



A PASSOVER SEDER 2009

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"I'm not saying I would have done anything differently."

-Henry Paulson

"We've lent some of it. We've not lent some of it. We've not given any accounting of, 'Here's how we're doing it. We have not disclosed that to the public. We're declining to."

-Thomas Kelly, J.P. Morgan Chase

Congressman Henry Waxman: "My question is simple. Were you wrong?"

Alan Greenspan: "Partially ..."

IN PREPARATION FOR A PASSOVER SEDER

Before the Seder do what you would have were there not going to be a Seder. Know that people everywhere believe in (God) and that terrible things are 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 Seder, as if a horde of zombies was slouching toward you and though they move slowly, you have to get away *fast*. If you cannot prepare your food quickly, place it in a satchel and go to sleep. Have a half-naked dude in leather chaps and a harness break down your door, yelling "Rhythm is a dancer!" in the dead of night, an LED-encrusted knife clutched in his teeth. Skillfully evade him, grab the satchel, dash from your house, arrive at the Seder.

A NOTE ON IRONY:

If there is one thing that A Passover Seder has taught me, it's that irony can be a force that fights against meaning. I don't want to poop on anyone's dancefloor, though, so 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 "sacrilegious" we are having a ritual experience, but also feel free to say anything else that you'd like, much the same way that the word (God) is treated elsewhere. Try to stifle your moans of "Condoleeza" this year though, to aid the healing of past wounds, or at least promote their repression.

JUST IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING:

The use of pronouns will always be permitted at A Passover Seder.

THIS NOTE REMAINS RELEVANT:

Any way we struggle against the world must give us enough joy to find strength.

INTERACTIVITY SPECIAL SUPER BIG FUN TIME!

Collateralized Debt Obligations. Credit Default Swaps. Tranches. Asset Backed Securities. Financial instruments are *just so complicated!* But let's say it's you in charge of a too-big-to-fail investment and lending institution. You have one piece of paper in front of you. Please turn it into a financial instrument for The Next Great Depression.

ORDER OF A SEDER

- 1. The First Cup**
- 2. Dirty, Dirty, Dirty**
- 3. Great Green Gobs**
- 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 need help forgetting. With it we may gain an important illusion of critical distance, but possibly we will just get stupid. So let us not trust in this critical distance, for the more we smoke it, the smaller the chance we will find it, and the greater the chance that we will whirl around in a paranoid, neurotic feedback loop. A paranoid, neurotic feedback loop. A paranoid, neurotic feedback loop. With it we make pretty things, and think they are much prettier than they actually are. Look at the blinky it's blinking it's blinking OHMYGOD PONIES! We will try not to smoke pot all the time and forget about You, d00d, 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 God-lovin' hippies out there who believe that it does. So let us say, ('Hence The Irony!')

Leaning on the left side, smoke the first cup, as long as you don't work for a multinational corporation with random drug testing, or it won't put you to sleep, or you don't want to get stoopid.

DIRTY, DIRTY, DIRTY

Do not wash your hands, and do not say the blessing. Why wash your hair? It's just going to get dirty again anyway.

GREAT GREEN GOBS

The 'master' of the 'house' takes a bit of parsley or some other green thing 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 WE GOTTA FIDDLE WHILE THIS SHIT BURNS BABY! WHEN WE RUN OUT OF OIL WE'RE GONNA GET ON AN ETHANOL-FUELED SPACESHIP AND FLY THAT SHIT INTO THE SUN AND GO OUT IN A BLAAAAAZE OF GLORY! WE TOTALLY SEQUESTERED ENOUGH CO2 FOR IT, UNDERGROUND, BABY, UNDERGROUND !
And let us say, (Hence the Irony!)

FRAGMENTATION

Before the group reads the following text, 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 roughly half of the rituals in the Jewish tradition, Passover celebrates our survival. As the ritual begins we imagine ourselves as slaves, and through the recitation of the story we are liberated. To facilitate our metaphorical liberation we get drunk, kick back and recline.

A book says that many years ago the Jews were slaves in Egypt. To live in America in 2009 is... a little weird. So on one hand, we, as secular progressive kinds of people, are supposed to be happy that Our Guy Won, even though it's getting clearer and clearer that he isn't so much Our Guy as much as he's Multinational Capitalism's guy. Yet one has to acknowledge that it's still way better than having a team of madpeople in charge. Yet every step Our Guy's economic team takes seems hellbent on redistributing what wealth America has left to the same group of crony capitalists that have been feeding at the trough for the last 20 years. So there's the relief that the people in charge aren't evil morons, yet a feeling that many of the evil morons have been replaced with slightly smarter, yet still kind of evil people, and maybe if they're not downright evil, they're definitely shortsighted enough to look evil, and they don't care what we think.

This Seder has always been a struggle to create belief within 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? As a wise man once wrote in a song, "What's a global hegemon to do, when it's no longer punk to be a Jew?"

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

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

Note: The youngest person at the table does not have to be Kevin Messman. However, if Kevin feels strongly about reading the four questions, the youngest person should let him. Whoever reads may substitute any question they want for the question in parenthesis. Also you should know that BunnyCam Live is real bunnies, not the porn kind.

On all other nights, we may work on projects, play Flower, make blinkies, blog, code, drink, smoke pot, recover from another miserable day in capitalism, wonder how everyone got so convinced deregulation was awesome, or watch BunnyCam Live. 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. And the process has to be supervised by a Jew from the moment the wheat is cut from the shaft, and baked within 15 minutes of having been exposed to moisture, or it ain't Kosher. (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 making various concoctions with them. (**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 uncomfortable. (**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!)

Sip or Drink The Second Cup. If you don't finish it now, please finish it during A Passover Story.

A PASSOVER STORY

Note: The word 'kibitz' is pronounced sort of by compressing the words "kibbles and bits" together, taking the "kib" from kibbles, and the "bits" from bits. Kibbles and

bits and bits and bits! Meaty Bone is a barking good treat, bark if you like meat!

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. This story is a reminder that indeed, *everyone is out to get us*.

There are those out there, Freud among them, who believed Passover was a 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 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 --

All rap:

Madoff! Was a hero to most!
But he never meant shit to me!
Straight up lyin that sucker was
Simple and plain
Throw him in jail with John McCain!

Anyway, I digress. 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 seem to be more in line with this Passover Seder, as we use the Passover story to craft belief out of our connections to each other and to our collective understanding of the world we live in. And even if this fails, it's 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 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. If the story of Laban The Syrian is removed from the Hagaddah, they feel a kind of vague

loss. That night, they dream about a man whose head is a giant matzah. He begs them to dip his head into horseradish and eat it. They initially refuse, but he is insistant, so they finally agree. When they dip the matzah-head into the horseradish, it becomes limp and dangles uncontrollably. They cannot put it into their mouths. A buzzer sounds and their teeth turn into locusts and fly into the sky. The buzzing is hellishly loud and will not stop. They snap awake in a cold sweat.) They kibitzed about whether each of the Plagues that (God) delivered onto Egypt came with Wrath, Indignation, Trouble, and the Messengers Of Evil, or whether they came with His Bruning Anger, Wrath, Indignation, Trouble, and the Messengers Of Evil. A full half of the Passover story involves a bunch of rabbis sitting around and kibitzing about shit which is relatively superfluous to the story itself. Though reading about this kibitzing, you are forced to kibitz in its recitation, opening up a space for dialogue and connection, or at least an opportunity to kibitz about the kibitzing.

There are other fringe benefits to the recitation of a Passover Seder. We affirm our ties, mediated as they may be, to a collective ethnic history that at least some of us share, and others of us fetishize. 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? Each of these sons asks a different question about the Passover story, and each is given an answer about belief.

The first son asks, 'Why has God given us these customs?' Then he goes back to Etrade. Give him what he wants, for he affirms the system. Teach him to manipulate it for his benefit. He will earn dope-ass kicks, bailout millions, one of those Hummer limos with the awesome ground effects, fake boobs.

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 attitude is for quitters, and goddammit, winners never quit. He does not realize that his right to free speech was given to him by the United States Army. Force him to do pushups with your foot planted in his back,

screaming "IS THAT ALL YOU GOT? HUH? HUH? COME ON! COME ON, YOU LITTLE FUCK!" Ask him who would have liberated him from Ol' Egypt when we were in the house of bondage.

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.

Regardless of what Freud thought, this book posits, arbitrarily but firmly, that something really did happen. It started when the Jews migrated to Egypt, possibly because of a drought. They were then enslaved by the Egyptians because, par for the Jewish course, they excelled without becoming assimilated in their society. We know that they are no longer slaves because we get to sit around and recontextualize the religion.

So the Jews kvetch up to (God), and then (God) saves the Jews from Pharoah 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, though they make us spill out drops of wine without telling us why. Instead, they dwell on the aforementioned kibitz-fest by the rabbis about exactly how many attributes of (God) you could attribute to each plague. (It's also important to point out that the more new, postmodern, and Reconstructionist the Haggadah is, the more they try to make a big deal out of the grief thing. The source text, however, was much more about how badass God was than about how bad we felt for smiting the people who had kept us enslaved.) Either way, the Egyptians were fucked. Will plagues be visited upon the Jews for playing the role of Pharoah in Israel today? Rahm Emanuel don't think so!

THE TEN PLAGUES

All say: YIKES!

Spill a drop of wine for each of the plagues

Sing the ten plagues

Fill The Third Cup from the weird-looking bottle which may or may not have a

psychedelic bear on it.

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 taken our jobs so we couldnt shop there even if we wanted to,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had taken our jobs so we couldnt shop there even if we wanted to,

And not bailed out the people whose behavior made those jobs go away,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had bailed out the people whose behavior made those jobs go away,
And not bailed them out AGAIN! And again! And again!,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had bailed them out AGAIN! And again! And again!,
And not given us Bernie Madoff's best Ponzi scheme evar,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had given us Bernie Madoff's best Ponzi scheme evar,
And not given us the fact that American Jews referred to it as
"Kristallnacht", proving that it will Never Again Be Punk To Be A Jew,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had given us the fact that American Jews referred to it as 'Kristallnacht',
proving that it will Never Again Be Punk To Be A Jew,
And not given us a world where Bernanke and Paulson still have their
jobs shovelling money into the furnace of the US banking system,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had given us a world where Bernanke and Paulson still have their jobs
shovelling money into the furnace of the US banking system,
And not given us Israel's illegal invasion and collective punishment of
Gaza,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had given us Israel's illegal invasion and collective punishment of
Gaza,
And not given us the fact that AIPAC can still determine whose nomina-
tion for an Obama cabinet post will go through,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FUCKING ENOUGH, 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 right
about now. 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

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. I totally looked it up on Wikipedia! 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, no means no.

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 that fistful up your ass instead. And don't be getting any of your friends to help you with that, you have to do it yourself. And imagine that the water you'd use to wash them down (or up, as the case may be) was owned by a multinational corporation which charges you exorbitant fees for it. Then imagine that the water also comes from runoff from a factory farm and the hormones have caused you to grow the opposite gender's sexual organs. Cup those organs in your hands and stroke them gently. No, not like that, like, gently. Ooooooh yeah.

MATZAH, KVETCH, CHECK!

All read:

Thank you, (God), for giving us something to kvetch about. What would we do otherwise? Did I tell you about my daughter Tabitha who does the competitive dancing? And let us kvetch, (Hence The Irony!)

BITTER, ANYONE?

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 we will never be aware of how enslaved we are, and that we 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, make a Hillel Sandwich. Also, fill the Fourth Cup. And fill out the Mad Lib. Oy, so many things to do!

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



NEXT YEAR?