

Repair the World Freedom Seder



Each year, we gather around the *seder* table to retell the story of Exodus, to reflect on an ongoing journey to freedom, and to connect past to present – from servitude to service. This year, around the world, Passover will be different from all others. Social distancing in the wake of COVID-19 has changed how we serve our communities and how we celebrate the season. As we reflect on the past year, we think about the changes we wish to see in the new one. This Passover, how will you support those around you in these new and rapidly changing circumstances?

In Freedom Seder, Jews And African-Americans Built A Tradition Together



During Passover, Jews around the world tell the story of Exodus. That story, with its radical message of freedom, has resonated with African-Americans since the days of slavery. More than 40 years ago, these two communities wove their stories together for a new Passover ritual – the Freedom Seder.

"Both the Jewish community and the black community have suffered great atrocities, and so the fact that we were coming together was a very important and powerful idea," he says. "And the way to best understand that was when people locked arms and sang *We Shall Overcome*."

-Topper Carew, civil rights leader

[Read more](#) and [watch footage](#) of the first Freedom Seder in 1969.

Introduction



Reader 1: We have come together this evening to celebrate liberation from the chains of oppression. Let us recall the struggles of all people in every generation in every part of the world.

Group: We are here because the struggle for human freedom never stops. We are here to remember all people – Jews and non-Jews – who are still struggling for their freedom.

Leader: The book we read from is called a Haggadah, which in Hebrew means, "The Telling". The traditional Haggadah evolved over the centuries and includes stories, anecdotes, and legends along with the story of the Exodus and the rituals of the Seder, which in Hebrew means, "Order". For this Haggadah, we draw from the richness and the history of many people and in doing so make the telling complete.

Reader 2: As we celebrate the Seder, we are reminded of the experiences of slavery and oppression, and the continued quest for liberation from the oppression that afflicts our communities today. This is done so that we may constantly be alert and ever watchful lest the pattern repeat.

Leader: Let us say: Hee-nay ma tov oo-ma na-yeem
She-vet a-kheem gam ya-khad.

Group: Behold, how good and pleasant it is for
brothers and sisters to live together in unity!

Candle Lighting



Reader 3: The day ends. The earth turns from sunshine to dusk and then to darkness. We assume for ourselves the task of kindling candles in the night, to enlighten the dark corners of our world. We still live in perilous times.

Reader 4: Behind us, though receding into the memories of even the oldest among us, we can still sense the fires of Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Rwanda, Armenia, and Bosnia. We also cannot ignore horrific injustices perpetrated against Native Americans, enslaved Africans, and American Japanese people in World War 2.

Reader 5: Before us, the threat of acts of hate and gun violence. We gather tonight to create from fire, not the heat of destruction, but the light of instruction; indeed to see more clearly the wisdom, strength and caring that glows from within each of us.

(TOGETHER)

May these candles, lit on the Festival of Freedom, bring light into our hearts and minds.

May they renew our courage to act for justice and freedom here and now.

May they illumine the path to truth, justice and peace.
And so we repeat the ancient blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל יוֹם טוֹב

Leader: Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam,
asher kiddishanu b'mitzvotav,
v'tzivanu lehadlik neir shel Yom Tov.

Translation: We praise G-d, spirit of everything,
who has made us distinct through Your directives
and has directed us to kindle the holiday lights.

Memorial Candle Lighting



Reader 6: On this night of the Seder we remember with reverence and love the millions of people of who perished at the hands of tyrants more wicked than the Pharaoh, who enslaved our fathers in Egypt. Come, said they said to their minions, let us cut them off from being a people, that their names may be remembered no more. And they slew the blameless and pure. But we abstain from dwelling on the deeds of the evil ones lest we defame the good in which exists in humanity.

Leader: We light this candle to remember the lives lost in these tragedies. They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided. May their memory bring redemption to the name of their people and oppressed peoples through all the world.

The Seder Plate



Reader 7: Charoset, a mix of apples, nuts and wine, represents the mortar that Jews were forced to make in Egypt for Pharaohs buildings. However, tonight let it represent a different type of glue. Let the charoset be love, and may love bind us together in peace.
*Charoset is derived from the hebrew word heres, meaning “clay”

Maror, the Horseradish root on your plate symbolizes the bitterness of slavery. It is on the Seder plate so that we never forget the bitterness of slavery and oppression.

Z'roah or the shank bone represents the special lamb sacrifice made in the days of the Temple for the Passover holiday. Tonight we use a beet to represent the bone on the Seder plate. The color of the beet reminds us of the Passover sacrifice. May we remember the sacrifices of those who came before us.

Reader 8: Karpas: Parsley represents spring, regeneration and growth. Let it remind us to care for ourselves so that we may sustain our minds and bodies as we carry out justice work.

Beitsa: The egg is a sign of new life and rebirth. The egg represents the birth of a new world that is free of oppression and hate.

Matzah: We eat this unleavened bread to remind us that our ancestors fled Egypt before the dough could rise. It is often referred to as “the bread of affliction” , Let it remind us that we must work for **freedom now!**

Modern Additions to the Seder Plate

Reader 9: The Olives: Just as the olive branch has served as a symbol of peace, the olives on the Seder plate serve to remind us that not only are we not free until everyone is free, but we are not free until there is peace in our homes, in our community and in our world. We specifically consider the oppression of the LGBTQIA community.

The Orange: The legend that has arisen around this story is that Dr. Susannah Heschel was giving a speech at a university. Afterwards, a man stood up and angrily denounced feminism, saying that a woman belongs on a *bima* (pulpit) the way an orange belongs on a Seder plate. To support women's rightful place in Jewish life, people put an orange on their Passover tables. The orange reminds us that all people have a place in the world, regardless of gender or sexual identity.

Reader 10: The Fair Trade Chocolate: Tonight we eat chocolate to remember all the trafficked and enslaved children in the Ivory Coast who toil in the cocoa fields. Unlike most chocolate today, this chocolate is made without child slave labor in the Ivory Coast. It is on our Seder plate to remind us that slavery still exists today, and that **we have the freedom and obligation to choose chocolate not made with child labor.** We take the sweetness of this chocolate as a symbol of resistance and the possibility of liberation for all.

A Lock and Key: For more than two million individuals who are incarcerated in the United States – the majority of whom are people of color – the lock represents the reality of being locked up and then locked out. They are locked out of jobs, housing opportunities, and in many places, voting rights.

We place the lock and key on our Seder plate tonight to acknowledge those who are behind bars, along with their loved ones, who are all locked up and locked out. The key reminds us of our potential to end the oppression that is mass incarceration in the United States.

Kiddush



Reader 11: The text of the Kiddush reminds us that the choice to uphold the sacred is in our hands. We do not directly bless wine, or praise its sweetness. Rather, we say that we are thankful for the fruit of the vine. The same fruit can also be used to make vinegar, which is sharp and bitter. Our actions determine whether this sacred moment in time inspires bitterness or sweetness, complacency or action.

Leader:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, borei p'ree
hagafen.

We praise the Ruler of Everything, who creates the fruit of the
vine

Kiddush



Leader: Before you drink the first cup of wine, let us give to be thankful that we have all been fortunate enough to make it to this place in our lives. Let us take a moment of silence to contemplate a current local issue where we have the ability to make change. How will we use our agency and good fortune to do good?

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
שֶׁהֵחֵינּוּ וְקִיָּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam,
she-hechyanu v'key'manu v'higiyanu lazman hazeh.

Group: We praise the Ruler of Everything,
who has kept us alive, raised us up, and brought us to this happy moment.
(Drink the first cup of wine)

Handwashing



Reader 12: In washing our hands, we symbolically cleanse ourselves of the year that was and prepare for the year to come. Let us now think of one part of last year we would like to acknowledge and learn from, and one hope for the year to come.

Reader 13: As we cleanse our hands, may we recognize that we cannot wash away the dirt of our prejudices and negative stereotypes of "other people" which cause so much hurt and pain. Let us commemorate the brave changemakers in our world and find a way to personally commit to working alongside them.

Karpas



Reader 14: At this point in the Seder, it is traditional to eat a green vegetable dipped in saltwater. The green vegetable represents rebirth, renewal and growth. We dip the parsley in salt water to remember the tears of people enslaved in history and the present.

Leader:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה

Baruch Atah Adonai,
Eloheinu melech ha'olam,
borei p'ri ha'adamah.

Blessed are You Ruler of the universe
who creates the fruit of the earth.

The Four People



Leader: On Passover, the Haggadah speaks about four sons; one who is wise, one who is evil, one who is innocent, and one who doesn't know to ask. Tonight we talk of four people who believe in racial justice. They are you and me; people with a variety of lived and learned experience and intersecting identities. What do they say?

They are Jewish people and non-Jews alike asking questions, engaging with and working towards racial justice. How do we answer? We call them in with compassion, we hold them accountable, we learn from those who came before us.

Reader 15: WHAT DOES A QUESTIONER SAY?

“I support equality, but the tactics and strategies used by current racial justice movements make me uncomfortable.”

Time and time again during the journey through the desert, the Israelites had to trust a vision of a more just future that the Israelites could not see themselves. They argued that there must be an easier way, a better leader, and a better God. They grumbled to Moses and Aaron in Exodus 16:3, “For you have brought us out into this wilderness to starve this whole community to death.” In the midst of our work, there are times when we struggle to identify our own promised land. We see this challenge in various social movements and only when we study these movements in depth, we see that many pushes for progress and liberation endure similar struggles, indecision, and pushback.

Reader 16: WHAT DOES A JEW OF COLOR SAY?

I don't often see myself represented in my community and seldom hear my stories, how can I stay engaged in a community that doesn't reflect my identity?

When our Jewish communities do not fully represent the ethnic and racial diversity of all Jews, we are responsible to question, call out, and call in our institutional leadership to assure that all Jews, feel welcomed, included, and represented in Jewish spaces. Before Moses killed the taskmaster who was beating up an Israelite slave, “he looked around and didn't see anyone” (Exodus 2:12). The next day, an Israelite who knew of the incident said to him, “Who made you our ruler?” (Exodus 2:14). Similarly, we must make sure to agitate in our communities so that Jews whose ‘authenticity’ is questioned (Jews of Color, LGBTQIA Jews, and Jews with disabilities) are seen, included, and represented.

Reader 17: WHAT DOES A NEWCOMER SAY?

How can I acknowledge my privilege in a way that works towards elevating the voices of marginalized people in my community?

The Passover story is about the process of moving from oppression to liberation. Liberation is not easy: it demands us to contribute our time and resources for the greater good, even if it makes us uncomfortable. In the desert, the Israelites constructed the Mishkan (Tabernacle) together. Exodus 35:29 says, “[T]he Israelites, all the people whose hearts moved them to bring anything for the work that God, through Moses, had commanded to be done, brought it as a freewill offering to God.” Those of us looking to engage in racial justice work can learn from that example. We need to consistently show up, on a path to confronting and exploring our individual privileges and oppressions.

Reader 18: WHAT DOES AN AVOIDER SAY?

“I am so scared of being called a racist, I don’t want to engage in any conversations about race.”

Having conversations about race and racism can be hard and uncomfortable, and we all make mistakes. It’s an essential part of the process. When Joseph began having dreams, he told his brothers that they would eventually bow down to him. In Genesis 37:8, Joseph’s brothers replied, “Do you mean to rule over us?’ And they hated him even more for his talk about his dreams.” Joseph honed the way that he shared interpretations of dreams, and used them to survive in Pharaoh’s palace. He learned from his mistake with his brothers, and his ability helped him to reunite with his family. We can learn from Joseph to overcome mistakes, even when talking about race, by continuing to show up and engage.

Do I Identify?



Reader 19: “The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. The opposite of art is not ugliness, it's indifference. The opposite of faith is not heresy, it's indifference. And the opposite of life is not death, it's indifference.” — Elie Wiesel

Reader 20: Get up. Stand up. Speak up. Do something.
-Tarana Burke, Founder of the Me Too Movement

Still I Rise – Maya Angelou



Reader 21: You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may tread me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Reader 22: Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops.
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Reader 23: Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Reader 24: Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise

Reader 25: Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise

I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise

Reader 26: Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise

I rise

I rise.

Ten Modern Plagues



Leader: The traditional Haggadah lists ten plagues that afflicted the Egyptians. We live in a very different world, but Passover is a good time to remember that, even after our liberation from slavery in Egypt, there are still many challenges for us to meet. Here are ten “modern plagues”:

Reader 27:

- 1. Inequity** - Access to affordable housing, quality healthcare, nutritious food, good schools, and higher education is far from equal. The disparity between rich and poor is growing, and opportunities for upward mobility are limited.
- 2. Entitlement** - Too many people consider themselves entitled to material comfort, economic security, and other privileges of middle-class life without hard work.
- 3. Fear** - Fear of “the other” produces and reinforces xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, antisemitism, homophobia, and transphobia.
- 4. Greed** - Profits are a higher priority than the safety of workers or the health of the environment. The top one percent of the American population controls 42% of the country’s financial wealth, while corporations send jobs off-shore and American workers’ right to organize and bargain collectively is threatened.

Reader 28:

5. Distraction - In this age of constant connectedness, we are easily distracted by an unending barrage of information, much of it meaningless, with no way to discern what is important.

6. Distortion of reality - The media constructs and society accepts unrealistic expectations, leading to eating disorders and an unhealthy obsession with appearance for both men and women.

7. Unawareness - It is easy to be unaware of the consequences our consumer choices have for the environment and for workers at home and abroad. Do we know where or how our clothes are made? Where or how our food is produced? The working conditions? The impact on the environment?

Reader 29:

8. Discrimination - While we celebrate our liberation from bondage in Egypt, too many people still suffer from discrimination. For example, blacks in the United States are imprisoned at more than five times the rate of whites, and Hispanics are locked up at nearly double the white rate. Women earn 77 cents for every dollar earned by a man. At 61 cents to the dollar, the disparity is even more shocking in Jewish communal organization.

9. Silence - Every year, 4.8 million cases of domestic violence against American women are reported. We do not talk about things that are disturbing, such as rape, sex trafficking, child abuse, domestic violence, and elder abuse, even though they happen every day in our own communities.

10. Feeling overwhelmed and disempowered - When faced with these modern “plagues,” how often do we doubt or question our own ability to make a difference? How often do we feel paralyzed because we do not know what to do to bring about change?

Then They Came- Martin Niemoller



Reader 30: First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out--

Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out--

Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out--

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me--and there was no one left to speak for me.

Modern Dayenu



Leader: Dayenu is Hebrew for “It would have been enough” or “It would have sufficed”. As we have already given names to issues that plague society, let us look forward to a time when our work is done and humanity can collectively look back and say “Dayenu”

Reader 31: When all the workers of the world received just compensation and respect for their labors, enjoy safe, healthy, and secure working conditions, and can take pride in their work.

Group: Dayenu

Reader 32: When technology for the production and conservation of energy and our natural resources is developed so that we can maintain responsible and comfortable lifestyles and still assure a safe environment for our children.

Group: Dayenu

Reader 33: When air, water, fellow creatures, and our beautiful world are protected for the benefit and enjoyment of all.

Group: Dayenu

Reader 34: When all people live freely in their own countries, practicing their beliefs and cultures without interference of persecution.

Group: Dayenu

Reader 35: When people of all ages, sexes, races, religions, cultures and nations respect and appreciate one another.

Group: Dayenu

Reader 36: When all children grow up in freedom, without hunger, and with the love and support needed to realize their full potential.

Group: Dayenu

Reader 37: When all children, women, and men, are free from the threat of violence, abuse and domination; when personal power and strength are not used as weapons.

Group: Dayenu

Reader 38: When food and shelter are accepted as human rights, not as commodities, and become available to all. When no one in our society has to fear hunger, cold, or loneliness.

Group: Dayenu

Reader 39: When all peoples living in strife are able to create paths to a just and lasting peace.

Group: Dayenu

Motzi Matzah



Leader: This is the bread of affliction, the poor bread, which the Jews ate in the ancient land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are in want share in the hope of Passover. As we celebrate here, we join with people everywhere. This year we celebrate here, next year we celebrate all over the world. Now we are slaves. Next year may we all be free.

(Eat a piece of matzah)

Maror



Leader: Maror, in Hebrew, means “bitter”. The maror reminds us of how bitter the Egyptians made the lives of their slaves. We read in the Torah:

“The Egyptians made their lives bitter with hard labor, with mortar and brick, and with every kind of work in the field. All the labor which the Egyptians forced upon them was harsh.”

When we eat maror during the Seder, we are reminded of the bitterness of slavery. (Eat the maror)

Koreich- The Hillel Sandwich



Leader: Now we eat a sandwich of matzah, which represents freedom, and maror, which represents bitterness. We also add in charoset. The charoset reminds us of the mortar and of the pain of slavery. However, as we eat it we taste its sweetness. This sweetness gives us hope that the future will bring justice to all people. In the time of freedom we must not forget the bitterness of slavery. In times of oppression we must keep alive the hope of freedom.

(Make a sandwich of matzah, charoset and bitter herbs)

I Have a Dream



Reader 40: “Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children. We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. I say to you today, my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

Reader 41: I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

This is our hope.

Our Liberation



Reader 42: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

-Lilla Watson