

A PASSOVER SEDER 2016



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 the deadline for your daily social media update was running out, but you if you could just finish dinner first you could get back onto the computer and send out that picture, but it's so hard to breathe in here, the air is like, thick or steamy or something, and they're going to be so mad if they don't get their tweets! If you cannot prepare your food quickly, place it in a satchel and go to sleep. Have Gypsy Starshine and his girlfriend Utopia break down your door, and Facebook Bernie-bro slogans at you alongside tired cat memes. Why can't Bernie supporters just argue the merits of his programs without resorting to sexist ad hominem attacks, you wonder, but it doesn't matter! Retire from the soche meads, don earmuffs for their dogwhistles, grab the satchel, dash from your house, arrive at the Seder.

A NOTE ON IRONY:

If there anything that doing A Passover Seder for a just -as-many-as-fingers-and-toes number of years has taught me, it's that people do not enjoy drinking blue stuff out of Windex bottles. But also I learned that irony can be a force that fights against meaningfulness. I don't want to bum out anyone's need for ritual continuity 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 attempting to have 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.

E3PROBABLY ONLY A FEW OF YOU ARE WONDERING BUT YOU SHOULD STILL KNOW:

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

THIS IS LIKE THE MOST IMPORTANT THING DUDE:

Y'all remember the Freedom Girls? They were really something! But now everyone's forgotten about them, just like they forget about everything else after 2 days. But we haven't forgotten! In their honor, write a new cheer or song for the presidential candidate of your choice.

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 instead we may 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 are inspired to make things, and then think they are much better than they actually are. With it we are more receptive to the both the beautiful and the everyday, but risk becoming memoryless denizens of Lumpy Space. We will try not to smoke it all the time and forget about You, d00d, but, um, you should have, um, what? You should have... you definitely should have somethinged... something. 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, or maaaaan, you just don't, OK? Also, while you're at it, fill the second cup while you're waiting for those dirty hippies to finish.

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 bullshit 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, hey, wait, is irony going to help farmers when weather patterns change the harvest, and suddenly there isn't enough coffee, or maybe cloves, or is it papaya this time? Is there a fungus making all the cacao rot? Can we engineer new species more quickly than they die out? Can we figure this out in time to not ruin the world for our real or potential children? So let us say: (Hence the bumper)

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*.

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 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. And the world starts to spin and we ask ourselves, is this working? Are we liberated yet? Who can we ask? Can we trust the answer?

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, "The great oppressor? Now it's me and you. 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: Feel free to substitute your own question for the question in parenthesis.

On all other nights, we may work on projects, fulfill a real or imagined social media mandate, get bummed out about our own privilege, and realize that getting bummed out about it

is itself a privilege, strap a tiny screen to our head, work on fixing that bug again, ponder the nature of friendship, (except I'm not going to do that, I'm the youngest, I don't ponder, that's for chumps!), or hit virtual balls into virtual goals with virtual cars with people we'll never see again, people with names like THE BALLSINATOR. 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. Indeed, 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

ALL READ! 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. The word 'Laban' is pronounced "Lay-ban", like "Lay me down, the band is playing my jam and I gotta dance my lay down dance!"

SO THEN: Kibbles and bits and bits and bits! Meaty Bone is a barking good treat, bark if you like meat! Arf! Arf!

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. And 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, that a certain amount of paranoia is in a previously persecuted people's self interest.

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. If a scholar was to roll a dip, slizz on some sizzurp, and try to puzzle out this metaphor, through the dense fog in his or her brain it might sound a little like this:

All rap in slow motion:

Moses! Was a hero to most!
But he never meant shit, meant shit to me!
Straight up bullshit that story was, story was
Don't be believin him
That fucker swiped right on Laban The Syrian!

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.

So whether or not history is lying to us, we can use the Passover story to enrich 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 was a heavy dispute over the difference between 'The days of your life' and 'All the days of your life.'

The Passover story also includes 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 Haggadah, you feel a kind of vague loss. That night, you dream that you are at a party. Everyone is talking about gentrification and you really want them to shut up or talk about something else, but you open your mouth and all that weakly stammers out are the words "actuary" and "brunch". Covering your mouth with your hand, you feel something grating against your skin. You peer into your now-cupped hands to discover that they are filled to the brim with tiny shards of teeth. You dump these teeth into a bowl filled with matzah farfel, egg, and milk and whisk briskly, hoping they will cook down soft enough to stuff into your brunch maw. Laban The Syrian is sitting at the table, and he will not be satisfied until brunch is served. His brunch maw shines like a furnace of righteousness. He wonders how much your rent has gone up this year.

Anyway whatevs, 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 relatively superfluous shit. And now, we are kibitzing about the kibitzing. This completes #The Great Circle Of Kibitzing, which along with #The Great Circle of Guilt, are the most important hashtags of the Jewish faith to transmit from parent to child.

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 forgive ourselves for the awkwardness of having to mention Rabbi Jose of Galilea. We can discuss the ‘Rod of Moses’ and give each other salacious winks. Also, we learned that the soothsayers said.

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 hikes the price up on some AIDS drugs. Give him what he wants, for he affirms the system. Teach him to manipulate it for his benefit. Indeed, he will throw some D’s on that shit. Man I saw that fucker at YCombinator last year peddling some heuristic detection algorithm for unregulated markets to leverage, and I was like, “What?” He will sell his stock in Theranos, and as he sits in The Edge drinking Kopi Luwak, his mistress’s yoga pants flow like a spilled bottle of Manischewitz.

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 some serious bullsh. His hashtags are *the worst*.

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 keep on keepin’ on, kid.’ 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, especially if you aren’t a really good person.

Regardless of what Freud thought, and perhaps in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, let’s say 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. That isn’t much of a stretch, right? We know that the Jews are no longer slaves because we get to sit around and recontextualize the religion.

Please pause for a second to fill The Third Cup from the pitcher, unless you haven’t drank the Second Cup yet, in which case, oy, you slacker!

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 continuing to play the role of Pharaoh in Israel today?

THE TEN PLAGUES

ALL SAY: YIKES!

Spill a drop of wine for each of the ten 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 had not given us mansplaining,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!**

If ghe had given us mansplaining,

**And ghe had not given us Martin Shkreli,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!**

If ghe had given us Martin Shkreli,

**And not given us the continued rise of religious fundamentalisms of all kinds,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!**

If ghe had given us the rise of religious fundamentalisms of all kinds,

**And not given us the continued war on Black lives,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!**

**And not given us the continued war on Black lives,
And had not given us the Syrian refugee crisis,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!**

**If ghe had given us the Syrian refugee crisis,
And not given us the fact that a huge number of
Americans don't seem to give a shit about anything they
can't see in a mirror,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!**

**If ghe had given us the fact that a huge number of
Americans don't seem to give a shit about anything they
can't see in a mirror,
And not given us a political circus masquerading as
choice that looks like it'll be between a fascist in training
and a status quo corporatist,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FUCKING ENOUGH,
OK?**

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. OK, we're totally never going to do that again. Because no matter how much worse the world gets, and, damn, son, it sure shows a remarkable ability to keep getting worse, we can still work on making it better, and if we are not actively making it better, hopefully we're at least trying to not make it worse. So 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. The Jews marked their doors with blood, and God launched his drones, programmed to understand the chemical signature of lamb's blood. So these drones successfully targeted the Egyptians, and the Jews were able to escape. Mostly.

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 GLUTEN JESUS FUCK! 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, if you ever even took them out from last year, please continue to stick both fists up your ass instead. And don't be getting any of your friends to help you with that, you best 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, no, not like that, like, gently. Now squeeze. Gently.

MATZAH, KVETCH, CHECK!

All read:

Thank you, (God), for giving us something to kvetch about.

Matzah, it is dry! And bland! So is suffering! Who likes to suffer? Nobody, but at least you can kvetch about it, which makes it better. For you, at least. So 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 smartphones. Everyone with a Facebook or other social media account should log into it. They should then prepare to upload a video to the social media service. When everyone is ready, hit record and say the prayer together. Then, eat the bitter herbs and charoset, and upload the video.

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. Say the prayer together. 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. A wise man said: People come and go, and forget to close the door, and leave their stains and cigarette butts trampled on the floor. And when they do, remember me. Some of them are old, and some of them are new, and some of them will turn up when you least expect them to, and when they do, remember me, remember me. So let us say, (Hence The Irony.)

Drink the Fourth Cup

THE FESTIVAL MEAL



NEXT YEAR?