

LEMONY SNICKET: Poor Man's Bread

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Source: The New American Haggadah

It is altogether proper that matzah is called the bread of affliction, because it has been afflicted more than any other foodstuff on earth. It is born in a searing-hot oven and then completely ignored for fifty-one weeks of the year while people walk around shamelessly eating leavened bread and crackers. Then, Passover rolls around, and it is smeared with various substances, ground up into balls, and, in the morning, fried up into a counterfeit version of French toast. Everyone eats it and nobody likes it, and there's always one last box that sits untouched in a cupboard for months afterward, lonely, broken, and utterly unloved.

Of course it is practically impossible for free and fortunate people such as ourselves to envision a life of slavery, but as an exercise in imagining our ancestors, place a large square of matzah in your mouth and eat it. Listen to the cacophonous crunches in your ears like the blows of the slavedriver's whip. Feel the searing dryness in your mouth like the thirst of the Hebrew slaves for freedom. And then, with your mouth full of matzah, try to say the Shema, and watch the particles of oppression scatter across the table. Slavery spreads like a spray of crumbs, and it is very difficult to rid ourselves of slavery's great moral shame, which is why, even thousands of years after the Exodus, there are so many people enslaved, and why, even weeks after Passover, there are so many matzah crumbs in the house.