



**PESACH WHILE
ISRAEL IS AT WAR
2024 / 5784**

Every year we have developed content to help you meaningfully engage your family, friends, colleagues, students, congregants and community during the seder and throughout Pesach. This year is no different, except that everything about this Pesach must be different.

At this moment 133 hostages still being held in Gaza by Hamas. Areyvut means “accountability” and “responsibility” and we have a responsibility to these hostages, their families, our beloved and precious chayalim (soldiers) and to all of Israel to ensure that our seder this year will be no like no other seder or Pesach.

We developed these resources with that sensitivity and strongly suggest that you print this out and take a few minutes to go through it and to in advance. Please select the items that are relevant for those assembled at your seder and table. Many focus on the seder and while we encourage you to use this content at your seder, we know that we have a lot of material and as such really encourage you to utilize this content throughout Pesach and beyond.

May we merit seeing all the hostages returned to their families and may God continue to protect our courageous chayalim and all of Israel.

I want to thank Judith Kuper Jaffe and Rena Ray for their help in bringing this year’s content to fruition.

We value you and appreciate your partnership, help and support. Your feedback is welcome at info@areyvut.org.

Wishing you and your family a Chag Kasher V’Sameach, a meaningful and memorable Pesach.

Am Yisrael Chai.

Daniel Rothner
Founder & Director

WHY IS THIS PASSOVER DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER PASSOVERS?

Every year, Jews are asked to see ourselves in the Passover story. Making this annual experience both meaningful and relevant is what makes the Seder such a lasting and powerful ritual. This year, the trauma of October 7th, the ongoing and perhaps escalating war in Israel, thousands of Israelis displaced from their homes, and the rising worldwide antisemitism, provides us with a new frightening lens for understanding the Exodus story. In some cases, the words of the Haggadah feel more relevant and in others, the Haggadah's proclamations clash with reality.

Passover has always been a much-anticipated holiday: delicious food surrounded by family and friends, and the promise of hope, peace and the future. This year, many people are anticipating this holiday of freedom and redemption with dread. The past several months have been difficult for all of us. Jews throughout the world witnessed the horrors of October 7th, the worst attack on Jewish life since the Holocaust, an ensuing war, and a rise of antisemitism, the likes of which most of us have never seen or felt.

Let's intentionally participate and reflect on this ancient ritual that holds the potential for healing, healthy discussion, and hope.

1. ORDER

During any traumatic period or upheaval, thinking about order helps us bring stability to our upheaval. Our ancient rabbis knew. Then and now, we bring our senses and traditions together to symbolize order.

It is incumbent to understand that the original Passover Seder was not created at the time of the Exodus. In the wake of the destruction of the Second Temple and tremendous political unrest, our Rabbis of Blessed Memory created this new and evolving concept thirteen hundred year after the Hebrew slaves crossed a split Red Sea and two thousand years ago. Out of the chaos of destruction, our Talmudic Rabbis, frightened for the continuity of Judaism as they knew it, used creativity to restore order and memorialize their narrative too.

The Rabbis wanted to gently remind us that they were losing their center of Jewish ritual, losing the Second Temple so they created 15 steps to the Seder to remind us of the 15 steps going up to the Temple. Discuss why the Rabbis of blessed memory inserted this for our memory. What can we insert symbolism for the future generations?

Our Seder, whose very name means order, offers us a tradition and a familiar ritual so that we can step out of shattering chaos, even momentarily. What should we add to our ancient ritual to make it personal and contemporary? How should we shape the memory of this time?

Let's consider some or all of the steps to the Passover Seder, as we bring our senses into the present:

a. Kadesh: Taste the wine and/or grape juice

i. Intentionally, support Israel and buy Israeli wine.

ii. Discuss how we should support and encourage others to support Israel at this time.

b. Urchatz: Feel of the water on our hands.

c. Karpas: Is the smell of the fresh parsley the scent of hope and rebirth?

d. Yachatz: Hear the sound of the breaking matzah.

- i. At a traditional seder, three pieces of matzah are used to represent the three groups of Jews: Kohanim (high priests), Levi'im (those who assist the Kohanim) and Yisraelim (all others). This year, consider adding a fourth matzah to represent the hostages.
 - ii. If matzah symbolizes slavery, what does breaking mean?
 - iii. If matzah symbolizes freedom, let's consider our broken freedom.
 - iv. Buy Israeli matzah and discuss how we should support and encourage others to support Israel at this time.
- e. Maggid:** We sing and we retell the story of pain and redemption, slavery and freedom.
- i. How do we sing this year?
 - ii. Discuss out redemption.
 - iii. In sections below, there are additional other suggestions to consider for this section.
- f. Rachtzah:** Wash
- g. Motzi:**
- i. Taking shattered Matzah and reassembling into a clear picture that restores narrative coherence.
 - ii. Buy Israeli matzah.
 - iii. Discuss how we should support and encourage others to support Israel at this time.
- h. Matzah:**
- i. Why is Motzi Matzah intentionally two separate steps? How do mark steps in our time?
- i. Maror:** Bitterness
- i. How can putting a small taste of bitterness mirror the experience of slavery?
 - ii. How can this symbol help us identify with the brutality and bitterness today?
- j. Korech:**
- i. Is it appropriate to taste the sweetness of the charoset, while there is so much bitterness in the world?
- k. Shulchan Orech:** We eat, recognizing that even when the world doesn't make sense, we need to endure.
- i. Donate and support food rescue organizations in Israel.
 - ii. How can we feast while we know there are hostages and regular people, who are not Hamas allies, starving?
 - iii. Should our Seder feast be intentionally stark?
- l. Tzafun:** Eating a broken Matzah as the dessert and the final food.
- i. Does this step carry special meaning this year?
- m. Borekh:** Grace after Meals
- i. Our practice of gratitude pushes us beyond our limits sometimes.
- n. Hallel:** Praise
- i. There is comfort in familiar liturgy and songs, traditions that tie us to less fraught times and evoke connections to family.
 - ii. Praising God at this challenging time helps us find hope in difficult times.
- o. Nirtzah:** Next Year in Jerusalem
- i. Sharing the hope of a rebuilt Jerusalem and a land of peace.

2. PASSOVER IS THE FESTIVAL OF QUESTIONS

How must this Passover feel different from other Passovers?

Traditionally, the youngest asks, "How is this night different from all other nights?" It is incumbent on us to understand that Passover was designed for hard questions. In fact, our sages tell us to gift our children with candy to elicit their questions. The more you can emphasize asking questions over lecturing, the more productive the discussion will be. This Seder night, the first since the events of October 7th, the Israel-Hamas war, and a steep rise in antisemitism worldwide, many of us are wondering, How will this Seder be different from all other seders? Asking questions sets us free. Slaves and those in bondage (hostages) are not free to ask them. However, freedom carries great responsibility.

a. Four New Questions:

- i. While on other Seder nights, we retell the ancient story of our people's liberation from Egyptian bondage, on this Seder night, we are keenly aware that we are a small chapter in the unfolding Jewish history. How should we feel this responsibility on Passover?
- ii. While on other Seder nights, we welcome grandparents, parents, and children to attend our Seders, enacting the value of From Generation to Generation. On this Seder night, we know that generational divides can bring with them strong political differences. On this holiday of redemption, we may feel nervous about what redemption looks like. How can we unite passionately and purposely with those at the table?
- iii. While on other Seder nights, we seek to design a Seder experience that is engaging and relevant. On this Seder night how can we focus on what unites us and avoid conversations that could divide us?
- iv. While on other Seder nights, we celebrate the promise of redemption. On this Seder night we assemble with mixed feelings. Some of us may add a fourth Matzah or place an empty chair at our table to remember those still held hostage by Hamas. Others feel the painful absence of soldiers killed in combat. Many feel the ache for all of those who have been killed and are suffering due to the conflict. How does heartbreak and brokenness accompany you on this Seder night?

b. Share a moment when you have felt particularly connected to the Jewish people. What gave you that sense of connection to the Jewish people?

c. How can we celebrate a holiday of freedom when over 130 people are still held captive in Gaza?

d. How do we call for all who are hungry to come eat at our tables when so many Israelis are not at their own seder tables and millions of Palestinians are on the brink of famine?

e. How do we identify with the hostages, the young men and women who are defending Israel, and the October 7th survivors? Should we send letters? Gifts through various organizations? Should we wear dog tag necklaces demanding that the hostages be returned?

f. How do we think about our ancestors who were slaves in Egypt without thinking of the hostages currently being held in Gaza? It feels almost impossible to call ourselves free when friends and loved ones are being held in unimaginable conditions for more than six months. How can we discuss freedom while our brothers and sisters are held in Gaza?

g. What symbols could you add to your seder table to represent the hostages?

h. Send notes to your Congressmen and US Senators asking the important questions: What else can the US do to support Israel at this time?

3. WE WERE SLAVES

The Exodus story is told in two different ways in the Haggadah. The first is in the Avadim Hayinu, "We Were Slaves", section at the beginning of Maggid. How do those sitting at the seder table and enjoying the fruits of freedom identify with this story? The Haggadah reminds us that no matter how distant we are chronologically from the Exodus from Egypt, our present-day freedom is possible only because of God's redemption of our ancestors long ago. Had that salvational act not occurred, "We, our children, and our children's children would all be slaves to Pharaoh." It would be a different Pharaoh, but in the end, all tyrants are the same.

Now we are here, next year we will be in the land of Israel; this year we are slaves, next year we will be free people. We hope that this would be nostalgic, not a reflection of our modern reality with the existence of the State of Israel! What should we be doing differently tonight?

4. NOW WE ARE HERE. NEXT YEAR IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL. THIS YEAR, SLAVES. NEXT YEAR, FREE.

Imagine Jews suffering blood libel accusations during Passover, yet still lifting the bread of affliction, and singing. Let's imagine how this felt. How can we feel free again in the Land of Israel?

5. FOUR CUPS

Our Sages taught that we drink four cups of juice/wine during the Seder is based on an interpretation of Exodus 6:6-7, which uses four different expressions for the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage. Consider the following thoughts.

1. May it be God's will to free the hostages safely and speedily from Gaza and to inspire all to work for a peaceful tomorrow.
2. May it be God's will to deliver the hostages safely into the arms of their loved ones and to enable all Israelis and Palestinians displaced by the war to return home in safety.
3. May it be God's will to free us from the hatred in our midst, surrounding us, even within us. In releasing hatreds, may we experience redemption.
4. May it be God's will to connect us with all peoples, as we renew our faith in God and in each other.

6. PLAGUES

How did the Children of Israel feel about the Egyptians' pain and suffering throughout the plagues? Were our ancestors awed and fearful? Were they vengeful over their neighbors' calamities? Learning from this teaching, how should we consider responding? Should we spill drops of wine in recognition of innocents in Gaza?

Reading the traditional text of the Haggadah and thinking about the murderous rage wrought upon Israel on October 7th, does Hamas's messengers of evil unleashed fierce anger, wrath, and fury on innocent Israeli civilians, on soldiers cowering in their beds, on lovers of music taking cover in bomb shelters or hiding in fields, on families in their safe rooms. How many plagues should we include and count?

According to the Midrash, God chastises the angels who begin to sing at the downfall of the Egyptians. "How dare you sing for joy when my creatures are dying!" As we reduce our joy by spilling our wine, let us remember that while we can celebrate being saved, our tradition teaches that we should not sing while God's creatures are dying. This is echoed in Proverbs: "When your enemy falls, do not rejoice."

During the reading of the Haggadah, the recitation of the plagues are accompanied by dipping one's finger into wine, one dip for each plague. What events should you consider plagues this year? What might you add to the list?

7. HARDENED HEARTS

Hamas is not a fair broker, returning the hostages at point. They have not allowed the International Red Cross in to visit the hostages. They have not communicated with the families about the welfare of their family who were brutally kidnapped on that Shabbat and holiday. Is it fair to compare the leadership of Hamas to Pharaoh?

"In every generation, each person is obligated to see themselves as if they had participated in the Exodus from Egypt," is one of the most evocative lines in the Haggadah. It is a call to empathy, to feel the suffering and redemption of our ancient ancestors, as our own. It is also a commandment to use the story to bring meaning into our own lives, as we imagine ourselves being lifted out of despair and into freedom. The Mishnah tells us that in every generation a person must view themselves as though they personally left Egypt. How do we execute this important value this year?

The Haggadah conveys a promise that is simultaneously troubling and consoling. The enslavement in Egypt was not a one-time event; it was meant to serve as a template for all of Jewish history. We have experienced many Egypts, many oppressors and the Haggadah implies that we will experience more. The promise is only that each time "God saves us from their hands." What does this mean? How does that make you feel in this unfolding moment? Is this uplifting or frightening?

October 7th was the worst day since the Holocaust. How should we navigate and carry the responsibility to carry the narratives forward? What do you think Never Again means in practice?

8. DAYENU

When is it enough? Should we offer a Dayenu that some hostages were returned? Should we offer one that the Iron Dome saved many lives? Is it too soon to sing Dayenu?

9. POUR OUT GOD'S WRATH UPON THE NATIONS THAT DID NOT KNOW

You and upon the kingdoms that did not call upon Your Name! - Psalms 69:25!

You shall pursue them with anger and eradicate them from under the skies of God - Lamentations 3:66

The passages above were added during the time of the Crusades during the 11th - 12th Centuries, almost a thousand years after most of the Haggadah was initially created. Its context is future oriented, since it is recited just after a door is opened for Elijah to herald the coming of redemption. It calls for divine vengeance against the enemies of the Jewish people. It leaves no room for doubt or equivocation. Its language is absolute and unforgiving.

On Passover, the God whose mercy is sought for a thousand generations elsewhere in the TaNaCh, in Rabbinic literature, and in the daily prayer book, is invoked and implored to eradicate nations and kingdoms that destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem and exiled the people of Israel from the Land of Israel.

Jews are prompted to Pour Out God's Wrath.

How do we express rage at the violation and destruction of human bodies, the cruel holding of hostages who have yet to be brought out from darkness to light, and the crushing of the dream that in a sovereign and armed Jewish state such things were safely in the past?

An out and out call for God to destroy our enemies seemed out of place in modernity. Feeling safe and secure, many of us have tried to soften this seemingly gratuitous call for anger by adding a prayer for the righteous gentiles, which was written 400 years before the Holocaust, or to using this moment to remember the victims of the Holocaust. Over the years, Jews tried to find ways to explain this ancient text as a lens into the period of time in which it was written and to distance ourselves from it because it makes us uncomfortable. Is this still the case?

Jews are instructed to open our doors and Pour Out God's Wrath, publicly, into the street. How do we recognize this exclusive privilege is for those who have the freedom to open our doors in safety without fearing harm from outside? How dramatically different this seemingly normal experience of opening our doors? How do we identify with our people hid in safe rooms in the South of Israel, gripping the door handles and barring them shut with their bodies while Hamas rampaged inside their homes?

Is this the year we should consider adding our own words to ask God to mete out justice and carefully Pour Out God's Wrath on those who have been heinous to the Jewish people? Should we add our personal rage to Pour Out God's Wrath on those who have held our people hostage and committed barbaric crimes of sexual violence? And while we ask God, what should we consider as we open our front door for Elijah, for redemption, and for hope for a better future?

How do we channel our anger, to speak out and stand up against rampant antisemitism? How do we publicly pour out our anger carefully against those who earned it, not shy away from seeking their destruction and our continued existence? As Elijah's cup sits poured, ready and waiting to welcome an era when it will indeed be impossible, much less a failure, to imagine this, should we add another symbol to beckon Elijah? What should it be?

Consider the experience of our college students on many campuses at this moment. How do they feel about opening their doors? How do they negotiate Pour Out God's Wrath in contemporary times.

At this time, let us note that the anger to which we give express is placed intentionally before Hallel, Psalm 115. The opening words are: "Not for us, Lord, not for us, but rather for the glory of Your name."

10. GRATITUDE AND PRAISE

These are hallmarks of resilience.

A short Hallel selection, Psalms of Gratitude, intentionally in in Maggid reflects the insight that words of praise and gratitude are always possible, even before we reach a redemptive ending. Go around your table and ask your guests: What do you feel grateful for? When have you had moments that made it difficult to feel any gratitude at all? What helps to find strength and hope even during extremely challenging times? Take a moment at the Seder to look around and appreciate everyone who is there.

As you read the verses of Hallel, including the verses about the redeemed captives, are there ways in which these ancient verses resonate differently this year or feel hollow?

Expressing gratitude is important always but especially in times when there is uncertainty. At the end of the seder, ask everyone present to share a word of personal gratitude for the evening. Be sure to thank Congressmen and Senators for the ongoing and continued support of Israel, the only democracy and steadfast ally of the US in the region.

11. SEFIRA

We count. We count the days until Shavuot, when we are gifted the Torah. Do we count the days since October 7th?

12. NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM

This year, when we say Next year in Jerusalem may we do so with the intention and prayer that next year, Jerusalem, all of Israel, and the Jews world over will be at peace.