

"Once we were slaves ..."

A Passage to
Equality

Haggadah Supplement

2014

JSPAN

Jewish Social Policy

Action Network

Why have a supplement to the Haggadah?

The Hebrews' flight to freedom over 3000 years ago reverberates today. Happily, most Jews and indeed most Americans are not enslaved, deprived, or forced to toil away their lives without hope for a better future. But not everyone.

The readings in this Supplement add a very current focus to the Seder service, and provide you the opportunity to explore ways in which next year in Jerusalem can be uplifting for all.



About your Passage to Equality Seder:

The traditional Passover Seder is a composition of fifteen segments. After lighting candles, the official order of the Seder is:

Kadesh, the recitation of Kiddush
Urchatz, washing the hands
Karpas, vegetable dipped in salt-water
Yachatz, breaking of the middle matzo
Maggid, the recitation of the story
Rachatz, second washing of the hands
Motzi, recitation of the hamotzi
Matzah, recitation of the matzo blessing

Maror, eating the bitter herbs
Korech, eating matzo and bitter herbs
Shulchan Orech, eating the festive meal
Tzafun, eating the afikomen
Barech, the recitation of grace
Hallel, the recitation of Pesach songs
Nirtzah, prayer that God accepts the service

This Haggadah Supplement suggests points in the Seder for each reading.

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Jewish Social Policy Action Network

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Before the first cup of wine: The Passover story is all about economic justice. In fact, it may be the oldest example in religious or other literature of an uprising and march to freedom of a people, our people. We overcame inequality!

But we have not only become free. Today we celebrate the breadth of our freedom, our life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. We take this time to address the powers that deny people equal opportunity to advance in our own society today.

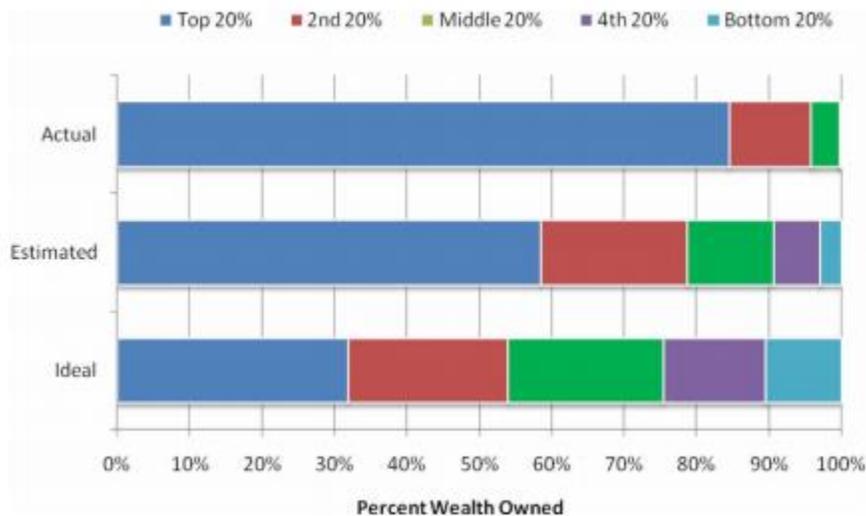
After Urchatz, washing of the hands:

Too often we seek to wash our hands of responsibility for the protection of those less fortunate. The Torah tells us:

Deuteronomy 15:7. If there is a poor man among you, one of your brothers, in any of the towns of the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand to your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks.

The Kingdom of God –the Rabbis held– is inconsistent with a state of social misery. They were not satisfied with feeding the poor. Their great ideal was not to allow a man to be poor, not to allow him to come down to the depths of poverty. They say, ‘Try to prevent it by teaching him a trade. Try all methods before you permit him to become an object of charity, which must degrade him, tender as your dealings with him may be’. (Solomon Schechter, 1893)

Do we keep the ideal not to allow people to be poor? This chart tells us what part of our national income goes to the poorest among us, the richest, and those in between. The poorest disappear!



Maggid, after the Four Questions:

Now we ask a fifth question: how is this TIME different for ALL people than other TIMES?

America used to work. The people had work. The system worked. It was far, far, from perfect - but we all had some share in the struggles AND the rewards. But somewhere along the way, we lost our way. And now we have an economy and a political system that works only for the rich. You can't keep down a people's hopes and dreams for a better life...with dignity and freedom....for themselves and their kids. More power to them! *Anonymous*

Our tradition teaches, "...If all the troubles of the world are assembled on one side and poverty is on the other, poverty would outweigh them all" (Midrash Exodus Rabbah 31:12). Even hundreds of years ago, the most pressing issue facing our communities' leaders was the distribution of wealth. That's because, while economic justice may not be in the headlines every day as the news cycles favor sexier issues like [drones](#), [immigration](#) and [guns](#), it is the constantly simmering problem [underlying and influencing](#) all of these. So yes, take action on these important, top-line issues, but know that none of those can truly be solved if we do not address the root causes of poverty in our country. – *Religious Action Committee of Reform Judaism, 2012*, <http://blogs.rj.org/rac/2013/06/18/are-you-sitting-down-the-dire-state-of-wealth-inequality-in-video-form/>

Maggid, after the Four Sons recitation:

During my second year in college, I decided to take the introductory course in economics. ... At the first lecture, the professor taught us about supply and demand. ... "demand" here does not equate to human need, but to the ability (and willingness) to pay for a product. No money -- no demand.

"Wait a minute," I objected. "You mean that if someone is starving on the street, penniless, then according to this model they have no demand to measure?"

Right, I was told. Demand measures ability and willingness to pay, not need. You can starve to death with no measurable "demand," no impact on the market whatsoever.



At that moment, I realized that market economics measures efficient production and distribution of resources, but nothing more. Like Darwinian evolution, it possesses no moral compass; it simply describes what is, not what ought to be.

– Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, *Biblical Economic Justice: Supply and Demand Isn't Enough*, HuffPost, January 9, 2012 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-bradley-shavit-artson/supply-demand-isnt-enough_b_1178974.html

Deuteronomy 26:12. When you have finished paying the complete tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and the widow, that they may eat in your towns, and be satisfied.

Leviticus 19:19ff. Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God. ...

So the Torah commanded its own “safety net” in biblical times. The obligation is imposed to feed the poor, care for the widow, educate the young. For all of these tasks, there was a tax to generate community funds – and whether the tax was sufficient or not, individual responsibility remained the commandment of Judaism.

Today we are shrinking the safety net: we have lowered SNAP support (food stamps), funding for both public and higher education, unemployment insurance, even the cost of living allowance in Social Security. The lack of support for the poor undermines families and reduces opportunity for people to advance - or even to hope for the most modest concept of happiness.



Our Seder is a great moment to discuss this: What should we be doing today, individually and as a nation, to provide equal opportunity for all?

Maggid, after recitation of the Plagues:

What are today's plagues? Start with poverty, lack of education, lack of economic opportunity, discrimination of all kinds, and resulting inequality.

Do not doubt that poverty is a plague. Today 42% of people born into poverty never leave it!

To treat people equally ... justice looks for barriers which interfere with the opportunity for access to productive resources needed to acquire the basic goods of society or to be dignified, participating members in the community. Justice takes into consideration certain handicaps which are hindrances to pursuing the opportunities for life in society. The handicaps which justice considers go beyond individual physical disabilities and personal tragedies. Significant handicaps can be found in poverty or prejudice. A just society removes any discrimination which prevents equality of opportunity. Distributive justice demands special consideration to disadvantaged groups by providing basic social and economic opportunities and resources.

The Scriptures speak of God's special concern for the poor ...

Repeatedly, the Bible says that the Sovereign of history works to lift up the poor and oppressed. Consider the Exodus. Certainly God acted there to keep the promise to Abraham and to call out the chosen people of Israel. But again and again the texts say God also intervened because God hated the oppression of the poor Israelites (Ex. 3:7–8; 6:5–7).

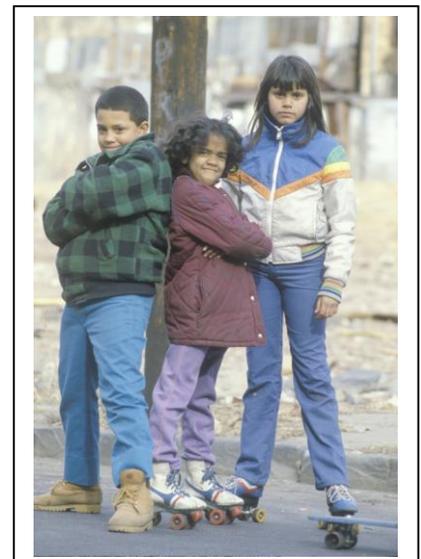
Annually at the harvest festival the people of Israel repeated this confession: 'The Egyptians mistreated us. ... Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the Lord brought us out of Egypt' (Deut. 26:6–8).

Or consider the Psalms: 'But the Lord says, "I will now rise up because the poor are being hurt"' (12:5). 'I know the Lord will get justice for the poor and will defend the needy in court' (140:12). God acts in history to lift up the poor and oppressed.

The Bible, however, goes one shocking step further. God insists that if we do not imitate God's concern for the poor we are not really God's people – no matter how frequent our worship or how orthodox our creeds. Because Israel failed to correct oppression and defend poor widows, Isaiah insisted that Israel was really the pagan people of Gomorrah (1:10–17). God despised their fasting because they tried to worship God and oppress their workers at the same time (Isa. 58:3–7). Through Amos, the Lord shouted in fury that the very religious festivals God had ordained made God angry and sick. Why? Because the rich and powerful were mixing worship and oppression of the poor (5:21–24).

- *Stephen Mott and Ronald J. Sider, Economic Justice: a Biblical Paradigm (Transformation, 2000)*
http://www.ocms.ac.uk/transformation/articles/1702.05_0_mott.pdf

But what about the 1%? Does fighting inequity necessarily mean bringing them down to some "normal" economic life-size? The same Torah that instructs us to relieve poverty and suffering also commands us: Thou shalt not covet.



Correcting poverty and suffering, improving education, making room for new entrants in the economic structure, raising up those who have suffered discrimination, all have costs. But Torah teaches us that these are communal costs that should be borne broadly across the society. Correcting inequity must not be a new plague imposed only on a small minority, however privileged.

Hallel - the Fourth Cup of Wine

Our story is the story of all people who have ever been in bondage, and this story compels us to work toward freedom for those who remain physically, spiritually, or economically enslaved.

- Adapted from the Camp Kinderland 2003 Haggadah.

Let us therefore celebrate our freedom and strengthen ourselves to join the fight against injustice wherever it exists. In the words of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny."

- Letter from Birmingham Jail," Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., April 16, 1963.

With the ongoing national economic struggles, many have become more aware of existing economic inequalities. Some struggle because they lack access to employment and others because their wages do not cover the costs of living.

Elijah's Cup

This special cup of wine is for Eliyahu Hanavi, Elijah the Prophet, a friend of the poor and the oppressed. According to tradition, Elijah appears as a poor man to see if he will be accepted and well-treated. This cup reminds us to make a commitment to open our homes and our time to those who are in need.

Miriam's Cup

We find a second cup filled with water, in honor of Miriam, Moses' sister. According to midrash (rabbinic legend), as long as Miriam was alive, a well of water followed the Israelites through the wilderness. In the biblical story of the exodus, after the people have safely crossed the Sea of Reeds, Miriam leads the women in songs of praise.

According to Midrash, *Sh'mot Rabbah* 1:12, it was "by the merit of the women" that the Jews were redeemed from slavery in Egypt. Pharaoh decreed that the Israelite men should sleep in

the fields and not at home. With this law, Pharaoh hoped both to increase the slaves' productivity (by eliminating commuting time) and to stop the Jews from procreating.

However, the midrash says that the women used to go out to the fields at night, seduce their husbands, and become pregnant. The women would then give birth secretly and hide the babies from the Egyptians. In the Bible, women such as the midwives Shifra and Puah, and Moses' mother and sister, Yocheved and Miriam, play crucial roles in defying Pharaoh's orders to kill all newborn Jewish boys.

With Miriam's Cup, we celebrate women's past and present leadership in social justice movements and rededicate ourselves to working toward the liberation of all women.

Whenever the rabbi of Sasov saw anyone's suffering either of spirit or of body, he shared it so earnestly that the other's suffering became his own. Once someone expressed his astonishment at this capacity to share in another's troubles. "What do you mean 'share?'" said the rabbi. "It is my own sorrow; how can I help but suffer it?"- *As told by Martin Buber, Tales of the Hasidim (New York: Schocken, 1947)*

It is not enough to teach our young people to be successful... so they can realize their ambitions, so they can earn good livings, so they can accumulate the material things that this society bestows. Those are worthwhile goals.

But it is not enough to progress as individuals while our friends and neighbors are left behind. "Perhaps we can bring the day when children will learn from their earliest days that being fully man and fully woman means to give one's life to the liberation of the brother/sister who suffer. It is up to each one of us. It won't happen unless we decide to use our lives to show the way."
- *Cesar Chavez*

- *Jewish Council on Urban Affairs & Beth Shalom B'nai Zaken Congregation, Freedom and Justice Seder (2012) <http://jcua.org/document.doc?id=10>*

Dayenu -- He Brought Us Forth

This wonderful song thanking the Lord for rescuing us from Egypt has its parallel today. We have enjoyed great success in the New World, but knowing how and why can help us address the needs of other less fortunate people, fairly and effectively.



Next Year in Jerusalem

The conclusion of our Seder is not just a call to travel or even to make Aliyah. It speaks to us, wherever we reside, to recognize and to pierce the invisible walls of discouragement and disadvantage.

“Let us be dissatisfied until the tragic walls that separate the outer city of wealth and comfort and the inner city of poverty and despair shall be crushed by the battering rams of the forces of justice. Let us be dissatisfied until those that live on the outskirts of hope are brought into the metropolis of daily security.”

- *Martin Luther King, “Where do we go from here,” Speech to Southern Christian Leadership Conference, August 16, 1967*

What can we do now to drive equality?

The seventh year was in Hebrew a year of Shmitah, when slaves were freed and the land was given a year to rest. Leviticus 25:6: This coming Jewish year is the year of Shmitah. How shall we proceed?

Here are five agencies that will be glad to receive your volunteer effort as well as your personal financial support.

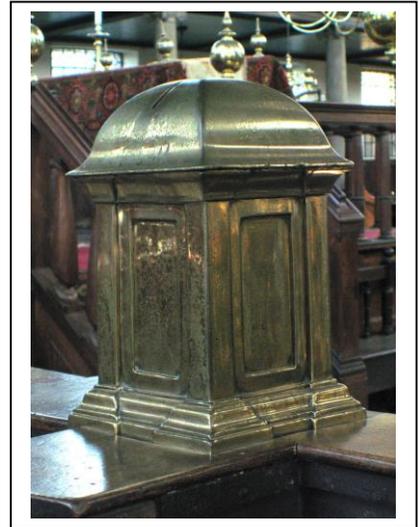
BEND THE ARC mobilizes Jewish resources in partnership with others for immigration reform, voting rights and other social action projects. www.bendthearc.com .

JEWISH RELIEF AGENCY is the largest provider of food assistance to Jewish families in need in the Greater Philadelphia region and is the third largest direct-service food pantry in our area. <http://www.jewishrelief.org/philadelphia/>

MAZON, the Jewish Response to Hunger, the fights hunger and malnutrition in the Jewish community and throughout the world through education, grants and strategic initiatives. <http://mazon.org>

PHILABUNDANCE is the largest hunger relief organization in the Delaware Valley, working to provide food directly and through 500 other service agencies. www.philabundance.org

PHILADELPHIA CORPORATION FOR AGING assists older Philadelphians and people with disabilities through direct services to seniors and others, and through advocacy. www.pcacares.org



And stay in close touch with your representatives in Congress and your state legislature. Here is a partial list.

In Pennsylvania contact:

Senator Robert P. Casey Jr.

(202) 224-6324

www.casey.senate.gov/contact/

Senator Patrick J. Toomey

(202) 224-4254

www.toomey.senate.gov/?p=contact

In Delaware contact:

Senator Christopher A. Coons

(202) 224-5042

www.coons.senate.gov/contact/

Senator Thomas R. Carper

(202)224-2441

[carper.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/
email-senator-carper](http://carper.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/email-senator-carper)

In Maryland contact:

Senator Benjamin L. Cardin

(202)224-4524

www.cardin.senate.gov/contact

Senator Barbara A. Mikulski

(202) 224-4654

www.mikulski.senate.gov/contact/

In New Jersey contact:

Senator Frank E. Lautenberg

(202) 224-3224

www.lautenberg.senate.gov/contact/routing.cfm

Senator Robert Menendez

(202) 224-4744

www.menendez.senate.gov/contact/

and your member of the House of Representatives.



About JSPAN

The Jewish Social Policy Action Network was founded in 2003 to give voice to progressive social values. We develop policy and action programs that express modern humanitarian principles drawn from Jewish tradition. We work to advance equality and opportunity in our pluralistic democracy and to protect the Constitutional liberties and civil rights of Jews, other minorities and the vulnerable in our society. We operate through individual policy centers and committees that address current social issues. As examples:

Our Church-State Committee brings together lawyers with outstanding backgrounds in the areas of freedom of religion and First Amendment law. We file amicus curiae briefs in major cases before the Supreme Court and other federal and state tribunals. We comment to our government and consult with other rights agencies.

Our committees and policy centers on education, hunger, poverty and other serious domestic policy issues generate positions, supporting evidence and argument, and opportunities for our members to participate in the public debate.

Our periodic open programs focus attention on major issues that deserve public support. Our primary topic and open programming for the current year is inequality. Our policy centers and committees report to the elected officers and Board of Directors including teachers and faculty, business, professional and volunteer activists.

JSPAN is a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions to the organization are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. The official registration and financial information of Jewish Social Policy Action Network may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, [1 \(800\) 732-0999](tel:18007320999). Registration does not imply endorsement.





The Great Synagogue of Budapest
Photos at pages 2, 4, 5, 6, 10 and 12 from Dreamstime.