

# Ha Lachma Anya/ This is the Bread of Affliction

Contributed by [Religious Action Center](#)

Source: Religious Action Center: Pesach, A Season for Justice

This reading takes place near the beginning of the Seder in the *yachatz* section. It provides the primary textual inspiration for feeding the hungry during Passover, as well as calling for an end to slavery, which continues to exist around the world in various forms. It also prompts us to join together with members of the African American community for communal Seders recognizing our common experience of slavery. This passage inspires many of the social justice programs created around the observance of Passover:

## Ha Lachma Anya

*This is the bread of affliction, the poor bread,  
which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.*

*Let all who are hungry come and eat.*

*Let all who are in want, share the hope of Passover.*

*As we celebrate here, we join with our people everywhere.*

*This year we celebrate here.*

*Next year in the land of Israel.*

*Now we are still in bonds.*

*Next year may we all be free.*

## Additional Readings:

### The Matzah of Unity

*by the United Jewish Communities Rabbinic Cabinet*

Passover is the great Jewish family holiday – but with a critical message about our ethics and values.

We eat the Karpas, the green vegetable – and recall our concern for the environment.

We dip into the salt water of tears – and remind ourselves to care for the oppressed.

We eat the bitter herbs – and sharpen our concern for the stranger.

We taste the matzah, the bread of affliction – and feel the memories of our servitude to Pharaoh.

We note the roasted egg, symbolic of the extra offering in the Temple in ancient days – and ask ourselves what are our own sacrifices?

Passover is so real and tangible, because we not only taste our freedom, but we also resolve to work for the liberation of all people. It is a time to ask ourselves: what are we doing to care for those in need? Can we reach out and assist with our tzedakah, our charitable contributions, or through our acts of loving-kindness?

Let us now take the middle matzah and divide it in half. As we break this matzah and set it aside, we link ourselves symbolically with all Jews throughout the world, especially those who have lived under the heel of the oppressor.

Our Seder meal will not conclude until the missing piece of Matzah is found and returned to the table. The Matzah, when restored, shows the desire of our people to be together as one, at peace. As Jews, we are a people of sacred fragments; we need help from God to bond together in everlasting unity.

Today the Star of David rises proudly in the former Soviet Union. Yet hundreds of thousands of elderly Jews struggle to survive. In Argentina, families, schools, community centers and synagogues face a difficult economic crisis and we provide basic services and supplies for tens of thousands of our fellow Jews.

Jews who left Ethiopia and other devastated countries experienced a modern exodus to live in freedom. They

brought their children and grandchildren to Israel, a land sworn to us by our ancestors and God. Now we are committed to helping them to become full participants in all aspects of Israeli society.

But our work is not done. We need boundless love for the Jewish people in order to continue our efforts at caring for the most vulnerable, supporting of Jewish education, ingathering of the exiles and to rebuilding Israel. May this Passover be a time of recommitment to our people and our faith.

### **Affliction Beyond Hunger**

*by Jews for Racial and Economic Justice*

In our city today, some of our neighbors are forced to work in order to receive their meager welfare benefits, which barely enable them to survive. Tonight we share their bread of affliction:

The affliction of work without dignity

The injustice of no minimum wage

The theft of protection from injury

The anxiety of work with no future

Panic at the threat of lost benefits.

The stress of leaving a child for work

The shame of forced placement

The death of educational opportunity

The robbery of the right to organize

Silenced voices of protest.

Who speaks aloud alongside those whose speech has been muted?

Who breathes together with those who cannot catch their breath?

We can breathe the breath of life, we can join these struggles, we can face the Pharaohs and strip them of their power.

### **Ha Lachma Anya Supplement**

*by Rabbi Arthur Waskow*

In the world today there are still some who are so pressed-down that they have not even this bread of oppression to eat. There are so many who are hungry that they cannot all come and eat with us tonight. Therefore we say to them, we set aside this bread as a token that we owe you righteousness, tzedakah, and that we will fulfill it. (Set aside one piece of matzah.) And to ourselves we say, not by bread alone, but by everything that is brought forth by the mouth of YHWH, lives the human; share your bread with the hungry, says YHWH. As the tradition says,

"Ha-sha-tah ha-kha; I-sha-nah ha-ba-ah b'ar-ah d'yis'ra'el,"

This year we celebrate here, but the next year we hope to celebrate in the land of Israel, the land of God-wrestling.

### **The Fourth Piece of Matzah**

*by Rabbi Joel Soffin*

While holding up a fourth piece of matzah, recite the following:

"We raise this fourth matzah to remind ourselves that slavery still exists, that people are still being bought and sold as property, that the Divine image within them is yet being denied. We make room at our Seder table and in our hearts for those in southern Sudan and in Mauritania who are now where we have been.

We have known such treatment in our own history. Like the women and children enslaved in Sudan today, we

have suffered while others stood by and pretended not to see, not to know. We have eaten the bitter herb; we have been taken from our families and brutalized. We have experienced the horror of being forcibly converted. In the end, we have come to know in our very being that none can be free until all are free.

And so, we commit and recommit ourselves to work for the freedom of these people. May the taste of this 'bread of affliction' remain in our mouths until they can eat in peace and security. Knowing that all people are Yours, O God, we will urge our government and all governments to do as You once commanded Pharaoh on our behalf: 'Shalach et Ami! Let MY People Go!'"