

A PASSOVER SEDER 2019

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, but tweet your progress at least every minute, or stream it on Twitch. Think to yourself 'Is the bruning anger that cooked this matzah, in fact, the sickest Brun?' If it is not, what will your sponsor brands think? 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 replace your recipes with pictures of Maria Butina cooking, captioned in Russian. Shake your head in dismay, delete your Twitter account, grab the satchel, dash from your house, arrive at the Seder.

A NOTE ON GALLOWS HUMOR:

Something I'm surprised by after leaving A Passover Seder to stew for two years, is how similar everything feels to how it felt two years ago at the beginning of this current kleptocracy. And I was thinking that there was going to be a bunch of gallows humor that needed to be removed because everything is such a bummer that it's just too sad to try to make light of it. But it turns out that I think I felt that way two years ago, and most of it was already gone. There is still humor, but it runs to the absurd rather than the gallowsy, I hope – a humor that doesn't accept that everything is totally fucked forever, even if it is fucked now.

A NOTE ON THE COVER

We don't need a picture of an atrocity to make us feel sadder about the last two years, do we?

JOHN HENRY STYLE

The Turing test is a test where a computer tries to prove that it is indistinguishable from a human. The AIs are coming for our jobs, folks. And most notably, they're coming for my job as writer of A Passover Seder. I need your help to stay one step ahead of the computer minds. Can you help me by making a list of names of Talmudic rabbis that would pass the reverse Turing test - to convince another AI that they were made by a genuine AI? Bonus points for rewriting any of the prayers in this Seder this way as well – I'll need all the help I can get!

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. Not So Much, Really
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 think they are better than they actually are. With it we are more receptive to the

both the beautiful and the everyday, but risk becoming an incoherent mumbleface. Without it, the music would not be able to make us even more high than we were just a second ago. 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 while hanging one's head.

Thank you, (God), for providing us this vegetable. Well, fuck, then. Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck. Genuine thanks to Greta, at least. May we, and our children, and everyone else's children have the chutzpah to change this fucking world harder than we've been able to change it, and may we change it before it's far too late, if it isn't far too late already. So let us say, (Fuck).

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 retell this story as 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, recline, and give ourselves sloppy pats on the back just for telling a story together.

This particular Seder has always been a struggle to create belief within the commodified, homogenized world that we live in. That's a struggle that assumes a huge amount of privilege. 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 the world grows darker, and wealth and systems of oppression become more concentrated, and as the effects of climate change grow closer and closer? 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 yet wonder 'what the fuck', wonder 'what the actual fuck?', wonder 'holy fuck, when is this going to be over anyway, or is it?', try not to look at the Internet wondering what the next fucking thing is that's going to happen, or scrounge some Baby Mum-Mums off the floor

to save for breakfast tomorrow. 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. (WTF?)

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. (WTAF?)

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. (WTWTWTWTWTWTF?)

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. (F! WTFEEEE! FFFFF! FFFFFF!)

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 by compressing the words "kibbles and bits" together, taking the "kib" from

kibbles, and the “bits” from bits. Kib-bitz. Kibitz. The word ‘Laban’ is pronounced “Lay-ban”, like “Lay me down, the band is playing my jam and I don’t care what you think, homes, I gotta dance my lay down dance! Lay-ban. Laban.

ALL SING: 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 some folks who are just good enough 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 holy shit, everyone really is still out to get us. Do we currently even need this reminder? We tell the story anyway, for when we once again do not, and again take our safety for granted.

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 try to puzzle out this metaphor through cultural appropriation, they might roll a dip, slizz on some sizzurp, and then stop, because they’d realize in that moment that playing cultural appropriation for laughs is cheap, and those laughs are microaggressions. But then they’d be like ‘but man, I’m so fucked up, what can I do now?’ And they would not know what they could do now.

So the Jews get free, with a burning bush and a parted river and signs and wonders and shit and they’re 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.

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 a small child. You are visiting your mother who works in a big white house in Washington DC. You do not live with her but you don't know why. The limousine's door opens and two angry men in suits lead you to the doorway, where a strange man shines a light on you. Your mother is there. She is angry, and one of her cheeks undulates from side to side. The cameras point from her to you, and when you look into them, huge bloodshot eyeballs wink back at you. Your mother is a monster, they whisper, a monster. That means that you are a baby monster. You want to laugh! A baby monster, so tiny, so cute! But your mother is glaring at you, her smoky eyeshadow curling up into tiny malice dragons. Soon they will snort their sooty fire, and the sirens will come, and they will take you home again.

Well anyway, the rabbis kibitzed about whether each of the Plagues that (God) delivered onto Egypt came with #Wrath, #Indignation, #Trouble, and the #MessengersOfEvil, or whether they came with #HisBruningAnger, #Wrath,

#Indignation, #Trouble, and the #MessengersOfEvil. A full half of the Passover story involves a bunch of rabbis sitting around and kibitzing about entirely superfluous shit. And now, we are kibitzing about the kibitzing. This completes #TheGreatCircleOfKibitzing, which along with #TheGreatCircleofGuilt, 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 mounting, soon-unforgivable 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 tries to defund public schools. 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. He's got a machine learning cluster working it out this very second. "Bro, this shit is like going to like fucking totally disrupt," he mutters and mutters, eyes darting from side to side. You will tell him that you know a thing, and then he will mansplain that thing back to you, to the very last detail.

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 the Youtube radicalization has really set in. Do not engage him about the nature of the Federal Reserve. His takes are colder than the nipple on a witch's tit, colder than a bucket of penguin shit.

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 a screen in his mouth. Tune it to a really juicy channel. Turn the volume up way loud.

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! Just drink the Second Cup as your Third Cup. Everyone needs a hug. But you are going to need some drank in your cup so you can spill it out when it's Ten Plagues time. The Third Cup is filled from the bottle of sketchy whiskey.

So, about the Jews: Regardless of what Freud thought, and perhaps in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, let's posit 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. Being enslaved is pretty shit, so (and this is where it gets weird) 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 far 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? Or upon us, for the exodus of deportations our government is causing at home?

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'. It is pronounced like the clarified butter Ghee.)

Look, people, there are **TOO MANY THINGS** that have happened over the last two years (and are still happening) that are fucked up. **TOO MANY.** So you will have to

help. We will go around the table, and when it is your turn, say something that it would have been enough for you, that nobody else has said. Because it almost certainly would have been enough for all of us. We can all agree that Sarah Huckabee Sanders would have been enough for us, right? Let's start with her.

**If ghe had given us Sarah Huckabee Sanders
And ghe had not given us _____
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US**

Take turns reading responsively as each person adds one more thing that it would have been enough if we had not had. Go once around the table, and end with **IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FUCKING ENOUGH, OK?**

NOT SO MUCH, REALLY

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. Chances are you've at least earned some shitty whiskey for your contributions. Enjoy! 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 told his subcontracted forces to launch their drones, programmed to understand the chemical signature of lamb's blood. So these drones mostly targeted the Egyptians, and some of the Jews were able to livestream, and others were able to escape.

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, no vaccines (JUST KIDDING! VACCINES!), 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 even bothered taking them out from two years ago, go stick two fistfulls up your ass instead. And don't be getting any of your friends to help you with that, you gotta do it yourself. And imagine that the water you'd use to wash them down (or up, as the case may be) is owned by a multinational corporation which is charging 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, which might be cool if you wanted them, but you can't help feeling a little ambivalent about the whole thing. Then imagine that it's also mixed with fracking water, which has made those organs fertile and numb, and your hands shaky. Cup those organs in your hands, if you still can. Hold on tight.

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?

Fuck social media, y'all. And fuck phones. Just read the prayer.

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 privileged 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...DESSERT!



Next Year?