

A PASSOVER SEDER 2010

GIVE IT BACK—
FREEDOM DOESN'T
NEED CHANGED!



A PASSOVER SEDER

“O-L-I-G-A-R-H-Y.”

-Glenn Beck

“The America I know and love is not one in which my parents or my baby with Down Syndrome will have to stand in front of Obama’s ‘death panel.’”

-Sarah Palin

“We came unarmed. This Time.”

- Random Teabagger Sign

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 an angry posse of mermaids were swimming toward the beach front cottage in which you thought you could finally just lie down and be safe, but no, once again, you have to get away *fast*. 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, yelling “Rhythm is a dancer!” in the dead of night, an LED-encrusted knife clutched in his teeth. Skillfully evade them, 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. Have we gotten to the point where moaning "Condoleeza" will actually be therapeutic?

JUST IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING:

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

THERE USED TO BE A RELEVANT NOTE HERE

But I'm just not feeling it this year.

NO PRESSURE OK? NO PRESSURE!

OK. So it's time for the Most Important Policy Meeting Of Your Life. It's time to rewrite American healthcare policy, and this time we're going to do it right! The only problem is, there's an angry room of Teabaggers who you're going to have to convince that your plan is the optimal plan. Years of watching Reality News TV has eroded their listening facilities. You will have to illustrate your program for them. You can use labels, but make sure not to use any large words! For they will not understand! Please create this diagram/picture/illustration and hand it in before we begin.

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 make pretty things, and think they are much prettier than they actually are. **OMG LETS GO ON CHATROULETTE!** We will try not to smoke pot all the time and forget about You, d00d, but, um, you should have, um, what? You should have... you definitely should have something. I'm not sure. 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 GENE-SPLICED ALGAE-FUELED SPACESHIP AND FLY THAT SHIT INTO THE SUN AND GO OUT IN A BLAAAAAZE OF GLORY! COLD FUSION, BITCH! COLD FUSION!** 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 2010 is... really just not that different than 2009, and that's not a good thing. The economy is recovering for multinational corporations and bailed-out banks, but not so much for everyone else. A healthcare bill passes that continues to reward the 'free market' instead of creating a meaningful public option. We continue to imprison potentially innocent people as 'enemy combatants' and deny them their Geneva Convention rights. Gaza is still being collectively punished. Yet any policy change which moves America to the center-right from the hard right is met by a kind of batshit crazy freaking out whose level of vitriol does not match the scope of the kind of changes being made. At least during the Dubya years one knew he thought of the opposition as a focus group. Were we somehow not batshit crazy enough all those years? Is our leadership too compromised to be able to push its own agenda?

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, "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: The youngest person at the table is Kevin Messman. If you do not have Kevin Messman at your Seder, you must make do some other way. Feel free to substitute your own question for the question in parenthesis.

On all other nights, we may work on projects, play Bit.Trip games, make blinkies, blog, code, drink, smoke pot, recover from another miserable day in capitalism, wonder how everyone got so convinced to shaft themselves in the name of progress, or watch the otters. Again. 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.

All repeat: Kibbles and bits and bits and bits! Meaty Bone is a barking good treat, bark if you like meat! Arf! 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. 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 a little somethin like this, hit it!

All rap:

Moses! Was a hero to most!
But he never meant shit to me!
Straight up lying that story was
I ain't fearin him!
Throw him in jail with 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 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 Haggadah, you feel a kind of vague loss. That night, you dream that you are waiting on a block-long line to enter a doorway whose purpose is unknown, but very important. Everyone is barefoot and they stare down at their feet as with every gooey step beet juice seeps up through the cracks in their toes. Every step like sucking mud. A cow staggers down the line, listing with some kind of ailment. The cow stops in front of you. It opens its mouth and you breathe the fetid air that leaks from its failing lungs. Everything goes black. You wake and you do not know where you are, or where you are going.) Anyway, 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 two snake-eating-tail ritual transmissions in the Jewish faith.

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 commodities trading. 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. Get him to the Williamsburg waterfront before people squat his pad!

The second son asks, 'So what do you really think of this God thing anyway,

* This paragraph was brought to you by jewhound.com!

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. Can that fucker produce a birth certificate? Well then how do we know he was born in this country? Is anyone going to liberate this fancy little fuck when we throw him in Bagram?

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 playing Noby Noby Boy, 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, 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. 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?

Fill The Third Cup from the weird-looking bottle which may or may not have a psychedelic bear on it.

THE TEN PLAGUES

All say: YIKES!

Spill a drop of wine for each of the plagues

BLOOD
FROGS
BEDBUGS
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 made this 'recovery' jobless,

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had made this 'recovery' jobless,

And not let the US continue to wage 2 imperial wars,

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had let the US continue to wage 2 imperial wars,

*And not let Israel continue to oppress Gaza and build illegal settle-
ments*

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had let Israel continue to oppress Gaza and build illegal settlements,

*And not allowed a political discourse to thrive where blowhards are
rewarded in proportion to the amount of hateful garbage they spew,*

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FOR US!

If ghe had allowed a political discourse to thrive where blowhards are
rewarded in proportion to the amount of hateful garbage they spew

*And not made the Democrats think that these crazy people should
inspire them to move the center far enough to the right that nobody
even knows what 'socialism' means anymore, or advocating for humane
social programs that aren't 'market-based solutions',*

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. OK, we're still not going to do that. But really, isn't it starting to be that time where we do this again? I mean, we can continue to say this nice passage about living, and persevering and growing and celebrating our rebirth as more feeling people, remaining firm in our beliefs, yet open and questioning enough to change them when necessary, and not abandoning a thirst for the truth, but doesn't just like riding the subway or reading the news just make you think about throwing back a nice refreshing glass of the blue shit? 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. 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 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. Nice.

MATZAH, KVETCH, CHECK!

All read:

Thank you, (God), for giving us something to kvetch about. What would we do tonight otherwise? Um.....

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. Then, eat the bitter herbs and charoset.

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?