

# 2019 Unconventional “Haggadah”

Lily Dodge

I put this together for a gathering of friends to celebrate Passover in my home, then decided to share it more widely. I am not a religious scholar or expert on anything, and this only reflects one person’s interpretation of the Seder.

I don’t own the copyright to any of the readings included. All sources are attributed & I’ve noted where I adapted them. I’m just the curator and this is only intended for private use.

## **About the readings:**

I come from a Jewish background and have since converted to Christianity, so most of the readings and content come from those contexts. Even in the case of readings without spiritual sources, I chose ones that are personally meaningful to me, a white American woman, so there is definitely a bias that I acknowledge. If you want an editable version so you can swap out your own readings, email me at [lilyldodge@gmail.com](mailto:lilyldodge@gmail.com).

## **A note on adaptations:**

Many of the readings in this Haggadah have been adapted from their original sources to be more inclusive & sensitive to people who are dealing with spiritual trauma or would otherwise not appreciate being asked to participate in explicitly religious readings. If you are bothered or offended by universalist re-interpretations of existing prayers or Scripture, this may not be right for you to use.

## **Required materials:**

- Printouts of this Haggadah
- Bottle of wine & pouring vessel for non-alcoholic beverage
- Wine glass for “Elijah”
- Heavy cardstock cut into circles
- Scissors
- Writing implements

## **Chag sameach!**

Lily Dodge

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## Parts of this Seder

1. **Kadesh: filling the first cup & setting intentions**
  - Reading: *Isaiah 55:8-11*
  - Traditional Hebrew blessing
  - Sharing circle: cup filling & intention setting
2. **Reclining: gratitude for what we have now**
  - Reading: *Epicurus quote*
  - Sharing circle: hopes fulfilled
3. **Karpas: honoring the suffering of our ancestors**
  - Reading: *They Need Only The Opportunity*
  - Traditional Hebrew Blessing & dipping of the karpas
4. **Breaking of the middle matzah & Elijah's Cup**
  - Readings: invitation & prophecy
  - Sharing circle: filling Elijah's cup
5. **The Four Children & Questions**
  - Traditional Hebrew: *Mah Nishtanah*
  - Readings: various readings on ritual
6. **The Exodus Story**
  - Readings: the Exodus story
  - Reading: *There's a Hole in my Sidewalk*
  - Activity: From the wilderness to the mountain
7. **Ten plagues**
  - Call & response: *We Stand As Healers*
  - Reading: *bell hooks quote*
8. **Singing Dayenu**
  - Reading: *The Orange*
  - Sharing circle: "it would have been enough"
  - Song: *Dayenu*
9. **Explanation of Passover symbols**
  - Readings: The Passover symbols
10. **Blessing before the meal**
  - Reading: *Grace Before Dinner*
  - Blessing each other: *Go Forth In Peace*
11. **Hillel sandwich**
12. **Meal!**

## **Kadesh & intention setting**

*The seder opens with the first cup of wine (or other drink), which symbolizes the beginning of the seder, a sanctified or “set-apart” time and space together. We will fill each other’s cups while setting intentions for the group as a whole.*

### **Reading: Isaiah 55:8-11**

*[Reader]* “For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Divine.  
“For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

*[Reader]* “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven  
and do not return there but water the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

### **Traditional Hebrew Blessing**

*[Leader]* Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, borei p’ree hagafen.

*[Reader]* We praise God, Ruler of Everything, who creates the fruit of the vine.

### **Sharing circle**

*In turn, everyone fills the cup of the person next to them while speaking a wish or hope for them and/or the group as a whole.*

## **Reclining**

*It is customary to spend the Seder reclining comfortably, to honor our freedom now compared to the enslavement of our ancestors.*

### **Epicurus quote**

*[Reader]* “Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for.” ~Epicurus

### **Sharing circle**

*While passing around a symbolic pillow, everyone share a story of an “answered prayer,” a hope fulfilled, or something in their life now that past-them would have dreamed of.*

## **Karpas**

*We remember the tears of the Hebrew people during their time in bondage and slavery, as well as the grief of all oppressed and enslaved peoples, throughout history through to today. We also include the parsley, a green sprig representing the rebirth of spring and the deliverance that those in bondage keep hope for.*

## **Virginia Woolf: “They Need Only The Opportunity”**

*[Reader]* For it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty.

*[Reader]* Now my belief is that this poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the cross-roads still lives. She lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here to-night, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed. But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh.

*[Reader]* My belief is that if we live another century or so — I am talking of the common life which is the real life and not of the little separate lives which we live as individuals — if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting-room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves...then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down. Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born.

*[Reader]* As for her coming without that preparation, without that effort on our part, without that determination that when she is born again she shall find it possible to live and write her poetry, that we cannot expect, for that would be impossible. But I maintain that she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worthwhile.

## **Traditional Hebrew blessing**

*While the blessing is being recited, dip the parsley into the salt water & eat it.*

*[All]* Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the earth.

*[Leader]* Baruch Atah Adonai Elo-heinu Melech Haolam Boreh Pree Ha'adamah.

## **Breaking of the middle matzah & Elijah's Cup**

*There are differing interpretations of this tradition. We will lean on two: 'not all that will be is seen now' and 'recognizing the brokenness of the world'.*

*We break the middle matzah so that we can hide part of it for the Afikomen hunt at the end of the seder. This represents the recognition of the future; that we cannot simply accept that our present reality encompasses all that will be and can be.*

*The breaking of the matzah also symbolizes the brokenness of the world that God seeks to heal through the Passover and all that it empowers & represents. It was the breaking of the middle matzah that Jesus performed at the last supper to represent his body being broken to rescue and redeem the world.*

*Here, we combine the breaking of the middle matzah with the invitation to the prophet Elijah. We pour a ceremonial cup of wine for the prophet Elijah, who we want to invite into our homes and lives. This represents being open and welcoming to the prophetic presence of God.*

***As the Leader lifts & breaks the middle matzah:***

*[Reader]* The wound is the place where the Light enters you. ~Rumi

*[Reader]* A prophet is someone who sees that this is not all there is, but is willing to face the fact that we are in a predicament and it's only as we co-participate with God, can we find ourselves moving in the direction of a beloved community." ~Kenyatta Gilbert

**Sharing circle:** *As we pass around Elijah's Cup and each pour a small amount of wine in, we speak something that we'd like to invite into our lives - perhaps in through the broken places.*

## **The Four Children & Questions:**

*[Leader - sing if able]* Mah nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol haleilot?

*[All]* How is this night different from all other nights?

*[Reader]* The wise child asks, "What do we learn from the Passover story?"

*[Reader]* Now about [rituals that challenge or disturb us]: We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. But whoever loves is known by Love.

So then, about [rituals]: We know that there is but one Goodness, from whom all things came and for whom we live. But [rituals] cannot in themselves bring us near to or far from the Goodness in ourselves and the world. We are no worse if we do not partake in certain rituals, and no better if we do. ~1 Corinthians 8 (adapted)

*[Reader]* The simple child asks, "What is this?"

*[Reader]* "A ritual is the enactment of a myth. And, by participating in the ritual, you are participating in the myth. And since myth is a projection of the depth wisdom of the psyche, by participating in a ritual, participating in the myth, you are being, as it were, put in accord with that wisdom, which is the wisdom that is inherent within you anyhow. Your consciousness is being re-minded of the wisdom of your own life. I think ritual is terribly important." ~Joseph Campbell

*[Reader]* The thoughtless child asks, "What does this service mean to you?"

*[Reader]* "This is what rituals are for. We do spiritual ceremonies as human beings in order to create a safe resting place for our most complicated feelings of joy or trauma, so that we don't have to haul those feelings around with us forever, weighing us down. We all need such places of ritual safekeeping. And I do believe that if your culture or tradition doesn't have the specific ritual you are craving, then you are absolutely permitted to make up a ceremony of your own devising, fixing your own broken-down emotional systems with all the do-it-yourself resourcefulness of a generous plumber/poet." ~Elizabeth Gilbert

*[Reader]* The silent child has no question to ask at all.

*[All]* A one minute silent meditation on a question you'd like to seek answers to in this coming year.

## **The Exodus Story**

### **Part One: Trapped in Egypt**

*[Reader]* The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with them. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them. The Lord [appeared to Moses and] said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.

### **Part Two: Wandering in the Wilderness**

*[Reader]* In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." They quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink. Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

### **Part Three: God On The Mountain**

*[Reader]* When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

### **There's A Hole In My Sidewalk**

*[Reader]* I walk down the street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I fall in.  
I am lost... I am helpless.  
It isn't my fault.  
It takes forever to find a way out.

I walk down the same street.  
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.  
I pretend I don't see it.  
I fall in again.  
I can't believe I am in the same place.  
But, it isn't my fault.

It still takes me a long time to get out.

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I see it is there.

I still fall in. It's a habit.

My eyes are open.

I know where I am.

It is my fault. I get out immediately.

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I walk around it.

I walk down another street.

**Portia Nelson**

### **Activity: From the wilderness to the mountain**

*Each person should get two circles of cardstock. On one, write a place in their life that they have felt trapped or stuck; and on the other, a place they would like to be. (This can be literal, physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, relational, etc.) Group should take a moment to consider the separateness of the two. How to bridge that gap? The answer comes as the Leader hands out scissors – by slicing halfway into both, they can be settled together into a new shape. This is the painful truth of the exodus: growth and deliverance come only after a wounding; a loss. Change requires uncertainty and discomfort. This is the necessary wilderness. [Discuss as the group prefers.]*

### **Ten plagues**

*Full disclosure: this part of the seder makes me very uncomfortable. It feels like celebrating the suffering God condemned the Egyptian people to. Yes, they were a slaveowning people – but vengeance and violence against oppressors is not the solution to the problem of injustice.*

*So I am completely re-working this section to be a recognition of ten “plagues” in our world and our commitment to standing against them as healers. The drops that we spill from our own glasses symbolize grief for the victims of these plagues & our own commitment to make sacrifices in our efforts to fight them.*

*As the leader reads each plague, the group responds “we stand as healers” and dips their fingers into their drinks to spill drops onto their plates or napkins.*

*Leader:* Violence and injustice against women (blood)

*All:* We stand as healers.

*Leader:* Homophobia, transphobia, and all that dehumanizes the LGBTQIA community (frogs)

*All:* We stand as healers.

*Leader:* Trauma, mental illness, and all that keeps us up at night (vermin in the houses)

*All:* We stand as healers.

*Leader:* Gun violence, war, and police brutality (beasts)

*All:* We stand as healers.

*Leader:* Agricultural malpractice, factory farming, & animal abuse (cattle disease)

*All:* We stand as healers.

*Leader:* Illnesses of poverty: lack of access to healthcare, poisoned water & food deserts (boils)

*All:* We stand as healers.

*Leader:* Climate change (hail)

*All:* We stand as healers.

*Leader:* Political and spiritual divisions, falsehoods, and hatred (swarms of locusts)

*All:* We stand as healers.

*Leader:* Racism and white supremacy (darkness)

*All:* We stand as healers.

*Leader:* All suffering of the innocent (slaying of the first born)

*All:* We stand as healers.

*[Reader]* Forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed? **bell hooks**

## **Dayenu**

*Dayenu means "it would have been enough" and is a celebration of the abundance of God's love. It comes with a fun song that translates to "If God had brought us out of Egypt, it would have been enough."*

### **Reading: The Orange**

*[Reader]* At lunchtime I bought a huge orange—

The size of it made us all laugh.

I peeled it and shared it with Robert and Dave—

They got quarters and I had a half.

And that orange, it made me so happy,

As ordinary things often do

Just lately. The shopping. A walk in the park.

This is peace and contentment. It's new.

The rest of the day was quite easy.

I did all the jobs on my list

And enjoyed them and had some time over.

I love you. I'm glad I exist. ~Wendy Cope

## Sharing circle & song

Each person states something in their life that brings them abundant, overflowing joy and gratitude. After everyone has shared, the group sings together:

Ilu ho-tsi, ho-tsi-a-nu,  
Ho-tsi-anu mi-Mitz-ra-yim  
Ho-tsi-anu mi-Mitz-ra-yim  
Da-ye-nu

Da-da-ye-nu,  
Da-da-ye-nu,  
Da-da-ye-nu,  
Da-ye-nu Da-ye-nu!

## Explanation of Passover symbols

### Brief overview of the Passover symbols:

- Roasted meat: *the sacrifice of the paschal lamb whose blood saved the people of Israel when they fled Egypt. Echoed strongly in the Easter/Crucifixion narrative.*
  - [Reader] Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. **John 15:13**
- Egg: *springtime and new life.*
  - [Reader] What didn't you do to bury me? But you forgot that I was a seed! **Dinos Christianopoulos**
- Maror ("bitter herb"): *The bitterness of slavery and oppression.*
  - [Reader] As my sufferings mounted I soon realized that there were two ways in which I could respond to my situation -- either to react with bitterness or seek to transform the suffering into a creative force. I decided to follow the latter course. **Martin Luther King Jr.**
- Charoses: *Symbolizes the mortar the Hebrew slaves used to make bricks.*
  - [Reader] I am, somehow, less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein's brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops. **Stephen Jay Gould**
- Karpas: *New life in the springtime, and the luxury and lavishness of the Passover meal.*
  - [Reader] Nothing is so beautiful as Spring –  
When weeds, in wheels, shoot long and lovely and lush;  
Thrush's eggs look little low heavens, and thrush  
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring  
The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing;  
The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush  
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush  
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling. **Gerard Manley Hopkins**

- Salt water: *The tears and sweat of enslavement*
  - [Reader] Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it. **Helen Keller**
- Matzah: *When the Jewish people were leaving Egypt, they were so anxious to be free that they didn't have time for their bread to rise and just baked it on the way.*
  - [Reader] There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread. **Mahatma Gandhi**
- Orange: *Women in the Jewish tradition (and all cultures) whose voices and labor have gone unappreciated.*
  - [Reader] I raise up my voice—not so I can shout but so that those without a voice can be heard. We cannot succeed when half of us are held back. **Malala Yousafzai**

## Blessing before the meal

### A Grace Before Dinner

[Reader] O thou who kindly dost provide  
 For every creature's want!  
 We bless Thee, God of Nature wide,  
 For all Thy goodness lent:  
 And if it please Thee, Heavenly Guide,  
 May never worse be sent;  
 But, whether granted, or denied,  
 Lord, bless us with content. Amen! ~**Robert Burns**

### Blessing each other

*Nearly all spiritual traditions empower individuals to speak blessings. We are not reliant on Divinity or perfection to bless ourselves and our community. We join hands and – literally, not metaphorically – bless each other. We bless and are blessed, each of us fully capable of receiving and sharing grace, joy, and love.*

*Holding hands, we bless each other together:*

[All]

### Go Forth In Peace

Adapted from The Book of Common Prayer

Go forth into the world in peace;  
 be of good courage;  
 hold fast that which is good;  
 render to no one evil for evil;  
 strengthen the fainthearted;  
 help the afflicted;  
 honour everyone;  
 love truth and serve goodness,  
 rejoicing in the power of your own holiness;  
 and the blessing of the cosmos which enfolds you.  
 Amen.

## **Hillel Sandwich**

*People have tried to sort of retcon symbolism for this, but it's just fun and tasty and a traditional way to start the seder meal. The bitter herb is balanced by the sweet charoses. This quote from Rabbi Hillel, I think, sums up the message of Passover - honor and fight for the blessings in your life, and remember and fight for those without.*

*[All]*

If I am not for myself, who will be for me?

If I am not for others, what am I?

And if not now, when? ~**Rabbi Hillel**

## **Meal**