

Hands Holding a Dandelion Flower



# HOLDING THE SWEET & THE BITTER

Four new questions that  
need to be asked at your  
Passover seder in 2026



**Passover supplement  
2026 | 5786**

*Alternative text is available on photos for accessibility purposes.*



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## About

# HOLDING THE SWEET & THE BITTER



The whole point of the Seder is to ask questions. This is your time to ask about things that confuse you, things you don't understand, or even things you don't agree with.”

-Rabbi Joy Levitt, co-author of *A Night of Questions, A Reconstructionist Haggadah*

How do I hold a sprig of parsley—fresh and crisp as the first days of spring—and dip it into salt water, the taste of tears? How do I open my heart to the joy of singing familiar songs and sharing a festive meal, while also holding the fear, grief, and anger I feel in response to cruelties in our world? And how do I emerge from the Passover *Seder* feeling free not only to remember liberation, but to claim joy—to find a renewed sense of resilience to guide me through these times?

Passover invites us to experience the fullness of our senses: taste and smell, song and story, texture and ritual. And to deepen the experience, we are challenged to hold contrasting feelings as well: at the *Seder* table, sweetness and bitterness sit side by side. We are asked not to choose one over the other, but to hold them together.

About

## HOLDING THE SWEET & THE BITTER

We know that joy can fuel courage—and that choosing joy can be an act of resistance, even defiance. When we gather around our *Seder* tables, we embrace traditions passed down not only through our families and communities, but through generations of ancestors who faced oppression and tyranny and still refused to give up hope.

With this in mind, the Ritualwell team has created four new questions to complement the traditional Four Questions. May these offerings spark meaningful conversation among friends, family, and community members—inviting reflection, connection, and the possibility of hope and joy, even when such feelings may feel hard to reach.

Chag Pesach Sameach!

חַג פֶּסַח שְׂמֵחָ!



# מַה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת?

שֶׁבְּכֹל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ  
אוֹכְלִין חֶמֶץ וּמַצָּה,  
הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כְּלוּ מַצָּה

***Ma nishtanah halailah  
hazeh mikol haleilot?***

*Sheb'khol haleilot anu okhlin  
hametz umatzah,  
halailah hazeh, kuloh matzah*





sheets of matzah

## WHY DOES THIS YEAR CALL FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS?

On all other Seders, we eat *matzah*, the bread of affliction. *Matzah* marks our transition from slavery to liberation. **In moments of transition, what helps you believe that better times are possible?**



וַיֹּאפֹּן אֶת־הַבֶּצֶק אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם עֲגַת מַצּוֹת כִּי לֹא חָמֵץ  
כִּי־גִרְשׁוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לְהִתְמַהֵמֶה וְגַם־צִדָּה לֹא־עָשׂוּ לָהֶם:

They baked the dough that they took out of Egypt into unleavened cakes [matzot], for it was not leavened, since they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared provisions for themselves

Exodus 12:39

In the Exodus narrative, *matzah* played a crucial role in the Israelites' swift escape from Egypt. With no time to allow the dough to rise, they prepared unleavened bread, which became a symbol of both quick liberation and the "bread of affliction." Today, as we eat *matzah*, we honor that significant moment of transition.

# THE TASTE OF PRAISE

by Elya Braden

In my primary-colored garden  
of *yeladim*\* where we crayola'd  
stick-people portraits of Judah Maccabee  
and his muscled bros, Moses crossing  
the Sea of Reeds, or Jonah cowering  
in the belly of a lumpy, grinning whale,  
every Bible story seemed to share  
a common theme: They tried to kill us,  
they failed, let's eat!

My Grama Fay's noodle kugel,  
steeped in cinnamon, freckled  
with stewed raisins, was the 8th  
wonder of our known world,  
and every kitchen memory I have  
is laced with the crackle-hiss  
of gribenes and onions rendering  
in cast-iron. Jewish popcorn,  
our mother called it.

Even American holidays were seasoned  
with our immigrant hungers  
as we fought for the "tushy"  
on every Thanksgiving turkey,  
an ancestral drive to flesh  
our bones with skin and fat.

\*children

Continued from previous page

## THE TASTE OF PRAISE

by Elya Braden

But Grama's piece de resistance was trotted out but once a year to celebrate our people's Exodus from that narrow place, a slavery of labor and lash, yoked to the grim will of a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph.

To mark the haste with which we fled, we now eat *matzah* for eight days, a rope that knots our people *l'dor v'dor*, generation to generation. *Matzah*, a bland cracker sans butter, egg or yeast, yet Grama could spin that dross into mouthfuls of heaven. No ordinary *matzah* balls, tight fists of paste and chew. No, hers were grapefruit-sized, clouds of exultation melting on our tongues.

The din of gathered family and friends, adults shouting their opinions, children cracking jokes, kicking shins under the table, all hushed when bowls of Grama's *matzah* ball soup were served, silent but for our collective scrape and slurp.

# BEFORE WE BEGIN THE SEDER

by Trisha Arlin

Blessed Holy Wholeness,  
as we sit here at our *Seder* table  
at this lovely gathering  
for the wonderful meal to come,  
we mourn the cruelty  
of Pharaoh and his followers.  
We grieve the indifference to  
the hunger and need of millions,  
the murder of innocents,  
the threats of deprivation,  
the abandonment of democracy  
and the fear of tomorrow.  
May our personal joy not be lost  
in our awareness of all this pain  
even as we eat and drink and pray.  
And may we tell our stories  
and remember our true selves  
and never let anyone shut us up.  
Amen

# MATZAH

by Rabbi Katie Mizrahi

*Halailah hazeh, kulo matzah\**

Empty of the leaven—heavy glue—sticky wheat paste

- no growing, belching yeasties
- no permanent pyramid bricks

Empty of the sedentary baggage from the narrow place  
stagnant pattern—habits built  
of guilt and fostered fear

*Matzah* is pure,

Made when Israel heard and dove,

stripped, through needle's eye

didn't think to gather

wintery protections, slavery possessions, task master excuses for  
being less than free.

Taste the bread.

Taste the lean spontaneous movement bread, crackery minimal  
*matzah*

bones of the risen loaf.

Leave the leaven in *Mitzrayim\*\**.

Run to the wide wide sea.

\*This night is all matzah

\*Egypt

# מַה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת?

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ  
אוֹכְלִין שְׂאֵר יִרְקוֹת,  
הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה (כָּלִי)  
מָרֹר



**Ma nishtanah halailah  
hazeh mikol haleilot?**

*Sheb'chol haleilot anu okhlin sh'ar  
y'rakot, halailah hazeh (kuloh)  
maror*



green bitter lettuce

ritualwell  
TRADITION & INNOVATION

## WHY DOES THIS YEAR CALL FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS?

On all other *Seders*, we eat *maror* to remember the hardships of slavery. We have all tasted bitterness this year—whether personal, communal, or global. **What are you holding when tasting the *maror* this year?**

No matter whether you choose horseradish, bitter lettuce, dandelion greens, or another vegetable for the *maror* on your Passover table, experiencing bitterness in its entirety is a vital aspect of the *Seder*. As we reflect on the symbolism of *maror*, we consider not only our personal experiences but also the inequalities present in the broader world.

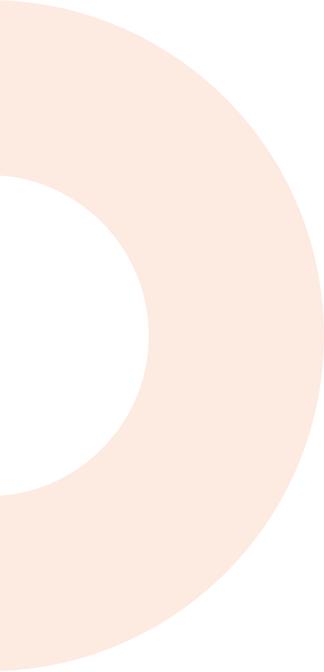
# BITTER WATERS

by Yael Fischman

*“How can you sing when My creatures are dying?”  
God said to the angels.\**

But I am not an angel, said Miriam.  
I am waters made bitter by enslavement  
by the blood of baby boys  
by mothers’ tears  
and almost, I confess, by my own.  
So now,  
if I dance from relief  
if I cry tears of release  
it is not because I rejoice in their deaths  
or take pleasure in the poetic justice  
of waters made bitter red with their blood, their limbs—  
I sing and dance because at last my limbs, my blood and my voice  
are finally my own, and they are sweet.

\*Paraphrase of commentary on Exodus, ch. 14, v.30, p. 270 Hertz Chumash



## HEARTBROKEN AT THE SEDER TABLE

by Elizabeth Caplun

this year I celebrate with a broken heart  
a heart shattered by human madness  
I celebrate in solidarity  
with my foremothers and forefathers  
who lost their lives dreaming  
of a place of safety  
I weep with all who are displaced  
abducted demonized  
starved and raped  
dreaming of a place of safety  
I celebrate because it is spring  
the season when hope  
pokes out of dark furrows  
ready to bloom if we weed out fear  
and prepare the soil for dialogue  
may we all celebrate with a full heart next year  
when we break free from violence  
when all feel safe and respected  
between rivers and seas  
everywhere

## BLESSING FOR TEARS

by Devon Spier

These are the words no one tells you.  
Buried beneath the tomb of the patriarchs.  
and the last wall left standing.  
And the village stained with our ancestor's blood.  
Now covered in daffodils.  
We fall apart.  
The ones back there and us, here.  
Underneath the weight of silence and racism.  
And singing our strength's praises.  
We fall apart.  
And though we have relished our survival.  
We mustn't ever forget our tears.

Salt water bowl on a seder plate





# מַה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת?

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אֵין אָנוּ  
מִטְּבִילִין אֶפְלוּ פַעַם  
אַחַת, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה נִשְׁתַּנָּה  
פַּעַמִּים



## **Ma nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol haleilot?**

*Sheb'khol haleilot ein anu matbilin  
afilu pa'am ehat, halailah hazeh,  
shtei peamim.*

## WHY DOES THIS YEAR CALL FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS?

On all other *Seders*, we dip twice: once in something sweet, and once in something bitter. Alongside the challenges we've faced, we've also experienced various forms of sweetness this year —whether personal, communal, or global.

**As you savor that sweetness this year, who or what comes to mind?**

*Haroset*, symbolizing the mortar the Hebrew slaves made, can be crafted from a variety of locally sourced fruits and nuts. Ashkenazi recipes often feature apples and walnuts, while Sephardic and Mizrahi versions might include dates, oranges, pistachios, almonds, and other delightful options. Regardless of the ingredients, *haroset* is sweet, and as we dip twice, we experience the contrast of bitterness and sweetness.



a seder plate with a shank bone, charosef, egg and bitter lettuce



## **AGAIN, ON THIS NIGHT**

by Suzanne Sabransky

On This Night...

We are gathered as one with our past  
To retell our forebear's tale  
To learn once more of the tears they shed  
And experience a taste of their travails

On This Night...

We experience slavery as if we are those slaves  
Tasting the bitter and salt of their ordeal  
In our abundance we recline and drink 4 cups  
Sharing the story and wondering, "How did they feel?"

On This Night...

We celebrate the rebirth of spring  
Remember how our ancestors faced the Red Sea  
Recreate the past as we eat, read, and sing  
Honoring The One who set us all free

*Continued from previous page*

## **AGAIN, ON THIS NIGHT**

by **Suzanne Sabransky**

On This Night...

We are thankful for what the Eternal provides  
Embracing the heritage all of us share  
Though Elijah has yet to come through our door  
Each year we open it and echo the prayer

So why on this night do we gather for Seder?  
Why is this night so different from all of the rest?  
Because on this night we were all freed from slavery  
Because on this night, we are all graciously blessed.

לְדוֹר וָדוֹר נִגִּיד גְּדֻלָּתְךָ וְלִנְצַח נְצַחִים קִדְשֶׁתְךָ נִקְדִּישׁ,  
וְשִׁבְחֶךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִפִּינוּ לֹא יִמוּשׁ לְעוֹלָם וָעַד

From generation to generation we declare Your greatness  
Your holiness we shall always proclaim,  
Source of Life, Your praise is forever on our lips.

Amen

# HAIKU SEDER

by Avi Killip

קִדְּשׁ

this holy moment  
wine sobers and sanctifies  
the *seder* begins

וְרַחֵץ

grimy from egypt  
we wash ourselves clean and wait  
ready for freedom

כְּרַפֵּס

we celebrate life  
by dipping into our tears  
another springtime

יַחֵץ

*matzah*; made to break  
teaching us to find within  
an *afikoman*

מְגִיד

a good story is  
worth hearing again this year  
tell me one more time

Continued from previous page

## HAIKU SEDER

by Avi Killip

רְחִצָּה

wash before blessing  
shhh, it's a quiet moment  
only then we eat

מוֹצֵיאַת מַצָּה

bread of affliction  
even you need to be blessed  
*Hamotzi Matza*

מָרֹר

when our bitter herb  
is really just a garnish  
we are privileged

כּוֹרֵךְ

once upon a time  
Hillel made the first sandwich  
bitter with the sweet

שְׁלַחַן עֹזֵרֵךְ

brisket; *matzo* balls;  
*gefilte* fish from the jar  
–so worth waiting for!

*Continued from previous page*

## HAIKU SEDER

by Avi Killip

צפון

hidden or stolen  
it always tasted sweeter  
ritual dessert

ברך

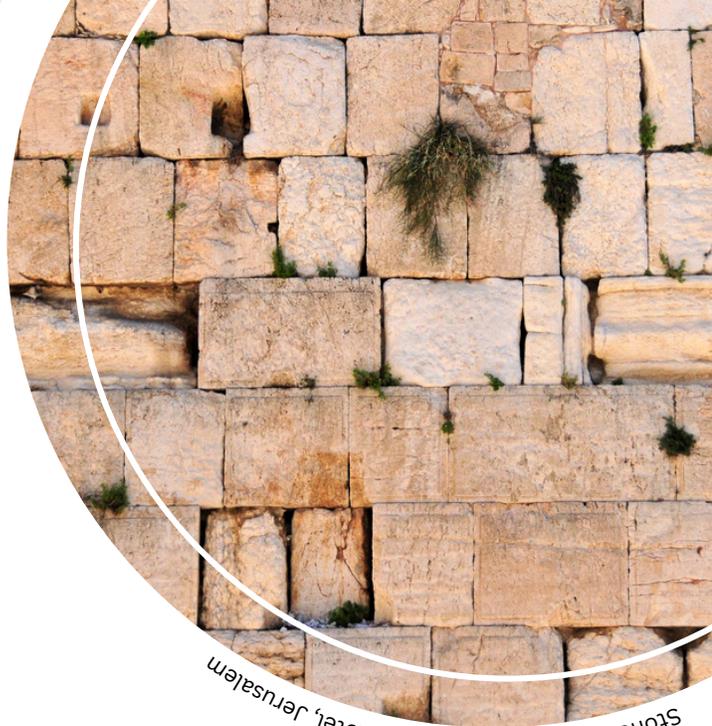
on this night we bless  
singing together, aloud  
like when we were kids

הלל

holy Redeemer  
who leads us to promised lands  
to you we sing praise

נרצה

let's do it again  
next year in Jerusalem  
or tomorrow night



Stones of the Western Wall / Kotel, Jerusalem

## HAROSET: A FAMILY TRADITION

by Laura Hegfield

Chop and mix in the well-worn wooden bowl handed down for at least six generations now. Deep-cut lines of memory, and the patina of time adorn its surface.

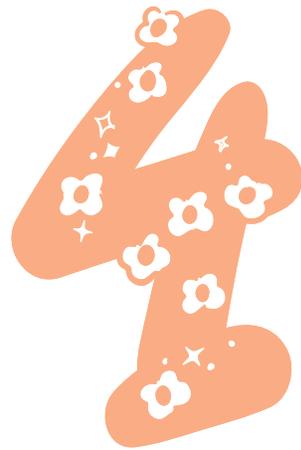
Peel and shred apples for sweetness, pour in a little wine to warm our hearts and enhance the color, shake in a few generous dashes of fragrant cinnamon to wake up our spirits, include walnuts for textural crunch and a hint of contextual bitterness, lest we forget for even a moment in our celebration tonight, that there is still great suffering in this world.

We chop and mix and add in a healthy handful of love, just as every mother before us did, and God willing, the next generations of mothers will do for years to come.

We chop and mix, chop and mix and recommit to creating a communal culture as varied as the assembled ingredients in our traditional family recipe; a society where our grandchildren, and theirs too, will be free to be who they are, who God intended for them to be; free to make charoset that our mothers', mothers', mothers', mother's mother would recognize and enjoy.

# מַה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת?

שֶׁבְּכָל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ  
אוֹכְלִין בֵּין יוֹשְׁבֵין וּבֵין  
מְסֻבִּין, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה  
כָּלֵנוּ מְסֻבִּין



## **Ma nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol haleilot?**

*Sheb'khol haleilot anu okhlin bein  
yoshvin uvein m'subin;  
halailah hazeh, kulanu m'subin.*

## WHY DOES THIS YEAR CALL FOR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS?

On all other *Seders*, we recline among friends and family as an expression of our freedom and comfort. As you recline, help support each other by sharing: **How do you find it possible to hold both bitterness and sweetness?**

For centuries, reclining at a meal was a privilege reserved for free people, while enslaved people or servants stood. When we recline at the Seder table, we take on a posture of rest and relaxation that celebrates freedom.

Two modern dinner chairs with seat pillows

# MOSES

by Gail Simmons

...Now the fire is in his voice, the slaves are at his back.  
Through scarred lips he is speaking truth to power  
Telling Pharaoh what he doesn't want to hear  
Showing Pharaoh what he doesn't want to know.  
While the whole world is watching  
While the whole world is on fire

The wizards nod admiringly: he has gone where we cannot.  
The courtiers smile, tightly: he is every inch a prince.

The peasants stand, their hearts aflame in hope,  
They, too, have labored in narrow places  
They have heard their Goshen neighbors groaning  
They, too, long for a sacred wind  
That might carry them on eagles' wings, or Moses' coattails  
As he leads his Hebrews across the sea.

They give their gifts of gold and silver freely  
Metals forged in fire and quenched in water.  
The bravest among them give more than that.  
The rising tide of the Sea of Reeds lifts all hopes.  
As the God of Moses liberates The Hebrews,  
the mixed multitude suspect He will liberate them as well.

[Read the full piece here](#)

## DRESSING THE SEDER TABLE

by Beth Kanell

My great-grandmother's china cups  
your grandmother's candlesticks  
my father's thick Hebrew still echoing  
your uncle's declaration  
my brother's courage and  
your sister's declaration.  
Back and forth the weaver's shuttle flashes  
drawing threads for the cloth.  
My mother gardening with her G-d  
the railroad hat your father wore  
my grandfather exalting tolerance  
dollar bill from your grandfather's grocery.  
All of the marriages, promises  
all the lives and deaths behind us  
all the way back to the Red Sea's crossing  
and all the children chanting now:  
All of that love is woven into  
the way the women dance.

# TROUBLE THE WATER

by Rabbi Tsurah August

We stand on the shore of the sea  
Fearsome  
Dark above, dark below  
We hesitate  
As if  
We have a choice

As if  
We could remain  
As if  
We could return  
We know we cannot  
We cannot wait

For the sea to split  
We cannot wait  
For the way  
to offer us an  
easy passage

Dark sea shore





Hands resting over a drum

*Continued from previous page*

## **TROUBLE THE WATER** by Rabbi Tsurah August

We must go  
Into the sea  
We must  
Learn to swim  
To dive  
Into the depths

And rise up  
With hope  
With fear  
Filling  
Our throats  
With raging song

Sing a new  
Song  
Together  
We can  
We will  
Reach the other side



a family sits around a Passover table, set with seder plate, food and beverages

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