

Haggadah l'Yom Zekhuyot Shel Adam: A Human Rights Haggadah

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and Margaret Holub*

AT THE JUNE 2006 BOARD MEETING OF RABBIS FOR Human Rights-North America, we both expressed an interest in creating liturgical forms that could be used in the Jewish world and beyond to help people think about human rights issues in general and the specific issue of torture. Margaret had been chairing the RHR initiative to end torture, an initiative especially important in wake of the recent embrace of torture by the US Administration. The idea of a Seder popped into our minds simultaneously. It is such a magnificent educational and ritual form. Why not use the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the central study text? The early rabbis realized that education must work on the senses and the heart as well as the intellect. We could also incorporate some of the sensual ritual moments developed by the rabbis to instill a deeper awareness of human freedom through retelling the story of the exodus from Egypt. The fourfold structure of the Seder was adapted to surround and deepen the engagement of participants with these issues. It is our hope that this form will be a way for communities to begin to educate themselves about human rights and deepen their commitment to the end of torture. We envision this as a resource for a Seder on Human Rights Day, December 10, on a third night of Passover, or any other time throughout the year.

THE SEDER TABLE IS SET with festival candles and yartzheit candle, maror, slices of egg, pitchers of salt water and plain water, and cups.

LIGHTING FESTIVAL CANDLES AND YARZHEIT CANDLE

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-Olam

(Nevarekh et M'kor Hayyeinu)

Asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel yom tov.

Blessed is the Source of Life who has given us the holy mandate to light festival lights.

RACHATZ

(Immersing hands in mayyim chayyim — living waters)

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-Olam

(Nevarekh et M'kor Hayyeinu)

Asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al netilat yadayim.

Blessed is the Source of Life who has given us the holy mandate to immerse our hands.

(Two people walk around with a pitcher of water, a bowl, and a towel. One pours water over the fingers of each participant. Or the water can be passed around the table, and each person can help her neighbor to wash.)

WELCOME

We are gathering to celebrate Human Rights Day, which commemorates December 10, 1948, the date when the nations of the world ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This declaration articulates a vision of safety, freedom, and dignity for every person on earth. Our gathering explores the profound aspiration to elevate the way one human being acts toward another. As Jews we draw on our unique tradition to express this aspiration. The Seder, a meal filled with symbol, story, and song, is the way we have transmitted our commitment to human dignity and freedom from earliest times. The Passover Seder has four cups of wine; so does this ritual. Tonight the four cups represent the four ways that human beings can interact with each other, or as our mystical tradition considers them, the four worlds of body, emotion, intellect, and spirit. We will reflect on our capacity for hurting as well as healing in each of these dimensions.

BEITZAH

The Passover seder meal begins with an egg. The egg is a symbol of potential, of what is not yet but will, God willing, come to be. Tonight we bless and eat an egg in recognition that full human rights are an aspiration as much as a reality. May life and well-being be born from this aspiration.

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-Olam

(Nevarekh et M'kor Hayyeinu)

Shehakol nihyeh bidvaro.

Blessed is the Source of Life from whose word all things are created.

(An egg is eaten here.)

I. First Cup — The World of the Body

For the first cup, we focus attention on the body — locus of both pleasure and pain, the place from which we locate our selfhood. To our ancestors, the body of the human being was a microcosm, the whole world in miniature, and the world in turn was a reflection of the human. In our tradition, the hair upon the head corresponds to the forests of the earth, the breath to the wind, tears to the oceans. (*Avot d'Rabbi Natan* 31:91-92) We begin with an awareness of our own bodies and the experience of centeredness in our physical selves.

(Pour cup of wine.)

GUIDED MEDITATIONS

(One person reads aloud.)

1. Let us take a moment to become aware of our own bodies in this moment. You are invited to allow your eyes to softly close. Bring your attention to sensations in your body. Perhaps you can feel the hardness or softness of the seat you are sitting on. Perhaps you notice sensation in your hands or feet. Tingling? Pressure? Lightness? Maybe it is pleasant. Maybe it is unpleasant. Allow the sensations to come and go. You might notice warmth or coolness in parts of your body, tightness or heaviness or ease.
2. Allow your attention to rest in the sensation of breath moving through your body. See if you can find the beginning of the inhale — in the nostrils, the throat, the chest, the abdomen. If you like, take a deep breath into your belly, letting your belly be soft. Allow it to feel just the way it is — without

judging it in any way. Don't think about what your body feels like. Just feel it. Allow your attention to remain with the breath or any other body sensation for the next few seconds. Now gradually open your eyes and keep some of your attention on the sensations of breath or body.

CONVERSATION

(In hevruta or around the table.)

Think back to a moment when you learned about the abuse of a human being. You may have experienced or witnessed an act of violence. Or you may have encountered a news item, a photograph, or other kind of information. Later we will ask you to recall your feelings at this encounter. For now we ask that you simply remember and, if you wish, describe, your own encounter with this experience. Perhaps you can sense where in your body this memory resides.

SONG

Eli tziyon v'areha

K'mo ishah b'tzireha

V'khiv'tulah hagurat sak

Al ba'al n'ureha

My God, Zion in her anguish is like a woman in travail

Or like a maiden mourning the love of her youth.

MAROR

Our ancestors gave us the bitter herb as a symbol of *Mitzrayim*/Egypt: enslavement, constriction, bitterness. Tonight we eat *maror* not only to remember but to taste bitterness, not only in the past but in the present, not only in our families and community but wherever the human body is assaulted, wounded, and deprived of dignity.

May the Source of Life protect and sustain all who are tortured or imprisoned without recourse, all who are fleeing oppression or who suffer on account of their gender, tribe, faith, or color or the way they express their truth. May their misery end speedily, and may they be redeemed.

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-Olam

(Nevarekh et M'kor Hayyeinu)

Asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al akhilat maror.

Blessed is the Source of Life who has given us the sacred mandate to taste the bitter herb.

(Maror is eaten.)

KIDDUSH

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-Olam

(Nevarekh et M'kor Hayyeinu)

Borei pri ha-gafen.

Blessed is the Source of Life who creates the fruit of the vine.

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-Olam

(Nevarekh et M'kor Hayyeinu)

Oseh shalom u'vorei et ha-ra.

Blessed is the Source of Life who makes peace and creates evil.

(from Isaiah 45:7)

(Drink wine.)

II. Second Cup — The World of the Emotions

(Pour wine.)

(A niggun, or wordless song, may be sung here.)

CONVERSATION

(Around the table or in hevruta.)

Return your thoughts to that encounter with abuse which you described before. Try to remember when you first encountered it. How did you feel then? Consider the history of that encounter in your life. Did your feelings about it change over time? Did you begin to forget it or set it aside at some point? Where is that memory within you today?

Think about a caring act of response to oppression or abuse. It may be an action which you yourself committed, one done by someone you know, or a

story of which you are aware. Try to remember when it first happened or when you first encountered it. How did you feel then? Try to recall the history of that action in your life. Did your feelings about it change over time? Did you begin to forget it or set it aside at some point? Where is that action within you today?

MIDRASH

The ancient rabbis searched for a way to understand how the elaborate and effective worship of the destroyed Temple could be replaced. This midrash is a poignant and radical offering pointing to the essential nature of ritual as promoting loving relations among people.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai once was walking with his disciple Rabbi Yehoshua near Jerusalem after the destruction of the Temple. Rabbi Yehoshua looked at the Temple ruins and said, “Alas for us! The place which atoned for the sins of Israel through the ritual of animal sacrifice lies in ruins!” Then Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai spoke to him these words of comfort: “Be not grieved, my son. There is another way of gaining atonement, even though the Temple is destroyed. We must now gain atonement through deeds of lovingkindness.” For it is written, “Lovingkindness I desire, not sacrifice.” (HOSEA 6:6) [AVOT D’RABBI NATAN 11a]

This midrash seems to suggest that the realization of the universality both of suffering and weeping in response to it, can link us to one another across expanses of time and space.

“She weepeth, yea, she weepeth in the night” (LAM. 1:2). Why this double weeping? Rabbah said in the name of R. Yohanan: Once for the First Temple and once for the Second....Another interpretation: “In the night”—when a person weeps at night, his voice is heard better. And another interpretation: When a person weeps at night, the stars and planets weep with him. Still another interpretation: When one weeps at night, whoever hears him weeps in sympathy. (LAM. R. 1:2, 24.)

SALT WATER

(One person reads aloud)

We are about to pass around a glass of salt water. Each of us will be asked to drink deeply from that glass. The salt water is a symbol of the tears, the wounds, and the cruelty in our world today. Our tendency might be to shrink back from this taste of suffering. We might fear that we will be overcome by the grief. It might be tempting and safer to take a tiny sip and then turn away. We therefore call upon a source of receptivity and compassion that is much greater than our limited selves. We imagine this power as able to hold more than the greatest ocean. We know that we are connected to this power. We know it is much vaster and more spacious than our isolated and alone selves. We know this power will allow us to completely taste this bitter drink as we strive to witness and address abuse and cruelty of all kinds. We aspire to a courageous heart. We drink deeply.

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-Olam

(Nevarekh et M’kor Hayyeinu)

Shehakol nihyeh bidvaro.

Blessed is the Source of Life, by whose word all things are created.

(Drink glass of salt water.)

KIDDUSH

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-Olam

(Nevarekh et M’kor Hayyeinu)

Borei pri ha-gafen.

Blessed is the Source of Life who creates the fruit of the vine.

Barukh Atah Adonai

(Nevarekh et M’kor Hayyeinu)

Ha-mohel et orlat libeinu

Blessed is the Source of Life who removes the foreskin from our hearts.

(Drink wine.)

Maggid — Universal Declaration of Human Rights

On December 10, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The first ten of its 30 articles are reproduced here. For the full text, go to www.unhchr.ch/udhr/.

At the Seder, you might:

- *Read the entire Declaration aloud, taking turns around the table.*
- *Ask everyone to read silently and pick one article that especially resonates to read aloud.*

Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3: Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4: No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6: Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7: All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8: Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10: Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

(A meal may be served at this point or at the end of the Seder.)

III. Third Cup — The World of the Intellect

CONVERSATION

(Around the table or in hevruta)

Does the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights seem appropriate to you? Does it go too far in its description of universal human rights? Is anything left out? Are some articles more important than others? Can you clarify the meaning of different articles by offering examples of their implementation?

There is a struggle in Judaism between a grand universal vision of the infinite worth of all human beings on one hand and the particular claim of Jews — sometimes over and against all other peoples — on the other. How do we as Jews mediate between universalism and particularism? How does our long-standing position as a vulnerable, minority people sensitize us to the suffering of others, or help us calibrate our moral compass? What do you see as the intellectual task of 21st century Jews with regard to human rights? Where do you see yourself in this conversation?

THE LIGHT OF WISDOM

(Yarzeit candle is passed around the table. Everyone reads together.)

Our Fount, our loving Parent, Caring One, be merciful with us, and place into our hearts the ability to understand, to see, to hear, to learn, to teach, to keep, to do and to uphold with love all that we study of your Torah.

May the Source of all wisdom bring clarity of insight to all who endeavor to bring justice to our world, particularly to those scholars, activists, and contemplatives who seek release for the captive.

KIDDUSH

*Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-Olam
(Nevarekh et M'kor Hayyeinu)*

Borei pri ha-gafen.

Blessed is the Source of Life who creates the fruit of the vine.

*Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-Olam
(Nevarekh et M'kor Hayyeinu)*

Ha-melamed hukkei hayyim.

Blessed is the Source of Life who teaches us laws of life.

(Drink wine.)

IV. Fourth Cup — The World of Spirit

(Pour a glass of water and a glass of wine for each person at the table.)

SONG

Pit-chu li sha'arei tzedek

Avo vam odeh Yah

Open for me the gates of righteousness,
and I will enter them and praise God.

STORY

(Choose one or both of the following selections, or bring a different personal testimony to read aloud.)

There is a Kippah in the Rubble

Rabbi Arik Ascherman, Executive Director, Rabbis for Human Rights (April 2003)

I was arrested last Wednesday. Again. Many of you know that we are experiencing a new wave of demolitions for lack of building permits in and around Jerusalem. On Wednesday the Municipality came to demolish four homes. The families had exhausted their legal options although they thought they had an agreement allowing them additional time to rezone their land. They didn't. (In any case they didn't have much of a chance. All four homes are located in a part of the Issawiya which the government refuses to recognize as a part of the village, let alone zone them for building.)

By the time another activist and I had reached Issawiya, two homes were already lost. However, we knew which other homes were scheduled for demolition and managed to reach the homes before the police sealed them off. They fired teargas when they saw us approaching, but that did not deter us.

The families were hysterical. The grandmother was wailing while the father of the family was clutching at his heart and others were begging us to do something. It was simply heartbreaking.

The [Israeli] police quickly arrived, but backed off — either because the families' lawyer was in court trying to get a stay or because they agreed to give the families time to get their belongings out of the houses. Friends and family set out to act as quickly as possible, even chipping away to remove the iron bars on the windows.

We received word that the lawyer had not been able to receive an injunction. I was determined to stay with the family in the home, hoping that would buy time for something to happen. However, the head of the local council had seen the violence which had taken place at the first two houses and persuaded the family to leave. He told me that adults were free to do what they wanted — after the children and elderly were safely out of the way.

We watched helplessly as the pneumatic drills tore into the final remaining home. To officer after officer I read off chapter and verse from various international conventions which Israel is a party to. Commanders ordered their people not to listen or take the paper.

I have to be careful in describing what happened next, as this may come to trial. The charge sheet against me claims that I ran in front of the bulldozers, interfering with the work of security forces and endangering myself.

I can say that I lost my kippah in the ensuing moments. There isn't much in the rubble of those houses, as the families succeeded in removing most of their belongings. It is not like some of the demolitions where we find children's toys, clothes and schoolbooks among the rubble. However, there is a kippah and I feel that it means something. Perhaps it symbolizes the trampling and burial of the Jewish values I grew up believing in.

Perhaps it means the opposite.

Perhaps it symbolizes the fact that there were Jews who stood against this injustice in the name of Torah.

From The Soft Vengeance of a Freedom Fighter

Albie Sachs (Albie Sachs is Justice of the Constitutional Court of South Africa; he was a long-time Jewish activist, lawyer, and leading member of the ANC.)

[South Africa's transition to a multiracial democracy] wasn't a miracle. It didn't just come to pass. Our transition had been the most willed, thought-about, planned-for event in the late twentieth century. I had once written that all revolutions were impossible until they happened, then they became inevitable. In our case, the movement from impossibility to inevitability seemed miraculous to many, particularly to those of little faith, who could only anticipate racial war and mutual ruin. That was the irony — the relationship between history and miracle had been reversed; for the total doubters, it had been a miracle, while for those of intense belief, it had been entirely rational. We believers knew that the transition had been the product of intensely thought-through planning and had been based on meetings and yet more meetings, endless, needless meetings, above-ground, underground, in prison, on Robben Island, in exile, meetings, some boring, some interesting, all with their "agendas" and "matters arising" and "any other business," meetings, meetings — I used to believe that freedom meant no more meetings, but still they continued, more and more meetings...we would have a classless society long before we achieved a meetingless one.

Did these things just happen, or did we make them come about? I knew that nothing we were living through had just come to pass. We had willed it all, worked for it, never given up, never let go of the basic ideas. Yes, we had believed — belief had been fundamental — but we had backed it up with endless hard work, and learned how to do things together, and to accommodate the fears and interests of others, and to survive the sarcasm and disbelief of those who regarded themselves as more knowledgeable than ourselves about what they called the real world, and we just kept going on until at last the impossible became first feasible and then real and finally inevitable.

(University of California Press, 2000, pp. 210-211)

GUIDED MEDITATION

(One person reads aloud.)

Think now about people who are allies, partners, and sources of inspiration in the work of realizing the vision of universal human rights. These may be people you know well or people you have only heard a little bit about. Perhaps think more specifically about one person who is a particular inspiration to you. Reflect for a moment on the yearning within that person for justice and well-being for all people. Commune with the soul of this person who inspires you and try to feel the texture of their particular strength, wisdom, and goodness.

The boundaries between one soul and another are porous. We are connected with each other, soul to soul, light to light. Feel that aspect of that inspiring soul which breathes within you. Take a moment in your thoughts to thank this person for being your teacher.

READINGS

If you should happen to be holding a sapling in your hand when they tell you that the Messiah has arrived, first plant the sapling and then go out and greet the Messiah. (AVOT D'RABBI NATAN)

OPENING THE DOOR

As the door is opened, participants are invited to call out names of their human rights heroes.

SONG

Eliyahu ha-navi. Eliyahu ha-tishbi.

Eliyahu Eliyahu Eliyahu ha-giladi.

Bimheirah b'yameinu yavo eileinu

Im mashiach ben David. Im mashiach ben David.

THE CUP OF WATER

(One person reads aloud.)

The defining moment of the Exodus from Mitzrayim was a passage through water to freedom. Water is the material substance which might be said to most resemble the divine. Water gives life, and water can take life as well.

Human beings are made of water. We are sustained by water. We cross into this life through the breaking of waters. We are laid to rest after we are washed and purified in the final ritual of water pouring over our body.

Water is a scarce resource on our planet. Wars are fought for water. Thirst will break us down.

Wisdom is compared to water and love is known as the great reservoir of living water. Water flows from the heaven and water surges out of the earth. Water unifies and heals; it sustains and destroys life.

Water wears away obstacles.

Jewish tradition celebrates water — the deep wells of our mothers and fathers and the great crossings of our people, at the Sea of Reeds and the Jordan River

Today, we seek the living waters of goodness and bravery to stand in the face of pain, open to the possibility of growing in our love of human rights, our commitment to human rights, our knowledge of human rights and our dedication to human rights.

“Let justice roll down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream!” (AMOS 5:24)

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-Olam

(Nevarekh et M'kor Hayyeinu)

Shehakol nihyeh bidvaro.

Blessed is the Source of Life by whose word all things come to be.

Barukh Atah Yah roka ha-aretz al ha-mayim.

Blessed is the Source of Life who founds the earth upon the waters.

(Drink water.)

KIDDUSH

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-Olam

(Nevarekh et M'kor Hayyeinu)

Borei pri ha-gafen.

(Drink wine.)

SONG

U-sh'avtem mayim b'sasson mi-maynei ha-yeshuah...

You shall draw water in joy from the wells of salvation!

Next year, may we live in a world that recognizes the inherent dignity and equal unalienable rights of all members of the human family.

Next year, may we live in a world closer to the ideals we hold of freedom, justice, and peace.

Next year, may we live in a world where human rights are more realized than declared!

SHEHECHEYANU

Barukh Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melekh Ha-Olam

(Nevarekh et M'kor Hayyeinu)

Shehecheyanu v'kimanu v'higiyanu lazman ha-zeh.

Blessed is the Source of Life, who has kept us and sustained us and brought us to this moment.



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Rabbi Margaret Holub is the rabbi of the Mendocino Coast Jewish Community and co-chair of “Honoring the Image of God: Stop Torture Now,” the anti-torture campaign of Rabbis for Human Rights-North America.

