

The Uncle Josh Haggadah Project, 2014

By Joshua Howe

1) OPENING PRAYER:

Long ago at this season, our people set out on a journey.
On such a night as this, Israel went from degradation to joy.
We give thanks for the liberation of days gone by.
And we pray for all who are still bound.
Eternal God, may all who hunger come to rejoice in a new Passover.
Let all the human family sit at your table, drink the wine of deliverance, eat the bread of freedom:

Freedom from bondage *and freedom from oppression*

Freedom from hunger *and freedom from want*

Freedom from hatred *and freedom from fear*

Freedom to think *and freedom to speak*

Freedom to teach *and freedom to learn*

Freedom to love (whoever we want*) *and freedom to share*

Freedom to hope *and freedom to rejoice*

Soon, in our days *Amen*

(*coming soon to a state near you)

First Cup of Wine:

“I take upon myself the mitzvah of this first of four cups of wine, in the name of the unification of the spirits of Nature with the Spirit of History.”¹

--We drink the first cup of wine in thanks for our deliverance from oppression

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

2) WASH your neighbors hands from Miriam's Well

¹ The word *mitzvah* has multiple meanings. Technically, each of the 613 commandments of the Torah, plus the seven rabbinic commandments, is a *mitzvah*, or moral law. But the same word, *mitzvah*, refers to any moral deed that fulfills those commandments, and more colloquially, any act of human kindness is a *mitzvah*. So be a *mensch* and do a *mitzvah* today by taking a healthy sip of wine.

--in Hebrew, *urchatz* means “cleansing,” but in Aramaic *urchatz* means “trusting”

3) KARPAS: EAT YOUR GREENS

--green = rebirth, renewal, and growth

--salt = tears of enslavement (within a health care system blind to our needs)

*Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu ruach ha'olam,
borei p'ri ha'adamah.*

Blessed are you, Adonai, Breath of Life,
creator of the fruit of the earth.

4) YACHATZ: BREAK THE MIDDLE MATZAH

(open the door)

“This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt, even though many of us were gluten intolerant. Let all who are hungry come and eat...but not too much, lest the empty calories go straight to their asses. Let all who are needy come and celebrate the Passover with us. Now we are here...which, all things considered, isn't so bad. Next year may we be again in the Land of Stuff That's Just a Little Better Than the Stuff We Have Now. Now we are slaves to instagram selfies; next year may we be free.”

(close the door)

5) MAGGID: STORY TIME!

The Four Questions (from the youngest): Why is tonight different from all other nights?

1. Every other night we eat whatever sort of bread we want; tonight, only Matzah. What gives?
2. So...these bitter herbs are awesome and all, but why do we eat them tonight?
3. Despite a historical penchant for hummus, the Jews aren't big dippers. Tonight we dip in both the salt water and the haroset. Why the double dip?
4. On all other nights we eat sitting up. Why are we all lounging around and reclining tonight?

4a. Active Group Relaxation

(answers: 1. When we took off from Egypt, we didn't have time to bake bread, so we made this stuff instead; 2. They remind us of the bitterness of slavery; 3. Tears of slavery, sweetness of freedom. It's called symbolism. Take a lit class; 4. We're free and upwardly mobile and today is the day we get to rub it in.)

The Four Children

1. The smart kid: What is the meaning of the rules, laws, and practices that we have been commanded to observe during the Passover Seder?
 - a. You shall tell this child the story of Exodus and explain the laws of the Talmud and the Torah. And when you are done, you shall ask this

child to do your taxes for you and hope that he or she gets into a good state school that you can afford.

2. The wicked child: This is lame. Why do you guys do this stuff?
 - a. The rest of us are basking in the glory of freedom and counting our blessings after being led out of slavery in Egypt, where we should have left ungrateful little punks like you to do some real work building pyramids for the Pharaoh.
3. The simple child: What's going on?
 - a. We're celebrating our deliverance from bondage and trying to figure out the difference between Pinterest and Tumblr. Try it, it's fun.
4. The one who does not know how to question
 - a. You must show this child the Passover ritual and feed it progressive ideals and liberal slogans.

For a number of happy years long ago, our ancestor Jacob and his son Joseph lived simple, sustainable lives in the prosperous wine country of Canaan. During a famine, however—which we can say with 97.2% certainty was the product of global warming—Jake and Joe were forced to give up their small-scale sustainable winery and get jobs as bureaucrats in Salem (then known as Egypt), where food and middle-management white collar positions with healthy benefit packages were equally plentiful. Jacob moved to Portland to retire with a bunch of hipsters half his age, and his son Joseph soon rose to high position writing environmental policy in the Pharaoh's court. Led by Joseph, our people were well-respected and well-regarded, comfortable and secure in the power structure of the time despite a disconcerting suburban lifestyle, a lot of rain, and a general dearth of good bagels.

Generations passed and our people remained in the Willamette valley of Egypt. Rulers came and went, and soon a new Pharaoh came to power. The new Pharaoh felt threatened by the strangers and immigrants in his people's midst, and noting that we wore funny hats, smelled of *gefilte* fish, and routinely failed to watch our fair share of NASCAR, Pharaoh used a point of parliamentary procedure and access to the Office of Management and Budget to have our people, the Jews, enslaved. Fearing rebellion and worrying that the Jews might figure out how to make the new universal health care website work properly and rob him of a great campaign tool, the Pharaoh decreed that all Hebrew boy-children be sent to semi-religious charter schools in the suburbs. But he was soon blocked by activist judges opposed to bussing, and Pharaoh threw up his hands and declared that he would kill the Jews and eat our brains instead. After further discussion and four lengthy committee meetings, it was finally decided that all firstborn Jewish boys would simply be put to death, and the measure was passed as a rider on a military appropriations bill the next day.

For two midwives of Egypt, Shifrah and Puah, the new directive seemed like a bad idea. Unconvinced that infanticide promoted long term family stability and

reproductive health, they defied Pharaoh's orders to put the newborn Jewboys to death. Through their courage, one little *k'nadle* survived.²

Fearing for his safety, the newborn's wet-nurses cautiously and reasonably placed the helpless infant in a leaky wicker basket that they found on craigslist (listed as a two bedroom with on-site laundry). They floated him off, alone, covered by a light sheet, down one of the largest and most polluted rivers in the world. It seemed like a reasonable thing to do at the time.

The lucky little Yid floated on down the Nile, and it was not long until he was found...and adopted...by none other than the Pharaoh's daughter...which was really no big deal and probably not a miracle or anything worth spending much time on in the story because it probably happens all the time. In fact, Pharaoh's daughter named him Moses, which scholars believe to have been derived from the Egyptian for, "I found him floating around in the water and decided to keep him, which is totally normal, right?" In another complete coincidence that's also probably no big deal, Pharaoh hired the boy's own mother as his wet-nurse. You know, no biggie. Thus he survived to adulthood, raised as Prince of Egypt.

Although a child of extreme privilege, as Moses grew he became aware of his adoptive father's blind commitment to ill-conceived free market principles and racist immigration policy. When Moses saw that his new father figure had sabotaged budget talks to help manufacture a fiscal crisis, he became angry and lashed out at an oil company executive who had wandered into his father's house, killing him instantly.

Fearing retribution, Moses set out across the Death Valley of the Sanai alone to hide out...well, that and maybe do a little Peyote and get a little weird with Charlie Sheen for a while.

There in the desert, God spoke to Moses (who was definitely not doing Peyote at the time, of course). Very cleverly, God disguised himself as a burning bush, which though it flamed was not consumed—a nice touch, but not a particularly convincing disguise. Moses knew it was the voice of God. The divine burning foliage called on Moses to lead the Hebrew people to freedom.

Moses demurred. He argued with God (in retrospect, this was probably a bad choice, God being who He was and all). Moses pled inadequacy. Citing omniscience, God disagreed. Moses tried to reschedule. In the end, God beat Moses in a rosham and that was it. God threw the rock of Gibraltar every time and beat Moses two out of three, so Moses had to go lead the Jews out of Egypt. Good old rock of Gibraltar.

Moses returned to Egypt and went to the Pharaoh to argue the injustice of slavery and the need for Pharaoh's party to reconsider dismantling Egypt's social welfare

² A *k'nadle* is literally a dumpling. Or a cute kid.

systems. He gave Pharaoh and his party a famous mandate that resounds through history in the voice of the late Charlton Heston:

“Let my people go.”

Pharaoh refused.

“Okay,” said Moses, “well then at least let the Democrats try to provide my people with health care, mortgage relief, and a decent wage.”

Pharaoh again refused.

Moses warned them that Mighty God would strike down the Egyptian people, bringing plagues upon the land.

Moses said, “Let my people go.”

Pharaoh refused.

And God, who had been reading the *Hunger Games* series in an effort to better connect with his teenage daughter (who was feeling depressed and unappreciated in anticipation of millennia of neglect in favor of her younger brother), turned the Nile to blood.

And Moses said, “Hey, Pharaoh, let my people go.”

And Pharaoh refused.

And then a whole bunch of frogs emerged from the river of blood to infest the land, which we’re pretty sure was also an act of God.

And Moses said, “Let my people go.”

And Pharaoh refused.

And then lice emerged from the masses of dead frogs, which was really gross and pretty obnoxious, but possibly not the work of God, though He did tip off a nice Jewish family that it would be a good time to go into the delousing shampoo business.

Moses at this point got into his Subaru and went down to REI and used his dividend to get himself a big old hiking staff to make himself look a little more rugged. Then he went back to Pharaoh and said, “let my people go.”

And still Pharaoh refused.

So God, building on the success of the lice, sent swarms of insects into Egypt.

And Moses pounded his new staff on the ground and said “Let my people go!” He thought is sounded pretty authoritative.

But Pharaoh refused.

And then God killed all the cows, and the price of chicken nuggets crashed for the first few days and then shot through the roof, which, because of the high demand for chicken, led to an egg shortage, and the whole of industrial agriculture went through a series of economic shocks while the local organic farms—coincidentally run by Jews—made a killing.

“Let my people go!” said Moses.

But Pharaoh refused.

God gave all the Egyptians boils.

“How ‘bout now?” asked Moses.

Pharaoh refused.

Then it hailed. This might have been a meteorological coincidence, but it did some serious damage to the remaining crops throughout Egypt, and Moses hoped to capitalize on it by calling it an act of God. God was watching pre-runs of Game 1 of the

2012 World Series, and didn't mind having his name associated with the hail, especially after Pablo Sandoval knocked his third dinger of the game and put the Giants up 6-0.

"So...how 'bout now?" asked Moses.

But Pharaoh (a Dodgers fan) refused.

Then there were locusts. Same outcome. Then darkness, which was pretty undeniably God's doing, and one that nobody saw coming (it being dark and all). But darkness also proved ineffective, which seems to have gotten God's attention, because then he got mad and decided to start killing people. He thought he'd begin with every first-born son in Egypt.

When God, who had by now ditched the burning bush getup in favor of the more familiar voice-from-above ensemble, told Moses what He wanted to do, Moses was a little shocked.

"Every first born son in the land of Egypt, huh?" Moses asked. "Jews, too?"

"Well, that would send kind of a mixed message, now wouldn't it," God said. "I'll tell you what. Get all the Jews to slaughter a lamb this evening, and wipe the lamb's blood over the doorways of Jewish houses. That way, I'll know which houses to hit, and which ones to pass over." God liked the sound of that idea, especially when he said "pass over" in a way that emphasized the "ass" and rolled over the "o" like "PASSover." That sounded good.

Moses nodded his head, thinking about what a weird dude God was. Then he started wondering how God was going to deal with passing over all the Jews living in lofts and downtown apartments in the same buildings as Egyptians after the banks had foreclosed on their houses, and what the landlords would say about smearing lamb's blood on the newly painted moldings of the Union Building down on Fifth Street, especially now that they had fired and deported everyone on the cleaning staff in order to compensate for the parent company's executive bonuses.

"Jesus, Moses, I'll figure it out," God said.

When he found the first-born sons of Egypt dead in the morning, Pharaoh held a hearing, and after some filibustering, passed a resolution to cut his losses. It was clear to Pharaoh that God shouldn't have had access to plagues, but Pharaoh didn't support doing away with plagues altogether, because plagues don't kill people; God kills people. Pharaoh told Moses to get his people together and hit the road. You know, or they'd all be killed and stuff.

Drops for the Ten Plagues: We commemorate the ten plagues that God sent down tot he Egyptians on our behalf with drops of wine on our plate. We place a drop on the plate as we say the name of each plague. They are:

Blood, Frogs, Lice, Insects, Cattle, Boils, Hail, Locusts, Darkness, First-Born

Fearful that that Pharaoh would change his mind, our people fled in a hurry. Instead of packing fresh bagels and lox and a nice baguette with organic brie like they imagined normal Jews would, you know, if they ever went camping, our people had to slap together some flour and water and bake it pronto. Only later did they realize the stuff had the texture of saltines and the flavor of cardboard. We called it Matzah, and we

eat it as a *mitzvah* eight days a year instead of bread, which always seems like a good idea on the first night but gets old after half a box.

It's unclear exactly why, but shortly after our fateful culinary blunder and our hasty departure, Pharaoh's party decided to send the army after us to bring us back. Some have suggested the Egyptian stock exchange crashed when so many prominent financial management professionals moved their holdings into off-shore accounts and fled the country, prompting Pharaoh to reevaluate his decision as soon as the opening bell sounded. Some evidence suggests that Pharaoh's party just kind of likes sending troops on vague and unrealistic missions in that part of the world. For my money, I think the Pharaoh came after us because we took his daughter with us, which, in retrospect, may have been another in a long series of bad decisions.

In any case, Pharaoh's army followed us to the sea. Like a *meshuggeneh*, Moses managed to lead us to the edge of an impassable body of salt water. And like *schmucks*, we plunged in after him. When we had gone as far as we could, however, God parted the waters for us to cross. Pharaoh and his army pursued, but when we arrived at the far edge, the waters that God had parted quite suddenly ceased to be apart. We mourn, even now, that Pharaoh's army drowned; our liberation is bittersweet because people died in our pursuit. We feel a little guilty. After all, we are Jews.

And thus God led us out of bondage in Egypt...and into the desert...for forty years. But that's another story for another day that we like to gloss over with *dayenu*.

To this day we relive our liberation, that we may not become complacent, that we may always rejoice in our freedom.

Dayenu: It would have been enough

Brought us out of Egypt and not divided the sea for us—Dayenu

Divided the sea and not permitted us to cross on dry land—Dayenu

Permitted us to cross on dry land and not sustained us for forty years in the desert—Dayenu

Sustained us for forty years in the desert and not fed us with manna—Dayenu

Fed us with manna and not given us the Sabbath—Dayenu

Given us the Sabbath and not brought us to Mount Sinai—Dayenu

Brought us to Mount Sinai and not given us the Torah—Dayenu

Given us the Torah and not led us into the land of Israel—Dayenu

Led us into the land of Israel and not built for us the Temple—Dayenu

Built for us the Temple and not sent us prophets of truth—Dayenu

Sent us prophets of truth and not made us a holy people—Dayenu

For all these, alone and together, we say—Dayenu!

**Optional Dayenu for 2014: If He had blessed Obamacare and never let them build the website...*

--Dayenu!

Second Cup of Wine

“I take upon myself the mitzvah of the second cup of wine to celebrate that I am free.”

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri hagafen.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

SIGNS & SYMBOLS

It is written: she who has not explained the following symbols has not fulfilled her duty.

The **Maror**, bitter herb or horseradish, represents the bitterness of slavery.

The **Haroset**, a mixture of apples and nuts and wine, represents the bricks and mortar we made in ancient times, and the new structures we are beginning to build in our lives today.

The **Lamb Shank** represents the sacrifices we have made to survive.

Before the tenth plague, our people slaughtered lambs and marked our doors with blood: because of this marking, the Angel of Death passed over our homes and our first-borns were spared.

The **Egg** symbolizes creative power, our personal and collective rebirth, and getting it on like Marvin Gaye. You know, spring holiday and all.

The **Parsley** represents the new growth of spring, for we are earthy, rooted beings, connected to the Earth and nourished by our connection.

Salt water of our tears, both then and now.

The **Orange**: Introduced in the 1980s to represent our embracing of traditionally marginalized people, Jew and Gentile alike. Because “gays belong to Judaism like an orange belongs on a Seder plate.”

Matzot of our unleavened hearts: may this Seder enable our spirits to rise.

6) RAKHTZAH: Wash ‘em again.

7) MOTZI/MATZAH

-thanks for the bread, thanks for the Matzah

-Rub-a-dub-dub, thanks for the grub, yay God!

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu ruach ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, v'tzivanu al achilat matzah.

(everyone eats Matzah)

8) MAROR: Bitter Herbs

9) KORECH: Hillel Sandwich (Matzah and Maror = Freedom and Slavery)

10) SHULKHAN OREKH: The Feast!

11) TZAFUN: Eat the Afikoman

12) BARECH: Bless the Meal³

Prayer After Eating (by Wendell Berry)

I have taken in the light
that quickened eye and leaf.
May my brain be bright with praise
of what I eat, in the brief blaze
of motion and of thought.
May I be worthy of my meat.

This is Just to Say (by William Carlos Williams)

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold

13) HALLEL: Praise

Third Cup of Wine

“I take upon myself the mitzvah of this third of four cups of wine in the name of the Earth from which the wine itself came.”

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri hagafen.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

³ These two poems have been part of the Uncle Josh Haggadah Project since the first year, and they seem to work well. For 2012, however, I want to invite you to try something new. Before your Seder this year, ask each person to bring their favorite food poem with them, and bless the meal (at the end, mind you, when everyone is happy and full) by reading each of the poems in turn. William Carlos Williams' "This is Just to Say" is my favorite. What's yours?

Open the Door for Elijah if you haven't already

Fourth Cup of Wine

“I take upon myself the mitzvah of this fourth cup of wine in the name of the sweetness of life, for which I am grateful.”

Baruch atah, Adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri hagafen.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

14) NIRTZAH: Closing

Benedicto (by Edward Abbey)

May your trails be crooked, winding,
lonesome, dangerous, leading to the most amazing
views. May your mountains rise into and above the
clouds. May your rivers flow without end, meandering
through pastoral valleys tinkling with bells, past
temples and castles and poets' towers into a dark
primeval forest where tigers belch and monkeys howl,
through miasmal and mysterious swamps and down
into a desert of red rock, blue mesas, domes and
pinnacles and grottoes of endless stone, and down
again into a deep vast ancient unknown chasm where
bars of sunlight blaze on profiled cliffs, where deer
walk across the white sand beaches, where storms
come and go as lightning clangs upon the high crags,
where something strange and more beautiful and more
full of wonder than your deepest dreams waits for
you—beyond that next turning of the canyon walls.
So long.

NEXT YEAR IN HEALTH AND GOOD COMPANY
(same time, same place)