5786 - 2026 Pesach Supplement

Resources for Your Seder

Next Year in Jerusalem of Above
Rabbi Micah Streiffer

לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם הַבְּנוּיָה!
L'shanah haba'ah bi'Yerushalayim hab'nuyah!
Next year in a rebuilt Jerusalem!

We end the Seder with an expression of messianic hope – of longing for Jerusalem. For centuries, our people have ended every Pesach by praying that this would be our last seder in exile. It is important to note the that words do not merely express hope that that we will celebrate next year in Jerusalem, but rather in a *rebuilt* Jerusalem. As the poet Marcia Falk puts it, "a Jerusalem of justice, harmony, and peace" (Night of Beginnings 171).

What does Jerusalem represent here? Does it refer to the real place, the living, breathing city? Or it is a symbol, an allegory for an end to war, poverty, hatred, and oppression? The answer, of course, is that Jerusalem represents both. The Rabbis of the Talmud (*Taanit* 5a) express this idea with the mystical notion that there are two Jerusalems: "Jerusalem of below" (*Yerushalayim shel mata*) and "Jerusalem of above" (*Yerushalayim shel ma'alah*). There is an earthly city, and there is a heavenly one, which represents its ideal, redeemed form. The Talmud continues that when the world is truly repaired, God will enter both cities and the two will be united, since they are bound up with one another: "The rebuilt Jerusalem is a city unified with itself" (Psalm 122:3).

As we bring this Seder to an end, we pray that next year we may see a Jerusalem that has been rebuilt and redeemed. May our sacred land and the people who share her see an end to the division and strife. May we work together to bring *Yerushalayim shel maa'lah* – the heavenly Jerusalem – here to earth.

Are We Truly Free When Others are Not?
Rabbi Micah Streiffer

Pesach is called *Z'man Cheiruteinu*—the season of our freedom. But what does it actually mean to be free? The Pesach seder explores this question through the symbol of matzah, the "bread of affliction." If we look closely, we will find that the unleavened bread carries two seemingly contradictory explanations—and that tension offers an important insight into the nature of freedom.

Explanation #1 – Matzah is the Bread of Affliction

הָא לַחְמָא עַנְיָא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אַבְהָתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְמִצְרָיִם.
Ha lachma anya di achlu avhatana b'ar'a d'Mitzrayim.
This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.

These words, which we say early in the seder, connect the matzah with affliction and slavery. Our ancestors ate it *in* Egypt, and by eating it now, we place ourselves back into that experience. We are reliving and reenacting our past experience of oppression.

Explanation #2 – Matzah is the Bread of Freedom

מַצָּה זוּ שֶׁאָנוּ אוֹכְלִים, עַל שׁוּם מַה? עַל שׁוּם שֶׁלֹּא הִסְפִּיק בְּצֵקָם שֶׁל אֲבוֹתֵינוּ לְהַחֲמִיץ
עַד שֶׁנִּגְלָה עֲלֵיהֶם מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים, הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא, וּגְאָלָם
Matzah zo she'anu ochlim al shum mah? Al shum she'lo hispik b'tzeikam she avotainu l'hachmitz ad she'niglah aleihem Melech Malchei Ham'lachim Hakadoah Baruch Hu. ug'alam.
This matzah that we are eating, what is it for? It is because our ancestors' dough was not yet able to rise when the Holy Blessed One came and redeemed them.

Only a few pages later, the matzah now symbolizes not slavery but freedom; not oppression but the escape from oppression. It is the bread that we carried with us into the wilderness, and we eat it now to reenact that moment of redemption.

How can this be? How can the matzah represent both slavery and the end of slavery, both oppression and redemption? This is indicative of a larger tension—Pesach is a time of both slavery and freedom. Our rituals recognize both experiences at the same time: we recline in our seats and eat and drink like royalty; yet our ritual foods taste of bitterness and salt. We sing with joy, "Once we were slaves, now we are free!" but we also cry out, "This year we are slaves, next year may we be free!" It's a beautiful contradiction: Judaism recognizes that freedom and enslavement are intertwined with one another; that even as we celebrate our own liberation, there is still oppression in the world. Are we truly free when others are not? Are we truly redeemed when the world is still unredeemed?

(continued on next page)

This ancient contradiction remains important today, especially as our eyes gaze eastward—as we think about our connection with Israel. On the one hand, we live in a time of a thriving Jewish state and a Hebrew culture unrivaled in any other age; yet we know that Palestinians have paid a heavy price for our sovereignty and wellbeing. On the one hand, we sighed with relief as the last Israeli hostage was returned from Gaza; yet we know that the pain of those living in Gaza and the West Bank continues to deepen. On the one hand, this week we celebrate our people's freedom and resilience; yet our celebration is tempered by the knowledge that Israelis remain at war, Palestinians and Iranians continue to be without true freedom or safety, and Jewish spaces around the world are under heavy security.

If the message of Pesach is that we cannot be free until all people are free, then the seder cries out to us that we still have much work to do. That we live in an unredeemed world, and that our freedom and sovereignty are only provisional, since they are ultimately bound up with the freedom and sovereignty of all those with whom we share our sacred land, and with whom we inhabit our fragile world. On this Pesach, may we redouble our resolve to bring redemption. May we hear and heed the most central message of the seder: that even in a broken world, redemption is still possible. Once, we were enslaved, and we struggled our way toward freedom. Next year, may we all truly be redeemed.

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Sand Beneath our Feet
Bruce Black

On the first day of Passover
we go for a walk on the beach and
can feel the sand beneath our feet

and in the way memory works
we remember our ancestors
walking across a dry sea with
the sand between their toes

and we imagine them
feeling the same breeze
sweep off the water

the same smell of salt air
the same taste of freedom.

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Our Freedom Song
Rabbi Judith Schindler

After experiencing hundreds of years of slavery in Egypt, the moment of redemption is finally upon us. Miraculously, we, as Israelites, cross through parted seas and stand on the solid ground of freedom.

Our first act of freedom is to sing.

Moses and the Israelites sing. Then Miriam and the women dance. Even though the Israelites departed in haste, the women made sure to pack their timbrels. They wanted to be prepared to celebrate.

Our freedom song is so central it is written in a different form than every other column of our Torah. Some say it is calligraphed in the image of bricks. Others say there is space within the text to represent the limits of our ability to praise God.

Our freedom song is so elevated we sing it twice a day in our liturgy. Just as the songs we listen to on the radio evoke memories that bring us back in time, the Mi Chamocha brings us back to our first moment of liberation.

Our freedom song not only looks back but forward. The song opens in what seems like future tense, stating: "*az yashir Moshe u'vnei Ysrael et hashirah hazot* – and Moses and the children of Israel *will sing* this song..." The grammar leads commentators to see it also as a reference to a future, final redemption (Mekhilta Shirata 1). It references the fact that liberation is not yet complete. Our singing the Mi Chamocha today is meant to inspire us to work for a greater liberation for ourselves and for all.

Our freedom song has inspired others movements in their struggle toward freedom – the American revolution, the emancipation of enslaved African Americans, the Civil Rights movement, just to name a few.

Some days when we face the darkness of our world, it can be difficult to sing. Yet may we sing our freedom song each day as we recall our liberation of the past and strive for justice, equality and liberation today, so that all can sing and all can celebrate.

Adapted from Laasok's "Taste of Torah" Blog.

Dreaming
Bruce Black

I dream of matzah and bitter herbs, of
gefilte fish, matzah balls, and salt water,
of tears and the sea divided in half
with a narrow path for us to follow.

I dream of hearing timbrels and voices,
of women singing, of weeping children
who want to go home while their mothers
dance by the sea in the chill night air
drunk on the taste of freedom.

I dream of Elijah the Prophet sipping from
his cup of wine beneath a fig tree in the Land
of Israel with my brother and niece and sister-
in-law who flew there for the holiday.

I dream of white tablecloths and the wine-stained
pages of haggadot from other seders, of *had gad yah*
and *let my people go*, of four cups of wine, of a broken
piece of matzah called the afikomen, which my father
always used to hide until after we finished our meal.

I dream of dreaming at my grandfather's table and
of feeling butterflies in my stomach before I have to
stand to recite the Four Questions, knowing the story
can't continue until I utter the words "Why is this night
different?" and that my people cannot be free until I open
my mouth and begin to speak. I dream of the future.

I dream our future depends on me.

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