

## Text sources

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- [5] Secular Seder Haggadah, DC/Baltimore Edition, 2023. Edited by Roger Curley and Maia Werbos. [https://tigrennatenn.neocities.org/rationalist\\_haggadot/DC\\_MD\\_2023\\_Haggadah.pdf](https://tigrennatenn.neocities.org/rationalist_haggadot/DC_MD_2023_Haggadah.pdf)
- [6] Rabbi Jeff Falick, Society for Humanistic Judaism.  
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## Rationalist Fusion Haggadah

Ilzolende

Nisan 5784 / April 2024

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## 0 Introduction

Welcome! We come together, a collection of those who are Jewish and Jewish, proximal to or in loving relationship with Jews, those who are Jews by choice or becoming-Jews. We come here across vast distances and representing many identities and experiences. It's perfect that we participate in a seder together, for the seder itself has brought Jews together across time and all the world. We, like all those many others, respect this tradition while we make it our own.[1]

The holiday of Passover is one of the most celebrated holidays in the Jewish calendar. Some believe that's because the holiday is primarily home-based and does not require membership or involvement in a synagogue or temple, although it can. The history of Passover, like most Jewish holidays, is multi-layered. It began with the celebration of spring, the rebirth of nature, and the birth of baby animals. The Exodus from Egypt was a later layer, which became the central and compelling story of the holiday. Although the story of the liberation of the Jews from Egypt is central in religious Judaism, remnants of the older nature holidays, both pastoral and agricultural, are easy to identify, such as the shank bone and the matzah.

Since the archaeological record is clear—there is no material evidence of the Exodus or corroborating documents of the story—Secular Humanistic Jews are left with the disturbing question: If the story isn't true, can we and do we want to continue celebrating the holiday? The themes of this holiday are universal. It is not difficult to identify with a story of liberation. There are many other reasons why we can and do continue celebrating Passover. Celebrating the holiday connects us to the Jewish people and our traditions. The theme of liberation and freedom is universal and timeless. Telling the entire story, both the myth and the history, only enriches our celebration of the creative imagination of our people at this time of year.[2]



### 0.1 Shehechyanu

We sing the Shehechyanu together outdoors to express our gratitude for being able to hold a seder this year.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, she'hecheyanu v'ki'manu v'higi-anu laz'man hazeh.*

Praised are You, Adonai our G-d, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season.

## 14 Nirtzah: Conclusion

In the tradition of the LessWrongers, we close with a variant of Chad Gadya, a cumulative song beginning with one baby goat.

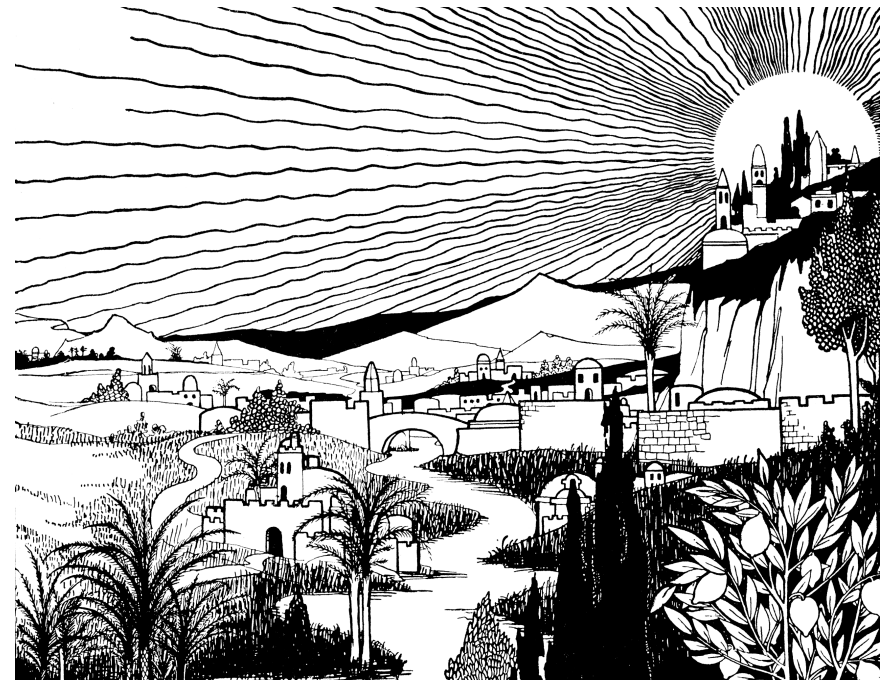
Chad Gadya, Chad Gadya  
Which my father brought for two zuzim.  
Then came the cat who ate the goat...  
Then came the dog who bit the cat...  
Then came the stick that beat the dog...  
Then came the fire that burned the stick...  
Then came the water that quenched the fire...  
Then came the ox who drank the water...  
Then came the butcher who killed the ox...  
Then came Death who slew the butcher...  
Then came the Scientist, who ended death...

And together we say: Alright, maybe not *quite* yet. But next year!

לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם!

*L'shanah haba'a b'Yerushalayim!*

Next year in Jerusalem!



## Dayenu

Traditionally, we sing “Dayenu”: it would have been enough.

Our sages asked: what do we mean by this? In some of the traditional pairings, one step without the next would have left us all dead! How can that be enough? And it was answered: celebrate each step toward freedom as if it were enough, then start out on the next step. If we reject each step because it is not the whole liberation, we will never achieve the whole liberation.

And yet, if we celebrate our past victories and become complacent, so too will we never achieve the whole liberation. And so we have come to sing “Lo Dayenu”: it would not have been enough.

And it has almost been said, “Keep two truths in your pocket, and take them out according to the moment. Let one be, ‘we have achieved great things’ and the other be ‘we have a terribly long way yet to go’.”

Determining which moment needs which truth is left to us.[4]

Had we crawled forth from the ocean,  
but not learned to speak with language, Lo Dayenu!

Had we learned to speak with language,  
but not mastered wheat and olives, Dayenu!

Had we mastered wheat and olives,  
but not raised ourselves stone cities, Lo Dayenu!

Had we raised ourselves stone cities,  
but not written tomes of wisdom, Dayenu!

Had we written tomes of wisdom,  
but not severed law from vengeance, Lo Dayenu!

Had we severed law from vengeance,  
but not crafted printing presses, Dayenu!

Had we crafted printing presses,  
but not named the rights of humans, Lo Dayenu!

Had we named the rights of humans,  
but not thought of mass production, Dayenu!

Had we thought of mass production,  
but not tamed and harnessed lightning, Lo Dayenu!

Had we tamed and harnessed lightning,  
but not taught it math and logic, Dayenu!

Should we teach light math and logic,  
but not banish death forever, Lo Dayenu!

## 0.2 Seder Plate

The seder plate holds the ritual items that are discussed during the seder.



**Zeroah** The roasted shankbone or beet commemorates the paschal (lamb) sacrifice made the night the ancient Jews fled Egypt. Some say it symbolizes the outstretched arm of God, as the word zeroah also means “arm”. Many vegetarians use a roasted beet instead. This has a connection to history: Pesachim 114b suggests beet as an important Pesach dish.

**Maror and Chazeret** Bitter herbs bring tears to the eyes and recall the bitterness of slavery. The Seder refers to the slavery in Egypt, but people are called to look at their own bitter enslavements.

**Charoset** There’s nothing further from maror than charoset, the sweet salad of apples, nuts, wine, and cinnamon that represents the mortar used by the Hebrew slaves to make bricks.

**Karpas** Karpas is a green vegetable, usually parsley. Karpas symbolizes the freshness of spring. Some families use potatoes or eggs for karpas, continuing a tradition from Eastern Europe where it was hard to find fresh green vegetables.

**Salt water** Salt water symbolizes the tears and sweat of enslavement, though paradoxically, it’s also a symbol for purity, springtime, and the sea.

**Orange** The orange is a symbol of the fruitfulness of inclusivity and liberation around sexuality and gender roles.

**Roasted egg** The roasted egg (baytsah) is a symbol in many different cultures, usually signifying springtime and renewal. Here it stands in place of one of the sacrificial offerings which was performed in the days of the Second Temple.[3]

## 0.3 Candlelighting

Ideally before sunset, light two candles.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha’olam, asher kid’shanu b’mitzvotav v’tzi’vanu l’hadlik ner shel (Shabbat v’shel) yom tov.*

Praised are you, Adonai our G-d, ruler of the universe, who has commanded us to light the (Shabbat and) holiday candles.

## 1 Kadesh: First cup



The first cup symbolizes the beginning not only of the service but of civilization itself.[4] Recite the following over a full cup of wine or other beverage:

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen.*

Praised are You, Adonai our G-d, ruler of the universe, who has created the fruit of the vine.

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, asher bachar banu mikol'am, v'rom'manu mikol-lashon, v'kid'shanu b'mitzvotav, vatiten-lanu Adonai Eloheinu b'ahavah moadim l'simchah, chagim uz'manim l'sason et-yom chag hamatzot hazeh. Z'man cheiruteinu, mikra kodesh, zeicher litziat mitzrayim. Ki vanu vacharta v'otanu kidashta mikol ha'amim umo'adei kod'shecha b'simchah uv'sason hinchaltanu. Baruch atah Adonai, m'kadeish Yisrael v'hazmanim.*

Praised are You, Adonai our G-d, ruler of the universe, Who has chosen us from among all people, and languages, and made us holy through Your mitzvot, giving us lovingly festivals for joy, and special times for celebration, this Passover, this sacred gathering to commemorate the Exodus from Egypt. You have chosen us, You have shared Your holiness with us among all other peoples. For with festive revelations of Your holiness, happiness and joy You have granted us joyfully the holidays. Praised are You Adonai, Who sanctifies Israel and the festivals.

## 2 Urchatz: Handwashing

Handwashing without a prayer.



We wash our hands. We wash away the concerns of the day. We wash away our lesser thoughts. And, most importantly, we wash away the grime and fomites on our hands. We use soap because soap was a marvelous invention, and we shouldn't let marvelous inventions go to waste.[4]

Praise to the domesticators of crops.

Praise to those who made it possible to gather ingredients from across the world.

Praise to the authors of recipes.

Praise to those who ensure we have peace and safety in which to enjoy this meal.

Praise to the farmers and the ranchers.

Praise to the maintainers of this building.

Praise to those who cooked this meal.[4]

## 13 Hallel: Praise and fourth cup

We offer specific praise for what others here have accomplished this past year.

At this time, it is traditional to speak of Elijah the prophet, who will come one day and usher in an age of peace and justice. Though according to some traditions, he will come when we have ushered in such an age, making his own role a little less clear. In any case, we hope for the age, and we hope for the prophet.[4]

Fill the Cup of Elijah and open the door, just in case he shows up.

### Fourth cup

The fourth cup is the cup of the future. The redemption is not yet complete. There are not so many outright slaves left in the world, but there are not none either. And there are few indeed who are able to live exactly as they wish. We continue to look to the day when all shall be free, and to even better days beyond.[4]

Recite the following Kiddush over a full cup of wine or other beverage:

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen.*

Praised are You, Adonai our G-d, ruler of the universe, who has created the fruit of the vine.

### Songs

This concludes the unmasked portion of the seder, so now it's time for singing. We begin by praising Elijah the Prophet in song.

*Eliyahu ha'navi*

*Eliyahu ha'tishbi*

*Eliyahu, Eliyahu*

*Eliyahu ha'giladi*

*Bim heira b'yameinu yavo eileinu*

*Im mashiah ben David*

*Im mashiah ben David.*

## 10 Shulchan Orech: Dinner



## 11 Tzafun: Dessert

If anyone knows where the *afikomen* is, now's the time to have it.

Traditionally, we would send the children to search for the *afikomen*, and the lucky finder would hold it hostage, as the seder cannot end without it! However, if we are all adults, we may skip this post-search negotiation.

The playfulness of finding the *afikomen* reminds us that we balance our solemn memories of slavery with a joyous celebration of freedom. As we eat the *afikomen*, our last taste of matzah for the evening, we are grateful for moments of silliness and happiness in our lives.[7]

## 12 Bareich: Third cup and blessings

The third cup symbolizes completion. We have worked hard and built a community, and now we have the opportunity to celebrate and give thanks together.[5]

Recite the following Kiddush over a full cup of wine or other beverage:

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri hagafen.*

Praised are You, Adonai our G-d, ruler of the universe, who has created the fruit of the vine.

### Blessings

By the labor, skill, and occasionally valor of many others, we have come to enjoy this meal tonight. Let us give thanks and praise. (After each line, we recite 'praise them' together.)

Praise to the founders of civilization.

## 3 Karpas: Green vegetable

Karpas, the green vegetable, is a symbol of spring and hope. Saltwater or acid symbolize the tears of the oppressed. Or they could symbolize the ancient ocean from which all life began, to combine with the fresh vegetables of the new year. Symbols are versatile like that. Why should karpas be touched by salt water? Because when times are good for us, we must remember the sorrow.[4]

Take a small amount of the karpas, dip it into salt-water, and recite the following:

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei p'ri ha'adamah.*

Praised are You, Adonai our G-d, ruler of the universe, who creates the fruit of the earth.

## 4 Yachatz: Breaking the matzah

Break the middle matzah. Reserve the larger half of the middle matzah in a napkin, bag, or Afikomen cover to hide for later. Lift the matzah tray and recite:

This is the bread of affliction, which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are in need, come and share the Pesach meal. This year, we are here. Next year, in the land of Israel. This year, we are slaves. Next year, we will be free.

## 5 Maggid: Storytelling and second cup

The story we are about to tell is very old. It was told orally for centuries, then written down, then retold more precisely for even more centuries. There are no surviving competing accounts, but some pieces still sound a bit implausible.

At first we believed the story. It was the only story. What else would we do?

Then we invented skepticism, guessed that it didn't happen, and cast it aside.

Then we invented anthropology, and picked the story up again to try to use it to understand the people who told it in the first place.

Then we invented memetics, and decided an even more interesting question might be why it keeps being retold, while most stories from that age are lost.

Who knows what we'll invent tomorrow?[4]



## 5.1 Four questions

*Mah nishtana ha'lailah ha'zeh mikol ha'leilot?*

Why is this night different from all other nights?

*She'b'chol ha'leilot anu ochlin chametz u'matzah. Ha'laylah ha'zeh kulo matzah.*

On all other nights, we eat either leavened or unleavened bread. Why on this night do we eat only matzah?

*Sheb'chol ha'leilot anu ochlin sh'ar y'rakot. Ha'lailah ha'zeh maror.*

On all other nights, we eat vegetables of all kinds. Why on this night must we eat bitter herbs?

*Sheb'chol ha'leilot ein anu matbilin afilu pa-am echat. Ha'lailah hazeh sh'tei p'amim.*

On all other nights, we do not dip vegetables even once. Why on this night do we dip greens into salt water and bitter herbs into sweet haroset?

*Sheb'chol ha'leilot anu ochlin bein yoshvin u'vein m'subin, ha'lailah hazeh kulanu m'subin.*

On all other nights, everyone sits up straight at the table. Why on this night do we recline and eat at leisure?

## 5.2 Four children

Before we answer these questions, we pause to consider the four children.

Four times the Torah bids us to tell our children about the Exodus from Egypt. From this we conclude that Jews can be kind of a nudge. We heard you the first time! Alternatively, we can conclude that there are four types of children. That sounds more interesting. Tradition identifies them:[4]

**The wise child** who wants to hear all the technical details, and should be rewarded with thorough explanations.

**The wicked child** who wants to rebel against the whole thing, and should be rewarded by letting them go off on their own.

**The simple child**, who wants to know what's going on, and should be given a simple answer.

**The child who does not know how to ask**, who should be *shown* things to kindle their curiosity about the world.

Freedom has to be *learned*. It can't be given from on high. Are we lecturing the people around us or are we respecting their agency? If we want a culture that encourages intellectual freedom, we have to think about how to nurture it.[5]

## 8 Maror: Bitter herb

According to Joshua Kulp's research, the original maror was likely lettuce or endive. Jews in cold regions lacked access to lettuce for Pesach, and substituted horseradish. However, while the closest analogue to the original maror may be romaine lettuce, extensive breeding has improved its taste. Thus, the bitter herb reminds us of our bitter past.

*Baruch ata Adonai Eloheynu melech ha'olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzi'vanu al achilat maror.*

Praised are You, Adonai our G-d, ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us through Your commandments and commanded us to eat maror.

Eat the bitter herb.



## 9 Koreich: Sandwich

When the Temple stood in Jerusalem, Hillel the Elder would eat his portion of the Pesach lamb in a sandwich with matzah and maror. We honor this custom by eating a sandwich of matzah and maror, including charoset to remind us of hope and sweetness even in bitter times.

Distribute pieces of the bottom matzah. Make and eat a matzah sandwich of maror and charoset.



## Tapuz: Orange

Ancient haggadot do not discuss oranges. The orange is a modern tradition.

Its origins lie in a fable that some university students invented for a feminist haggadah in the 1980s. It tells the story of a girl who asks a rabbi about the place in Judaism for a lesbian. The angry rabbi retorts, "There's as much room for a lesbian in Judaism as there is for a crust of bread on the seder plate."

When a prominent professor of Jewish studies came across the students' haggadah, it gave her an idea for a new ritual. Placing bread on her seder plate was out of the question. This, she believed, would suggest that people who were different violated Judaism. But maybe another symbol might do the trick. She selected the orange, noting that "it suggests the fruitfulness for all Jews when lesbians and gay men are contributing and active members of Jewish life."

Today, thousands of Jews around the world place an orange on their seder plate. It serves as a proud statement of inclusivity.[6]

## 6 Rachtzah: Ritual handwashing

We've already discussed the reasons for handwashing. We now wash our hands with a blessing, to express gratitude for this tradition.



*Baruch ata Adonai Eloheynu melech ha'olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzi'vanu al ne'tilat yadaim.*

Praised are You, Adonai our G-d, ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us through Your commandments and commanded us to wash our hands.

## 7 Motzi-Matzah: Blessing the unleavened bread

Lift the three matzahs on the matzah plate.

Praise to the growers of cereal crops, and the millers of flour, and the transportation network that brings foodstuffs together and then to our door, and the cooks and scientists and engineers who work to make broader ranges of food accessible to those with dietary restrictions.[4]

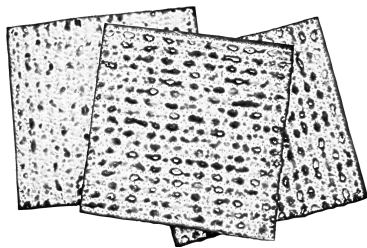
*Baruch ata Adonai Eloheynu melech ha'olam ha'motzi lechem min ha'aretz.*

Praised are You, Adonai our G-d, ruler of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

*Baruch ata Adonai Eloheynu melech ha'olam asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzi'vanu al achilat matzah.*

Praised are You, Adonai our G-d, ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us through Your commandments and commanded us to eat matzah.

Distribute pieces of the top and middle matzahs for everyone to eat.



## 5.3 Exodus story

Once we were slaves in Egypt, but now we are free.

This story probably didn't happen, but it's the story we have.

Our forefather Joseph arrived in Egypt. After much difficulty, he rose in prominence there by his wisdom, eventually becoming the king's chief counselor. So when there was famine in our homeland, we all went down into Egypt, and were accepted there for Joseph's sake.

But time passed. Joseph grew old and died, and eventually a new king arose over Egypt who did not remember Joseph. And he said to his people, "Look, these people are flourishing and growing strong. Let us, then, deal shrewdly with them, lest they become more powerful, and in the event of war, join our enemies in fighting against us and gain control over the region."

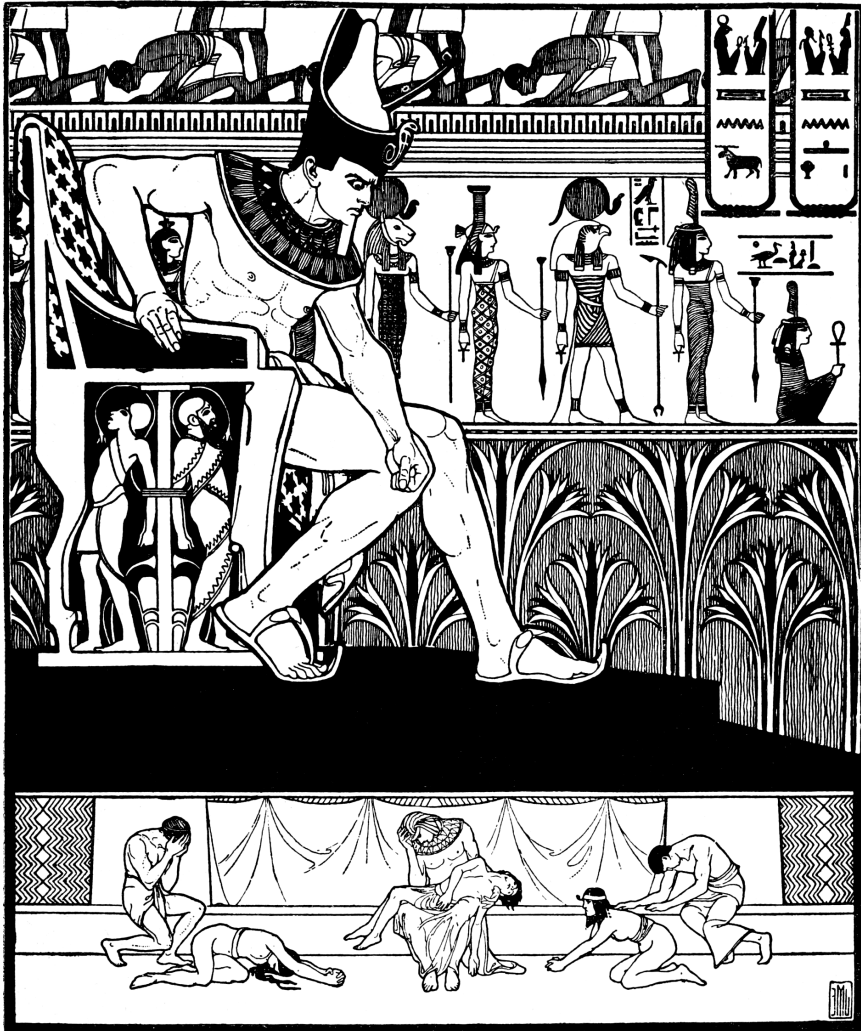


So they set taskmasters over us with forced labor and made us build garrison cities for Pharaoh. The Egyptians embittered our lives with harsh labor using mortar and brick and with all sorts of work in the fields. But the more we were oppressed, the more we increased and spread out, so that the Egyptians came to despise and dread us. Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, "Every boy that is born shall be thrown in the Nile, but let every girl live."

But we were not helpless, for our ancestors had made a covenant with a powerful deity. We cried out to the God of our ancestors, who heeded our plight. And Our God said, "I will go through the land of Egypt, and I will mete out justice against all the gods of Egypt."

Many perished and the suffering was great. Pharaoh, nonetheless, remained obstinate; he would not yield. Finally when Our God visited the tenth plague upon them, the death of first-born sons of Egyptians, a great cry went up throughout Egypt, and Pharaoh allowed our people out of the land.

Even then he did not relent, sending his army against us to slay us in the wilderness. But when they chased us to the sea, Our God opened the sea for us and permitted us to cross on dry land. When the army followed, He closed the sea again, drowning them. And so we were safe.[4]



## 5.4 Ten plagues

Our sages taught: When the Egyptian armies were drowning in the sea, the Heavenly Hosts broke out in songs of jubilation. God silenced them and said, “My creatures are perishing, and you sing praises?” At the same time, our ancestors broke out in similar songs, and were not silenced. From this we learn the difference between what is perfectly right and what is reasonable to expect.

But what of the plagues themselves? And of the drowning soldiers? How can it be right to cause such suffering to a populace for the actions of an unelected ruler? Or if it is not right, what is it doing in this story? Some have said that the Egyptian people did elect the pharaoh. Not in any formal election, of course,

but they still granted him the power of his office. Pharaoh was neither a wizard nor a giant – he held power only because the populace granted him legitimacy.

Some have said that the suffering was necessary. That by doing horrors of a magnitude that would be remembered for millennia, God avoided needing to do horrors over and over again later. Or because inflicting horrors on pharaoh alone would only have resulted in his being replaced by a similarly minded pharaoh, and only by targeting the country could a difference be made. These limitations suggest a rather weaker God than in previous chapters, but sometimes a good story will sacrifice consistent worldbuilding for the sake of applicability.

And some have said that there is no justification. That the real lesson is how arbitrarily awful evils can be fully concealed by a social setting in which no one is expected to point them out and it feels awkward and out-of-place to do so.

We remind ourselves to refrain from expressing joy at the suffering of our enemies by removing a drop of wine from our cup for each plague.[4]

*Dam, tsfardeyah, kinim, arov, dever, sh’chin, barad, arbeh, choszech, makat bechorot.*  
Blood, frogs, lice, beasts, cattle disease, boils, hail, darkness, death.

## 5.5 Pesach, Matzah, Maror

Rabban Gamliel taught that whoever does not explain these three things has not fulfilled their duty.

The *zeroah*, a shankbone or beet, represents the lamb sacrifice made in the days of the Temple for Passover. This sacrifice was called the *pesach*, meaning “to pass over”, because God passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt when visiting plagues upon our oppressors.

The matzah reminds us that when our ancestors were finally free to leave Egypt, there was no time to pack or prepare. Our ancestors grabbed whatever dough was made and set out on their journey, letting their dough bake into matzah as they fled.

The maror provides a visceral reminder of the bitterness of slavery, the life of hard labor our ancestors experienced in Egypt.[7]

## Second cup

The second cup symbolizes human progress and achievement.[4] Recite the following over a full cup of wine or other beverage:

*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha’olam, borei p’ri hagafen.*

Praised are You, Adonai our G-d, ruler of the universe, who has created the fruit of the vine.