



# THE STORIES WE TELL

Supplemental readings  
for your Seder by the  
Stephen Wise Temple clergy.

STEPHEN  
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## THE STORIES WE TELL

Rabbi Yoshi Zweiback

I love all sorts of stories but I have a particular fondness for short stories. It's an extraordinary challenge: telling a compelling narrative in an economical way with a beginning, middle, and end that makes you think and even inspires you to act in certain ways.

Passover is the quintessential Jewish storytelling time. Embedded in the Haggadah is the master narrative of our People. And whatever version you use—whether an old, stained Maxwell House edition or even one you've designed yourself—the essential message can be summed up quite succinctly: "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. God freed us for a purpose."

This is our core story. Our empathy comes from our experience of having been strangers in a strange land. We were oppressed and so we have a special concern for the most vulnerable. And then we experienced the fulfillment of our collective dream: we were redeemed from bondage, we went forth a free people. But the story doesn't end there, on the other side of the sea. We travel as a people to Sinai where the purpose of our freedom is revealed. **Our job is to bring redemption to the world.**

It's the greatest story ever told and it's a great *mitzvah*—a deep and holy obligation—to re-tell it every year, to be inspired by it so that we can live its message.

Our tradition teaches that our basic responsibility is to tell the story in its simplest form—at least just the facts. But one who adds to the telling, who brings their own experiences, ideas, and stories—*harei zeh meshubach*, this is to be praised. We hope that these pieces, written by your rabbis and cantors, bring you inspiration for your own storytelling around the Seder table.

Chag Sameach.



STORYTELLING

## TEARS, LOVE, AND POTATO KUGEL

Cantor Nathan Lam

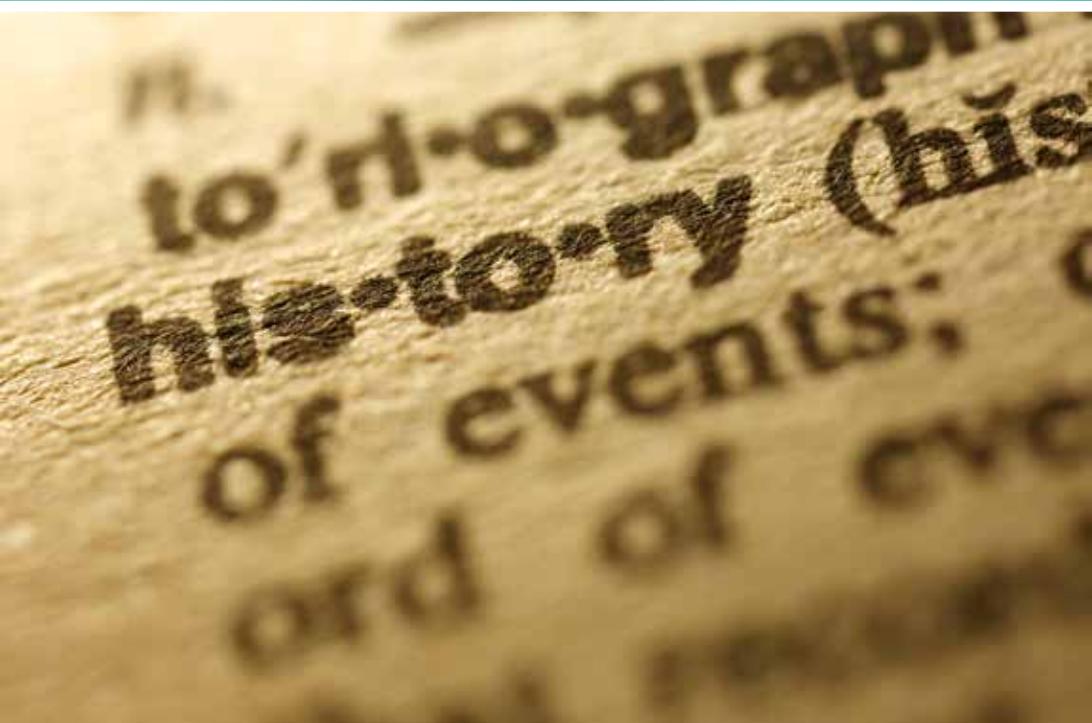
As a child, Pesach was my favorite holiday. I loved sitting at the table, loved being the youngest person at my mother's family Seder. The story of Passover was told by my uncle Charlie (my mother's sister's husband). But I most loved being in the kitchen for the few days prior to the Seder with my auntie Sylvia. Sylvia, who was born in Poland, learned to cook from my great-grandmother and grandmother, and carried that legacy into her kitchen. The care, love, and work that went in to making every dish perfect was her goal. Perfect, to her, meant that it had to be the way it was made in the old country, nothing less. Perfect meant the taste, the way it looked, and of course, the stamp of approval from my grandma Freida.

My grandfather Nathan came to America in 1914, just before the First World War broke out; my grandmother, Aunt Sylvia, and Uncle Ben weren't able to come to the States until 1920. My mother Marcia and her younger brother were born in Springfield, Missouri, then a city with 85 Jewish families (and not many more now). There was a 17 year age difference between my grandmother and Aunt Sylvia, and 16 years difference between my mother and her older sister. Those years spoke of a place and a time that I would never know firsthand. My aunt was one of my connections to the world of Jews in Jewish Poland, a lifeline to that part of my story.

Each year, Passover was a connection to the past—not only the Exodus from Egypt, but also from a world lost to the Shoah (Holocaust). My aunt and grandmother would tell me stories about their hometown Yozefov, a *shtetl* (small town) not

far from Warsaw. And each year, I would look at the only picture we had of my great-grandparents, which hung above my grandmother's bed. Just like the story of the Exodus, they would tell those stories year after year, and they were just as much a part of the Passover Seder as the parting of the Red Sea.





Taste is one of the strongest centers of sense memory, and our memories were certainly tied up in the foods we ate. Each year I would taste the chopped liver and potato kugel while it was being made; each year, I watched them cry as they read the last letter they got from the family in Poland, in 1939. It was clear to me how deeply those loved ones lived in their hearts, and how the taste of those foods and the memories—both joyous and tragic—were inextricably linked. I began to realize that as my aunt cooked, she was cooking not just for the Pesach that we were about to celebrate, but for all the ones that we missed, all the ones at which our extended family would never sit. We tasted the bitter herbs and the salt water, and felt their absence, even as we celebrated the joys of freedom.

My Seder table looks different today. I am aware of those who no longer sit with me, and I still carry the memories of those whom I never met. But I also look around at my children and grandchildren, the life we have built here—and feel the deepest joy and sweetness. So for us today, we say *shehecheyanu*, we thank God for all our blessings, our families, our community, Israel and this great country we live in. We say *shehecheyanu* for our freedoms and the many gifts we are afforded every day.

## GOD'S PROMISE OF REDEMPTION

Rabbi David Woznica

Rabbi, author, and noted theologian Irving “Yitz” Greenberg points out that when historians are asked to rate the world’s most influential events, invariably they list: they list the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. Christians might reference the time of Jesus, and Muslims will likely point to the birth and life of Mohammed.

Rabbi Greenberg posits that the Exodus from Egypt is “arguably the most important event of all time,” calling it “*the* event of human history” as, without exaggeration, had the Exodus not occurred, it’s unlikely any of the events historians earmark as important would have happened.

The Exodus from Egypt transformed history. Once freed from the grip of slavery our people trekked to Mt. Sinai. It was there we received the book of all books, the Torah.

It is God who gave us the Torah. In it, God demands that human beings act justly—rich and poor alike. It is God who demands that we are honest in business, decent to one another—Jew and non-Jew alike. And that we understand all people share in the spark of the divine.

Nearly 3,200 years ago, God took us out of Egypt to be God’s chosen nation; chosen to bring the Torah to the world. Our task has not changed. Aspiring to live by the mitzvot and shape our lives by the ideals of the Torah is as pertinent today as it has been for over three millennium. While historians have their lists as to what are the most significant events in history, it’s difficult to imagine anything having as revolutionary and significant an impact as the Exodus from Egypt. Consider that as you prepare and welcome into your homes the reenactment of the Exodus—our Passover holiday.

I wish you and yours a most joyous, happy, and meaningful Passover celebration.

## THE FOUR QUESTIONS

Around the world, the youngest children at their Seder tables will sit up proudly and recite the Four Questions in a multitude of languages.

How many languages can you gather at your Seder table?

Can someone ask them in

English?

Hebrew?

Yiddish?

Farsi?

Ladino?

French?

Spanish?

Russian?

Mandarin?

Korean?



### The Four Emoji Questions

Translated by Cantor Steven Walvick  
(Toms River, NJ)



### The Four Twitter Questions

Translated by Adina Kling  
(Framingham, MA)

#NameSomethingThatConfusesYou  
Why is this night different from all other nights @God can you explain this to me?

#ThrowbackThursday to yesterday  
when I was allowed to eat bread. Tonight we eat #matzah

#tbh I dont really want to eat maror  
#SorryNotSorry #JewProblems

Getting to double dip vegetables  
tonight>> #Swag

Shout out to @Moses for letting us sit  
comfortably tonight on pillows #YOLO

Visit [WiseLA.org/Passover](http://WiseLA.org/Passover) for videos to learn them  
in American and Israeli Sign Language!

## THE PLANET IS TALKING: ARE WE LISTENING?

Rabbi Ron Stern

Does anyone really like parsley? It's a garnish at best and yet it has a central place in the Pesach Seder. In fact, it occupies a coveted spot on the already packed Seder plate! As we ravenously savor the aromas emanating from the kitchen and anticipate the feast that seems to be an interminable distance away we deceive our palate by munching on fodder. It is hardly satisfying and yet, it is a highlight of our Seder! We lift the parsley, dip it in salt water and say the blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, בּוֹרֵא פָּרִי הָאֲדָמָה

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, borei p'ri ha-adama.*

Readings in the Haggadah tell us that it is the vegetable of spring; a symbol of the bounty that grows from the parched earth after cleansing rains of winter. Thousands of years of Passover S'darim (Seders) have relied upon this immutable turn of the seasons. The rains come, the snow melts, the earth returns to fertility. Once, it was inconceivable that this sacred cycle could be disrupted and yet we are now the first humans in the entire history of the earth who know that our earth's life-sustaining fertility is at risk. Not the kind of risk that comes from seasonal variations, that was always a fact of human existence, but at risk of such severe disruption that all our technology may not be able to shield us from its effects.

Then, to lift the parsley was to celebrate the bounty of the earth and its eternal patterns. Now to lift the parsley is to know that we are inadvertently on a trajectory towards a time when there may be no symbol of earth's verdant bounty to raise up. We have witnessed the fires that ravage our state, the hurricanes that submerge cities, the warming oceans that are quickly exterminating ecosystems. And yet, we munch the parsley each Pesach and go about our business as if the world is not screaming its alarm to us.

This Pesach Seder, as we celebrate our freedom to live our lives as we choose, it is essential that we choose to live so that the generations after us can also benefit from our fleetingly luxuriant planet. Continuing our lives as we have is an immensely selfish act that deprives our children and children's children of the precious life-giving earth beneath their feet.

Say the blessing, munch the parsley, and pledge to reduce your carbon footprint. Go solar, buy an electric car, drive less, purchase carbon offsets when you fly, reduce your own use of carbon burning fuels—advocate for our governments to do the same. We are told that in haste our enslaved ancestors grasped their freedom, let that spirit of earnestness and alarm drive us, in haste, to secure this planet's future so that our children's children will continue to lift the parsley to celebrate the story of our ancient freedom and the promise of a blossoming spring.



## WISE, WICKED, SIMPLE, AND SILENT: STORIES OF THE FOUR CHILDREN

Rabbi Sari Laufer

If your Seder is anything like ones that I have hosted and attended, there might be some awkward silence or embarrassed giggling when it comes time to read about the Four Children.

If it's a "go around the table and take turns" kind of Seder, you might wait anxiously to see which of the stereotypes will fall on your lap. If parts are assigned, you'll wonder if they are trying to tell you something. Am I the wicked child, an outcast at the Seder table? Do they think I am the simple child? If I am the wise child, is that a compliment, or do they think I am a "know-it-all?" If I do not know how to ask, what is my place here?

When we sit around the Seder table, we tell the stories of our ancestors. We tell of the ones who went forth from Egypt, who went forth from Europe, who went forth from Iran, who went forth with nothing and built lives and legacies. We tell stories about the ones who came before us, funny stories and hard stories. We might tell stories about the ones who will come after us, writing a hopeful future for our children and grandchildren.

And all throughout the Seder, but especially with the Four Children, we tell stories about ourselves—about who we are and who we want to be; we tell the stories of who we think we are, and who we want desperately not to be.

Maybe we wanted to be the wise child, but were labeled too early on to grow into that potential. Maybe we always wanted to be the wicked child, but were afraid to take risks and take chances. Maybe we always wanted to be the simple child, but could not get away from our own complexities. And maybe we wanted to be the one who did not know how to ask, but were always given words to say, even if they were not our own.

**Here's my**

So, how do we redeem the Four Children? How do we let them help us tell our own stories? Rabbi Menachem Mendl Schneerson, the great Lubavitch rabbi of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was known to teach that we should all see ourselves as each of the Four children; in different moments of our lives, we will be wise, wicked, simple, and unable to ask.

But more than just acknowledging that we carry all of these stories within us, what if we celebrated them? David Moss, an incredible Jewish artist, wrote:

Every child is unique, and the Torah embraces them all...The text of the Haggadah introduces the four children with a short passage in which the word *baruch* (blessed) appears four times...every child is a blessing. Diversity, how we deal with it, and how we can discover the blessing within it, is perhaps the theme of the midrash of the Four Children.

Lastly, the words of Rabbi Miriam Spitzer remind me that the Four Children can be an opening. She writes:

Perhaps the Haggadah deliberately provides caricatures of four types of children to teach us something about the care we must take when we answer questions. Each person at our Seder is coming from a different place. This one is older and more experienced. That one has never been to Seder before. That other one was sick and did not expect to make it to Seder, but is there. That one never learned to read Hebrew, and that one knows French.

Each of us is wise, each of us is wicked, each of us is simple, and each of us does not know how to ask. But, if we all sit together and tell our stories, if we all learn from one another? In other words of the Seder: *harei zeh m'shubach*—this is praiseworthy.

Chag Sameach—wishing you a joyous and blessed Passover.

**story...**

## DAYENU

Rabbi Josh Knobel

In March 2007, while deployed with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, I enjoyed the privilege of leading several Passover Seders for Jewish soldiers in northeastern Afghanistan. With a brigade commander's helicopter at our disposal, I visited three bases in one day, including a mountainside base in Naray that served as home to members of the 71<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment.

The assembled soldiers, which included Jews hoping to connect with their tradition and Christians curious to learn more about Jewish ritual, had made festive preparations for the event. The chaplain had even secured a Jewish Chaplaincy flag, which he proudly flew from the tent where we met for our Passover meal. Though the soldiers' and officers' eyes lit up at the sight of boxed matzah and canned gefilte fish, what really struck a chord at our Seder table was the recitation of *Dayenu*, which evoked both cheers of gratification and tears of joy from those present.

*Dayenu*, a simple song, represents a newer addition to the Haggadah. The foundations of our hagaddah can easily be traced to the early rabbinic period c. 200 C.E., but the *Dayenu* song only appears in full form for the first time in the Siddur of Rav Amram Gaon, published around 850 C.E.

With one word, *Dayenu*, meaning 'that would have been enough for us,' the song's refrain encapsulates all the miracles performed for our people, from their liberation to their settlement of Israel. It can also summarize all the miracles we have experienced since then, both as a people and as individuals.

However, what likely gives *Dayenu* its lasting allure is not its message, but, rather, its simplicity. The song's one-word refrain lends itself effortlessly to its upbeat, repetitive tune, one that evokes memories of Passover among Jews everywhere, even in northeastern Afghanistan.

In that sense, *Dayenu* was the perfect metaphor for our experience. In a land far from home, surrounded by brothers and sisters in arms, the mere act of celebrating Passover was enough for us. It symbolized our freedom to choose, uninhibited by the religious extremism we were fighting to extinguish. It symbolized our connection with fellow Jews, stretching across space and time. And it symbolized the gift of memory, reminding those present what had brought them so far from home.

Twelve years later, I still remember that Seder fondly, for whether we're celebrating in the comfort of home or in a dusty tent, whether we're eating alongside family or perfect strangers, or whether we're recounting the Exodus in comfortable repose or listening for rocket fire—the blessings of freedom, connection, and memory that we celebrate with Passover—*Dayenu*, they are enough for us.

## SEDER SINGING

By Cantor Emma Lutz

*The only thing better than singing is more singing.*

—Ella Fitzgerald

This famous quote from the extraordinary artist Ella Fitzgerald always makes me think of the boundless joy and noise at a Passover table. It is the music that carries us into those late hours, tired throats, and full bellies reminding us of the great pleasure of freedom.

For the Passover Seder, almost every component is precisely measured: four quizzical questions, four sweet cups of wine or juice, ten identical drops from finger to plate representing each corresponding plague, three breakable pieces of matzah, and one festive feast. “Seder” literally means order, and while we all might have variants on our personal or family traditions, there is a reliable structure to this ritual meal. The magical storytelling and the mystical melodies bring this basic, arranged order to messy and happy life.

The variety of music in the Seder is truly limitless. I cherish the minor, lilting, curious phrases of the Four Questions, and that special moment of each youngest child’s rite of passage as they lead us in the chanting. I love the clapping and thrashing that takes place during *Dayenu*, and the sweet comfort of the gentle hymn, *Adir Hu*. For better or for worse, I even love the silly parody songs my brother and uncle concoct for equal parts pedagogy and humor! I especially enjoy attending someone else’s Seder and learning a different melody to a familiar song, a holy insight into someone else’s custom and a new interpretation on how I might understand our text. Whichever tunes we might favor or embrace, our many choices in melody are a reflection of both our singular and shared histories, as well as a celebration of our freedom to express our whole selves.

May your Seder be meaningful and sweet and remember—the only thing better than singing is more singing.



## NOW TELL YOUR OWN STORY

While the core experience of the Passover Seder is the retelling of the Exodus tale, our sages—from the earliest days—encourage the enhancement of that narrative with other texts, songs, and the sharing of personal stories.

We hope that the pieces in this supplement will inspire conversations around your Seder table; even more than that, we hope that they will inspire you to tell your own stories, sing your own songs, and ask your own questions.

In addition to the words in this supplement, the Wise clergy have curated many wonderful resources to enhance your Seder.

### Visit [WiseLA.org/Passover](http://WiseLA.org/Passover) where you can find:

- Family-friendly Passover Seder ideas
- Meaningful opportunities for *tikkun olam*
- Links to downloadable Haggadot:
  - The Kveller Haggadah: A Seder for Curious Kids  
(and Their Grownups)  
*Co-created by Rabbi Sari Laufer*
  - The Wise Early Childhood Center Haggadah  
*Featuring artwork by Wise Early Childhood students*
  - The Wise Second Night Seder Haggadah  
*Edited by Rabbi Ron Stern and Cantor Emma Lutz*
- Links to the Four Questions in over 300 different languages and styles



A still life composition on a light green background. In the top right corner, there is a large, golden-brown cracker with a perforated surface. Below it, a teal glass with a flared rim is positioned diagonally. In the bottom right, two walnuts are placed above a corner of a dark red book with intricate blue and gold patterns. In the bottom left, there are several small, bright orange flowers on thin stems.

Chag Sameach  
from your  
Stephen Wise Temple  
Community



LET'S CONNECT

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