

MAGGID (Tell the Story)

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Tell the story of the Exodus, and identify the Pharaohs in your life today.

Blessing over the second cup of wine.

We are descended from slaves who staged the first successful slave rebellion in recorded history. Ever since, our people has kept alive the story of liberation, and the consciousness that cruelty and oppression are not inevitable "facts of life," but conditions that can be changed.



The oppressive ancient Egyptian regime in which Jews lived as slaves was overthrown. The Passover story reminds us that in every age we must continue the struggle for liberation, which Jews first experienced on the first Passover some 3,200 years ago.

The Haggadah reminds us that the primary obligation of Passover is to experience ourselves as though we personally went out of Egypt. So now, let someone at the table tell the story of our enslavement, of the genocide against the firstborn Hebrew males, of the way Moses was saved and grew up in the palace and then came to identify with his own people the slaves. Let someone tell of how Moses killed an Egyptian policeman who was beating an Israelite slave and then fled to Midian, how Moses heard God's voice through a fire that was burning inside him and returned to Egypt, how his demand to "let my people go" was met by the Pharaoh with an escalation of oppression of the Israelites, how his own people shunned him as a trouble-maker who was only making things worse, and how God brought forth a set of environmental disasters. Let someone tell of how Moses was able to convince the Israelites and the Pharaoh that these disasters were intentional plagues from God, how the Israelites eventually came to accept that they could use those plagues as cover to leave Egypt, how 80 percent of the slaves couldn't make that leap and so decided not to leave with Moses, and how joyful a celebration it was for those who did leave by making a huge leap of faith in believing that transformation was really possible. While this story is being told, let all the other people at the table keep their eyes closed and try to imagine that it is *you* who are going through this experience, *you* who have the doubts about Moses and the possibility of a radical transformation, and *you* who finally is able to take that leap of faith. And allow yourself to feel what that must feel like when you can do that in your own life today!

THREE SYMBOLS OF PASSOVER

PESACH (the Bone or Beet): Our Seder plate includes a symbol of the ancient Passover sacrifice, which was brought each year to the Temple in Jerusalem. The Hebrew word for sacrifice is *korban*, which comes from the root meaning "near." What could bring you closer to your highest spiritual self?

MATZAH: The Torah tells us that the Israelites had to take the uncooked dough with them, "for they had prepared no provisions for the way." Symbolically, the matzah reminds us that when the opportunity for liberation comes, we must seize it, even if we do not feel fully prepared — indeed, if we wait until we feel prepared, we may never act at all. If you had to jump into such a struggle tomorrow morning, what would you have to leave behind?

The matzah also stands in contrast to *chametz* (Hebrew for the expansive yeast that makes bread rise), which symbolizes false pride, absorption in our individual egos, and grandiosity.

MAROR (the Bitter Herbs): The suffering of the Jews in Egypt has been matched by thousands of years in which we were oppressed as a people. Our insistence on telling the story of liberation and proclaiming that the world could be and should be fundamentally different has angered ruling elites. These elites often tried to channel against the Jews the anger that ordinary people were feeling about the oppression in their own lives. But Jews are not the only ones to have suffered oppression and violence. We think of the genocide against native peoples all around the world, including in the United States. We think of the enslavement of Africans, and the oppression of Armenians, homosexuals, women, and many others. Yet, tonight it is appropriate for us to focus also on the suffering of the Jewish people and to affirm our solidarity with victims of anti-Semitism through the ages. Anti-Semitism still persists in our own time in the use of double standards in the judgment of Jews, in acts of violence against Jews, and in refusing to acknowledge the history of Jewish suffering as equal to the suffering of other victims of oppressive social regimes in Christian, Islamic, and some secular societies, as well. Meanwhile, we Jews need to acknowledge the ways that this suffering has at times distorted our consciousness and made it

hard to fully grasp the pain others feel. We must evolve a Global Judaism that compassionately embraces the Jewish people and all other peoples.