Machar’s 2021 Humanistic Passover Seder

The Seder – A Call to Order
Welcome / B’rakhim Ha-Ba’im / קרובים חבאים

 Haram MaToV u-Ma’Na’im Shevet Amim Gam Yachad.

See how good it is when peoples sit together.
(Adapted from Psalm 133)

Seder Means ”Order” – Our Order Today

Kadesh v’Neirot Setting Aside the Day and Candles
Mab Nishtanah The Four Questions (and a New One)
Yachatz Break the Middle Matzah
Maggid Tell the Story
Arba T’shuvoth Answer the Challenges
Kos ha-Zikaron The Cup of Memory
Kos ha-Tikvah The Cup of Hope
Nirtzah Conclusion
Kadesh v’Neirot
Setting Aside the Day and Candles

N’varekh et ba-or ba-olam,
N’varekh et ba-or ba-adam,
N’varekh et ba-or shel yom tov v’shel Shabbat.

Let us bless the light in the world,
Let us bless the light in humanity,
Let us bless the light of the holiday and of Shabbat.

Kadesh v’Neirot
Setting Aside the Day and Candles

N’varekh et borei p’ri ha-gafen.

Let us bless those who create the fruit of the vine.
Mah Nishtanah

The Four Questions (and a New One), or, Disorder

Mah Nishtanah – The Four Questions

Mah nishtanah ba-lailab ba-zeb mi-kol ba-leilot?

She-b’khol ba-leilot anu okblin chametz u-matzab, ba-lailab ba-zeb – kulo matzah.

She-b’khol ba-leilot anu okblin sb’ar y’rakot, ba-lailab ba-zeb – maror.

She-b’khol ba-leilot ein anu matblin afilu pa’am echat, ba-lailab ba-zeb sb’tei f’anim.

She-b’khol ba-leilot anu okblin bein yoshvin u-vein misubin, ba-lailab ba-zeb kulanu misubin.
**Mah Nishtanah – The Four Questions**

What makes this night different from all other nights?

1. On all other nights we eat either leavened bread or matzah – tonight, it's all matzah.
2. On all other nights we eat any vegetable – tonight, there is bitter herb.
3. On all other nights we don't dip even once – tonight, twice.
4. On all other nights we eat either sitting up or reclining – tonight, we are all reclining.

**Mah Nishtanah – a New Question**

She-b’khol Pesachim anu yoshvin panim el panim, ha-lailah ha-zeh kulnu m’iruchakin.

On every other Passover, we sit face-to-face – tonight, we are all forced to be distant.
**Mah Nishtanah – Your Questions, or, No One Said There Would Be Homework!**

(There still isn’t homework, but there’s work to do, and you’re probably at someone’s home!)

In small groups, randomly assigned, take a few minutes to introduce yourselves to one another (if you don’t already know one another) and share the questions that are nagging at you this Passover. Zoom will bring us all back together on its own.

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**Yachatz**

*Breaking the Middle Matzah*

We break the middle matzah and set it aside – traditionally for the *afikomen*, the Seder’s final morsel of food.

The other half of the matzah remains between the other two.

Today, it reflects our brokenness, hidden within what appears to be whole.
The Bread of Affliction

Ha lakhma anya di akbalu avabatana.

This is the bread of affliction, which Jewish forebears ate.
All who are hungry – let them come and eat.
All who need to – let them come and celebrate Passover.

This is the bread of brokenness.
The Traditional Story

The tale of the Jewish people’s quest for freedom from Egyptian bondage was written so long ago that no knows how much is fact. But like all good stories, its moral lessons are valid and important. According to the story, the Israelites—a single family—traveled to Egypt in a time of famine, settled, and prospered. Their prosperity, we are told, threatened the Egyptians, and the Israelites were enslaved. After 400 years, a man arose among them, his life saved in childhood by midwives, Shifrah and Pu’ah, and his sister, Miriam. Moses, we read, grew up in luxury among the Egyptians, and was cast out for an act of conscience.

The Traditional Story

Moses, we read, returned to Egypt and demanded the release of the Israelites from slavery. His efforts eventually succeeded. At our Seder, we celebrate the story of Moses and of the flight from freedom to slavery. We celebrate the struggle of all people to be free. this story has encouraged Jews and non-Jews alike in times of persecution and hardship.

The story of the Exodus was a particular inspiration to Americans of African descent, brought to America as slaves. When they sang “Go Down Moses,” they thought of their own leaders and their own struggle for freedom. Mindful of how much is still to be done, we now sing that song.
“Go Down Moses”

When Israel was in Egypt land, Let my people go!
Oppressed so hard they could not stand, let my people go!

Go down Moses, way down in Egypt land,
Tell old Pharaoh, to let my people go.

When Moses took them from their toil, let my people go!
He led them all to freedom’s soil, let my people go!

Go down Moses, way down in Egypt land,
Tell old Pharaoh, to let my people go.

The Ten Plagues

(Pour a second cup of wine or grape juice if you have them)

In the Torah’s story of Moses and the Exodus, it describes ten plagues that forced Egypt to its knees. We recognize the cost to ordinary people such plagues would impose were they to occur all to one nation.

The ancient rabbi, Hillel, said that saving one life is like saving the entire world. Losing one life is like losing the entire world, and our humanistic values demand that we realize that we should not rejoice in human suffering – we should instead seek to end it.
The Ten Plagues

In recognition of our obligation to lessen suffering, we lessen our enjoyment by diminishing our cups once for each of the ten plagues.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blood</th>
<th>Dam</th>
<th>Boils</th>
<th>Sbichin</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frogs</td>
<td>Tiferdeia</td>
<td>Knehad</td>
<td>Hail and fire</td>
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<td>Gnats</td>
<td>Kinim</td>
<td>Gom</td>
<td>Locusts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beasts</td>
<td>Arov</td>
<td>Yorah</td>
<td>Darkness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cattle disease</td>
<td>Dever</td>
<td>Keer</td>
<td>Death of the first-born</td>
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The Ten Plagues

More homework!

Spend a few minutes – again in a randomly-assigned group – sharing what you think might be our modern plagues – the brokenness of our world. There are two ground rules:

1) *individual people are not plagues*, no matter how bad you might think they are;

2) ask whether each plague affects the powerful and the powerless alike, or affects mainly the powerless and disadvantaged.

Zoom will automatically bring us back together after a few minutes.
The Ten Plagues

Having diminished our cups in recognition of freedom brought from suffering, we dedicate this second cup of wine to our hopes for peace and freedom, and to our recognition that we have a mutual obligation to repair our broken world.

Nvarekh et borei p’ri ha-gafen.

Let us bless those who create the fruit of the vine.

Answer the Challenges

Why is this night different?
Lo Dayeinu – It’s Not Enough

Long ago our people learned
Not even food that they had earned
Could satisfy their dignity
If they weren’t free.

So they roamed for many years
With thirst and hunger, pain and tears
They sought a land of liberty
Where all are free.

[Chorus:]
Lo dayenu, lo dayenu,
Lo dayenu, dayenu dayenu dayenu

(Adapted from the traditional song by Rabbi Daniel Friedman)

(Chorus)

The moral of this story’s clear
People cannot thrive in fear
Justice is security
All must be free.

(Chorus)

Pesach, Matzah, and Maror

“Rabban Gamliel used to say, someone who has not mentioned these three things on Passover has not fulfilled his obligation; these are: Pesach (the Passover sacrifice), matzah (unleavened bread), and maror (bitter herb).”

Notice: he said “mention,” not “have” or “eat.”

Often on the Seder plate is the zerqa, a shankbone, which is used to remember the Passover sacrifice that, in ancient days, was the central part of Passover’s celebrations – but one we no longer practice.

There is often matzah as a reminder of slavery, affliction, haste, and brokenness.

And there is often maror as a reminder of the bitterness of slavery.
**Pesach, Matzah, and Maror**

We eat matzah because it’s just enough: flour and water, and nothing more — not even time to rise.

We eat matzah to remind us that we have known oppression — we must regard ourselves as though we ourselves came out of slavery — and that we are bound to those who are now oppressed.

*N'varekh et ba-motzi'im lechem min ba-aretz.*
Let us bless those who bring forth bread from the earth.

*N'sameach ki naganu lizman akhilat matzah.*
Let us rejoice, for we have reached the time for eating matzah.

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**Pesach, Matzah, and Maror**

Why *maror*, bitter herb? Because its bitter taste reminds us of the bitterness of slavery. It reminds us: struggle is better than the complacent acceptance of injustice.

Why *maror?* Because it was eaten in ancient agricultural festivals, reminding us of the contrast of bitter and sweet.

(If you have it, take some *maror* and combine it with *charoset.*)

*N'sameach ki naganu lizman akhilat maror.*
Let us rejoice, for we have reached the time for eating bitter herbs.
**Pesach, Matzah, and Maror**

It is said that Rabbi Hillel first ate the korech, a layering of matzah, maror, and charoset. Why charoset? Because its thick, sticky quality resembles the mortar used to stick bricks together, reminding us of the toil associated with slavery. And because, with the end of the korban pesach, the Passover sacrifice, another food was needed to commemorate Passover.

*korech* means binder. By binding these three foods together, we commemorate the bittersweet combination of oppression, freedom, and the obligation to help heal ours and the world’s brokenness.

(If you have matzah, charoset, and maror, combine them and eat the *korech.*)

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**Pesach, Matzah, and Maror**

What else is on the Seder plate?
This year, it might not be very much!

Most often we find karpas, a green vegetable usually eaten at the very start of the Seder, before the Four Questions. We usually also find the beitzah, an egg, the second of two cooked items that were part of rabbinic tradition for the Seder’s meal.

Many have the tappuz, an orange, a modern tradition that symbolizes inclusion and rejection of homophobia, transphobia, and other biases and systems of oppression.

Some may use a beet instead of a shankbone. Some may include olives or tomatoes or potatoes to symbolize specific quests for justice.
**Pesach, Matzah, and Maror**

This year – and every year – the important thing to remember is: whatever you are able to bring is enough.

No Seder has ever been perfect, and every Passover has had its own brokenness.

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**The Cup of Memory**

(If available, pour a third cup of wine.)

During this festival of life and of brokenness, we remember the victims of the Nazi Holocaust, resolving that their memories shall not be forgotten. We remember the victims of chattel slavery in our own country, and the persecution of all who suffered merely for who they were.

We remember that America’s fears are the same as ever, and lift this cup to acknowledge that we cannot give in to fear.

\( \text{לְכַלְדוֹת} \text{ אַנְתָּ הַמְּרוֹאָא} \text{ כּוֹרִי הַגָּף} \).

N'varekh et borei p'ri ha-gafen.

Let us bless those who create the fruit of the vine.
The Cup of Hope

It is a long tradition at the Seder to include a cup of wine for Elijah, a symbol of hope for the future—and traditionally, of an expectation of a messianic redemption. It has long been customary to open a door for Elijah's—and a better age's—entrance.

A newer tradition is to include another cup on the table, filled with water. This is called Miriam’s Cup, named for Moses's sister in the Torah’s story of the Exodus, who finds water for the Israelites in the wilderness.

By remembering the stories of Elijah and Miriam together, we remember the hope of prior generations, and the role of women in our story. And we end with a song rooted in hope for new beginnings.

The Cup of Hope

Eliyahu ha-navi, Eliyahu ha-Tishbi, Eliyahu ha-Giladi.
Miriam ha-n’vi’ah, ba-achot ha-abuvah.
Ba-tupim u-vim’cholot, tzahalab al ha-tovot.

Elijah the prophet, Elijah the Tishbite, Elijah the Gileadite.

Miriam the prophetess, the beloved sister. With drums and dances she rejoiced.
(First verse traditional; second verse by Rabbi Jeffrey Falick)
Nirtzah

It is desirable.

Nirtzah

Nirtzah means “it is desirable” or “it is acceptable.” It is traditional to end the Seder with the statement that what has come before is acceptable.

Yet Seders traditionally end with “Next year in Jerusalem,” suggesting that in fact, nothing that went before is acceptable.

We have not done all that is customary in the Seder. As in almost all years past, what has come before is not truly, fully acceptable. As in almost all years past, the Seder is, as we are, at least a little broken.

This year, as in all years, there’s more to do. And so long as there is more to do, there is hope.
Nirtzah

Od yavo shalom aleinu
Od yavo shalom aleinu
Od yavo shalom aleinu
Ve-al kulan

Salaam
Aleinu ve-al kol ba-olam
Salaam, salaam

Peace will yet be upon us and the whole world.
Peace upon us and the whole world.
Mosh Ben Ari