

This Year We Are Slaves, Next Year, May We All Be Free

Contributed by [Rabbi Barry Dov Lerner](#)

Source: Foundation for Family Education, Inc.

Haggadah Adapted from the Religious Action Center's Pesach: A Season for Justice Each year, through the Passover seder, we re-enact the experience of our people's liberation from slavery to freedom. The Haggadah commands us that in every generation we are to experience the seder as if we ourselves went out from Egypt to freedom. The seder reminds us that while we are not literally slaves, our freedom may be affected by old attitudes, negative thoughts, overwhelming worries or out-of-sync values. "Slavery does offer a certain freedom that can be attractive: the freedom from responsibility for yourself and others, the freedom from having to establish goals, figure out how to reach them, or think beyond the moment. It takes strength and guts to walk out of a known situation, which for all its pain, is predictable. It is human nature to want to stay put within the stability of the status quo." (Ross, "Self Liberation" in Celebrate! The Complete Jewish Holiday Handbook) But Judaism has never been satisfied with the status quo and each year, with the coming of spring and the acknowledgement of new growth and renewal, we remind ourselves and teach our children that freedom is a worthy goal. For teens who are gaining more freedoms, the holiday can teach the message that freedom also comes with responsibility. For our ancestors in Egypt, freedom meant entering into a covenantal relationship with God. It was only after we were freed that we were given the Ten Commandments, which obligated us in ways that continue to forge our relationship with the Divine. Like our ancestors in Egypt, we can escape from the things that enslave us, the things that hold us back. Once the Israelites encountered God and saw that God could bring them into freedom, "they gave up the comfort of the familiar, without concern for provisions or how they would get to or exist at their destination. They left Egypt because they believed a better life awaited them elsewhere. As Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav counseled, when you are about to leave [Egypt] 'mitzrayim' you should not worry about how you will manage in a new 'place.' Anyone who does or who stops to get everything in order for the journey will never pick himself or herself up." (Ross)

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT Parents and teens often have unique struggles over the issue of freedom. Below are some questions to help you explore the issue together. * What makes a person free? * In what ways are you enslaved? * What does it mean for you as a teen when you get new freedoms? * What does it mean to you as a parent to give your teens new freedom? * What would you like to be freed from in this coming year? * How can we help each other gain new freedoms? Work together to identify those responsibilities your teenagers must undertake as they enjoy more freedoms and what your teens can do to alleviate concerns you face as you allow more freedom.

SEDER PROJECTS FOR MEANING During Passover, we celebrate and thank God for delivering us from Egypt by singing Dayeinu (It would have been enough). We enumerate each step along the way, recognizing that each one was a miracle—parting the sea, providing for us in the desert, giving us Shabbat, bringing us to Mount Sinai, giving us the Torah, and more. At this time of year, while we remember our own oppression and redemption from Egypt, we often forget that Jews around the world are still oppressed whether by their governments or as a result of the economies they live in. Take some time with your family to learn about these communities. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee has information about Jewish communities all over the world who have yet to experience all the freedoms we have come to cherish. Learn about a few and then write a prayer to include in your seder that will teach your family and friends about this community as you pray that they may soon know the freedom that you do.

POTATOES Following Operation Solomon, the Ethiopian Jews who arrived in Israel were unable to digest much substantial food. Israel's doctors fed the new immigrants simple boiled potatoes and rice until their systems could take more food. To commemorate this at the seder, you may choose to eat small red potatoes alongside the parsley for karpas. Potatoes can serve as a reminder of the wondrous exodus in our own time from Ethiopia to Israel.

ORANGE Many families and congregations have begun adding an orange to the seder plate as a way of acknowledging the role of women in Jewish life. This custom began with Susannah Heschel, who explains: In the early 1980s, the Hillel Foundation invited me to speak on a panel at Oberlin College. While on campus, I came across a Haggadah that had been written by some Oberlin students to express feminist concerns. One ritual they devised was ... a sign of solidarity with Jewish lesbians. At the next Passover, I placed an orange on our family's Seder plate. During the first part of the Seder, I asked everyone to take a segment of the orange, make the blessing over fruit, and eat it as a gesture of solidarity with Jewish lesbians and gay men, and others who are marginalized within the Jewish community (I mentioned widows in particular). ...I felt that an orange was suggestive of ... the fruitfulness for all Jews when lesbians and gay men are contributing and active members of Jewish life. In addition, each orange segment had a few seeds that had to be spit out—a gesture of spitting out, repudiating the homophobia that poisons too many Jews.

ADDITIONAL SERVING OF MAROR Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom in Montreal created a special addition to the Passover seder to raise the profile of the issue of human trafficking. To "Remember the Enslaved of our Time" they recommend adding an extra serving of maror. After doing the blessing over the bitter herbs and eating them, and after making the "Hillel Sandwich" with bitter herbs and charoset, prepare a small piece of matzah with maror and say: In remembrance of today's slaves, up to 4 million people trafficked each year, now, in our own time, some in our very own country, we eat this extra portion of maror. We remember women entrapped by criminals who promised them a better life abroad. We think of children sold into slavery who knot carpets or tend crops at this moment. We recall refugee men swept into captive labor. With this extra maror, we who are free share the bitterness of the lot of today's slaves, resolving to appeal to governments, leaders, and communities to end human trafficking for all time.

MIRIAM'S CUP This modern custom celebrates Miriam's role in the deliverance from slavery and her help throughout the wandering in the wilderness. An empty cup is placed alongside Elijah's cup. Each attendee at the seder then pours a bit of his or her water into the cup, symbolizing Miriam's life-giving well that followed the wandering Israelites. With this new custom, we recognize that women are equally integral to the continued survival of the Jewish community. With a social action lens, we see the pouring of each person's water as a symbol of everyone's individual responsibility to respond to issues of social injustice, and that together we can make a positive difference.

YOUR OWN SYMBOL Discuss the freedoms for which your family is especially thankful, or those for which you feel we need to fight in today's world. Then choose an object together that will symbolize this freedom or plight.