Passover Haggadah
The Feast of Freedom
Editor's Note

It has been an illuminating experience to collaborate with Rabbi Max Routtenberg, Rabbi Wolfe Kelman and Rabbi Jules Harlow—a remarkable rabbinic triumvirate. Their erudition, their sensitivity and their insights have enriched page after page of this Haggadah. Special acknowledgments are due to Rabbi Harlow for his masterly stylization of the Arami oved avi text, and for his luminous translations of Birkat Hamazon, Hallel and Nishmat. Special thanks are due to Rabbi Bernard Raskas for enhancing the aesthetic dimensions of the Haggadah. I am indebted to Nina Beth Cardin for the prodigious diligence and dedication she has brought to the formidable task of coordination. And, above all, I am profoundly grateful for the creative contributions of my sister, Miriam Rabinowicz, who has added immeasurably to the cadence and clarity of the text.
Rabinowicz who accepted our invitation to become the editor of the Haggadah of The Rabbinical Assembly. The members of the Haggadah Committee found it a great joy to work with her. Her glowing spirit and her sparkling lyrical prose illumine every page.

It is our hope and prayer that this Haggadah, by helping to enhance our celebration of Pesah, will contribute to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Jewish experience through the centuries. May it strengthen our commitment to Judaism.

The Haggadah Committee
Max J. Routtenberg, Chairman
Jules Harlow Wolfe Kelman

Maht niichtahan? Why is this Haggadah different from all other Hag- gadot, from the estimated 3,000 editions that have been produced during the past 500 years? This one is different primarily because it is the first that faithfully reflects Conservative ideology.

Like all the liturgical texts of Conservative Judaism, it is deeply committed to preserving the classic tradition. At the same time, we recognize that a tradition remains alive and well when it evolves and adjusts, responding to new developments and developing new dimensions. So conservation and innovation are counter-balanced in order to present, clearly and compellingly, the perennially and universally relevant themes of freedom and redemption.

Five years ago we were charged by The Rabbinical Assembly to prepare a Haggadah. After two years of preparation, we issued a preliminary edition, for the express purpose of receiving "comments, criticisms and recommendations" from those who would use and study it.

We are grateful to the hundreds of rabbis and laymen who presented their views to us. Many useful comments and suggestions were submitted. We studied them carefully, and, after earnest consideration, made extensive revisions and rearrangements of our text. Certain passages were omitted; many new ones were added.

We have paid special attention to the presentation. This volume has been greatly enriched by the unique art of Dan Reisinger and the superb craftsmanship of our designer, Bernard Klein.

Even a brief glance reveals the degree to which we are indebted to the editor of the preliminary edition, Michael Strassfeld, for his novel arrangement of the material as a pedagogic device and his skillful use of rabbinic literature. This edition includes a number of his original commentaries. We are also indebted to Rabbi Avraham Holtz and Rabbi Yochanan Muff for their help with the style of the Hebrew texts.

We would like to express our appreciation of the supportive role played by presidents, past and present, of the Rabbinical Assembly: Rabbi Stanley Rabinowitz, under whose administration this committee was appointed; and his successors, Rabbi Saul Teplitz and Rabbi Seymour Cohen, who reappointed us and encouraged us in our work. We are equally appreciative of the wholehearted support of Rabbi Mordecai Waxman, current chairman of the Publications Committee.

The overall task of revision and rewriting was presented to Rachel
Introduction

Every individual should feel as though he or she had actually been enslaved in Mitzrayim and redeemed from Mitzrayim. Therefore, each of us should speak of our own Exodus—in the language that we understand, in the context familiar to us, and with the knowledge and experience that we have acquired.

For even if we were all scholars, even if we were all sages, even if we were all endowed with great wisdom, we would still have to use the language of our day in order to understand, to relate to and to explain the story of the Exodus. This Haggadah, while retaining the basic form and flavor of the traditional text, enables us to discuss the “going forth from Mitzrayim” in terms of our own lives and times.

The problems posed by the Haggadah are not purely linguistic or stylistic. Often texts are cited which seem strange and obscure to us. The challenge has been to create new interpretations, new midrashim, merging the old and the new into a coherent entity, a totality of character and content, a synthesis of prayer and praise, of poetry and picture and prose, a symphony of silence and song, one narrative without end, renewing itself over and again.

In a sense, the slavery and the Exodus were not one-time occurrences. They happen in every generation. Every life is a Hillel sandwich, commingling the moror of bondage with the matzah of redemption. Only for the Simple Child are slavery and freedom absolute. What is slavery? What is freedom? Are we not free? And are we not still enslaved?

At the Seder we hear these eternal questions reverberating through the ages: the sages of Bnei Brak in discursive discussions lasting until dawn, somber celebrants in the ghetto of Prague amid the grim gathering shadow of blood libel accusations. Marranos celebrating in stealth in Spanish cellars, inmates in the Bergen-Belsen death camp lacking matzah but beset by moror in its most bitter form, dissidents immured in Siberian prisons, and Jews in the Free World reeling at ease. We tell of events that happened centuries ago, and yet we talk of today, and we dream of tomorrow. Past, present, future . . . all become one before the One God of Israel on this night of nights, this night of watching, of looking back . . . and looking forward.

Consequently, accommodating the past while adapting to the present, this Haggadah includes the following features:

a) A guide to the requisite rituals, detailing how and why each ritual is performed. This allows people with minimal Jewish background to participate fully.

b) A commentary on the text, explaining passages and provoking questions, in order to engage all the participants.

c) Alternative readings to replace or to augment the text.

By design, in the interests of freedom and flexibility, more material has been presented than can be used at any one Seder, so that each gathering can create its own mood and highlight different aspects of the celebration. The text is central and traditional; the commentaries are supplementary and optional.

The festal meal is followed by a new section, another Maggid, marking the latest milestones in the far-flung travels of our people. Catastrophe and consolation: each generation must endure or witness this fate yet all too familiar cycle. Both the Holocaust and the rebirth of the State of Israel are mirrored here, for they shape our own Exodus from our own Mitzrayim. The translation attempts to fuse fidelity to the Hebrew text with a felicitous English rendering. However, Hebrew phrases and expressions which have no exact equivalents have been transliterated, not translated. A telling example is the use of Mitzrayim instead of Egypt. Mitzrayim can be related to the root צ-ר, narrow, meaning literally “from the narrows.” The violent vicissitudes of history have endowed Mitzrayim with broader connotations, so that it has come to represent repression and tyranny. Mitzrayim transcends the longitudes and latitudes of geography. Mitzrayim is every place and any place in the world where people have been (or still are) persecuted.

Finally, since Jews do not pronounce the ineffable name of God, as it appears in Hebrew, but substitute Adonai (“my Lord” or “my master”), this term is used throughout.

Additions to the second edition of The Feast of Freedom reflect the informed and constructive comments received from both scholars and lay readers. Marginal notes have been added, instructions have been further clarified and the Historical Section (“In Every Generation”) has been amplified.
rate passages which were omitted at the First Seder, and to select for
discussion different aspects of such topics as slavery and freedom, the
Holocaust, Israel, and the messianic hope. Relevant material can be
introduced from Jewish literature. And it would be appropriate to read
the lyrical Song of Songs with some of the many interpretations of this
beguiling book. Thoughtful planning will make the second night a
dynamic and different reenactment of the Exodus experience.

The final motif in the Maggid section is the concept of redemption,
symbolized by the anticipated appearance of the prophet Elijah,
harbinger of the Messiah. It is proposed that the Cup of Elijah become
the Fifth Cup of the Seder, the Cup of Redemption, in honor of Israel,
"the beginning of the flowering of our redemption."

Preparing for the Haggadah

The Seder is without parallel in its significance, its scope, its format
and its objectives. This is a very specific ceremony, carefully choreo-
graphed, designed to take place in the home, designed to involve every
member of the household, particularly the children, in a ritual that is in
some instances thousands of years old, in rites that are rich with layer-
upon-layer of meaning. The Haggadah serves as the blueprint for the
Seder, and is indispensable to its proper observance.

Our ancestors prepared themselves by reading major portions of
the Haggadah on the Shabbat preceding Pesah (Shabbat Hagadah). Simi-
larly, all the participants in the Seder would do well to become
familiar with this new text since it involves modifications and variants.

Primary responsibility rests upon the leader who must make the
selections and determine the pacing. Such decisions should be made in
advance, bearing in mind the essential elements of the Haggadah, the
time factor, and the reservation of material for the Second Seder. The
essentials, in order of appearance, are:

KIDDUSH (The First Cup)
MAGGID (The Narration)
THE SECOND CUP
THE SYMBOLIC FOODS (Matzah, Maror, Korekh, Afikomen)
BIRKAT HAMAZON (The Third Cup)
HALLEL
THE FOURTH CUP

The Maggid section, which recounts the story of the Exodus and
explains the Seder symbols, provides interesting options. The text of
Arami oved avi ("My father was a wandering Aramean") can be read
together with the suggested midrashim or with different interpreta-
tions. Verses from the Book of Exodus can be substituted or inter-
woven. And participants can add their comments on the subject
matter.

The section following the meal also allows the leader to make
choices. The standard Birkat Hamazon can be recited, or the short
version. Selections can be made at will from the historical readings,
Hallel and the songs. Whatever the components, this segment con-
cludes with the Fourth Cup.

While the Second Seder must also include the basic elements,
there is opportunity here for creative variation. It is fitting to incorpo-
Erev Pesah: The Day Before Pesah

The day before Pesah is the Fast of the Firstborn, a day on which we commemorate our exemption from the fate that befell the Egyptian firstborn. It is customary for firstborn Jews and their parents to attend a seder, the final study session of a rabbinic text, which is followed by a ceremonial meal (seudat mitzvah). Participants are exempted from fasting.

Matzah should not be eaten on the day before Pesah. Some do not eat matzah during the preceding month, an abstinence intended to enhance the taste of matzah at the Seder.

Eiruv Tashhilin

Since cooking is prohibited on Shabbat, what is the procedure when Shabbat follows the first two days of Pesah? It is permissible to prepare meals on yom tov for consumption on yom tov, but it is permissible to prepare meals on yom tov for consumption on Shabbat only if preparation is symbolically started before the beginning of the festival. Thus if Pesah begins on Wednesday night, the ceremony of eiruv tashhilin is observed on Wednesday before sunset. Simply set aside some cooked food and matzah for Shabbat. This permits the preparation, during Pesah, of additional food for Shabbat.

Setting aside a small quantity of food, recite:

בפורק סאהה יходим אולקנוי פוכל חעלם אושר קרבוי

By means of this eiruv, we and all who live in this community are permitted to bake, cook, heat food, and make the necessary preparations during yom tov for Shabbat.

God and grammar. “Praised are You,” “Who has sanctified us.” Why do we shift, in the space of one brief invocation, from second person to third? This syntactical deviation accurately pinpoints the mystical ambivalence of our multi-faced consciousness of God. How we address Him hinges on how we relate to Him. Thus the two phrases, connected by the relative pronoun (who, asher), reflect our awareness that the God who is near and known to us is simultaneously the Supreme Being who is distant, unknown and beyond our knowing. It was perhaps the height of religious genius to knit these numinous strands into the many blessings that are uttered every day.
The Search for Hametz

A formal search for leaven (bedikat hametz) is conducted on the night before Pesah. This symbolizes the final removal of leaven (hametz) from the home. Before the search, it is customary to deposit small pieces of bread (ten pieces, according to kabbalistic lore) in strategic places so that the inspection should have a purpose. It is traditionally carried out by the light of a candle, with a feather and a wooden spoon to collect the hametz; all this is set aside until morning. If erev Pesah occurs on Shabbat, we search for hametz on Thursday evening. Why do we use a candle? ‘The spirit of man is the lamp of Adonai, searching all the inward parts’ (Proverbs 20:27). If we scrutinize our premises so punctiliously, how much more scrupulously should we examine the crevices and crannies of our hearts?

Before the search, recite:

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who has sanctified us through His commandments, commanding us to remove all hametz.

After the search, recite:

All hametz in my possession which I have not seen or removed, or of which I am unaware, is hereby nullified and ownerless as the dust of the earth.

Recitation of this declaration, and a similar one the following day, prevents us from violating the prohibition against hametz (Exodus 13:7). In the morning, after the last meal of hametz, leftovers are added to the crumbs gathered the previous night. These are burned or thrown out. This concludes the ritual of banishing hametz from our dwellings.

In the morning, recite:

All hametz in my possession, whether I have seen it or not, whether I have removed it or not, is hereby nullified and ownerless as the dust of the earth.

The Search. “No leaven shall be found in your houses” (Exodus 12:19). “No hametz shall be seen within your borders” (Exodus 13:7). The search for hametz was instituted in response to these explicit directions. The accompanying formula, retained in the original Aramaic, dates back to the Gaonic period. It first appears in the voluminous writings of the noted Talmudist Isaac ben Jacob Alfasi (1013–1083) of Fez.

Removing the hametz. Rabbi Israel of Ryzhin explains the bedikat hametz procedure in this way: ‘In the evening we search for hametz, but we do not burn it until the next day. The searching and the burning are allegories of things to come. Galat is the night of exile during which we allow the hametz (the less appetizing qualities of our people) to remain in the house. But when the morning of our redemption comes, those qualities will be cast into the fire of our return and completely consumed. Then the words of Isaiah will be fulfilled: He will swallow up death forever, Adonai will wipe away the tears from all faces’” (Isaiah 25:8).

Nullifying the hametz. If, in all sincerity, we attempt to conquer temptation and to cleanse our hearts of sin (hametz), we need not brood or wallow in guilt if our attempts are not entirely successful, and we cannot entirely eradicate every speck. We gain credit for good intentions, for although we must strive for perfection, it is inevitably beyond the reach of mere mortals. As Rabbi Elimelekh of Lyzhenk reminds us, “Only God is perfect.”
Reflection:

Adonai, our God and God of our ancestors, just as I have removed all hametz from my home and from my ownership, so may I evict the evil inclination from my heart, and may You dislodge the evil from the earth.

The Search for the Meaning of Hametz

Of all the festivals of the Jewish year, Pesah alone is distinguished by special dietary requirements, namely, the laws pertaining to hametz. During Pesah, Jews are prohibited from eating or even owning hametz. So what is it and why is it taboo at this time? Hametz is defined as any mixture of flour and water that has been allowed to ferment for more than 18 minutes. The most obvious example is bread, but grain ingredients, i.e., traces of leaven, can be found in liquor and in many processed foods, which are accordingly proscribed on Pesah.

On the surface, matzah represents the cakes that our ancestors baked in haste amid frenetic preparations for departure from the house of bondage. Yet, delving for deeper meanings, the Rabbis identify leaven with the evil inclination, the urge that gives rise to wrongdoing. They point to the philological similarity between the two Hebrew words, hametz and matzah, and they ponder the implications of this resemblance. It takes mere moments for unleaven to become leaven, and it takes even less time for good intentions to become embittered. The Alexandrian philosopher Philo derives this moral: just as leaven is banned because it is “puffed up,” so we must guard against the self-righteousness that puffs us up with false pride.

The lines are drawn—good versus evil, humility versus arrogance, unleaven versus leaven, matzah versus hametz. A comparison is also made between matzah, representing the simple life, and hametz, representing the complexities of civilization. Perhaps the temporary “bread embargo” is intended to bring us back to nature and its homespun joys.
Reclining. It is customary to recline during the Seder, in an attitude of amusement against pillows.

Kittel. Some leaders don a white robe called a kittel. White is the color of joy, of freedom and festivity. In the kabbalistic color spectrum, white represents mercy and loving-kindness, the divine attributes to which we attribute our deliverance from Mitzrayim. The kittel is a reminder of the vestments of the Temple priests and of the raiment worn by the ancient Israelites on festivals. “The people wear white, eat and drink and rejoice, for they know that the Holy One, praised be He, performs miracles for them.”

Preparing the Seder Table

In honor of this “history feast par excellence,” the most momentous meal of the year, it is customary to set the table in festive style, with the finest linen, the finest silverware.

Seder plate—K’arah

The symbols of the Seder are arranged on a six armed, preferably a decorative ceremonial platter. (There can be more than one such plate on the table.) The symbols are:

1)Zeroa — a roasted bone, usually a shankbone, symbol of the Pesah offering. The bone is scorched, to simulate that offering. (Vegetarians may substitute a broiled beet, Pesahim 114b.)

2)Karpas — a vegetable, usually green.

3)Haroset — a mixture of chopped nuts, apples, wine and spices.

4)Beitzah — a roasted egg, symbol of the festival offering in the Temple.

5)Maror — bitter herbs, either romaine lettuce or horseradish.

6)Hazeret (indicated on some Seder plates) — additional maror for the korekh sandwich.

Mattzo. Place three matzot, covered, in front of the leader, to the right of the Seder plate. Use plain flour-and-water matzot for the Seder. Some people prefer matzot sh’marah made with flour which has been guarded since the harvest to prevent fermentation through contact with water. On the day before Pesah, some devout Jews bake matzo by hand. These are called matzot mitzvah.

The Four Cups. Wine punctuates each major section of the Haggadah. Every adult is required to drink these four cups.

Eliah’s Cup. A goblet, usually large and ornate, is set aside for Eliah.

Salt water. Karpass is dipped into salt water.
Candle Lighting

Before sunset, light the candles and recite:

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who has sanctified our lives through His commandments, commanding us to kindle the (Shabbat and) festival lights.

Those who recite the second blessing (she-heheyanu) at this point need not repeat it during Kiddush.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe, for giving us life, for sustaining us and for enabling us to celebrate this festival.
Every edition of the Haggadah looks different. Every reading sounds different, suggesting new nuances, new insights. Yet the Seder, the ordering of the evening, has changed little since it was orchestrated by the masters of the Mishnah so many centuries ago. It is hardly happenstance that the Seder has become such a rare fusion of fixity and flux, of structure and spontaneity. For while it is meritorious to elaborate upon the Exodus, it is mandatory to observe the basics. To ensure that these basics were preserved, at a time when not every Jew possessed a Haggadah, the Rabbis devised an aide-mémoire, a rhymed mnemonic, which is often chanted as a prelude to the Seder.

KADESH
URHATZ
KARPAS
YAHATZ
MAGGID
ROHTZAH
MOTZI
MATZAH
MAROR
KOREKH
SHULHAN OREKH
TZAFUN
BAREKH
HALLEL
NIRTZAH
Kadesh

Reflection:
I am ready to fulfill the commandment of drinking the first of the Four Cups. This recalls God’s promise of redemption to the people Israel, as it says, “I will free you from the burden of the Egyptians” (Exodus 6:6).

Lift the cup of wine and recite Kiddush, adding the words in parentheses on Shabbat.

(And God saw all that He had made, and it found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. The heavens and the earth, and all they contain, were completed. On the seventh day God finished the work which He had been doing. He rested on the seventh day from all the work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it He rested from all His work of creation.)

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who creates the fruit of the vine.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who has chosen us and distinguished us by sanctifying us through His commandments. You have lovingly favored us with (Shabbat for rest and) festivals for joy, seasons and holidays for happiness, among them (this Shabbat and) this season of Pesah, the season of our liberation, a day of sacred assembly commemorating the Exodus from Mitzrayim. You have chosen us, sanctifying us among all peoples by granting us (Shabbat and) Your sacred festivals (lovingly and gladly) in joy and happiness. Praised are You, Adonai who sanctifies (Shabbat and) the people Israel and the festival seasons.

WHY: Kiddush is recited on the eve of every Shabbat and every festival, customarily over a brimming cup of wine, a symbol of joy, as it is written, “wine gladdens the heart of man” (Psalms 104:15). Tonight, Kiddush is recited over the first of the Four Cups.

WHY is wine used as a symbol of sanctification when it so readily brings to mind revelry and intoxication? How can it be a symbol of liberation when so many have become enslaved to it? The point is that, in Jewish tradition, no object is intrinsically good or intrinsically bad. Its nature is determined by the way we use— or misuse—it.

Sanctifying the seventh day. The seventh day is the armistice in man’s crucial struggle for existence, a truce in all conflicts, personal and social . . . a day on which handling money is considered a desecration, on which man avows his independence of that which is the world’s chief idol. The seventh day is the exodus from tension, the installation of man as a sovereign in the world of time.

Shabbat and Shavuot. It is instructive to compare Shavuot, celebrated every seventh day of a moon-month by the ancient Babylonians, with this uniquely Jewish institution, the incomparable Shabbat. Shavuot was dedicated to Saturn (hence Saturn’s day or Saturday). In the old astrological tradition, Saturn was the lord of the time, the lord of death, the lord whose fury and malevolence had to be propitiated by mourning and self-castigation. Sinister and cheerless were the shadows cast by Saturn, in startling contradiction to the light and joy radiating from Shabbat. On this hallowed day, Saturn is de-throned, mourning is transcended, time is suspended. Goodness and gladness prevail. Life and love and freedom reign supreme.
You hailed, Your people Israel. We are God's stake in human history. We are the dawn and the dusk, the challenge and the test. How strange to be a Jew and to go astray on God's perilous errands. We have been offered as a pattern of worship and as a prey for scorn, but there is more still in our destiny. We carry the gold of God in our souls to forge the gate of the kingdom.

Peoplehood, personhood. On this night of bonding, of unity and community, we gather together to celebrate our birth as a nation, to review our historic heritage, to ratify our collective covenant. But, at the same time, each of us must make a personal statement of accountability and commitment. For while Judaism fosters a strong sense of peoplehood, of Klal Yisrael, it also insists on individual responsibility, on individual worth.

Adonai differentiates. When a person strikes many coins from one mold, they all resemble one another. The supreme King of kings fashions every man in the stamp of the first man, yet not one resembles his fellow. Therefore every human being is obliged to say, 'The world was created for my sake.'

HOW: Using a pitcher or a cup, pour water over each hand. Why are 'washing instructions' pertinent? Because this is an act of ritual cleansing. All the participants may wash their hands, or the leader may do so on their behalf before distributing karpas.

HOW: A vegetable, preferably a green vegetable, like parsley, is dipped in salt water. (This is the first dipping.) Some people recline while eating karpas.

WHY: Why is the afikomen wrapped up? One explanation links this to the manner in which the Israelites left Mitzrayim, their kneeling utensils wrapped in their garments (Exodus 12:24).

On Saturday night (motza-et Shabbat), add:

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who creates the lights of fire.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who differentiates between sacred and profane, between light and darkness, between Israel and other nations, between the seventh day and the six days of creating. You made a distinction between the sanctity of Shabbat and the sanctity of the festivals, and You sanctified Shabbat more than the other days of the week, distinguishing and hallowing Your people Israel through Your holiness. Praised are You, Adonai who differentiates between the sanctity of Shabbat and the sanctity of yom tov.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe, for giving us life, for sustaining us and for enabling us to celebrate this festival.

Drink the wine while reclining.

Urhatz

Wash your hands without reciting the customary blessing.

Karpas

Dip a vegetable in salt water and recite:

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who creates the fruit of the earth.

Yahatz

Take the middle matzah and break it in two. Wrap the larger piece in a napkin and set it aside as the afikomen, to be eaten at the conclusion of the meal. Replace the smaller piece between the other two matzot. It is customary to hide the afikomen, and in some families the children hold it for ransom.

On Saturday night (motza-et Shabbat), add:

Why: Hanukkah customarily comprises blessings and wine, over spices and over fire. Here only the latter is recited, for the blessing over wine is included in the Kiddush, and the blessing over spices is applicable only when Shabbat is followed by an ordinary weekday. This Hanukkah marks the transition from Shabbat to yom tov.

Yakhezhu is a handy mnemonic that helps to register the sequence of the Kiddush blessings when yom tov begins on Saturday night (motza-et Shabbat): ga‘in (wine), Kiddush (sanctification) ner (light), hanukkah (end of Shabbat) and finally z’man (sheheheyanu). Because it sounds like the German phrase jäg den Haas, “hunt the hare,” some medieval artists enlivened their Hagadot with a hare-hunting scene, a double anomaly since hunting animals is un-Jewish and the hare is “unclean” to boot! This linguistic fabrication was absorbed into the vernacular, and a fictional village called Yakhezhu became the setting for some of Sholom Aleichem’s stories.

Fire, Adam came into being just before dusk on the sixth day of creation. When he saw the sun vanish and blackness blanket the earth, he was terrified. Then God showed him how to dispel darkness and fear. By rubbing together two flintstones, Night and Death’s Shadow, Adam created fire.

Differentiating. The Torah teaches us to make distinctions. We are hidden by revelation to distinguish between God and idols, between true and false prophets, between pure and impure, between good and evil, between sacred and profane; in sum, between that which conforms to God and that which does not conform to Him. Our destiny — our very survival — depends on whether we make the right distinctions.
WHY: Why are three matzot used? Two loaves are traditional for Shabbat and festivals, visual reminders of the double portion of "heavenly bread" that the Israelites would gather every sixth day during those decades of desert wayfaring, since no manna appeared on Shabbat. A third matzah is added on Pesah to represent the bread of affliction (lehem oni), which is divided at this point. Most authorities believe that the matzah we break for y'all is not used for the motzi blessing before the meal; hence the additional matzah.

The stacked matzot can be taken to represent both the divisions (Kohanim, Levites, Israelites) and the unity of the Jewish people. The three matzot are also reminiscent of the "three measures of fine meal" from which, at Abra- ham's request, Sarah baked instant cakes for their three angelic visits (Genesis 18:6).

WHY: Why do we break the middle matzah? A symbol of the skimpy fare upon which we subsisted as slaves, matzah is broken in half to dramatize its pitiful inadequacy. "Breaking bread" also signifies hospitality, and we are about to invite the needy and the hungry to eat with us and to share with us.

Unleavened bread is the leveler that raises us all to the same lofty level. Outside, the battle rages between the haves and the have-nots, between those who have more and those who have less. Too often the struggle for daily bread is attended by (everish competition, tension and trauma. But at this most egalitarian of banquets, bread of the most unpre- tentious kind is the uncommon denominator that makes all Israel fun (kin).
Maggid

Uncover the matzot.

This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Mitzrayim. All who are hungry, let them enter and eat. All who are in need, let them come celebrate Pesah. Now we are here. Next year in the land of Israel. Now we are enslaved. Next year we will be free.

In the hope that next year all Jews, and indeed all humanity, will be free, we utter a plea for those around the world who are persecuted and unfree.

Adoni, our God and God of our ancestors, just as You took the Israelites from among the Egyptians and led them through the sea, so may You have mercy on our brothers and sisters, the House of Israel, those who are distressed and those who are oppressed, wherever they may be. Save them. Lead them from narrow straits to abundant favor, from darkness to light, from enslavement to redemption, speedily, in our days, and let us say: Amen.

WHY: Few things reveal more about the character of the redac- tors of the Haggadah than the fact that this oration to the poor and to the stranger is couched in Aramaic, the language spoken by Jews in talmudic times. It was regarded as imperative that the invitation should be understood by everyone. For the very same reason, some recite this paragraph in English as well.

The theme of hospitality is threaded throughout the Seder, through Pesah, through all our festivals. We open our homes to those who are homeless, and we open our door to Elijah, symbol of the weary wayfarer. Moreover, these symbolic gestures are pre- faced by practical measures.

Before Pesah we collect and dis-tribute matzoh and wine (literally “money for grain”), so that every Jew should be free to celebrate the festival of freedom. Halakha prescribes that matzoh and wine for the Four Cups must be pro- vided for even the poorest among us, those who subsist solely on charity. To allow any Jew to suffer deprivation on this day would be a mockery of Pesah, for it would mean that we had forgotten that we were all once slaves in Mitz- rayim.

This is the bread of affliction. Why do we start this joyous cele- bration with a pointed reference to the bread of affliction? Perhaps we do so to underscore that many of our fellow Jews are still afflicted, that there is still hunger in the world, and that we are still in exile (galut). This pivotal pas- sage culminates in a confident assertion of our belief that the redemption will come and will come soon.
The Four Questions. Why are three questions asked and never directly answered in the Hagadah? To this question there are more than four answers.

1. Questioning is a sign of freedom, proof that we are free to investigate, to analyze, to satisfy our intellectual curiosity.

2. The simplest question can have many answers, sometimes complex and contradictory ones, even as life itself is fraught with complexity and contradictions. To see everything as good or bad, matzah or maror, is to be enslaved to simplicity.

3. The Hagadah challenges us to ask ourselves whether we are asking the right questions.

4. To accept the fact that not every question has an answer, not every problem can be neatly resolved, is another stage of liberation. In the same way that questioning is a sign of freedom, acknowledging that some things are beyond our understanding is a sign of faith. Says Rabbi Wolfs of Zhilomir: ‘For the believer, there is no question; for the non-believer, there is no answer.’

5. When we find the answers for ourselves, we find ourselves experiencing and understanding the true meaning of the Exodus.

The forty-nine questions: ‘To attain truth,’ says Rabbi Barukh of Medzilbat, ‘man must pass forty-nine gates, each opening to a new question. Finally he arrives at the last gate, the last question, beyond which he could not live without faith.’
We were slaves

Uncover the matzot.

We were slaves to Pharaoh in Mitzrayim but Adonai our God brought us forth with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm. And if the Holy One, praised be He, had not taken our ancestors out of Mitzrayim, then we, our children, and our children’s children, would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Mitzrayim. Now even if all of us were scholars, even if all of us were sages, even if all of us were elders, even if all of us were learned in the Torah, it would still be our duty to tell the story of the Exodus from Mitzrayim. Moreover, whoever elaborates upon the story of the Exodus deserves praise.

A tale is told about Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Joshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon. They were gathered in Bnei B’rak, discussing the Exodus from Mitzrayim all through the night, until their students came to them and said, ‘Masters, the time has come to recite the morning Sh’ma.’

Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said, ‘Behold, I am as old as the years of man, yet I was not convinced that the Exodus should be referred to every night until ben Zoma explained it to me through this verse, ‘In order that you may remember the day of your departure from Mitzrayim all the days of your life’ (Deuteronomy 16:3). ‘The days of your life’ indicates only during the day. ‘All the days of your life’ includes the night as well.’ The sages explain, ‘The days of your life’ means in this world. ‘All the days of your life’ includes the days of the Messiah.’
Praised be He who is everywhere. 
Praised be He. 
Praised be He who gave the Torah to His people Israel. 
Praised be He.

The Four Children

The Torah alludes to four types of children: one who is wise, one who is wicked, one who is simple, and one who does not know how to ask.

What does the wise child ask? “What are the statutes, the laws and the ordinances which Adonai our God has commanded us?” (Deuteronomy 6:20). You should inform this child of all the laws of Pesah, including the ruling that nothing should be eaten after the afikomen.

What does the wicked child ask? “What does this ritual mean to you?” (Exodus 13:26). To “you” and not to “him.” Since he removes himself from the community by denying God’s role in the Exodus, shake him by replying, “This is done because of what Adonai did for me when I went out of Mitzrayim” (Exodus 13:8). “For me.” Not for him. Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed.

What does the simple child ask? “What is this all about?” You should tell him, “It was with a mighty hand that Adonai took us out of Mitzrayim, out of the house of bondage” (Exodus 13:14).

As for the child who does not know how to ask, you should open the discussion for him, as it is written, “And you shall explain to your child on that day, ‘It is because of what Adonai did for me when I went free out of Mitzrayim”’ (Exodus 13:8).
In the beginning our ancestors served idols, but then God embraced us so that we might serve Him, as it is written, “And Joshua said to the people, ‘Thus says Adonai, God of Israel, Long, long ago your ancestors dwelt beyond the River Euphrates, Terab, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor. They served other gods. But I took your father Abraham from beyond the River, and I led him through all the land of Canaan. I multiplied his descendants. I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau, and to Esau I gave Mount Seir as his inheritance. But Jacob and his children went down to Mitzrayim’” (Joshua 24:2–4).

Praised be He who keeps His promise to Israel. Praised be He who foresaw both our enslavement and our redemption when He made the covenant with our father Abraham (Genesis 15). As it is written, “He said unto Abram: Know for certain that your offspring shall be strangers in a strange land, and shall be enslaved and afflicted for four hundred years. But know with equal certainty that I will judge the nation that enslaved them, and that afterwards they will leave with great substance” (Genesis 15:13–14).

Four hundred years. There are indications that God intended to commute the sentence and to revenge us ahead of time (after 210 years). In the phrase hishen et ha-ketz (literally, calculated the end) the numerical values of the letters in ketz add up to 190. So it is added that God figured on subtracting this number from the four hundred years, even as He prefigured the exile.

Raise the cup of wine in thanksgiving.

It is this promise that has sustained our ancestors and us, for not just one enemy has arisen to destroy us; rather in every generation there are those who seek our destruction, but the Holy One, praised be He, saves us from their hands.

Replace the cup.

In the beginning

The Haggadah, multi-volume with 400 years of history.

Torah and Midrash

We have reached the heart of the Haggadah. The following four verses, from the book of Deuteronomy, beginning Arami oved ani, supply a succinct synopsis of the history of the Exodus. (This passage was originally recited every Shabbat by pilgrims bringing their first fruits to the Temple in Jerusalem.) We are about to expand each phrase, to expand each thought, citing biblical chapter and verse to support and illustrate our explanations.

Consider these verses: My father was a wandering Aramean, and with just a few people he went down to Mitzrayim and sojourned there. And there he became a great nation, mighty and numerous. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; and they imposed hard labor upon us. We cried out to Adonai, the God of our ancestors; and Adonai heard our plea and saw our affliction, our misery and our oppression. Then Adonai took us out of Mitzrayim with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with awesome power, with signs and with wonders (Deuteronomy 26:5–8).

“My father was a wandering Aramean, and with just a few people he went down to Mitzrayim and sojourned there. And there he became a great nation, mighty and numerous” (Deuteronomy 26:5).

My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Mitzrayim. He was impelled, by force of the divine word, as it is written, “Know for a certainty that your offspring shall be strangers in a strange land and they shall be enslaved and afflicted for four hundred years” (Genesis 15:13).

With just a few people. As it is written, “Your ancestors went down to Mitzrayim with seventy persons in all, and now Adonai your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky” (Deuteronomy 10:22).
And sojourned there. This teaches that our father Jacob did not go down to settle permanently in Mitzrayim but rather to sojourn there, as it is written, ‘And Jacob’s sons said to Pharaoh, “We have come to sojourn in this land, since there is no pasture for your servants’ flock, for the famine in the land of Canaan is severe. Pray let your servants stay awhile in the land of Goshen”’ (Genesis 47:4).

And there he became a great nation. This teaches that the Israelites became easily identifiable there. They became unique, recognized as a distinctive nation, through their observance of mitzvot. They were never suspected of unchastity or of slander; they did not change their names and they did not change their language.

Mighty and numerous. As it is written, “The Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and increased greatly, so that the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1:7).

“The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; and they imposed hard labor upon us” (Deuteronomy 26:6).

The Egyptians dealt harshly with us. They were ungrateful, for they paid back in evil the kindnesses that Joseph had done for them, as it is written, ‘A new king arose over Mitzrayim who did not know Joseph” (Exodus 1:8). He acted as if he did not know about Joseph.

Another interpretation: The Egyptians dealt harshly with us. They made us appear to be bad, for it is written that Pharaoh said to his people, “Behold, the Israelites are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal unkindly with them, lest they multiply, for then, in the event of war, they might join our enemies and fight against us and later leave our land” (Exodus 1:9–10).

Mitzrayim. The Hebrew word for Egypt occurs more than 700 times in the Bible. Only the name Israel occurs more frequently. Yet there is not a single derogatory reference to the Egyptians.

The Torah makes two things perfectly clear. The Israelites were driven to abhor the abominations practiced in Mitzrayim (“You shall not copy the practices of the land.” Leviticus 18:3). But with equal sternness they were cautioned against harboring a grudge against their one-time taskmasters. (“You shall not despise the Egyptians. Remember, you were once a sojourner in their land.”) This is surely the most positive negative commandment ever written into a moral code.

Rashi’s comment on this verse underlines the importance of hospitality — and of gratitude: “It is true that the Egyptians drowned our children in the Nile, but earlier, during the famine, they gave us refuge and made us welcome in their land.”

They might join our enemies. With such seditive supplications Pharaoh fomented friction among his gullible court. In the end, the Israelites left Mitzrayim aided by Mitzrayim’s worst enemy—the Egyptians themselves.
And oppressed us. As it is written, “So they set taskmasters over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor; and they built store-cities for Pharaoh: Pithom and Raamses. . . . The Egyptians ruthlessly compelled the Israelites to toil with rigor” (Exodus 1:11, 13).

And they imposed hard labor upon us. They would impose a difficult task upon the weak and an easy task upon the strong, a light burden upon the young and a heavy burden upon the old. This was work without end and futile, for the Egyptians wanted not only to enslave them but also to break their spirit.

“We cried out to Adonai, the God of our ancestors; and Adonai heard our plea and saw our affliction, our misery, and our oppression” (Deuteronomy 26:7).

We cried out to Adonai. As it is written, “It came to pass in the course of time that the king of Mitzrayim died. The Israelites groaned under their burdens and cried out, and their cry to be free from bondage rose up to God” (Exodus 2:23).

The God of our ancestors. Because of the merit of our ancestors, we were redeemed from Mitzaayim. As it is written, “God heard their moaning, and recalled His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob” (Exodus 2:24).

And Adonai heard our plea. As it is written, “I have seen the affliction of My people in Mitzrayim, and I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, and I know of their sufferings. And I have come down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians, and to bring them out of that land” (Exodus 3:7–8). And it is written, “I shall be with Israel in trouble” (Psalms 91:15). And it is written, “In all their afflictions He was afflicted” (Isaiah 63:9).

And saw. What did He see? He saw that the Israelites had compassion for each other. When one of them finished his quota of bricks, he would help others.

The king died. With the death of the tyrant who had enslaved them, the Israelites hoped for the annulment of the evil decrees. When the new ruler renewed the edicts, they realized that the persecution was a matter of national policy. Despairingly, they appealed to God.

The Israelites cried out. To prevent them from mobilizing against their oppressors, the Israelites were forbidden to complain, even to each other. However, under cover of the national mourning for Pharaoh, the Israelites were able to express their anguish.

Their cry rose up. When there was a shortage of construction materials, the Egyptian overseers would seize the children of the laborers and bury them alive inside the walls of the buildings. The children wept within those terrible tombs. And God heard their weeping.

The merit of the fathers. Proxied piecy? A talmudic crutch? Far from it. This peculiarly Jewish concept links parents and progeny in intergenerational harmony, a shared concern for bringing earth closer to heaven. The memory of saintly ancestors can serve, consciously or unconsciously, to guide, inspire and strengthen, sometimes saving us from ourselves.

What did God see? He saw people of the caliber of Amram, father of Miriam, Aaron and Moses. He saw that the Egyptians had weakened but not warped the moral fiber of the Israelites. He saw that His people deserved His compassion—because they showed compassion towards each other.
This refers to the drowning of the sons. Pharaoh’s ultimate aim was the destruction of the Israelites, not their enslavement. If the Egyptians wanted slaves, why would they kill the children? History has proved that rational considerations are often irrelevant. Pharaoh’s heirs, driven by a manic determination to destroy the Jews, have often pursued their monstrous objectives even when these became counterproductive, demonstrably detrimental to the economy of the “host country.”

Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile. “Where the sin was committed the judgment takes place.” Water became an agent of retribution. The first plague turned to blood all the waters of Mitzrayim, the rivers, the streams, the pools and the ponds that had “shed the blood” of little children. And, punished measure for measure, the Egyptians eventually came to a watery end in the Sea of Reeds.

This refers to the straw. At the first flickerings of insurrection, Pharaoh instituted harsher work-rules, designed to crush the Israelites’ faith in Moses and in God. At first, the stratagem was effective. The hapless slaves accused Moses of making matters worse, of increasing rather than lightening their load.

The overseers suffered willingly. Later, when God said to Moses in the desert, “Gather seventy elders for Me” (Numbers 11:10), Moses replied, “I do not know who is worthy.” God indicated that the Jewish overseers in Mitzrayim had proved their worth when they balked at mistreating their people, undertaking to suffer in their stead.

Our affliction. This refers to the enforced separation of husbands and wives. The Egyptians decreed that men should sleep in the field and women should sleep in the city, in order to decrease their offspring. The women, however, would bring warm food to their husbands, and comfort them, saying, “They shall not succeed in subjugating us. In the end, the Holy One will redeem us.” Thus, in spite of the decree, they would be together and they did have children. Through the merit of the righteous women of that generation the Israelites were redeemed from Mitzrayim.

Our misery. This refers to the drowning of the sons, for Pharaoh decreed, “Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live” (Exodus 1:22). The Israelites would circumcise their sons in Mitzrayim. The Egyptians would ask, “Why do you insist upon circumcising them? In a little while we shall throw them into the river.” The Israelites would respond, “Nevertheless we shall circumcise them.”

And our oppression. This refers to the straw. For Pharaoh decreed, “You shall no longer provide the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather straw for themselves” (Exodus 5:7). Whenever the Egyptians counted the bricks and found the quota unfilled, the Israelite overseers refused to deliver their fellow Israelites to the Egyptians. Instead, they submitted themselves, and willingly suffered the punishment in order to lighten the ordeal of their fellow Israelites.

This refers to the enforced separation of husbands and wives. One theory posits that the segregation was compulsory; a second theory suggests that it was voluntary. When Amram heard Pharaoh’s last condemning new-born sons to death, he separated himself from his wife Yocheved. All the Israelite couples followed suit, whereupon Miriam remonstrated with her father, Amram. “Your conduct is more damaging than Pharaoh’s mandate,” she contended, “for Pharaoh sentenced only the male children, whereas you have pronounced sentence against all children.” Amram found her argument convincing. He returned to his wife, and the other husbands were reunited with their spouses. Yocheved conceived and gave birth to Moses.

The merit of the mothers. Pharaoh’s fatal mistake was his underestimation of the women. When the midwives to the Hebrew women, Shifra and Puah, refused to set expediency above conscience and refused to collaborate in the annihilation of their charges, the Israelite “resistance movement” was born. Despite the knowledge that they might be brutally bereft of their infants, the women of Israel continued to give birth, continued to bring sustenance and strength, courage and consolation to their disheartened husbands. Behind Moses, hero of the Exodus, stood heroic women: Yocheved, his mother; Miriam, who watched over her baby brother and contrived to have their mother appointed his nurse. And, in the greatest irony of all, an Egyptian princess, Pharaoh’s own daughter, drew Moses from the Nile...and became the instrument of Israel’s redemption.
“Then Adonai took us out of Mitzrayim with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with awesome power, with signs and with wonders” (Deuteronomy 26:8).
Four in Folklore. This is a night of counting, as well as recounting, and the number four figures repeatedly in the evening scenario. There are four questions, four children, four kinds of food and four cups of wine. Wherefore so many fours? Because, it is said, of the four qualities that helped Israel to survive in Mitzrayim, because of the four meritorious martyrs, because of the four banners the Israelites carried in the wilderness, because of the four evils we endured, and because of the four nights of watching. The Book of Remembrance records four nights of revelation: the night He revealed Himself to create the universe, the night He revealed Himself to make the covenant with Abraham, the night He revealed Himself to rescue us from Mitzrayim, and the night (still to come) when He will reveal Himself to redeem us for good.

I will take you out. This verse contains four expressions of redemption: “I will free you,” “I will deliver you,” “I will redeem you,” and “I will take you to be My people.” The Four Cups that we drink tonight represent these four steps to freedom.

A sign and a symbol. This is a reference to the tefillin worn on forehead and arm during weekday morning worship. Master of the universe, when a Jew drops his tefillin on the floor, he hastily picks them up and kisses them. So testifies Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev in one of his famous colloquies with God. “Your tefillin, Your people Israel, have lain on the ground for nearly two thousand years. Why do You let them lie there, trodden underfoot?” When will You gather up Your tefillin and embrace them?

Then Adonai took us out of Mitzrayim. Not by an angel. Not by a seraph. Nor by a messenger. Rather, the Holy One Himself, in His glory, as it is written, “For that night I will pass through Mitzrayim, and I will strike down every firstborn in Mitzrayim, both man and beast, and on all the gods of Mitzrayim I will execute judgments.” I am Adonai” (Exodus 12:12).

“I will pass through Mitzrayim” — I and not an angel. “And I will strike down every firstborn” — I and not a seraph. “And on all the gods of Mitzrayim I will execute judgments” — I and not a messenger. “I am Adonai” — I and no other.

With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. When the Egyptians made the life of our ancestors bitter, the Holy One said, “I will redeem them,” as it is written, “I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary judgments. I will take you to be My people, and you will be My God. And you shall know that I, Adonai, am your God” (Exodus 6:6–7).

With awesome power. This refers to divine revelation, as it is written, “Has God ever taken for Himself one nation from the midst of another, with prodigies, acts, signs and wonders, with war, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with awesome power, as Adonai your God did for you in Mitzrayim before your eyes?” (Deuteronomy 4:34).

With signs. This refers to the staff, as it is written, “And in your hand take this staff with which you shall perform the signs” (Exodus 4:17).

Another interpretation: With signs. This refers to God’s commandments. For they are an eternal sign that God saves and redeems, and a remembrance for all generations of the covenant between the Holy One and His people. Thus it is written, “And this shall serve you as a sign on your hand, and as a symbol on your forehead — in order that the teachings of Adonai may be in your mouth — that with a mighty hand Adonai freed you from Mitzrayim” (Exodus 13:9).
And with wonders. This refers to the plagues, as it is written, “And I will show you wonders in the heavens and on earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke” (Joel 3:3).
Rabbi Judah made an acronym.

Why did he do this? Perhaps he used this euphemistic contraction because he did not like to linger on the subject. Or perhaps the mnemonic was intended to help us remember the ten plagues in the order recorded in the Book of Exodus (since different versions occur in different texts, Psalms 78 and 105, for instance).

According to midrashic legend, this acronym pre-dated Rabbi Judah. For it was engraved upon the staff of Moses, the staff that was created on the eve of the very first Shabbat. With this staff, Moses performed the “signs” in Pharaoh’s court and in the wilderness.

**Did the Holy One bring the plagues upon the Egyptians, or did the Egyptians bring the plagues upon themselves?** Environmentalists contend that pollution is a man-made problem. Do the air and seas pollute themselves? Moreover, there is a moral, or more accurately, immoral dimension to the wanton contamination of the elements. In the same way that Noah’s contemporaries called forth the flood, in the same way that the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah caused fire and brimstone to consume them, so the Egyptians, by their depraved and licentious lifestyle, tainted their environment, blighted their own lives. The first nine plagues can be construed as extreme manifestations of natural phenomena.

**These are the ten plagues which the Holy One brought upon the Egyptians:**

*At the mention of each plague, remove a drop of wine from your cup.*

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**BLOOD FROGS VERMIN BEASTS CATTLE PLAGUE BOILS HAIL LOCUSTS DARKNESS DEATH OF THE FIRSTBORN**

Rabbi Judah made them into an acronym:

**D Tzah A Daash B’Alad.**

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WHY do we remove ten drops of wine from our cups? We glory in our liberation, but we do not glorify our fallen foes. When the waters of the Sea of Reeds engulfed the Egyptians, the ministering angels began to sing praises. But God silenced them, saying, “My children perish. Cease your songs!” So we celebrate with less than a full heart, with less than a full cup.

**These are the ten plagues. Why were there plagues? Why ten plagues? Why these ten plagues? The makkot can be classified as punitive strikes; they can also be viewed as opportunities for repentance. Each chastisement was announced in advance, providing Pharaoh with ten face-saving occasions to relent and to relinquish his stranglehold on the Israelites. But Pharaoh could not, would not see the error of his ways, and his hard heart was hardened. While God could undoubtedly have rescued the Israelites by other means, the plagues were necessary ploys in a cosmological confrontation.**

“The contest was far more than a dramatic humiliation of the unrepentant and infatuated tyrant. It was nothing less than a judgment on all the gods of Mitzrayim (Exodus 12:12). The plagues fell on the principal divinities that were worshipped since time immemorial in the Nile Valley. The river was a god; it became loathsome to its worshippers. The frog was venerated as a sign of fruitfulness, and it was turned into a horror. The cattle—the sacred ram, the sacred goat, the sacred bull—were all smitten. The sacred beetle became a torment to those who had put their trust in its divinity. When we add the plague of darkness which showed the eclipse of Ra, the sun-god, we see that we have here a contrast between the God of Israel, the Master of the universe, and the senseless gods of a senile civilization.”

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By permission.
DAYYENU (It would have been enough)

With measured and mounting jubilation, this lifting litany chronicles an extraordinary progression. It tells how God in His lovingkindness raised us, step by step, from the degradation of slavery to the heights of freedom as His chosen people. We express our thankfulness for every beneficent act, and we delight in the Godly design that plotted our path—via Sinai—to our Promised Land.

How many acts of kindness God has performed for us!

He gave us the Torah. We all stood at the foot of Mount Sinai and we all heard the divine pronouncement. But what exactly did we hear? All of the ten Commandments? The first two Commandments? Or only the first word, the first sound, the aleph of "T" (Anochi)? If we accept the radical premise, advanced by Rabbi Mendel of Kamenetz, that we heard the "immense aleph", alone, then what we heard was the preparation for communication. For aleph is the source of articulate sound, encompassing the whole alphabet and all human discourse. It remained for Moses and his heirs to translate the sound, to interpret and communicate the substance. "The Torah contains, in actuality or in embryo, all knowledge, all wisdom," say the sages. Everything our teachers have taught us through the ages was already made known to Moses at Sinai. Continuity of revelation is maintained. And our prayers are addressed to God who gives us the Torah every day, in the hope that every day we will receive it anew and fulfill it anew.

HAD HE TAKEN US OUT OF MITZRAYIM WITHOUT CARRYING OUT JUDGMENTS AGAINST THE EGYPTIANS — DAYYENU.

HAD HE CARRIED OUT JUDGMENTS AGAINST THE EGYPTIANS WITHOUT VANQUISHING THEIR GODS — DAYYENU.

HAD HE VANQUISHED THEIR GODS WITHOUT DIVIDING THE SEA FOR US — DAYYENU.

HAD HE DIVIDED THE SEA FOR US WITHOUT LEADING US ACROSS ON DRY LAND — DAYYENU.

HAD HE LED US ACROSS ON DRY LAND WITHOUT TAKING CARE OF US FOR FORTY YEARS IN THE DESERT — DAYYENU.

HAD HE TAKEN CARE OF US FOR FORTY YEARS IN THE DESERT WITHOUT FEEDING US MANNA — DAYYENU.

HAD HE FED US MANNA WITHOUT GIVING US SHABBAT — DAYYENU.

HAD HE GIVEN US SHABBAT WITHOUT BRINGING US TO MOUNT SINAI — DAYYENU.

HAD HE BROUGHT US TO MOUNT SINAI WITHOUT GIVING US THE TORAH — DAYYENU.

HAD HE GIVEN US THE TORAH WITHOUT LEADING US TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL — DAYYENU.

HAD HE LED US TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL WITHOUT BUILDING THE TEMPLE FOR US — DAYYENU.

How manifold and miraculous are the great deeds that our God has performed for us, from taking us out of Mitzrayim to building the Temple.
The miracle. There is no doubt about one miracle. This wandering tribe, in many respects indistinguishable from numberless nomadic communities, grasped and proclaimed an idea of which all the genius of Greece and all the power of Rome were incapable. There was to be only one God, a universal God, a God of all nations, a just God.

Miriam the prophet. “I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam” (Micah 6:4). Miriam is ranked with her brothers as one of the liberators of ancient Israel. Many midrashim tell of her resourcefulness, her leadership, her outspokenness, her wisdom and her beauty. Because of her merits, runs one Miriam myth, the Israelites were blessed with fresh sweet water all the days of their life. Throughout those forty years in the dreary desert, the wanderers were accompanied by “Miriam’s well,” a movable, miraculous well. This periaptic oasis was the wellspring of refreshment, fragrance, lush greenery—and some very tall tales.

The women went out with timbrels. Timbrels? How did timbrels happen to materialize on the windswept shores of the Sea of Reeds? How did the women happen to have timbrels in their hand luggage? Ask yourself what you would take if you were required, at short notice, to leave your home for a journey of unspecified duration to an unidentified destination. Household goods? Clothing? Family treasures? The women of ancient Israel, in such a predicament, had enough imagination and enough faith to pack musical instruments. They knew that God would perform miracles for His people, and they wanted the wherewithal to celebrate. In such homely details, we glimpse the valor and the values of Israel’s frontier women.

When they were told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his courtiers had a change of heart and said, “What have we done, releasing Israel from our service?” The Egyptians gave chase, and overtook them encamped by the sea. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued the Israelites into the sea, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots and horsemen. Then the waters turned back and covered all the horses, chariots and horsemen. Of Pharaoh’s entire army not a single one remained. Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam chanted for them, “Sing to Adonai, for He has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider has He hurled into the sea” (Exodus 14:5, 9, 22, 23, 28; 15:20–21).

The Israelites went into the sea. The odds were three hundred to one against the fleeing Israelites, but neither the charging chariots of Pharaoh nor the necromantic machinations of all Midrashim’s arch-magicians could harm them. Escorted by a pillar of light by night and by a pillar of cloud by day, they decamped and sailed forth to safety.

Walls of water. So spectacular were the sights that accompanied this crossing that a servantmaid at the Sea of Reeds beheld greater wonders than Ezekiel in his loftiest visions. Yet noting that Psalm 136 praises God with equal fervor for “sundering the Sea” and for “giving food to all flesh,” the Rabbis conclude that both acts are equally fantastic. Earning a living, day in, day out, is little short of a miracle. Every morsel of bread is a demonstration of benign divine providence.

Not a single one remained. Pharaoh himself, according to legend, did not perish in the Sea of Reeds. He repented, and was delivered from the depths. Later he was appointed king of Nineveh. When that city’s impending doom was announced by the reluctant prophet Jonah, the king led his people in fasting and penitential prayers. And Nineveh was spared. Now, when tyrants gravitate to their eternal unrest, the reformed Pharaoh greets them with hindsight’s vexatious wisdom: “Why did you not profit from my example?”
From slavery to freedom. And from Auschwitz to Entebbe in a single generation.

Halleluyah! The "Egyptian Hallel" (Psalms 113 to 118) is one of the oldest sections of the Haggadah. These psalms were chanted by the Levites in the Temple during the Pesah ritual. According to the Rabbis, these same psalms were chanted by the Israelites at the Sea of Reeds, the scene of the deliverance.

Sing praises, servants of Adonai. All forms of servitude result in sadness. Only the service of the Creator brings joy to the heart.

Servants? "Since we long ago, my noble friends, resolved never to be servants to the Romans nor to any other than to God Himself who alone is the true and just Ruler of mankind, the time has now come that obligates us to make that resolution true in practice." So spoke Eleazar ben Jarai to the defenders of Masada in the year 73 C.E., according to the stirring docu-drama outlined by Josephus. "Let us die before we become slaves under our enemies and let us go out of the world, together with our wives and our children, in a state of freedom." For seven years a few hundred zealots had held at bay the panoplied legions of Imperial Rome. When defeat became inevitable, they chose death by their own hands rather than dishonor.

The happy mother. Jeremiah painted Jerusalem as a desolate widow, and the community of Israel is often depicted as a grieving, woman, childless or bereft. Yet the generation that has witnessed the liberation of Jerusalem, the Holy City made whole, wholly ours again, at one with itself and with its loved ones, has reason to believe that it is witnessing redemptive rays. Rachel still weeps for her children, but she no longer refuses to be comforted.

Lift the cup and recite:

Therefore, we must revere, exalt, exalt, adore and glorify God who performed all these miracles for our ancestors and for us. He took us from slavery to freedom from despair to joy from mourning to celebration from darkness to light from enslavement to redemption and we sing before Him a new song. Halleluyah!

Replace the cup.

Halleluyah! Praise Adonai. Sing praises, you servants of Adonai.

Let Adonai be praised now and always.

From east to west, praised is Adonai.

He is exalted above all nations. His glory extends beyond the heavens.

Who is like Adonai our God, enthroned on high, concerned with all below in heaven and on earth?

He lifts the poor out of the dust, He raises the needy from despair, He seats them with the powerful, with the powerful of His people, He settles a barren woman in her home, a mother happy with her children. Halleluyah! (Psalm 113)
When Israel left the land of Mitzrayim, it rejoiced and sang songs of liberation. The Jordan River flows as joy, and the hills are leaped like rams. O sea, why did you flee? Jordan, why did you retreat? Even if the earth trembles, the presence of Adonai, at the presence of Jacob's God, turns rock into pools of water, flint into fountains. (Psalm 114)

Lift the cup of wine and recite:

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who has redeemed us and our ancestors from Mitzrayim, who has brought us to this night when we eat matzah and maror. Adonai, our God and God of our ancestors, enable us to celebrate in peace other holy days and festivals, joyful in the rebuilding of Your city Jerusalem and joyful in Your service. We will sing a new song of thanks for our redemption and for our spiritual liberation. Praised are You, Adonai, redeemer of the people Israel.

The Second Cup

Reflection:

I am ready to fulfill the commandment of drinking the second of the Four Cups. This recalls God's promise of redemption to the people Israel, as it says, "I will deliver you from bondage" (Exodus 6:6).

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who creates the fruit of the vine.

Drink the wine while reclining.
Rohtzah

Wash your hands and recite:

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who has sanctified our lives through His commandments, and commanded us to perform the ritual washing of our hands.

Motzi Matzah

Lift the three matzot and recite:

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who brings forth bread from the earth.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who has sanctified our lives through His commandments, commanding us to partake of matzah.

Eat the matzah while reclining.
Maror

Dip some maror in haroset and recite:

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who has sanctified our lives through His commandments, commanding us to eat maror.

Eat the maror without reclining.

Korekh

Sandwich some maror between two pieces of the bottom matzah and recite:

This is a reminder of the Temple and a reminder of the practice of Hillel. While the Temple was in existence, Hillel would make a sandwich of the Pesah offering, with matzah and maror, and eat all three together, in fulfillment of the verse, “with matzot and maror they shall eat it” (Numbers 9:11).

Tzafun. The hiddenness of the afikomen intimates to us that the miracle of the Exodus was a preparation for future acts of redemption which are still hidden from us. The Exodus from Mitzrayim did not result in complete salvation. Every generation must contribute towards achievement of the final redemption.

Yahutz, the breaking of the middle matzah, is a silent, reflective act wherein part of the matzah is concealed to be searched out before the blessings that conclude the meal may be recited.

It is the larger piece of the middle matzah that is concealed. For more is hidden than is revealed. Within us, individually and collectively, there are prayers to be fulfilled, promises to be redeemed. We are, like the broken matzah, incomplete. Our children, in their searching, are extensions of our explorations.

We prepared for Pesah in the night, searching for the hidden hametz; we end the Seder in the night, searching for the hidden matzah. To know there is concealment is to know that we must work for revelation, for completion. As with yahutz, so with eating the afikomen, no benediction is uttered, no word is spoken, for this is wordless discovery.

The festive meal. Tonight’s meal, with its unusual setting and its unusual ingredients, is itself an occasion for festive rejoicing. In fact, since Hallel psalms are said before and after it, some commentators consider this meal to be part of Hallel—a palpable act of praise.

Beginning with eggs. It is customary to begin the meal with eggs dipped in salt water. Adding spice to the feast of freedom is the fact that we are free to select our own interpretations for its sundry symbols, interpretations factual or fanciful. For instance, why do we eat eggs? Perhaps because eggs are associated with mourning. It cannot be simply a calendrical quick that the fast commemorating the destruction of the Temple, Tisha b’Av, always occurs on the same day of the week as the first night of Pesah. Yet eggs do not merely conjure up a mournful memory. They also symbolize life, birth, fertility, regeneration.

HOW: The afikomen is distributed among the participants and eaten while reclining.

WHY: Because its significance was primarily symbolic, the Pesah offering was eaten at the end of the meal when people were no longer hungry. In remembrance of this, we eat the afikomen at the end of our meal. The meaning of the Greek word afikomenis unclear. It probably means either dessert or the practice of going reveling from house to house after the Seder (Pes. 119b). The Rabbanites allowed both post-prandial partying (hardly compatible with the solemnity of the evening) and eating after the Pesah offering (so that its flavor might linger). Today nothing is eaten or drunk after the afikomen (except for the third and fourth cups of wine).
Barekh

Fill the Third Cup.
For the short version of the blessings after the meal, Barkhat Hamazon, see page 89. Conclude with the Third Cup (page 93). On Shabbat and festivals, Psalm 116, shir hama'alot, is the prologue to Barkhat Hamazon.

When Adonai brought us back from exile to Zion, it was like a dream. Then our mouths were filled with laughter, joyous song was on our tongues. Then it was said among the nations: ‘Adonai has done great things for them.’ Great things indeed He did for us; therefore we rejoiced. Bring us back, Adonai, as You bring streams back to Israel’s desert soil. Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who goes his way in sadness, bearing his sack of seed, will yet come home in gladness, bearing ample sheaves of grain (Psalm 126).

When three or more adults have eaten together, one of them formally invites the others to join in these blessings. (When ten or more are present, the words in parentheses are added.)
The leader:

Friends, let us give thanks.
Rabotai n’varekh.

The others respond:
May Adonai be praised, now and forever.
Yehi shem adonai m’vorakh mei-attah v’ad olam.

The leader continues:
May Adonai be praised, now and forever.

With your consent, friends, let us praise (our God) the One whose food we have eaten.
Yehi shem adonai m’vorakh mei-attah v’ad olam.
Bir’shut rabotai, n’varekh (eloheinu) she’akhahnu mishelo.

The invitation. “If three people have eaten at one table without uttering words of Torah, it is as though they had worshipped idols.” So says Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. “But when three people eat together and engage in holy table-talk, it is as though they have eaten at God’s table” (Avot 2:6). We began the evening by inviting fellow Jews to join us at our celebration. Now we invite our companions, a quorum of three or more, to join us in thanksgiving. The formula for this invitation, zimun, which is found in the Mishnah (Berakhot 7:3), derives from the verse, “O magnify Adonai with me, and let us exalt His name together” (Psalms 34:4). Since prayer is so personal, why this emphasis on liturgical togetherness? And how is it humanly possible for us to “magnify” Him whose greatness defies measure? Our duty, our destiny, is to serve Him both as individuals and as a community. Furthermore, Creator and creation are interdependent. By serving His purpose here on earth, we fulfill His cause. God needs us — our good deeds, our living testimony — even as we need Him.
The others respond:

Praised be (our God) the One of whose bounty we have partaken and by whose goodness we live.

Barukh (elohenu) she’akhalnu mishelo us’tavo hayinu.

The leader continues:

Praised be (our God) the One of whose bounty we have partaken and by whose goodness we live.

Barukh (elohenu) she’akhalnu mishelo us’tavo hayinu.

All together:

Praised be He and praised be His name.

Barukh hu u-barukh sh’mo.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who sustains the whole world with kindness and with compassion. He provides food for every creature, for His love endures forever. His great goodness has never failed us. His great glory assures us nourishment. All life is His creation and He is good to all, providing every creature with food and sustenance. Praised are You, Adonai who sustains all life.

We thank You, Adonai our God, for the pleasing, spacious, desirable land which You gave our ancestors, and for liberating us from Egyptian bondage. We thank You for the covenant sealed in our flesh, for teaching us Your Torah and its precepts, for the gift of life so graciously granted us, for the food we have eaten, for the nourishment You provide us all day, whatever the season, whatever the time.

For all this we thank You and praise You, Adonai our God. May You forever be praised by all living things, as it is written in the Torah: “When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall praise Adonai your God for the good land which He has given you.” Praised are You, Adonai, for the land and for sustenance.
On Shabbat, add:

Strengthen us, Adonai our God, with Your commandments, especially the commandment of this great and holy seventh day, that we may rest therein, lovingly, according to Your will. May it be Your will, Adonai our God, to grant that our Shabbat rest be free of anguish, sorrow and sighing. May we behold Zion Your city consoled, Adonai our God, and Jerusalem Your holy city rebuilt. For You are Master of deliverance, Master of consolation.

Our God and God of our ancestors, on this day of Pesah remember our ancestors and be gracious to us. Consider the people standing before You praying for the days of the Messiah and for Jerusalem Your holy city. Grant us life, well-being, lovingkindness and peace. Bless us, Adonai our God, with all that is good. Remember Your promise of mercy and redemption. Be merciful to us and save us, for we place our hope in You, gracious and merciful God.

Rebuild Jerusalem the holy city, soon, in our time. Praised are You, Adonai who in His mercy rebuilds Jerusalem. Amen.

The great and holy House. ‘Will God in very truth dwell on earth?’ declared Solomon when he consecrated the Sanctuary in all its golden gleaming splendor. ‘Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You; how much less this House that I have built’ (I Kings 8:27). The Temple was a supreme symbol of God’s presence among His children. But when it was destroyed, our hopes were not destroyed with it. For the Rabbis, like the prophets before them, insist that ‘the heart of God’s Temple,’ that repentance and good deeds are the most acceptable of offerings.

May we never find ourselves in need. Unhappily, we have often found ourselves in need, desperate need. Locked out of guilds, locked into ghettos, debarred from owning land, subject to the vagaries of repressive regimes, subject to legalized job discrimination in every field. Jews through the ages have suffered on the morrow of poverty. At the same time, the Jewish community has pioneered enlightened anti-poverty programs. To help the poor (and that includes the non-Jewish poor)—with food, gifts, loans, means of rehabilitation and above all, kindness—is a religious obligation of the highest order, equivalent to all the other mitzvot combined.

Your helping hand. Picture the scene at the Sea of Reeds. While the Israelites hesitated and Moses prayed for help. Nakhshon ben Amminadab, prince of the tribe of Judah, took the plauge and leaped into the raging waters. Others followed his example. Moses raised his rod — and only then did the great waves obey and subside. In Judaism, passivity is disgrace. God helps those who help themselves.
Bless this land, bless the State of Israel. We wear coats of many colors. Many loves and many loyalties are spun into the fabric of our lives. We are patriotic citizens of the lands of the dispersion, and we order our days according to the lunar calendar. We pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and we work for the betterment of our neighborhood and our nation. Said Philo, domiciled in Alexandria, Egypt, some nineteen hundred years ago, “We who live throughout the world all owe a debt of loyalty to our fatherland. But we also have a motherland which is the holy city of Jerusalem.”

The dawn of our redemption. This dawn broke with a blood-red sky. As we pray for the protection and the security of the vulnerable Jewish State, we mourn the heavy toll that this redemption took in young and gallant lives. “Seven thousand killed in 1948 in the War of Independence; another thousand killed in the 1964 Sinai Campaign and the 1967 Six-Day War; three thousand killed in the October 1973 War; hundreds killed by terrorist raids. We offer ourselves grim consolation, all the wars have cost us less than three days at Auschwitz.”

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe, our Father, our King, our Creator and Redeemer who fashioned us, our Holy One and the Holy One of Jacob, our Shepherd and Shepherd of the people Israel, the King who is good to all, whose goodness is constant throughout all time. Bestow upon us grace, kindness and compassion, providing us deliverance, prosperity and ease, life and peace and all goodness. May we never be denied the good things of life.

May the Merciful reign over us throughout all time.

May the Merciful be praised in heaven and on earth.

May the Merciful be lauded in every generation, glorified through our lives, exalted through us always and for all eternity.

May the Merciful enable us to earn our livelihood honorably.

May the Merciful lift the yoke of exile and lead us in dignity to our land.

May the Merciful send a full measure of blessing to this house and to this table at which we have eaten.

May the Merciful send us the prophet Elijah, whose good deeds we remember, who will bring us good tidings of deliverance and comfort.

May the Merciful bless this land and protect it.

May the Merciful bless the State of Israel, the dawn of our redemption.

Father, Redeemer. God is incorporeal (“He exists without possessing the attribute of existence, He lives without possessing the attribute of life”), yet He is not an abstraction. “I believe,” declares Yehudah Halevi’s Rabbi to the King of the Khazars, “in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who led the Israelites out of Egypt with signs and miracles. Our allegiance, in other words, is not to the God of the philosophers. We believe in the God who acts in and through history, the God who redeemed our ancestors...and us.”

The yoke of exile (galut). Since our exile began with the loss of our homeland, does not the restoration of that homeland effectively end the exile? In a profound theological sense, Israel itself, now isolated among the nations of the world, is in galut. The reason inheres in its role as the people of God. Israel is the prototype of all mankind, which is in galut, alienated from God and exiled from the new Jerusalems, which is yet to be rebuilt. Many lovers of Zion see the reestablishment of the Jewish State as the genesis of our exodus from exile.

The prophet Elijah. How can there be amity between nation and nation when neighbors are at odds, when households are divided? Early in the Seder the “wicked” child poses disruptive questions. The evening draws to its close with Elijah bringing harmony, shalom bayit, into the home, generating empathy between alienated generations, so that peace may spread in concentric circles until it envelops the whole human family.
May the Merciful bless those of our people who are in trouble and bring them out of darkness into light.

May the Merciful bless (my father) our host and (my mother) our hostess, together with their children and all that is theirs (me and my family and all that is mine). May He bless us and all that is ours (and may He bless all who are gathered here), as He blessed our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in everything. May He fully bless each and all of us. And let us say: Amen.

May our merit be invoked on high, leading to enduring peace. May we receive blessings from Adonai, loving-kindness from the God of our deliverance. May we be found pleasing in the sight of both God and mortals.

On Shabbat, add:
May the Merciful grant us a day of Shabbat rest, a foretaste of the world to come.

May the Merciful grant us a share in eternity, in the company of the righteous who sit with crowns on their heads, enjoying the splendor of the Shekhinah.

May the Merciful consider us worthy of the messianic era and life in the world to come. He bestows salvation and loving-kindness upon His king, upon His anointed, upon David and his descendants forevermore. May He who brings peace to His universe bring peace to us, and to all Israel. And let us say: Amen.

May His holy ones revere him, for those who revere Adonai know no want. Scoffers may suffer want and hunger, but those who seek Adonai shall lack nothing.

The life of eternity. A certain individual was once vouchsafed a vision of the world to come, and in this vision he saw scholars deeply immersed in the study of the Torah. “This,” he exclaimed in disappointment, “is heaven?” “You think the sages are in Paradise?” a heavenly voice rebuked him. “No! Paradise is in the sages!”

Bringing peace. Heaven (sheha-mayim) came into being when God made peace between fire (esh) and water (mayim). If God can create harmony between such elemental opposites, then surely we can resolve our often trilling differences and help to create peace on earth.

I have not seen the righteous forsaken. However, we are not our brother’s judge. Whether a person is “righteous” or not, we cannot look on, apathetic and indifferent, when we see him impoverished or in distress. Moses, brought up in Pharaoh’s palace, could have settled for a life of princely privilege. Instead, he went out to help his people, toiling alongside them, intervening on their behalf, trying to lighten their burdens and their spirits. “Every man for himself” is not a Jewish credo.
Blessings After the Meal

Short Version

On Shabbat and festivals, Psalm 126, shir hama’alot (page 79) is recited before Birkat Hamazon.

When three or more adults have eaten together, one of them formally invites the others to join in these blessings. (When ten or more are present, the words in parentheses are added.)

The leader:

Friends, let us give thanks.

Rabotai n’varekh.

The others respond:

May Adonai be praised, now and forever.

Yehi shem adonai m’vorakh mei-attah v’ad olam.

The leader continues:

May Adonai be praised, now and forever.

With your consent, friends, let us praise (our God) the One whose food we have eaten.

Yehi shem adonai m’vorakh mei-attah v’ad olam.

Bir’shat rabotai, n’varekh (eloheinu) she-akhalnu mishelo.

The others respond:

Praised be (our God) the One of whose bounty we have partaken and by whose goodness we live.

Barukh (eloheinu) she-akhalnu mishelo so’tuv’so hayinu.

The leader continues:

Praised be (our God) the One of whose bounty we have partaken and by whose goodness we live.

Barukh (eloheinu) she-akhalnu mishelo so’tuv’so hayinu.

All together:

Praised be He and praised be His name.

Barukh hu u’varukh sh’mo.
Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who sustains the whole world with kindness and compassion. He provides food for every creature, for His love endures forever. His great goodness has never failed us. His great glory assures us nourishment. All life is His creation and He is good to all, providing every creature with food and sustenance. Praised are You, Adonai who sustains all life.

We thank You, Adonai our God, for the pleasing, spacious, desirable land which You gave our ancestors, for the covenant and the Torah, and for life and sustenance. May You forever be praised by all living things, as it is written in the Torah, “When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall praise Adonai your God for the good land which He has given you.” Praised are You, Adonai, for the land and for sustenance.

On Shabbat, add:

Strengthen us, Adonai our God, with Your commandments, especially the commandment of this great and holy seventh day, that we may rest therein, lovingly, according to Your will. May it be Your will, Adonai our God, to grant that our Shabbat rest be free of anguish, sorrow and sighing.

Our God and God of our ancestors, on this Pesah remember our ancestors and be gracious to us. Consider Your people Israel standing before You today, praying for Jerusalem Your city. Bless us, Adonai our God, with all that is good. Remember us this day for blessing, rescue us with life.

Show mercy, Adonai our God, towards Your people Israel, and toward the royal House of David Your Messiah. Rebuild Jerusalem, Your holy city, soon, in our time. Praised are You, Adonai who in His mercy rebuilds Jerusalem. Amen.
It is told of Elisha. This allusion to the prophet and wonderworker Elisha, heir to the mantle of Elijah, appears in the Sephardic Bir-kat Hamazon.

May He bring peace. Etymologically, peace (shalom) comes from a root meaning to perfect, to complete, for without peace our life, our world, is indeed imperfect and incomplete. Consequently, it is not enough to pray for peace. While we observe most commandments when and as the opportunities present themselves, we must go out of our way to “seek peace and pursue it” (Psalms 34:15).

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who is good to all, whose goodness is constant throughout all time. Favor us with kindness and compassion now and in the future as in the past. May we be worthy of the days of the Messiah.

May the Merciful bless all who are gathered here.

On Shabbat, add:

May the Merciful grant us a day of Shabbat rest, a foretaste of the world to come.

May the Merciful grant us a day of unspoiled goodness.

May we be satisfied with what we have eaten. May we be content with what we have drunk. May what remains benefit others, even as it is told of Elisha that he set twenty loaves of barley before throngs of people, and they ate and food was left over, according to the word of Adonai (II Kings 4:42–44).

May Adonai grant His people strength. May Adonai bless His people with peace.

The Third Cup

Reflection:
I am ready to fulfill the commandment of drinking the third of the Four Cups. This recalls God’s promise of redemption to the people Israel, as it says, “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary judgments” (Exodus 6:6).

Lift the cup of wine and recite:

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who creates the fruit of the vine.

Drink the wine while reclining.

The days of the Messiah. But how long will he tarry? For millennia we have expected him momentarily. For millennia we have lived in hope. Through fasting, through meditation, through prayer, through esoteric computations, the faithful have endeavored to accelerate his advent, or at least to arrive at the divinely scheduled date of his arrival. But this remains the best-kept secret of the ages. Like shooting stars, pseudo-redeemers rose and fell, leaving tragedy in their wake. Yet still the messianic hope blazed like a beacon through the gloom and doom of the exile. The sages said that the Messiah would come when humanity was “all good or all bad.” They said he would come when Israel observed even one Shabbat wholeheartedly. They said he would come when he came. And when he comes, then what? “No hunger. No warfare. No jealousy. No strife. Prosperity everywhere. Blessings in superabundance. And the world will be wholly occupied with acquiring knowledge of God.”

Some believe that redemption—like revelation—is continuous and that every human being is intimately implicated in the process, endowed with the ability to help or hinder, advance or delay it. They see in every soul, in every action, a redemptive spark. So every one of us counts and everything we do matters. Together we can perfect ourselves, and complete creation. Together we can help to restore cosmic harmony. And bring about the beginning of the End of Days.

Reflection:

Lift the cup of wine and recite:

Drink the wine while reclining.

וְהִשְׁלַישְׁנָה

כּוֹס שָלִישִׁי

כניה קָמוּקְעֵה וּמַעְקֹמְהֶנָּה תָּלִים מָצוּתִים דְּמָא שֵׁלֵשִׁי

שְׁנֵה בֵּנֵי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וּשְׁתֵּהֻּ שְׁמַקְרֵי בֵּית הָאָדָם לְעֵצֶת אֲבָנָהָם יָרֹבְּבִים וּמַעְקֹמְהֶנָּה גְדוֹלִים.

וְלַיְשֵׁמָהּ

כּוֹס שָלִישִׁי

נָגֶּפֶּה

Drink the wine while reclining.
In the Warsaw Ghetto it's Pesah once more. The cup of Elijah is filled to the brim. The faithful recount the deliverance of yore. But in storms the Angel of Death, baleful, grim. As always, the barking of germane is heard. As always, the snarling of mad dogs of hate. They have come here, these jackbooted pharaohs, to herd Israel's innocent lambs to their terrible fate. But never again will Jews tolerate taunts. Never again obey death-bearing orders. The doorposts tonight will be crimson with blood. The blood of the murderers, freedom's destroyers.

Banim Heller

In Every Generation

From this mini-anthology of writings ancient and recent, you may wish to select readings to include in your Seder celebration. The objective? To enrich and intensify your own Exodus experience, so that, in the words of Rashi Kook, "the old may become new and the new may become holy." We have retraced our passage from slavery to freedom, from Mitzrayim to Mount Sinai. Now we take up the tale again, for new chapters continue to unfold. For two thousand years we wander through desert and dale - multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision - welcome, unwelcome, tolerated, taunted, harbored, haunted... as we journey towards the Promised Land.

Erev Pesah 1943. The Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto started on the first night of Pesah. For twenty-eight shattering days, while the world watched in silence, a handful of men, women and children pitted their fragility against the massed might of the Nazi war machine. Although the flames have long been extinguished, the embers still smolder. For Pharaohs come and Pharaohs go: the Nephilim, the Belzazzars, the Hamans. But the Freedom Fighters of the Ghetto will live for ever, every testimony to the love of liberty kindled by the Exodus. Once more the Covenant People had kept the faith.

Master of the universe, I do not know what questions to ask. I do not expect You to reveal Your secrets to me, All I ask is that You show me one thing - what this moment means to me and what You demand of me. I do not ask why I suffer. I ask only this: Do I suffer for Your sake?

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchov
Shimon Grilius spent five years in a Soviet labor camp as a prisoner of conscience. His crime? His desire to live in Israel. When he finally immigrated in 1974, he opened a yeshiva in Jerusalem for Russian olim. This is an extract from his prison journal:

We held the Seder in a hurry, so in the time of the Exodus from Mitzrayim, since the camp authorities prohibited the holding of a Seder. Instead of maror, we were slices of onion, and for zeroa, we used burnt soup cubes. We read from one Haggadah, the only copy we had, and when we reached korekh, we had nothing to put between the matzot. Then Losif Mendelevich said, “We do not need a symbol of our suffering. We have real suffering and we shall put that between the matzot.”

Anatoly Shchurinsky first applied to the Soviet government for permission to emigrate to Israel in 1977. After years of escalating harassment, he was arrested for “treason” in 1977, and separated from his wife, Avital, one day after their marriage. When the Soviet court imposed its harsh sentence, he made this statement:

Five years ago, I submitted my application for exit to Israel. Now I am further than ever from my dream. It would seem to be cause for regret. But it is absolutely otherwise. I am happy. I am happy that I lived honestly, in peace with my conscience. I never compromised my soul, even under the threat of death. I am happy that I helped people. I am proud that I knew and worked with such honest, brave and courageous people as Sakharov, Orlov, Ginsburg, who are carrying on the traditions of Russian intelligentsia. I am fortunate to have been witness to the process of the liberation of Russia’s Jews.

I hope that the absurd accusation against me and the entire Jewish emigration movement will not hinder the liberation of my people. My near ones and friends know how I wanted to exchange activity in the emigration movement for a life with my wife, Avital, in Israel.

For more than 2,000 years the Jewish people, my people, have been dispersed. But wherever they are, wherever Jews are found, every year they have repeated, “Next year in Jerusalem.” Now, when I am further than ever from my people, from Avital, lacing many arduous years of imprisonment, I say, turning to my people, my Avital: Next year in Jerusalem.

Prayer recited in Bergen-Belsen before eating hametz:

אכתי שוהטשאני, дома גלילה קורא ל談יא לברוב
לישתא רועにく לוי אוו קק סקאבסת מורה
בישמה יאיר טוקן אוו ואו רוקא לברוב
שמדערעמע מאבר באומני אנטאמו בקברק
פשירה הון מינבון ומקומי קלפי מז呛ה.

On this Seder night, we recall with anguish and with love our martyred brothers and sisters, the six million Jews of Europe who were destroyed at the hands of a tyrant more fiendish than Pharaoh. Their memory will never be forgotten. Their murderers will never be forgiven.

Trapped in ghettos, caged in death camps, abandoned by an unseeing or uncaring world, Jewgave their lives in acts that sanctified God’s name and the name of His people Israel. Some rebelled against their tormentors, fighting with makeshift weapons, gathering the last remnants of their failing strength in peerless gestures of courage and defiance. Others went to their death with their faith in God miraculously unimpaired.

Uncheeked, unchallenged, evil ran rampant and desecrated the holy innocents. But the light of the Six Million will never be extinguished. Their glow illuminates our path. And we will teach our children and our children’s children to remember them with reverence and pride.

We invite the souls of all who are missing, the souls of all who were snatched from our midst, to sit with us together at the Seder. This invitation was uttered by Seder celebrants in the Vilna Ghetto in 1942 . . . and we repeat it tonight. For on this night all Jews are united in history and in hope. We were all in Mitzrayim. We were all at Siuai. We were all in the hell that was the Holocaust. And we will all be present at the final redemption.
Ani ma'amin.
I believe with all my heart in the coming of the Messiah, and even though he may tarry, I will wait well and every day for his arrival.
Maimonides, 12th century

Ani ma'amin.
I believe in the sun even when it is not shining.
I believe in love even when I do not feel it.
I believe in God even when He is silent.
Jews in Germany, 1939

Ani ma'amin b'emunah shleimah b'v'iat ha-mashiach. V'al pi she-yit-mah-mei-ah, im kol zeh al'akef tu b'khol yum sheyavo.
Why does this impassioned invocation of divine wrath belong in our celebration of freedom? Because, by opting conveniently for chronic amnesia, the world compels us to remember freedom's foes.

So we remember. The Hadrianic persecutions. The Crusades. The ritual murder accusations. The Inquisition. The pogroms. The Holocaust. And we remember the God-fearing men and women of all nations who risked their lives for us in so many valleys of the shadow of death.

We are forbidden to hate the Egyptians. Yet we are enjoined to remember the crimes of the Amalekites. We are commanded to feed our enemy when he is hungry. We are warned to leave the avenging to the God of justice. Remembrance. Gratefulness. Retribution. Restraint. Should we struggle to reconcile these complicated and conflicting emotions, or should we simply accept the fact that they coexist?

Jewish existence is a tapestry woven of silk on a loom of steel, woven with tears and blood, mystery and martyrdom, threnody, exultation, anguish, ecstasy, peril and paradox. We will never forget that most desirable of designations, merciful children of the merciful God, rabbanim b’nei rabbanim.

And we will never forget the Amalekites.

Fill Elijah's goblet and the Fourth Cup. The leader fills Elijah's goblet, or passes it round the table so that every participant can add some wine from his or her own cup. Rabbi Nachman of Breslev used to fill Elijah's goblet in this communal fashion to demonstrate that we must work together to bring about redemption. "Only through its own efforts," declare the sages, "will Israel be redeemed." We open the door for Elijah (usually a child is given this privilege) as we raise and recite.

Pour out Your wrath upon those who do not know You and upon the governments which do not call upon Your name. For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his dwelling place (Psalms 79:6-7).

Pour out Your fury upon them, let the fierceness of Your anger overtake them (Psalms 69:25).

Pursue them in indignation and destroy them from under Your heavens (Lamentations 3:66).
I will send the prophet Elijah to you. When his days on earth had run their tumultuous course, the Prophet Elijah was translated to heaven in a chariot of fire. Yet many are certain that Elijah never left us. The “Bird of Heaven” dons different guises in his various role as companion and protector of his people, and legion are the legends of his miraculous mediation on behalf of the poor and the persecuted. But his most important mission is still to be accomplished. For he is the herald of the messianic era. Tradition places the Pesah of the future like the Pesah in the past in Nisan, the month of nism (miracles). So we fling wide our doors for his visitations, hoping that this year the age-old reverie will become reality, that the elusive Elijah will finally drink from his cup . . . and proclaim the long awaited Messiah. Some families greet the unseen visitor with a hearty, Barukh haba, welcome!”

Opening the door. The custom is venerable, mixed in metaphor, history and messianic speculations. Was the door opened as a reminder that the gates of Mitzrayim (from which no slave has ever escaped!) were unlocked for us? Were kindly hosts on the lookout for strangers or tarry guests? Were wary celebrants on guard against informers or against malevolent neighbors plotting devilry? Were Jews, even when the forces of evil were arrayed against them, opening their doors (thereby rendering themselves even more assailable) to prove their faith in the guardianship of God, who would neither slumber nor sleep on this “night of watching”? In comparatively recent times, the practice became associated with Elijah. Certainly, this is a night of openness, as we open our minds to new understanding, new revelations, new possibilities for growth.

“Behold, before the coming of the great and awesome day of Adonai, I will send the prophet Elijah to you. He will turn the hearts of the parents to the children and the hearts of the children to their parents” (Malachi 3:23–24).

Elijah the Prophet

The Fifth Cup of the evening belongs to Elijah. The first four cups represent four landmarks on the road to redemption: for God lightened our burdens, removed our burdens, took us out of Mitzrayim and made us His people. Yet the Bible speaks of a fifth landmark: our resettlement in the land of our ancestors. For centuries, while our land languished in foster care, the Fifth Cup reminded us of Elijah’s promised coming and our promised inheritance. Today Israel is ours again. A homeless people has been restored to its cherished homeland. Jerusalem, never forgotten in the bleak black night of exile, is once more our capital. And the Cup of Elijah is the Cup of Redemption . . . in anticipation of the redemption that will bring enduring peace.
For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until her vindications goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a flaming torch. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of Adonai, and a royal diadem in the palm of your God. You shall no more be termed “Forsaken,” and your land shall no more be termed “Desolate”; but you shall be called “I delight in her,” and as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so shall your God rejoice over you (Isaiah 62:1,3,4,5).

I believe that a wondrous breed of Jews will spring up from the earth. The Maccabees will rise again. The Jews who will it shall achieve their own State. We shall live at last as free men and women on our own soil, and in our own homes die peacefully. The world will be lubricated by our freedom, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness. And whatever we attempt there for our own benefit will redound mightily and beneficially to the good of all mankind.

The land of Israel is part of the very essence of our nationality; it is bound organically to its very life and inner being. Human reason, even at its most sublime, cannot begin to understand the unique holiness of Erets Yisrael. Deep in the heart of every Jew, in its purest and holiest recesses, love for this land blazes like the fire on the altar of the Temple, burning unceasingly, with a steady flame... Within the Jewish people as a whole, this is the living source of its desire for freedom, of its longing for a life worthy of the name, of its hope for redemption, of the striving toward a full, uncontradictory and unbounded Jewish life. This is the meaning of the Jewish people’s undying love for Erets Yisrael—the Land of Holiness, the Land of God.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook

The wilderness and the parched land shall be glad; the desert shall burst into bloom. It shall flower abundantly and rejoice, even with joy and with songs; the glory of Lebanon, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of Adonai, and the splendor of our God. And the ransomed of Adonai shall return, crowned with everlasting joy (Isaiah 35:1-2,10).

The prophet Elijah. For a hundred generations from his time until our own, Elijah, the Gileadite, uncompromising exponent of the prophetic traditions of the simple life and simple worship, has continued to haunt our imagination. Within a few decades he became a legend. While those who had seen and known him were still alive, his activity came to be described in impossible hyperbole and obscured, when it did not destroy, his historical personality. Great leader, thinker and statesman who for a generation had single-handedly held the forces of ethical and religious disintegration in check... seen in the light of the social conditions of his day, Elijah emerges as one of the supreme geniuses of western history.

The question of the Fifth Cup: The Four Cups, as noted earlier, mark the first four promises enumerated in Exodus 6:6–8: “I will free you, I will deliver you, I will redeem you, I will take you to be My people, I will bring you to your land.” However, some authorities were of the opinion that a fifth cup should mark the fifth promise contained in this passage. Since the Rabbis could not resolve this problem to their satisfaction, they decided on a ingenious compromise: we pour the fifth cup but we do not drink it. We leave it for Elijah. So, in addition to bringing advance word of the Messiah, Elijah will also bring the answers to questions that have perplexed us for ages. A people compulsively prone to answering a question with a question, we have yet another reason to welcome the prophet with all the answers.

Eliyahu hanavi Eliyahu hatishibi, Eliyahu, Eliyahu, Eliyahu haklagadi, Bimheirah b’yetenu yavo eileenu, Im Mashiah ben David, im Mashiah ben David. Close the door and be seated. Elijah’s cup remains on the table as we rejoice, in psalm and song, for past redemptions and for the future redemption soon to dawn upon us.
Their idols. “It is the object of the whole Torah to abolish idolatry and utterly uproot it, and to demolish the belief that the stars can interfere, for good or evil, in human affairs.” Those who hitch their wagons to the stars are self-delivered hostages to fortune, marionettes who allow their minds and their movements to be manipulated. Keying their conduct to the uncaring constellations, they trade dynamism for domination, freedom for fatalistic quiescence. They are perpetually prisoners in the confines of an astrological Mitzrayim.

Their idols are silver and gold. Nowadays no one admits to bowing to Baal or sacrificing to Mammon. Yet an idol by any other name is still an idol. Slavish conformity to society, mindless pursuit of success, submission to the thralldom of things—such forms of idol worship are all too prevalent. The Rabbinic equated idolatry with hatred, pride, anger, avarice, slander and hypocrisy, and these notoriously durable pseudo-deities have yet to be dethroned.

The earth He entrusted to mortals. “The heavens are already heavenly,” observes Rabbi Hanukh of Alexander, “but the earth has been consigned to us so that we might make it more like heaven.” When we enjoy our planet’s plenty, and in benedictions acknowledge the origin of our enjoyment, then we inherit the earth.

Hallel

Hallel, which is followed by the songs which start on page 116, concludes with the Fourth Cup (page 135) and Nirtzah.

Not for us, Adonai, not for us but for Yourself win praise through Your love and faithfulness.

Why should the nations say: “Where is their God?”

Our God is in heaven; He does whatever He wills.

Their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands.

They have a mouth and cannot speak, eyes and cannot see.

They have ears and cannot hear, a nose and cannot smell.

They have hands and cannot feel, feet and cannot walk;

They cannot make a sound in their throat;

Their makers shall become like them, so shall all who trust in them.

Let the House of Israel trust in Adonai; He is their help and their shield.

Let the House of Aaron trust in Adonai; He is their help and their shield.

Let those who revere Adonai trust in Adonai; He is their help and their shield.

(Psalms 115:1–11)

Adonai remembers us with blessings.

He will bless the House of Israel.

He will bless the House of Aaron.

He will bless those who revere Him, young and old alike.

May Adonai increase your blessings, yours and your children’s as well.

May you be blessed by Adonai, Maker of heaven and earth.

The heavens belong to Adonai, and the earth He has entrusted to mortals.

The dead cannot praise Adonai, nor can those who go down into silence.

But we shall praise Adonai now and forever.

Halleluyah! (Psalms 115:12–18)

Not for us. Why did the Revelation take place in the wilderness, in a veritable no-man’s land? Perhaps to indicate that the Torah was potentially everyman’s land, that all were welcome to dwell within its all-embracing borders and to drink of its living waters. In Temple times the priests would offer prayers for all the nations of the world, and in the darkest of dark ages Israel never relinquished the dazzling daydream of the time when all roads would lead to Zion and the God of the universe would be universally acknowledged and acclaimed.

Whatever He wills. God is all-powerful and all-knowing but neither His omnipotence nor His omniscience impinge on human freedom. Setting before us good and evil, life and death, God exhorts us to choose life. The choice is ours, for everything is in the hands of heaven... except the fear of heaven. Maimonides spells it out: “Each of us can become upright like our teacher Moses or wicked like Jeroboam, wise or foolish, kind or cruel, churlish or charitable, and so on. There is no coercion. Each of us willingly selects the path we please to pursue. Hence we will be judged for our deeds, according to our deeds.”
Delivered from death? We are God’s memory and the heart of mankind. We do not always know this, but the others do, and that is why they treat us with suspicion and cruelty. Memory frightens them. Through us they are linked to the beginning and the end. By eliminating us they hope to gain immortality. But, in truth, it is not given us to die, not even if we wanted to. We cannot die, because we are the question.

All men are false. The Torah commands us to be truthful to one another. It is just as important, says the Talmud, the Holy Jew of Pekushah, for us to be truthful to ourselves.

Grievous in the sight of Adonai: God desires the destruction of sin, not the destruction of sinners. “I have no pleasure in the death of ungodly ones, how much more so must He grieve over the death of those who love and serve Him?”

How can I repay Adonai for all His gifts to me? I will raise the cup of deliverance, and invoke Adonai by name. I will pay my vows to Adonai in the presence of all His people. Grievous in the sight of Adonai: is the death of His faithful. I am Your servant, born of Your maidservant; You have released me from bondage. To You will I bring an offering, and invoke Adonai by name. I will pay my vows to Adonai in the presence of all His people, in the courts of the house of Adonai, in the midst of Jerusalem. Halleluyah!

(Psalms 116:11-19)
Praise Adonai, all nations.  
Laud Him, all peoples.  
His love has overwhelmed us,  
His faithfulness endures forever. Halleluyah!

(Psalms 117)

Give thanks to Adonai for He is good, 
His love endures forever.  
Let the House of Israel declare: 
His love endures forever.  
Let the House of Aaron declare: 
His love endures forever.  
Let those who revere Adonai declare: 
His love endures forever.

In my distress I called to Adonai;  
He answered by setting me free:  
Adonai is with me, I shall not fear;  
what can mortals do to me?  
With Adonai at my side, as my help,  
I will yet see the fall of my foes;  
Better to depend on Adonai than to trust in mortals;  
Better to depend on Adonai than to trust in nobility.  
Though all nations surrounded me, 
in Adonai’s name I overcame them.  
Though they surrounded and encircled me, 
in Adonai’s name I overcame them.  
Though they surrounded me like bees, 
they were snuffed out like burning thorns;  
In Adonai’s name I overcame them.  
Hard pressed was I, I nearly fell, 
but Adonai helped me.

Adonai is my strength, my song, my deliverance.  
The homes of the righteous echo 
with songs of deliverance:  
“The might of Adonai is triumphant; 
the might of Adonai is supreme, 
the might of Adonai is triumphant.”

I shall not die but live to tell the deeds of Adonai.
Adonai severely chastened me, but He did not doom me to death. Open for me the gates of triumph, that I may enter and thank Adonai. This is the gateway of Adonai; the righteous shall enter through it. (Psalms 118:1–20)

Repeat each of the following four verses.

I thank You for having answered me; You have become my deliverance. The stone which the builders rejected has become the corner-stone. This is Adonai’s doing; it is marvelous in our sight. This is the day Adonai has made; let us exult and rejoice in it. Deliver us, Adonai, we implore You. Ana adonai, hoshiah na. Prosper us, Adonai, we implore You. Ana adonai, hatziljah na.

Repeat each of the following four verses.

Blessed in the name of Adonai are all who come; We are from the house of Adonai. Adonai is God who has given us light. Wreathe with myrtle the festive procession as it winds its way to the altar. You are my God, and I thank You. You are my God, and I exalt You. Give thanks to Adonai, for He is good; His love endures forever. (Psalms 118:21–29)

May all creation praise You, Adonai our God. May the pious, the righteous who do Your will and all Your people, the House of Israel, join in thanking You with joyous song. May they praise, revere, adore, extol, exalt and sanctify Your sovereign glory, our King. To You it is good to give thanks; to Your glory it is fitting to sing. From age to age, everlastingly You are God. Praised are You, Adonai, King exalted with songs of praise.

I thank You. The very first words of prayer recorded in the Bible issued from the lips of Leah, gratified mother of six of Jacob’s sons.

Deliver us, Adonai! And when the people saw a great multitude of the enemy’s hosts, they said, “How shall we be able, being so few, to fight against so many?” Judah answered, “Victory in battle does not depend on the size of the armies, but strength comes from God. They come against us in much pride and iniquity to destroy us. But we fight for our lives and our Torah. Be not afraid. Remember how our ancestors were saved at the Sea of Reeds when Pharaoh and his horsemen pursued them. Let us implore God to remember His covenant with our families and to overthrow our foes. Then all the nations will know that there is One who protects and saves Israel.” And Judah led them into battle, and fought like a lion, and beheld, the enemy forces were vanquished and they fled. And Israel had a great deliverance, and sang songs of thanksgiving, and praised God for His goodness, because His mercy endures forever.

The year 164 b.c.e. saw history’s first recorded fight for freedom of worship. When Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria attempted to crush Judaism and impose his own brand of paganism upon us, the priest Mattathias and his sons led the call to arms. Against overwhelming odds, the Maccabees recaptured Jerusalem, re-dedicated the Temple, and proclaimed an independent Judea. At Hanukkah, as at Pesah, we celebrate the victory of right over might, conscience over cohorts, freedom over tyranny, light over darkness.
Nishmat

The breath of all that lives praises You, Adonai, our God. The force that drives all flesh exalts You, our King, always. Transcending space and time, You are God. Without You we have no other to rescue and redeem us, to save us and sustain us, to show us mercy in disaster and distress. God of all ages, God of all creatures, ceaselessly extolled. You guide the world with kindness, its creatures with compassion. God neither slumbers nor sleeps. You stir the sleeping, support the falling, free the fettered, raise those bowed down and give voice to the speechless. You alone do we acknowledge.

Could song fill our mouth as water fills the sea,
And could joy flood our tongue like countless waves,
Could our lips utter praise as limitless as sky,
And could our eyes match the splendor of the sun,
Could we soar with arms like eagle’s wings,
And run with the gentle grace of swiftest deer,
Never could we fully state our gratitude
For one ten-thousandth of the lasting love
Which is Your precious blessing, dearest God,
Granted to our ancestors and us.

From Mitzrayim You redeemed us, from the house of bondage You delivered us. In famine You nourished us, in prosperity You sustained us. You rescued us from the sword, protected us from pestilence and saved us from severe and lingering disease. To this day Your compassion has helped us, Your kindness has not forsaken us. Never abandon us, Adonai our God. These limbs which You formed for us, this soul-force which You breathed into us, this tongue which You set in our mouth, must thank, praise, extol, exalt and sing Your holiness and sovereignty. Every mouth shall thank You, every tongue shall pledge
devotion. Every head shall bow to You, every knee shall bend to You, every heart shall revere You, every fiber of our being shall sing Your glory, as the Psalmist sang: “All my bones exclaim—Adonai, who is like You, saving the weak from the powerful, the needy from those who would prey on them?” Who can equal You, who can be compared to You, great, mighty, awesome, exalted God, Creator of heaven and earth? We exult You even as David sang: “Praise Adonai, my soul; let every fiber of my being praise His holy name.”

You are God through the vastness of Your power, great through the glory of Your name, mighty forever, awesome through Your awesome works. You are King, enthroned supreme.

He inhabits eternity, sacred and exalted. As the Psalmist has written: Rejoice in Adonai, you righteous. It is fitting for the upright to praise Him.

By the mouth of the upright are You extolled, by the words of the righteous are You praised, by the tongue of the faithful are You acclaimed, in the heart of the saintly are You hallowed.

Among assembled throngs of the House of Israel in every generation Your name shall be glorified in song, our King. For it is the duty of all creatures, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, to thank, laud and glorify You, extolling, exalting, to add our own praise to the songs of David, Your anointed servant.

You shall always be praised, great and holy God, our King in heaven and on earth. Songs of praise and psalms of gratitude become You, acknowledging Your might and Your dominion. Yours are strength and sovereignty, sanctity, grandeur and glory always. We offer You our devotion, open our hearts in thanksgiving. Praised are You, Sovereign of wonders, crowned with adoration, delighting in mortal song and psalm, exalted King, eternal life of the universe.
Moshell bim-lukhah, nora ka-halakhah, sevtoo yomru lo.

(REFRAIN)

Mosheh melkoteynu, norah be-melkoteynu. Zikaron amoro lo.

Mikol zekh, mikol yashar, mikol Asher, mikol lev yamim.

Mosheh melkoteynu, norah be-melkoteynu. Zikaron amoro lo.

Mikol zekh, mikol yashar, mikol Asher, mikol lev yamim.

Anvo bim-lukhah, podet halakhah, tzadikav yomru lo.

(REFRAIN)

Karosh melkoteynu, romah be-melkoteynu. She'anei amoro lo.

Kol ha-le'eh, kol ha-le'eh, kol ha-le'eh, kol ha-malkah.

Kadash bim-lukhah, rahum ka-halakhah, shin-anav yomru lo.

(REFRAIN)

Teshuva melkoteynu, tovim be-melkoteynu. Siftei amoro lo.

Kol ha-le'eh, kol ha-le'eh, kol ha-le'eh, kol ha-malkah.

Takif bim-lukhah, tomeikh ka-halakhah, teminam yomru lo.

(REFRAIN)

Dagul bim-lukhah, hadur ka-halakhah, vatakev yomru lo.

(REFRAIN)

Zakai bim-lukhah, hisn ke-halakhah, tafsimav yomru lo.

(REFRAIN)

Yahid bim-lukhah, kahir ka-halakhah, limadav yomru lo.

(REFRAIN)

The time of singing has come. The formal Haggadah recitation has been completed and the night of watching becomes the night of singing with Israel voicing its rejoicing.

‘How can we laud God? Let us count the ways.’ So the anonymous authors of Ki lo Na’eh and Adir Ha (page 120) may have reasoned. For these hymns run the gamut of the aleph-bei, heaping honorific upon honorific, hosanna upon hosanna. Translations have been omitted since the literal meaning is secondary to the motivation to praise the skies the Creator of heaven and earth, the Ancient of Days, our God who is exalted beyond all blessing and praise.

To Him praise is proper. How does one express the inexpressible? The urge to proclaim the glory of God is counterbalanced by the knowledge that such utterances are at worst blasphemous and at best redundant. Quantitatively, qualitatively, our vocabulary is too limited to do justice to the infiniteness of God. For this reason the Rabbis consider verbal excesses—the multiplication of magniloquent phrases—improper. And therefore ‘silence is praise.’ But poets are poets, and they will not be silenced. Often lyrical linguists took refuge in alphabetic acrostics, thereby imposing stylistic limitations upon their passion and their poetry.

Prosaic postscript: arranging stanzas alphabetically makes them easier to remember.
Melodies, memories. The traditional singing chant in which the Haggadah is read by the head of the house, and now and then repeated by the listeners in chorus, sounds so awesomely intense, so maternally gentle yet at the same time so soul-stirring, that even those who have long forsaken the faith of their fathers and pursued foreign joys and honors are moved to the very depths of their being when the old, familiar sounds happen to strike their ears.

Hashid hu, tahor hu, yahid hu. (REFRAIN)

בנין אולם, כamiento, כהן אולם, בנין יתכן 커רב. בeatedת צפורה, נקיטת צפורה, אלא גוז, אלא גוז, בנין יתכן 커רב.

Kabir hu, lamud hu, melekh hu. (REFRAIN)

נוֹרֶה אָם, שְׁמוֹי אָם, צוֹזֵי אָם, יְבָהֵל יתכן 커רב. בeatedת צפורה, נקיטת צפורה, אלא גוז, אלא גוז, בנין יתכן 커רב.

Nora hu, sagio hu, ee-zuz hu. (REFRAIN)

פּוֹדֵה אָם, צַדִיק אָם, כַּדּוֹק אָם, יְבָהֵל יתכן 커רב. ב柞ת צפורה, נקיטת צפורה, אלא גוז, אלא גוז, בנין יתכן 커רב.

Podeh hu, tzadik hu, kadosh hu. (REFRAIN)

ראָהָם אָם, שְׁמַד אָם, שְׁמוֹש אָם, יְבָהֵל יתכן 커רב. ב柞ת צפורה, נקיטת צפורה, אלא גוז, אלא גוז, בנין יתכן 커רב.

Rahum hu, shaddai hu, takif hu. (REFRAIN)

May He rebuild the Temple. In the refrain that pleads for the rebuilding of the beit hamikdash, the Temple is the symbol of Israel's restoration — and the inauguration of the messianic age.

The Temple. Geology and theology coalesce in the legend that assigns topographical centrality to the Sanctuary. Thus the construction of the world began with the foundation-stone (even she'iyah) of the Temple, for the Temple is the center of the Holy City, the Holy City is the center of the Holy Land, and the Holy Land is the center of the earth.

Swiftly in our days. “A thousand years in Your sight are but as yesterday when it is past” (Psalms 90:4). God’s ways are not our ways, nor is His time-frame our time-frame. Hence, we plead with a sense of urgency for a quickening of the divine chronometer.

Hadur hu, vatik hu, zakai hu. (REFRAIN)

اذير هوأ
Mighty is He

Adir hu, adir hu.

(REFRAIN)

Yitoneh veito be-karov,
Bim-hei-rah, bim-hei-rah,
Be-qa-meinu be-karov.
El be-nei, El be-nei,
Be-nei veit-kha be-karov.

Bahir hu, gadol hu, dagul hu. (REFRAIN)

חרור אָם, צוּר אָם, בָּאָרוּ אָם, יְבָהֵל ביזה 커רב. ב柞ת צפורה, נקיטת צפורה, אלא גוז, אלא גוז, בנין יתכן 커רב.

Rahum hu, shaddai hu, takif hu. (REFRAIN)
EHAD MI YODEI-A

Who Knows One?

Who knows one?
I know one.
One is our God in heaven and on earth.

Ehad eloheinu sheh-ba-shamayim u-va-aretz.

Who knows two?
I know two.
Two are the tablets of the covenant.
One is our God in heaven and on earth.

Who knows three?
I know three.
Three are the patriarchs.
Alpha and Omega, Sh'mesh, and V'sh'mesh.

Who knows four?
I know four.
Four are the matriarchs.
She'lah, Leah, Rachel, and Efraim.

Who knows five?
I know five.
Five are the books of the Torah.
One is our God in heaven and on earth.

Who knows six?
I know six.
Six are the sections of the Mishnah.
One is our God in heaven and on earth.

Who knows seven?
I know seven.
Seven are the days of the week.
One is our God in heaven and on earth.

Who knows eight?
I know eight.
Eight are the days of circumcision.
One is our God in heaven and on earth.
Who knows nine?
I know nine.

Nine are the months to childbirth.
Eight are the days to circumcision.
Seven are the days of the week.
Six are the sections of the Mishnah.
Five are the books of the Torah.
Four are the matriarchs.
Three are the patriarchs.
Two are the tablets of the covenant.
One is our God in heaven and on earth.

Who knows ten?
I know ten.

Ten are the commandments at Sinai.
Nine are the months to childbirth.
Eight are the days to circumcision.
Seven are the days of the week.
Six are the sections of the Mishnah.
Five are the books of the Torah.
Four are the matriarchs.
Three are the patriarchs.
Two are the tablets of the covenant.
One is our God in heaven and on earth.

Who knows eleven?
I know eleven.

Eleven are the stars of Joseph’s dream.
Ten are the commandments at Sinai.
Nine are the months to childbirth.
Eight are the days to circumcision.
Seven are the days of the week.
Six are the sections of the Mishnah.
Five are the books of the Torah.
Four are the matriarchs.
Three are the patriarchs.
Two are the tablets of the covenant.
One is our God in heaven and on earth.

Who knows twelve?
I know twelve.

Twelve are the tribes of Israel.
Eleven are the stars of Joseph’s dream.
Ten are the commandments at Sinai.
Nine are the months to childbirth.
Eight are the days to circumcision.
Seven are the days of the week.
Six are the sections of the Mishnah.
Five are the books of the Torah.
Four are the matriarchs.
Three are the patriarchs.
Two are the tablets of the covenant.
One is our God in heaven and on earth.
Who knows thirteen?
I know thirteen.

Thirteen are the attributes of God.
Twelve are the tribes of Israel.
Eleven are the stars of Joseph’s dream.
Ten are the commandments at Sinai.
Nine are the months to childbirth.
Eight are the days of circumcision.
Seven are the days of the week.
Six are the sections of the Mishnah.
Five are the books of the Torah.
Four are the matriarchs.
Three are the patriarchs.
Two are the tablets of the covenant.
One is our God in heaven and on earth.

שלשה עשר מי ידע?
שלשה עשר אני יודע.
שלשה עשר מלאך.
שנינו עשר שבטיים.
אחת עשר الماضيים.
עשר יבשמה.
משה חמש לתי.
שבעה וחמשים מילים.
שתים וחמש שבעים.
שלשה כורדים.
חמשה יומין.
 ארבעה אבות.
שלשה אבות.
עשריםeres נברת.
שבעים ושבעים.
שלשה שנה.
שבעים ושבעים.
שש שבעים שנה.
HAD GADYA
One Kid, Just One Kid

One kid, just one kid.  
My father bought for two zuzim, one kid, just one kid.

Then came a cat and ate the kid  
that my father bought for two zuzim,  
had gadya, had gadya.

Then came a dog and bit the cat  
that ate the kid  
that my father bought for two zuzim,  
had gadya, had gadya.

Then came a stick and beat the dog  
that bit the cat that ate the kid  
that my father bought for two zuzim,  
had gadya, had gadya.

Then came a fire and burnt the stick  
that beat the dog that bit the cat that ate the kid  
that my father bought for two zuzim,  
had gadya, had gadya.

Then came water and quenched the fire  
that burnt the stick that beat the dog  
that bit the cat that ate the kid  
that my father bought for two zuzim,  
had gadya, had gadya.

Then came an ox and drank the water  
that quenched the fire that burnt the stick  
that beat the dog that bit the cat that ate the kid  
that my father bought for two zuzim,  
had gadya, had gadya.

Then came a shobet and slaughtered the ox  
that drank the water that quenched the fire  
that burnt the stick that beat the dog  
that bit the cat that ate the kid  
that my father bought for two zuzim,  
had gadya, had gadya.

Is this singable ditty a simplistic nursery rhyme version of cause and effect, crime and punishment? Or is it an allegory of Israel's fate among the nations? In the light of the second theory, the one-of-a-kind kid is Israel, purchased by the Almighty for two zuzim (the two tablets of the Torah or Moses and Aaron). And here is the cast of Israel's oppressors, identified in order of appearance (or disappearance) as: Assyria (the cat), Babylon (the dog), Persia (the stick), Greece (the fire), Rome (the water), the Saracens (the ox), the Crusaders (the shobet), the Ottomans (the angel of death). But all's well that ends well. For, “If you see the oppression of the poor and the violent perverting of justice and righteousness in the state, marvel not at the matter: for one higher than the high watches” (Ecclesiastes 5:7). As the curtain comes down on this miniature morality play, retribution is exacted and death dies, confounded forever. So the Seder ends on a note of jubilation and the prospect of life everlasting.
Then came the angel of death who killed the shobhet
who slaughtered the ox that drank the water
that quenched the fire that burnt the stick
that beat the dog that bit the cat that ate the kid
that my father bought for two zuzim,
HAD GADYA, HAD GADYA.

Then came the Holy One and killed the angel of death
who killed the shobhet
who slaughtered the ox
that drank the water
that quenched the fire
that burnt the stick
that beat the dog
that bit the cat
that ate the kid
that my father bought for two zuzim,
HAD GADYA, HAD GADYA.
Counting the Omer

(recited only on the second night)

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe whose mitzvot add holiness to our lives and who gave us the miztvah of counting the Omer.

Today is the first day of the Omer.

Reflection:

Master of the universe, You commanded us to count the Omer, as You have written in Your Torah: “From the eve of the second day of Pesah, when an Omer of grain is to be brought as an offering, you shall count seven complete weeks. The day after the seventh week of your counting will make fifty days” (Leviticus 23:15–16). Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, may it be counted in my favor that I have dutifully counted the Omer today, and may I thereby make amends for any harm that I may have done, and may I be purified and sanctified in the holiness of heaven. Amen.

HOW: Every evening, from the second night of Pesah until the night before Shavuot, we count the days of the Omer.

WHY: Omer (literally “sheaf”) refers to the offering from the new barley crop which was brought to the Temple on the sixteenth of Nisan, the eve of the second day of Pesah. Omer has come to be the name of the period between Pesah and Shavuot. By counting the days of this period (sefarit ha-omer), we recall the events which they connect, the liberation from enslavement commemorated by Pesah and the gift of Revelation commemorated by Shavuot, events which took place during our people’s journey to the Promised Land. On our personal journeys in life we each have our own enslavements and liberations, revelations and promised lands. As we often count the days leading to significant events in our personal lives, so we count such days in the life of our people, times past and present. We also recall that our ancestors were closely connected with the soil, directly dependent upon crops, and we recount their gratitude for the harvest of grain through which God renewed life each year.
Nirtzah

The Fourth Cup

Reflection:

I am ready to fulfill the commandment of drinking the fourth of the Four Cups. This recalls God’s promise of redemption to the people Israel, as it says, “I will take you to be My people and I will be your God” (Exodus 6:7).

Lift the cup of wine and recite:

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe who creates the fruit of the vine.

Drink the wine while reclining, then recite the following blessing, adding the words in parentheses on Shabbat.

Praised are You, Adonai our God, King of the universe, for the vine and for its fruit. We thank You for the earth’s bounty and the pleasing, spacious, desirable land which You gave our ancestors, that they might eat of its produce and be satisfied with its goodly yield. Adonai our God, have mercy on Jerusalem Your city, on Zion the home of Your glory, and on the Temple. Fully restore Jerusalem soon and in our day, so that we may rejoice in its restoration and eat of the land’s good fruit in abundance and praise You in holiness. (Renew us this Shabbat.) Grant us joy this Pesah. We thank You, Adonai, for Your goodness to all. We thank You for the land and for the fruit of the vine. Praised are You, Adonai, for the land and for the fruit of the vine.
Hark! my beloved! Behold, he comes, Leaping upon the mountains, Skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart. My beloved spoke, and said to me: "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For now the winter is past, The rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; The time of singing has come, And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; The fig-tree puts forth her green figs, And the vines in blossom give forth their fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." (Song of Songs 2:8–13).

WHY do we read the Song of Songs (shir hashirim) on Pesah? Coinciding with springtime, the earth’s annual reawakening from its wintry slumber, Pesah celebrates Israel’s reawakening from its woeful winter of enslavement. Shir hashirim sings of spring, of flowering pomegranates and budding vines. It sings of love, a love that cannot be quenched, a love that is sweeter than wine and stronger than death. According to traditionalists, this is the eternal love between Israel and its Redeemer who came “leaping upon the mountains,” leaping over space and time to hasten the liberation of His beloved people.

Our Seder now has ended with its history-laden rites. We have journeyed from Mitzrayim on this storied night of nights. We bore witness, we remembered our covenant with You. So we pray that You redeem us as You pledged Your word to do.

NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM!
La-shanah haba’ah b’irushalayim.
NOTES AND GLOSSARY

ABBAYI, Nahmani ben Kayll, 278–338 CE: Babylonian amora (see below), outstanding dialectician, head of the Pumbedita Academy (333–338). His discussions with Rabba (q.v.) are frequently cited in the Talmud.

AGGADAH (literally, narration): Homiletical, imaginative, allegorical interpretations of Scripture; those sections of rabbinic literature which are not concerned with Halakhah (q.v.).

AKIVA ben Joseph, c. 60 to 130 CE: Tanna (q.v.), the foremost scholar of his time and one of the most charismatic personalities of all time. Politician and patriot, he rallied to the support of Bar Kokhba. When Rome forbade study of the Torah, he continued to teach it in public, and for this act of “civil disobedience” the Romans executed him.

AMALIKE: Unprovoked, these predatory nomads waylaid the Israelites in the desert, attacking from the rear, slaughtering the enfeebled, defenseless strangers (Exodus 17:8–16 and Deuteronomy 25:17–19). Amalek became a byword for wanton militarism, for man’s inhumanity to man, for “not fearing God.”

AMORA, pl. AMORAIM (literally, lecturers): Interpreters of and commentators on the Mishnah, they flourished between 200 and 500 CE. Their thoughts and teachings comprise the Gemara.

AYOT or PEREK AYOT (The Fathers. Ethics of the Fathers): One of the sixty-three tractates of the Mishnah, a compendium of the aphorisms of scores of sages who taught from the 3rd century BCE to the 3rd century CE.

BAR KOKHBA, “Son of a Star”: Shimon ben Kosiba. The general, hailed by Rabbi Akiva as “the king-messiah,” who led a valiant but doomed rebellion against the Romans 132–135 CE, ending catastrophically with nearly 600,000 Jewish casualties (page 135 of Judaeus, New Yorke, 1615).

BONERS, Joseph ben Samuel (Tov Elen), 11th century. French scholar-poet, author of the concluding stanzas (page 136) of a liturgical poem describing the laws of Pesah, composed for reading in the synagogue on the Shabbat before Pesah.

BOOK OF THE DEAD: Egyptian funerary texts.

ELAZAR BEN AZARAH, 1st to 2nd century CE: Statesman-scholar of illustrious lineage, a direct descendant of Ezra the Scribe. Said to have been elected leader of the Academy at the age of eighteen.

ELEAZER ben HYCRANUS, 1st to 2nd century CE: Renowned tanna, a pupil of Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakai and a teacher of Rabbi Akiva. Established his own Academy at Lydda.

ENOCI: Father of Methuselah, Enoch (Genesis 5:18–24) was one of the saintly figures of the generation before the Flood. He became a popular figure in Jewish mysticism.

gamliel: Several distinguished Rabbis bear this name. The Rabban Gamliel of the Haggadah is variously identified as Gamliel the Elder, president of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem before the destruction of the Temple, or his grandson, Gamliel II, president of the Sanhedrin in Yavneh, circa 80, after the destruction of the Temple.

gemara (completion): Commentary on and supplement to the Mishnah. Together, Mishnah and Gemara make up the Talmud.

halakhah (literally, the way, specifically Jewish law): Rabbinic interpretation of Jewish law. Civil and religious legislation that governs every aspect of life.

hametz: Leaven and leaven products proscribed on Pesah.

histoires: 1st century BCE: President of the Sanhedrin, “one of the greatest personalities in the annals of Judaism and indeed of all mankind” (L. Finkelstein). While the teachings of the School of Hillel were often hotly disputed by the opposing School of Shamai, the rulings of the former generally prevailed.

josephus, flavius: or Joseph ben Mattitahu ha-Cohen, c. 38 to 100 CE: Jewish general who defected to the Romans and who wrote incisive, if slanted, accounts of Jewish life in the first centuries BCE and CE. His works include The Wars of the Jews and Antiquities of the Jews.

joshua ben hananiah, 1st to 2nd century CE: Palestinian tanna, a Levite who had served in the Temple, this sage, like many of his colleagues, earned his living by manual labor. He was a maker of needles.

judah ha-nasi, c. 135 to 220 CE: Patriarch of Judaea, final redactor of the Mishnah. A scholar of great repute, Judah the Prince is often called simply “Rabbi.”

lazar: Brother of Rebekah, uncle of Jacob, father of Rachel and Leah.

luris, isaac ben solomon ashkenazi, the “Ari” or the holy lion, 1534–1572: Highly influential kabbalist who lived in Safed.

maggid (telling, exposition): Focus of the Pesah Haggadah, the section which recounts the story of the Exodus and God’s miraculous deliverance of the Israelites.

ma’or shetam (literally, money for wheat): Special charity fund set up to ensure that all Jews have ample provisions, including wine, for the festive celebration of Pesah. In talmudic times, compulsory taxes were levied on the community for this important fund.

mekhilta of rabbi ismael: Tannaitic (pre-200 CE) exegetical work on the Book of Exodus.

mishnah (to expound, to interpret): Creative talmudic and post-talmudic exegesis of biblical texts intended to uncover new strata of meaning and to elicit new homiletic insights.

mishnah (repetition): “The official textbook of the Oral Law,” according to Solomon Schechter, the Mishnah is a compendium of Jewish civil and religious laws, as formulated between the years 200 BCE and 200 CE, and edited by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi.


nisim: The month of spring. Nisan is the first month of the Jewish religious year and the seventh month of the civil calendar. Pesah begins on the fifteenth of Nisan.

pesahim (literally, Pascal lambs): The tractate of the Talmud which details and discusses the ordinances relating to the observance of Pesah.
PHILO JUDEUS - Jewish Hellenistic philosopher of the first century CE. 
RAVI, Solomon ben Isaac, 1040–1105: Born at Troyes, France, commentator par excellence on the Bible and the Talmud. 
RASHI, Abba Akiva, Abba the Tall, early third century CE: Amora, founder and head of the Academy of Sura in Babylonia, an institution with 1,200 students. He and his colleague Samuel figure prominently in the Talmud. 
ROSH HODESH: The beginning of a new month was regarded as a minor festival by the ancients (and as a minor new year by the mystics), a time for special offerings and special prayers. We still recite special prayers on Rosh Hodesh. 
SAMUEL, c. 177–257 CE: Babylonian amora, head of the Academy of Nehardea, the “judge of the diaspora” was familiar with Greek, Latin, medicine and astronomy. 
SANEDRIN: Supreme Court of ancient Israel. 
SHEDIVAH (dwelling): The numerous presence of God, infusing the world with His glory and accompanying the Jewish people throughout its long night of exile. 
TANNIN (teaching): Monumental compilation of early rabbinic wisdom, comprising Mishnah and Gemara. The Palestinian Talmud (Yerushalmi) was compiled by the late 4th century; the Babylonian Talmud (Bavli), a work of 5,894 folio pages and 2,500,000 words, was completed a century later. 
TAMAR, Aaron Samuel, 1869–1931: Rabbi of Grodno, Belorussia, a preacher of pacifism. 
TANNA, pl. TANNAE (literally, teachers): scholars of the first two centuries whose legislation and precepts are recorded in the Mishnah. 
TAFORE, late 1st century: Prominent tanna, colleague (and one time teacher) of Rabbi Akiva, noted for his wisdom, wit and humility. 
TISSA RAY (Ninth of Av): Fast day commemorating the destruction of both the First Temple (586 BCE) and the Second Temple (70 CE). It is also the anniversary of other national tragedies, among them the fall of the last stronghold against Rome in 135 CE, the expulsion from Spain in 1492, and the birth of Shabbetai Tzvi in 1626. 
YAVNE: Ancient Palestinian city, south of Jaffa. Here, after the destruction of the Second Temple, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai established an academy and re-established the Sanhedrin, building a thriving center of scholarship that ensured the survival of Judaism and the continuity of Jewish tradition. 
YOM MA’AYMAT: Israel Independence Day, commemorating the signing of the Declaration of Independence on May 14, 1948 (Yar 3, 5708). Halakha and other special prayers and readings are added to the service on this day. 
ZHONO (brightness): the “bible” of the kabbalists, a mystical commentary on the Torah, attributed by some to thirteenth century Spanish scholar Moses de Leon and by others to second century sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai.
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