That’s Judaism! — A little pedagogy, a little pageantry, a little fantasy, a little realism; a game of hide and seek, a mnemonic device, some superstitious behavior, a little pedantry and regimentation, a magical formula, a measure of faithfulness — in short, something to appeal to everyone.

— Blu Greenberg

With a store-bought solution, I lose an opportunity for personal transformation.

— Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi
Introduction

The Hebrew word *aggadah* means "telling." Around the world, Jewish families all celebrate the same holiday, but we each do it in our own way, telling the Passover story that most resonates with our lives and hopes. The saga is ancient, but it is always relevant, as modern injustices give new meaning to this timeless tale of slavery, despotism, and freedom. We take this time to think of all oppressed peoples, honoring our differences and our need to work together for our future and our children.

The book of Exodus says that “mixed multitudes” went with the Israelites out of Egypt. To welcome a mixed multitude at our table tonight, this haggadah replaces the traditional Hebrew blessings with secular phrases of celebration. As you feel moved, please ask questions, answer questions, take time to ponder, argue with the text, raise topics for discussion, and otherwise make the Seder your own.

Creating a Special Moment

Like all Jewish festivals, Passover begins with the lighting of candles to mark the end of an ordinary day and the beginning of a sacred day. Tonight the flames’ warmth and light symbolize the end of winter and the beginning of spring.

*We come together in shared determination to act in rightness, and light candles to honor (Shabbat and) the festival of Passover.*

The Shehecheyanu blessing is said to mark special occasions. It is a pure expression of celebration: we are alive, we are together, and we are free.

*We share our celebration of coming through difficult times to reach this moment together.*
Wine, Water, and the Empty Cup

Wine marks a special occasion. The enslaved own nothing, not even their own time. By specifying a day for feasting and joy, we proclaim our freedom.

There are many fours in the Seder. The four cups of wine are among the most prominent. In this haggadah we consider their relation to the Kabbalistic four worlds (physicality, emotions, thought, and essence) and God’s four promises of redemption (liberate you from labor in Egypt, deliver you from slavery, redeem you through acts of might, and take you as a people). We raise our wine glasses in honor of the freedoms we have and those we struggle to secure.

To begin our journey out of the land of Egypt, where our bodies were burdened with labor, we pour the first cup.

*Our coming together in celebration enhances the sweetness of the fruit of the vine.*

We include an empty cup for those who do not yet have freedom, and fill it with our commitments to work toward justice and never forget those who suffer. We also include a cup of water in memory of Miriam, a prophet and leader whose miraculous well of water sustained the Israelites in the desert. Our water honors the women who lead and sustain our communities.

Urchatz, Washing Hands

In place of traditional hand-washing, take a moment to picture yourself washing away all the grit and grime of the ordinary day. Feel refreshed and renewed, ready for our festival.

Karpas, the Spring Greens

As we remember the liberation from Egypt, we also celebrate the stirrings of spring after a long, cold winter. We dip karpas—
watercress—in salt water to recall the tears our ancestors shed. May they be our only tears this year.

\[ \text{We share our celebration of the life force that brings forth greenery from the earth.} \]

**Matzah, the Bread of Affliction and Freedom**

This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat; let all who are needy come and celebrate the Passover with us.

Matzah is also the bread of freedom. As the Israelites prepared to leave Egypt, they baked it in haste, with no time to let the dough rise, and it sustained them in their flight.\(^1\)

We break the middle matzah and hide the larger piece, the afikoman. It will be found at the end of the meal, a game that helps to keep children awake through the long Seder service.

Before Passover, many Jews clean house to get rid of every crumb of chametz, moistened grain that might ferment and become leavening. This is a good time to do some spring cleaning and get rid of metaphorical chametz too: sour feelings, puffed-up egos, and clutter.

**The Four Questions**

The four questions are actually one question, to which there are four traditional answers. The youngest person at the table asks: "Why is this night different from all other nights?"

Those at the table who are new to the Seder ask:

1. On all other nights we eat either leavened or unleavened bread. Why, on this night, do we eat only unleavened bread?

   \[ \text{We eat matzah to remember the bread our ancestors baked in haste.} \]
2. On all other nights, we eat all kinds of herbs. Why, on this night, do we eat especially bitter herbs?

We eat bitter herbs to relive the bitterness of slavery.

3. On all other nights, we do not dip herbs in any condiment. Why, on this night, do we dip them in salt water and charoset?

We dip our food in salt water for tears and charoset for the mortar and bricks made by the Jewish slaves in Egypt.

4. On all other nights, we eat either sitting straight or leaning. Why, on this night, are we required to lean?

We recline in comfortable chairs to savor our freedom and remember not to take it for granted.

The Seder asks us to see ourselves as though we personally left Egypt. These tangible metaphors help us get as close as possible to feeling as though we really have suffered enslavement and can understand the true joy of liberation.

**The Four Children**

The parable of the four children shows four ways that those new to the Passover story may feel about it: excited, doubtful, curious, or confused. Those more familiar with the story are asked to encourage, reassure, teach, and lead. We all take turns in these roles over the years, and even those who are new or uncertain have an important place at our table and in our work for freedom.

**The Exodus**

Long ago, during a time of famine, the ancient Israelites traveled to Egypt. At first, we prospered, but then an evil Pharaoh came to power, enslaving the Israelites and burdening us with heavy work and sorrow. The Pharaoh even decreed that all Hebrew boys be killed.
But two midwives, Shifrah and Puah, defied his orders, helping one boy survive.

Fearing for him, his mother, Yochaved, placed him in a basket and floated him down the Nile. He was found, and adopted, by Pharaoh’s daughter, who named him Moses. She hired Yochaved to nurse him, and raised him as a prince of Egypt.

Moses was sympathetic to the slaves who worked in the brickyards. When he saw an overseer mistreat a slave, he struck the overseer and killed him. Afraid of retribution, he set out alone. God spoke to him from a burning bush and called him to lead the Hebrew people to freedom.

Moses returned to Egypt and gave Pharaoh a mandate that resounds through history: Let my people go.

Pharaoh refused. God unleashed ten terrible plagues upon the Egyptians. Only when his nation lay in ruins did Pharaoh agree to our liberation.

Before Pharaoh could change his mind, our people fled, not waiting for their bread dough to rise. Pharaoh’s army followed. We ran as far as the land would take us and then plunged into the Red Sea. Only when we had gone as far as we could did the waters part for us. We mourn, even now, that Egyptian soldiers drowned: our liberation is bittersweet because of their deaths.

It is traditional to dip drops of wine out of our glasses in memory of the Egyptian people who paid the price for Pharaoh’s stubbornness. Though at times we have no choice but to use force to defend ourselves and free others, we must always look for the path of liberation without vengeance. (Everyone dips out a drop of wine.)

To this day, we relive our liberation, that we may not become complacent, that we may step up when called to action, and that we may always rejoice in our freedom.
Dayenu

The song "Dayenu" tells the entire story of the Exodus from Egypt as a series of miracles, saying that each one would have been enough even if it had not led to the next. "Dayenu" reminds us that each of our lives is the cumulative result of many fortunate moments, small and large. Though we celebrate each one, we then forge ahead on our own without waiting for further miracles.²

The Second Cup: Emotions, Freedom from Slavery

In the four promises of redemption, being delivered from slavery comes after being liberated from slave labor. This is because the traces of slavery linger in the heart long after the body is free. Though no longer in a place of constraints, we may struggle to feel in our hearts that we are truly free and equal to those who once oppressed us. Let us defy these fears by taking bold action and owning our choices.

Let us also take this moment to celebrate all the emotions that accompany the first steps toward freedom. How beautiful it is, in this season of spring when the blossoms first escape the strictures of their narrow buds, to contemplate all the possibilities that lie before us.

Our coming together in celebration enhances the sweetness of the fruit of the vine.

Rachtzah, Washing Hands Before the Meal

The storytelling is done; it's time for food! But first, we get another moment of transition. Picture yourself washing away the last of Egypt's dust and readying yourself for the meal ahead.³ (A secret four: washing both hands twice makes four hands.)

Motzi-Matzah, the Breaking of Matzah

Meals traditionally begin with the breaking of bread, an ancient sign of coming together in fellowship. Tonight we break matzah together.
We share our celebration of the spark of life and the human effort that bring forth bread from the earth and bring it to our table.

We come together in shared determination to act in rightness, and observe the ritual of eating matzah.

Maror, the Bitter Herb

Maror reminds us of the bitterness of slavery. Choosing to eat it reminds us that we can choose to acknowledge and help those in anguish, rather than turning away from their pain.  

We come together in shared determination to act in rightness, and observe the ritual of eating maror.

The Symbol Plate

Pesach: The shank bone represents the Pesach, the special lamb sacrifice made for the Passover holiday in the days of the Temple. "Pesach" means "passover" because God passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt when visiting plagues upon our oppressors.

Maror: The bitter herbs provide a visceral reminder of the bitterness of slavery, the life of hard labor our ancestors experienced in Egypt, and today's laborers who plant and pick and prepare our food.

Charoset: The charoset recalls the mortar used by the slaves in Egypt. Its sweetness is the sweetness of freedom.

Egg: The egg is a symbol of new life and a reminder that all of us are fragile and dependent at times. The roasted Seder plate eggs remind us of ancient burnt offerings and the seamless continuity of life.

Orange: The orange symbolizes our welcome of women, queer and trans people, and others who have in the past felt excluded from our communities and from positions of leadership and honor.
Olive: The olive branch has been a symbol of peace for thousands of years. We add olives or olive oil to our Seder plates to symbolize our hopes for peace around the world, and especially in the Middle East.

Additions to the traditional symbol plate, such as oranges for inclusivity and olives for peace, can be seen as Seder hacks: turning well-known mechanisms to surprising and wonderful new purposes.

Koreich, the Hillel Sandwich

Around 100 BCE, the sage Hillel began the tradition of eating a sandwich of bitter maror and sweet charoset between two pieces of matzah. For the literal-minded, this fulfills the letter of the commandment to eat these things together. For those who prefer symbolism, we are reminded that bitterness and sweetness come side by side in life.

Spreading charoset on the matzah gives us a glimpse of the life of a Hebrew laborer spreading mortar with a trowel. Then, as we eat the sandwich, we fast-forward to the time of Hillel. We may even have a dizzying moment of imagining being Hillel as he imagines being enslaved in Egypt. Feel the layers of nearly six thousand years of Jewish history all atop one another and mingled together, like the charoset and maror layered over the matzah.

Shulchan Oreich, the Festive Meal

This is a night of questions. Consider these for discussion over dinner, or ask your own:

What are our happy Seder memories?

What has this winter taught us? What elements of our own lives do we hope to revive this spring?

What chametz would we like to clean out of our lives?
Why is this night, this particular Passover here and now with this group of people, different not only from the other 364 nights of the year but from all the Passovers of the past and future?

Let's write our own "Dayenu." What are some of the small joys and triumphs that made our Seder happen tonight?

What are some of the personal narrow places we have escaped? What are some we're still in, and longing to be freed from?

Rabbi David Hartman writes, "Passover is the night for reckless dreams; for visions about what a human being can be, what society can be, what people can be, what history may become." What can we do to fulfill our reckless dreams? What will be our legacy for future generations?

**Tzafun, the Hidden Afikoman**

At the close of our meal, the children find the afikoman and ransom it back to the adults. *Afikoman* means “dessert”: we eat a bite of matzah, a last taste of affliction to remind us of those who still go hungry, flee tyranny, and battle oppression. We were rescued from Egypt, but our liberation is not complete until the whole world is free.⁵

**Barech, a Toast of Gratitude**

We raise a toast to the life we share, the food that sustains our life and all life, and the new life being born in the springtime. L’chaim!⁶

**The Third Cup: Thought, Redemption Through Might**

Just as we freed our hearts from constricting and false beliefs, we begin to free our minds from constricting and false thoughts, clearing the way to take our own powerful actions and build a better world.

> Our coming together in celebration enhances the sweetness of the fruit of the vine.
Hallel, Welcoming the Prophets

During the Crusades, a prayer called "Pour out Your wrath" was added to the haggadah. In the present, as we rage against injustice, we can channel the power of our own wrath into righteous action.\(^7\)

Now we open the door to welcome the prophets Elijah and Miriam. If anger is what fuels us, hope is what steers us. Let us make space for peace and hope in our everyday lives.\(^8\)

The Fourth Cup: Essence, Becoming a People

Sometimes the concept of “the Jewish people” can seem as indefinable and nebulous as the concept of the essence, the soul. But whatever Jewishness is, tonight we have affirmed and renewed our own unique connections to it, partaking of a tradition nearly six thousand years old. Hopefully we have found something in this evening’s Seder that satisfies our souls.

Our coming together in celebration enhances the sweetness of the fruit of the vine.

Nirtzah, the Conclusion

We end our Passover Seder by saying in unison:

May slavery give way to freedom.

May hatred give way to love.

May ignorance give way to wisdom.

May despair give way to hope.

Next year, at this time, may everyone, everywhere, be free!
Thoughts and Readings

The Torah refers to the festival of Pesach by the name of Chag Hamatzot, the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Matzah is considered lechem oni, the bread of affliction. It is the hard, dry, rough bread that slaves eat, instead of the soft, rich bread of freemen. But matzah is also the lechem cherut, the bread of freedom, for it is the bread the Jews baked as they prepared for a hasty exit, with no time to allow for the dough to ferment and rise... Thus, in typical Jewish dialectical fashion, the bread of slavery and the bread of freedom are one and the same. And in that there is a most important lesson: the difference between slavery and freedom is not necessarily creature comforts, but rather a relative mastery over one's fate. In slavery, they ate the hard, broken crusts which the master allowed them. In the Exodus, the Jews voluntarily accepted a most Spartan regimen as they set out on their tenuous journey—because they had before them a vision of liberation.

—Blu Greenberg, after a teaching by Irving Greenberg

Matzah is also the bread of sacrifice. The book of Leviticus, an instruction manual for the priests of the Temple, explains that those who cannot afford to sacrifice animals should instead sacrifice unleavened bread. The only exception is the sacrifice of thanksgiving, to which leavened bread is added. Pesach is a festival of thanksgiving, but it celebrates the first steps toward redemption, when we still remember the sorrows of enslavement and the trials of the exodus. The journey begun today on Pesach, with the sacrificial matzoh, will end in seven weeks at Shavuot, the thanksgiving festival for the fertile promised land, when we celebrate the grain harvest with leavened bread.

—adapted from a teaching by Rabbanit Sharon Rimon

Traditionally, seders require three matzot. Why three? Three are our patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Three are the tenses hinted-at in God's unpronounceable Name.
The three matzot can also represent one point of view, an opposing point of view, and the compassionate understanding which bridges them both.

—Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

Everything whole in the world has an edge where it broke off something or was cut away. The bread we are about to break is already broken.

We want to think it and we are perfect, but the loaf is an illusion, a compromise with the shattering of light.

Yet maybe it’s in slow breaking that wholeness happens. The bud of the apple tree fragments into beauty and the stem of the iris tears its way through the soil. The heart breaks as it grows. You could call that wholeness: the movement of life toward a fuller version of itself, the egg releasing its core into the world, the tree lurching its way toward branches.

It’s the splitting of the sea that lets us out of Egypt: severed from the old self we thought invincible, we run toward a future that shatters the moment we enter it, becoming the multiple and unknown present. Bless the world that breaks to let you through it. Bless the gift of the grain that smashes its molecules to feed you over & over.

This Passover night, time is cracking open. Wholeness is not the egg; it’s the tap tap tap of the wet-winged baby bird trying to get out. Break the bread at the feast of liberation. Go ahead. Do it. The whole is already broken, and so are you, and freedom has to have its jagged edges. But keep one half for later, because this story isn’t whole, and isn’t over.

—Rabbi Jill Hammer

2 What does this mean, "It would have been enough"? Surely no one of these would indeed have been enough for us. Dayenu means to
celebrate each step toward freedom as if it were enough, then to start out on the next step. It means that if we reject each step because it is not the whole liberation, we will never be able to achieve the whole liberation. It means to sing each verse as if it were the whole song—and then sing the next verse.

— *The Shalom Seders, compiled by New Jewish Agenda*

I began digging at the concept of Egypt, and the results have been coming for over 20 years. Each year, sometime during the seder, I identify an Egypt that I have left, or in which I am still trapped and in need of deliverance.

— *Rabbi Ruth Adar*

3 Our hands were touched by this water earlier during tonight's seder, but this time is different. This is a deeper step than that. This act of washing our hands is accompanied by a blessing, for in this moment we feel our People's story more viscerally, having just retold it during Maggid. Now, having re-experienced the majesty of the Jewish journey from degradation to dignity, we raise our hands in holiness, remembering once again that our liberation is bound up in everyone else's. Each step we take together with others towards liberation is blessing.

— *Rabbi Menachem Creditor*

4 The Baal HaTanya (Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady, 1745-1812) draws a fascinating distinction between two types of sadness. The first he refers to as bitterness, a form of regret or sadness that emerges from a sense that things are broken, or less than ideal. This form of sadness is positive, he says, because it emerges from a place of idealism, hope, and a powerful desire to change. We are “bitter” because we sense that a vital and healthy part of ourselves is not finding expression in the world. It is precisely our capacity for hope and transformation that
makes this type of sadness possible. Our sense of loss is informed by our appreciation for a whole.

The second type of sadness is depression. This type of sadness “closes our hearts” with despair, numbs our feelings, and blocks out all joy. From this perspective, perhaps we eat maror to explore how to move from a sadness that holds us back to a sadness that can lead to growth and change. When dealing with hard things I often find I am choosing between allowing sadness to dominate my mood or trying to ignore it and put it aside altogether. The narrative of the seder refutes this false dichotomy. We don’t deny the difficulties and pain, but maybe we can put it into a wider context that includes joy and gratitude. We make room for sadness but we don’t let it take over. We eat the maror with the matza.

...Our eating of maror and talking about slavery might also carry with it a lesson about the negative power of shame. I don’t like sharing my stories of pain or difficulty. They often feel like stories of failure. It often feels like my pain is a result of my inadequacy in managing my life or lack of success. If I were a better person, more capable, wiser, more powerful, my story would be all about happiness. Sadness becomes associated with failure. By including the pain and humiliation in our national story of birth and redemption we are reminding ourselves that pain, sadness, and difficulty are part of everyone’s story. I don’t need to paper over it or pretend it’s not there. My challenge is to include fully the hard parts of my story, both individually and nationally, and still feel joy and gratitude. Our plates include bitter herbs right next to the matza and the wine.

—Rabbi Zvi Hirschfield

5 Tzafun means “hidden,” and the afikoman is usually hidden for children to find. Why end the meal thus? Because we want the dinner to end with the taste of slavery/freedom in our mouths—thus the taste of matzah, rather than some unrelated sweet.
But this explains eating matzah late, not the charade of hiding it. The hiding works on two levels: it intrigues the kids—and it allows us to affirm our sense of the Hidden and Mysterious. On this theory, we hide the larger half of the broken matzah because we are affirming that there is more that is Hidden and Mysterious in the world than any information we can gather.

—adapted from a text by Rabbi Arthur Waskow

We still have a long, long way to go before we reach the promised land of freedom. Yes, we have left the dusty soils of Egypt, and we have crossed a Red Sea that had for years been hardened by long and piercing winter of massive resistance, but before we reach the majestic shores of the promised land, there will still be gigantic mountains of opposition ahead and prodigious hilltops of injustice.

...I must confess, my friends, the road ahead will not always be smooth. There will still be rocky places of frustration and meandering points of bewilderment. There will be inevitable setbacks here and there. There will be those moments when the buoyancy of hope will be transformed into the fatigue of despair.... Difficult and painful as it is, we must walk on in the days ahead with an audacious faith in the future.

—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

6 The traditional Birkat Hamazon, grace said after meals, begins with this paragraph:

We bless you now, Wholly One, the power and majesty in all. You gave us this food, you sustain our lives With your grace, with your love, your compassion. You provide all the food that comes to us, guiding and nourishing our lives! Now we hope and we pray
for a wondrous day when no one in our world
will lack bread or food to eat.
We will work to help bring on that time,
when all who hunger will eat and be filled.
Every human will know that Your love is a power
sustaining all life and doing good for all.
We bless you now, Wholly One, for feeding everything!

—translation by Rabbi Burt Jacobson

7 Oppression breeds anger to which we must attend.

Once, we recited this text out of powerlessness. We asked God to pour
forth wrath because we were unable to express our own. But in
today’s world, where we enjoy agency to an unprecedented degree,
we must resist the temptations of perennial victimhood and yearning
for revenge.

And yet we know that rage, unexpressed, will fester. Let us therefore
acknowledge our communal pain. Let us recognize the intersecting
systems of oppression which ensnare our world, from antisemitism to
xenophobia, and feel appropriate anger in response. And let us
recommit ourselves to honing our anger so that it might fuel us to
create change, so that our wrath may lead us to redemption.

—Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

8 I would like to invite us to do the following in our Seders: Before we
open the door for Eliahu Hanavi, sit quietly and ask deep inside,
“What questions are so important for our lives going on after Pesach
that we would want to invoke the presence of Eliahu Hanavi so that
we can pose them to him?”

Then, when we sing “Eliahu Hanavi, Eliahu Hatishby,” and we open
the door, we should sit quietly and try to address the questions to
Eliahu from within our deepest places; and not rush to resume the
Seder. Please wait at this time for what you might hear as Eliahu’s response for us. In this way, we can all experience the wonderful grace of giluy eliahu / the revelation that comes to us through Elijah.

—Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

The cup of Elijah holds wine;
the cup of Miriam holds water.
Wine is more precious
until you have no water.
Water that flows in our veins,
water that is the stuff of life,
for we are made of breath
and water, vision
and fact. Elijah is
the extraordinary; Miriam
brings the daily wonders:
the joy of a fresh morning
like a newly prepared table,
a white linen cloth on which
nothing has yet spilled.
The descent into the heavy
waters of sleep healing us.
The scent of baking bread,
roasting chicken, fresh herbs,
the faces of friends across
the table: what sustains us
every morning, every evening,
the common daily miracles
like the taste of cool water.

—Marge Piercy