

# Ten ancient and modern plagues

Contributed by [Alida Liberman](#)

**Source:** Adapted from A Humanist Modern Haggadah by Eszter Hargittai

*Let us all fill our cups with wine...*

**Reader 1:** Tonight we drink four cups of the fruit of the vine. There are many explanations for this custom. They represent, some have said, the four terms God to describe the redemption in Exodus: "I shall *take* you out...", "I shall *rescue* you...", "I shall *redeem* you...", "I shall *bring* you..." The four cups might also represent the four corners of the earth, for freedom must live everywhere; the four seasons of the year, for freedom's cycle must last through all the seasons.

**Reader 2:** A full cup of wine symbolizes complete happiness. The triumph of Passover is diminished by the sacrifice of many human lives when ten plagues were visited upon the people of Egypt. In the ancient story, the plagues that befell the Egyptians resulted from the decisions of tyrants, but the greatest suffering occurred among those who had no choice but to follow. It is fitting that we mourn their loss of life, and express our sorrow over their suffering. Therefore, let us diminish the wine in our cups as we recall the ten plagues that befell the Egyptian people.

[As each plague is named, everyone dips a finger in wine and then touches a plate to remove the drop.]

Blood, Frogs, Gnats, Flies, Cattle Disease, Boils, Hail, Locusts, Darkness, Death of the Firstborn.

**Reader 3:** In the same spirit, our celebration today is also shadowed by our awareness of continuing sorrow and oppression in all parts of the world. Ancient plagues are mirrored in modern tragedies.

**Reader 4:** We are a world people, living in many lands and among many nations. The power of science has shrunk our planet and has made all of us the children of one human family. We are all victims together of enormous social problems. We share in their effects and in the responsibility to overcome them.

**Reader 5:** We spill wine from our cups at the mention of each of these contemporary plagues. We cannot allow ourselves to drink a full measure since our own lives are sobered by these ills, which darken our lives and diminish our joy. As the pain of others diminishes our joys, let us once more diminish the wine of our festival as we repeat the names of these modern plagues:

**Group:**

Hunger, War, Crime,  
Disease, Racism, Abuse,  
Poverty, Homophobia, Pollution,  
Apathy and indifference to human suffering.