



Here are seven different moments or practices for you to consider adding to your Pesach celebration.

Blessings for a sweet and liberating Pesach for you and for the world!



1. One moment actually begins before Pesach, on this coming Shabbat, **Shabbat HaGadol**.

As the Haftarah, traditionally we read the last passage from the Prophet Malachi (last of the Prophets), who says (speaking for God):

"Here! -

*I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of **the great and awesome day of YHWH***

- And he will turn the hearts of parents to children and the hearts of children to parents,

lest I come and strike the earth with utter destruction."

In a number of congregations, some follow the reading of this passage by first VERY briefly speaking of the **environmental dangers** now facing the earth.

Then call all the children under 13 to the front of the congregation, turning to face and be faced by the congregation, and ask the older generation to recite and then the children to respond, the following:

"And I myself will become Elijah the Prophet, to turn the hearts of children and parents toward each other so as to turn aside from our lives the danger that the earth be struck with utter destruction.

- I pledge that I..."

And then ask them to fill in silently what they will do. This could also be done upon lifting up the Cup of Elijah at the Seder, after reading the passage from Elijah.



2. Some years ago, Rabbi Martha Hausman proposed that a special plate be set aside next to the traditional Seder plate, on which could be placed physical objects brought by every participant in the Seder as a **symbol of their liberation THIS YEAR** from *Mitzrayim*.

Mature learned Jews, children, and people who have never before attended a Seder can all relate to this, and the stories about the objects on the **Freedom Plate** become a very powerful part of the Seder.

The custom can be introduced soon after the Seder begins, to ask those present to begin lifting and explaining their freedom-object. For example: one year it was a just-completed 500-page book for one person, a single gold coin that another's father had brought out of Germany as a last-ditch economic prop in case destitution were descending; for another, a watch (about liberation from rigid time-rules; for another, nothing - as an "object" of freedom from the rule that something should be brought.

Alternatively, one might use either the passage:

"In every generation one rises up against us to destroy us," or -

"In every generation every human being must look upon her/himself as if we ourselves, not our ancestors only, come

forth from slavery" as times to raise up the Freedom Plate and hear its stories.

3. For many, one of the worst Pyramidal/Pharaonic oppressions in our lives is being driven into **overwork**, and the **spiritual and emotional exhaustion** that follows.

Here is a poignant example: The NYTimes has reported that schools are increasingly abolishing recess time in order to get the children to do more work. This is a form of slavery. As the article noted, the possibility of "wonder" is being squashed. the opposite of Heschel's teaching that the root of all spirituality is "radical amazement."

So we could add the following to the Seder, perhaps after the passage, "*In every generation, there is one who rises up against us, to destroy us.*"¹

Today we face a new kind of *Mitzrayim*, the Tight and Narrow Place.

Freedom without jobs is a bitter joke - yet many of us find our jobs dissolved, downsized, disemployed.

Jobs without freedom are slavery - yet many of us are forced to overwork.

Our jobs exhaust us.

When Moshe faced the Burning Bush, He learned that like an eternal burning bush, Time itself is not consumed, though each instant vanishes to open the way to the next.

Things of space seem permanent - but as we seek to make them into our servants, they may enslave us.

When the Israelites went forth from slavery, they sought time for rest and self-reflection:

They found Shabbat.

Rather than live under the tyranny of space and overwork, we will in our lives set apart a time for freedom.



4. Benjy Ben-Baruch of Ann Arbor has suggested a new practice for Ashkenazic households that are not yet ready for a total break with the prohibition on rice and beans.

A prohibition that has been denounced by leading *Masorti* (Conservative) authorities in Israel as propping up the differences between the two communities and even an atmosphere of Ashenazic superiority.

The proposal is that along with Elijah's Cup there be **set aside a small plate of rice or beans** not for eating but for observing. (Its presence does not *treyf* up the table or the house AT ALL, since all agree this is not *hameytz*.)

"This dish of rice is to symbolize our hope for **respectful pluralism** among all Jews, and our intention to cross over all meaningless boundaries between us, while honoring our distinctive customs."



5. The Orange on the Seder Plate.

Origins of the Orange are shrouded in the mythic mists of the 1980s: according to one tale, a women who spoke on women in the rabbinate and the equalization of other forums was rebuked by a man who said, "Women belong on the bimah like an orange belongs on the Seder plate."

Thus the story may have originated in a practice of some Jewish lesbians of setting 'bread' on the Seder plate as a symbol of affirming lesbianism, though understanding it as transgressive of Jewish tradition. But

¹ Some of the imagery is a paraphrase of a passage from "The Sabbath" by Abraham Joshua Heschel.

others responded by saying that the full inclusion of lesbians and gay men in all of Jewish life was a fulfillment of Torah, not a transgression. So something new should be brought to the Seder plate, but not something that violates it.²

But regardless of the origins of the Orange, it has come to stand for the **freedom and equality of women and people of all sexual minorities in Jewish life**, and implicitly of how the achievement of that freedom is already changing Jewish practice.

The Orange also is the only whole fruit on the Plate, and so carries within itself the seeds of its own future as Torah carries within itself the seeds of change.

The traditional practice is, either in response to someone's independently raising the question, "Why is there an Orange on the Seder plate?" or by raising the question deliberately (as a fifth question, or in pointing to the items on the plate just before the meal) to answer with any or all the answers above.



6. For many years, we have hoped we would no longer need to ask these **additional questions** at the Seder table. Sadly, we see that we still must.

FOUR MORE QUESTIONS A Passage to be Read in the Passover Haggadah (Perhaps After the Tale of the Five Rabbis in B'nei B'raq)

Let us therefore tonight expand upon the story of our deliverance from slavery by asking:

- Why is this Pesach night different from every other Pesach night?

Because on every Pesach night - as well as tonight - we call out to another people, "Let our people go!"

But tonight we also hear another people Calling out to us: "Let our people go!"

Tonight the children of Hagar through Ishmael and the children of Sarah through Isaac call out to each other:

We too are children of Abraham!
We are cousins, you and we!

As Isaac and Ishmael once met at *Be'er LaChai Ro-i*, the Well of the Living One Who Sees,

So it is time for us to meet
- Time for us to see each other, face to face. Time for us to make peace with each other.

They met for the sake of their dead father, Abraham;

We must meet for the sake of our dead children - Dead at each others' hands.

For the sake of our children's children, So that they not learn to kill.

And so tonight we must ask ourselves **four new questions**:

a. **Why does the Torah teach:**

"When a stranger lives-as-a-stranger with you in your land, you shall not oppress him. The stranger who lives-as-a-stranger [*hager hagar*] with you shall be as one of your citizens; you shall love her as yourself."?

Because *Hagar Hamitzria* [Hagar the Egyptian] was a stranger in your midst, and "because you were strangers in the Land of Egypt."

b. **Why do we break the matzah in two?**

Because the bread of affliction becomes the bread of freedom when we share it.

Because the Land that gives bread to two peoples must be divided in two, so that both peoples may eat of it.

² See Rebecca Alpert's excellent book, "Like Bread on the Seder Plate."

So long as one people grasps the whole land, it is a land of affliction.

When each people can eat from part of the Land, it will become a land of freedom.

c. **Why do we dip herbs twice, once in salt water and once in sweet *haroset*?**

First for the tears of two peoples, Israeli and Palestinian;

then for the sweetness of two peoples, Palestinian and Israeli;

for the future of both peoples, who must learn not to repeat the sorrows of the past but to create the joys of the future.

d. **Why is there an egg upon the Pesach plate?**

It is the egg of birthing. When we went forth from *Mitzrayim*, the Narrow Place, it was the birth-time of our people, the People of Israel; and today we are witnessing the birth of freedom for another people, the People of Palestine.

When the midwives Shifrah and Puah saved the children that Pharaoh ordered them to kill, that was the beginning of the birth-time;

When Pharaoh's daughter joined with Miriam to give a second birth to Moses from the waters, she birthed herself anew into God's daughter, *Bat-yah*,

And our people turned to draw ourself toward life. When God became our Midwife and named us Her firstborn, Though we were the smallest and youngest of the peoples, The birthing began;

When the waters of the Red Sea broke, We were delivered.

So tonight it is our task to help the Midwife Who tonight is giving birth to two new peoples -

For tonight only Hagar can give a new birth to the children of Israel, And only Sarah can give a new birth to the children of Ishmael.

Our lives are in each other's hands. No Pharaoh can force us to kill.

7. Lev and Gayle Koszegi write that they were putting together their personal haggadah, and realized that the traditional *Maggid* [narrative] does not actually include a simple narration of the Exodus story, so they wrote this little song.

The Children of Israel!

[by the Koszegi Hillbillies, (c) 5760]

Come an' listen to a story /
'bout a man named Mo,
A Hebrew child raised /
by the daughter of Pharaoh, An' then one day /
an Egyptian beat a slave, An' Moses stepped in, /
the Hebrew for to save... (Struck the guard, killed him dead!)

Well, the next thing you know, /
ol' Mo is all a-feared. The Hebrews said, /
"Mo, run away from here!" Mo decided Midian /
was the place he oughtta be, And there he stayed, /
till he saw a burnin' tree... (God, that is... boomin' voice, majesty.)

God told Moses /
to go an' tell Pharaoh, "Time has come /
to let my people go!" Pharaoh just laughed, said, /
"You tryin' to pull my leg?" So Mo raised his staff, /
and God brought down the plagues... (Blood, that is... frogs an' lice, hailstones.)

Ten plagues in all, /
and the last was really bad: Slayin' of the first-born, and Pharaoh was a dad. He said to the Hebrews, /
"Go on! Get away from me!" So they loaded up their matzah /
and they headed toward the sea... (Red, that is... mighty wide, no way across.)

Pharaoh got all crazy /
and decided to attack. Mo raised his staff, /
and the waters, they drew back! The Hebrews walked through, /
just as dry as they could be, And Pharaoh's army chased 'em, /
but were covered by the sea... (Drowned, that is... chariots, riders, too)

The Mo's sister Miriam, /
she began to sing, And the womenfolk danced /
as she played the tambourine. Once we were slaves, /
but now we are free, And in every generation /
we recall our history... (The Children of Israel!)