

A Passover Seder 2003



A PASSOVER SEDER 2003

JENNY JONES: Tell us how you think postmodernism affected your career as a novelist.

ALEX: I disavowed writing that contained real ideas or any real passion. My work became disjunctive, facetious and nihilistic. It was all blank parody, irony enveloped in more irony. It merely recapitulated the pernicious banality of television and advertising. I found myself indiscriminately incorporating any and all kinds of pop kitsch and shlock. [He begins to weep again.]

JENNY JONES: And this spilled over into your personal life?

ALEX: It was impossible for me to experience life with any emotional intensity. I couldn't control the irony anymore. I perceived my own feelings as if they were in quotes. I italicized everything and everyone. It became impossible for me to appraise the quality of anything. To me everything was equivalent -- the Brandenburg Concertos and the Lysol jingle had the same value. . . . [He breaks down, sobbing.]

JENNY JONES: Now, you're involved in a lawsuit, aren't you?

ALEX: Yes. I'm suing the Modern Language Association.

JENNY JONES: How confident are you about winning?

ALEX: We need to prove that, while they were actively propounding it, academics knew all along that postmodernism was a specious theory. If we can unearth some intradepartmental memos -- y'know, a paper trail -- any corroboration that they knew postmodernism was worthless cant at the same time they were teaching it, then I think we have an excellent shot at establishing liability.

- JENNY JONES wades into audience and proffers microphone to a woman.

WOMAN (with lateral head-bobbing): It's ironic that Barry Scheck is representing the M.L.A. in this litigation because Scheck is the postmodern attorney par excellence. This is the guy who's made a career of volatilizing truth in the simulacrum of exculpation!

VOICE FROM AUDIENCE: You go, girl!

WOMAN: Scheck is the guy who came up with the quintessentially postmodern re-bleed defense for O.J., which claims that O.J. merely vigorously shook Ron and Nicole, thereby reaggravating preexisting knife wounds. I'd just like to say to any client of Barry Scheck, "Lose that zero and get a hero!"

[The AUDIENCE cheers wildly.]

WOMAN: Uh, I forgot my question.

-Mark Leyner

A Passover Seder 2003 is dedicated to Avery Ferentz in loving memory.

IN PREPARATION FOR A PASSOVER SEDER

Before the Seder do what you would have otherwise were there not going to be a Seder. Know that people everywhere believe in (God) and that terrible things are probably being committed in (God)'s name **at this very moment**. Ask yourself: How do I live in this world? Keep food prep times under 15 minutes when cooking for the Passover, as if they were **coming for you** and you had to get away fast. If you cannot prepare your food quickly, place it in a satchel and go to sleep. Have a burly friend break down your door in the dead of night and attempt to take you away. Evade this friend, grab the satchel, dash from your house, arrive at the Seder.

A NOTE ON IRONY:

I have come to believe over many years that irony is a force that fights against meaning. Are we able we fight against this by using irony itself ironically, cancelling out the void in meaning it creates? Is this another postmodern way to avoid responsibility, or a way of animating dead words with a new kind of vitality? This is for you to decide. Feel free to say "Hence The Irony" after prayers for the sake of nostalgia for past Seders, or to express the irony that by being so "sacreligious" we are having a genuine communal ritual experience, but also feel free to say anything else that you'd like there, much the same way that the word (God) is treated elsewhere. Except please don't say "Dick Cheney," unless you absolutely have to

A HAPPY NOTE, STILL:

The use of pronouns is still permitted at The Passover Seder.

A NOTE ON LAST YEAR'S SEDER, WHICH REMAINS RELEVANT THIS YEAR

Any way we can find to live, persevere, struggle against the world we live in must give us enough joy to find strength.

ORDER OF A SEDER

note: 'Seder' means 'Order', so we could be calling this 'Order of an Order', except

that then we'd be talking about the Masons, and then I'd have to kill you.

- 1. The First Cup**
- 2. Dirty, Dirty, Dirty**
- 3. Get Green**
- 4. Fragmentation**
- 5. The Second Cup**
- 6. A Passover Story**
- 7. Oy! It Would Have Been Enough!**
- 8. Rebirth**
- 9. We Now Return To A Passover Story**
- 10. Hillel, or Make Your Own Passover Story**
- 11. The Fourth Cup**
- 12. The Festival Meal**

THE FIRST CUP

All read:

Thank you, (God), for providing us this weed. With it we can forget things that we may need help forgetting. With it we may gain the necessary critical distance to keep our lives in a sort of order, though probably not enough distance to watch Fox News without feeling dirty. However, let us not trust in this, for the more we smoke it, the smaller the chance we will find this critical distance we are looking for, and the greater the chance that we will spin around in a paranoid, neurotic feedback loop. A paranoid, neurotic feedback loop. A paranoid, neurotic feedback loop. With it, however, we make pretty things, and think they are much prettier than they actually are. We will try not to smoke it all the time and forget about You, Dude, but You probably should have had the foresight to make it act in a way that makes You prettier also. Though, on further reflection, there have got to be some people out there who believe this too. So let us say, ('Hence The Irony!')

Leaning on the left side, smoke the joint.

DIRTY, DIRTY, DIRTY

Wash your hands but do not say the blessing.

GET GREEN

The 'master' of the 'house' takes a bit of parsley and dips it in some salt water and distributes it to everyone at the table. Before eating the parsley, say this prayer:

Thank you, (God), for providing us this vegetable. Sorry about fucking up the Earth so badly, but, like, um, we recycled, or at least we tried, back when we could. I wonder what environmental statutes will be cut this year because they aren't cost effective? Was that me? Oh, sorry. And let us say, (Hence the Irony!)

FRAGMENTATION

The 'master' of the 'house' breaks the middle matzah in the plate. He leaves half of it there and excuses himself to the bathroom. Maybe he's hiding the other half, and maybe if anyone can find it after the meal has been eaten, they will win a special prize.

Fill The Second Cup

A book says that many years ago the Jews were slaves in Egypt. The book we are reading tonight is a translation of a Haggadah prepared by the Ktav Publishing House in New York City in 1949. That book is a translation of the story of the Exodus in the Bible, a written version of an oral text about Jew-persecution and Jew-flight. This translation is an attempt to reassemble fragments handed down through history and piece them together into something that we can relate to and try to understand.

A book says that many years ago the Jews were slaves in Egypt. Like about half of the rituals in the Jewish tradition, Passover celebrates survival. We are ordered to kick back, recline, and inebriate ourselves. As the ritual begins we are to imagine ourselves as slaves, and through the recitation of the story, and the unhooking of our consciousness, we are liberated.

A book says that many years ago the Jews were slaves in Egypt. To live in New York in 2003 is to be dwarfed by information, saturated by advertising, constantly choking back the gag reflex of one's own skepticism. To live in America in 2003 is to watch a government drunk on its own power continue to curtail the rights of its own citizens and oppress the people of the world, economically, culturally, and militarily. It is to watch innocents be slaughtered and be written off as 'collateral damage' by our military, and to watch the deliberate murder of journalists who will not accept military control. It is to watch the suppression of an entire people by the Jewish state who we support economically as it not only kills innocent Palestinians, but internationals who have come to their aid.

This Seder has always been a struggle to create belief in the commodified,

homogenized world that we live in. Is this kind of struggle the privilege of those who are able to take their own freedom for granted? If the freedom we celebrate at the end of this ritual is grounded in oppression, how can we claim to be free at all? Is it enough to rewrite the story, to try to take control, or are these only more words? We must strive to be compassionate, understanding, and to actively speak out against tyranny in all forms in order to be free.

We begin to recite our story of the Jews when the youngest person sitting at the table asks four questions.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

On all other nights, we may drink, smoke pot, do our homework, watch teevee, recover from another miserable day in capitalism, think, very technically, about how many bomblets do not detonate per cluster bomb dropped, imagine what happens to the children who pick up the bomblets, wonder who invented the word 'bomblet', or surf the gleaming roads of the information superhighway, baby. Tonight we sit around a table with a bunch of people who we might or might not know, enacting a ritual which many of us have never participated in before. **Yo, 'sup wit dat?**

On all other nights, we can eat bread if we want to. Tonight we are obligated to eat matzah instead. **Yo, 'sup wit dat?**

On all other nights, most of us would not eat any bitter herbs. Those of us who might would do so without considering them bitter, or even as herbs. Tonight we'll be eating bitter herbs at least once, calling them "bitter herbs," and dipping them into all sorts of shit. **Yo, 'sup wit dat?**

Let's face it, on all other nights, many of us slouch. But tonight we are supposed to recline even if we have good posture, or our chairs are very comfortable. Why the mandatory relaxation? **Yo, 'sup wit dat?**

THE SECOND CUP

All read:

Thank you, (God), for providing us this wine. With it we can say things which we may ordinarily never say and do things which we may ordinarily have far too much self-consciousness and dignity to do. Verily, we can both say and do these things and not regret it until the next morning, if we are unfortunate enough to remember them at all. And let us say, (Hence the

Irony!)

Drink The Second Cup

Fill the Third Cup

A PASSOVER STORY

We read this story tonight because the Jews are a hardy race of people who are pretty good at surviving whenever someone tries to kill them. Even now that the Jews live in relative plenty and security, they are not very interested in being killed again. It is ironic, then, not in a recontextual and uplifting way, but in a bitter and tragic way that the Jews are perpetrating a kind of slavery on others in this day and age.

There are those out there, Douglas Rushkoff and Freud among them, who see the Passover story as not grounded in any historical truth. They feel that it served as a handy metaphor for reaffirming the Jewish tradition and explaining a time in history in which many people converted to Judaism. In this interpretation, the ten plagues (which we will get to soon) represent the pagan gods of the Egyptians, the Jews were never really slaves (except, in a metaphorical way, to said pagan gods), and Moses was an Egyptian. Another metaphorical interpretation goes like this, yo -- once freed, the Jews are led out of Egypt to wander into the desert for 40 years which serve as a sort of womb for their rebirth. They have no responsibilities, wander aimlessly, and are fed by God. As they receive the 10 commandments from Moses (via God) they are reborn as a civilization.

These interpretations might be more in line with our interpretation of this Passover Seder, as we use the Passover story to craft our own kind of belief in our connections to each other and to humanity in general. And even if not, they're good kibitzing. In biblical times, telling this story was so important that wise old men would sit around and kibitz about when it should be told. They also kibitzed about such things as whether the words 'all the days of your life' meant the days and the nights also. There seemed to be a heavy dispute over the difference between 'The days of your life' and 'All the days of your life.' (The Passover story also included a large digression about Laban The Syrian. To this day, countless numbers of Jews do not understand the importance of Laban The Syrian to the Passover Story.) These arguments became part of the story, and force you to kibitz in its recitation, opening up a space for dialogue and connection.

There are other fringe benefits to the recitation of a Passover Seder. We affirm our ties, mediated as they may be, to the collective ethnic history that at least some of us share. We also get to say 'delivered us from the house of bondage' a number of times, and to mention Rabbi Jose of Galilea. We can discuss the 'Rod of Moses' and give each other salacious winks.

To help us understand our connection to the Passover Story, we are given four sons to use as models. Is it a coincidence that there are four sons in the Polenberg family? Nobody knows. Each of these four sons asks a different question about the Passover story, and each is given an important answer about belief.

The first son asks, 'Why has God given us these customs?' Then he goes back to reading the Sun. Give him what he wants, for he affirms the system. Teach him to manipulate it for his benefit. He will earn dope-ass Nike sneakers, a job at Burton-Marsteller, one of those foxy chicks in the Burberry ads with the gams sticking out of the overcoat, a Miata.

The second son asks, 'So what do you really think of this God thing anyway, and all these rituals where we have to wait so long to eat such weird food? And while he used to say "what's with that stuff in the Windex bottle, anyway?," now he just looks pissy. By saying 'You' instead of 'I,' he makes it clear that his Limp Biskit-grade rebellion will not let him believe in anything that you try to consider real. Tell him he'd have been well fucked back in Ol' Egypt when we were in the house of bondage, and to stick his head back into the MTV. No Air Jordans for the second son.

The third son asks 'Wuzzat?' He's not very bright. Pat him on the head and say 'God brought us out of the house of bondage. Just wait, and you can eat.' Wipe the drizzle off his chin.

The fourth son can't even ask a question. Put words in his mouth for him. Try to make them really good words, even if you aren't a really good person.

Archetypal sons notwithstanding, this book posits that something really did happen. It started when the Jews migrated to Egypt, probably because of a drought. They were then enslaved by the Egyptians because, par for the Jewish course, they excelled without becoming assimilated in the society where they lived. We know that they are no longer slaves because we get to sit around and recontextualize the religion, free to the extent that we're free.

What happens is that (God) saves the Jews from Pharaoh by visiting these ten plagues on the Egyptians, each worse than the last. This is a good time to point out that there's almost no grief in the Passover ritual. The only time we're supposed to grieve is during our recitation of the plagues. Many Haggadahs don't even bother notifying us that we are supposed to grieve. Instead, they dwell on a kibitz-fest by the rabbis about exactly how many attributes of (God) you could attribute to each plague. The big question: four or five attributes per plague? Either way, the Egyptians were fucked. Will plagues be visited upon the Jews for playing the role of Pharaoh in Israel today, or will they continue to be given billions of dollars in American aid?

THE TEN PLAGUES

Spill a drop of wine for each of the plagues

blood

frogs

vermin

beasts

cattle disease

boils

hail

locusts

darkness

slaying of the first-born

Sing the ten plagues

DAYENU (OY! IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!)

(note: 'ghe' will be substituted as a gender-neutral pronoun where 'he' would have been used in olden times. It rhymes with 'twee'. The 'h' is silent.)

If we are going to bother to believe in (God), we should believe that Ghe has done a bunch of good stuff for us!

If ghe had brought us out of Egypt

And not drowned the Egyptians at the Red Sea like lemmings,

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had drowned the Egyptians at the Red Sea like lemmings,

And not let us survive subsequent attempts at genocide,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had let us survive subsequent attempts at genocide,
*And not let us become exceedingly wealthy in the medical and
legal professions,*
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had let us become exceedingly wealthy in the medical and
legal professions,
*And not allowed us to dominate a corrupt and tawdry
entertainment industry,*
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had allowed us to dominate a corrupt and tawdry
entertainment industry,
And not let us shop at Niketown,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had let us shop at Niketown,
*And not let Niketown's success help turn vast swaths of America into
a gigantic mall with cotton candy and MTV and nothingness for every-
one,*
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had let Niketown's success help turn vast swaths of America into a
gigantic mall with cotton candy and MTV and nothingness for everyone,
*And not let the mallness of America to lull its citizens to sleep while the
IMF, World Bank, and WTO conspired to allow multinational corpora-
tions to profit not only at the expense of Third World countries, but our
own expense as well*
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had let the mallness of America to lull its citizens to sleep while the
IMF, World Bank, and WTO conspired to allow multinational corporations
to profit not only at the expense of Third World countries but our own
expense as well
*And not let the Republican party grab the White House illegally, and
not have let the Democrats become so venal that they couldn't pose
enough of an alternative to keep control of the House and Senate,*
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had let the Republican party grab the White House illegally, and not have let the Democrats become so venal that they couldn't pose enough of an alternative to keep control of the House and Senate,

And not given us Total Information Awareness and the PATRIOT Act to keep track of all our information, and detain us if we're being bad,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had given us Total Information Awareness and the PATRIOT Act to keep track of all our information, and detain us if we're being bad,

And not given us an immoral war on Iraq to keep us from thinking about how fucked-up things are getting here at home, both politically and economically,

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had given us an immoral war on Iraq to keep us from thinking about how fucked up things are getting here at home, both politically and economically

And not given us a mass media so beholden to the military/industrial/infotainment/governmental complex that they'd never even think about telling us the truth about anything

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FUCKING ENOUGH, NO, REALLY, OKAY?

REBIRTH

All read:

In previous incarnations of A Passover Seder, we would enact our own death by drinking a suspicious-looking blue liquid out of a windex bottle at this very point. But we have seen enough death and simulations of death for a while. Thank you, (God), for allowing us to live, and persevere, and grow. Instead of simulating our death, let us celebrate our rebirth as more feeling people. Let us try to remain firm in our beliefs, yet open and questioning enough to change them when necessary. Let us not abandon a thirst for the truth. And let us say, (Hence The Irony!)

Drink the Third Cup

Fill the Fourth Cup

WE NOW RETURN TO A PASSOVER STORY

The three important symbols of the Passover Meal are...

THE PASSOVER OFFERING

THE MATZAH

THE BITTER HERBS

Point to the Offering:

The Passover Offering reminds us that God gave us a chance to spare our first-born children. It also gives us a convenient name for the holiday. Carbon-dated and molecularly analyzed fragments recently looted from the National Museum of Baghdad tell us that God passed over the houses of the Jews which were marked with blood from the offering.

Point to the Matzah:

The Matzah is here to remind us that we had to tear-ass out of Egypt to get the jump on Pharaoh and his posse, who were all saddled up to bust a cap into us. If we had waited for it to rise, we woulda been slaughtered. So no bread, no corn syrup, nuh huh.

Point to the Bitter Herbs:

These bitter herbs are here to remind us that being in slavery sucks. Stick a fistful of those bad boys in your mouth. This year, maybe stick two. And imagine that the water you'd use to wash them down was owned by a multinational corporation like Vivendi or Bechtel, charging you exorbitant fees for it. Can't happen here, right? Riiiiiiiiight.

BLESSING OVER THE MATZAH

All read:

Thank you, (God), for saving our ass, even if the bread didn't have time to rise. Was that me kibitzing again? I'm sorry. And let us say, (Hence the Irony.)

BITTER HERBS:

First, combine bitter herbs and charoset on a spoon.

Then, all take their cellphones out of their pockets. All cellphone users should find partners with cellphones, preferably sitting next to them. One of the two partners will turn off their cellphone. The other partner will enter the number of the turned-off cellphone into their cellphone. The group should dial the cellphones in synchronicity. When every phone is connected to a voice mailbox, all recite the prayer into the cellphones.

Thank you, (God), for saving our ass again. We eat the bitter herbs tonight to remember how bad it was before you saved our asses, but temper it with sweetness because we've suffered enough. Let us remember that there are other, more technological kinds of slavery, that it is very easy to be unaware of how enslaved we truly are, and that we can enslave others by doing **nothing but living our own American lifestyles**. And let us say, (Hence the Irony.)

HILLEL, OR, MAKE YOUR OWN PASSOVER STORY

Before the prayer, fill out the Mad Lib

THE FOURTH CUP

Thank you, (God), for allowing us to live another year, to pursue our hopes and aspirations, to attempt to strive at the edge of our periphery and stride, unafraid, into the void of mystery. We survive, and we remember. And let us say, (Hence The Irony.)

Drink the Fourth Cup

THE FESTIVAL MEAL



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President

April 18, 2003

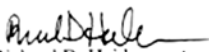

President George W. Bush
The White House
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Dear President Bush,

Next Year?

Sincerely,

THE AMERICAN-ISRAEL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, INC.
OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

By: 
Richard D. Heideman /s/ 
President