

RABBIS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS – NORTH AMERICA

PESACH SEDER SUPPLEMENT

NEXT YEAR MAY WE BE FREE

North America

Passover is z'man cherutainu, the time of our freedom. At this time when we remember the Jewish people's transition from slavery to freedom, it is critical to reflect on those around the world who are not yet free from oppression, torture, and war. RHR-NA has prepared the following discussion text and commentary for use at your Seder. It can be adapted to fit your preferences, and it can be used anywhere in the Seder.

And if the Holy One, Blessed be God, had not taken us out of Egypt, we and our children and our children's children would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. (The Passover Haggadah)

Each Passover, we gather with our families, friends, and communities to celebrate our freedom. As a people born out of slavery, we share a bond with those who continue to be slaves, with those who do not have enough to eat, and with those whose basic rights as human beings are denied. Free as we are, we are not free to ignore them. We understand that action is the obligation of those who are free. We say “let all who are hungry come and eat.” To be a slave is to have one's humanity ignored. By remembering that time in our own history, we take the first step toward committing ourselves to action on behalf of those who still need to be redeemed.

Human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights... Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person . . . No one shall be held in slavery or servitude . . . No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment . . . Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law. (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6)

We live in a world in which the word “freedom” is abused. Freedom has come to mean the right to do what we want, whenever we want, to whomever we want, whether as individuals or as a nation. To protect our freedom, we allow our government to torture detainees, to justify waterboarding, and to erode our civil liberties. This is not freedom. This is slavery. We have become slaves to a view of the world that places us, rather than God, at the center.

This year we are slaves, next year may we be free people. (The Passover Haggadah)

This year we can commit to ensuring human rights for all. We can call our elected officials and ask them to stop torturing others in our name. We can raise our voices so that those who authorized torture are brought to justice. We commit ourselves to the core value of *K'vod Habriot*, the dignity of every person, so that next year, at Passover, even more people will be free.

In every generation, a person is obligated to see his or herself as though he or she had personally been redeemed from Egypt. (The Passover Haggadah)

For every step that God takes during the Exodus, we say “*Dayenu!* It is enough for us! Redeem us from Egypt? *Dayenu!* Part the Red Sea? *Dayenu!*” But for us here today, “*Dayenu!*” is a question. Have we done enough to bring human rights to all? Are we blind to the image of God in every person? *Dayenu?* This is our challenge. This is our obligation as free people. It is because of what God did for us when we went free from Egypt.

You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt. (Exodus 23:9)

“You were strangers in the land of Egypt” reminds us that we have experienced the great suffering that one in a foreign land feels. By remembering the pain that we ourselves have undergone, from which God, in God's mercy, delivered us, our compassion will be stirred up towards every person in this plight. (Sefer Ha-Hinukh 431)

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Kavannah (Intention)

Invite people at your table to think of an action they will do to protect the human rights for all.

[Read Aloud]

We are hereby ready to fulfill our obligation of *K'vod Habriot*, respect for the dignity of every human being. We pray that our fellow citizens shall not be the source of suffering in others. We commit ourselves to raise our voices in support of universal human rights, to know the heart of the stranger, and to feel compassion for those whose humanity is denied. May our compassion lead us to fight for justice.

Blessed is the Source of Life, who redeemed our ancestors from Egypt and brought us together this night of Passover to tell the story of freedom. May God bring us security and peace, enabling us to celebrate together year after year. Praised are you, Source of Righteousness, who redeems the world and loves justice and freedom.

Four Questions

How much freedom would you be willing to give up to ensure your own security or that of your family?

Pharaoh justified the enslavement of the Israelites partly because of the fear that they would join with Egypt's enemies in some way. Should the United States be allowed to curtail the freedom of its citizens in order to achieve security?

The Torah commands us to feel compassion for the stranger. What concrete actions should come out of this compassion?

What is your personal "*Dayenu*" question for the year? How can you challenge yourself to do more for human rights?

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Please Support Our Work!

The work of Rabbis for Human Rights is sustained by the generous support of thousands of individuals in the United States. This Passover please consider making a contribution to support our efforts. We are committed to providing the necessary support for the sacred work of our colleagues in Israel. The decline in the value of the dollar means that we have to raise more money just to provide the same support as we did last year.

Please send your contribution to: Rabbis for Human Rights – North America, P.O. Box 1539, West Tisbury, MA, 02575

All general contributions support the work of our colleagues in Israel. If you wish to make an additional donation to support our North American program, please indicate this clearly on your check.

You may also make a contribution online at www.rhr-na.org.

Thanks so much for your support and for your commitment to uphold the human rights of all.

We invite you to participate in our work:

- If you would like to join *K'vod Habriot: A Jewish Human Rights Network*, please visit our website, www.rhr-na.org, or email RHR-NA at office@rhr-na.org.
- If you would like more information about the Second North American Conference on Judaism and Human Rights, *Masekhet Ha'Atzmaut* or on the solidarity mission to Israel, please email RHR-NA at office@rhr-na.org.

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Israel

In just a few weeks, Israel will celebrate its 60th birthday. In honor of this important event, we invite you to read two short sections from the Israeli Declaration of Independence at your Seder. There are four questions for discussion following each text. We encourage you to include in your discussion the question of how we can help Israel fulfill the vision in the Declaration of a State that is based on “freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the Prophets of Israel.”

Text #1: Our Connection to the Land of Israel

The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.

After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom.

Impelled by this historic and traditional attachment, Jews strove in every successive generation to re-establish themselves in their ancient homeland. In recent decades they returned in their masses. Pioneers, defiant returnees, and defenders, they made deserts bloom, revived the Hebrew language, built villages and towns, and created a thriving community controlling its own economy and culture, loving peace but knowing how to defend itself, bringing the blessings of progress to all the country's inhabitants, and aspiring towards independent nationhood. (Israel's Declaration of Independence)

Four Questions

What has Israel meant to you in your life?

What connects you to Israel?

What are your memories of important moments in the history of Israel?

Imagine Israel sixty years from now. What do you envision?

Text #2: Justice, Peace and Freedom as Envisaged by the Prophets of Israel

THE STATE OF ISRAEL will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. (Israel's Declaration of Independence)

The Jewish State will be based on full equal rights for all its residents—irrespective of religion and race in the political, civic, religious and national spheres, with no hegemony and no subservience. Every community will enjoy full autonomy in the management of its religious, educational, cultural and social institutions. The Arabic language and schools will enjoy all governmental rights. Independent municipalities will be established in every city and village. The State will seek to equalize the standard of living of every resident of the land of Israel. (David Ben-Gurion, 13 March, 1945)

Four Questions

Is the vision of Israel as a democratic state and a Jewish state ultimately reconcilable?

Can there be equality in some areas and not in others?

How do the text of the Declaration and Ben Gurion's statement mesh or clash with your vision of Israel?

What are some ways in which Israel can resolve the tensions between being a democratic state and a Jewish state?

This short excerpt for use at the Passover Seder is based on *Masekhet Ha'Atzmaut, a Talmudic Style Commentary on Israel's Declaration of Independence* developed by RHR (see article on page 3). Rabbis in North America and in Israel will be studying some English sections from the Masekhet between Passover and Shavuot. If you would like a complete copy of the material, please send an email to office@rhr-na.org.