

Elijah

Contributed by [Latino-Jewish Student Coalition](#)

Source: Jeffrey Goldberg in The New American Haggadah

We interrupt this celebration of liberation to bring you a word from the Jewish id. “Pour out Thy Wrath,” we demand of God. But wait. **We moderns have been told that we are opening the door for Elijah as a way of signaling our readiness to work for a better time, a messianic age free of strife and unfairness. Aren’t we opening the door to the poor, and to the people of all nations, inviting them to come eat with us and learn with us? Well, yes, but we open doors, and close doors, for many reasons. In the ghettos of Europe, Jews opened their doors at this moment for two fascinating and conflicting reasons. One was to let the gentiles see that, yes, indeed, the Jews were doing what they claimed they were doing, having an innocent meal together—no Christian children being slaughtered here, thank you very much. At the same time, employing words not understood by their neighbors, the JEws were venting their anger at the gentiles who were making their lives a misery.**

The anger of our ghetto ancestors was understandable. Why not let powerless people have their fantasies of justice and revenge? But should we pour out our wrath today, onto societies that accept us? Or, to ask the question another way, **is righteous anger, even aimed at ancient enemies, and not our neighbors, ennobling or distorting? Anger, channeled destructively, can lead to vindictiveness, to a kind of constricting tribalism that sees everyone on the other side of our circled wagons as an enemy. Destructive anger is one of the great dangers of our age. Technology has, among other things, enabled the instantaneous transmission of invective; the Internet is used all too often to demonize and polarize. The Talmud tells us that God loves the man who does not get angry.**

But isn’t anger also a useful motivator? Isn’t there such a thing as righteous anger? The abolitionists were angry; the suffragists were angry; Herzl was angry; Gandhi was angry. But they poured their wrath not into vengeful violence, but into new foundations of justice. But how do we know when our constructive anger becomes dangerous? Can we ever trust our emotions? OR is that why we have law—because we can’t?