

The Song of Songs Seder: A Night of Sacred Sexuality

By Rabbi Robert Teixeira, LCSW

Many fault lines cut through the human family. The *Sex-Is-Holy* - *Sex-Is-Dirty* divide, which inflicts untold suffering on millions, is one of the widest and oldest. We find evidence of this divide in every faith tradition, including Judaism, where we encounter it numerous times in the Talmud, in reference to the Song of Songs, for example. This work, which revolves around the play of two Lovers, is by far the most erotic book in the Bible.

According to the Talmud, the Song of Songs was set aside to be buried because of its sensual content (Avot De-Rabbi Nathan 1:4). These verses were singled out as particularly offensive:

I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me. Come, my beloved, let us go into the open; let us lodge among the henna shrubs. Let us go early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine has flowered, if its blossoms have opened, if the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give my love to you." (Song of Songs 7:11-13)

At length, the rabbis debated whether to include the Song of Songs in the Bible. In their deliberations, they used the curious phrase "renders unclean the hands." Holy books, in their view, were essentially "too hot to handle" on account of their intrinsic holiness. Handling them, then, renders unclean the hands, that is, makes one more or less untouchable, until specific rituals of purification are carried out.

Rabbi Judah says: The Song of Songs renders unclean the hands, but there is a dispute about Ecclesiastes. Rabbi Jose says: Ecclesiastes does not render unclean the hands, but there is a dispute about the Song of Songs....Rabbi Simeon ben Azzai said: I received a tradition from the seventy-two elders...that the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes render unclean the hands. Rabbi Akiba said: Far be it! No man in Israel disputed about the Song of Songs [by saying] that it does not render unclean the hands. For the whole world is not as worthy as the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the writings are holy but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies. (Babylonian Talmud, Yadayim 73a).

Thank the Divine, the Source of Love, for the intervention of Akiva!

Including the Song of Songs in the sacred canon of scripture came with a price, however: It was allegorized, that is, interpreted as a love affair between the Lord and the community of Israel, and in the process it was de-sexualized. For example, in the eyes of Rashi, the breasts of the female lover were two staves of the ark, Moses and Aaron, the Tablets (Ten Commandments), the king and the high priest, or synagogues and study halls, anything but breasts.

Throughout the centuries, Jewish mystics—subscribing to the dictum “as above, so below”—clung to another, perhaps more ancient understanding of the Song of Songs. The mysterious kabbalist Joseph of Hamadan, a contemporary of Moses de Leon, who composed / redacted the Zohar—the central work of Kabbalah—regarded the male and female characters in the Song of Songs as the masculine and feminine faces of divinity, as the heavenly Bridegroom and Bride, which reflect their earthly counterparts.

In his *Sefer Tashak*, Hamadan writes of the Bride, whom he refers to as the Matrona (the Great Married Mother):

“King Solomon, may peace be upon him, said in his wisdom, ‘I am a wall, my breasts are like towers’ (Song of Songs 8:10), this alludes to the breasts of the Matrona that are like towers, and from these holy apples of the Matrona the righteous in the Garden of Eden and the holy angels are nourished...From these breasts of the Matrona the upper and lower beings are sustained, and the holy angels and souls of the righteous draw forth from there honey and milk. Thus it is written, ‘Honey and milk are under your tongue’ (Song of Songs 4:11).”

In recent years, efforts to recover the erotic dimension of the Song of Songs have gained steam. *In the Fever of Love: An Illumination of the Song of Songs* by Rabbi Shefa Gold is one noteworthy example.

At long last, it seems, the sensuality of this work can explode unhampered by commentary that ignores the obvious, the delightfully obvious.

“As an apple-tree among trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the youths. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my mouth” (Song of Songs 2:3).

“Awake, O north wind, come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, that its perfume may spread. Let my beloved come to his garden and enjoy its luscious fruits” (Song of Songs 4:16).

“Let me in, my own, my darling, my faultless dove! For my head is drenched with dew, my locks with the damp of night” (Song of Songs 5:2).

“I have come to my garden, my own, my bride; I have plucked my myrrh and spice, eaten my honey and honeycomb, drunk my wine and my milk” (Song of Songs 5:1).

As in the days of Solomon and the Shulamite, that is, the Lovers in the Song of Songs, human beings are fascinated by sex. One recent study estimates that thirty percent of all global web traffic is pornographic.

Unfortunately, faith traditions have not kept up, that is, kept it up. The religious establishment has been preoccupied with severing us at the waist and brainwashing us into believing that sex and sexuality are confined to Earth not reflected in Heaven.

In response to this reality, the *Song of Songs Seder* humbly emerges.

The seder—intended for the eve of the Intermediate Sabbath of Passover when Jews chant or recite the Song of Songs—takes place around the dinner table as do the First- and Second-Night Seders. Participants enter the ethereal Garden for the Wedding Feast of the Heavenly Bridegroom and Bride.

The Song of Songs Seder, which unfolds according to its own fourteen-step Haggadah—Kaddesh, Urechatz, Karpas, Yachatz, etc.—includes variations on familiar components. Four cups of milk and honey replace the four cups of wine, the Love Story (the Song of Songs) swaps places with the Exodus Story, Four Wedding Guests stand in for the Four Sons, and the King’s Cup (for King Solomon) and the Queen’s Cup (for the Queen of Sheba) take the place of Elijah’s and Miriam’s Cups.

These excerpts from the Song of Songs Seder should provide a taste of its flavor.

The host of the Wedding Banquet introduces the seder plate:

The Song of Songs Seder Plate, like every seder plate, contains six foods, one for each point of the Sacred Hexagram. This shape, known since antiquity as the Seal of Solomon, is imbued with Love. First and foremost, it symbolizes the seamless unity of Divinity, indeed, of all things. The upward-pointing

triangle represents the Divine Masculine and the downward-pointing triangle the Divine Feminine. HE and SHE are ecstatic Oneness, filling all creation and flowing into and through every human relationship, opposite- and same-gendered.

Keeping one foot in the Garden, guests step into the Egypt of Sexual Oppression and come face to face with the Ten Plagues Inflicted on Sacred Sexuality:

The Tenth Plague: Death of the Firstborn (Sexual Violence)

Countless fathers and mothers cry out in pain over the Death of the Firstborn, that is, the deaths of their children, who were victims of sexual violence. Rape, hate crimes based on gender identity and sexual orientation, and state-sponsored sexual terrorism are forms of sexual violence. Homosexual sex (between consenting adults) punishable by death is an example of state-sponsored sexual terrorism. (Homosexuality is a capital crime in nine countries: Afghanistan, Iran, Maldives, Mauritania, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somaliland, Sudan, and Yemen.)

After eating the famous Hillel Sandwich, wedding guests prepare the Selfless Love Sandwich consisting of charoset and pomegranate seeds.

Charoset symbolizes love! “Refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love” (Song of Songs 2:5). The key ingredients for charoset—though there are literally countless recipes—are all mentioned in the Song of Songs: apples, cinnamon, figs, raisins, and walnuts. Charoset is Love Paste. It cements and in some cases re-cements us to the Divine--who dwells within the human heart--and to one another.

The Song of Songs Seder is intended to bring healing to Sacred Sexuality in the upper and lower worlds, thereby filling in the age-old *Sex-Is-Holy - Sex-Is-Dirty* divide. It offers each of us an opportunity to embrace the radiant, sweet-smelling Oneness, which manifests from the crown of the head to the soles of the feet. In addition, the seder lends itself to creating a much needed sacred context in which to celebrate, discuss, and explore human sexuality.

May those who are hungry for love be fed! May they, in turn, proclaim *Next Year in the Garden!*

Martin Sicker *An Introduction to Judaic Thought and Rabbinic Literature* (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2007), 10-13.

J. Zwelling (translator), *Joseph Hamadan's Sefer Tashak: Critical Text Edition with Introduction* (J. Zwelling, 1975), 323.

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The Song of Songs Seder

Leader: Passover or PE-SACH is one of three pilgrimage festivals in Judaism. Every year at this time, our ancestors undertook a pilgrimage to Jerusalem where they celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In other words, they made a spiritual journey. Every PESACH, we also undertake a pilgrimage.

All: We make our way to dusty, hot, oppressive Egypt, to MEETZ-RA-YEEM, which means narrow place. There we join our fathers and mothers as slaves to pharaoh.

We experience what they experienced, we witness what they witnessed. We behold the Divine breaking into history, raising up Moses (MO-SHE) and Aaron (A-HA-RON), unleashing plagues, and splitting the Sea of Reeds so at long last we can walk from “bondage into freedom, from sorrow into joy, from mourning into festivity, from darkness into great light, and from servitude into redemption” (Babylonian Talmud, P-SA-CHEEM 116b).

Leader: As Rabban Gamliel (RA-BAN GAM-LEE-AYL) (early First Century C.E.), grandson of Hillel (HEE-LAYL), reminds us, “In every generation, a man or woman is bound to regard himself or herself as though he or she personally had gone forth from Egypt” (Babylonian Talmud, PSACHEEM 116b).

All: By so doing, we come face to face with the reality of our own Egypt and pharaoh.

Leader: On this Shabbat, the Intermediate Shabbat of Passover (SHA-BAT CHOL HA-MO-ED PE-SACH), our tradition invites us to undertake a very special spiritual journey. We make our way to a lush, green Garden filled with fruit trees and vines where the air is thick with love.

All: We are invited to enter a Love Story, which tells love stories. We are invited to the Wedding Feast of wedding feasts. We are invited to enter the Song of Songs (SHEER HA SHEE-REEM).

Rabbi Akiva (A-CEE-VA) said, “For the whole world is not as worthy as the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the writings are holy but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies” (Babylonian Talmud, YA-DA-YEEM 73a).

All: The Song of Songs Seder Plate, like every seder plate, contains six foods, one for each point of the Sacred Hexagram.

Leader: This shape, known since antiquity as the Seal of Solomon, is imbued with Love. First and foremost, it symbolizes the seamless unity of Divinity, indeed, of all things. The upward-pointing triangle represents the Divine Masculine and the downward-pointing triangle the Divine Feminine. The two appear as Lovers in the Song of Songs, which, according to tradition, was written by Solomon (SH-LO-MO). He and She are ecstatic Oneness, filling all creation and flowing into and through every human relationship, opposite- and same-gendered.

The Foods on the Seder Plate

Arrangement of Foods on the Seder Plate: Imagine a hexagram on the plate. Regarding the upward-pointing triangle, place ZROA at the top-most point, place MAROR at the right-most point, and place CHAROSET at the left-most point. Regarding the downward-pointing triangle, place BAYTZA (two boiled eggs) at the bottom-most point, place CHAZARET at the right-most point, and place CARPAS at the left-most point. And place REEMON (pomegranate seeds) in the middle of the hexagram.

All: Every Seder Plate contains six foods, one for each point of the Sacred Hexagram.

Leader: This shape, known since antiquity as the Seal of Solomon, is imbued with Love. First and foremost, it symbolizes the seamless unity of Divinity, indeed, of all things. The upward-pointing triangle represents the Divine Masculine and the downward-pointing triangle the Divine Feminine. The two appear as Lovers in the Song of Songs, which, according to tradition, was written by Solomon (SHLOMO). He and She are ecstatic Oneness, filling all creation and flowing into and through every human relationship, opposite- and same-gendered.

Take turns introducing the foods. Fuller explanations of the foods can be found within the body of the seder.

Three MA-TZOT

Not two but three MATZOT are brought to the table for PESACH. The top MA-TZA represents our Divinity, the bottom MATZA our Humanity, and the middle MATZA the integration of the two, which is the primary goal of every spiritual practice.

CAR-PAS (Green Vegetable)

CARPAS symbolizes the green, life-filled Garden, the natural world, where Lovers play.

ME-LACH HA MY-YEEM (Bowl of Salt Water)

Salt water represents tears.

MA-ROR (Bitter Herb)

MA-ROR symbolizes unrequited love and one's inability to embrace sexuality.

CHA-ZA-RET (Bitter Herb)

CHA-ZA-RET symbolizes the fragility and fleeting nature of love.

CHA-RO-SET (Fruit-nut Chutney)

CHAROSET symbolizes love!

REE-MON (Pomegranate)

The pomegranate, mentioned more than any other fruit in the Song of Songs, symbolizes fertility and conjugal love par excellence!

Z-RO-A (Shank Bone)

The shank bone symbolizes the Divine Masculine, in particular, the Cosmic Phallus or Lingam, the upward-pointing triangle of the hexagram. *Roasted beet can be used in place of roasted shank bone (Babylonian Talmud, PSACHEEM 114b).*

BAY-TZA (Egg)

The egg symbolizes the Divine Feminine, in particular, the Cosmic Vulva or Yoni, the downward-pointing triangle of the hexagram. *Boiled rice can be used in place of boiled egg (Babylonian Talmud, PSACHEEM 114b). Place two boiled eggs—which are typically roasted after they've been boiled—or two dollops of boiled rice on the Seder Plate.*

Kindling the Lights

All: "Awake, O north wind, come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, that its perfume may spread. Let my beloved come to his garden and enjoy its luscious fruits!" (Song of Songs 4:16).

Leader: Let us kindle the Lights of Shabbat.

All: BA-RUCH A-TA

E-LO-HAY-NU RU-ACH HA-O-LAM, A-SHER CEE-D-SHANU B-MEETZ-VO-TAV, V-TZEE-VA-NU L-HAD-LEEC NAYR SHEL SHA-BAT.

Blessed are You, Yah, our Power, Breath of All, Who sanctifies us with commandments and commands us to kindle the lights of the Sabbath.

Leader: Let us give thanks for this moment:

All: BA-RUCH A-TA YAH E-LO-HAY-NU RU-ACH HA-O-LAM, SHE-HE-CHE-YA-NU V-CEE-Y-MA-NU V-HEE-GEE-A-NU LA-Z-MAN HA-ZE.

Blessed are You, Yah, our Power, Breath of All, Who has kept us alive and has sustained us and has brought us to this season.

The Steps of the Seder

*Before taking a Step of the Seder, call out its name. After taking that step, call out the name of every preceding step and then call out the name of the step just taken. Example: Let's say you're about to take **Step 6: RACHTZA: Wash hands before feast**. Before you take this step, call out RACHTZA. After taking it, call out Steps 1-5 (CADAYSH, URCHATZ, CARPAS, YACHATZ, MAGEED) and then call out Step 6 (RACHTZA), which you just took.*

All: Let us take these steps to enter the Garden.

CA-DAYSH: The Kiss and the Anointing. Recite blessing over milk and honey. Make Kiddush (CEE-DUSH). Drink the **First Cup** of milk and honey.

UR-CHATZ: Wash hands before eating green vegetable. No blessing is recited.

CAR-PAS: Eat green vegetable (parsley) dipped in salt water.

YA-CHATZ: Break middle MATZA and hide larger half (A-FEE-CO-MAN).

MA-GEED: Recite Song of Songs.

RACH-TZA: Wash hands before feast.

MO-TZEE MA-TZA: Say blessings over bread and MA-TZA.

MA-ROR: Recite blessing for eating bitter herb.

CO-RAYCH: Eat MATZA and bitter herb. Eat MATZA and CHAROSET and REEMON .

SHUL-CHAN O-RAYCH: Serve the Wedding Feast.

TZA-FUN: Eat the AFEECOMAN.

BA-RAYCH: Give thanks / say grace.

HA-LAYL: Recite Psalms of Praise (HA-LAYL).

NEER-TZA: Conclude the Seder.

CADAYSH

The Kiss and the Anointing

Recite the blessing over milk and honey.

Make CEEDUSH.

*Drink the First **Cup** of milk and honey.*

All: “Let me be a seal upon your heart, like the seal upon your hand” (Song of Songs 8:6)

“Your ointments yield a sweet fragrance, Your name is like finest oil” (Song of Songs 1:3)

All: Let us sanctify one another.

Participants kiss one another on the right hand. They then trace the Seal of Solomon over one another’s heart, tracing the upward-pointing triangle clockwise (beginning with the top-most point) and the downward-pointing triangle counterclockwise (beginning with the bottom-most point). Lastly, using (scented) olive oil, they trace the Four-Letter Name (from right to left YOD, HAY, VAV, HAY) on one another’s forehead.

The Four Cups

All: “I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine” (Song of Songs 6:3).

Leader: The Four Cups of the Seder reflect the Four-Letter Name of the Divine—spelled from right to left: YOD, HAY, VAV, HAY—and the Four Letters reflect the Two Lovers in the Garden. Spelling the Name backwards—HAY, VAV, HAY, YOD—reveals the essence of the Hebrew words for He (HAY VAV) and She (HAY YOD). The Name, then, means He-She. And the Oneness of He-She pervades the Garden.

The Divine said, “I will take you out of the misery of Egypt...to a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus / SHMOT: 3:7).

Kiddush

Leader / All: [Evening became morning]: The sixth day. And the heavens and the earth and all that filled them were complete. And on the seventh day Yah completed the labor Yah had performed, and Yah refrained on the seventh day from all the labor which Yah had performed. And Yah blessed the seventh day and Yah sanctified it, for Yah then refrained from all Yah's labor - from the act of creation that Yah had performed.

All: BA-RUCH A-TA YAH, E-LO-HAY-NU RU-ACH HA-O-LAM SHE-HA-COL NEE-YA BEED-VA-RO.

Blessed are You, Yah, our Power, Source of All, at whose word all things come into existence.

Leader / All: BA-RUCH A-TA YAH E-LO-HAY-NU RU-ACH HA-O-LAM, A-SHER CEE-D-SHANU B-MEETZ-VO-TAV V-RA-TZ-A VA-NU, V-SHA-BAT COD-SHO B-A-HA-VA UV-RA-TZON HEEN-CHEE-LANU, ZEE-CA-RON L-MA-A-SAY V-RAY-SHEET. CEE HU YOM T-CHEE-LA L-MEEC-RA-AY CO-DESH, ZAY-CHER LEE-TZEE-AT MEETZ-RA-YEEM. CEE VAN-U VA-CHAR-TA, V-O-TANU CEE-DASH-TA, MEE-COL HA-A-MEEM. V-SHA-BAT COD-SH-CHAH B-A-HA-VA UV-RA-TZON HEEN-CHAL-TANU. BA-RUCH A-TA YAH, M-CA-DAYSH HA-SHA-BAT.

Blessed are You, Yah, our Power, Source of All, Who sanctified us with commandments, and hoped for us, and with love and intent invested us with Yah's sacred Sabbath, as a memorial to the deed of Creation. It is the first among the holy festivals, commemorating the exodus from Egypt. For You chose us, and sanctified us, out of all nations, and with love and intent You invested us with Your Holy Sabbath. Blessed are You, Sanctifier of the Sabbath.

The First Cup

All: We call the **First Cup** HAY. *Drink the **First Cup** of milk and honey.*

**E-RETZ ZA-VAT CHA-LAV
(A Land of Milk and Honey) 1**

E-RETZ ZA-VAT CHA-LAV, CHA-LAV U-D-VASH (x4-8)
(A land flowing with milk and honey)

E-E-RETZ ZA-VAT CHA-LAV, ZA-A-VAT CHA-LAV U-D-VASH (x2)

(A land flowing with milk and honey)

Reader: On the very day King Solomon completed the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, God and His bride were united, and her face shone with perfect joy. Then there was joy for all, above and below.

As long as the Temple stood, it served as the sacred bedchamber of God the King and His Bride, the Shekhinah. Every midnight She would enter through the Holy of Holies, and She and God would celebrate their joyous union. The loving embrace of the King and Queen assured the well-being not only of Israel, but also of the whole world.

The King would come to the Queen and lie in Her arms, and all that She asked of Him he would fulfill. He placed his left arm under her head, His right arm embraced Her, and He let Her enjoy His strength. Their pleasure in each other was indescribable. He made His home with Her and took His delight between Her breasts. They lay in a tight embrace, Her image impressed on His body like a seal imprinted upon a page, as it is written, Set me as a seal upon Your heart (Song of Songs 8:6).

As long as the Temple stood, the King would come down from His heavenly abode every midnight, seek out his Bride, and enjoy her in their sacred bedchamber. But when the Temple was destroyed, the Shekhinah went into exile, and the Bride and Groom were torn apart. 4

2

URCHATZ

Wash hands before eating green vegetable.

No blessing is recited beforehand.

All: May what prevents us from experiencing the fullness of erotic love be washed away.

3

CARPAS

Dip green vegetable (parsley) in salt water.

Recite blessing.

Eat green vegetable (parsley).

Reader:

CARPAS (Green Vegetable)

CARPAS symbolizes the green, life-filled Garden, the natural world, where Lovers play. "Come, my beloved, let go into the open; let us lodge among the henna shrubs." (7:12).

Reader:

ME-LACH HA MY-YEEM (Bowl of Salt Water)

Salt water represents tears, the tears of those whose hearts have been broken by Love and the tears of those who have been oppressed by the self-appointed guardians of human sexuality who are in fact its secret enemies. "I met the watchmen who patrol the town; they struck me, they abused me" (Song of Songs 5:7).

All: BA-RUCH A-TA YAH, E-LO-HAY-NU RU-ACH HA-O-LAM BO-RAY P-REE HA- A-DA-MA.

Blessed are You, Yah, our Power, Source of All, Who creates the fruit of the ground.

4

YACHATZ

Break the middle MATZA and hide the larger half (AFEECOMAN).

All: The Middle MATZA symbolizes the integration of our Divinity and our Humanity. We break this MATZA in half to emphasize that the work of integration is ongoing. In fact, it is life-long. Oftentimes, the work of integration cannot move forward because we are cut off from a part of ourselves. Only when we find that part of ourselves, can the work continue. As we make progress, we become more loving to ourselves and other people, thereby transforming the world into paradise.

MAGEED

Recite the Song of Songs.

Song of Songs 5:1 is the sacred arc of the story. Here the Couple consummates their love for each other.

To emphasize the sacredness of this verse, it is chanted using the traditional trope.

*Drink the **Second Cup** after reciting the Song of Songs.*

All: This is the bread of affliction—LACH-MA AN-YA—which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Whenever we are enslaved, enslaved by work, we cannot be present to ourselves or others, and Love suffers. And whenever Love suffers, we suffer. And whenever we suffer what we call God suffers. Let all who are hungry, come eat. Let all who are in need, come celebrate.

All: “Bring me into the banquet hall, feed me with love; sustain me with raisin cakes” (Song of Songs 2:4-5). 6

All: Why is this night different from all other nights?

MA NEESH-TA-NA HA-LY-LA HA-ZE MEE-COL HA-LAY-LOT?

All: On all other nights we eat leavened products and MATZA, and on this night only MATZA, which helps us to understand the importance of working toward integration in our lives.

On all other nights we eat all vegetables, and on this night only bitter herbs, which highlights for us the gap between our divinity and humanity.

On all other nights, we don't dip our food even once, and on this night we dip twice, which reminds us of the difference between hate and love, separation and connection.

On all other nights we eat sitting or reclining, and on this night we only recline, which instills in us hope for a transformed world.

The Four Wedding Guests

Take turns introducing each guest.

The **Wise Wedding Guest** asks, “Why does our tradition call on us to recite the Song of Songs? Explain to this guest how the themes of Passover and the Song of Songs are related to each other and then go on to share one or more secrets embedded in this work.

The **Wicked Wedding Guest** asks, “Why do you bother with the Song of Songs? Provide this guest with a direct and firm explanation: “Some say the Divine wrote the Song of Songs and gave it to us at the moment the Sea of Reeds was split. Others say the Divine gave it to Moses (MOSHE) along with the Torah at Sinai (SEE-NY). For me it was given, so I could rethink my relationship to the Divine and to others. If our hearts are overflowing with love, the world will be transformed.” 5

The **Simple Wedding Guest** asks, “the Song of Songs?” Explain to this guest that the Source of Love loves each of us so much that we were given the ability to experience love in general and erotic love and pleasure in particular.

The **Wedding Guest Who Does Not Know Enough to Ask** deserves patience. Say to this guest, “‘It is because of this that the Divine acted on my behalf when I left Egypt.’ The Divine freed me, freed us, out of love. The Song of Songs helps us to understand that the Divine is all love. All Love is the name of the Divine!

The Ten Plagues

Take turns introducing the plagues.

All: These are Ten Plagues inflicted on our Sacred Sexuality.

DAM (Blood): Making Sex Unholy

Sex is holy! Human beings, particularly those who claim to speak on behalf of the Holy, make sex unholy. Changing pure into impure can be likened to changing water into Blood.

TZ-FAR-DAYA (Frogs): Treating Partners as Disposable

Choosing to end a committed relationship or marriage is a uniquely personal decision. The two people don't deserve or need others to sit in judgment of them. Relationships and marriages take work. If we don't discern whether we should put the work in and instead just pick up and leave, we behave much like Frogs, which jump from one feeding to the next.

CEE-NEEM (Lice): Unwanted Thoughts

Unwanted sexual thoughts, like Lice and other pests, cause us to lose focus, thereby opening the door to neglect of ourselves and others.

A-ROV (Wild Beasts): Addiction

Simply put, if we don't control our sexuality, it will control us. When we spin out of control sexually we behave like Wild Beasts who indiscriminately trample on others.

DE-VER (Epidemic): HIV / AIDS

Without question, HIV / AIDS is a global Epidemic, a pandemic. HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is transmitted primarily through unprotected sexual intercourse. Most people who have HIV or who are at risk for contracting it do not have access to care, prevention, or treatment. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 36 million people have died of AIDS (since 1981), and 35.3 million are living with HIV/AIDS right now. 7

SH-CHEEN (Boils): STDs

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) make themselves felt in painful ways, like Boils on the skin. If left untreated, they can ravage the body and mind.

BA-RAD (Hail): Negative Messaging

Establishments, particularly religious establishments, routinely disempower people in order to perpetuate themselves. Instilling shame around sexuality is an ancient and highly effective way of controlling others. Subjecting people to negative messages about sexuality can be likened to pummeling them with Hail.

AR-BE (Locusts): Predators

Sexual predators, like Locusts, seek to devour. Some force homeless youth—40 percent of whom are LGBT—into prostitution, others traffic women and children into the commercial sex industry, and still others seek ways to fuel addiction to internet porn. 8

CHO-SHECH (Darkness): Ignorance

Millions if not billions of people have been rendered incapable of recognizing the inherent holiness of sexuality. They can't see as if blanketed by Darkness.

MA-CAT B-CHO-ROT (Death of the Firstborn): Sexual Violence

Countless fathers and mothers cry out in pain over the Death of the Firstborn, that is, the deaths of their children, who were victims of sexual violence. Rape, hate crimes based on gender identity and sexual orientation, and state-sponsored sexual terrorism are forms of sexual violence. Homosexual sex (between consenting adults) punishable by death is an example of state-sponsored sexual terrorism. (Homosexuality is a capital crime in nine countries: Afghanistan, Iran, Maldives, Mauritania, Nigeria, Saudia Arabia, Somaliland, Sudan, and Yemen.) 9

Telling the Love Story / Reciting the Song of Songs

Use a version of the Song of Songs that appeals to you. In case you choose one that doesn't clearly identify the person or persons speaking, refer to the list below. The Contemporary English Version (CEV) is particularly well suited for a dramatic reading:

<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Song+of+Solomon+1&version=CEV>

The Song of Songs, which consists of eight chapters, has six narrative parts: He, She, Friends, Wedding Feast Guests, Young Women, and a Narrator.

Chapter 1—Narrator: 1, She: 2–7, He: 8-11, She: 12-14, He: 15, She: 16-17. Note that in 1:5, Young Women speak these words: “We are happy for you! And we praise your love even more than wine.”

Chapter 2—She: 1, He: 2, She: 3-10, He: 11-15, She: 16-17. Note that in 2:10, He speaks these words: “My darling, I love you! Let’s go away together.”

Chapter 3—She: 1-5, Wedding Feast Guests: 6-11.

Chapter 4—He: 1-15, She: 16.

Chapter 5—He: 1, She: 2-8, Friends: 9, She: 10-16. Note that in 5:1, Friends speak these words: “Eat and drink until you are drunk with love.”

Chapter 6—Friends: 1, She: 2-3, He: 4-10, She: 11-12, Friends: 13. Note that in 6:13, She speaks these words: “Why do you want to see this woman from Shulam dancing with the others?”

Chapter 7—He: 1-9, She: 10-13.

Chapter 8—She: 1-4, Friends: 5, She: 6-7, Friends: 8-9, She: 10-12, He: 13, She: 14. Note that in 8:5, She speaks the words: “I stirred up your passions under the apple tree where you were born.”

All: “The Divine raises the poor from the dust, lifts up the needy from the refuse heap to set them with the great, with the great men of the Divine’s people” (Psalm 113:7-8)

All: “Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Divine, at the presence of the Power of Jacob” (Psalm 114:7).

The Second Cup

All: BA-RUCH ATA YAH, ELOHAYNU RUACH HA OLAM SHEHACOL NEEYA BEEDVARO.

Blessed are You, Yah, our Power, Source of All, at whose word all things come into existence.

All: We call the **Second Cup** VAV.

*Drink the **Second Cup** of milk and honey.*

All: He has appeared!

6

RACHTZA

Wash hands before the feast.

All: May what prevents us from seeing others as reflections of ourselves be washed away.

BA-RUCH A-TA YAH E-LO-HAY-NU RU-ACH HA-O-LAM, A-SHER CEE-D-SHANU B-MEETZ-VO-TAV, V-TZEE-VA-NU AL N-TEE-LAT YA-DA-YEEM.

Blessed are You, Yah, our Power, Breath of All, Who sanctifies us with commandments and commands us regarding the washing of the hands.

7

MOTZEE MATZA

Say blessings over bread and MA-TZA.

Everyone receives a piece of the top MATZA, which represents our Divinity.

All: May we come to know on the deepest level possible that All Is One! All is Divine!

BA-RUCH A-TA YAH E-LO-HAY-NU RU-ACH HA-O-LAM, HA-MO-TZEE LE-CHEM MEEN HA-A-RETZ.

Blessed are You, Yah, our Power, Source of All, Who brings forth bread from the earth.

BA-RUCH A-TA YAH E-LO-HAY-NU RU-ACH HA-O-LAM, A-SHER CEE-D-SHANU B-MEETZ-VO-TAV, V-TZEE-VA-NU AL A-CHEE-LAT MA-TZA.

Blessed are You, Yah, our Power, Source of All, Who sanctifies us with commandments and commands us regarding the eating of MATZA.

MAROR

Say blessing for eating bitter herb.

Eat a bitter herb.

All: BA-RUCH A-TA YAH, E-LO-HAY-NU RU-ACH HA-O-LAM A-SHER CEED-SHAN-U B-MEETZ-VO-TAV V-TZEE-VA-NU AL A-CHEE-LAT MA-ROR.

Blessed are You, Yah, our Power, Source of All, Who sanctifies us with commandments and commands us regarding the eating of MAROR.

Reader:

MAROR (Bitter Herb)

MA-ROR symbolizes unrequited love and one's inability to embrace sexuality. "Upon my couch at night I sought the one I love—I sought, but found him not." (Song of Songs 3:1) In addition, MAROR represents the pain that accompanies our failure to integrate our Divinity and Humanity.

Reader:

CHAZARET (Bitter Herb)

CHAZARET symbolizes the fragility and fleeting nature of love. Love is indeed fragile, "like a lily among thorns" (Song of Songs 2:2). We must take care, therefore, to protect it from being damaged beyond repair. "I opened the door for my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone." (Song of Songs 5:6) In addition, CHAZARET, like MAROR, represents the pain that accompanies our failure to integrate our Divinity and Humanity.

CORAYCH

Eat MATZA and MAROR together.

Eat MATZA, MAROR, and CHAROSET together, if that is your custom.

Eat MATZA, CHAROSET, and REEMON (pomegranate seeds) together.

The Hillel Sandwich and the Selfless Love Sandwich

All: Tonight, we will eat two sandwiches, the Hillel Sandwich and the Selfless Love Sandwich.

Leader: The stack of three MATZOT represent our Divinity, our Humanity, and the integration of the two, and the MAROR and CHAZARET represent the pain that accompanies the division of our Divinity and Humanity.

In the days of the Second Temple, Hillel (HEE-LAYL) the Elder (c. 110 B.C.E . – 7 C.E.) ate the Passover sacrifice (lamb) with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

All: We observe this practice by eating MATZA and MAROR, which on this occasion, remind us that our lives cannot be free of pain and suffering as long as our Divine and Human natures remain separate. Let us eat the Hillel Sandwich.

Take two small pieces of MATZA and place a spoonful of MAROR in between. Now eat the Hillel Sandwich. If it is your custom, add a spoonful of CHAROSET or dip the sandwich in CHAROSET before eating.

All: How can we integrate our Divinity and Humanity?

Leader: The Torah answers, “Love your fellow as yourself” (Leviticus / VA-YEEC-RA 19:18).

Our brother Hillel knew this answer. “What is hateful to you,” he says, “do not to your neighbor: that is the whole Torah, while the rest is the commentary” (Babylonian Talmud, SHABAT 31a).

All: Love, ever-expanding Love, then, is the secret to bringing about Oneness in ourselves and in the world.

Reader:

CHAROSET (Fruit-nut Chutney)

CHAROSET symbolizes love! “Refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love” (Song of Songs 2:5). The key ingredients for CHAROSET—though there are literally countless recipes—are all mentioned in the Song of Songs: apples, cinnamon, figs, raisins, and walnuts. CHAROSET is Love Paste. It cements and

in some cases re-cements us to the Divine, who dwells within the human heart, and to one another. “Charoset,” writes Rabbi Arthur Waskow, “is an embodiment of the sacred text that is perhaps the most ‘subversive,’ certainly the most fully embodied, book of the Hebrew Scriptures—the Song of Songs.” 2

Reader:

REEMON (Pomegranate)

The pomegranate, mentioned more than any other fruit in the Song of Songs, symbolizes fertility and conjugal love par excellence! “Let us go early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine has flowered, if its blossoms have opened, if the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give my love to you” (Song of Songs 7:13). Those who scouted the Promised Land brought back pomegranates as proof of the land’s fecundity (Exodus / SH-MOT 13: 23). Pomegranates were incorporated into the design of the Temple and vestments of the High Priest—the capitals of the two free-standing columns, in front of the Temple, were covered with pomegranates, and the hem of the Robe of the Ephod was decorated with pomegranate-shaped tassels. For mystics, these associations were significant. In their view, the Temple (BAYT HA-MEEC-DASH) and the Holy of Holies (CO-DAYSH HA-CO-DA-SHEEM) were imbued with Sacred Sexuality. The Temple / Holy of Holies was known as the “Bed Chamber” because therein A-DO-NY and SHE-CHEE-NA came together as One. 3

All: On this occasion, we eat MATZA and CHAROSET and REEMON (pomegranate seeds). By so doing, we remind ourselves of two things: our Divine and Human natures can be brought together if we truly love one another as reflections of ourselves, and it is the nature of self-less love to increase exponentially. Let us eat the Selfless Love Sandwich.

Take two small pieces of MATZA and place spoonfuls of CHAROSET and REEMON (pomegranate seeds) in between. Now eat the Selfless Love Sandwich.

SHULCHAN ORAYCH*Serve the Wedding Feast.***Reader:****ZROA (Shank Bone)**

The shank bone symbolizes the Divine Masculine, in particular, the Cosmic Phallus or Lingam, the upward-pointing triangle of the hexagram. “As an apple-tree among trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the youths. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my mouth” (Song of Songs 2:3). A burnt bone reminds us that Sacred Sexuality, both Divine and Human, remains under siege and must be reclaimed and celebrated in our day.

Reader:**BAYTZA (Egg)**

The egg symbolizes the Divine Feminine, in particular, the Cosmic Vulva or Yoni, the downward-pointing triangle of the hexagram. “Who is She that shines through like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, radiant as the sun... (Songs of Songs 6:10)? In nearly every culture, the egg symbolizes birth or rebirth as well as the female reproductive system, namely, the breasts and the womb. “Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle” (Song of Songs 7:4). A burnt egg reminds us that the Divine Feminine, the Goddess—known as SHECHEENA in Judaism—was driven from our consciousness, which introduced unprecedented imbalance into the world. In addition, a burnt egg reminds us that Sacred Sexuality, both Divine and Human, remains under siege and must be reclaimed and celebrated in our day.

Boiled rice can be used in place of boiled egg (Babylonian Talmud, PSACHEEM 114b). Place two boiled eggs—which are typically roasted after they’ve been boiled—or two dollops of boiled rice on the Seder Plate.

11

TZAFUN

Eat the AFEECOMAN.

All: We reunite with a lost part of ourselves so the work of integration can continue in earnest. We step toward greater health and wholeness, and we emerge as more caring, compassionate, and loving beings.

“I eat my honeycomb with my honey” (Song of Songs 5:1 ‘RSV’).

The Wedding Feast was sweet, but the MATZA even sweeter. For this reason, we savor the taste of the MATZA one last time.

12

BARAYCH

Give thanks / say grace.

*Drink the **Third Cup** of milk and honey.*

Fill the King’s Cup with wine and Queen’s Cup with water.

All: PO-TAY-ACH ET YA-DE-CHA, U-MAS-BEE-A L-CHOL CHY RA-TZON.

BA-RUCH ATA YAH, HA-ZAN ET HA-COL.

“You open Your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing” (Psalm 145:16 ‘RSV’). Blessed are You, Yah, Who nourishes all.

We are thankful, above all, for knowing You.

Psalm 63

Take turns praying aloud this psalm.

¹A psalm of David, when he was in the Wilderness of Judah.

²Beauty Beyond Beauty, You are my Power;

I search for You,

my soul thirsts for You,
my body yearns for You,
as a parched and thirsty land that has no water.
³I shall behold You in the sanctuary,
and see Your might and glory,
⁴Truly Your faithfulness is better than life;
my lips declare Your praise.
⁵I bless You all my life;
I lift up my hands, invoking Your name.
⁶I am sated as with a rich feast,
I sing praises with joyful lips
⁷when I call You to mind upon my bed,
when I think of You in the watches of the night;
⁸for You are my help,
and in the shadow of Your wings
I shout for joy.
⁹My soul is attached to You;
Your right hand supports me.

The Third Cup

All: BARUCH ATA YAH, ELOHAYNU, RUACH HAOLAM, SHEHACOL NEEYA BEEDVARO.

Blessed are You, Yah, our Power, Source of All, at whose word all things come into existence.

All: We call the **Third Cup** HAY.

*Drink the **Third Cup** of milk and honey.*

The King's Cup

Leader: "Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the Lord." (Malachi / MAL-A-CHEE 3: 23).

For centuries, Jews have looked to the prophet Elijah (E-LEE-YA-HU), who was carried off to heaven in a fiery chariot, to return to Earth to announce the coming of the Messiah (MA-SHEE-ACH). Solomon, who is one of the forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses of Judaism, will surely accompany him (Babylonian Talmud, M-GEE-LA 14a). 10

Reader: According to legend, Solomon, who "was the wisest of all men" (I Kings / M-LA-CHEEM 5:11), possessed a cup in which he could see everything that was happening on the face of the earth, which explains, perhaps, why he knew so much about Love. 11

All: Let us fill King's Cup with wine.

"Oh, give me of the kisses of your mouth, for your love is more delightful than wine." (1:2)

The Queen's Cup

Leader: "When the Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame, she came to Jerusalem....King Solomon gave the Queen of Sheba all she desired" (II Chronicles / DEEV-RAY HA-YA-MEEM 9:1and 12)

Reader: According to the Ethiopian *Kebra Nagast or Glory of Kings*, Queen Makeda of Aksum visited Solomon. 12 She agreed to sleep in a room near his providing he didn't make any sexual advances toward her. Solomon agreed to abide by these terms as long as the queen didn't take anything belonging to him. He then ordered a spicy meal to be prepared for the two of them. Afterward, he arranged for a glass of water to be placed at her bedside. During the night, she woke up thirsty and drank the water. A short while later, Solomon bellowed that Makeda had stolen from him and insisted that the two of them make love, which they did. The queen eventually returned home, pregnant with Solomon's child, the future Menelik I, the ancestor of Haile Selassie (1892-1975), the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

All: Let us fill Queen's Cup with water.

"You are a garden spring, a well of fresh water" (4:15)

Open the front door.

All:

SHLOMO MAL-CEE,

SHLOMO CHA-CHA-MEE,

SHLOMO, SHLOMO, SHLOMO A-HU-VEE!

BEEM-HAY-RA V-YA-MAY-NU YA-VO AY-LAYNU

EEM MASHEEACH BEN-DA-VEED

EEM MASHEEACH BEN-DA-VEED

Solomon my king,

Solomon my wise one,

Solomon my love,

Speedily may he come to us

with the Messiah, the son of David,

with the Messiah, the son of David.

13

HALAYL

Recite Psalms of Praise.

*Drink the **Fourth Cup**.*

All: "Oneness is mindful of us. The Divine will bless us; the Divine will bless the house of Israel; the Divine will bless the house of Aaron; the Divine will bless those who fear Oneness, small and great alike" (Psalm 115:12-13).

All: "I love the Divine for Oneness hears my voice, my pleas; for the Divine turns the Divine's ear to me whenever I call....O Oneness, I am Your servant, Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have undone the cords that bound me" (Psalm 116:1-2, 16).

All: "Praise Oneness, all you nations; extol the Divine, all you peoples, for great is the Divine's steadfast love toward us; the faithfulness of Oneness endures forever. Hallelujah" (Psalm 117:1-2).

All: "The right hand of Oneness is triumphant! The right hand of Oneness is exalted! The right hand of Oneness is triumphant!" (Psalm 118:15-16).

The Fourth Cup

All: BARUCH ATA YAH, ELOHAYNU RUACH HAOLAM SHEHACOL NEEYA BEEDVARO.

Blessed are You, Yah, our Power, Source of All, at whose word all things come into existence.

All: We call the **Fourth Cup** YOD.

Drink the **Fourth Cup** of milk and honey.

All: She has appeared!

14

NEERTZA

Conclude the Seder.

All: He and She are One, in Bliss, forever and ever!

"Love is fierce as death, Passion is mighty as Sheol; its darts are darts of fire, a blazing flame. Vast floods cannot quench love, nor rivers drown it (Song of Songs 8:6-7).

Next Year in the Garden!

L-SHA-NA HA-BA-A BA-GAN!

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the contribution that my friend Joshua Greenberg made to this work. He was the first to mention that the shankbone and egg represented the Cosmic Phallus and Vulva. He suggested that participants sanctify one another through anointing with oil, and demonstrate their acceptance of Oneness through kissing one another's hands.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of David Katan with the song *Shlomo Malkee*.

Pronunciation Key

A as in A piece of fruit

AY as in The DAY after tomorrow

E as in LET me do it

EE as in MEET me there at noon

Y as in BY the seaside

O as in OH no not again

U as in Follow the RULE

TZ as in The BERLITZ foreign language series

CH as in The composer BACH

CH makes a slight gargle-like sound.

Notes

1 The following is an easy-to-learn version of ERETZ ZAVAT CHALAV (A Land of Milk and Honey): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=etHzgFYUtpk>

2 Rabbi Waskow's teaching on CHAROSET can be found on this page:

<https://theshalomcenter.org/node/1265>)

3 Tanchuma, Vaera (TAN-CHU-MA, VA-AY-RA) 9 states that the bedchamber in which Joash (YO-ASH) and his nurse were hidden (II Kings / MLACHEEM 11:2 and II Chronicles / DEEVRAY HAYAMEEM 22:11) was the Holy of Holies. Tanchuma refers to an ancient collection of rabbinic homilies and Vaera to the weekly Torah portion Exodus (SHMOT) 6:2-9:35. Midrash Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah (MEED-RASH SHEER HA SHEEREEM RA-BA) (parasha 1) and Vakira Rabba (VAYEECRA RABA) (17, 7) regard the entire Temple as a bedchamber. Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah is a commentary on the Song of Songs and Vakira Rabba on the Book of Leviticus (SAY-FER VAYEECRA).

4 Howard Schwartz, *Tree of Souls* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 54.

5 Rabbi Eliezer (E-LEE-E-ZER) stated that the Song of Songs was given at the Sea of Reeds (Shir Ha-shirim Rabbah 2.2.2) and Rabbi Akiva (ACEEVA) at Sinai (SEENY) (1.12.1).

6 "Bring me into the banquet hall, feed me with love" (Song of Songs 2:4) is supported by the LXX, one or more Syriac versions, and several medieval manuscripts. The source for this translation can be found on this page: <http://classic.net.bible.org/home.php> (NET Bible Learning Environment, online home of the NET Bible translation, which includes 60,932 translators' notes).

7 HIV / AIDS statistics can be found on this page: <http://www.who.int/gho/hiv/en/>

8 Homeless LGBT youth statistics can be found on this page:

<http://www.sdglnc.com/news/2010/02/09/sex-trafficking-hits-san-diegos-lgbt-youths#sthash.8RydS39C.dpbs>

9 The list of countries where homosexuality is considered a capital crime can be found on this page:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_rights_by_country_or_territory

10 Rashi regarded Solomon as one of the forty-eight prophets; see *The Stone Edition TANACH*, Chart 14, 2038.

11 Robert Bly and Leonard Lewisohn (translators) *The Angels Knocking on the Tavern Door: Thirty Poems of Hafez* (Harper Collins e-books), 37. In the poem "What Do We Really Need?" Hafez writes: "Solomon's cup, in which all the world could be seen, is the bright soul of the Friend." Regarding this stanza, the translators write, on page 101, "The term translated here as "Solomon's cup" is jam- i jahan-nama (the world-displaying goblet), referred to by Hafez in a number of other ghazals in this book."

12 E.A. Wallis Budge (translator) *The Kebra Nagast* (1932), Chapter 30: Concerning How King Solomon Swore to the Queen and Chapter 31: Concerning the Sign which Solomon Gave the Queen.

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[end]