

## **The Hunger Seder, Produced by Mazon and JCPA: A Haggadah Dedicated to Hunger Awareness and Activism**

As we are sure many of you know, many of the Jewish holidays are excellent opportunities to mention, focus on, or make connections with the contemporary world around us, particularly the issues that need our attention desperately, such as Sukkot and the homeless, Yom Kippur and the hungry, etc. This year, we are providing you with two resources to connect Passover with the issue of hunger: a haggadah and small passages or portions that you might want to add to your own traditional Seder specifically meant to draw attention to the plight of the hungry in our own society.

The first choice, to simply use the entire “Hunger Seder” can be easily done by downloading the pdf and following it. Please go to

[http://mazon.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/2013\\_MAZON-JCPAHungerSeder\\_rev.pdf](http://mazon.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/2013_MAZON-JCPAHungerSeder_rev.pdf)

The other choice is to use some of the following passages or portions presented below. We have indicated where in the traditional Seder this new material might be inserted.

Please have a happy Passover Seder and consider more explicitly addressing this critical issue this year. Thanks.

### **1) What is a Hunger Seder? [as you begin your Seder]**

*LEADER: Each year, Jews across the world join with family, friends, neighbors, and strangers to celebrate the holiday of Passover. But why? What is behind this tradition?*

Though Passover celebrates the Jewish people’s freedom from slavery in Egypt, it is truly a celebration of freedom from all slavery and oppression. Yet in our world today, both still exist. Many people, even in a free society such as ours, are bound by hardships and challenges that make them virtual slaves to their circumstances.

Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav taught: The Exodus from Egypt occurs in every human being, in every era, in every year and on every day. On this day, we act as if we ourselves went out from Egypt, as if we ourselves are hungry.

*LEADER: For those of us who do not usually suffer the agony of hunger, today is a day to stand in the shoes of others, to remember that every one of us should be free from hunger and have the right to eat nourishing, sustaining food. As we learn in Pirke Avot, the teachings of our fathers,*

**המלאכה לגמור, ולא אתה בן חורין להבטל ממנה.**

# לא עליך

*Lo alecha ham'lacha ligmor, v'lo ata ben chorin l'hibatale mimena.*

“You are not obligated to finish the work [of perfecting the world] but neither are you allowed to desist from it.”

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 4 cups of wine: a cup for each of the promises of freedom God made to the Israelites as God led us out of bondage. 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 READ IN UNISON)

1. We will feed our communities today.
2. We will learn why so many women and their children struggle with hunger.
3. We will urge our policymakers to make it a priority to end hunger in our communities.
4. We will create a world where all Americans, and all people, are free from hunger.

## **2) Kadesh – The First Cup: We feed our communities today. [the first blessing over the wine]**

*LEADER: We lift our glasses and read the blessing over the wine together (drink wine after the blessing):*

אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן  
ברוך

*Baruch ata Adonai Elohenu, Melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen*

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

An old man was walking along a beach when he happened upon 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.

Each time we volunteer at a soup kitchen, spend a day sorting boxes at the food bank, or donate extra food from our cupboards, our actions have value beyond measure. The Talmud, the writings of Judaism’s oral law and commentary, holds up this action and declares,

*“Whoever saves a life, it is as if s/he saved the entire world.”*

This is one important way we fulfill our promise to feed our communities today.

### **3) Karpas – Green Vegetable [dipping of greens]**

*LEADER: Karpas is from the Greek word Karpos, which means “fruit of the soil.” When spring comes we note with pleasure the bounty of vegetables and fruits in the market. Yet in many communities and neighborhoods across the country, instead of a seasonal bounty there exists persistent scarcity.*

Too many families struggle to put food on the table. Too many families are forced to make impossible choices between their most basic necessities – food, rent, utilities, medicine. Too many families simply cannot afford nutritious food, which negatively impacts their health.

This year, as we dip our Karpas into salt water, let us remember that we must work to increase access to affordable, good quality, nutritious food for everyone.

*Distribute green vegetable, dipped in salt water, then together recite blessing over the Karpas:*

אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי האדמה  
ברוך

*Baruch ata Adonai Elohenu, Melech ha’olam, borei p’ri ha’adama*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, creator of the fruits of the earth.

May the blessings of Your bountiful harvests be enjoyed by all of humankind.

#### **4) Ma Nishtana – 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.*

1) (ALL) *Why is this year different from all other years?*

Last year, legislators were unsuccessful in their efforts to reauthorize the five-year Farm Bill, legislation that funds and sets standards for SNAP, our nation's largest anti-hunger program. As our representatives in Washington prepare to try again, they face unprecedented pressure to lower the deficit through large-scale cuts to the federal budget. SNAP is the largest program funded by the Farm Bill, the fact of which alone has made it a primary target for cuts despite the program's efficiency and overall effectiveness. We must make certain that hungry families struggling to put food on their tables do not suffer at the hands of those who have reduced them from individuals to dollar signs.

2) (ALL) *Why a Hunger Seder?*

Economists point to indications that our national recession is over, but difficulty and struggle hunger because they cannot access the nutritious food they need to lead a minimally healthy life. We cannot allow reports about record corporate profits or new highs in the stock market, blind us to the challenge that persists for nearly one out of every six Americans. We must raise our voices to ensure that everyone understands the ongoing urgency of the need.

3) (ALL) *Why does food insecurity disproportionately impact women and children?*

While 46 million Americans face poverty in the United States, women are disproportionately represented among the poor, and record numbers of women are living in extreme poverty. Women and their children, regardless of race or ethnicity, are more likely than men to be living below the poverty line, and over twice as many elderly women as men are poor. There has been a large gender poverty gap in every year since the official poverty standard was created. This gap persists despite working outside the home or securing a higher education. What drives women and their children into poverty and keeps them there is a complex mix of increasing numbers of households headed by female single parents, the lack of affordable child care and a workplace where women still earn only 77% of what men earn. If we don't recognize that women experience these challenges differently then we cannot craft solutions that truly meet their unique

needs.

*4) (ALL) Why are so many people still struggling to put food on the table when there are government programs to support them?*

While government programs like SNAP, WIC 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 that they qualify, or even that these programs exist. Other times the process to enroll is so complicated that people just give up. And for some, especially older Americans, 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.

## **5) The Four Children**

*LEADER: At Passover, we talk about the Four Children, each of whom has a different reaction to hearing the Passover story. During today's Seder, we read about four people who have different perspectives on hunger and have all experienced it differently. Each has a particular reaction to what s/he is learning. None are right, and none are wrong. But helping each of them understand the issues is critical to overcoming hunger in the United States.*

*LEADER: Person 1: I want to help. Teach me about hunger, and how I can help.*

(ALL) To this person, reply that the most important thing to know is hunger does not need to exist in the United States. It's not a problem of enough food, but of creating ways for people to access and afford food that is healthy, nutritious, and sustaining. Provide her with information about programs that help people access healthy food – such as SNAP, WIC, school breakfasts and lunches, and senior feeding programs. Teach her how to visit her public officials, write letters to the editor, organize petitions, and join with others to impact real social change.

*LEADER: PERSON 2: But I'm not hungry. What does this have to do with me?*

(ALL) To this person, reply that although he does not experience the oppression of hunger daily, it is only when none are hungry that we will truly live in a safe, stable, and just community.

*LEADER: Person 3: My family is hungry but we've never needed help to buy food before. This is embarrassing.*

(ALL) To this person, reply that it is okay to need help. When she asks for and receives help, she is making the world more whole by feeding her children. There is no shame in seeking assistance and, in truth, it is those among us who refuse to lend a helping hand who should be ashamed.

*LEADER: Person 4: I have experienced hunger but I need extra help to overcome it. Why is learning about hunger important to me when what I really need is food?*

(ALL) To this person reply that in the daily struggle of hunger, it seems impossible to look beyond one single person and see the enormity of the problem in the United States. Yet, the problem will only be solved when we all come together to say, “No more!” When Moses inspired the slaves in Egypt, they joined forces with others who were suffering. Today is our day to work as one to repair the world.

## **5) The Ten Plagues**

*LEADER: On Passover, we read about the 10 plagues God unleashed on the Egyptians. But the plagues we see today are not punishment from God. The plagues we see today are plagues of our own making -- the awful, unintended results of our own actions and creations. As we read each of these plagues aloud, we dip a finger into the wine and touch a drop onto our plate. This reminds us that, even as we celebrate freedom, our freedom is not complete.*

*Dip your finger in your glass and place a drop of wine on the plate for each plague:*

(ALL READ TOGETHER IN UNISON)

1. The single mother who gives the last bits of food in the house to her child, while she goes hungry
2. The grandmother who must choose between paying for medicine and paying for her lunch
3. A neighbor who never invites you over because she can't offer you food
4. An unemployed mom who is too embarrassed to apply for food stamps
5. A friend who feels alienated because she cannot join in on social events at restaurants
6. The woman who brings plastic bags to Shabbat Oneg or a church lunch to take home food for the rest of the week
7. A mother who does not apply for food stamps because she cannot understand the application system
8. The tons of edible food that spoil or are thrown away
9. The young couple who live in an urban neighborhood where there is no full service grocery store, only fast food and convenience stores
10. APATHY – the greatest plague of all, the failure to make ending hunger a national priority

**5) Kos Sheini –The Second Cup:** We will learn why so many women and their children struggle with hunger.

*LEADER: We lift our glasses and read the blessing over the wine together (drink wine after the blessing):*

אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן  
ברוך

*Baruch ata Adonai Elohenu, Melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen*

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

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 the oppression of hunger, and to look forward to a future when all people are free from the bondage of food insecurity.

**6) Maror – Bitter Herbs**

*LEADER: Another important Passover symbol is maror (מרור), bitter herbs. Bitter herbs serve as a reminder of how the Egyptians embittered the lives of our fathers and mothers. When we eat these bitter herbs, we partake in the bitterness of servitude and oppression.*

(ALL) It is our obligation, as people and as members of this community, 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.

*LEADER: We join together in the blessing over the maror (lift up maror and eat a piece after the blessing):*

אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו  
וצונו על אכילת מרור ברוך אתה יי

*Baruch ata Adonai Elohenu, Melech ha'olam, asher kideshanu be'mitzvotav ve'tzivanu al achilat maror*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has made us holy with God's commandments and commanded us to eat bitter herbs.

## **7) Koreich – Hillel Sandwich**

On Passover, we also eat charoset (חרוסת), a sweet mix of apples, nuts and cinnamon, which symbolizes the mortar the Jewish people used when they were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.

*(Take two pieces of matzah and create a sandwich with charoset and maror.)*

During the Passover Seder, we eat a sandwich of maror and charoset between two pieces of matzah, called a Hillel sandwich.

No community in this country is free from hunger, a bitter reality in our land of plenty. But there are also communities in this country that unite to support those who are most vulnerable among them. The Hillel sandwich we make today is a symbol of this dichotomy: the sweetness of a community's compassion and commitment tempering the bitterness of the situation.

## **8) Kos Sh'Lishi – The Third Cup: We will urge our policymakers to make it a priority to end hunger in our communities.**

*LEADER: We lift our glasses and read the blessing over the wine together (drink wine after the blessing):*

מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגָּפֶן  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

*Baruch ata Adonai Elohenu, Melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen*

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

## **9) TZAFUN - Finding the Afikomen**

Afikomen comes from the Greek word for dessert, and is the last item eaten during the Seder. Traditionally, the Afikomen is hidden toward the beginning of the Seder to keep children's attention. When the meal is over, the Seder's younger participants search the house for the Afikomen. This year, let us consider the Afikomen as a symbol for the ongoing search for answers as to why so many American families struggle to put food on the table every day.



*LEADER: Where is the hunger that persists in our country today? For those among us who do not see the problem?*

**OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES:**

*Advocacy*

On March 1st, the sequester (across-the-board budget cuts) became law after Congress and the White House failed to reach a deficit reduction deal, as prescribed in the Budget Control Act of 2011. Unless legislative action is taken immediately, funding for the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) will be cut by 5.1%, forcing at least 600,000 mothers and their children off the program.

WIC has always received strong bipartisan support. It is a proven program which over the past 38 years has been shown to improve consumption of key nutrients, at-risk children's health, growth and development, and reduce hunger.

Please fill out a postcard to your Member of Congress to urge them to protect WIC.

*Discussion*

Break into small discussion groups and have a 10-15 minute discussion about hunger in America. Some questions to consider:

- Why did you come to today's Seder? What are you hoping to learn/gain?
- Are you surprised to learn about the prevalence of hunger in America?
- Have you seen examples of hunger in your community? If yes, what have you seen?
- If no, why do you think this is?
- What do you think we can do to reduce the problem of hunger?

The story of the Exodus from Egypt has a happy ending – darkness gave way to light and the oppression of Egyptian slavery gave way to freedom. This is why we teach our children about the Exodus and also why we must teach them about hunger and poverty – so they will understand the struggles people face and will continue the work of making our world better.

**10) KOS R'VI-I - THE FOURTH CUP: We will create a world where all Americans, and all people, are free from hunger.**

*LEADER: We lift our glasses and read the blessing over the wine together (drink wine after the blessing):*

# ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן

*Baruch ata Adonai Elohenu, Melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen*

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

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."

-Talmud, as told by Peninah Schram

We drink the Fourth Cup to remember our promise to create a world where all people, today and for generations to come, will be free from hunger and malnutrition. This is our vision of a world that has been redeemed.

## **11) KOS ELIJAHU - The Cup of Elijah**

*Pass around Elijah's cup and have all participants fill the cup with some wine from their own cups*

Elijah's cup sits on our table as a symbol of hope and the coming of the Messiah. It is a Passover tradition for each person to spill a little wine from his/her glass into Elijah's cup, which has been empty for the entire Seder. This kind of collaborative effort is how we will build strong communities for our children and our children's children.

*All rise and face the open door.*

When the rabbis could not resolve a dispute with one another over a matter of law, they would proclaim: "Elijah will solve all of the difficult questions and problems." Today we open the door of the future. We first invite those who have experienced hunger to join with us to generate solutions. We then invite Elijah, the prophet of hope.

(ALL) We pray that in the coming year, may we come closer to solving the problem of hunger.

All of these passages were taken from the Hunger Seder 2013/5773. dk