

הגדת שויון המנים  
An Egalitarian Haggadah

Composed for  
the Women of Reform Judaism/Sisterhood  
of the  
Congregation of Liberal Judaism

by  
Rabbi Ariel Stone

*The Seder is set up traditionally with one change: the addition of an orange to the Seder plate.*

## Sanctification of the Day

קְדָשׁ

The first ritual of the Pesach Seder, "Kadesh", is a transitive verb which in the infinitive form means "to sanctify". The word does not mean "sacred"; this Pesach day which now dawns as evening falls is not made holy by some mysterious power far beyond us, and handed to us as we passively sit. By our words and our actions we **make** this day holy; we sanctify it. By our words and our actions we make our lives into sacred moments.

May the festival lights we now kindle  
Inspire us to use our powers  
to make this moment sacred:  
not to harm but to heal,  
not to hinder but to help,  
not to curse but to bless,  
and thus to bring the God of freedom  
into our world.

נְבָרֵךְ אֶת מַעַיִן חַיֵּנוּ, אֱלֹהֵי חַי הָעוֹלָמִים, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ  
לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל יוֹם טוֹב.

Nevarekh et ma'ayan khayyenu, elohey khai ha'olamim, asher kidshanu bah'mitzvotahv  
v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Yom Tov.

We bless the Source of our Lives, the Indwelling Holy Presence of our World, by which we find our holiness, our sense of the sacred, the meaning which illumines and fills our lives. We give thanks for the light of our lives.

קְדוּשָׁה

THE KIDDUSH CUP - We begin to be holy when we begin to heal, to help; we begin to heal when we reach out to each other. We now symbolize our caring for each other with the simple act of pouring the first cup of wine for one another. No one should fill her or his own cup.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Barukh ata Adonai Eloheynu Melekh ha-olam borey pree hagafen.

We give thanks for the awesome, mysterious power of the universe which causes vines to grow and grapes to ripen, turning sunlight into sustenance, making our shared ritual a symbol of freedom as we remember the Exodus from Egypt.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר בָּנוּ מִכָּל עַם, וְרוּמְמָנוּ  
מִכָּל לְשׁוֹן, וְקִידְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו. וְתַתֵּן-לָנוּ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּאַהֲבָה (שְׂבִתוֹת  
לְמַנוּחָה וּמוֹעֲדִים לְשִׂמְחָה, חַגִּים וְזִמְנִים לְשִׂשׁוֹן, אֶת יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת  
הַזֶּה, וְאֶת יוֹם חַג הַמִּצּוֹת הַזֶּה, זְמַן חֲרוּתֵנוּ), בְּאַהֲבָה (מִקְרָא קוֹדֵשׁ,  
זְכוֹר לִיצִיאַת מִצְרָיִם. כִּי בָנוּ בְּחַרְתָּ, וְאוֹתָנוּ קִדְּשָׁתָּ מִכָּל הָעַמִּים,

(וְשַׁבָּת) וּמוֹעֲדֵי קֹדֶשׁ (בְּאַהֲבָה וּבְרִצּוֹן) בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְשִׂשׂוֹן הַנְּחֻלָּתָנוּ.  
בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי, מְקַדֵּשׁ (הַשַּׁבָּת וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַזְּמַנִּים).

Blessed is the Divine Source of Life, from which we derive our sense of meaning, our awareness of our interdependence and our peoplehood, source of our strength and sense of our destiny. We bless the sense of sanctity we know through doing mitzvot such as this (Shabbat day and this) holy day of Passover celebration. We are grateful for holidays and the chance to come together in friendship and joy, such as this holiday of the Matzah, when we commemorate our freedom and remember the Exodus from Egypt. We celebrate our unique understanding of God. We give thanks for our heritage; we give thanks for this day, and for the sense of the holy by which, when we acknowledge it, we make this day sacred.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁחֲחִינּוּ וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגִּיעֵנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה.  
Barukh atah adonai eloheynu melekh ha'olam sheh-heh-cheh-yanu v'keemah-nu v'higiyanu lazman hazeh.

Blessed is the sacred Mothering Touch which enfolds and supports us, the Fatherly Protection which sustains us, holding us in life, bringing us to these moments. We give thanks for having lived to see this day.

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזֶמַן הַזֶּה *Bayamim hahem bazman hazeh* - "In those days, at this time"; the events that we strive to recall were true for our ancestors in those times, as they are true for us in these times.

The word "Mitzrayim", which is Hebrew for Egypt, can also be understood in the Hebrew as a "narrow place", a place of "straits" in which we struggle to move and breathe. We all know our own Mitzrayim.

Our bodies were slaves in Mitzrayim *bayamim hahem*, in those days, and there may be ways in which we feel as if our physical beings are entrapped now *bazman hazeh*, at this time, in a place where we do not want to be: maybe a job or a relationship that doesn't feel right anymore; maybe an illness or a political situation or a style of life.

Our souls were trapped in Mitzrayim *bayamim hahem*, in bodies that were enslaved. And it may be that *bazman hazeh* our souls feel trapped; maybe by our belief systems or by a need to project blame or by the parts of ourselves that we have not yet integrated: maybe an angry part, or a jealous part, or a hurt part, or a part that feels controlled or controlling.

Each of us knows our own internal reality: each of us knows what our own, personal place of bondage, our Mitzrayim, looks like. Each of us knows the ways in which we enslave ourselves, the *hametz* which is the daily patterning of our lives, the routines which hold us back from our true selves, clogging our souls. Each of us knows the places in our lives and the parts of our being in which we would like to have more freedom, more choices.

**TOGETHER:** Let us remember, for now and for all time, that freedom starts in our hands, in our hearts, in our minds. Let us remember that freedom begins with

acknowledging what is and then choosing to be free, taking actions to become free, to allow freedom and harmony into our lives. We can choose not to be enslaved.

We create our own freedom when we care about others, and help them to become free. When we create a world where all are safe, then we will be safe; when all reach out to one another, all will find harmony.

## To wash the hands; to exonerate

וְרָחַץ

The first of two hand-washings of our Seder is, strangely, performed without a blessing. It is done in silence, it is done as we think about where we are, what we are doing. As we now leave this table to wash, let us do so quietly, and let us consider: In Hebrew, the word "wash" also means "exonerate": of what would we wash our hands, this day, that we might be clean in the face of our own conscience? Of what might we wash ourselves clean, that we might make this day holy?

We wash our hands now, in silence, and ready ourselves for the rituals we now begin - for the telling of the story of our freedom.

## The rain is over and gone, spring has come

כַּרְפָּס

We take in our hands this symbol of the spring, the parsley all lush and green, Earth's smile, the fertility of womb and field and mind, and the promise of growing, of the new shoots of childhood and the continuing seasoning of age.

We take this symbol of all that is good and sustaining, and we dip it into the salt water, water which symbolizes tears of bitterness. Growth is not without pain; our ancestors knew suffering and so do we. We eat them together, the good green fruit-of-the-earth and the salt tears we shed to grow the fruit of our lives.

נְבָרַךְ אֶת מַעַן חַיֵּנוּ, אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָמִים, בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה.

N'varekh et ma'ayan khayeynu, elohey olamim, borey pri ha'adamah.

We bless the Source of our Lives, God of all the worlds, source of the creation of the fruit of the earth.

There is a goddess and I know her. Her hands are not clean,  
And she is large and strong and not too young. She wears  
A sweatshirt with a hood and jeans, and sells black-purple  
Eggplant, spinach, bright broccoli, sixty cents  
The pound at the Greenmarket at Union Square. Her slat-side truck  
Has Pennsylvania plates, and she says she lives near Lancaster,  
But I know the truth, because her calloused hands turn earth  
To things good to eat, and green, and lovely.

## Breaking the middle matzah

יָחַץ

These three matzot symbolize that which was, and will not ever be again - the sacrifice of the lamb which we once offered up to God in ancient days, in Jerusalem. The middle

matzah represents freedom, but it is broken in half, for our freedom is broken; there are those who are not free this night.

- hold the matzah aloft and say -

This is the bread of affliction, the taste of slavery:  
it is eaten in fear, with a closed heart, a constrained soul.  
Dust and ashes in the mouth.

The other half will become our Afikoman.  
It is the bread of remembering, the taste of learning to be free.  
Dry with anticipation, with exhilaration, with excitement.

- place matzah on shoulder -

In haste,  
with our bread on our backs,  
we went out of Egypt.

This middle matzah also symbolizes our brokenness.  
The story is told that first, we were whole beings,  
female and male together we were created,  
whole.

But the gods became jealous of our perfect happiness,  
and so we were split apart,  
sent away from our other halves.

And now we search for it, for our wholeness,  
aware only that we long for completeness,  
looking for our other half.

We, male and female, need each other.

On this night, let us hear our need and the need of all those around us,  
and feed it.

## הא לחמא עניא

הא לחמא עניא די אכלו אבהתנא בארעא דמצרים. כל דכפין ייתי  
וייכול, כל דצריך ייתי ויפסח. השתא הכא, לשנה הבא בארעא  
ישראל. השתא עבדי, לשנה הבא בני חורין.

Ha lakhma, ha lakhma anya, di akhalu, akhalu avahtanah. B'ara, b'ara diMitzrayim, b'ara,  
b'ara diMitzrayim. Kol dikhfin yeytey v'yeykhul, kol ditzrikh yeytey v'yifsakh. Hashata  
hakha, l'shana haba b'ara diYisrael. Hashata avdey, l'shana haba b'ney khoreen.

This is the poor bread,  
- this matzah reminds us of our poverty -  
the bread of affliction,  
- our thirst to be whole -

which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.  
- *our hunger for companionship.*  
All who are hungry, come and eat;  
- *May I hear the need in my neighbor's voice -*  
all who are in need, come and be satisfied.  
- *I who so wish to be heard myself.*  
At this hour we are here;  
- *We all know loneliness -*  
next year at this time let us be in Israel.  
- *Together, may we find love.*  
At this time we are slaves;  
- *We all know frustration -*  
next year at this time may we be free.  
- *Together, may we know fullness.*  
*Together, may we know peace. -*

Herald, narrator; an angel who tells the future **מַגִּיד**  
מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות?

Mah nishtana halaila hazeh mikol haleilot?  
*Why is this night different from all other nights?*  
*Why do we celebrate a women's Seder this night?*

שְׁבֹכֵל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין חֻמֶּץ וּמִצָּה - הַלֵּילָה הַזֶּה כּוֹלוּ מִצָּה.  
Shebekhol haleilot anu okhlim khameytz umatzah - halaila hazeh kulo matza.  
*...that on all other nights we eat leavened and unleavened foods - on this night, only unleavened.*  
*...that on this night, women not only prepare the Seder but lead it.*

שְׁבֹכֵל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין שְׂאֵר יַרְקוֹת - הַלֵּילָה הַזֶּה מָרוֹר.  
Shebekhol haleilot anu okhlim sheh-ar yerakot - halailah hazeh maror.  
*...that on all other nights we eat all kinds of herbs - on this night, only bitter herbs.*  
*...that on this night we remember the bitterness of exclusion from our own Jewish history.*

שְׁבֹכֵל הַלֵּילוֹת אֵין אָנוּ מְטַבִּילִין אֶפִּילוּ פַּעַם אַחַת - הַלֵּילָה הַזֶּה שְׁתֵּי פְּעָמִים.  
Shebekhol haleilot ayn anu matbilin afilu pa'am echat - halailah hazeh sheh-tey feh'amim.  
*...that on all other nights we do not dip our food even once - on this night, we dip twice.*  
*...that on this night, we dip into the bitter and into the sweet, and we know that despite the repression women have known, women have always known men who defended women's rights, in word and in deed.*

שְׁבֹכֵל הַלֵּילוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין בֵּין יוֹשְׁבֵין וּבֵין מְסֻבִּין - הַלֵּילָה הַזֶּה כְּלָנוּ

## מְסֻבִּין.

Shebekhol haleilot anu okhlim beyn yoshvin u'veyn m'subin, halailah hazeh kulanu m'subin.

*...that on all other nights, we eat sitting or reclining - on this night, we all recline.*

*...that on this night, women will find it difficult to lean back and relax, as all free people have a right to do.*

Tonight we remember the mothers of our people,  
mothers in spirit and in nurturing,  
whose strength and courage and faith in our God  
above and around and within  
has helped us to reach this day.

### ***Devorah, judge and prophet in Israel, why do we eat our matzah at a women's Seder?***

The only woman judge in the ancient nation of the Israelites, Devorah held court under a palm tree outside her home. Later generations explained that this was to guard against accusations of impropriety, since it was said that a woman must not be alone in a house with a man other than her husband.

Devorah had led the war of Israelite liberation against the Canaanite King Javin; she directed her general, Barak, to the victory, which is recorded in the Song of Devorah in the Book of Judges. Nevertheless, the rabbis of the Talmud denounced her as arrogant and not properly feminine.

"They called me Judge in Israel," she says to us. "They called me a woman of great and rare distinction, a mother of our nation. Yet while they praise my wisdom and my compassion, of which they were in such awe, they still saw me as they saw all women, as weak and wanton, and I was sexually threatening to them, not to be trusted.

"We celebrate a women's Seder tonight so that we are free to be ourselves, not afraid that our actions are misjudged or misinterpreted, considered too bold and aggressive, unwomanly, or inappropriate."

## To bring out, to cause to come out

## מוֹצֵיא

We bless the bread of our meal now; we bring it out in order to bless its place in our ritual lives. Bread is the "staff of life", the central component upon which our lives depend. Let this act of holding up the matzah-bread help us to focus on the central pillar of our souls, the inner essence of identity and being upon which our lives depend for meaning. We become holy through awareness; we become holy through giving thanks.

נְבָרְךְ אֶת מַעַיִן חַיֵּנוּ, רֶחֶם עוֹלָמֵנוּ, הַמוֹצֵיא לָחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Nevarekh et ma'ayan khayenu, rekhem olameynu, hamotzi lekhem min ha-aretz.

We bless the Source of our Lives, the Womb of our World, which brings forth sustenance from the soil, bread from the earth.

## Unleavened bread; strife, contention

## מַצָּה

We follow the blessing for bread with the special blessing for matzah, the bread of our haste to go forth from slavery into freedom. This bread is a mistake - it was supposed to rise; let it symbolize the mistakes we make when we take the risks that let us grow, that make us free and whole people. May all our mistakes be as easy to swallow!

The second meaning of "matzah" is strife, argument; unnatural flattening of the soul, and misery, and fear, and striking out with rash tongue and hand. May our souls rise out of fear toward growth, out of flattening toward wholeness and openness - and may we know the airy, floating lightness of joy.

נְבָרְךָ אֶת מַעֲיַן חַיֵּינוּ, מְקוֹר נְשָׁמֵינוּ, אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵיקְבוֹתָהּ אֲנַחְנוּ מְקַדְּשׁוֹת  
אֶת עַצְמֵינוּ עַל אֲכִילַת מַצָּה.

Nevarekh et ma'ayan khayenu, makor neshameynu, ah-sheer b'ikvot anakhnu m'kadshot et atzmeynu al mitzvat akhilat matzah.

We bless the Wellsprings of our Lives, the Source of our Souls, by which we become holy through the mitzvah of eating matzah.

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### ***Bruriah, scholar and sage, what is the bitterness of exclusion from our own Jewish history?***

Bruriah was the daughter of Rabbi Tradiyon and the wife of Rabbi Meir, both highly respected scholars and leading legislators of the Jewish people at the time of the Roman occupation of ancient Israel; they supported her study of Torah and Jewish law. So highly regarded was Bruriah's learning and insight that her legal opinions were recorded and became authoritative halakhah, an extraordinary occurrence in those times and nearly unheard of even today.

Bruriah was infuriated by the attitude of the rabbis toward women. In the Talmud it is recorded that Rabbi Yossi haGalil was walking on his way when Bruriah crossed his path, and he asked her directions, saying, "What way should I go to the town of Lod?" She replied, "HaGalil, you are stupid! Do not the rabbis say, 'do not talk at length with women'? You should have asked, 'How to Lod?!'"

"The rabbis did not respect me," says Bruriah to us; "they were threatened by my mind. And so they told evil stories about me, that I seduced one of my husband's students. Thus they slandered my memory before our people throughout all history.

"Even though they respected my learning, it never occurred to them that any woman, given the same opportunity to learn as I, might have become my equal in scholarship - or theirs.

"Thus on this night we remember the bitterness of women's exclusion from Jewish history; thus do we mourn the loss of half the potential creativity and learning of the Jewish people, which might have graced Judaism throughout our history."

### **Bitter herbs, bitterness**

מָרוֹר

We were created together, the man and the woman, for ourselves and each other - but the rabbis all agree that woman was created last, woman was created least. She was not made from the head, they said, lest she hold herself too high; she was not made from

the eye, they said, lest she peer into the sky. She was not made from the hand, or she'd be touching everything; she was not made from the mouth, lest she talk too much. They agreed: despite all the precautions God took, still woman is guilty of all these sins. They agreed: woman is weak, woman leads man into sin; on the same day, God made Eve and Evil. The rabbis all agree: woman was created last, woman was created least.

נְּבָרֵךְ אֶת מַעַיִן חַיֵּינוּ, מְקוֹר נֶשְׁמֵנוּ, אֲשֶׁר בְּעִקְבוֹתֶיהָ אֲנַחְנוּ מִקְדָּשׁוֹת  
אֶת עֲצָמֵינוּ עַל אֲכִילַת מָרוֹר.

Nevarekh et ma'ayan khayenu, makor neshameynu, ah-sheer b'ikvot anakhnu m'kadshot et atzmeynu al mitzvat akhilat maror.

We bless the Wellspring of our Lives, the Source of our Souls, by which we come to know the holy through performing the mysterious mitzvah of eating bitter herbs.

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### ***Rabbi Regina, how is it that despite the bitter repression women have known, women have also known much good, much beauty?***

The Reform Movement in Judaism developed, in the first half of the nineteenth century, out of the revolution in European thought called the Enlightenment. Its earliest roots were to be found among the scholars who carried out their research into Bible and their reforms of the prayer service in Hamburg, in Frankfurt, and in other German cities. Among the radical beliefs it espoused was the religious equality of women in Judaism; but for the first one hundred years of the existence of European Reform Judaism, no woman was actually admitted to study at the *Hochshule* for rabbinic training in Berlin. Despite the best of ideal intentions, the dominance of men in Judaism was difficult to overcome, both for men and for women.

Then came Regina Jonas, who successfully entered the *Hochshule* and completed the course of study for rabbinic ordination in the 1920's. But the Board of Directors of the school refused to ordain her a rabbi, so her teacher and mentor, one of the school's professors, turned to oldest Jewish custom attested in the Talmud for ordaining rabbis - he ordained her privately, rabbi to rabbi. Rabbi Jonas was unable to find work as a congregational rabbi, but she was able to find a position with a Berlin hospital as a chaplain, serving patients both Jewish and non-Jewish in their greatest need.

Regina Jonas served in Berlin as Rabbi in Israel until the 1930's, when she was taken away, with all the other martyrs of our people, to Auschwitz, where she was murdered. זְכַר צְדִיקָה לְבִרְכָה *zekher tzadikah livrakha* - may the memory of the righteous be for us a blessing.

"I shed many tears in my short life," Regina tells us, "tears of frustration over chances to grow and participate denied to me because I was a woman; tears of fear at the rise of the Nazi party in my native land; tears of pain and grief at the hands of the Nazis.

"But through the bitterness, I was upheld by the knowledge that there were men who did not subscribe to the patriarchal chauvinism of traditional Judaism; they supported my ordination, my Jewish work, my idealistic dreams for our people. Thus on this night do we acknowledge the amelioration of the bitter with the sweet, and give thanks for those who sweetened the bitterness of the general attitude of exclusion of women. We remember both bitter and sweet, we commemorate them both."

## Bringing together the bitter and the sweet

פורך

The bitter and the sweet - these are the warp and the woof of our lives. We combine the bread of haste, of unrealized potential, with the bitterness of exclusion. What do we have to ameliorate this sadness? We have the gift which is the sweetness of our very lives - we live, we know love, we have felt God's presence and it has moved us to song. And we give thanks that we are not alone; we struggle together, all women and men who see God's light in each human soul, regardless of the shapes of our bodies and our culturally-dictated gender roles.

In this life, at least, these things are bound irrevocably together: laughter and tears, life and death, good and evil. We bless them together, for we know that without the tears we would not fully appreciate laughter - without death we would not fully value life. As we learn to maximize the good and valuable, let us remember the evil we would reject, lest it creep, unrecognized, back into our presence.

As we now taste the haroset together with the maror, we remember the bitter as we give thanks for the sweet. Our tradition calls this the "Hillel sandwich" for thus did Rabbi Hillel eat it; tonight we add our own special taste to the mixture, with a bit of orange segment to symbolize our presence. We have always been there, but now we come bringing our own song, our unique contribution to the mixed tastes of our history, our reality, our destiny.

\* \* \*

### ***Glückel, mother and wife, why do women find it difficult to lean back and relax on this night, as all free Jews have the right to do?***

Glückel of Hameln was born in 1646 in Hamburg, daughter of a prominent family; at the age of two she was expelled, with all the Jews of Hamburg. Her family settled in Danish territory, until war overtook them in 1658; at twelve she was a wanderer again. Her family was able to return to Hamburg, but with no "right of residence", without which Jews lived in a town at the mercy of their rulers. Glückel was betrothed at the age of twelve; at fourteen she was married. She bore thirteen children (twelve lived) and cared for them; she also advised her husband on business matters, and when he died, leaving her with eight children still at home, she was able to continue the family's financial enterprises on her own. On his deathbed, her husband was asked if he had any last wishes. "None," he said, "my wife knows everything. She shall do as she has always done."

Glückel records a poignant reminder of the inconveniences of the religious role of women in her day at that same time: when her husband's condition was pronounced hopeless, and he has only a few hours to live, she says to him, "Dearest heart, shall I embrace you - I am unclean?" and he responds, "God forbid, my child - it will not be long before you take your ritual cleansing." When she returned from the *mikvah*, he had already died.

Glückel wrote her memoirs in 1690, in order to distract herself from her "melancholy thoughts" after the death of her husband. She was married again, in 1700, to the richest banker in Lorraine; but persecution and harassment against Jews, especially those in finance, caused him in 1702 to go bankrupt, losing all his money and hers too.

When the second husband died in 1712 she refused to become a burden to her children; it took one daughter three years to persuade her to come and live with them, in Metz. She died in 1724 at the age of 78.

"I had a long and a busy life," Glückel tells us, "and I considered myself blessed - usually. But rest was a precious, stolen moment for me, and I could not enjoy leisure. Women are the ones who create and sustain, and so we can never truly be at rest. There will always be needs, always be cares - you and I, daughter, will always have to be there, to cook and to clean, to help and to nurture."

## The second cup of wine

## מְקַדְשׁוֹת

Tradition tells us that we drink four cups of wine because the rabbis find four expressions of redemption in the Torah; the fifth cup, of Elijah, represents their disagreement over a fifth possible expression.

In appreciation for the female scholar Bruria's teachings, let us this night rule differently; let us drink this second cup in honor of our spiritual mothers, the women of our Jewish heritage, of whom much was expected, from whom little was sought.

נְבַרְךָ אֶת מַעְיָן חַיֵּינוּ, אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָמִים, בּוֹרְא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Nevarekh et ma'ayan khayeynu, Elohey olamim, borey pree hagafen.

We bless the Wellspring of Life, the Womb of the World, from which the grapes grow.

עַבְדוֹת הַיֵּינוּ *Avadot hayinu* - We were slaves in Egypt.

The story of the liberation of our people from Egypt begins with the Hebrew midwives, Shifrah and Puah, who refuse to carry out Pharaoh's directive to murder all new-born Jewish baby boys.

According to a midrash, Miriam as a child prophesied her brother Moses's birth; she helped their mother protect him from the murderous Egyptians.

Legend tells us that the mothers of Israel in Egypt did not let their children forget Hebrew, and continued to give them Hebrew names. Thus did they help their children remember their identity while in exile.

"For the sake of the women who were righteous, we were delivered from Egypt." - Rashi, commentary on the Talmud, Pesachim 108b)

According to legend, there were ten plagues brought upon Egypt, which were necessary to bring about our liberation. But we are not yet really free, for some whose lives touch ours in this world are not free. Some Jews are not free to observe the Pesach Seder this night. Some people are not free to live as they would choose. And women are not yet free.

There are plagues yet in the life of Jewish women:

- *The consistently male image of God ruling over our lives*
- *The Biblical stories traditionally selected for study and commentary which ignore the role of women*
- *The sexist language of our prayerbooks*

- The denial of women as equally capable and committed Jews in traditional Judaism
- The denial by omission of women who are single, childless, lesbian, poor, or disabled from among the central concerns of Jewish life.
- The prison created by rigid traditional views of the roles of women and men.

## Would it have been enough?

דֵּינּוּ

Had women been remembered equally with men	
But forgotten in the telling of the Exodus,	דינו?
Had women been remembered in the telling of the Exodus,	
But not thought of as individuals,	דינו?
Had women been thought of as individuals,	
But not seated among the men in synagogue,	דינו?
Had women been seated among the men in synagogue,	
But not been counted for the minyan,	דינו?
Had women been counted for the minyan,	
But not been permitted an <i>aliyah</i> ,	דינו?
Had women been permitted an <i>aliyah</i> ,	
But not allowed to study Torah,	דינו?
Had women been allowed to study Torah,	
But not become Bat Mitzvah,	דינו?
Had women become Bat Mitzvah,	
But not gained access to the rabbinate,	דינו?
Had women gained access to the rabbinate,	
But not been treated as complete equals,	דינו?

*When we become complete equals, then will men and women go out from Egypt together! Dayeinu!*

## Washing of the hands; watering place

רְחֻצָּה

Let this second washing of the hands symbolize for us the safety we create in this place for each other. We hold the water for each other, demonstrating our dependence upon each other, and our dependability. We are there for each other, as a Jewish community, and as Jewish women with a common heritage.

נְבָרֶךְ אֶת מֵי מַעְיָן חַיֵּינוּ, אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹכֶם אֲנַחְנוּ מִקְיָמוֹת אֶת מְצוֹת נְטִילַת יָדַיִם.

Nevarekh et mey ma'ayan khayenu, ah-sheer b'tokham anakhnu m'kayemot et mitzvat netilat yadayim.

We give thanks for the Wellspring of our Lives, symbolic waters through which we may fulfill the mitzvah of the washing of the hands, making this moment holy by our awareness of water as the Source of all Life.

We are blessed

מְקַדְּשׁוֹת

The third cup of wine represents our physical selves, our corporeal reality; we are mostly water, mostly sweet and colored water. This wine represents woman's creative potential - the blood of fertility, the intoxication of joy.

נְבָרַךְ אֶת מַעַיִן חַיֵּנוּ, אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָמִים, יוֹצֵר פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן.

Nevarekh et ma'ayan khayenu, elohey olamim, yotzeyr pree hagafen.

We bless the Source of our Lives, the God of all the worlds, the creator of the fruit of the vine.

Order of the Table; arrangement

שׁוֹלְחַן עוֹרֵךְ

i.e., The meal is served

\* \* \*

Hidden, secret; unexpected; conscience

צָפוּן

Children make a game of hiding and seeking; adults learn to hide from each other, and from our true selves, so well that we cannot find, and sometimes forget what it was for which we were looking.

Both women and men have been taught by society to forget a part of themselves; both women and men feel the sadness and longing, both women and men know what it means to be less than whole.

*The afikoman is brought together again with the other half of the middle matzah, the other half of herself.*

What is broken shall be made whole. What is shattered shall be restored. Our hope is our own dedication, to find what is lost, to bring together what is broken, to restore our lives and our world.

*The afikoman is distributed and eaten; it is dessert, the last taste our mouths should remember from the Seder.*

Blessing for sustenance of body and soul

בְּרַכַּת הַמָּזוֹן

We offer four blessings for sustenance of body and soul after we eat.

We give thanks for sustenance.

Recognizing that it is not by our own hands alone that we have food to eat, we remember the sower and the reaper, the gatherer and the processor, the wholesaler and the retailer; we are grateful for the seller and the buyer, the preparer and the cooker. We are thankful for the long chain of interconnected human activities which bring food to our table, and we stand in awe of the natural processes which allow the seed to germinate and the grain to grow. We voice our thanks and praise for the Power of Life which sustains us, providing us with food.

נְבָרְךָ אֶת מַעֲיַן חַיֵּינוּ, אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָמִים, הַזֵּן אֶת הַכֹּל.

Nevarekh et ma'ayan khayyenu, elohey olamim, hazan et hakol.

We bless the Source of Life which sustains all life.

We give thanks for the earth.

It is the earth, Mother Earth, upon which we live, from we grow all that which keeps us alive. On Pesach we are commanded to eat certain foods, to give recognition to the basic sources of life: food, water. It has been said, "think of yourself not as a human being bound up in spiritual experience, but as a spiritual being bound up in human experience."

We say prayers and think of them as spiritual only. But human deeds can be spiritual acts also. On Pesach we say prayers and follow them with the physical act of eating; thus do we see the link of the spiritual and the physical. Growing a garden, cooking a meal, counseling a friend, driving carpool, earning a living, kissing a scraped knee - all life is suffused with the potential for spiritual awareness. All life can be a prayer.

נְבָרְךָ אֶת מַעֲיַן חַיֵּינוּ, אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָמִים, עַל הָאָרֶץ וְעַל הַמָּזוֹן.

Nevarekh et ma'ayan khayyenu, elohey olamim, al ha-aretz v'al hamazon.

We give thanks for the inexhaustible Source of Life, in the earth and in all sustenance.

We give thanks for the city of Jerusalem.

We give thanks for this reminder of the importance of place; a safe place, a place in which to live and grow and give. We give thanks for the reality of our holy places. Our homeland, Israel, and the air and hills and stones of Jerusalem, symbolize for us our longing for a sacred place where we can rest and love and be loved. May our coming together on this night transform this place, here, for us, into a sacred space for our Jewish spirits. May we create it so.

We pray for שְׁלוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַיִם - the peace of Jerusalem; may all those who love her find a way to live together in peace. We pray for שְׁלוֹם בֵּית - the peace of our houses, this house we share and our own homes.

נְבָרְךָ אֶת מַעֲיַן חַיֵּינוּ, אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָמִים, בּוֹנֵה בְּרַחֲמָיו יְרוּשָׁלַיִם : אָמֵן.

Nevarekh et ma'ayan khayyenu, elohey olamim, boney b'rakhamim Yerushalayim, Amen.

We give thanks for the Source of Life, God of all the Worlds, inspiring us to spiritually rebuild Jerusalem and our own sacred places.

We give thanks for loving-kindness where it is manifested.

A Rabbi was once asked, "Where is God?"

The answer: "Wherever you let God in."

We give thanks for nurturance wherever we have been blessed to feel it; for all who have helped us grow: mothers and fathers, lovers and friends, children and sisters and brothers. We give praise for the underlying Inspiration for unconditional love, for unending compassion and unstinting emotional support of our spiritual and psychological needs. May we always receive and always give with generosity of spirit and without counting our cost, as it has been written, "Practice random acts of kindness and senseless beauty."

Thus may we know God's presence in our lives and in the life of the world.

נְבָרֵךְ אֶת מַעַן חַיֵּנוּ, אֱלֹהֵי עוֹלָמִים, הַטּוֹב וְהַמְּטִיב לְכֹל.

Nevarekh et ma'ayan khayyenu, elohey olamim, ha-tov v'ha-maytiv la-kol.

We bless the Source of all Life which fills us with generosity and teaches us to recognize moments in which we might share our sustenance; thus giving us the chance to become better persons. Thus might we come to see and know our lives by the light of God, which, it is written, is "sown for the righteous."

## Praise; shine, give light; rage

הַלֵּל

The process of praise is interrupted now so that we might show our generosity in the midst of our joy, the openness of our hearts in the moment of our celebration. For Jews, no celebration is complete without recognition of the stranger in our midst; no day may be made holy unless that stranger becomes an honored guest, and a friend.

When we open the door for Elijah, we demonstrate our hope for a better world, symbolized by the Messiah's coming, which Elijah was to foretell. When we open our hearts to the stranger in our midst, we demonstrate our willingness to start with ourselves to create that better world. Before we continue to voice our praise and happiness at being together in celebration, let us open to each other - let us meet someone new, let us approach someone we do not know, and make the stranger a friend.

A proverb:

If you always assume  
that the person sitting next to you  
is the Messiah  
waiting for some simple human kindness  
You will soon come to weigh your words  
and watch your hands.  
And if the Messiah so chooses  
not to be revealed

in your time  
it will not matter.

## Pleasing, acceptable, agreeable

נְרַצָּה

We fill and lift the last cup of wine now, and we recall our covenant with God, and we accept the responsibility and privilege of belonging to the Jewish people. We lift the cup and say together:

*I have been in Egypt; I have been in bondage. I have been in the desert; I have come forth to know freedom. I have learned our history; I am still on my journey.*

*We follow her flowing cape in the cold night air,  
We follow her dark figure through the heat of day  
To places unknown.  
"Get up, go forth, leave this place,  
and go to a new place which I will show you."  
We hear the ancient words of Divine Inspiration  
which beckon us forth to the future.  
We entreat her to halt, to recognize us.  
What is the way? we ask.  
Her footsteps disappear in the desert sand.  
We will join hands, and look for the way together.*

נְבַרְךָ אֶת מַעַיִן חַיֵּנוּ, רַחֵם עוֹלָמֵינוּ, מִקּוֹר פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן.

Nevarekh et ma'ayan khayenu, rekhem olamim, makor pree hagafen.

We bless the Source of our Lives, the Womb of the world, from which comes forth the fruit of the vine.

Our Women's Seder is now completed. May all women and men celebrate Pesach next year in a world at peace; may we celebrate freedom without and within. May we find our way out of Mitzrayim, the narrow place of enslavement, soul-constraint, and loneliness. May we come to find our Jerusalem of the soul, a place of beauty, generosity of spirit, openness, and joy. May we not feel the need to observe a Women's Seder!

We now bless each other and ask for blessing for ourselves:

And then all that has divided us will merge  
and then compassion will be wedded to power

*and then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind  
and then both men and women will be gentle*

and then both women and men will be strong  
and then no person will be subject to another's will

*and then all will be rich and free and varied  
and then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many*

and then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance  
and then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old

*and then all will nourish the young  
and then all will cherish life's creatures*

and then all will live in harmony with each other and the Earth  
...and then everywhere will be called Eden once again.

לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה בְּירוּשָׁלַיִם הַבְּנוּיָה

*L'Shanah Ha'Ba'ah Birushalayim HaB'nuyah!* Next year in a renewed Jerusalem!

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*Acknowledgements*

COVER:

- p.1 "May these festival lights", from *A Passover Haggadah*, compiled by Rabbi Larry J. Halpern.
- p.2-3 "Bayamim hahem bazman hazeh", adapted from *The Santa Cruz Haggadah*, Karen G. R. Roekard. The Hineni Consciousness Press, 1992; pp. 7-8.
- p.4 "There is a goddess", *Apotheosis of the Kitchen Goddess II*, Teresa Noelle Roberts, p. 242 COS.
- p.6ff the Four Questions and three of the Four Mothers (Devorah, Bruriah, and Gluckel) are loosely taken from *San Diego Women's Haggadah* (Women's Institute for Continuing Jewish Education, La Jolla CA 1993) and E. M. Broner, *The Women's Haggadah* (HarperCollins, NY, 1994).
- p.11 "Dayeinu?" from *San Diego Women's Haggadah*, p. 45.
- p.14 "A proverb" from a creative service composed by Rabbi Elias Lieberman, Cincinnati, OH, 1983.
- p.15 "We follow her cape," *The Women's Haggadah*, p. 67.
- p.16 "And then", Judy Chicago, untitled poem from *The Dinner Party*. Quoted from *Cries of the Spirit* (COS), p. 235.

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