

בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה

שמות יג:ח

On This Very Day: **One Pesach Later**

Reflections for Passover
in the Year 5781



Dearest Holy Readers,

A whole year and a little bit has passed of a very challenging pandemic. We've taken a wild ride. There have been so many challenging and bad moments along with some good in between.

One reflection that can bring us around is that at first, being in the pandemic together was a terrifying thing. Everyone was experiencing the confusing danger of this virus. But now, as we've been in it for so long that we can remind ourselves how important it is to know that we are not alone. We are not alone in our struggles, in our isolation. Even though there is physical aloneness, it is something we all are going through together.

And as we start to see glimpses of hope in the horizon that this virus is on its way out, we can recall the great narrative of our ancestors, the Yetzia, the Exodus from Egypt. We are told in the haggadah that in every generation we must feel as if we are leaving Egypt. Not that we are free now, but that we are in the process of leaving. The rabbis tell us that we must never lose hope in the process of moving to redemption.

We hope that with this companion you feel the boundless, multilayered light of Pesach at your seder, and remember our togetherness as we all work to continue bringing the holy sparks of Torah back into our lives. Chag Kasher Vesameach, Happy Passover!

With Love,

Lavi, Sofia, Benji and Raffi

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The Order of the Seder

My Fifteen Step Seder Benji Zoller

Sung to the tune of the Seder song.

Pesach Seder	Expectations of Zoom Day	Usual Zoom Day	Post-Pandemic Day
1. Kadesh	Wake up	Wake up	Wake up
2. Urchatz	Brush teeth	Snooze alarm	Minyan
3. Karpas	Get dressed	Get up	Without
4. Yachatz	Daven	Bathroom	A mask
5. Magid	Breakfast	Facebook	Breakfast
6. Rachtza	Daily Daf	Daven	With Friends
7. Motzi	Parsha	(In pajamas)	In-person school
8. Matzah	Seder	Ice cream	Learning
9. Maror	Shiur	Zoom Shiur	B'chavruta
10. Korech	Lunch	Netflix	Fresh air
11. Shulchan Orech	Machshava	Twitter	Full days
12. Tzafun	Run	Dinner	Life is all
13. Barech	Dinner	Clubhouse	Figured out
14. Hallel	Clean up	More ice cream	Smiling from
15. Nirtzah	Fall asleep	Pass out	Ear to ear

The list continues below...

([And, a recording can be accessed here.](#))

Seder of My Soul in Pandemic Life (Told in eight parts)

Part I	Part II	Part III	Part IV
These days	Yet I struggle	A full year	<i>Min ha'</i>
Feel so	To pull	Has gone by	<i>Meitzar</i>
Similar	My head away from my phone	And so much	My soul
Each day	Netflix	Has changed	Cries out
A fresh start	Facebook	I'm married	Broken
To be	The social	Now	In pain
Lazy	Dilemma	But Poppa	The crack
I want	It hurts	Is gone	Invites
To be	I struggle	I want	The light in
Productive	I want	To move on	Find strength
To make	To cry	I want to grieve	Rise up
The most	And make	But I feel	It's okay to cry
Of the	Sense of	Trapped	Nothing is
Blessings	This	Like I can	More whole
I have	Chaos	Not breathe	Than a broken heart

Part V	Part VI	Part VII	A Reimagined Seder Yomi
So I search	Each day	We try	Wake up
For that breath	Brand new	To make sense	Smile
That peace	A chance to	To put chaos	Each day
Of mind	Restart	In order	Is a gift
That chance	I can	But life	I'm so
To free	Break the loop	Is not	Grateful
My enslaved	Of un-	That	To be
Soul	Productivity	Simple	Alive
I must	And embrace	Man plans	Next to
Be strong	My heart	God Laughs	My love
I must grieve	The light and the dark	That's just the way it goes	My heart wears no mask
I can	It's in	All I can	Breathe deep
Move forth	My hands	Pray for	It'll be okay
Facing	To let my soul	Is order	Even if you don't know
Reality	Go free	In my heart:	What's next...

Five Seders

Baila Eisen Teitelbaum

Passover 2016

My Shul Rabbi from home insists that students in Israel must observe a two-day holiday at the bookends of Pesach rather than one. At this time, my year in seminary, I am struggling to find an easy, organized Jewish identity - an identity that I don't have to struggle for. Even though I've only spoken to Rabbi Goldberg twice, I want him to anchor me. I want to have a Rabbi to whom I can direct halachic questions, like my other seminary friends do. So I decide to celebrate the two-day holiday. All of my friends are going hiking on the second day of Pesach; I'll be conducting a second Seder at my friend Einat's house.

Einat lives in the central district, near the ocean. Palm trees line the streets, and the air is heavier than it is in most of the country, heavy with the moisture of saltwater. As Einat drives us home from the bus stop, she rolls the windows down. We turn a corner and I point ahead and say, “The sea is that way, right?” Einat laughs. “Yes. How did you do that?” “I can smell it,” I say. Is that really possible? I wonder. I was born and raised in Florida; this is my first Pesach away from home. It's funny to be in a place that feels more like home than anywhere else in Israel, when my family is so far away.

The seder table is crowded with guests, all of them family except for me, Amital, and Leah - three of Einat's American friends from seminary. Einat's father is loud and moves through the seder quickly, throwing toys to her sister's

children when the plagues roll around: frogs leap through the air, followed by plastic cows. Einat's grandfather has dementia. Every few minutes, he says, “What are we up to? Why did you skip the last page?” At first, Einat's father is patient: “We already said that part, Abba. Okay, we can say it again.” But soon he becomes impatient: “Abba, we already said it! No, we're up to here,” and he turns the pages of the old man's Hagadah for him. “Here, I'll say it for you,” he says, mumbling as quickly as possible to hurry his father-in-law along. Magid is the long stretch of seder before dinner, and with small, potentially whiny children at the table, Einat's father wants to hurry. Einat's grandfather grows more flustered, telling his son-in-law not to rush the Seder. The rest of the table is alive with chatter; they must be used to Saba's antics by now. I feel sad for the old man, but even though I have experience caring for elderly people with dementia, I can't think of anything to do to help him - I'm all the way at the other end of the table, and it would be impolite to ask to move. I try to ignore him, like everyone else is.

We go to sleep late on full stomachs. The next day flies by, and soon the family is making havdalah and helping me set up for my second seder. I make kiddush for the first time and eat leftovers. My friends wander in and out, singing along with me and laughing at how funny it is to be done with the holiday when I am not. It's nice to have them around, and I don't feel lonely. At some point, they facetime whoever is hosting Pammy, another lone American celebrating the

second day, and try to get the two of us to say hello to each other; we both pointedly ignore the phone while trying not to giggle. Me and Pammy, alone in our solitary holiday, but accompanied by our silly friends.

Passover 2017

My first year of college in Manhattan - not Israel, but still far away from home. My roommate Sarah is from Teaneck, New Jersey, a short drive from campus. The short drive is irrelevant to us, though; we take the subway up to the jitney, a quaint, miniature bus that leaves from the George Washington Bridge. Getting to Sarah's house, a twenty-minute journey by car, takes us an hour and a half. I decide that it's worth it to experience the jitney, which is occupied exclusively by Jews and Hispanics and has a special ambiance set by the driver's Mexican dance music. Teaneck is beautiful, with huge trees and even larger houses. It seems that everyone walking down the street is Jewish. Sarah's house has a basement guest room with its own bathroom, where I stay.

By this point, I'm vegetarian. A week before the Seder, Sarah's mother worriedly asks me if I eat fish. When I say yes, she orders me about a dozen salmon fish patties from a kosher lepesach catering service nearby. That's what I eat the whole time I'm there, along with salad and matzah with cream cheese. It's not bad.

I light candles before Sarah's mother does, so that I have time to daven mincha going into sundown. I feel a little uncomfortable saying the blessing next to her empty candlesticks, but at this point taking time to daven is more important to me than a sense of holiday unity.

This first year out of seminary, I am strong in my Jewish practice in ways that I haven't been before. I am also struggling to find my place in the in-town, Modern Orthodox world that I am encountering for the first time.

Sarah's family is small; she and her twin brother, Ben, are the only siblings. For the Seder, her uncle, a traditional Jew with a loud, witty sense of humor, shows up along with his wife and one of his two kids. He and Ben liven up the table with jokes and raucous laughter. Sarah's father, a small, quiet man, beams at them across the table. While the two could not be more different from each other, it's easy to see that he admires his boisterous son.

When it's time to sing Ma Nishtana, the youngest at the table, Sarah's shy teenage cousin, doesn't step up to the plate. "Come on, Ben, you're the youngest in our family," Sarah's mother urges. "Mom, just by a few minutes!" Ben says, rolling his eyes. "Okay, fine, I'll do it. But you all have to help me out." He starts in a low, very off-key voice: "Ma nishtana halailah hazeh...come on guys, let's get singing here. Dad? I know you want to sing, Dad, you look so excited." Reluctantly, we all join in: "Mikol haleilot, mikol haleilot." None of us are very good singers - in fact, all of our voices mingle to create a sound kind of like a creaky chair - but there's something fun about everyone doing Ma Nishtana together. Throughout the night, there is lots of laughter. At around midnight, the extended family drives home, and I, full of salmon patties and matzah, go to sleep.

Passover 2018

My sophomore year of college. By this point, I have started seriously “questioning” or “struggling” - two of Modern Orthodoxy’s favorite euphemisms for that particular, universal experience of wondering if God doesn’t exist and religion is totally pointless, and why we’re doing all this anyway. I prefer the Hebrew term, “mashber.” I am experiencing a shattering, a breaking. I deliberately rip toilet paper on shabbos. I eat non-Kosher cheese. That summer, I will break my fast on Tisha b’Av, and I’ll put on pants for the first time and walk down to the Kotel wearing them. But the best part of my mashber, and the part that has stayed with me to this day, is that I have begun to drift towards the Conservative community. So for Passover 2018, I find myself joining my friend Shoshi at her traditionally Conservative family’s house.

Shoshi’s family is warm and fascinating. Her mother is a veterinarian who takes home all of the animals at her clinic that are beyond hope, and names them based on the Jewish holiday nearest to their birthday. Among others, a traumatized greyhound named Dayenu, recently rescued from the racecourse, runs skittishly around the house, and an unfriendly and mentally ill dog with a stent in his brain named Shemini wanders around in circles in his favorite bathroom. To accommodate this veritable zoo, Shoshi’s two-story New Hampshire home is big-boned, with (at my count) three living rooms filled to the brim with comfortable couches and blankets that invite a nap at all times of the day or night. Shoshi’s father is from South America, and speaks with a noticeable accent. The entire

family is brilliant - all of her grandparents and both of her parents went to college and graduate school, and they value education highly. The Seder table is packed to the gills with all sorts of guests, family and friends blurring together. The table extends well out of the dining room and makes an L-shape, leaving room for another five people near the front door. This is where Shoshi and I and our friend Daniel, who also came for the holiday, sit and giggle and drink abundant amounts of fruity wine with some strangers or family members who are close to our age.

Shoshi goes to JTS, a Conservative Jewish seminary that has a dual program with my school. As the Seder progresses, Shoshi’s grandpa shouts down to us (he has to shout because we are so far away), “Let’s hear from our future Rabbi! What are they teaching you over there? Share some Torah!” Familiar words at any holiday table, but I am shocked to hear them spoken to a woman. This is a new experience for me, much more exciting and dangerous than the idea of driving on Shabbos or eating dairy out. Like any Yeshivah boy, Shoshi is prepared for the question. She stands up and begins to speak, shouting over the crowd of tipsy voices. She shares a beautiful, complex Dvar Torah. She speaks eagerly and lovingly, as someone who is a “nerd about this,” as she would say - as a Talmid Chacham in training, as a person whose soul yearns for Torah. By the end, many of the guests are bored and not listening, but her grandpa shouts, “Good job!” I am awed. My friend is a miracle, and I never knew.

Passover 2019

It is a four-hour drive to Silver Spring, Maryland. I take the bus there with my friends Maya and Rana, twin sisters. On the bus, they fall asleep on each other’s shoulders. Very cute. I take a sneaky picture and send it to my boyfriend, Louis.

It is my younger brother Asher’s freshman year at the University of Maryland, a twenty minute drive from Maya and Rana’s house. I haven’t had Passover with a family member since 2015, so I am eager to invite Asher to join me. But there’s one problem: Asher is no longer interested in Judaism. When he left home, he removed his kippah and has refused to step foot in the Hillel since he arrived on campus. I am still on my own Jewish journey, so I am understanding. I don’t want him to be Orthodox if that isn’t right for him. But Asher was born on Passover, when I was three years old. One of my earliest memories is holding him in my arms after drinking a Kedem grape juice box on the ride over to the hospital. Every year until I left home, I would make him a special kosher for Passover chocolate cake for his Hebrew birthday. I am sure that no matter how he feels about religion, he will join me for Passover, the universal Jewish holiday, a time of family and connection.

That year, Passover is Friday night. Asher texts me that Friday night is the time when he goes drinking with his friends, so he doesn’t want to come. My mom gets involved. She offers to pay for his uber over to my friends’ house and back. But he remains ambivalent. A few minutes before the holiday starts, I call Asher. “Please come,” I say. “It’s so close, just a twenty minute

drive. It’s free. Please.” “Maybe,” he says. “If I went, it would just be to make mom happy. But you don’t understand, Baila. Friday night is for hanging out with friends. I look forward to this all week.” I jump in: “You can hang out with your friends every week. It’s Pesach! Asher, these people are super chill. They won’t judge you. They’re not like the people in Boca. I promise it will be fun. The food here is so good!” He hesitates. “Maybe I’ll come. What time again?” “7:30,” I say. “But you can come whenever. We’ll be here all night. You can come late. No one cares.” “Maybe,” he says again. I turn off my phone and go downstairs to light candles. I know that he won’t come, but I don’t want to admit it to myself. My friends make personalized place settings for everyone, including one for Asher with a drawing of a Rubik’s cube. Asher has incredible Rubik’s cube skills. I tell the family not to wait for him. But I wait for him. I want him to come so badly. 7:30...8:30...9:30...the plate with the Rubik’s cube place setting remains empty.

Maya and Rana’s family is made up of liberal, intellectual Modern Orthodox Jews. Their mother is a professor of Jewish philosophy, and their father runs a startup to make homes more environmentally friendly. Their younger sister Selah is a high schooler who spends the day before Passover preparing for Model UN. The guests are all intellectuals too. A professor of French poetry comes with his wife, who is also a professor. Our friend Josiah, a philosophy major at our school, shows up with his parents, both professors. Another close family friend, Marla, who comes with her daughter, is a professor of Jewish studies and sexuality. Being at this seder is a little like being in a seminar class at school.

As we read through the Hagadah, people offer commentary and hot takes, emotional responses and historical connections. Some people have brought additional texts to read, which add nuanced commentary to the traditional Magid. The more people drink, the more insightful they get. This is the most thoughtful seder I have ever been to, and I enjoy myself immensely. At 12:30 am, I follow Maya upstairs to her room and snuggle beneath the blankets on her air mattress. I think about telling Maya: I wish Asher had come. But she is already asleep.

Passover 2020

My senior year. My now-fiancé Louis and I flew down to Florida the first weekend of my spring break, because my mom wanted to throw us an engagement party. Louis was supposed to stay for the weekend, then fly back to New York for school on Monday. But over the weekend, both of our schools announced that they were moving online for the rest of the semester. Neither of us had packed clothing to last more than a couple of days. A weekend visit turns into a week, a week turns into a month. Louis has met my family briefly before, but now he becomes one of us. He plays chess with Asher, who is also home for spring break. He has philosophical conversations with Shmuel, a junior in high school. He jokes around with Meir, the youngest. He and my dad have long talks about obscure Jewish topics. He joins my mom for her nightly walk. I am thrilled. When we got engaged, we made the decision to become each other’s family. But we barely knew each other’s siblings and parents. This COVID-induced stay feels so much more real, so much more natural than getting married in a familial vacuum, his relatives in

California and mine in Florida while we plan a wedding in New York. I am especially happy to have Louis join me at my first seder at home in five years, my first seder back with my family.

It has been a long time, but in many ways everything is the same. My dad make dukeh, the Yemenite version of charoset. My mom cooks steak, and I make shakshukah. We set the table with lettuce leaves interspersing the china plates. We put out the seder plate. We get out my dad’s Yemenite Hagadahs with their beautiful illustrations. We drag the couches over to the table so that everyone can lean comfortably. My mom and I light the candles together, singing the blessings out loud in the familiar tune. We all sit down: just us, just family.

“This is my first Pesach with you guys in five years,” I announce. My mom looks surprised. “Has it really been that long? I can’t believe it.” “It’s been a good time,” I say. “I’ve been some interesting places.” But as we begin Magid, taking turns reading the ancient words in Hebrew and English, I know: it’s good to be home.

Havdalah

Intentions for a Pesach Havdalah

Raffi Levi

In the tractate of Arachin, page 10a, the Talmud relays to us the times during holidays in which we say a full Hallel.

It states:

שמונה עשר ימים שהיחיד גומר בהן את ההלל:
שמונה ימי החג, ושמונה ימי חנוכה, ויום טוב הראשון של פסח, ויום טוב (הראשון) של
עצרת; ובגולה עשרים ואחד: תשעה ימי החג, ושמונה ימי חנוכה, ושני ימים טובים של פסח,
ושני ימים טובים של עצרת.
מאי שנא בחג דאמרי' כל יומא, ומאי שנא בפסח דלא אמרינן כל יומא? דחג חלוקין
בקרבתיהן, דפסח אין חלוקין בקרבתיהן.

There are eighteen days a year on which the individual completes the full hallel: The eight days of Sukkot, and the eight days of Hanukkah; and the first festival day of Passover; and the festival day of Assembly, i.e., Shavuot. And in the Diaspora, there are twenty-one days: The nine days of Sukkot; and the eight days of Hanukkah; and the first two festival days of Passover; and the two festival days of Assembly, i.e., Shavuot. What is different about the festival of Sukkot, that we say hallel every day, and what is different about Passover, that we do not say hallel every day, but only on the first day? The days of the festival of Sukkot are distinct from one another with regard to their additional offerings, as the number of bulls offered changes each day of Sukkot (see Numbers 29:12–38). (Since each day is unique, the full hallel is recited on each day.) By contrast, the days of Passover are not distinct from one another with regard to their additional offerings (see Numbers 28:24), (and therefore the full hallel is recited only on the first day.

So why do we have a different kind of Hallel on Succot than on Pesach? Because they require different kinds of korbans (sacrifices). But why is the korban for Pesach concentrated on one night according to the Torah, whereas Succot is a daily korban?

Perhaps what makes Pesach unique is that it is momentous, it is one night, one korban, one seder (in theory at least, though not outside Israel), and it radiates as one moment throughout the Holiday. The Pesach Seder is the centerpiece of the holiday, just as the Seder Plate is the centerpiece of the Seder. Succot, by contrast, is many moments, it is a celebration which revolves around always creating many moments of joy. I think this is because they are different kinds of celebration. Sukkot is about a development of happiness, which requires regular tending to. Every day we must express joy. Pesach, by contrast about developing that immediate sense of freedom and joy. It is about a moment of freedom. Breaking away from the shackles of Egyptian oppression was, in the immediate experiential sense, like flicking a switch. In a moment, our freedom was given back to us! A collective moment, and a moment of gathering, of ingathering through freedom. Pesach is about switching from slavery into freedom.

As we enter into Havdalah on this first Seder night, let’s remember not only to distinguish between the holiness of Shabbat and the holiness of Pesach, but that essentially, Pesach is about creating a fundamental and immediate shift. It is a concentrated kind of gratitude-sacrifice for freedom. May we be able to enter into the Pesach seder with a fundamental, concentrated Havdalah, Distinction, and by doing so make this moment holy and special.

Ha Lachma – This is the Bread of Affliction

The Beginning of Maggid: An Open Invite to Partake and Share?

Ilana Bauman

מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות?

How is this night different from all other nights?

Every year we ask this same question. This year, everyone seems to be asking another question.

מה נשתנה הפסח הזה מכל הפסחים?

How is this Pesach different from all other Pesachs?

This Pesach is definitely not what we are used to. The situation we are all currently experiencing has led us to think about the world in ways that would not have previously - we have been gaining different perspectives, noticing different nuances, asking different questions. I have looked at the way we celebrate Pesach with a totally different lens this year. It has led me to deep and different

understandings of this holiday, and has given me the opportunity to think of questions I have never considered before. I encourage all of you, as you continue with your Seder, to ask questions, offer interpretations, and look at our story through your own lens, through a different lens. Embrace that this Pesach is unlike others. And on that note, I’d like to share with you a question I am asking this year.

My favorite line in the entire Haggadah is in the opening paragraph of the Maggid section of the Seder. This year, I am just not sure how I am going to say it.

הָא לַחֲמַא עֲנִיָא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אַבְהֵתְנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְמִצְרַיִם.
כָּל דְכָפִין יִיתֵי וְיִיכַל. כָּל דְצָרִיד: יִיתֵי וְיִפְסַח.
הַשְׁתָּא הָכָא, לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה בְּאַרְעָא דִּישְׂרָאֵל.
הַשְׁתָּא עַבְדֵּי, לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה בְּנֵי חוּרִין.

This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.

All who are hungry, let them come and eat. All who need, let them come and have Pesach with us.

Now we are here, next year we will be in the land of Israel.

Now we are slaves, next year we will be free people.

All who are hungry? All who need? Let them come? How can we say this line truthfully this year? How can we begin Magid with this line in a genuine way this year? The Haggadah, our tradition, the telling of the Exodus from Egypt - all of these are supposed to be timeless. For that reason, I am confident that this line must also be; we may just need to change the way we are thinking about it. So I ask you - how do you understand this line of our Haggadah this year? And I encourage you - raise this question at your Seder table and see what you come up with! I would love to hear your thoughts.

I asked this question to a number of dear friends and mentors, and here are some of the notable insights they shared. I bring these points from our conversations not because they fully answer this question, but in the hopes that they spark further questions and discussions at your Seder table. Agree with them, challenge them, take their ideas and make them your own. This is the true beauty in the Pesach Seder.

- By asking how we can say “let them come” if we cannot actually let them in, we make the assumption that the main point of an invitation is for someone to walk through the door. Perhaps that is an incorrect premise. Perhaps the main point of an invitation is not for it to be received, but for it to be sent. Welcoming others is part of our Jewish identity, ingrained in our communal values, Pesach tradition, and Haggadah text. Just because we cannot extend an invitation this year, does not mean we, as a community, have to lose our core value of

welcoming others in. The heartfelt desire to invite, the pain we feel when we need to uninvite, those are testament to how deeply rooted looking out for one another is in our tradition. While we cannot physically welcome guests into our homes this year, we can share a warm and sincere “I wish I could invite you to my Seder.” That act shows the true heart of the Jewish people.

- *What value do we gain through the act of inviting others, regardless of their response?*
 - *What does it mean to act wholeheartedly? How can we ensure our actions are heartfelt?*
 - *In what other contexts is welcoming others part of our Jewish identity and tradition?*
- The offer to invite someone to come means that we have somewhere for them to come to and we have something to offer them. On Pesach, we are meant to be celebrating our freedom from slavery, our transition as a nation from destitution to affluence. The ability to invite people over is a luxury - we have what to offer, so we give. That only further emphasizes our freedom.
 - *What is something special that you have? What is something special you can offer?*
 - *How does it feel to have something? How does it feel to share something?*
 - What are we inviting people to? Let’s look at this line of focus in the context of the sentences surrounding it. We introduce the bread of affliction, welcome others to take part, and then express our hope for the future - next year in Israel, next year as free people. With this paragraph, we are not just inviting people to join us for a meal, we are inviting people to join us on a journey through our story. Will you go through this process with us? Through every step of the story? Through the affliction of slavery and through the celebration of freedom? That is our invitation. Whether someone is with us physically or not, it makes no difference. The Jewish people experience life as a whole, and we experience it together. We experience the full story, the downs and the ups and the downs and the ups, as a united front and a united people. With this introduction to Magid, we welcome each other into that communal experience.
 - *How can we experience something with someone else if we are not physically together?*
 - *Why might we invite others to join in our downs and in our ups, and not just our ups?*
 - *When did you join someone in experiencing their ups or downs? What made you join them?*

I encourage you not to take these suggestions at face value, but to delve into them, and into your own ideas. Let them spark your own questions, interpretations, and conversations. I invite you to join me in engaging with our story. Chag Sameach! Have a wonderful Pesach!

1. “Kol Ditzrikh - All Who Are in Need”

R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, cited in *A Night to Remember: The Haggadah of Contemporary Voices*

Although they may initially seem redundant, the two invitations we issue in *HaLakhma Anya* - “Let all who are hungry, kol dikhfin, enter and eat” and “Let all who are in need, kol ditzrikh, come and celebrate the Passover” - in reality are not. *Kol ditzrikh* means those who are in need - but not in need of bread. Whoever is in need of bread, *dikhfin*, is hungry. *Kol ditzrikh* refers to one who is alone, who has a lot of Matza and wine but no home or family. There are indeed many ways to be included among the *kol ditzrikh*. The invitation to “all who are in need” is not *yeitei ve’yekhol*, “to eat with us;” rather, it is to spend the Pesach with us, *yeitei v’yifsaik*, to celebrate with us.” It is an invitation to unfortunate and lonely people....

HaLakhma Anya is the renewal of a pledge of solidarity among the Jewish people - solidarity between individual and individual, and between the individual and the Jewish community as a whole. It is a proclamation that we are one people, and that we are ready to help one another. Pesach night is a time of sharing; if the sense of solidarity, responsibility, unity and readiness to share and to participate are not manifested and demonstrated, the whole Seder becomes meaningless.

- Jews all over the world are reciting the Haggadah, alone yet in solidarity. For a moment, close your eyes and imagine several different people you know calling out, “All who are in need, come and celebrate Passover”. Now imagine someone you don’t know extending this invitation.
- R. Soloveitchik speaks of a sense of responsibility. Describe one act you have already taken or will take this Passover to discharge the responsibility to “*kol dikhfin* - those who are hungry” and/or “*kol ditzrikh* - those who are in need”.

The Duality of Matza

Ilana Bauman

(To discuss at the beginning of Magid; during Pesach, Matza, and Maror; or when eating the Matza)

הָא לַחְמָא עֲנִיָּא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם.

Ha Lachma Anya. This is the bread of affliction. That our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt.

מַצָּה זוֹ שֶׁאֵנוֹ אוֹכְלִים, עַל שׁוּם מָה?

Matza Zo She'anu Ochlim, Al Shum Ma? This Matza that we are eating, for what reason?

Because our ancestors' dough was not able to rise before Hashem redeemed them.

Our Matza seems two-faced. On the one hand, matza is the bread of affliction, the simple, unleavened bread that is eaten by a slave or someone who has less. On the other hand, matza is the bread of liberation, the bread that had no time to rise amidst our sudden redemption, eaten by someone who is hastily moving onward with their lives to a stage free from oppression, a stage of freedom. What meaning can we make of this dual identity of matza?

As we think back to last Pesach and try to process the year that we’ve had, matza can provide us with an important frame for reflection. This has been a year of anxiety, pain, and unimaginable loss, a year of overwhelming uncertainty and sadness, a year of polarization and disconnect, a year of expectations falling short and needing to embrace the unknown no matter how scary. This has also been an year filled with hope in which we have shown incredible support for one another, a year filled with aspirations for a future that can be better than where we are right now, a year of genuine love and care for one another, a year of longing for connection and building connection, a year of strength, perseverance, and resilience. Our year seems two-faced as well, and we know both faces accurately describe our experiences. How is it possible that a year characterized by troublesome darkness can simultaneously be characterized by uplifting light? This year, like most years, has not been a year of sadness or happiness, of hopelessness or hopefulness, but a year in which we have grown to sit with the feelings of both despair and joy, of frustration and appreciation together, at the same time. We have learned, more than ever, the importance of the duality of the matza.

The matza teaches us that we need not view our experiences as a dichotomy - either this or that, but as a dialectic - both this and that. Thinking of matza as either the bread of affliction or the bread of liberation ignores a key part of understanding the story of the Jewish people, our story. On the seder night, we do not only focus on our freedom just as we do not only focus on our slavery. These experiences are in conversation with each other and build off of each other, and that unsettling yet truly authentic coexistence is not only what makes our story so meaningful, but also what empowers each of us, *בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר*, *b’chol dor vador*, in every generation, to view ourselves as though we ourselves have left Egypt, from slavery to freedom, having experienced both affliction and liberation. The matza, the bread of affliction and liberation, is the one object which represents both experiences, and our task is to figure out for ourselves how to settle in that overlap and relate to the coexistence.

With that in mind, I encourage you to ask the following questions to the people at your seder table, or create your own questions! Engage in the story of Pesach by engaging in your own story and the stories of the people around you. You may find that the Pesach story really is part of us in every generation, *בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר*, *b’chol dor vador*. Have a wonderful Pesach! Chag Sameach!

- *Matza as the bread of affliction: What is an experience you have had this year that was difficult, unsettling, or unexpected?*
- *Matza as the bread of liberation: What is an experience you have had this year that was uplifting, hopeful, and filled with love?*

- *Matza as both: In what ways has this year been difficult and challenging? In what ways have you pushed yourself to be strong, brave, and resilient? Can you describe the experience of being both down in the depths and also in the process of rising up?*

The Four Questions

Thirty Questions

Lavi Teitelbaum

How different is this night from all other nights!

1. ... for on all other nights, we eat *hametz* or *matzah*; on this night, only *matzah*.
2. ... for on all other nights, we eat all kinds of vegetables; on this night, *maror*.
3. ... for on this night we actually do eat all kinds of vegetables (parsely, potatoes, what have you), but we ask a question that makes it sound as if we don't.
4. ... for on all other nights, we don't even have even one appetizer with a dip; on this night, we have two.
5. ... for on all other nights, we pour the dressing on the salad; on this night, we put the salad in the dressing.
6. ... for on all other nights, we have ranch dressing or vinaigrette; on this night, salt water and *haroset*.
7. ... for on all other nights, we would never eat parsley by itself; on this night, we even say a *bracha* on it.
8. ... for on all other nights, mom tells us to please sit up straight at the table; on this night we are all reclining.
9. ... for on all other nights, we only wash our hands for bread; on this night, we also wash our hands for vegetables.
10. ... for on all other nights, we always say a *bracha* when we do *netilat yadayim*; on this night, we only say a *bracha* the second time.
11. ... for on all other nights, we ask questions about things that happened already; on this night, we ask about things that haven't happened yet.
12. ... for on all other [shabbat and holiday] nights, we say *hamotzi* on two loaves; on this night, two and a half.
13. ... for on all other nights, we put bread in the freezer when we want to save it for later; on this night, we hide it behind the couch.

14. ... for on all other nights, we pour ourselves wine when we're ready to drink it; on this night, we pour way in advance.
15. ... for on all other nights, we clear the table only after we're done eating; on this night, we clear it before we even start, and then reset it again a minute later.
16. ... for on some other nights, we say *kiddush* early, before sundown; on this night we make sure to wait until it's dark.
17. ... for on all other nights, we are careful not to spill our wine; on this night, we spill sixteen drops.
18. ... for on all other nights, we don't say *hallel* at night; on this night, we say *hallel* at least once (with possible exception of Yom HaAtzmaut).
19. ... for on all other occasions on which we say *hallel*, we make sure not to talk in the middle; on this night, we eat a whole meal!
20. ... for on all other nights, we complain about the state of Jewish education; on this night, we celebrate it.
21. ... for on all other nights, we have two cups (one for *kiddush*, one for *birkat hamazon*); on this night, four cups.
22. ... for on all other nights, we are told not to eat too many carbs; on this night, we are told to eat more and more.
23. ... for on all other nights, we put salt on our bread; on this night, *haroset*.
24. ... for on all other nights, we try hard not to contradict ourselves; on this night, we tell our children, “we may not eat an afikoman after the Pesach meal” but then tell them that we can't finish the seder until we've eaten the “afikoman.”
25. ... for on all other nights, *matzah* is *matzah*; on this night, we need *shmura*.
26. ... for on all other nights, our house is pretty clean; on this night, it is *very* clean.
27. ... for on all other nights, we finish off our meal with any kind of desert we like; on this night, only *matzah*.
28. ... for on all other nights, we read out of a *benscher* or a *siddur*; on this night, a *haggadah*.
29. ... for on all other Jewish holidays that entail strange customs, we don't make a point of getting kids to ask about them; on this night, we get kids to ask questions for which we don't even have answers.
30. ... for on all other nights, we _____; on this night, _____ (fill in the blank with your own additions!).

Addendum: A Classification of Strange Things we do at the Seder

In my mind, there are five levels of strange things we do at the seder. At some risk of generalization, these are listed in the historical order in which they were added to the seder.

Level 1: Strange Things with Straightforward Answers.

Why do we only eat *matzah*? Because it says so in the Torah and it’s a big part of the Exodus story. Why do we have an extra dipping vegetable? Because there’s a mitzva to eat maror. Why do we only eat roasted meat and not boiled? Because we are eating the Paschal lamb (this one no longer applicable). The original strange seder customs had straightforward reasons.

Level 2: Strange Things with Strange Historical Answers.

Why do we all recline? Well, we don’t really, but it’s because we’re free people. What does being free have to do with leaning? Something about Roman dining customs? The second level strange seder customs were once not strange at all, but became strange as we moved forward in time, for example forgetting how Roman citizens would eat their festive meals.

Level 3: Strange Things with No Answers at All.

Why do we take away the seder plate and then put it back? Why do we pour the second cup of wine way in advance? Just to be strange - that’s all. So the children will ask.

Level 4: Strange Things with Technical Halakhic Answers.

Why do we wash our hands twice, and once without a *bracha*? Because of an antiquated *halakha* that we no longer trust enough to say a *bracha*, and because we might get distracted by the seder and forget to keep our hands pure. Why do we dip in salt water? In memory of the tears of the slaves! But originally it was just because there’s no particular reason to dip in *haroset*, and the only technical Halakhic obligation is to use a liquid dip.

Level 5: Everything is Strange.

These days, when everybody at the seder has a *haggadah* in front of them, nothing is a surprise. Why do we lean to the left? Because the *haggadah* tells us to. Why do we break the middle matzah? Because the *haggadah* tells us to. Why do we wash our hands without a *bracha*? Because the *haggadah* tells us to. For many Jews, it’s just as bizarre to wash with a *bracha* as without one. This is the opposite of the child who does not know how to ask; we now can ask about the whole shebang! How different is this night from all other nights, for on this night we do a truckload of strange Jewish stuff!

The Fifth Question: Pandemic Pesach

Leah Oppenzato

On other Pesachs we gather for our seder, celebrate in person, and break matzah together. Why this year do we celebrate together yet apart?

Once we were slaves, now we are free. Free people have choices. Our choice is to take care of the most vulnerable by sheltering in our homes to stop the spread of this modern-day plague. This great communal act of *gemilut hasidim* — lovingkindness — has the power to split the sea and free us once again. Our tradition tells us that to save even one life is to save the entire world.

השאלה החמישית: פנדמיה בפסח

בכל פסח אחר אנחנו מתכנסים לסדר, חוגגים יחד באותו חדר, ואוכלים מצה יחד. למה השנה אנחנו חוגגים הפעם יחד בנפרד? פעם היינו עבדים, עכשיו אנחנו בני חורין. לבני חורין יש האפשרות לבחור. בחירתנו היא לדאוג לפגיעים ביותר בינינו בכך שאנו תופסים מחסה בבתינו כדי לעצור את התפשטות המגיפה המודרנית הזאת. מעשה גדול זה של גמילות חסדים יש בכוחו לקרוע את הים ולהוציאנו שוב לחירות. המסורת מלמדת אותנו שהמציל נפש אחת כאילו הציל עולם ומלואו.

— Hebrew translation by Avi Gold

We Were Slaves in Egypt

**"For it is in the arena of education
that the battle for the good society is lost or won."¹**

Sofia Freudenstein

The beginning of the Maggid section of the Haggadah is the outline for why we are doing what we are doing at the Seder table. It is the answering of the *Ma Nishtana*, the four questions that

¹ Rabbi Sacks

help what the Seder is really all about. We describe how we were slaves in Egypt and the labour we endured.

Then, the answers and storytelling completely shifts. We zoom out of the specific storytelling of leaving Egypt, and see another time in history in which this story is being re-told. We become spectators to the seder conversations of Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Tarfon, who were reclining in Bnei Barak in a post-Temple time period. We hear not about the storytelling itself, but instead how it went about; all-night, captivating, and lively. Then, we are privy to one specific piece of Torah and storytelling shared:

אָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן־עֲזַרְיָה הָרִי אֲנִי כְּבֹן שִׁבְעִים שָׁנָה וְלֹא זָכִיתִי שֶׁתֵּאמַר יְצִיאַת מִצְרַיִם בְּלֵילוֹת
עַד שֶׁדַּרְשָׁה בֶּן זֹמָא...

Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya said, "Behold I am like a man of seventy years and I have not merited [to understand why] the exodus from Egypt should be said at night until Ben Zoma explicated it...

Why is this the Torah shared with us, and how does it help us with our own storytelling of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, in order better to understand the true purpose of this holiday?

In order to better understand this piece of Torah, I think it is important to note initially how it is shared. Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya describes himself as being "like a man of seventy years." What exactly does this mean? Close readers of the text might recognize this description - it is a direct reference to an *aggadah* in Masechet Berakhot 27b-28a. Rabban Gamliel has just been kicked out of the Beit Midrash, after continuously shaming Rabbi Yehoshua. Who would be able to replace such a Torah giant, and not only that, but teach a completely different ideology of Torah learning? Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya is chosen. At first glance, it might seem unclear why he is chosen. However Rav Benny Lau in his analysis of Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya's succession explains that he is chosen due to his more accessible stance on Torah. This is exemplified in the detail in the Talmudic text that Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya is a direct descendant of Ezra the Scribe, one of the greatest democratizers of Jewish text. Ezra wrote the Torah in the more colloquially understood Amaraic letters script and enforced weekly Torah readings in addition to the Shabbat readings.² The only flaw in Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya's fresh leadership style is that he is too young! His wife expresses concern that at his young age of 18 years old, the other Rabbis would look down on him. In response, a miracle occurs and white hairs appear in his hair and beard. The Gemara continues, a circular reference fashion back to our statement in the Haggadah: "**That explains that which Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya said: I am as one who is seventy years old and he did not say: I am seventy years old**, because he looked older than he actually was" (Berakhot 28a).

What is this reference to the story in Berakhot coming to teach us about the Seder? The Seder is about a story of freedom from slavery. One of the most important parts of becoming a free nation is

² Rav Benny Lau, Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua + Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya in *Sages Vol. II*

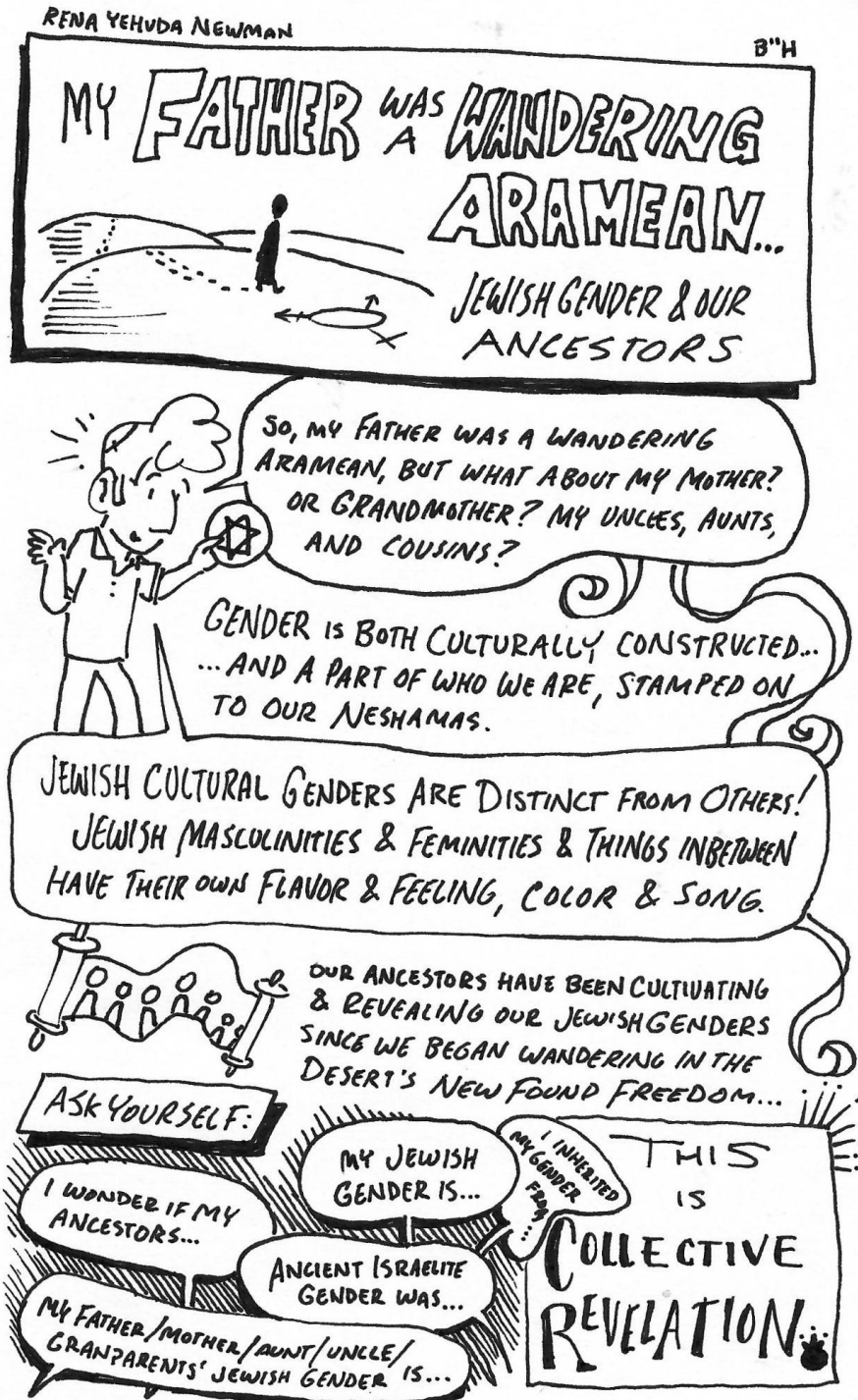
ensuring the education of the people through empowering younger generations to be interested in learning the story, as seen through the built-in structure for children (or any Seder participant!) to ask questions. Implicitly within this empowerment, comes the value of democratization of knowledge. *Anyone* is able to ask questions, and thereby gain knowledge, even the bad children and the children who do not even know how to formulate questions properly! This is a value truly embodied in Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya’s appointment to the head of the Beit Midrash due to his lineage from Ezra, and even further on in the story when he decides to let in more students than Rabban Gamliel ever did (Berakhot 28a). It is even exemplified in the story of the Haggadah itself - Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya is not afraid to admit that even he has more to learn about the story of the Pesach Seder which Ben Zoma points out to him!

No matter age or learning background, Pesach is a time of free people, and free people must, as Rabbi Sacks zt”l said, “never forg[et] that freedom is a never-ending effort of education in which parents, teachers, homes and schools are all partners in the dialogue between the generations.”³ Through the example of Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya’s approach as Ezra’s descendant to the opening the Beit Midrash doors and his unabashed curiosity to continue learning and growing, may we be blessed with a Pesach that is educational and open to all those coming to join.

³ Rabbi Sacks, Covenant and Conversation for Parshat Bo 5773 <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-bo-freedoms-defense/>

My Father Was a Wandering Aramean: Jewish Gender and Collective Revelation

Rena Yehuda Newman



Ve-hi She'anda – God Stood by Our Ancestors and by Us

Vehicles of Action: Fighting Avdut with the Freedom of Faith

Raffi Levi

The pandemic has taught us so much about what it means to fight for freedom, from protest to protest, from the Black Lives Matter movement to refugees at the border to this very vulnerable moment, Stopping Asian Hate. Recently, there has also been a rise in the unchaining Agunot (women whose ex-husbands refuse to give a Jewish divorce document called a “Get”), as social media moves with great mobility to stop abusers from manipulating others through the Halachic system. During a moment where physical action is more difficult to take than ever, people are, paradoxically, noticing the struggles of our society more acutely than ever. Why does this denial of our regular life, this very limitation, become the point at which movements for justice have become filled with agency and success?

Furthermore, the question for me is, how do we get there? How do we build a movement, not only collectively, but also in ourselves. How do we become activists for a cause – a spiritual cause? A social cause? A cause for healing my own heart, or growing into myself as a person? How do we break free from the chains of oppression, and also, how do we build the faith to fight for ourselves? How do we build the

confidence to go out and bring justice and order into our chaotic and disparate world?

One of the modes of freedom in Jewish thought seems to be that of the freedom of faith. We have the freedom to choose our faith and create a fellowship with the Other, with God. Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits describes our relationship with God as requiring the ability to deny God. This radical shift towards freedom of choice is what makes our relationship not only possible, but truly meaningful and worth developing. [At this point, I would like to acknowledge that Berkovits uses highly gendered language that befits his social context. Yet, I believe his language is referring to, and applicable to, all people.] Berkovits says,

“The encounter [between God and human beings] is significant because **it happens between God and a person who is free to be himself...** By an act of divine self-denial, man is made free to deny him. In order to be encountered, man must possess his own self worth with a measure of freedom; and if so, he is also free to refuse the encounter. **But it is because of such freedom that the encounter becomes a fellowship.** The act of divine self-denial is the precondition of the

fundamental religious experience." (God, Man, and History. 36)

God denies Godself in this world in order so that we can choose God. So therefore, if we have faith, and make that choice, we not only have a knowledge of god, but we have a relationship that we are building, which gives us responsibility and a sense of concern. Without that faith and choice, would our relationships, with God or otherwise, be so meaningful? If we don't have faith in one another, and in ourselves, how do we move forward with action? How else, if not with faith, do we develop an authentic fellowship with our Creator and all the Creator's creations?

I would like to argue that having the very choice of faith is what gives us faith; and faith is

the root of our responsibility, both in our relationship with God, and our relationship with life, the people around us, and the challenges that face us as people. We can become activists, we can mobilize, when we choose to have faith, and when we confidently put ourselves into a relationship with the movements we care about. We must embrace complexity of the challenges that lay ahead of us, and hold ourselves accountable with confidence, and in that dance, we must also proclaim faith, in something bigger, in the things that move us, and in the need to uplift all those alienated voices and victims of oppression. May we truly go from *avdut*, slavery, to *cherut*, freedom, by choosing faith, and choosing the good and righteous paths in our lives.

Queen Esther's Seder Night

Zachary Beer

It oftentimes feels like there's a familiarity to history. We seem to experience some similar events again and again, no matter what the historical setting. This feeling is certainly apparent in Jewish history. As Ramban, or Nachmanidies, famous wrote "מעשה אבות סימן לבנים", the acts of the fathers are a sign to the children.

Although they predate Ramban, the sages of the Gemara take this idea even further. As they write, many events in Jewish history are not just similar, but occurred at similar times in the year, stating:

רבי יהושע אומר בניסן נברא העולם בניסן נולדו אבות בניסן מתו אבות בַּפֶּסַח נולד יצחק בראש השנה נפקדה שרה רחל וחסנה בראש השנה יצא יוסף מבית האסורין בראש השנה בטלה עבודה מאבותינו במצרים בניסן נגאלו בניסן עתידין ליגאל

Rabbi Yehoshua says: In Nisan, the world was created; in Nisan the Patriarchs were born; in Nisan the Patriarchs died; on Passover, Isaac was born; on Rosh HaShana Sarah, Rachel, and Hannah were remembered by God [and conceived sons;] on Rosh HaShana Joseph came out

from prison; on Rosh HaShana our forefathers' slavery in Egypt ceased; in Nisan the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt; in Nisan in the future, the Jewish people will be redeemed in the final redemption.

(TB Rosh Hashana 11a)

This idea is also true regarding two of Judaism's greatest stories of redemption- those of Purim and Pesach.

In both, a Jew ends up in the royal palace by some happenstance- Be it by floating down the river or winning a beauty contest. In their new royal roles, they have the ability to be shielded from the existential threats to their people- In the form of Pharaoh and Haman.

However, these two leaders, Esther and Moshe chose to step up in moments of crisis, intervening and risking their own lives. This point of action would, in both cases, lead to the redemption of the Jewish people.

These two events also lead to revelation as well. In the case of the Exodus, it was at Sinai. In the case of Purim, the Talmud describes that:

“וַיִּתְּצֵבּוּ בְּתַחֲתֵית הַהָר”, אָמַר רַב אֲבָדִימִי בַר חַמָּא בַר חֲסָא: מְלַמֵּד שְׂכַפָּה הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת הַהָר כְּגִיגִית, וְאָמַר לָהֶם: אִם אַתֶּם מְקַבְּלִים הַתּוֹרָה מוּטָב, וְאִם לֹא – שֵׁם תְּהֵא קְבוּרַתְכֶם. אָמַר רַב אֲחָא בַר יַעֲקֹב: מִכָּאן מוֹדְעָא רַבָּה לְאוּרְיִיתָא. אָמַר רַבָּא: אַף עַל פִּי כֹן הַדּוּר קַבְּלוּהָ בַיּוֹמֵי אֲחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ, דְּכַתִּיב: “קִיְמוּ וְקַבְּלוּ הַיְהוּדִים” – קִיְמוּ מַה שְּׁקִיבְלוּ כְּבָר.

And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet God; and they stood at the lowermost part of the mount” (Exodus 19:17). Rabbi Avdimi bar Hama bar Hasa said: The verse teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, overturned the mountain above the Jews like a barrel, and said to them: If you accept the Torah, excellent, and if not, there will be your burial. Rav Aha bar Ya'akov said: From here there is a substantial caveat to the obligation to fulfill the Torah. Rava said: Even so, they again accepted it willingly in the time of Ahasuerus, as it is written: “The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them” (Esther 9:27), and he taught: The Jews [willingly] ordained what they had already taken upon themselves.

(Shabbat 88a)

There are many other parallels, but there is one glaring difference that makes these stories differ.

In the Passover story, the Israelites celebrate Passover for the first time, at the original Seder, on the fourteenth day of Nisan. It is on this night that the firstborn of Egypt are slayed by God, and the people are finally let go.

However, in the Purim story, something else is going on that night . As the Midrash describes:

וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר לְהִשִּׁיב אֶל מְרֹדֶכַי (אסתר ד, טו), אֲמַרְהָ לוֹ לֵךְ כְּנוֹס אֶת כָּל הַיְהוּדִים הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן וְצוּמוּ עָלַי וְאֶל תֹּאכְלוּ וְאֶל תִּשְׁתּוּ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים, אֱלֹהֵי יִי"ג וְיִי"ד וְיִי"ו בְּנִיסָן.

שָׁלַח לָהּ וְהָרִי בָהֶם יוֹם רִאשׁוֹן שֶׁל פֶּסַח, אֲמַרְהָ לוֹ זָקֵן שְׁבִישָׁרְאֵל, לָמָּה הוּא פֶּסַח. מִיָּד שָׁמַע מְרֹדֶכַי וְהוֹדָה לַדְּבָרִי, הִדָּא הוּא דְכֹתִיב: וַיַּעֲבֵר מְרֹדֶכַי וַיַּעַשׂ כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוְתָהּ עָלָיו אֶסְתֵּר. תִּמְנָן אֲמַרְיִן שְׁהַעֲבִיר יוֹם טוֹב שֶׁל פֶּסַח בְּתַעֲנִית.

And Esther said to respond to Mordechai: She said to him, "'Go and gather all of the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast for me - do not eat or drink for three days' - these are the 13th, 14th, and 15th of Nisan." He (Mordechai) sent to her, "Behold, in them is the first day of Pesach." She said to him, "The Elder of Israel, what is Pesach for?" Immediately, Mordechai understood and conceded to her words. That is [the meaning of] that which is written, "Mordechai passed and did like everything that Esther commanded him." There they say, that he passed the holiday of Pesach in a fast.

Rather than being saved on the first day of Pesach, on the night of the Seder, the Jewish people were fasting, hoping for redemption.

Instead they found redemption a mere day later.

As the Megillah records, on the evening of the fifteenth day of Nisan, Esther invited Ahasuerus and Haman to her party. However, it goes out of its way to note one particular dish served.

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר בְּמִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן מַה־שָּׂאֵלָתְךָ וַיִּנָּתֶן לָךְ וַיִּמַּה־בְּקִשְׁתְּךָ עַד־חֲצֵי הַמַּלְכוּת וַתַּעַשׂ:

At the wine feast, the king asked Esther, "What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half the kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."

(Esther 4:6)

Much like at the Seder, wine was central to Esther's meal. It was through this meal that the redemption of the Jews began.

Esther’s meal, perhaps, represents the original “Second Seder” in Jewish history. She did not recount the story there necessarily, but rather reenacted it in exile, acting as Moses while her husband and Haman took on roles a Pharaoh.

It was after this Seder that-

On that night the king could not sleep...

בַּלַּיְלָה הַהוּא נִדְדָה שְׁנַת הַמֶּלֶךְ

(Esther 6:1)

Not merely could Ahasuerus not sleep, but on that very night, the second Seder night, God himself could not sleep, as the sages record. God remembered His intercession on behalf of the Israelites centuries ago, and knew He had to act once again. At this moment, the redemption of the Jews of Persia began.

We have faced one Passover in the midst of pandemic, and now we are to face another. Hopefully our Seders, both those of the original Exodus and of Esther alert the Holy One, blessed be He to our great needs down on Earth. And may God, like in Egypt and Persia intercede on our behalf.

The Story of Going to Egypt and Becoming a Nation

I Have Bled in the Telling

Levi Morrow

I have bled in the telling, Yes
I have bled in the telling

Little drops spilled
Over the edges of
My narrative history
Fall the truth and the lie and I live
Red words broken cracked
On a flat white fate
The sharpened edges of a story

I have spoken in the bleeding, Yes
I have spoken in the bleeding

Turned my body into words
My love into songs for
Lords and ladies leaning
Into the story turning
The pages living

The rush of the song
That the songs sing
The too too much of the table
As I bleed in the telling

Yes it hurts
But I was born to bleed
In the telling
The story of my birth
The bodying of
The hurt
The heart
The only-half
The holy

The Plagues

Perhaps, Hakol B’seder

Leah Nerenberg

It is a story The very first Seder took place under the darkness of night, with the fear of a plague, enslaved, in Egypt. No one was freed; no one had begun to experience the miracles that awaited them. And yet, it was a Seder. It was B’seder. It was okay.

During Maggid, when we recite the Ten Plagues, we remove ten drops of wine from our glasses. The wine is there to remind, or maybe even command us, to remember the suffering of the Egyptians - not the people committing genocide, but the silent bystanders, or the people who saw the injustice and didn’t have the power to stop it. Once removing the ten drops, we drink the remainder of the second cup, representing the word וְהַצַּלְתִּי - God has *saved us* from slavery.

Perhaps this somewhat strange ritual is performed to remind us of a complex yet intrinsically human idea. We must drink our wine. Yet, we cannot drink the full glass. Spilling ten drops represents the broken, scarred, unjust aspects of our world. And we must remember them, honor them, create space for them, and actively work to fix them. And immediately after, we drink our glass of wine to honor our freedom, our lives and our blessings.

The challenge of last year’s Seder was having the courage to admit that we weren’t

okay. We were alone, lonely, scared and confused. Our reality was new and unknown. We struggled.

So maybe the challenge of this year’s Seder is to acknowledge that we are okay. That after a year of a changed reality, we are beginning to accept it and learn how to live in it. That we are able to move on from continuous suffering to a different world, and be okay.

The order of the Seder puts us in order, allowing us to experience a new world while simultaneously experiencing a familiar ritual process. There is order to the world even if we struggle to recognize it. The earth continues to spin even when we feel like our world has stopped.

The cups of wine we drink encourage us to realize our freedom. Our cup may not be overflowing with joy or gladness and there may be ten (or more) drops missing, but there is wine in it. That is enough to pause and remind ourselves:

We are okay. Hakol B’seder.

Is the Plague Over?

Sara Aviva Teitelbaum



If God had not Split the Sea for Us – Dayenu

Speaking Our Way To Freedom: The Sea Split Open

Jeremy Tibbets

It is a story as cryptic as it is tragic, and due to these two qualities, nearly impossible to make sense of. In preparation for the Pesach holiday, the Arizal *zy”a* was teaching his students about a parable for the splitting of the sea in the Zohar. There is a ewe, tells the Zohar in Beshalach 52b, who cries out when the world needs compassion. When it comes time for the ewe to give birth, its womb is too small and it is unable to do so. God, hearing its cries, sends a snake to bite it, opening up its womb and allowing it to give birth. After telling this story, the Arizal said *baruch dayan ha’emet*, the traditional response to hearing the news that someone has passed away. He explained that R. Shimon bar Yochai, the teller of this parable in the Zohar, concludes with the request that no one attempt to understand this parable, and for violating this, his son’s life would be taken. That night, the Arizal’s son fell ill and passed into the next world.

R. Chaim Vital *zy”a* in *Sha’ar HaKavannot Drushei Pesach* #12 attempts to make sense of this story. He suggests that this scenario is a microcosm for the Pesach narrative. When the Jews stood at the banks of the Red Sea with nowhere to go, all of their heavenly and earthly enemies began to surround them. Although they had witnessed miracles which overturned the

natural order numerous times, they once again found themselves fear-stricken. Their cry arose to God who descended into the narrow space to redeem them one last time and to allow them to be saved, with Moshe’s staff, once transformed into a serpent, biting through the sea and splitting it open. R. Chaim Vital warned that any who attempt to uncover the secrets of Torah in a time of narrowness, a time of *katnut*, risk becoming victims of the snake’s bite.

This explanation could understandably seem curious to an attentive reader. Weren’t the Jewish people in the ultimate narrow place as they escaped Egypt? Why would they fare better than the Arizal who was only teaching about this experience? I want to turn to three commentators on this initial story in the Zohar to weave together an answer not only to these questions, but also to gesture towards one understanding of the text’s secret.

In *Ohr Yakar* Beshalach #8, R. Moshe Cordovero *zy”a* offers his explanation of what the snake is: “the *kelippot* (literally husks, the negative energies) and accusers... who seek to draw life from the decree a little bit.” The unholy elements of the world approach in desperate hunger to feed. This act turns out to be productive for Bnei Yisrael and they are saved because of it. The very beings which originally

meant them harm inadvertently protect them. Paradoxically, it is the closeness and engagement with the *kelippot* which allows for Bnei Yisrael to be saved.

The Rebbes of Komarno did not see this as an accidental occurrence. In *Zohar Chai*, the commentary on the Zohar by the second Komarno Rebbe, the subversion of the *kelippot* to serve Bnei Yisrael’s interests is considered an intentional act: “through the intensity of the light of the Infinite, everything is connected and unified, shedding its form to be literally connected to the absolute Nothingness, and this is called *zivug* (intercourse)... God’s will is revealed in every world... and the snake bites off the garments and adornments of the *Shekhina*, calling out from the narrow place... and the dry land can be seen.” Before the snake’s bite, there is a moment where “God’s will is revealed in every world.” The *kelippot* are not only biting at holiness to be sustained. They are revealed to be acting in accordance with the Divine will, and in this regard even their harsh act becomes an act of holiness in a certain sense. This is put succinctly by the third Komarno Rebbe in his *Damesek Eliezer* where he writes that “you can understand through this how everything is unified, one, singular, and interconnected, from the highest level of *Atzilut* down to the bottom of the void of this world.” Nothing is separated or cut out of the chain of being that structures this world, not even that which seems antithetical to the good or the holy. All of it can be a vessel for the Divine will.

The Ramchal *zy”a* in *Adir BaMarom* seeks to understand how the *Sitra Achra*, the unholy hosts, can be turned to our side. He believes that holiness and unholiness are both rooted in God’s

name, and that ultimately, “they are only drawn from the punctuation of it, and so they must subdue to holiness and praise God in holy glory.” The way that this is brought about is actually through the opening of the mouth: “they embody the secret of the mute dove, enclosed on all sides in front of the snake.” It is through the *peh sach*, the speaking mouth, that the unholy is drawn into alignment with the holy. The ewe’s cry awakens the snake’s aid; our crying out to God brings even the *kelippot* to our side.

The power of Pesach is the power to tell your story. We do not attempt to exclude the negative or unseemly parts of the Exodus narrative, just as we do not wish to downplay the miraculous and extraordinary elements. The Seder is a night to grapple with all of it even if we do not know where it will lead us. We must speak about it in order to understand it. The only path forward is through.

The mystical understanding of the splitting of the sea teaches us that we can gain a new perspective on the hard parts of our lives by speaking them through. In a year where so much has changed and so much bad has happened in front of our eyes, I feel tempted to have a Seder which only focuses on the good. I want to experience revelations like Yechezkel did when confronted with the *ophanim*, the wheel-like angels, literal divine gears in the universe’s structure. In *Yalkut Shimoni* Beshalach #247, it is taught that even the most simple folks saw greater revelations at the splitting of the sea than Yechezkel ever did. Through openness and connection with others, we uncover new reasons for the world’s machinations and can find new

ways to move forward and be changed. This is the way to freedom.

One of my favorite teachings is brought down in the name of R. Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern *shlit”a* in *Likutei Yam HaChochma* Vol. 1 pg. 402: “One must speak with God about everything that happens to them like a person speaking to a friend, because everything that occurs to a person is a story which is derived from the tales of ancient days, and a person’s life is a complete story. Therefore, everything which

occurs to a person is Torah.” On Pesach, the holiday in which each of us “is obligated to see ourselves as if we left Egypt” (Mishnah Pesachim 10:5), we all have unique experiences and understandings to bring to the table. As we tell our collective story this Pesach and reflect on our own life’s story, I bless you (and myself) with a new lens to see our life’s story and to find new pathways, previously covered over, ready to lead us to the freedom we need.

Pesach, Matzah, Maror

We Will Do and We Will Listen: The Spiritual Journey from Pesach to Shavuot

Sam Arnold

Throughout the last few months when we, the Jewish people, were reading Sefer Shemot (The Book Of Exodus), my religious school students were hard at work creating and illustrating a Sefer Torah depicting the main ideas and events found within each Parshah. It took a lot of work, however, if you named an item like Matzah, every student for the most part, was able to explain two things:

1. What is Matzah
2. Why is Matzah Significant?

As someone that has the goal to be a Jewish Educator, there is nothing more beautiful than eagerly watching your students enjoy sharing Torah with the world. However, as I was

looking back at their project, I realized there may have been a universal life lesson that was missed.

When the Seder takes place, there are a lot of questions. Tradition teaches the youngest person at the Seder table asks the four questions to represent the idea that one should start learning at the earliest of ages. We question what child of the four are most like ourselves, but, really we are made up of all of their qualities. But, of all the questions that are essential to ask during the Seder, the one that stands out is: What is the meaning of the Matzah that we eat? The answer that is given in the Haggadah is: “The Matzah is to remind us that before the dough which our ancestors

prepared for bread had time to ferment, the supreme king of kings, the Kadosh Baruch Hu, revealed themselves to them and redeemed them. The Torah states: So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders (Shemot 12:34).” However, while this answer is viable, the Matzah is so much more than that because when you change the letter “A” in Matzot (the plural of Matzah), it becomes Mitzvot, yielding the idea that “You shall observe the Mitzvot.” Mah Yafeh, how beautiful that this flat (dare I say bread) reminds us that we have Mitzvot to fulfill on a daily basis!

The second night of Pesach, we begin the journey of counting the Omer and making our way towards the holiday of Shavuot. Now, focusing on the wandering after Sinai, the Kabbalists teach that there are forty two stops along the way. The number forty two represents Hashem’s name. Therefore, when

each stop occurred along the journey, there is this idea that it was a spiritual elevation. From one stop to the next, the Israelites were becoming holier.

Therefore, *Chevre*, the lesson that was missed, was that as fun as eating Matzah and celebrating Pesach is, the holiday sets us up to receive Torah and commit ourselves to living Jewishly and following Mitzvot. Just as when the Israelites made it to Sinai and pronounced: “*Naaseh V’Nishma*: We will do and We will listen” so too, during Pesach and the time of the Omer, we need to focus on how we can continue to build a spiritual journey full of obligation, happiness, meaning and Joy so that by the time Shavuot rolls around, we too can accept Mitzvot and state “*Naaseh V’Nishma*: We will do and We will listen.”

Chag Kasher V’Sameach: A Zissen (Sweet) and Joyous Pesach from my family to yours!

Next Year in Jerusalem

Pandemic Passover

Karolyn Bengier

Passover is an opportunity to connect each generation with each other and to our roots as a people. This holiday connects the Jewish nation through the Seder, the order of the meal, and the re-telling of our liberation. Perhaps that is why Passover is observed among American Jews more than any other Jewish holiday.

Yet, this year we still cannot have guests. We cannot share in the joy of connecting with our history, our people, or each other.

Here we are celebrating a holiday whose sole purpose is to connect our people through history and we are unable to come together ourselves. This feast highlights the ten plagues and we are stuck in the midst of a modern-day one. A festival articulating the birth of our nation and we are forced to celebrate as individuals.

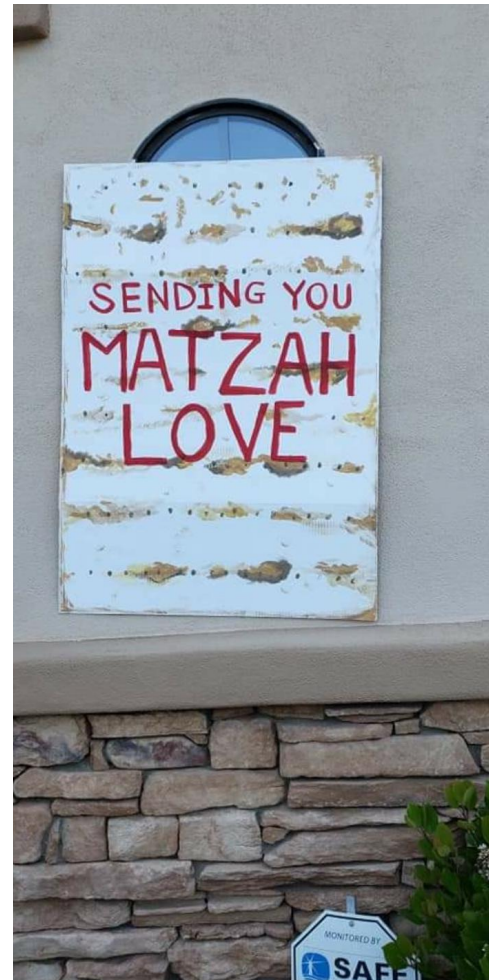
Worse, we've been doing this for a year! America began our lockdown around this time last year and after twelve months of social distancing the strain of the pandemic is taking its toll.

Not having guests for Shabbat and Yom Tov, not hanging out at community events, zooming into each other's lives instead of meeting in a shared space has caused strain.

So what do we do with our second Pandemic Pesach? How do we make this holiday meaningful, relevant, and joyful??

Giving to others always brings me joy. I'm helping those in need by providing matzah and meals to help lower income families make Passover. But this doesn't alleviate my sadness of not being together for the Seder.

I tell myself I need a change in attitude. By thinking differently about the experience I may be able to overcome my feelings toward it. No, it's not the same experience and no, it's not what I'm used to but maybe that's the point.



Covid highlighted many problems and inequalities in our society which I hope will now be addressed. I am certain a post-Covid world will be different from the one before it and a new normal will be established. Why not apply this same lesson to myself? What are the silver linings about a pandemic passover?

Rather than hosting numerous people I can focus on my children, hearing their thoughts and insights about the seder. Instead of exhausting myself preparing for guests I can delight in relaxing before the holiday. I will not spend a fortune on passover food and I will make much less food.

Of course, this doesn't change the root cause of my frustration: I'm tired of the pandemic. I'm frustrated by the isolation. I'm angry about it being disregarded by so many, resulting in mutations and more time spent social distancing and isolating.

This pandemic has taught us some powerful lessons, if we choose to learn from them. First and foremost is that we are all connected. We are not isolated in this world; our actions affect others. We need each other. We are social creatures and we need our communities.

And what better time to highlight the importance of community and connection than on Passover, the birth of our nation?

Passover is when our people, united through genealogy, became a true nation. We overcame oppression and took back our liberty. We didn't act alone; we did it together. Passover is the story of our collective redemption. It is not only a story of Moses, it is about all of us struggling together to achieve our freedom.

Passover was never meant to be celebrated in isolation. For example, we say “all who are hungry, come and eat”. This is a communal event!

Yes, today we are physically apart, yet our connection is much deeper than physicality.

We are drawn together across history, continents, over a thousand years of persecution, hope, and redemption. Passover is one of many stories of our collective redemption, survival in the face of persecution. Collectively, we are strong and we survive.

This year we are alone but next year we will be together.

Genocide Never Changes

Rahima Mahmut (World Uyghur Congress)
& Sheldon Stone (Stop Uyghur Genocide)

[\[To read more from Jewish Movement for Uyghur Freedom's Pesach page click here.\]](#)

Genocide never changes! It may take different forms in different generations, the victims may vary, but the means and motives seldom differ. We don't often talk about the genocide aspects of the bondage in Egypt. We emphasize the slavery, in the Haggadah and our daily prayers. We talk of our going-out "from servitude to freedom!" But make no mistake, there was an attempted genocide,

through preventing births. Initially, the Egyptians commanded midwives to kill the Hebrew baby boys, but they refused (Shemot 1:16), so the Egyptians threw the baby boys into the Nile (Shemot 1:22). Presumably, the baby girls were later to be wives or concubines to the Egyptians, ensuring the Hebrew culture and nation died out. The midrash has it that the men who were working as slaves were not allowed to return home at night, but were to sleep where they worked, so that they could not co-habit with their wives and procreate (Shemot Rabbah 1:12).

The similarities with the Uyghur Genocide are clear. Women face forced sterilization and abortion, even of late-stage fetuses, with the midwives killing babies that survive. There is forced marriage of young girls to Han Chinese men. The Chinese government’s “becoming relatives” policy gives Chinese communist party officials the opportunity to live with Uyghur families of men detained in camps or enduring forced labour, and to share beds with their wives. Some of the decline in Uyghur births is attributed to these men, being unable to return home and have the opportunity for procreations.

The motives are similar too. The Hebrews were "an abomination", even when Joseph was alive, because they did not worship the Egyptian deity (Rashi to Bereshit 43:32). Later they were seen as subversive, likely to fight against the Egyptians and eventually leave the country altogether (Shmot 1:10). The Uyghur people’s Muslim faith in something other than the Chinese Communist Party is seen as "extremism." Uyghurs are regarded as "terrorists" and “separatists." The Chinese government portray them as “malignant tumors,” compare their faith to mental disease, and urge the Party faithful to implement genocidal policies, telling them “You can’t uproot all the weeds hidden among the crops in the field one-by-one; you need to spray chemicals to kill them all.”

There may be one difference though. We know of no Hebrew diaspora of exiles who had fled or settled elsewhere, who could not return, who had no news of friends and family, and who feared trying to contact them would see their dear ones punished for consorting with foreign powers. My last conversation with my brother was in January 2017. He asked me to leave them in God’s hands. Under sophisticated hightech surveillance, our family members do not feel free or safe in their own homes. They are watched all the time, with cameras every few yards using facial recognition and by artificial intelligence to racially profile. Their mobile telephones monitored, with voice recognition technology to recognise the voice of the person to whom they speak.

The Passover Seder ends in the hope that the Jews will next year be free in their homeland. This year, Jews across the world join the Uyghurs, in their own daily prayers that one day they too will be free, and in action together to achieve this.

Recipes



Pesach Banana Chocolate Chip Cake

Leora Lupkin

Leo's Passover banana-chocolate chip loaf

Tools

Big mixing bowl

Electric mixer or spoon (big)

Spatula

Bread pan



Ingredients

2 ½ cups of cake meal

1 cup chocolate chips

4 bananas sliced

6 egg whites

1 cup of sugar

1 ½ teaspoons of cinnamon

½ cup margarine or oil

Instructions

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Place the cake meal, margarine, and egg whites in the bowl. Mix on low until it well mixed. Then add the cinnamon and sugar and mix until blended. Lastly add the chocolate chips, and bananas. Mix on medium level. Pour your mixture in to the bread pan (use spatula if needed) then put in the oven for 45 min. (if it is not totally cooked by then keep it in for another 25 min.)

Enjoy!