THE BASE PASSOVER COMPANION

The Base Passover Companion guides you through each of the fifteen steps of the *seder* with thought-provoking commentaries written by some of the rabbis and educators who have led Base throughout its first 10 years. As part of Mem Global, Base rabbis welcome Jewish young adults into their homes to learn and explore Jewish wisdom; now, through this companion, you can bring that wisdom into your own home. Coming from different backgrounds, seminaries, and identities, these rabbis represent the diversity of Base and the diversity of the Jewish people. This companion itself is just one combination of infinite possibilities through which to experience and journey through this wonderful holiday.

INTRODUCTION

Rabbi Adam Gindea, Base Miami (2017-2023), VP of Base & Rabbinic Innovation (2025-present)

Tonight, we embark on a mystical and magical ritual to retell, and hopefully, relive the experience of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, the Exodus from Egypt. The Passover *Seder* is one of the oldest and most continuously celebrated rituals in the world. Tonight is very much about celebrating our freedom and remembering the enslavement and redemption of our ancestors. Yet at the same time, we are commemorating the national formation of *Bnei Yisrael*, and gathering to tell the story of our familial, national, and global introduction to God. The ritual of the Seder is the roadmap to exploring the relevance of those concepts and ideas within our own lives today.

As we begin this ritualistic journey, the questions, insights, and ideas throughout the night allow us to deeply engage in the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions to truly "regard oneself as if they personally left Egypt." (Pesachim 10:5). The fifteen steps of the Seder allude to the fifteen steps in the ancient temple in Jerusalem, mapping out a journey of elevation towards the heavens.

There is a powerful phrase in Jewish mystical thought that teaches *Adam Olam Katan* – a human being is a small universe. The narratives of the Torah are more than simply stories of historic events. They are teachings and insights to life, being, and living all garbed in the veils of narratives. Stories allow insights and understandings of the inner workings of the world and universe to be conveyed through time and space echoing in the psyche of people and traditions long after the original experience fades into mere memories. Stories and narratives keep the *ikar* – the essence – of those encounters alive from generation to generation. Tonight, we tell the story of Exodus. We share the story of how our ancestors experienced bondage, suffering, and confinement, and how God took them out of that space into freedom and openness. Egypt is not solely a geographical location that enslaved ancient Israelites, but is the cosmic concept of narrowness, constraint, and limitations manifest throughout time and space.

As you read, consider: What is your Egypt this year? What holds you back, limits you, confines you? Tonight, we are gifted with the ritual to explore the cosmic concepts of hardships, confinement, and limitations, while celebrating their counterpoints: freedom, redemption and salvation, all garbed in the stories and narratives of the Exodus. Thank you for inviting us along on your journey.

KADESH

Why do we drink four cups of wine and why do we have a fifth Cos Elyah /Elijah's cup?

Rabbi Megan GoldMarche, Base Chicago (2016-2022)

Like any good Jewish question, tradition gives multiple explanations for the many cups of wine at our *Seder* table. Four evil decrees of Pharaoh that we were saved from, four mentions of a cup of wine in Pharoah's butler's dream (Genesis chapter 40), four types of spiritual impurity that we must liberate ourselves from (Kabbalah). And the one I have most often taught and been told, the four stages of freedom from God's promise in the book of Exodus (6:6–7): "I will take you out," "I will save you," "I will redeem you," and "I will take you as my nation." And then the final cup, Elijah's cup, to which we all contribute but no one drinks, to symbolize the complete redemption we will experience when Elijah brings the Messiah.

These are great answers, but they don't get at the real question when planning a *Seder* as a Base family. How much wine should I buy? And what about folks in recovery who might feel safer at a dry *Seder*? And do we serve abundant wine because wine makes many folks feel a bit more open, leading to the deep personal sharing and connection that make many Seders magical? Non-alcoholic options other than Kedem grape juice are available so that folks who don't drink don't feel like they are getting a less desirable option? And in the states where it's legal, what about CBD drinks?

In my six years as a Base rabbi, the questions above and the answers I came up with alongside my colleagues and wife Paige were as holy and deep as the ones about redemption and Kabbalah. As you look around your *Seder* table, think about all the ways your host took extra steps to make sure everyone is as comfortable as possible. How are the chosen grape beverages a way to elevate the meal? How are they a tool of connection? How is your *Seder* community a blessing?

And what about the fifth cup, *cos Eliyahu*? This cup is the ***Base-iest*** of all cups- the one that we all must contribute to, that sits at the table awaiting a final guest who may or may not arrive. The cup of possibility, that, maybe, tomorrow we really will all be free, that the many plagues that enslave each of us and our communities could truly be overcome if we just worked together. We are all in the same boat when it comes to this final cup, no matter what you did or did not drink up until this point in the *Seder*.

As you begin to drink your first cup of wine or grape juice (or other cool alternative) here are five intentions I hope you will consider:

1) **Be open to the folks around you. This is the power of a little wine at its best: letting down defenses, not worrying so much about what others are thinking about you and caring more about how you are building connections.**
2) **Pour a cup for someone else – ask what they would like to drink and make them feel like an honored guest as you serve them.**
3) **Let someone else serve you, you too are an honored guest at this meal.**
4) **Remain present. Let what you consume make you more aware of the ways you are free and the ways you remain enslaved and be considerate of those around you who are grappling with their own chains.**
5) **Look for Elijah – I promise slivers of his presence, his hope, his promise are at your table. Whether they sneak a sip from his cup, allow you to leave with a new friend, or inspire you to do something for the world tomorrow, we all have the power to get us one step closer to redemption.**

URCHATZ

Why are we leading a ritual evening with an activity that doesn't have a blessing associated with it?

Rabbi Adam Gindea, Base Miami (2017-2023),
VP of Base & Rabbinic Innovation (2025-present)

Urchatz is the only of the fifteen steps of the *Seder* that begins with the conjunctive letter *Vav*. Its opening letter bridges this wordless washing with the preceding step of *Kadesh*. *Vav* also has deep symbolism and mystical interpretations. Its numerical value of six is also an allusion to the six character traits that make up the emotional inner-workings of our lives. In the mystical tradition, there are four worlds that we both journey through and simultaneously live in. There is the physical world/world of action/*Olam Asiyah* that we know, see, touch, and encounter alongside others. As we explore ourselves more deeply, we encounter the world of emotions/*Olam Yetzirah* where love, compassion, anger, rage, and all the other emotions dwell. Even deeper still is the world of thought/*Olam HaBriyah* where our intellect and cognitive processing occurs within the mind and brain. The final world is *Olam HaAtzilut* where we encounter the Divine within and without. It is in *Atzilut* where we can begin to realize that the deepest places within our own selves mirror the most distant places beyond the heavens. The journey to the Creator beyond, mirrors and parallels the journey towards the Infinite within. Before we can truly begin the journey towards a spiritual encounter, before we can come face to face with eternity and infinity, before we can break free from the confinement and limitations of our own selves and egos, we have to wash ourselves of the emotions that often drive our beings. *Urchatz* begins the journey of the *Seder* inviting us to wash away the inner tensions and turmoil that come with being emotional beings. We wash without a blessing because we are not inviting God into this moment but rather cleansing ourselves of our own inner elements that prevent us from being fully aware of the Divine ever-presence. *Urchatz* is *Vav Rachatz*-washing the *Vav*, rinsing away the inner voices and characters who take charge of our being and run our experience in the world in a way that has the potential to sever an awareness of and connection to the Infinite Creator.

What aspects of yourself do you wish to work on/wash clean/refresh?

THE ANNA & FRED DOPPELT BASE ANDERSONVILLE

By MemGlobal & Jewish United Fund

KARPAS

What is Karpas all about and what is the word and why do we dip it and why does it start the meal?

Hannah Swirnow, Base Andersonville (2021-present)

Many are familiar with the origins of the *Seder* experience, which is modeled after ancient Greek feasts. But the power of the *Seder* is much deeper and from a more clever place of resistance than this cursory view gives it credit for! The entire *Seder* experience oscillates between a sly subversion of the elite ruling cultures of ancient powers and reimagining practices of those foreign or ruling cultures within the bounds of Jewish practice. It is an exercise in the meeting of creativity, preservation and resistance.

"*Karpas*" is an example early in the *Seder*. The word karpas itself appears Greek in origin and likely refers back to ancient Greek practice. Greek aristocrats would include vinegar-dipped parsley to freshen their breath and palate at banquets. The evening would then devolve into pleasure, indulgence and consumption. Later, the Romans would do the same. Jewish rabbis and scholars were horrified by these practices! Gluttony and lechery over dinner? No thanks!

So why on earth would our pious rabbis look to those feasts when imaging our liberation celebration? Enter, subversion! When we dip parsley in salt water, we indeed mimic the upper class oppressors in action, but we do so during a festival of our survival. The salt water becomes a reminder of the hardships we have passed, for Jews deeply remember our past even in the throes of joy. It is one of the first rituals at the *Seder*, an evening of structure, learning and cultural celebration. We've taken "their" thing and turned it into "our" thing, which is now a famous representation of Jews throwing off the yokes of repression!

You may see potatoes, radishes or even bananas at the table in place of parsley. Parsley is a fresh green that needs plentiful water to grow– a good symbol of springtime and a productive rainy season in the Mediterranean. As Jewish people left or were pushed further afield, the weather and ground harvests were different. Greens at *Pesach* time were harder to find. We did not completely revise our practice but reimagined it. We adapted by eating readily available foods more common in the lands in which we were living. We asked, on what other foods can we say "*borei pri hadamah*", thank you *Hashem for fruit of the ground*.

The balance for us as Jews in the Diaspora is an ongoing question of what we adapt to for the sake of survival and learning and what we reject (literally or symbolically) to preserve the foundational values of our people. Ultimately, both the subversion and the reinterpretation are lenses through which we can make sense of the world as Jews. Our project is, in a sense, about striking the right balance between them.

YACHATZ

Can we ever be free without first being broken?

Rabbi Adam Gindea, Base Miami (2017-2023),
VP of Base & Rabbinic Innovation (2025-present)

There can be no growth, no moving forward, no evolution without breaking through the confines of what limited us before. During this season, seedlings burst forth through the crust of the earth to bring out what has been growing under the surface. Emotional and psychological developments come after moments of breakthrough and a shedding of the perception of the prior self. It is often when we are at our most fragile and vulnerable that we encounter a breaking point that brings us to clarity and a roadmap forward. This moment of *Yachatz* is the symbolic breaking point before we can engage in the telling of the story of what comes next. During *Yachatz*, we take the afikoman and hide it away. This breaking, a symbolic separation of one into two later to be reunited during *Tzafun*, brings with it the secret of creation itself—wholeness, oneness, and unity, separated and broken for the sake of encountering another, the very basis of what it means to be in relationship.

What moment since last Passover comes to mind for you that led to breakthrough or growth?

MAGGID

‘Disgrace to Glory’ – What’s our story?

Rabbi Elizabeth Bonney-Cohen,
Base Boston (2018-2022)

The Rabbis tell us that the story we are meant to tell at the Passover *Seder* is one that “begins with disgrace and concludes with glory” (*Talmud Bavli, Pesachim* 116b), but, as with all the best moments in Jewish life, there is debate as to what this means.

For those of us with the DreamWorks animated film “The Prince of Egypt” running on loop in our minds throughout the whole Passover holiday, the unfolding of a narrative arc that begins with disgrace and concludes with glory is obviously that of the deliverance from slavery. And this is what Shmuel says. In response to the question of what it means to “begin with disgrace,” Shmuel simply states, “we were slaves.” For him, the story we tell on Passover begins with our enslavement, the disgrace of being a dehumanized, oppressed people. Naturally, then, to conclude with glory means that the story ends with our liberation, emerging from the split sea and rejoicing in our freedom. This is the story of the Jewish people we are meant to tell.

But Shmuel’s counterpart, Rav, offers a different take. For him, the story we are to tell at the *Seder* is one that begins with “Our ancestors were idol worshippers.” Rav urges us to recall the story of the Jewish people that begins long before Egypt. It is a story about emerging not through parted waters, but rather, of emerging into our own relationships with God. Tradition tells us that Abraham famously broke his father’s idols, an act of rebellion that solidified his place as the first monotheist. This is the story Rav wants told, because if idolatry is the starting point, then the glory at the end of his story is the inverse: we are now those who cling to only one God. The *Shema*, arguably the central and most familiar Jewish prayer, is a statement of God’s oneness that highlights that sustaining glory of the Jewish people.

The story from slavery to freedom is one that highlights Divine agency. In this story, our oppression is beyond our control. Whether by the social factors at play or by a Sacred Actor hardening Pharoah’s heart, the Jewish people are but an object of this story. Life is being done to us, not by us. We are told that it is by an outstretched arm that God acts, unleashing the plagues, activating the miracles, and ultimately delivering the Jewish people to the dry shore on the other side of the sea. It is a story of wonders and supernatural power, where the human characters are almost mere tools for Divine use.

The story from idolatry to monotheism, on the other hand, swings entirely in the other direction. This story is all about human agency. Driven by one’s own spiritual fortitude, an individual has complete control over what one believes–in many gods, in one God, or in nothing at all. In this story, the choice to lean into exclusive relationship with a singular deity is not in the hands of that deity at all. The story of the Jewish people, therefore, is one of our own doing, where God is an object of our own spiritual journey.

So, which one is it: which is the story we are meant to tell? Are the Jewish people defined by our liberation or by our monotheism?

The answer is that, of course, both are our story, both are core to who we are. The beauty of Judaism is that we are a people called to be in relationship with the Divine, to be partners in the creating and unfolding of the world. We are agents in that story – in control of our mindset, our behaviors, our contribution to those around us. But, we are also at the mercy of that which is beyond us – unable to dictate the unfolding of history, the natural world, the rhythms of life and death, and so much more.

And so, at our *Seder* tables, we do more than remember. We locate ourselves within this sacred tension – between what has been done for us and what is asked of us. We remember that there are moments when we are carried on eagles' wings, lifted by a grace we did not earn, and there are moments when we are called, like Abraham, to take a courageous step toward the unknown, guided only by faith. Both are holy. Both are our inheritance.

Tonight, as we tell our story, may we feel the presence of the One who redeems and of the Spark within ourselves that responds. May we know that we are never only slaves, and never only seekers, but always souls in relationship – held and holding, called and calling. And may embrace this sacred bothness as we write the next chapter of our collective story.

Discussion Questions:

- **When in your own life have you experienced a moment of "disgrace to glory"? What changed, and what role did you play in that transformation?**
- **Which of these two stories feels more familiar to you right now: a story in which things are happening to you, or a story in which you are actively shaping what happens next? How does that awareness affect the choices you make?**
- **Rav's story suggests that glory comes from choosing what and whom we serve. What are the "idols" of our time—things that can capture our loyalty, attention, or identity? How do we decide what is truly worthy of our devotion**
- **Shmuel's story reminds us that liberation sometimes comes from forces beyond ourselves. How do we respond when we experience gifts, opportunities, or freedoms that we did not create alone?**
- **As we sit here tonight, what is one area of your life—or one aspect of our world—that is still in "disgrace," waiting for its journey toward "glory"? What is one small step that could begin that journey?**

BASE LINCOLN PARK By MemGlobal & Jewish United Fund

MAGGID

On *Seder* night, why don't we read the related chapters of the Torah to fulfill the obligation to retell the story?

How can we create the rabbinic experience of *Seder* as learning?

(or: make maggid limmud / learning again!)

Rav Sarah Mulhern & Rav Will Friedman
Base Lincoln Park (2021-present)

At the heart of the *Seder* is the *haggadah*, at the heart of the *haggadah* is *maggid,* and at the heart of *maggid* is a *arami oved avi:* a series of *psukim*[1] *(*verses) and midrashim[2] (rabbinic stories from the Oral Torah) thereon through which the story of *yitziat mitzraim* is told.

These verses are not only literarily and literally right at the center of the maggid section, but they are the biblical text that seems to have been integrated earliest into the Seder[3]. As many have pointed out before[4], this inclusion and centering is on its face very strange: these verses are not themselves from the exodus story as it is narrated in the present tense in Sefer *Shmot (the Book of Exodus)*, but rather consist of four short verses from the book of Deuteronomy which reflect back on the earlier exodus experience. In context, these *psukim* are the speech required of each Israelite farmer retelling the exodus story which was recited as a part of the Shavuot ritual in the Biblical temple.

This has always made intuitive sense to us. To connect to the actual experience of exodus, beyond imagining as it was, is impossible for those of us who were not there. We have never been enslaved and then liberated by a series of dramatic miracles. Instead, we are asked to connect to and through the earliest layers of our ancestors finding their place in and retelling that story, to root ourselves in the very beginnings of the process of making the exodus story a core of our durable national identity. We center ourselves not in the story of the liberated slave but in the experience of a person who is now living securely in the land of Israel, reflecting on journey of their ancestors and how its legacy has impacted them. We connect not to the exodus itself, but to the process of making the story our own and drawing lessons from it relevant to our current condition, specifically the lesson that the bounty before us is to Gd's credit and not our own and therefore must be shared with those who have less.

According to the Mishnah, we are not to read or recite these verses but to be *"doreish"* them, meaning to examine, question, expound, interpret, or teach[5] them. In modern *haggadot,* we are provided with a series of beautiful midrashim which the Rabbis wove on these verses, playfully and insightfully connecting back to and lifting up details from the longer narrative in *Sefer Shmot* which they found particularly salient or important. These midrashim are truly gorgeous, but something of the experience of *"doreish"* is often lost when they are simply recited around the table.

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1 Deuteronomy 26:5-8

2 Found here and paralleled in Sifrei Devarim, it is unclear which is earlier, see JPS Commentary to the Haggadah

3 Mishna Pesachim 10:4 specifies that this section must be included. Other Biblical texts in Maggid seem to have been added in the Amoraic period, see BT Pesachim 116a.

4 Examples include Daniel Goldschmidt, Israel Yuval, and Joshua Kulp

When we set out to design a *Seder* for our community at Silverstein Base in Lincoln Park, we wanted to disrupt the American Jewish given of this section of the *Seder* as a ritual recitation and reconnect to the original Rabbinic experience of *talmud* Torah that this text reflects. We therefore chose to design this section of our *Seder* as we do learning experiences more generally at our Base. Participants are broken into *chavrutot* (learning pairs) and given the original verses from Deuteronomy along with framing information and probing questions, in order to facilitate them weaving their own midrashic conversations about the verses rather than passively observe the Rabbis.

This section of our *Seder* experience has remained stable each year and is consistently a moment where the room comes alive with the energy of *talmud Torah,* where our 50 or 60 guests transform from attendees to participants. In addition, each year, we choose a few of the traditional *midrashim* which strike us as particularly relevant to the mood of our community or the experiences of the past year and bring those forward as an object of study and discussion themselves. We offer this framework and model as a way into your own Pesach experience of *Seder* as a learning experience and share below the most recent year's handout.

Chag Kasher v'Sameach!

BASE LINCOLN PARK
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TZEI ULMAD

Go Forth And Learn!

Rav Sarah Mulhern & Rav Will Friedman,
Base Lincoln Park (2021-present)

The *haggadah* tells the story of the Exodus in many ways. One of those ways is by quoting the retelling of the Exodus story found in Deuteronomy 26:5-8, which every Israelite landowner would recite each year when bringing the first fruits of their crop to the Temple. These verses were then expounded in *midrashim*, rabbinic interpretations, the length and content of which have varied throughout history.
Tonight, we invite you to read these verses and some rabbinic interpretations of them. In your small group, read **out loud** and discuss the verses below, using the suggested questions to guide your discussion as desired. Then, choose **one** of the *midrash* options to explore.

5 And you shall speak and say before the Lord your God:

"My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt, and resided there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous.

6 And the Egyptians dealt cruelly with us, and afflicted us, and imposed on us hard labor.

7 And we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, and our labor, and our oppression.

8 And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, in an awesome happening, and with signs, and with wonders.

Discussion Questions:

- **What aspects of the Exodus story do these verses focus on? Why do you think the Rabbis want to direct our attention to these aspects in particular?**
- **Do any of these aspects seem particularly relevant to you this year?**
- **Are there things that this retelling leaves out?**
- **What lessons does this retelling draw out from the Exodus experience? Is this similar or different from your own take aways this year?**

Midrash Option 1: Jewish Difference

"And resided there" – this teaches that Jacob, our ancestor, didn't go down to be absorbed into Egypt, but only to reside there temporarily, as was said (Genesis 47:4): "They [the sons of Jacob] said to Pharaoh: 'We have come to reside in this land, because there is no pasture for your servants' flocks since the famine in the land of Canaan is severe, and now, please, let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen.'"

"And became there a nation" – this teaches that the Jewish people were distinct there.

Discussion Questions:

- **How do you know when a place is home? What does it feel like to be somewhere temporary rather than permanently?**
- **What does it mean to be distinguishable or marked out? Do you ever feel that way as a Jew? As a member of another group of which you are part?**
- **What does it mean to be a nation rather than a group of individuals? How does a group of individuals become a nation?**

Midrash Option 2: Oppression

"And God saw our affliction" - this refers to the separation of partners to prevent sex, as it is stated (Exodus 2:25): "And God saw the Children of Israel and God *knew*" (a biblical euphemism for sex).

"And our *labor*" – this refers to [the killing of] the newborn boys, as it is stated (Exodus 1:22): "Every boy that is born, throw him into the Nile, but every girl you shall let live."

"And our oppression" – this refers to the pressure [of poverty or poor living conditions],

as it is stated (Exodus 3:9): "And I also saw the oppression that the Egyptians are applying on them."

Discussion Questions:

- **What are the different kinds of harms named here?**
- **Why might the Egyptians have used different kinds of tactics to oppress the Israelites? What might their goal(s) have been?**
- **Where do you see these kinds of oppression being used in our world today?**

MAGGID
HA LACHMA ANYA

Why are we inviting guests at this point of the *Seder*?

Rabbi Jackson Mercer, Base Boston (2023-present)

Ha Lachma Anya is a liturgical invitation. Amidst the order and comfort of our *Seder*, we are meant to open our table and our homes to those needing to experience freedom. Don Isaac Abarbanel (a 15th-century Portuguese scholar) asks and answers, "Why is *Ha Lachma Anya* in Aramaic, not Hebrew like most of the rest of the *Seder*?... For it is meant to be in our *lingua franca*... it is meant to be an **actual** invitation understood by those living wherever Jews are celebrating Passover." Accordingly, Passover *Haggadahs* from across time and across the Jewish diaspora have translated *Ha Lachma Anya* into their vernacular.

I offer you an additional version or commentary of *Ha Lachma Anya* to contemplate, from another famous Sephardi thinker, Emma Lazarus:

The New Colossus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

MAGGID
MAH NISHTANA

Why do we call it the 4 questions, when we only ask 1 question?

Rabbi Frankie Sandmel, Base Bay Area (2022-present)

The haggadah is a pedagogic tool, a generations-old lesson plan structured for self-directed learning. The first part of maggid, starting with the Four Questions, is all about inspiring questions and demonstrating study as a spiritual practice – modeling what learning as a tool for liberation can feel like.

These four questions teach us two things about the nature of asking questions at the *Seder*.

First, they are "*kushias*" as opposed to "*sheilas*." A *sheila* has a clear, concrete answer – what does this word mean? Where does this practice come from? While these are important questions, they are unequal – the asker lacks knowledge, the answerer has that knowledge; once the answer is shared the topic is closed.

A *kushia*, on the other hand, is a challenge – it notices gaps, contradictions, and inconsistencies, pointing to moments without clear or singular answers and thereby inviting imagination, creativity, discussion, and disagreement. Anyone, of any age, background, or experience, can come up with creative, meaningful answers to *kushias*.

As we read these questions, we invite you to begin to create your own. What metaphor do you see in our dipping? What purpose could our reclining serve in practicing the journey from slavery to liberation?

And, beyond this moment, as we continue our evening, keep your eyes and ears open for other gaps, inconsistencies, and surprises that make you say, "huh", and please – please! – ask. Because whether this is your first *Seder* or your 100th, your questions are what keep this ritual rich, engaging, and ever-changing to meet the moment.

MAGGID
BARUCH HAMAKOM

Why is G-d referred to here as "HaMakom" – "The Place"? What does this name reveal?

Rabbi Sofia Zway, Base Los Angeles (2023-present)

Why is G-d referred to here as "*HaMakom*" — "The Place"? What does this name reveal?

The Torah refers to God by seven different names. The Rabbinic and mystical traditions add many more to these seven, each name reflecting a quality of God, or an aspect of our relationship with God. Here, in the middle of the *Maggid* section of the *Haggadah*, we find God named as *HaMakom* - "The Place," or, as Nathan Englander interprets it, "the One that is Space and the Source of Space, the One that is the World but Whom the World Cannot Contain." In other words, God is the force that contains and sustains the world while simultaneously transcending time and space. In this section of our *Seder*, we relive the experience of the Exodus through ritual, we reenact the great displacement of the Israelites. Though the exodus from Egypt was, of course, a good thing, it nonetheless represented a rupture from the life our ancestors knew. In the wake of that rupture, God's presence (and lots of *kvetching*!) filled the void and became a constant for our ancestors on their journey through the wilderness. By addressing God by this name, the *Haggadah* reminds us that God cannot be confined to any particular place, but that God exists and can be accessed wherever we are – physically, spiritually, or emotionally– even in times of rupture.

This passage introduces the *midrash* of the four children. So, what does *HaMakom* have to do with the four children? The four children offer four different responses to the story of our collective Exodus. Three ask questions, and one remains silent. I see in these children an example of what so often happens to us in the wake of a rupture: we fill the gaping hole that has been left in our lives with questions. With silence. With anger. With confusion. With isolation. With ritual. Our tradition certainly invites us to make ritual, to make order/*Seder*, out of the chaos of loss and uncertainty. So, when we comfort a mourner, or visit the sick, we call upon God as *HaMakom*. And when we retell the story of our collective journey from slavery to freedom, we say *Baruch HaMakom*: Blessed is The Place. Blessed is the place of brokenness from which questions and silence and meaning and redemption emerge.

MAGGID
FOUR CHILDREN

Why does the wicked child get such a bad rap?

Was the question so deserving of the response?

Rav Brett Kopin, Base Los Angeles (2023-present)

Of the Four Children, perhaps the most interesting one is the Wicked Child. His question is relatively straightforward– "What is this service to you?"– and for this he is not only punished but given a disparaging title, for eternity! This begs an obvious question: "What's so bad about his question?" One of my favorite responses to this question is from Rabbi Ed Feinstein. He says that as educators, we are most comfortable being asked the "how" questions, like the one the Wise Child asks. It is easy to tell someone what to do or how to behave. But being asked "why" questions– what does all this *mean?*– which is at the heart of the Wicked Child's question, is much more difficult to answer.

Who is the unnamed person responding to each of these children in turn? Their parents? Their teachers? The Jewish tradition itself? Rabbi Feinstein adds that his teacher, Rabbi Harold Schulweis *z"l*, once asked how there could be a child at the table who doesn't know how to ask. "What kind of child doesn't know how to ask a question?!" Rabbi Schulweis remarked. "I'll tell you who. It's last year's Wicked Child. He asked a big question about meaning and we silenced him, telling him we didn't have time for his question. So, this year, he sits at the end of the table, silent, unengaged, and we assume he has no more questions to ask." Our challenge as mentors, parents, and educators is to take the "why" questions seriously. Why are we doing this? If you feel left out of the tradition, how do we invite you into the conversation and into the great mystery of the "why?" Perhaps this year we will do better at addressing all our children's questions.

THE ANNA & FRED DOPPELT BASE
ANDERSONVILLE
By MemGlobal & Jewish United Fund

MAGGID
BNEI BRAK

How did the Rabbis in Bnei Brak get so swept away in time and miss Shacharit?

Rav Jonathan Posner, Base Andersonville (2021-present)

Sometimes, when you're deep in the telling of a story, time moves differently. Every year, Jews gather together to practice the act of remembering and retelling what happened to our ancestors and what happened to us as individuals. In this way, time flattens – we each bring something to the collective memory of what happened to those who came before us, and in so doing, also insert ourselves into the story of our ancestors, as if we were there alongside them. Taking the time to let everyone share their story, their own accounting of the exodus, could very easily take all night. So, it's no surprise to me that the rabbis of *B'nei Brak* almost missed the morning *Shema*. They were in time and out of time all at once.

MAGGID
VEHI SHE'AMDA

How do we balance the joy of liberation with the pain of repeated persecution throughout Jewish history?

Rabbi Rebecca Blady, Base Berlin (2017-2021)

"*Vehi she'Amda*," and she stood. Who stood? The Roman goddess Libertas, her image engraved on ancient coins. Marianne of France, symbol of liberation since the French Revolution. The Statue of Liberty, standing proudly for over a century to welcome immigrants to the United States.

She is liberty, and she stood – for generations, across continents and cultures. The imagery produced by Western civilization in her honor is profound and ever-present. It is no surprise, then, that when we begin to interpret the words "*Vehi she'Amda*," our minds gravitate toward some opaque promise of liberation. In the context of Pesach, naturally, the Exodus provides the perfect narrative backdrop for that promise: We leave Egypt, gently escorted by the mighty hand of G-d, and here begins our story of freedom and safety, repeated in every generation in which we find ourselves oppressed.

But is this really the promise of "*Vehi she'Amda*?"

From 1853-1892, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (known as the Netziv) led the prominent Volozhin Yeshiva in Lithuania. When confronting this question, in his posthumously published work of responsa Teshuvot Meshiv Davar, the Netziv was dealing with another matter that weighed existentially on him. The Russian Minister of Education had begun to intervene in his Yeshiva, demanding that it incorporate rigorous secular studies and severely limit the number of hours devoted to Torah study.

In this context, the Netziv adopted a radically different interpretation of "*Vehi she'Amda*." It's impossible to define this promise, he writes, as a liberatory miracle such as the Exodus. In what other generation did we exit a situation of oppression loaded with wealth and enjoy a supernatural, life-saving event almost immediately afterward? No: The promise is, rather, כִּ֣י גֵ֤ר יִהְיֶה֙ זַרְעֲךָ֔ – your children will be a ger, a stranger, in the lands in which they live (Genesis 15:13). Note the faulty grammar, it's on purpose: Your children will unite into one entity, one nation, but it will be a minority, struggling against a majority, in every generation.

In contrast to our feminine heroes, isolated effigies devoted to an idea of freedom, our promise is a challenge. In every generation, we will work to maintain our core identity as Jewish people. We will resist those who stand against our existence. We will struggle to remain a single ger, one people; we will argue, and we will splinter. We will not always represent the best of who we are.

But the result, in every generation, is so much stronger than the statues.

We are a people that have trained ourselves to never be stagnant. We do not take liberation, when offered to us, for granted. We, like the Netziv before us, grapple with what it means to be responsible for preserving our way of life. That grappling alone gives our lives such profound meaning. Every Jewish generation is dynamic; each one makes a contribution to our history. Including ours.

There is no statue, no coin, no portrait that can accurately convey what it means to be a Jew today. Because being a Jew is never a stagnant affair; it can't be reduced, even to a single miraculous event, such as the Exodus. That's the paradox of our mysterious feminine phrase, "and she stood." It refers to us: here, standing, alive, another chapter of history published. It's not the promise of liberation, but the promise of life.

THE SELMA AND LAWRENCE RUBEN BASE UWS
By MemGlobal

MAGGID
10 PLAGUES

Moses's Staff & Cultivating Leadership

Rabbi Danny Morris-Dubin Stein, Base Upper West Side (2023-2026)

The 10 Plagues that struck the Egyptians are known by the acronym *Detzakh Adash B'aḥav* דצ"ך עד"ש באח"ב, with each plague is represented in a letter. While these plagues were determined by God and executed through Moses, our tradition teaches that they were predetermined long ago. In fact, the acronym *Detzakh Adash B'aḥav* was inscribed on Moses's staff. According to one wild midrash (i.e. rabbinic fan fiction), this staff was passed from generation to generation until it reached Moses:

ר' לוילאומר, אותו המטה שנברא בין השמשות נמסר לאדם הראשון מגן עדן, ואדם מסרו לחנוך, וחנוך מסר ו לנח, ונח לשם, ושם מסרו לאברהם, ואברהם ליצחק, ויצחק ליעקב, ויעקב הוריד אותו למצרים, ומסרו ליוסף בנו. כשמת יוסף ושללו ביתו, נתנה בפלטרין של פרעה, והיה יתרו אחד מחרטומי מצרים, וראה את המטה ואת האותות אשר עליו, וחמד אותו בלבו, ולקחו והֶביאו ונטעו בתוך הגן של ביתו, ולא היה אדם יכול לקרב אליו עוד. כשבא משה לתוך ביתו, נכנס לגן ביתו של יתרו וראה את המטה וקרא את האותות אשר עליו ושלף ידו ולקחו וראה יתרו למשה ואמר זה עתיד לגאול את ישראל ממצרים לפיכך נתן לו את צפורה בתו לאשה, שנ' ויואל משה לשבת את האיש

> Rabbi Levi says, the same staff that was created at twilight was transferred to the First Human from the Garden of Eden, who then transferred it to Ḥanokh, and Ḥanokh transferred it to Noaḥ, and Noaḥ to Shem, and Shem transferred it to Abraham, and Abraham to Isaac, and then to Jacob, and Jacob brought it down to Egypt, and he transferred it to his son, Joseph. Then, the Egyptians captured Joseph's house when he died, and the staff was placed in Pharaoh's palace.
>
> Yitro was one of the Egyptian magicians, and he saw the staff and the letters of the plagues that were on it. Yitro desired the staff in his heart and took it. He brought it and planted it in the garden in his house. Nobody could approach it, but Moses saw the staff when he entered the garden of Yitro's house. He read the letters of the plagues that were upon it, drew his hand, and took it. Yitro looked at him and said, "This is the one who will redeem Israel from Egypt." Therefore, he gave him Tzipporah, his daughter, to be his wife. As it says in Exodus 2:21, "And Moses consented to stay with the man (Yitro)."
>
> (**Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezar 40:2-3**).

This is a powerful moment as Yitro recognizes the potential of Moses's leadership. Perhaps like Yitro, each of us has moments in which we identify the next leaders for the moment. Whether it be identifying a future rabbi, a Moishe House resident, or a community leader in general, it is up to us to say, "I see potential in you, and I'd like to 'pass the baton' your way." When we recognize a potential leader, we have an incredible opportunity to highlight and uplift the skills of such an individual to help them become the person our community needs today.

Who is one person in your community you see as a leader?

How can you help this individual grow into their leadership?

MAGGID

Liberating Ourselves from our Inner Pharaoh

Rabbi Dave Yedid & Daniel Eisenberg,
Base Denver (2022-present)

In the tradition of Kabbalah – Jewish mysticism – the story of the Exodus is understood as an inner journey from a place of narrowness to expansiveness. The Hebrew word for Egypt מִצְרַיִם (*mitzrayim*) means the narrow place of suffering. As Queer people, so many of us know what it feels like to be hemmed in by external voices of oppression which we come to internalize. We may have developed an inner Pharaoh who tells us that we need to stay confined, to remain in the narrow closet of suffering, that all the parts of ourselves are not welcome. On *Pesach*, Passover, we have the opportunity to begin to liberate ourselves from this Pharaonic voice. In so doing we will also need to find the internal voices which support our liberation, our inner Moses and inner Miriam.
I invite you to participate in a short meditation to allow ourselves to fulfill the principle of seeing ourselves as if we personally are leaving Egypt. If meditation is not your thing, that's totally ok, all of this is an invitation.

If it feels good, I invite you to find your find on the floor in a grounding position and, if it feels supportive, to close your eyes. I invite you to connect with the sensation of your feet grounding on the floor or the sensations of your sit bones sitting on the chair. I invite you to notice what feels good, good enough or neutral.

If you feel ready, I invite you to imagine a voice inside you which confines you in some way. Imagine this voice dressed as Pharaoh, sitting on the throne and speaking down to you. Then, I want you to imagine a voice inside you which says "no, let my people go. I will not remain in your captivity." Imagine this voice as Moses, in his humble tunic carrying his staff. Notice how the voice of Pharaoh might harden, and then notice how the voice of Moses insists, with the support of the Divine, that this confinement must no longer continue. It is time to leave. I want you to imagine the voice which confines and oppresses you being struck by 10 plagues until it relents. This voice is the voice of transphobia, homophobia, biphobia which may be mixed with antisemitism and racism. This voice is not your core self. Notice how the voice of Moses, the one who yearns for liberation, expresses itself. If it feels good, I invite you to make a hand gesture to symbolize this voice of inner liberation from Pharaoh. And then with your other hand, if it feels good, I invite you to summon the energy of Miriam who left Egypt with a tambourine in her hand. I invite you to imagine holding a musical instrument of your choosing and preparing to cross the sea. To leave behind Pharoah. To enter into the wilderness where you are no longer captive to the voice which confines you. To truly come out into the fullest expression of your fabulous self.

Allow yourself to ground into your body and when it feels good, I invite you to open your eyes and look around at these other people who are about to cross the sea with you.

Leaving Home Meditation

Rabbi Dave Yedid

Imagine that you are in your home, in Egypt. You share a one-room house, cramped with generations. Each day, you see your loved ones come back home from a day of backbreaking labor, broken down, tired, weary from oppression. They return with injuries, whiplashes, and hurt spirits. You know that your parents, your grandparents and great grandparents have been slaves; but you also know it hasn't always been this way. As you welcome in Shabbat each week over the candles, you recount stories of a time when you were free, practicing Israelite traditions without fear, and you pray to the Holy One for those days to return.

There are whispers that our leader, Moses, has been meeting with Pharaoh to beg for our freedom, to soften his hardened heart. Outside the walls of our tiny home, strange things have been happening. There have been bugs flying through the sky, cattle dropping dead, sections of the River Nile turned to blood. All of the sudden, there is a commotion in the house, everyone back early from baking bricks, scrambling to get our things together. "We are being freed!" you hear a relative shout. You scramble with everyone, witnessing tears and noticing shouts of joy from each household. You grab what little possessions you have into some fabric, tying it to your tunic. You see your auntie throw flour and water into a bowl, she kneads it but we hear word that the Egyptian army has changed their mind – they are after us now, our window to freedom is closing. She throws the dough into the oven, and what emerges limp, flat, and dry. Maybe this bread will nourish us, somehow. You make your way out of the home, knowing this may be goodbye forever, but you are not sad. There is a fire in your belly, a deep knowing that God is with you. As you glance back, you notice your auntie grab a small timbrel from the corner and strap it to her waist. Why could she need such a thing?

You make your way to the edge of the sea, crowded with families and animals, nervous and excited. You see Moses on the edge, unsure what to do, speaking up to the sky. You see your neighbor Aminadav step bravely into the water; first his legs, then he is up to his waist, then his chest, his chin, then the water moves to his lips. Will he drown? All of the sudden Moses shouts and plunges his staff into the water. You can't believe your eyes; a pathway of dry land emerges; a miracle from God! Walls of water surround you on each side. You can hear the sound of the Egyptian army's chariots gaining ground from behind. All around you is a mix of crying, prayer, signs of disbelief, and somewhere inside, silence.

You keep walking through the portal, until you reach the other side. No one knows what has happened, no one knows if the army is still chasing us. But the water closes behind, the dry portal is closed, no chariots in sight. Your auntie makes what sounds like a war call, and the women echo her. Their shouts send a shiver down your spine; this is freedom. Your auntie unhooks her tambourine and joins in with the women, dancing with unabashed joy. You don't know what lies ahead, but you know this moment is what you've been waiting for, the beginning of what your ancestors have been praying for over the Shabbat candles. This tastes sweet. This is freedom.

MAGGID
DAYENU

Would it actually have been enough if G-d freed us from Egypt but we never received the Torah?

Rabbi Dvir Cahana, Base Miami (2024-present)

When singing *Dayeinu*, we can be taken aback by the number of crucial steps necessary to arrive at the end goal of constructing for ourselves a G-dly temple. In response to each one we say "*Dayeinu*" "It would have been enough". But would it really have been enough, if we were slaves in Egypt and we were freed but died shortly after? What would the ordeal of liberation have all been for?

After each milestone, it still would not be enough for us to be self-sustaining and independent. The absurdity of the statement leads us to need to read the next sentence, and then maybe then we will be alright on our own? Think again. It is a need in human dignity to want to lead a fully independent lifestyle, it hurts to know that we need help from an external source. Even after we built the temple, we still are dependent on the Most High. *Dayeinu* is thus a demonstration of a people who are struggling with the tension of seeing the extended hand from above and being willing to receive that extra support.

Being able to ask for help is humbling, and leaves us all vulnerable to judgment, but it is the first step of unshackling ourselves from the chains that bind us.

MAGGID
BTZEIT YISRAEL

How does nature respond to human liberation – is the world itself changed when people are freed?

Rabbi Dave Yedid, Base Denver (2022-present)

As slaves, the Israelites were engaged in deeply extractive labor in Egypt. To build pyramids and buildings, they had to dig deep pits into earth to use for bricks. The plagues, *HaShem's* outcry of this treatment, are a warning that the treatment of the Israelites as slaves meant the natural world could not be in balance; how we treat each other is how we treat the earth, or the earth responds to us—this is the crux of our ecological crisis.

We also know the Israelites grew and foraged their own foods in Egypt. We see them complain in the desert:

זָכַרְנוּ֙ אֶת־הַדָּגָ֔ה אֲשֶׁר־נֹאכַ֥ל בְּמִצְרַ֖יִם חִנָּ֑ם אֵ֚ת הַקִּשֻּׁאִ֣ים וְאֶת־הָאֲבַטִּחִ֔ים וְאֶת־הֶחָצִ֖יר וְאֶת־הַבְּצָלִ֥ים וְאֶת־הַשּׁוּמִֽים׃

We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.

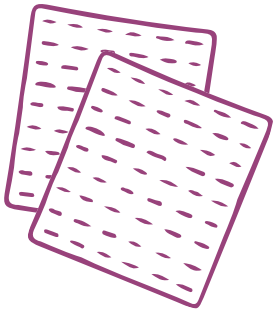
But, once they are freed, they are not extracting from the land. They are gathering the *Manna* that *HaShem* provided for them each day. Their relationship to land changed, and the land changed with them. We were *hefker* in the desert – free from being owned, and free from owning – and it is this freedom that allowed us to become a people and prepare to enter The Land.[1]

1 BaMidbar Rabba 1:7 Another matter: "The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai" – it is, that anyone who does not render himself like a wilderness, accessible to all, is unable to acquire wisdom and the Torah. That is why it is stated: "In the wilderness of Sinai."

RACHTZAH & MOTZI MATZAH

Eating the Matzah in Silence

To be read before Rachtzah (washing)



Rabbi Justin Pines, Base Englewood (2023-2025)

Inspired by the Seder of Dr. Itzhak David Goldberg and the Haggadot of Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon and Rabbi Reuven Leuchter

We are about to eat *matzah* on *Seder* night, joining the long chain of generations who have done this before us, in every chapter of Jewish history.

After we wash our hands, I invite everyone to remain completely silent until the blessings over the *matzah* have been recited, the *matzah* has been distributed, and everyone has not just taken a bite, but finished eating their full portion.

Our sages disagree on the exact amount: one-third, one-half, or three-quarters of a full piece of *matzah*. If you're able, try for three-quarters; at least half is encouraged.

Matzah is both the bread of our affliction and the bread of our redemption – the symbol of *galut*, exile, and the symbol of *geulah*, redemption.

Matzah teaches us that when we reflect on our slavery, we must also remember our redemption; and when we reflect on our redemption, we must remember our slavery – and how every detail of that experience helped give birth to the people of Israel.

For now: no talking, and no rushing.

Let us be fully present as we eat *matzah* on *Seder* Night.

[Proceed to wash, then recite the two blessings (*motzi* and *al achilat matzah*), distribute the appropriate portion to everyone who is able to eat it, and signal for everyone to begin eating together in silence.]

Optional Reflection:

Afterward, you may wish to reflect on the experience—the taste and texture of the matzah, the effort it takes to eat it, the generations who came before us, the dual meaning of matzah, or what it feels like to fulfill a tradition simply by being present, or whatever else comes up.]

MAROR

Why does the *Seder* have so much experiential learning?

Rav Moshe Webber, Base Logan Square (2023-present)

We receive two specific instructions from the *Mishnah* about what needs to happen at the Passover *Seder*: First, Rabban Gamliel tells us that we need to talk about three things at our *Seder* table, the Passover offering, *Matzah*, and *Maror* (bitter herbs). Second, the *Mishnah* tells us that every single person who attends the *Seder* must see themselves as if they were personally liberated from Egypt. No wonder that these instructions made their way into our *Haggadah*.

The fact that these two specific instructions appear one after the other tells us something important. We cannot just think about, reflect on, or simply tell the Passover story, but we must experience it. However, this creates its own set of problems. Is such a thing even possible? There is a world of difference between the group of Jews who were liberated from Egypt and wandered into the desert and the subsequent generations who retold their story. That gap may seem insurmountable.

Our job is to bridge that gap, and access that world of our ancestors in some way that is beyond words, beyond language.

Rabban Gamliel's statement gives us another clue on how we might do this because the Passover offering, *Matzah*, and *Maror* are all things we actually consume at the *Seder*. In the ancient world, when the Holy Temple still stood, Passover offerings would be brought to the Temple and then consumed by a small group at a meal. Today, we oftentimes consume meat at the *Seder*, and vegetarians and vegans will substitute this for beets. In addition to this, we are obligated to consume both *Matzah* and *Maror* at the *Seder* as well. These are not things we just talk about at the *Seder* table but things that we also taste.

This material, gastronomical experience is also an experience of interpretation. Flavor becomes our hermeneutic to guide us to meanings that words alone cannot unlock. Words are, of course, a part of it too. Rabban Gamliel tells us that the Passover offering and *Matzah* are reminders of both freedom and what *Hashem* specifically did for us in Egypt, and *Maror* refers to the bitterness of slavery.

However, we might ask, did Rabban Gamliel get it backwards? The order he gives us is the Passover offering, *Matzah*, and *Maror*. Are we to start with freedom and end with the bitterness of slavery? Shouldn't this be done in reverse? The answer has to do with flavor.

The Passover offering, meat or beets, is luscious and oily. It is savory and salty and coats the palate. *Matzah* extends this flavor, prolonging the salty and savory. *Maror* is big and bold, and its spiciness eliminates all other flavors.

At the *Seder*, we do not begin with *Maror*, and this might be because it is such a bold and powerful flavor that if we started with it, we might not fully taste anything else. *Maror* is a shock to the system and has the potential to blow our palate. We have to taste freedom first before the bitterness of slavery. This allows us to experience the flavor of freedom on its own terms, and it might even leave us wanting for more. But perhaps the most memorable thing we eat, in fact, is *Maror* because of its bombastic, bold flavor. In this sense, at the *Seder* we taste freedom, but it is the bitter taste of slavery that leaves the longest impression.

Conceptually, the most difficult part of the Passover story to access is the experience of slavery. Can we truly understand what it was like to be a slave in Egypt? Most of us cannot. However, *Maror* does give us a lasting impression that creates a pathway in our collective memory. The spicy, bitterness of *Maror* allows us to experience the Passover story differently, revealing new depths. *Maror* is not the last thing we eat either. Perhaps *Maror*'s lasting impression allows us to better understand its absence. We first taste freedom on its own terms, wanting more, and then our palate is overwhelmed by the bitterness of slavery. Afterwards, we taste freedom again, and its flavor takes on new depths and new meanings because the memory of bitterness still lingers.

THE LUBA & BERNARD FRIEDMAN BASE LOOP

By MemGlobal & Jewish United Fund

KORECH

Is there a symbolic meaning behind the Hillel Sandwhich?

Rav Ezra Balser, Base Loop (2018-present)

Imagine the best sandwich ever. Thin crispy flatbread. Salted roasted lamb. Horseradish aioli. That is the sandwich of a truly free person. It's a critical reminder that while the *Seder* is awesome, and we are at pinnacle levels of Jewish freedom, we are still not there yet. We have much left to do. So people do not love the sandwich. That is good. You are supposed to crave what it used to be, and what it one day will be again.

SHULCHAN ORECH

What's the deal with Kitniyot?

Jessie Gindea, Base Miami (2017-2023)

The Pesach *Seder* is a gathering space that invites us to connect to our shared history, to the rituals we move through together, to each person around the table, and to the generations who have sat at *Seder* tables across our lives. It holds both collective memory and deeply personal ones; the unforgettable moments shared with the people we've sat beside over the years, the perfect (or less-than-perfect!) menus, and the serious, funny, or complicated ways each year's *Seder* has unfolded. It is a grounding tradition, one designed to create a sense of timeless belonging.

The *Seder* reminds each of us, held within the unique constellation of people at our table, that we are part of something larger than ourselves and that however we show up is exactly right for this moment. We are asked to recall the memories woven into our very DNA, to experience and re-experience the formative story of the Jewish people, and to understand that we are part of that story. Remembering and connecting is not a one-time act; it is our yearly responsibility. And then, after the singing, the reading, the hand-washing, the matzah-sandwich-making, the asking of the Four Questions, and the journey of leaving Egypt, we are invited to take a deep breath and share a meal.

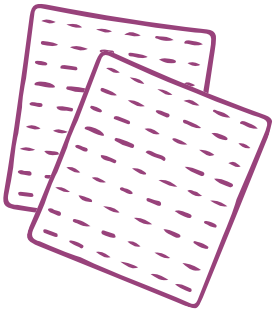
The 2025 *World Happiness Report* found that sharing meals is one of the strongest indicators of subjective well-being, on par with income and employment. Those who share more meals with others report significantly higher life satisfaction and positive emotion, and lower levels of negative emotion. Priya Parker reminds us in *The Art of Gathering* that coming together around a table is not a passive act but a creative one, becoming meaningful only when approached with intention and purpose.

What is the *Seder* if not an intentional gathering shaped by profound purpose? After ten structured steps of remembering, connecting, and experiencing the Jewish people's journey out of Egypt, the community around the table enters a sensory space meant to nourish both body and soul. Here, the hosts and participants are invited into creativity: Will this be a year of nostalgic recipes, lovingly saved and repeated year after year? Will this be a year of new dishes, chosen thoughtfully with delicious intention? How will the space of *Shulchan Orech* once again remind each person at the table how essential their presence is to this gathering?

This gorgeous and delicious eleventh step of the *Seder* is meant to restore us after recounting a moment in our history that is at once traumatic and profoundly formative. It offers us a pause and a chance to breathe and replenish ourselves after another year of navigating the pleasures and challenges of daily life. This is a space for genuine connection, a reminder that while we are part of something vast and enduring, each of us matters. The small details of our lives, our growing edges, our glimpses of awe, the stories we carry, are worthy of being shared at this table.

TZAFUN

Is Matzah really the dessert that we are staying up all night to have?



Rabbi Dave Yedid, Base Denver (2022-present)

We know that *Matzah* isn't dessert. It's a parody of dessert, our *lechem oni* – our bread of poverty and affliction. But we eat it after the festive meal to remind us that it's what we had in our satchels when we left Egypt. Today, it is not needed to sate our hunger but remind us of the journey our ancestors took. If everyone is silent when you bite into the matzah, in our communal crunching and chewing you'll be able to hear the crunch of footsteps our ancestors took as they left Egypt.

BARECH

Shfoch Hamatcha

Rabbi Avram Mlotek, Base Manhattan (2015-2021)

Growing up, my family *Seders* always had Holocaust survivors present as well as Yiddish song and poetry, especially Yiddish songs from the Holocaust. I learned from a young age that the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the largest Jewish rebellion during World War II, coincided with the first night of Passover. Can you imagine the dissonance and inspiration our grandparents' generation faced as they recited these words then: "Pour out your wrath against those nations who do not know you."? To me, this is not some empty, violent plea, but the mark of spiritual resistance. Even though the uprising was a physical battling, these religious parts of our liturgy -which to today's universally oriented ear- might feel foreign, ultimately speak to the unresolved and enduring nature of the Jewish spirit, relying upon God, not man, to dispel true judgment.

This moment in the *haggadah* seems to offer us a different understanding or reaction to Jewish suffering: strength and prayer. Unfortunately, there were too many nations in the world who did not stand up for the destruction of Eastern European Jewry during the Shoah, the Holocaust, as there are too many peoples today who do not speak up against the swarms of Jew hatred or genocides of the Rohingya, Uyghurs and Sudan. The then homeless and powerless people of Israel relied upon God as the "Man of war," as He is called definitively in the Song of the Sea in Exodus, not to harm innocents, but to stand up for them.

The following poem was one included in our family *Seder*. Written by Binem Heller, the great Yiddish poet, Holocaust refugee and survivor, in 1943 shortly after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising; it was translated into English by the writer Max Rosenfeld. While its words may seem damning, they are the sounds of our people struggling to survive, a sound we may or may not be familiar with anymore.

"Pesach has come to the Ghetto again.
The wine has no grape, the matzo no grain,
But the people anew sing the wonders of old,
The flight from the Pharoahs, so often retold.
How ancient the story,
how old the refrain!
The windows are shuttered.
The doors are concealed.
The Seder goes on.
And fiction and fact
Are confused into one.
Which is myth? Which is real?
Come all who are hungry! Invites the Haggadah.
The helpless, the aged, lie starving in fear.
Come all who are hungry, and children sleep, famished.
Come all who are hungry, and tables are bare.

Pesach has come to the Ghetto again,
And shuffling shadows shift stealthily through,
Like convert-Marranos in rack-ridden Spain
Seeking retreat with the God of the Jews.

But these are the shards,
the shattered remains Of the “sixty ten-thousands”
whom Moses led out Of their bondage . . .
driven to ghettos again . . .
Where dying’s permitted but protest is not.
From Holland, from Poland, from all Europe’s soil,
Becrippled and beaten the remnant has come.
And there they sit weeping, plundered, despoiled,
And each fifty families has dwindled to one.

Pesach has come to the Ghetto again.
The lore-laden words of the *Seder* are said,
And the cup of the Prophet Elijah awaits,
But the Angel of Death has intruded, instead.
As always – the German snarls his commands.
As always – the words sharpened-up and precise.
As always – the fate of more Jews in his hands:
Who shall live, who shall die, this Passover night.
But no more will Jews to the slaughter be led,
The truculent jibes of the Nazis are past.
And the lintels and doorposts tonight will be red
With the blood of free Jews who will fight to the last.

Pesach has come to the Ghetto again.
And neighbor to neighbor the battle-pledge gives:
The blood of the German will flow in the Ghetto.
So long as one Jew in the Ghetto still lives!
In face of the Nazi – no fear, no subjection!
In face of the Nazi – no weeping, no wincing!
Only the hatred, the wild satisfaction
Of standing against him and madly resisting.
Listen, how Death walks abroad in the fury!
Listen, how bullets lament in their flight!
See how our History writes ‘end’ to the story,
With death heroic, this Passover night!”

HALLEL
HODU LASHEM KI TOV

What does it mean to proclaim God's goodness after recounting so much suffering and trauma? How does gratitude function as a form of resilience or resistance?

Matt Bonney-Cohen, Base Boston (2018-2022), Base National administrative team (2020-present)

The *Pesach Seder*, like life itself, is full of contradictions, paradoxes, and complexity. As Dr. Erica Brown writes in the introduction to her *Haggadah* entitled *Seder* Talk: "On Passover, we create order to lose order. On this night, we balance between order and chaos, between organizing the *Seder* with a set chronology and in concrete stages and then telling a messy story that gets interrupted and upended with all of our commentary. It is a story of injustice and triumph of human strain and divine salvation, of hesitation and progress. Of course, it must be told in fits and starts."

The *Seder* includes two distinct times to sing the *Tehillim* (psalms) that comprise *Hallel*: the "Egyptian" Hallel that follows the narrative of the splitting of the sea at the end of *Maggid*, and the longer *Hallel* that follows Birkat HaMazon, Grace after Meals. In creating this ultimate experiential learning event of the Jewish calendar, it seems the Rabbis possessed the wisdom that 21st century psychologists continue to share: the more gratitude one offers, the more one feels satisfied with one's lot, to paraphrase the teaching from *Pirkei Avot*, the Ethics of the Fathers. Amidst the unprecedented use of the term "unprecedented" to refer to the pace of change and continual uncertainty in contemporary society, spiritual resilience and even anti-fragility, become even more necessary skills needed to life lives of meaning and purpose.

Throughout the generations, the Jewish people have survived the worst that humanity has thrown at us, yet we have refused to surrender the faith that future generations will experience redemption. *Hallel* and the opportunity to praise God's actions as being good might not always seem intuitive. In fact, these words might, at times, strike us as being too simplistic. But these words also remind us that we are God's partners in creation, and it is through our words and actions that we will together create a future worthy of redemption.

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NIRTZAH

How do we hold on to hope when "next year" never quite seems to come?

How does this line reframe the entire *Seder* as not just past-focused, but future-oriented?

Rav Jonathan Posner, Base Andersonville (2021-present)

"Next year in Jerusalem" echoes our *Seder's* beginning. We know that our world is imperfect, and we know that in some way, we are still in the narrows of some kind of slavery. Like its cousin from the beginning of the Maggid section, this line operates on at least two levels. One level is literal: we hope to merit the return to our Land and for the unification of our People. For many Jews now and in times past, the yearning for the Land is real, and there is an anguish in not being able to be there. "Next year, life might be better; I'll make it to Jerusalem." Another is metaphorical: there is *Yerushalayim Shel Mata* and *Yerushalayim Shel Ma'ala* – the lower, worldly, physical Jerusalem, and the upper, aspirational, heavenly Jerusalem. We might find ourselves in Jerusalem for *Seder* one day, and still, we will say these words because *Yerushalyim Shel Ma'ala* represents the perfected world. The Jerusalem of the future, and always we march toward it.

NIRTZAH
ECHAD MI YODEA

Are these a random list of associations? Can you make sense of the order?

Rabbi Jeremy Borovitz, Base Berlin (2017-2021)

Each holiday, every event, no matter the occasion—as Jews, we love communal singing. Sure, everyone loves a good *Hazzanut* (cantorial singing), but there's something magical about singing *Zemiros* around a Shabbat table, or a cacophony of voices belting out *Ein Keloheinu* at the end of communal prayer. And while the Pesach *Seder* is filled with song, it's really not until the very end of our *Seder* that we truly dive into the communal singing experience. Why do we sing so much after the *Seder* has officially concluded?

Concluding our *Seder* last year, my friend and colleague Daniela Bogdanova gave a fascinating answer. When the Israelites were finally free, when they had crossed the sea and the waves closed behind them, what did they do? They sang. This might seem counterintuitive. Weren't they exhausted? Yet to sing in hushed tones, to whisper, to fear being heard, could be reminiscent of slavery. But to project our voices loudly and ecstatically into the air is the act of someone who is free.

Have you heard the words we sang? Lines which celebrate our particularism as a people. The multifaceted nature of God. The tribes which serve as our lineage, the dreams which portended futures for our ancestors. The renewal of the covenant we make with our children, the books we find most holy, the foremothers and forefathers who initially paved the way.

And yet, we also touch on our universalism. The days of the week and the months it takes to bring new life into the world, the ethical foundations which continue to serve as a watchword for societies rooted in morality and truth. And of course we talk about the singularity of God, or the Universe, the fabrics which bind all people together, no matter the octave or the lyrics or the tune.

Deep within us, in this moment where we feel most free, we feel both sides of this coin. I am a Jew, and I am a Human Being. I am a citizen of a country and a member of my *Shul*. I am a neighbor and a rabbi, a friend and a *chaver*. To be free is to sing, about everything that you are, without fear that someone else will try and silence you.