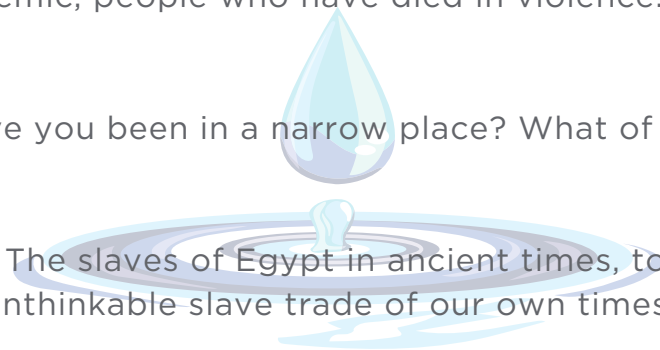
SALTY

Salt Water

Dip the karpas in salted water to remember the tears of the slaves. Think of all the tears that have been shed in the last year. The terrible losses, the terrible grief of so many families. Lives lost in the pandemic, people who have died in violence. Endless tears.

When have you cried in the last year? When have you been in a narrow place? What of that story can you tell now?

Can you link your tears to the slaves of history. The slaves of Egypt in ancient times, to the terrible story of slavery in America, to the unthinkable slave trade of our own times?



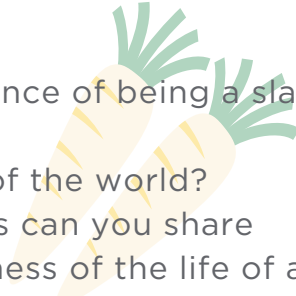


BITTER

Maror - Bitter Herb

We eat bitter herbs to remember the bitterness of the experience of being a slave.

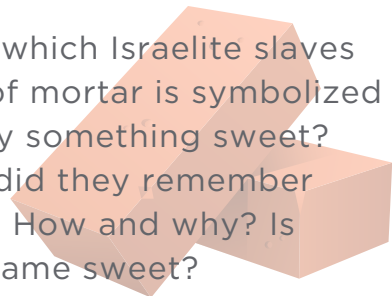
Have you been bitter in the past year? Bitter about the state of the world? Bitterness of your own circumstances? What of that bitterness can you share now? How might you (would you?) connect that to the bitterness of the life of a slave?



SWEET AND STICKY

Haroset

Haroset is the sweet paste that represents the mortar with which Israelite slaves were forced to produce bricks. Interestingly, this memory of mortar is symbolized by sweetness. Why do you think it would be represented by something sweet? Think of the Israelite memory of slavery in the Torah. How did they remember slavery? Their existence in Egypt? Was it a sweet memory? How and why? Is there something constraining in your life that suddenly became sweet?



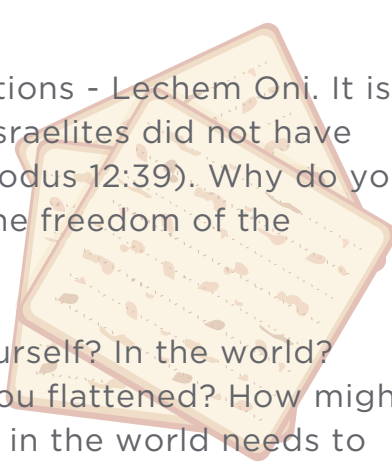
What are you (what do you feel) forced to produce in your life? What about those who work in oppressive conditions? What stories can we tell about their struggle?

FLAT AND CRUNCHY

Matzah

The bread of freedom. Matzah is termed the bread of afflictions - Lechem Oni. It is also the bread of our freedom. The Torah tells us that the Israelites did not have time to let their bread rise as they escaped from Egypt (Exodus 12:39). Why do you think it is matzah that is the archetypal representation of the freedom of the Israelites?

What puffery do you want to flatten at this moment? In yourself? In the world? What is your affliction at this moment? How does it keep you flattened? How might being flattened paradoxically lead you to being free? What in the world needs to be flattened so that we as a global society can move towards freedom?





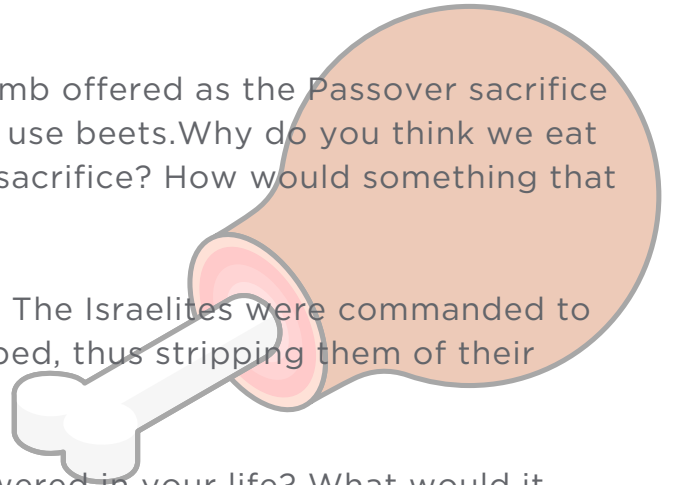
FIRE ROASTED

Zeroa

The shank bone is symbolic of the Paschal lamb offered as the Passover sacrifice in biblical times. Vegetarian households may use beets. Why do you think we eat something roasted to represent the paschal sacrifice? How would something that was immersed in fire capture this offering?

The lamb was worshipped as a god in Egypt. The Israelites were commanded to sacrifice the very god their masters worshipped, thus stripping them of their underlying power.

What are ways that you are or feel disempowered in your life? What would it mean to sacrifice the power behind whatever it is you are enslaved to? To fundamentally challenge and destabilize the powers that keep people enslaved around the world?





I EAT MAROR: REFLECTIONS OF A JEW OF COLOR

By Rabbi Mira Rivera,
Associate Rabbi & Director of Pastoral Care

We eat maror to remember bitterness of oppression in the criminal justice system

We eat maror to remember bitterness of oppression of tyrannical executive order

We eat maror to remember systemic oppression

Of the immigrant, the sick, the powerless, and the poor,

I eat maror to remember being spat upon

Judio! your Grandma's a Jew

I eat maror to remember

Shame on you, Conversos

I eat maror to remember bitterness

In sweet sanctuary of worship

Where the only people who looked like me

Were hired to clean up our debris

I eat maror to remember

That which unites us

While speakers with august degrees

Tell me how I should feel

Discourse with civility

Sarabande

Pas waltz around

In three, two, one

About face

Face to face

I eat maror to remember how bittersweet it is to see people of color

Like me in here

And I do not, do not for one moment doubt that they are Jewish



If they're in here

Haven't we all come to worship in this house so fine

Broken we walked in here

You have no idea how

Broken and needing

When we come in here

Broken and needing to pray

I eat maror to remember how bitter

Sweet it is to see people of color

**In here where I raised my children
We are care**

Giving for our parents

We are baby

Sitting with your children

**We are women and men without whom
this city will go poof!**

**But we're invisible except when we're
called to clean up the debris**

I eat maror to remember bitterness

that ruined my taste

That ate up my teeth

When I was told

Something's not quite right

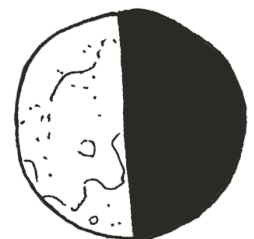
You don't have the background

You don't have the Yichus

Move over

this is only

for Jews





THE BESHT AT THE CROSSROADS

By Rabbi Scott Perlo,
Romemu Brooklyn Rabbi

R. Tzi Hirsch saw his father, The Ba'al Shem Tov, in a dream...“Did you know of my pain?” he asked.

“I knew,” said the BeShT.

“Who let you know?” asked R. Tzi Hirsch.

“Those who walk the crossroads.”

“And who are they who walk the crossroads?”

“Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov are those who walk the crossroads, in order to know of the troubles of Israel. Then they go to inform the righteous in their graves.”

(Shivhei haBeShT 133)

Many of us have heard that the Hebrew word for Egypt, Mitzrayim, means narrow places. Really, though, mitzrayim means “straits.”

Israel, when enslaved in Egypt, was in dire straits. Our ancestors could only go one way: forced, inexorably, deeper into slavery.

But the midrash teaches that it was the acts of righteous women that caused Israel to be redeemed from Egypt. These were the midwives, Shifra and Puah, who refused Pharaoh’s order to kill any male children born to Israel.

The midwives didn’t petition Pharaoh. They didn’t lobby him to change his policy. They didn’t compromise with him or threaten him. They didn’t accede to his demands under certain conditions. Rather Shifra and Puah just decided to do something different. They let the boys live, and then lied to Pharaoh about what was happening. They went their own way. These women gave exactly zero phar-uks.



The straits of Egypt led straight into suffering, but the midwives turned off the path. They blazed their own trail. They created a crossroads where none existed before. From that point in the story, one can see clearly how others begin to turn away too. First a mother who saved her son, then the son who gave up his royalty to defend slaves, and on and on: more and more people reaching the crossroads and deciding to go a different way. In the direst strait of them all, at the edge of the sea, the sea opens up and finally: a new direction for Bnai Yisrael.

In my imagination it was the crossroads that Shifra and Puah made that was brought into the world to come. The forefathers walk the moral crossroads that the holy midwives created in honor of their mesillat yesharim - their righteous path. They wait for us, even in our troubles, to show us a new direction.





THE RABBIS AS EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATORS

By Rabbi Janice Elster,
Director of Youth & Family Education

The Torah instructs us to teach our children the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The rabbis of the Mishnah took this command to heart in creating the seder rituals. They did not just tell us to tell the story to our children, they created a whole series of interactive, experiential educational activities and rituals that would ensure future generations would have a deep understanding of not only the story itself but it's meaning, message and implications. **Every part of the seder from the strange foods on the seder plate, to drinking four cups of wine (instead of one), to the things we say, to the foods we eat...every part is designed to provoke children to ask questions so the adults can answer and teach the children.** If all these strange things are not enough to provoke the children to ask questions they even included a question for the child to recite and get answers (what we refer to as the "Four Questions" is really one question with four answers, "Why is this night different from all other nights?").

The rituals of the seder may no longer seem unusual, as we do them every year. But if you are not provoking the children at your seder to ask questions, you are not fulfilling the mitzvah, so change things up, make new rituals, add things to the seder plate that have symbolic meaning. Make the seder something that provokes questions from all participants. Invite people to stop the seder and ask questions anytime. **Remember the goal of the seder is to learn deeply from the Exodus story not just go through the motions.** Take a cue from our ancient rabbis and make the seder into a deep learning experience for all.





A NEW SEDER SONG BOHEMIAN PASSOVER RHAPSODY

By Basya Schechter,
Romemu Hazan

There are times where we need to put a little bit more of a modern twist on the ways we tell stories, and what better way to celebrate as royalty than with a little Queen.

Is this the real life,
Is it Mythology - ("or part of JEPD")
Caught in a sandstorm
No escape from this slavery
Open your eyes
Look up to the skies and see
My name is Moses I have g-d's sympathy
Because I'm easy come easy go
little high little low
Anyway the wind blows doesn't really matter to me, to me



INTERLUDE:

Pharaoh - I killed a man
Took a shovel to his head
Smote him - now he's dead,
Pharaoh, life had just begun - had to leave it all behind to face the bush..."
Pharaoh, oo didn't mean to be the one
To make - you wish you weren't first born at all...
Carry on, carry on, as if nothing really matters -
Small interlude...
Too late, your time has come



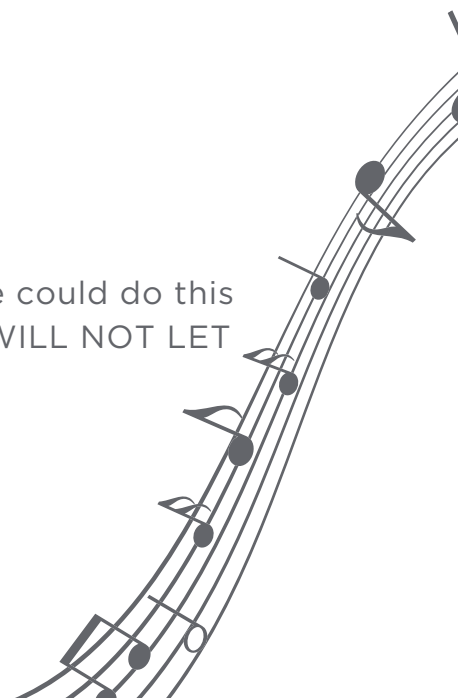
Will send blood along the Nile
Frogs that jump about a mile,
Goodbye everybody we've got to go,
Gotta leave you all behind
And Face the Truth (Ten Commandments PROP..)
Pharaoh, ooh (any way the wind blows)
You don't want to die,

Make you wish you weren't the first born at all (music....) - GUITAR SOLO
I see a little silhouette of a lamb
Oh my god, oh your god

Will you do the miserloo,
(Little interlude of 2 people doing one round of Miserlou dance
w/instruments)

Thunderbolt and lightning - Hail is very frightening me
PHARAOH: Moshe rabe moshe rabeinu I refuse to let you go
LET HIM GO LET HIM GO " - (italian opera mode..)
- PHARAOH:
I'm just a rich king everyone obeys me
CHORUS:
He's just a rich king from a rich family
Spare us our lives from his own monstrosity
Easy come easy go, will he let us go -

PHARAOH: Bismilla, NO I will not let you go (I)
PHARAOH: Bismilla, I will not let you go (I) (Let us go) (we could do this
back and forth with community - I have a NO NO NO WE WILL NOT LET
YOU GO..
Mama Mia mama Mia, will he ever let us go
oh yeh oh yeh..
Beelzebub has a devil put aside for you -
GUITAR SECTION:





Pharaoh:

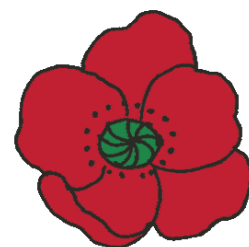
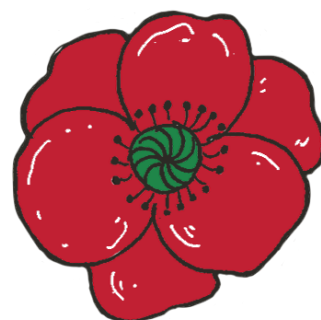
So you think you can threaten and blind me my eye..

MOSES:

So you think you can ignore me,
And let my people die

MOSES: Oh, Pharaoh, can't do this to us Pharaoh,,
Just gotta get out, just gotta get right outta here
Oh YEH! OH YEH!!

Something's really changes,
Everyone knows Oh YEH -
Something's really changing..
"Mah nishtana, halayla hazeh"





MINDFULNESS PRACTICES FOR EVERY STEP OF THE SEDER

Originally published on haggadot.com

By Sarah Chandler,
Romemu Yeshiva Director

For so many of us, the Seder is a ritual to ‘get through.’ There is someone rushing through the words, another person checking the clock, another drooling over the smells from the kitchen. What if as the seder unfolds, we knew we could look forward to an opportunity for pause and reflection? Using the prompts below, transform your seder table into a circle of balance.

Note: These exercises can either make up a complete ‘mindfulness seder’, or you can choose one or more to incorporate into a seder you are leading or attending.

Kadeish קדש - recital of Kiddush blessing and drinking of the first cup of wine

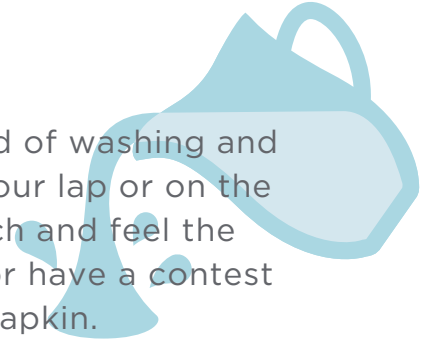
As you begin the seder, there is often a great deal of anticipation. Looking forward to that first sip of wine, taste of matzah, warm soup...instead of counting how many pages to the next section, focus in on each step of this ritual. One method is to narrate (either out loud or in your mind) each step as objectively as possible: “I am holding the glass. I am opening the wine. I am pouring the wine. I am holding up the glass. [say blessing] I am sipping the wine. I am swallowing the wine.” Notice what arises in this practice - is it calm and presence, or more agitation or anticipation? Bonus: try it for each of the 4 cups and see how it changes.





Urchatz ורחץ - the washing of the hands

Water is life and our hands are purified by the waters. Instead of washing and then rushing to dry them off, hold your wet hands open on your lap or on the edge of the table. Sit in silence or quiet whispers as you watch and feel the water evaporating. Take bets on when they will be fully dry or have a contest who can go the longest without drying them on the closest napkin.

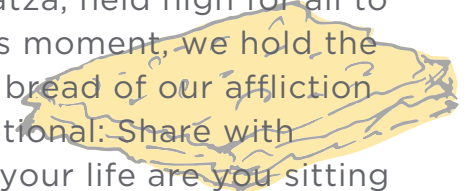


Karpas כרפס - dipping of the karpas in salt water

Reciting blessings over our food is a chance to slow down and connect to the source of our nourishment. Assemble platters of three or more vegetables for each guest, or invite each guest to assemble mini platters at their seat after passing around a tray of vegetables. Choosing one item at a time, hold it in the air with your focus on the vegetable. What's did it look like while in the ground? (You may wish to provide photos - I'm especially fond of photos of potato plants!) Close your eyes and imagine the trip from the ground to the store to your plate. Then say the blessing.

Yachatz יחץ - Breaking the Middle Matza

The breaking of the matza should be done in silence. As you prepare for the break, count three long breaths with eyes open and focus on the matza, held high for all to see. Listen closely to the sound of the matza breaking. At this moment, we hold the paradox of wholeness and brokenness; the matza is both the bread of our affliction and the bread of freedom. Take three more deep breaths. Optional: Share with someone next to you or the whole table - what paradoxes in your life are you sitting with today?

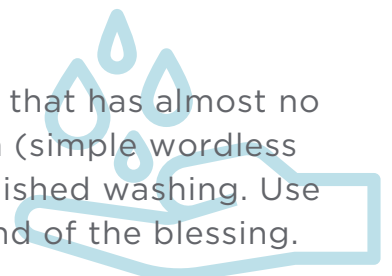


Maggid מגיד - retelling the Passover story

Dayeinu: What in our lives do we take for granted, but may actually be enough for us? Share with someone next to you or the entire table. After each person shares, respond: Dayeinu!

Rachtzah רחצה - Second washing of the hands

So much of the seder is talking and listening. Finally, here's a part that has almost no talking. After you say the hand washing blessing, choose a niggun (simple wordless melody) that you and your guests can carry until everyone has finished washing. Use eye contact and the raising of the matza for motzi to signal the end of the blessing.





Motzi Matza מוציא מצה - Blessing before eating matzo

The first bit of matza is always the driest. One is truly meant to savor that bite and not mix with any other dips or spreads. As you begin to munch on the first bit, notice what thoughts, feelings, and sensations arise. Joy, dryness, satiation...what else? Allow these to come and go without judgement until your serving of matza is consumed.



Maror מרור - Eating of the Maror

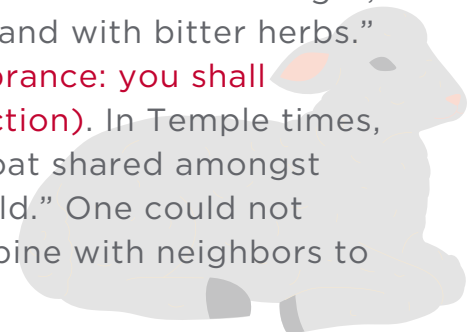
The embodied practice of purposely consuming maror has deep symbolism. Dipping $\frac{3}{4}$ ounces of maror into haroset, which is sweet, brings healing and alignment as we approach the formal meal.

Koreich כורך - Eating of a sandwich made of matzah and maror

Koreich is a memory sandwich. Since we no longer slaughter a lamb for the paschal sacrifice, there is only maror on our matzo sandwich. Though the Pesach sacrifice is primarily represented with the zeroa, shankbone, on the seder plate, our memory sandwich is the key moment of the seder to recall this sacrifice. Though we do not recite an additional blessing for this sandwich, as we chew, we recline and recall the communal rite of the shared roasted lamb.

The moment we consume this sandwich, we are simultaneous recalling the Pesach offering, both from Temple times and from our last night in Egypt. What makes this symbol so powerful is that we have the capacity to recall two moments in history simultaneously:

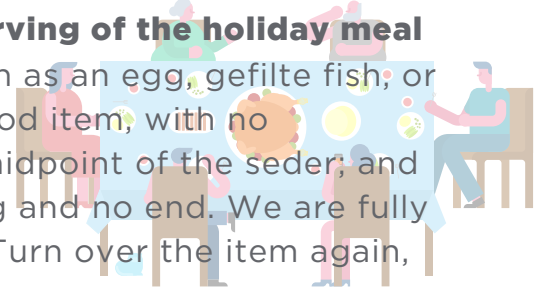
The word "Pesach" is literally the name of this sacrifice, which was done in memory of the one performed in Egypt on the night of the 10th plague when they put animal blood on the doorposts. The Torah commandment to consume the offering on the Passover holiday comes from Exodus 12:8: "They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs." and then in verse 14: "This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival..." (See Exodus 12:3-14 for the full section). In Temple times, there were many key rituals regarding a sacrificed lamb or goat shared amongst family. In Exodus 12:3 we read "שֶׁה לְבַיִת - a lamb per household." One could not observe this ritual on their own - usually, families would combine with neighbors to afford a high quality lamb to share on the holiday.





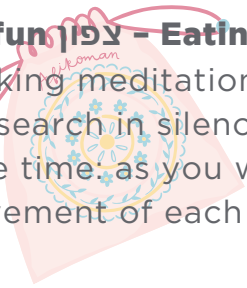
Shulchan oreich שלחן עורך - Lit. "set table"—the serving of the holiday meal

Many seder meals begin with a spherical object, such as an egg, gefilte fish, or matza ball. Take a moment to examine this round food item, with no beginning and no ending. You have made it to the midpoint of the seder; and yet, this round item reminds us there is no beginning and no end. We are fully redeemed and we are still waiting to be redeemed. Turn over the item again, then bring it to your mouth for the first bite.



Tzafun צפון - Eating of the afikoman

Walking meditation: An opportunity to get out of our seats and wander. Perform the search in silence. Take your steps slowly and carefully. Extra credit if you have time: as you walk, say to yourself "lifting, stepping, placing" for each movement of each foot.



Bareich ברך - Blessing after the meal and drinking of the third cup of wine

Gratitude opportunity: Before or after saying the blessing after the meal, share one aspect of tonight's seder that you are grateful for in this moment.



Hallel הלל - Recital of the Hallel & drinking of the fourth cup of wine

Praise and song with nature: As we sing hallel and enjoy our 4th cup, imagine one sign of spring such as a tree bud or flower. Close your eyes and picture it celebrating the unfolding of warmth and light that comes with the new season.



Nirtzah נירצה - say "Next Year in Jerusalem!"

Turn to someone next to you or share with the entire group farewell blessings for their journey home or a sweet night's rest.



SONG OF THE SEED: MIN HA'METZAR

By Miriam Rubín,
Community Engagement

This has been the ultimate year of constriction for all of us. Finally we've arrived at the full moon of Nissan, to celebrate Hag Ha'Aviv - the Celebration of Spring (1 of 4 names for Passover).

Millions of seeds this time of year are going through their own Passover experience. If you listen closely enough, you can hear their Min HaMetzar cry wailing throughout the land and sky this time of year. I heard a glimpse of their piercing song this season and, with their permission, I wrote it down for us to read and speak aloud. Each seed goes through an excruciating measure of constriction. And when they make it to the other side they're freedom is expressed with the most abundant flash of color, fragrance, and beauty: Spring. This year, let us sing the "Song of the Seed", and through it, may we experience greater knowing of what true liberation and a greater kinship with the earth's beings and rhythms.

A Plant's Min Ha'Metzar

Yah, please! Help me out from this narrow
place
Yah, please! Won't you help me through?
Please! Hold me close, and show me the way
Into love and trust in you

The hardest seed
When planted deep
And sown with tears of longing
Cracks open at midnight
With sheer pain and fright
A cry so loud
send shivers throughout earth and sky

"How will I make it out alive?"

I'm blind
Who is me?
I can no longer see
but I sense that I'm no longer
alone

Fear! my old friend!
Has reached out her right
hand,
and has offered
to guide me with love

Now is the time
To reach out from this rhyme
And join in the song
of becoming



After the greatest fright
after the longest night
The sun has risen over the darkness

I break open
I break free
I am growing
with pure glee

I am blooming
and reaching for the light.

Yah, you've seen me out from
my narrow place
Yah, you've seen me through
You've re-shaped my mind,
and re-organized time
I have faith and trust in you.
I have faith and trust in you.





THE RIGHTEOUS WOMEN OF THE GENERATION

From Maya Zinkow,
Joseph S. Ingber Rabbinic Intern

The following is a midrashic (exegetical) take on the story of our liberation from Exodus. Consider reading this source and using the discussion questions below to enrich your telling of the Maggid (story telling portion of the seder) at your seder this year, in the merit of our matriarchs.

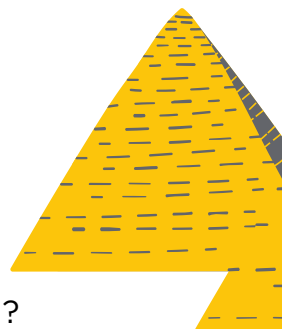
Babylonian Talmud, Masechet Sotah 11b

Rav Avira taught: *In the merit of the righteous women that were in that generation, the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt.* At the time when these women would go to draw water, the Holy Blessed One would materialize for them small fish that would enter into their pitchers, and they would therefore draw pitchers that were half filled with water and half filled with fish. And they would come and place two pots on the fire, one pot of hot water and one pot of fish.

And they would take them to their husbands, to the field, and would bathe and anoint them with oil and feed them the fish and give them to drink and have sex with them between the sheepfolds, as it is stated: “When you lie among the sheepfolds, the wings of the dove are covered with silver, and her pinions with the shimmer of gold” (Psalms 68:14). As a reward for “when you lie among the sheepfolds,” the Jewish people merited to receive the plunder of Egypt, as it is stated “The wings of the dove are covered with silver, and her pinions with the shimmer of gold” (Psalms 68:14).

Questions:

- According to Rav Avira, what made the women of the enslaved generation righteous?
- What, according to this midrash (story), was the reason for our redemption?
- What is the relationship between sexual power and freedom?
- What other righteous women play a role in the story of our redemption?





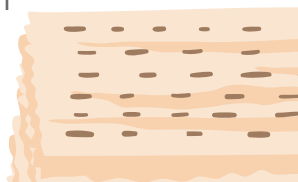
PASSOVER SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: BEDIKAT/BI'UR CHAMETZ AS CONTEMPLATIVE EGO-CHECKING AND SOUL-SEARCHING

By Ben Perlstein,
Joseph S. Ingber Rabbinic Intern

One of the most important rituals in preparation for Passover is bedikat/bi'ur chametz, the checking for and removal of any remaining chametz - any traces of leavening that might be left in our homes. In this ritual we move from room to room with a candle, searching for and burning up any chametz that we find.

Jewish tradition also offers us an internal dimension to this practice, translating chametz not just as leavened grain products but also as inflation of ego - arrogance in the heart. Checking for and removing this internal chametz can be particularly important because of Passover's associations with freedom from affliction and humiliation. In the process of moving toward freedom from humiliation, removal of chametz reminds us to remain humble - not to get carried away with ego. It reminds us that as we leave slavery, we are still in service - that recovering our dignity does not mean becoming inflated.

At the same time, though, true humility in this process calls for moderation. As we root out undue inflatedness, Passover's ultimate focus on uplifting liberation reminds us to avoid falling back into the opposite extreme of total deflation. We find this balancing act symbolically reflected in the ritual of searching for and burning away extra chametz, as we do this practice with just a candle - not a big torch of consuming fire. The candle itself is humble, just checking for and gently removing the chametz. So, too, even as we are checking our egos, we are also not obliterating them. Cultivating humility in an immodestly overpowering way would not just go too far; it would defeat the purpose.





This lesson also comes alive in how the word chametz shares its Hebrew root with the word chamtzan, oxygen. This linguistic connection points to the role that oxygen plays in the process of leavening, while also bringing our attention to how the flame that we use to find and burn away the chametz is itself fueled by oxygen. Oxygen may create chametz - which negates Passover - but freedom is also impossible without any oxygen at all. Here, again, we see a call to remain humble in our liberation, without letting that humility drive us back into oppressive loss of dignity altogether.

The complex relationship here between oxygen and the creation, finding and burning of chametz may also apply just as literally to internal spiritual practice. Turning our attention toward the breath, we may see how the same oxygenation process that gives us life can puff up our chests and inflate us, and also quite powerfully free us of arrogance, through a gentle in-breath. As Passover asks us to search ourselves for inner chametz and seek balance between humility and dignity in liberation, we may find it all in our breath - breathing free.

Indeed, Proverbs 20:27 teaches, **Ner Adonai nishmat adam, chofes kol chadrei baten** - **The candle of God is the soul of a person, searching all of one's inner rooms.** Reading this verse as a description of spiritual search for chametz, we might also hear in the phrase nishmat adam - the soul of a person - direct resonance with neshimat adam, the breath of a person. Just as we are called to take a candle from room to room, searching for remaining chametz in our homes, we may understand our soul-breath as a spiritual candle for searching the rooms of our hearts. We can feel each breath shining light in every corner of ourselves and gently removing the ego-leavening - neither burning us nor threatening the natural light of our souls, but rather upholding a sense of freedom, worth, dignity, and divinity, with no need for undue inflation.





With this intention in mind, I would like to invite us all to take a few deep breaths and focus our attention on experiencing each inhalation as a gentle search through our hearts - with that candle of the breath - for any excess arrogance. With every exhalation see if you can feel the release of internal chametz, tapping into freedom from the affliction of arrogance - freedom from the tightness of ego. Again, no need for full-blown self-deprecation - just softening and releasing into the simultaneously humble and dignified sense of service in freedom that Passover is all about.

I invite you to stay with this breathing exercise for as long as you would like - doing this internal soul-searching for any chametz that still needs to be released, and just taking a breath-break from the frenzy of Passover prep, from the voices of our internal taskmasters, and, of course, from the broader situation in our world.

This surreal and tragic time has asked so much of us, and it continues to ask us to cultivate the kind of balanced appreciation that this practice may support - to maintain humility in the face of forces that are beyond our control and knowledge, while also internalizing a dignified sense that our actions and choices are important - that we can do so much, even in small gestures, to support each other and look out for each other's health and safety. Both Passover and the pandemic ask us not to fall into the extremes of believing either that what we do does not matter or that we are somehow totally in control, but rather to feel the balance that I hope this breathing practice may bring - of humility but not humiliation, service but not slavery, and dignity without undue inflation of ego.

May we all have a truly meaningful, safe and healthy holiday - a zissen Pesach and chag sameach.





QUESTIONS FOR TRANSFORMATION

— “ ————
 This year we are slaves, הַשָּׁתָּא עֲבָדִי
 next year we will be free. לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין
 ———— ” ————

On Passover, we recall the story of our people's exodus from Egypt, the place of constriction. But sadly, many of us are still trapped in our own personal Egypts.

Therefore, we must use this time to reflect on what that is and why we haven't left.

Questions to Ask Yourself

What is
your
Egypt?

What is
holding
you back
from
leaving?

What are
you
bringing
with you?

In what
ways
have we
already
left?



PASSOVER IN QUOTATIONS

“The exodus from Egypt occurs in every human being, in every era, in every year, and in every day.”

— Rabbi Nachman of Breslov

“I love Passover because for me it is a cry against indifference, a cry for compassion.”

—Elie Wiesel

“You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

—Exodus 23:9

“We are commanded to teach our children about the Exodus from Egypt in a manner so vivid that everyone at the table—but especially the kids—remembers (not merely imagines but actually remembers) what it feels like to be a hungry, hunted slave. The seder makes memory manifest, tangible, and solid as Grandpa’s kiddush cup.”

— Anita Diamant

“To be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”

— Nelson Mandela

“Sharing food is the first act through which slaves become free human beings. One who fears tomorrow does not offer his bread to others. But one who is willing to divide his food with a stranger has already shown himself capable of fellowship and faith, the two things from which hope is born. That is why we begin the seder by inviting others to join us. That is how we turn affliction into freedom.”

— Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z”l