

The Freedom Plate - Several years ago, Martha Hausman proposed that a special plate be set aside next to the traditional Seder plate, on which could be placed physical objects brought by every participant in the Seder as a symbol of her/ his liberation THIS YEAR from Mitzraim.

This can be very powerful. Mature learned Jews, children, and people who have never before attended a Seder can all relate to this, and the stories about the objects on the Freedom Plate become a very powerful part of the Seder.

Our custom is that soon after we begin, we ask those present to begin lifting and explaining their freedom-object. One year it was a just-completed 500-page book MS for one person, a single gold coin that another's father had brought out of Germany as a last-ditch economic prop in case destitution were descending; for another, a watch (about liberation from rigid time-rules; for another, nothing – as an "object" of freedom from the rule that something should be brought.

Alternatively, one might use either the passage "In every generation one rises up against us to destroy us" or "In every generation every human being must look upon her/himself as if we ourselves, not our ancestors only, come forth from slavery" as times to raise up the Freedom Plate and hear its stories.

Symbols of Freedom - For many of us, one of the worst Pyramidal/ Pharaonic oppressions in our lives is being driven into overwork, and the spiritual and emotional exhaustion that follows. (The New York Times has reported that schools are increasingly abolishing recess time in order to get the children to do more work. This is a form of slavery. As the article noted, the possibility of "wonder" is being squashed. This is the opposite of Heschel's teaching that the root of all spirituality is "radical amazement.")

So we could add the following to the Seder, perhaps after the passage, "In every generation, there is one who rises up against us, to destroy us." (Some of the imagery is a paraphrase of a passage from *The Sabbath* by Abraham Joshua Heschel.)

Today we face a new kind of Mitzraim,
the Tight and Narrow Place.
Freedom without jobs is a bitter joke --
yet many of us find our jobs dissolved, downsized, disemployed.
Jobs without freedom are slavery --
yet many of us are forced to overwork.
Our jobs exhaust us.
When Moshe faced the Burning Bush,
He learned that like an eternal burning bush,
Time itself is not consumed
Though each instant vanishes to open the way to the next.
Things of space seem permanent --
but as we seek to make them into our servants,
They may enslave us.
When the Israelites went forth from slavery,
they sought time for rest and self-reflection:
They found Shabbat.
Rather than live under the tyranny of space and overwork,
We will in our lives set apart a time for freedom,

The Orange on the Seder Plate - Origins of the Orange are shrouded in the mythic mists of the 1980s: According to a tale that won wide currency, a woman who spoke for the equality of women in the rabbinic and other forums was rebuked by a man who said, "Women belong on the bimah like an orange belongs on the Seder plate."

But it seems it is historically more accurate that the Orange originated in a practice of some Jewish lesbians of setting *bread* on the Seder plate as a symbol of affirming lesbianism, though understanding it as transgressive of Jewish tradition. But others responded by saying that the full inclusion of lesbians and gay men in all of Jewish life was a fulfillment of Torah, not a transgression. So something new should be brought to the Seder plate, but not something that violates it. (See Rebecca Alpert's excellent book, *Like Bread on the Seder Plate.*)

The Orange has come to stand for the freedom and equality of women and people of all sexual minorities in Jewish life, and implicitly of how the achievement of that freedom is already changing Jewish practice. The Orange also is the only whole fruit on the Plate, and so carries within itself the seeds of its own future as Torah carries within itself the seeds of change.

Further, the Orange can symbolize Malkhut, the (feminine) Sefira of Majestic Inclusion. Till now the other objects on the Seder Plate have symbolized the other six sefirot and Malkhut has been symbolized by the Plate itself -- very important but present as Ground, not Figure. With the Orange, Malkhut becomes visible as Figure while remaining Ground as well.

The traditional practice is, either in response to someone's independently raising the question, "Why is there an Orange on the Seder plate?" or by raising the question deliberately (as a fifth question, or in pointing to the items on the plate just before the meal) to answer with any or all the answers above.

Bringing News of Redemption - When it is time to open the door for Elijah the Prophet, you could remind everyone that very recently, on the Shabbat HaGadol just before Passover, traditionally we read the last passage from the Prophet Malachi (last of the Prophets), who says (speaking for God):

"Here! -- I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of YHWH --- And he will turn the hearts of parents to children and the hearts of children to parents, lest I come and strike the earth with utter destruction."

You might follow the reading of this passage by first VERY briefly speaking of the climate crisis now facing the earth. Then ask the two generations (or more) who are the Seder table to recite to each other the following:

"And I myself will become Elijah the Prophet, to turn the hearts of children and parents toward each other so as to turn aside from our lives the danger that the earth be struck with utter destruction. I pledge that I ----"

And then ask them to say to the next person what they will do to heal the earth..

Miriam's Goblet

(*Kos Miriam*)

In recent years, we have begun placing two ceremonial goblets on our Seder tables: the traditional one, filled with wine, for Elijah the Prophet, and a second one, filled with water, for Miriam the Prophetess (she is called "prophetess" in Exodus 15:20).

Miriam is a central figure in the Passover drama. She stands guard loyally when her baby brother Moses is set floating on the Nile, and she arranges for a wetnurse—Moses' own mother—who gets paid by Pharaoh's daughter for caretaking and living with her own child. Miriam leads the Hebrew people in singing and dancing (that most natural expression of religious joy) after they cross the Red Sea. And she dies by the kiss of God; the Angel of Death, we are told, has no power over her. After her death in the desert, the Hebrews lose their most precious possession: water—and it is then that Miriam's grieving brother strikes the rock.

The Midrash teaches us that the water, which disappeared at Miriam's death, came from a miraculous well. Created during twilight on the eve of the world's first Sabbath, the well was given by God to Miriam because of her holiness, and it was intended to accompany

the Hebrews in

the desert

through-

out the

span of

her life.

"Miriam's

Well," as

it was -

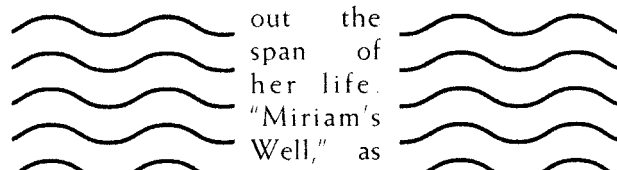
called,

not only

quenched

thirst, it also cured

body and soul. Both Miriam and her well were spiritual oases in the desert,



bedrock sources of nurturance and healing.

We place Miriam's goblet on the Seder table as a counterweight to the cup of Elijah. The latter is a symbol of messianic redemption at the end of time; the former, of redemption in our present lives. Elijah lived in the desert as a lone, howling visionary, focused on the millennium. Miriam sojourned in the same wilderness, but she accompanied the Hebrew people. Tireless tribal parent, she offered hope and renewal at any stage of the journey.

We place Miriam's goblet on the Seder table to remind us, as well, of Jewish women, whose stories have been too sparingly told. On Passover in particular, a holiday celebrating many kinds of birth (that of Hebrew babies in Goshen, of Moses, of the Jewish people, of springtime), we recall women, whose domain, of course, is birth. Beyond the many males in the Haggadah—Jacob, Laban, Pharaoh, Rabbi Tarfon, Rabbi Eliezer, Sisera, Elijah, even God as "King"—Miriam's cup remembers others.

We raise her goblet and recite this prayer:

*You abound in blessings,
God, creator of the universe,
Who sustains us with
living water. May we, like
the children of Israel leaving
Egypt, be guarded and
nurtured and kept alive in the
wilderness, and may You give
us wisdom to understand that
the journey itself holds the
promise of redemption.*

AMEN.

—Rabbi Susan Schnur

This special Passover reading is brought to you
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