

HUNGER SEDER

Or Hadash: A Reconstructionist Congregation

March 26, 2015 - 7 Nisan 5775

adapted from materials created by Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger
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Leader: Welcome. Or Hadash is joining communities around the country this evening who are hosting Hunger Seders to call attention to the ongoing issue of hunger in the United States, which affects 1 in 6 American households. On this holiday when we celebrate our freedom and proclaim, "Let all who are hungry come and eat," we recognize that this is an impossibility for the 50 million Americans bound by hardships and challenges that make them virtual slaves to their circumstances. Through our speakers, our actions, and our Seder this evening we highlight the difficulties caused in this country by hunger and pledge to work for a day when all will be free from the oppression of hunger.

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Leader: The word 'seder' means 'order.' The ordered rituals and symbols of the Passover Seder help us to tell the story of the Jewish people's liberation from slavery in Egypt. During the traditional Seder, we join together and drink four cups of wine: a cup for each of the promises of freedom God made to the Israelites as God led us out from slavery in Egypt. Today we join together and make four new promises; promises not about breaking the shackles of Egyptian slavery but about breaking the bonds of hunger. We do so standing together and calling for a better tomorrow, one in which we are all blessed to have healthy, delicious food for our families, our neighbors, our friends, and for all Americans.

All:

1. We will feed our communities today.
2. We will seek out those in need and act to nourish our neighbors and ourselves.
3. We will use our power to persuade our leaders to act to abolish hunger in our communities.
4. We will create a world where all Americans and all people are free from hunger.

Kadesh: the First Cup

Participant:

As we prepare to drink our First Cup and make our first promise, we acknowledge that not everyone has the luxury to feed their bodies with reasonably-priced nutritious food. Far too many of our neighbors and friends – and especially the very young and very old – simply do not have adequate resources to do that which we take for granted: eat in a way that actually provides nourishment. Our first cup is our first promise: We will work to ensure that everyone has access to enough nutritious food.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam borei p'ri ha-gafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Participant:

We also join in a prayer to give thanks for the opportunity to come together this evening to reflect on the problem of hunger in our country and to commit to action.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַחַיִּינוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעַנוּ לַיָּמֵן הַזֶּה.

*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam,
she-hechyanu vekiemanu vehigyanu laz'man ha-zeh.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who gives us life, sustains us, and has enabled us to reach this season.

Urchatz: hand washing

Leader: The washing of hands is a ritual of purification. We symbolically “wash away” apathy or indifference and instead prepare ourselves to reignite our passion for justice and our commitment to ending hunger.

Participant: Parable of the Starfish

An old man was walking along a beach when he happened up on a young girl picking up starfish, one by one, and throwing them gently into the water. He asked the girl,

“Why are you throwing these starfish into the ocean?” She replied, “Because the sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don’t throw them back, they will die on the beach.”

The old man looked at the girl and remarked, “But there are miles and miles of beach and many starfish along each mile. You can’t possibly make a difference.” The young girl listened politely and smiled. Then she bent down, picked up another starfish, threw it back in the ocean, and turned to the old man. “It made a difference for that one,” she replied.

Karpas: green vegetables

Participant: Just as after the Israelites left Egypt and wandered in the desert they needed manna to sustain them because there is no food found there, so we use Karpas, the fresh green vegetable, to symbolize the food deserts throughout our country – urban areas where it is impossible to find fresh, nutritious foods. The salt water will remind us of the abundant sodium and other unhealthy additives that are instead found in much of the only food available to those who are poor.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה.

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-adamah

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who creates the fruit of the earth.

Maggid: telling the story

Participant:

At Passover we recall that we were slaves in Egypt, and God brought us out from there with a strong hand and outstretched arm. If God had not brought us out from Egypt then we – our children, and our children’s children – might still have been slaves in Egypt.

Though many of us are blessed to enjoy the freedom we gained so long ago, far too many people continue to be enslaved by their circumstances. As we gather for this Hunger Seder, nearly 50 million Americans – including 16 million children – face uncertainty about when and where they will find their next meal. But if we extend our strong hands and stretch out our arms, we can free them from the bondage of hunger.

Participant: Parable of the Babies in the River

One day a group of friends gathered for a picnic at a river near their village. As they shared food and conversation, one of them noticed a baby in the river, struggling and crying as she floated downstream. Quickly they rushed to save her from drowning. But no sooner had they done so, more babies came floating down the river. And even more after that!

The friends quickly decided they needed to coordinate more villagers to assist in their rescue activities. They organized volunteers to take turns watching over the water and pulling babies from the water. Volunteers recruited their friends to help, and before long the entire village was helping to rescue the babies from the river.

In the middle of the ongoing rescue operation, one villager jumped out of the river and began running upstream.

“Where are you going?” shouted the other rescuers. “We need you here to help us save these babies!”

As she ran she replied, “I’m going upstream to stop whoever is throwing them in!”

Leader: Call to action

The Four Questions:

Leader: The Four Questions we ask at our Hunger Seder challenge us to consider what is different about this night. Only when we ask the right questions can we understand the real meaning of hunger and hope to do something about it.

Participant: Why a Hunger Seder?

Despite passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, there are many more individuals still suffering from the oppression of hunger. This year Congress has set forth budgets that include significant cuts to funding for social welfare spending – including crucial programs aimed at combating hunger. While our economy has improved, many in this country still face food insecurity on a daily basis. We must raise our voices to ensure that everyone understands the urgency of the need – especially our policymakers.

Participant: Why is this year different from all other years?

The Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act authorizes all of the federal school meal and child nutrition programs, which ensure that children from low-income families have access to healthy and nutritious foods. The current law, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, is due to expire in September of this year. Reauthorization provides an important and timely opportunity to build on the strengths of the current law and to improve and strengthen the child nutrition and school meal programs so that they better meet the needs of our nation's children. The child nutrition programs that need to be authorized this year include the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, Afterschool Snack and Meal Program, Special Supplemental Nutritional Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, and the Special Milk Program.

Participant: What are the impacts of hunger in this country?

Hunger leads to instability in families, greater risk of developmental problems and chronic health condition for children, and greater risk for injuries and complications for adults. According to a recent report by the Center for American Progress and Brandeis University, "Hunger costs our nation at least \$167.5 billion due to the combination of lost productivity per year, more expensive public education because of the rising costs of poor education outcomes, avoidable health care costs, and the cost of charity to keep families fed." And, of course, hunger saps the dignity of those in our country who suffer, and the moral fiber of a nation of unprecedented wealth and abundance.

Participant: Why are so many people hungry when there are government programs to support them?

While government programs like SNAP and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (which provides home-delivered food packages to low-income seniors) are important, they can only help those who are enrolled. Sometimes people are not aware the programs exist or that they qualify. Other times the process to enroll is so complicated that people just give up. And for some, the stigma attached to asking for assistance is so great, they choose to suffer in silence. This is why we must expand access to these programs and make it easier for people to participate.

Second Cup:

Participant: The Second Cup represents our promise to see those in need and act to nourish our neighbors and ourselves. We drink this cup to share the story of oppression of hunger, and to look forward to a future when all people are free from the bondage of food insecurity.

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Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam borei p'ri ha-gafen.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Matzah: the bread of affliction

All:

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

Let all those who are hungry come and eat with us.

Let all who are in need come and share in our meal.

This year we are here; next year may we be in the land of Israel.

This year we are slaves; next year may we all be free.

Participant: We thank God for providing us wheat to make bread. In doing so, God gives us the tools we need to sustain ourselves and our communities. We have the tools to create a hunger-free world. It is our responsibility to use them to create a stronger society.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz.

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

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל אֲכִילַת מַצָּה.

*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav
vitzivanu al achilat matzah.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who makes us holy through Your commandments and commands us to eat the matzah.

Maror: the bitter herbs

Participant: The bitter herbs are a reminder of the afflictions our ancestors suffered in Egypt. At Passover, we dip the herbs in sweet charoset in gratitude for our freedom. On this night when we think of others who are still afflicted by hunger, we forego the sweetness, even as we pledge to do what we can to lighten the load of those less fortunate and to show compassion for all those who continue to face oppression.

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*Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech ha-olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav
vitzivanu al achilat maror.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who makes us holy through Your commandments and commands us to eat the bitter herbs.

Dayyenu: in gratitude for our blessings

Participant: We are grateful that so many among us do not suffer from the oppression and hardship of daily hunger.

All: *Dayyenu*

Participant: We are grateful to live in a democracy in which we are able to influence our government's priorities.

All: *Dayyenu*

Participant: We are grateful for those who work on the front lines to fight hunger and food insecurity each day.

All: *Dayyenu*

Participant: We are grateful we made the time to be present for this Hunger Seder to educate ourselves and be inspired to act.

All: *Dayyenu*

Participant: We are grateful for each other – alone we are limited, but together we are a powerful voice for change.

All: *Dayyenu*

Day-, dayyenu

Third Cup:

Participant: The Third Cup represents represents our commitment to persuade our leaders to act to abolish hunger in our communities. We are aware of the scourge of hunger in our nation, but unlike the plagues in ancient Egypt which were punishments sent by God the plague of hunger is one of our own creation. Before drinking from our third cup, we diminish it for each of the qualities that allow people to go hungry in this nation of enormous wealth and abundance.

All:

1. Waste
2. Indifference
3. Scorn
4. Greed
5. Complacency
6. Contempt
7. Resignation
8. Despair
9. Self-Indulgence
10. Apathy

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

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Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

Participant: Parable of Honi

One day, Honi the Circle Maker was walking on the road and saw a man planting a carob tree. Honi asked the man, "How long will it take for this tree to bear fruit?" The man replied, "Seventy years."

Honi then asked the man, "And do you think you will live another seventy years and eat the fruit of this tree?" The man answered, "Perhaps not. However, when I was born into this world, I found many carob trees planted by my father and grandfather. Just as they planted trees for me, I am planting trees for my children and grandchildren so they will be able to eat the fruit of these trees."

Elijah and Miriam's cups:

Participant: Elijah and Miriam's cups sit on our table as a symbol of hope and the coming of the Messiah. Rather than wait for hunger to end, we must actively work toward this goal. And so each of us will pour wine from our own glasses into Elijah's or Miriam's cup to demonstrate the kind of collaborative effort necessary to build strong communities for those who are most vulnerable in this nation, and for us all.

*Eliyahu ha-navi, Eliyahu ha-Tishbi, Eliyahu, Eliyahu, Eliyahu ha-Gil'adi.
Bimheirah b'yameinu yavo eleinu im mashi'ach ben David, im mashi'ach ben David*

*Miryam ha-nevi'ah, oz v'zimrah b'yadah, Miryam tirkod itanu l'hagdil zimrat olam
Miryam tirkod itanu letakein et ha-olam
Bimheirah b'yameinu hi tevi'einu el mei ha-yeshu'ah, el mei ha-yeshu'ah*

Elijah the prophet will come to us soon to hail the messianic days.

Miriam the prophet will dance with us at the waters of redemption.

Fourth Cup:

Participant: Our fourth and final cup signals our commitment to see a world where all Americans and all people are free from hunger. Let us hope for and work toward making this world a reality.

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Nirtzah: Conclusion

Leader: Our Seder is now coming to a close. We celebrated our successes, learned about the hunger that still plagues our communities, and affirmed our commitment to work together to create a hunger-free world. We pray that, at this time next year, our fellow men, women, and children will be blessed with abundance and free from the yoke of hunger and poverty.

All:

One day, God, may it be Your will
that we live in a world perfected,
in which food comes to the hungry as from heaven
and water will flow to the thirsty as a stream.

But in the meantime,
while the world is filled with hunger,
empower us to stand on Your behalf
and fulfill the words of your prophet:
“to all who are thirsty bring water,”
and “greet those who wander with food.”

This Passover, bless us that we should sustain the hungry

חג שמח