

Passover and Social Justice

Contributed by [Religious Action Center](#)

Source: Pesach: A Season of Justice

Passover is rich in social justice themes. It is impossible to study the story of our redemption and not feel compelled to eradicate injustice in the world today. Among the primary social justice themes found in the Exodus story and in the Passover observance are hunger and homelessness and oppression and redemption. "This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all those who are hungry come and eat with us. Let all who are in want share the hope of Passover." (Haggadah, "Ha Lachma Anya") "Ha Lachma Anya" reminds us of a time when our diets were once restricted to matzah, considered the "bread of affliction."

Due to our hasty retreat from Egypt, we were limited to the food carried on our backs – the unleavened bread that we were unable to thoroughly prepare. Our experience with hardship following the exodus from Egypt inspires us to consider those who eat the metaphorical "bread of affliction" in present times, and to let all those who are now hungry join us at our Passover tables. "Even the poorest person in Israel may not eat until he reclines, and they must not give him less than four cups of wine." (Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 99b)

The Babylonian Talmud reminds us that it is imperative for us to take care of all in our community, even the poorest person, during Passover and throughout the year. Four cups of wine, quite a luxury for some, is seen as an integral part of the Passover observance. The requirement that even poor Jews be provided with ample wine, and presumably, with all the ritual foods and courses for the one night of the Seder, leads to the expectation that we should help the poor and the hungry year-round. "My Father was a wandering Aramean who went down to Egypt and dwelled there." (Haggadah, "Maggid")

The painful reminder of our status as strangers in the land of Egypt and our subsequent 40 years of wandering in the wilderness without a home raises awareness of immigration and refugee concerns. The memory instills in us a desire to eradicate homelessness in the areas around us, and ultimately, the world. "This year we are slaves. Next year, may we all be free" (Haggadah, "Ha Lachma Anya")

As we are commanded, we place ourselves directly into the story, remembering what it was like for us, the Children of Israel, to be slaves in the land of Egypt. This personal experience of slavery motivates us to examine the current international situation and wrestle with cases of injustice, oppression, and slavery today. Sadly, slavery did not end at that time, but persists even to this day. Pesach is an opportunity for us to raise awareness of contemporary examples of slavery and oppression throughout the world. In our own nation, domestic violence traps victims within their homes, limiting their freedom as surely as if they were enslaved.

When we recall our immense joy at being freed from slavery to worship and live according to the dictates of our faith, we are inspired to celebrate the great strides made by various contemporary groups, such as women and African Americans, which have fought for redemption from oppression and won, as our ancestors did. The observance of Passover presents a rich opportunity for interfaith sharing and celebration.