

# ✡ A Passover Seder ✡ Haggadah Supplement

## For Ethically Sensitive Jews and our non-Jewish allies.

(You don't have to be Jewish to create or attend a Seder—or to adopt the approach to spiritual reality embodied in this text).

by **Rabbi Michael Lerner**, Editor, *Tikkun Magazine* and Rabbi, Beyt Tikkun Synagogue  
(which meets in both S.F. and Berkeley. More info: [www.beyttikkun.org](http://www.beyttikkun.org))

This text is not meant to be a replacement for but a supplement to the traditional Haggadah. Feel free to make copies of this to use at any seder you attend, or to transform this in ways that work best for you!

### AS WE SIT AT THE SEDER TABLE:

Seventy-eight percent of American Jews voted for Barack Obama in 2008, and a majority of non-Jewish Americans joined them. The message was clear: • end the war in Iraq and let our troops come home • end the war on the poor and the environment • stop favoring the rich and corporate interests.

Our Seder celebrates the first liberation struggle of our people, overcoming slavery and proclaiming to the world that the “way things are” is not the only way things can be. In the face of oppression, we proclaimed to the Pharaoh's empire that there is a God (YHWH) who is the Force of Healing and Transformation in the world—the force that makes possible the transformation from “what is” to “what ought to be.”

At our Seder tonight we celebrate the steps we've taken toward liberation. We look at where we are as a people and as human beings in our struggle to build a world of freedom and peace for all.

We rejoice together at the election of an African American as President!

But we are concerned about the outcome of the global meltdown of our economic and political system. We are now experiencing the results of decades of materialism and selfishness. Too many Americans closed their eyes to the suffering of those who have been living in poverty, even in the midst of American affluence. Now the suffering is spreading to the rest of us.

The American economic system can create prosperity, but also cultivates greed, fraud, and a selfish “looking-out-for-number-one” mentality. This offends Jewish values, and has hurt our souls—even if we ignored these spiritual and psychic costs while the system was providing material goodies for many of us.

The media, corporations, and their friends in government urged us to translate our spiritual and intimacy needs into consumption. This worked for some but produced alienation, loneliness, widespread emotional depression and a huge global anger at our society from others around the world. With individualism tearing down communities and teaching the ethos of “looking out for number one,” some people even turned to various religious fundamentalisms as a way to resist the global ethos of capitalism. These fundamentalisms cannot be defeated by our insistence on the value of democracy and human rights—not unless we simultaneously recognize and address what has been appealing in these old-time religions: their insistence that there is a hunger for meaning and purpose in life that cannot be achieved by material accumulation or endless new technologies, and that people hunger for loving community and connection to the mystery and majesty of the universe as much as for money or power or sexual conquests.

We do not want a return to the economic arrangements of the past few decades. The false equation of “progress” with the accumulation of material goods and endless new technologies produced a global environmental crisis as an orgy of consumption destroyed much of the life support system of the planet. Only a fundamental transformation of the ethical and spiritual foundation of our economic and political order can save humanity and the planet in the 21st century. Developing this new vision is the task for spiritual progressives from every religious background.

Many progressive Jews are finding the ethical and spiritual foundation for this transformation in the Jewish tradition. Jewish values support generosity, caring for others, and loving the stranger, while rejecting the extreme individualism, alienation and loneliness that accompanies the dominant ethos of American society.

At our Seder tonight we challenge Western societies to adopt specific economic programs that flow from these Jewish values: • A National Bank that gives loans without charging interest • A legal system based on the “obligation to care” for each other, not just look out for “number one” • An economy that prescribes a sabbatical year for everyone (the same year—the whole society taking off one year to not produce, but instead to focus on what we as a human race want to accomplish in the next six years) • A Global Marshall Plan as an extension of the Torah's notion of a tithe • Single payer universal health care • Unrestricted immigration • Protection of workers' rights.

Unfortunately, we as Jews also have to face a rather troubling reality. Within our own community these wonderful Jewish ethical values have too often been ignored. Too many prominent Jews have followed the narrow path of self interest.

Similarly, Israel, which describes itself as “the State of the Jewish people,” has failed to embody the highest values of the Jewish tradition in the way that it treats our brothers and sisters the Palestinians. The human rights violations and the slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza, the seizing of Arab lands, the imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians without trial and the revelations by Israeli soldiers themselves of acts of brutality in Gaza and the West Bank are not isolated incidents. They are not the product of evil soldiers. They are the inevitable consequence of imposing and enforcing occupation.

We are not Jews who reject Israel or think it is the worst human rights violator on the planet! The U.S. role in Iraq, the genocide in Darfur, the repression of Buddhism in Tibet, and the extremes of repression in Iran and several Arab states are moral outrages of equal or greater proportion. Nor do we excuse the human rights violations and terrorism perpetrated by Hamas. Every act of violence against civilians must be vehemently opposed.

Tonight at our Seder table, and again on the High Holidays, we affirm that our special responsibility as Jews is to look critically at our own individual and communal behavior. It would be hypocritical to celebrate the freedom achieved from slavery while ignoring the ways that we as Americans and/or as Jews and/or as supporters of the state of Israel have been acting as Pharaoh to the Palestinian people.

We must not let our long history as victims of oppression or our anger at God for not having saved us from the Holocaust become the foundation for adopting the religion of our enemies: the religion that says that we can only trust in our power, our army, our ability to wipe out our enemies. This false God, parading under the title of “being realistic,” stands in stark contrast to the traditional voice of Jewish compassion, generosity, and caring for others. The whole point of surviving as Jews is to challenge that religion of violence and domination and affirm instead the possibility of a world ruled by the logic of love and generosity. When we were utterly degraded as slaves, we experienced God as the power that was there redeeming us into freedom and sacred service. Now it is we who are powerful, and when our Jewish community aligns with the use of power in heartless and cruel ways against another people we feel deep grief. Our Torah says: “When you come into your land, do not oppress the stranger. Remember that you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” The Torah commands us positively: “Thou shalt love the stranger.”

We must use our Seder to begin a conversation about how to create a broad social movement for peace, justice, and ecological sanity. President Obama needs to hear from those who are not trapped in the “inside-the-beltway” logic that dominates the national media and our national political leadership. If we do not make fundamental changes in our economic system and in our approach to foreign policy, we may find ourselves in deeper despair this time next year.

Tonight at our Seder we will tell heroic stories of the past, but we must never imagine our past suffering gives us a moral pass to ignore the ethical distortions of the present moment. Our Seder must help us plan a way to transform the present. But we must do so with a strong dose of compassion, both for our own people and for the Palestinian people. We have co-created the current mess. We have both suffered from so much post-traumatic stress that sometimes people on both sides of this struggle fail to recognize the humanity of the other.

As Jews, we must challenge our own people's distorted vision and blend that challenge with deep love and caring, not just chastisements.

Americans of every faith can make a huge contribution to this process by challenging the dominant vision in the West about how to achieve “homeland security”—namely through domination and power over others. Our Torah, and almost every other major religious and spiritual tradition, teaches a different message: that security can best be achieved through generosity, caring for others, and love. This revolutionary message must be given teeth, which is why we at *Tikkun Magazine* and Beyt Tikkun Synagogue in the Bay Area have formed the interfaith Network of Spiritual Progressives and launched a campaign for a Global Marshall Plan that would have the U.S. and other advanced industrial societies dedicate between 2–5% of our Gross Domestic Product each year for the next twenty to once and for all end global poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate education, and inadequate health care, and to repair the global environment (details on this plan and on how to join us are at [www.spiritualprogressives.org](http://www.spiritualprogressives.org)). Rather than attempt to rebuild an economic system that has been destroying the environment and encouraging an ethos of selfishness, our goal as spiritual progressives is to build a new global economy based on ancient spiritual values of love, kindness, generosity and caring equally for the well-being of everyone on the planet. That this kind of miracle can happen, that what everybody thought was impossible can suddenly become possible, because there is a power in the universe that is the power of love and transformation, this is what we experienced in Egypt and what we are seeking to enliven within ourselves by creating this Seder. We see that beyond the self, beyond family and country, we are part of the unfolding and evolution of consciousness in the universe, and we celebrate and recommit ourselves to that Force of Healing and Transformation.

So let's now close our eyes. Can you see the universe and your place in it? Affirm now your role as partner with God in the healing and transformation of all that is. The Seder can also be a time to do “tikkun” (to heal and transform parts of ourselves and our society).

### KIDDUSH

We are gathered here tonight to affirm our continuity with the generations of Jews who kept alive the vision of freedom in the Passover story. For thousands of years, Jews (and our non-Jewish allies) have affirmed this vision by participating in the Passover Seder. We not only remember the Exodus but actually relive it, bringing its transformative power into our own lives.

The Hebrew word for Egypt, mitzrayim, means “narrow straits.” Traditionally, mitzrayim has been understood to mean a spiritual state, the “narrow place” of confusion, fragmentation, and spiritual disconnection. Liberation requires us to embrace that which we have been taught to scorn within ourselves and others, including the split-off parts from our own consciousness that we find intolerable and that we project onto some “evil Other.” The Seder can also be a time to reflect on those parts of ourselves.

Israel, according to the Torah, left Egypt with “a mixed multitude.” The Jewish people began as a multicultural mélange of people attracted to a vision of social transformation. What makes us Jews is not some biological fact, but our willingness to proclaim the message of those ancient slaves: (*Say Together*) The world can be changed, we can be healed.

Blessing over the first cup of wine.

### KARPAS

The saltwater on our table traditionally represents the tears of the Israelite slaves. The green vegetables we dip in the water suggest the possibility of growth and renewal even in the midst of grief.

The greens on the table also remind us of our commitment to protect the planet from ecological destruction. Instead of focusing narrowly on what we may “realistically” accomplish in today's world, we must refocus the conversation on **what the planet needs** in order to survive and flourish. We must get out of the narrow place in our thinking and look at the world not as a resource, but as a focus for awe, wonder, and amazement. We must reject the societal story that identifies success and progress with endless growth and accumulation of things. Instead we will focus on acknowledging that we already have enough; we need to stop exploiting our resources and instead care for the earth.

Dip the greens in saltwater and say your own personal blessings for the earth.

### FOUR QUESTIONS: THE ADULT VERSION

Discuss as a group or in pairs at the Seder table:

1. Egypt, mitzrayim in Hebrew, comes from the word tzar: the “narrow place,” the constricted place. In what way are you personally still constricted? Are you able to see yourself as part of the unity of all being, a manifestation of God's love on earth? Are you able to overcome the ego issues that separate us from each other? Can you see the big picture, or do you get so caught in the narrow places and limited struggles of your own life that it's hard to see beyond your personal struggles? What concrete steps could you take to change that?
2. Do you believe that we can eventually eradicate wars, poverty, and starvation? Or do you believe that no one really cares about anyone but themselves, and that we will always be stuck in some version of the current mess? Or do you think that such a belief is *itself* part of what keeps us in this mess? If so, how would you suggest we spread a more hopeful message and deal with the cynicism and self-doubt that always accompanies us when we start talking about changing the world?
3. What experiences have you had that give you hope? Tell about some struggle to change something—a struggle that you personally were involved in—that worked. What did you learn from that?
4. When the Israelites approached the Sea of Reeds, the waters did not split. It took a few brave souls to jump into the water. Even then, the waters rose up to their very noses, and only then, when these brave souls showed that they really believed in the Force of Healing and Transformation (YHWH), did the waters split and the Israelites walk through them. Would you be willing to jump into those waters today—for example by becoming an advocate for nonviolence or for the strategy of generosity and the Global Marshall Plan? Would you go to speak about this to your elected representatives? To your neighbors? To your coworkers? To your family?

### MAGED (TELL THE STORY):

Tell the story of the Exodus, and identify the Pharaohs in your life today.

Blessing over the second cup of wine.

We are descended from slaves who staged the first successful slave rebellion in recorded history. Ever since, our people has kept alive the story of liberation, and the consciousness that cruelty and oppression are not inevitable “facts of life,” but conditions that can be changed. Because God makes possible the *tikkun* (healing and transformation) of the world, reality is enough. Dayenu—it is enough.

### THREE SYMBOLS OF PASSOVER

**PESACH** (the Bone or for vegetarians, the Pascal Beet): Our Seder plate includes a symbol of the ancient Passover sacrifice, which was brought each year to the Temple in Jerusalem. The Hebrew word for sacrifice is korban, which comes from the root meaning “near” or “close.” What could bring you closer to your highest spiritual self?

**MATZAH**: The Torah tells us that the Israelites had to take the uncooked dough with them, “For they had prepared no provisions for the way.” Symbolically, the matzah reminds us that when the opportunity for liberation comes, we must seize it, even if we do not feel fully prepared—indeed, if we wait until we feel prepared, we may never act at all. If you had to jump into such a struggle tomorrow morning, what would you have to leave behind? The current global economic meltdown may be precisely such a moment. Are you ready to leave the slavery of our current economic system?

The matzah also stands in contrast to chametz (Hebrew for the expansive yeast that makes bread rise), which symbolizes false pride, absorption in our individual egos, and grandiosity.

**MARROR** (the Bitter Herbs): The suffering of the Jews in Egypt has been matched by thousands of years in which we were oppressed as a people. Our insistence on telling the story of liberation and proclaiming that the world could be and should be fundamentally different has angered ruling elites. These elites often tried to channel against the Jews the anger that ordinary people were feeling about the oppression in their own lives. But Jews are not the only ones to have suffered oppression and violence. We think of the genocide against native peoples all around the world, including in the United States. We think of the enslavement of Africans, and the oppression of Armenians, homosexuals, women, immigrants and many others. Yet, tonight it is appropriate for us to focus also on the suffering of the Jewish people, and to affirm our solidarity with victims of anti-Semitism through the ages. Anti-Semitism still persists in our own time in the use of double standards in the judgment of Jews, in acts of violence against Jews, and in refusing to acknowledge the history of Jewish suffering as equal to the suffering of other victims of oppressive social regimes in Christian, Muslim, and some secular societies, as well. Meanwhile, we Jews need to acknowledge the ways that such suffering has at times distorted our consciousness and made it hard to fully grasp the pain others feel. We must evolve A GLOBAL JUDAISM that compassionately embraces the Jewish people and all other peoples.

### THE MEAL

The Haggadah says, “Let all who are hungry come and eat.” Traditionally, this is understood to mean not only literally feeding the hungry, but also offering spiritual sustenance to those in need. Both must go hand in hand. We live in a society of unprecedented wealth, yet we turn our backs on the hungry. Even the supposedly liberal and progressive political leaders are unwilling to champion any program to seriously address world hunger and homelessness.

There is also a deep spiritual hunger that must be fed. Though the cynical proclaim that “those who accumulate the most toys win,” our tradition teaches that money, power, and fame cannot sustain us. Our spiritual tradition teaches us to be present to each moment; to rejoice in all that we are and all that we have been given; to experience the world with awe, wonder, and radical amazement; and to recognize that we already have enough and are enough.

Not just during the Seder, but also at every meal, it is incumbent upon us—the Jewish tradition teaches—to talk words of Torah, to study some section of our holy books, or to in other ways make God feel present at our table. Try this every night as you eat: bring God and God's message of love, generosity, peace, social justice, ecological sanity, and caring for others into every meal that you eat.

Enjoy the meal. Following the meal, say a blessing expressing thanks to God for the food and by expressing a commitment to do what you can to redistribute food on this planet so that everyone will have enough. Drink the third cup of wine.

### WELCOMING THE POSSIBILITY OF THE MESSIANIC AGE

We open the door for Elijah—the prophet who heralds the coming of the Messiah and a world in which all peoples will coexist peacefully—acknowledging the Image of God in one another. To deny the possibility of fundamental transformation, to be stuck in the pain of past oppression, or to build our religion around memories of the Holocaust and other forms of suffering is to give the ultimate victory to those who oppressed us. To testify to God's presence in the world is to insist on shifting our focus from pain to hope, and to dedicate our energies to transforming this world and ourselves. (All together recite): **We still believe in a world based on love, generosity, and openheartedness. We continue to affirm the Unity of All Being.**

Now let us build together a communal vision of what messianic redemption would look like.

Close your eyes and let some picture of this appear in your minds. Then, open your eyes and share with others your picture of the world we want to build together.

Blessing over the fourth cup of wine.

Sing songs of liberation!

## Want to be part of a Judaism that shares the values articulated in this Haggadah supplement? You can:

1. **JOIN Beyt Tikkun Synagogue.** Come to our annual retreat and/or High Holiday services. There may even be a few remaining seats at our (2nd night) Passover Seder April 9 at the Noe Valley Ministry in S.F. if you join as members. Details at [www.BeytTikkun.org](http://www.BeytTikkun.org). 415-575-1432
2. Come to our course, **GLOBAL JUDAISM: A re-introduction to a Judaism of Love and Generosity.** Taught by Rabbi Michael Lerner. Fri. evening May 1 to Sun. afternoon May 3. Details at [www.beyttikkun.org](http://www.beyttikkun.org)
3. **Subscribe to *Tikkun Magazine*** at [www.tikkun.org](http://www.tikkun.org)

**If you are not Jewish** but wish to bring these values into your Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or other spiritual communities, or if you are a (spiritual but not religious) atheist please join our interfaith Network of Spiritual Progressives at [www.spiritualprogressives.org](http://www.spiritualprogressives.org)

**YES!** I'll help you spread this message. I'll send a tax deductible donation of  
 \$1,000  \$500  \$300  \$180  \$120  \$80  \$50  \$25  Other \_\_\_\_\_  
or I'll enclose my credit card info and you can bill it for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ one time; or \$ \_\_\_\_\_ each month for one year. Or, I'll call your office at 510-644-1200 to donate that way.

## Tikkun & Beyt Tikkun Synagogue

2342 Shattuck Ave, Berkeley, CA 94704 510-644-1200 Shul@tikkun.org  
1021 Sanchez, San Francisco, CA 94114 415-575-1432