

Mah Nokhal BaSe'udah HaZo? | מה־נאכל בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת?

“What Will We Eat At This Meal?”

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| What will we eat at this meal? | MAH no-KHAL ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO? | מה־נאכל בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת? שׁוֹר הַבָּר וְלִוְיָתָן! |
| The Primeval Ox and the Leviathan! | SHOR ha-BAR velivya-TAN! SHOR ha-BAR velivya-TAN | שׁוֹר הַבָּר וְלִוְיָתָן אָכַל |
| We will eat the Primeval Ox and the Leviathan— | a-KHOL no-KHAL— Ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO! | נֹאכַל— בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת! |
| All at this meal! | | |
| What will we drink at this meal? | MAH nish-TEH ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO? | מה־נִשְׁתֶּה בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת? יַיִן הַמְּשֻׁמֵּר! |
| The Preserved Wine! | YA-yin hamshu-MAR! | יַיִן הַמְּשֻׁמֵּר שְׁתֵּה נִשְׁתֶּה; |
| We will drink the Preserved Wine; | YA-yin hamshu-MAR sha-TOH nish-TEH; | שׁוֹר הַבָּר וְלִוְיָתָן אָכַל |
| We will eat the Primeval Ox and the Leviathan— | SHOR ha-BAR velivya-TAN a-KHOL no-KHAL— Ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO! | נֹאכַל— בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת! |
| All at this meal! | | |
| Who will tell us words of Torah at this meal? | MI ya-GID LA-nu div-REY to-RAH ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO? | מִי יַגִּיד לָנוּ דְבָרֵי תּוֹרָה בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת? |
| Moses our master! | Mo-SHEH ra-BE-nu! | מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ! |
| Moses our master will tell us words of Torah; | Mo-SHEH ra-BE-nu ya-GID LA-nu to-RAH; | מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ יַגִּיד לָנוּ דְבָרֵי תּוֹרָה; |
| We will drink the Preserved Wine; | YA-yin hamshu-MAR sha-TOH nish-TEH; | יַיִן הַמְּשֻׁמֵּר שְׁתֵּה נִשְׁתֶּה; |
| We will eat the Primeval Ox and the Leviathan— | SHOR ha-BAR velivya-TAN a-KHOL no-KHAL— Ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO! | שׁוֹר הַבָּר וְלִוְיָתָן אָכַל נֹאכַל— בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת! |
| All at this meal! | | |

“What are we going to eat for dinner?”

Even for those of us who eat meat, it might surprise us to be served a mythical creature. But, that's exactly what happens at the Passover *seder*, according to this old poem “Mah Nokhal BaSe'udah HaZo?” (מה־נאכל בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת?) “What Will We Eat At This Meal?”).

We do not know who wrote this Hebrew ditty, but it has been sung for several centuries by the Jews of Libya, Djerba and Afghanistan. With a list like that, this might not sound like an Ashkenazic tradition. Yet, a Yiddish version of this song exists!

Just as the *seder* night is full of questions, this song is a whole slew of questions, but with some unexpected answers.

The main dishes are the Primeval Ox and the Leviathan—the former ruling the land creatures, and the latter the most powerful of all sea creatures. Sometimes called *Behemah* (בְּהֵמָה, “Beast”) or *Behemot* (בְּהֵמוֹת, “Beasts”), the Primeval Ox appears alongside Leviathan in the Hebrew Bible. Although the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch did not make it into the Hebrew Bible, this Jewish book tells a tradition that later rabbis will tell: that, in the future, God will make a feast where these two terrors of the Earth will be eaten by the

1. From *An Invitation To Piyut*, <http://www.piyut.org.il/textual/693.html> (accessed April 11 2014).

מה נאכל בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת? | Mah Nokhal BaSe'udah HaZo?

“What Will We Eat At This Meal?”

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| Who will tell us words of wisdom at this meal? King Solomon! King Solomon will tell us words of wisdom; Moses our master will tell us words of Torah; We will drink the Preserved Wine; We will eat the Primeval Ox and the Leviathan— All at this meal! | MI ya-GID LA-nu hokh-MAH ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO? Sheh-lo-MOH ha-MEH-lekh! Sheh-lo-MOH ha-MEH-lekh ya-GID LA-nu hokh-MAH; Mo-SHEH ra-BE-nu ya-GID LA-nu to-RAH; YA-yin hamshu-MAR sha-TOH nish-TEH; SHOR ha-BAR velivya-TAN a-KHOL no-KHAL— Ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO! MI yena-GEN LA-nu ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO? Da-VID ha-MEH-lekh! Da-VID ha-MEH-lekh yena-GEN LA-nu; Sheh-lo-MOH ha-MEH-lekh ya-GID LA-nu hokh-MAH; Mo-SHEH ra-BE-nu ya-GID LA-nu to-RAH; YA-yin hamshu-MAR sha-TOH nish-TEH; SHOR ha-BAR velivya-TAN a-KHOL no-KHAL— Ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO! | מִי יַגִּיד לָנוּ חֻכְמָה בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת? שְׁלֹמֹה הַמֶּלֶךְ! שְׁלֹמֹה הַמֶּלֶךְ יַגִּיד לָנוּ חֻכְמָה; מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ יַגִּיד לָנוּ דְבָרֵי תוֹרָה; יַיִן הַמְּשֻׁמֵּר שְׁתַּה נִּשְׁתֶּה; שׂוֹר הַבָּר וְלֵוִיָּתָן אָכַל— נֹאכַל— בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת! אָכַל נֹאכַל— בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת! מִי יִנְגַן לָנוּ בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת? דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ! דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ יִנְגַן לָנוּ; שְׁלֹמֹה הַמֶּלֶךְ יַגִּיד לָנוּ חֻכְמָה; מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ יַגִּיד לָנוּ דְבָרֵי תוֹרָה; יַיִן הַמְּשֻׁמֵּר שְׁתַּה נִּשְׁתֶּה; שׂוֹר הַבָּר וְלֵוִיָּתָן אָכַל— נֹאכַל— בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת! |
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righteous remnant (29:4). Later rabbinic traditions carry forward this idea very clearly, and our song here tells us that this night is different from all other nights: for, tonight, we're eating the food of the future!

But while we eat the food of days to come, we drink from the wine of history. The “Preserved Wine” on our table tonight dates back to the Six Days of Creation (a tradition taught in the Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 34b). We eat in the future, but we drink the past.

Like our meal tonight, the *Torah* transcends time. And if we were hoping for somebody to teach a little *torah* tonight, we will have the man who first brought *torah* to us bringing it down again. Moses our master comes back to life tonight at our very table!

A religious man was Moses, but was he wise? Bring in the wisest man the Jews have ever known: King Solomon. If it weren't for him, our tradition wouldn't know to whom to attribute the Books of Proverbs, Song of Songs, or Ecclesiastes. Modern bible scholars may disagree today, but our tradition points to King Solomon as the author of “the Wisdom literature” of our Bible.

But enough of the brains and the smarts. Tonight is a night of entertainment! King David will play his lute, Miriam the Prophet will dance, and Deborah will sing. And who said vaudeville was dead?

Mah Nokhal BaSe'udah HaZo? | מה נאכל בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת?

“What Will We Eat At This Meal?”

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| Who will emerge dancing for us at this meal? | MI te-TZE bema-HOL LA-nu ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO? | מי תִצֵּא בַּמְחוּל לָנוּ בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת? |
| Miriam the Prophet! | Mir-YAM hanevi-AH! | מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה! |
| Miriam the Prophet will emerge dancing for us; | Mir-YAM hanevi-AH tetze bema-HOL LA-nu; | מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה תִצֵּא בַּמְחוּל לָנוּ; |
| King David will play music for us; | Da-VID ha-MEH-lekh yena-GEN LA-nu; | דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ יִנְגֵן לָנוּ; |
| King Solomon will tell us words of wisdom; | Sheh-lo-MOH ha-MEH-lekh ya-GID LA-nu hokh-MAH; | שְׁלֹמֹה הַמֶּלֶךְ יַגִּיד לָנוּ חֻכְמָה; |
| Moses our master will tell us words of Torah; | Mo-SHEH ra-BE-nu ya-GID LA-nu to-RAH; | מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ יַגִּיד לָנוּ דְבָרֵי תוֹרָה; |
| We will drink the Preserved Wine; | YA-yin hamshu-MAR sha-TOH nish-TEH; | יַיִן הַמְּשֻׁמֵּר שְׁתַּה נִשְׁתָּה; |
| We will eat the Primeval Ox and the Leviathan— | SHOR ha-BAR velivya-TAN a-KHOL no-KHAL— | שׂוֹר הַבָּר וְלִוְיָתָן אָכַל— |
| All at this meal! | Ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO! | בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת! |

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| Who will sing for us at this meal? | MI ta-SHIR LA-nu ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO? | מי תִשִּׁיר לָנוּ בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת? |
| Deborah the Prophet! | Devo-RAH hanevi-AH! | דְּבוֹרָה הַנְּבִיאָה! |
| Deborah the Prophet will sing for us; | Devo-RAH hanevi-AH ta-SHIR LA-nu; | דְּבוֹרָה הַנְּבִיאָה תִשִּׁיר לָנוּ; |
| Miriam the Prophet will emerge dancing for us; | Mir-YAM hanevi-AH tetze bema-HOL LA-nu; | מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה תִצֵּא בַּמְחוּל לָנוּ; |
| King David will play music for us; | Da-VID ha-MEH-lekh yena-GEN LA-nu; | דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ יִנְגֵן לָנוּ; |
| King Solomon will tell us words of wisdom; | Sheh-lo-MOH ha-MEH-lekh ya-GID LA-nu hokh-MAH; | שְׁלֹמֹה הַמֶּלֶךְ יַגִּיד לָנוּ חֻכְמָה; |
| Moses our master will tell us words of Torah; | Mo-SHEH ra-BE-nu ya-GID LA-nu to-RAH; | מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ יַגִּיד לָנוּ דְבָרֵי תוֹרָה; |
| We will drink the Preserved Wine; | YA-yin hamshu-MAR sha-TOH nish-TEH; | יַיִן הַמְּשֻׁמֵּר שְׁתַּה נִשְׁתָּה; |
| We will eat the Primeval Ox and the Leviathan— | SHOR ha-BAR velivya-TAN a-KHOL no-KHAL— | שׂוֹר הַבָּר וְלִוְיָתָן אָכַל— |
| All at this meal! | Ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO! | בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת! |

Yet, tonight isn't just a show. Good as this gathering may be already, there is good news yet to come. And we have a very special guest who comes bearing “good news” for us. Elijah the Prophet, for whom we always open our doors, is finally showing up tonight! Let's listen carefully because the rumor is the “good news” he has might have something to do with the messiah.

But, news, schmewz... What good is a life without blessings? We should always end an evening with a blessing. We will soon be blessed by the blesser of all blessers: the original High Priest, Aaron himself.

Tonight, we eat the future; we drink the past; Moses and Solomon bring the wits; Deborah, Miriam and King David provide entertainment of Biblical proportions; Elijah the Prophet is the news anchor; and

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“What Will We Eat At This Meal?”

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| Who will bring us good news at this meal? | MI yeva-SER LA-nu beso-RAH to-VAH | מי יבשר לנו בַּסְעוּדָה טוֹבָה בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת? |
| Elijah the Prophet! | ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO? | אֵלִיָּהוּ הַנְּבִיא! |
| Elijah the Prophet will bring us good news; | Eli-YA-hu hana-VI! | אֵלִיָּהוּ הַנְּבִיא יְבַשֵּׁר לָנוּ |
| Deborah the Prophet will sing for us; | Eli-YA-hu hana-VI yeva-SER LA-nu beso-RAH to-VAH; | בַּסְעוּדָה טוֹבָה; |
| Miriam the Prophet will emerge dancing for us; | Devo-RAH hanevi-AH ta-SHIR LA-nu; | דְּבוֹרָה הַנְּבִיאָה תֵּשִׁיר לָנוּ; |
| King David will play music for us; | Mir-YAM hanevi-AH tetze bema-HOL LA-nu; | מְרִיָּם הַנְּבִיאָה תִצֵּא בְּמַחֹל לָנוּ; |
| King Solomon will tell us words of wisdom; | Da-VID ha-MEH-lekh yena-GEN LA-nu; | דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ יִנְגֵן לָנוּ; |
| Moses our master will tell us words of Torah; | Sheh-lo-MOH ha-MEH-lekh ya-GID LA-nu hokh-MAH; | שְׁלֹמֹה הַמֶּלֶךְ יַגִּיד לָנוּ חֻקֵּי מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ יַגִּיד לָנוּ דְּבָרֵי תּוֹרָה; |
| We will drink the Preserved Wine; | Mo-SHEH ra-BE-nu ya-GID LA-nu to-RAH; | יֵין הַמְּשֻׁמֵּר שְׁתֵּה נִשְׁתֵּה; |
| We will eat the Primeval Ox and the Leviathan— | YA-yin hamshu-MAR sha-TOH nish-TEH; | שׁוֹר הַבָּר יִלְוִיָּתָן אָכַל נֹאכַל— |
| All at this meal! | SHOR ha-BAR velivya-TAN a-KHOL no-KHAL— Ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO! | בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת! |

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| Who will bless us at this meal? | MI yeva-REKH o-TA-nu ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO? | מי יְבָרֵךְ אֹתָנוּ בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת? אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן? |
| Aaron the Priest! | Aha-RON hako-HEN! | אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן יְבָרֵךְ אֹתָנוּ; |
| Aaron the Priest will bless us; | Aha-RON hako-HEN | אֵלִיָּהוּ הַנְּבִיא יְבַשֵּׁר לָנוּ |
| Elijah the Prophet will bring us good news; | yeva-REKH o-TA-nu; | בַּסְעוּדָה טוֹבָה; |
| Deborah the Prophet will sing for us; | Eli-YA-hu hana-VI yeva-SER LA-nu beso-RAH to-VAH; | דְּבוֹרָה הַנְּבִיאָה תֵּשִׁיר לָנוּ; |
| Miriam the Prophet will emerge dancing for us; | Devo-RAH hanevi-AH ta-SHIR LA-nu; | מְרִיָּם הַנְּבִיאָה תִצֵּא בְּמַחֹל לָנוּ; |
| King David will play music for us; | Mir-YAM hanevi-AH tetze bema-HOL LA-nu; | דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ יִנְגֵן לָנוּ; |
| King Solomon will tell us words of wisdom; | Da-VID ha-MEH-lekh yena-GEN LA-nu; | שְׁלֹמֹה הַמֶּלֶךְ יַגִּיד לָנוּ חֻקֵּי מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ יַגִּיד לָנוּ דְּבָרֵי תּוֹרָה; |
| Moses our master will tell us words of Torah; | Sheh-lo-MOH ha-MEH-lekh ya-GID LA-nu hokh-MAH; | יֵין הַמְּשֻׁמֵּר שְׁתֵּה נִשְׁתֵּה; |
| We will drink the Preserved Wine; | Mo-SHEH ra-BE-nu ya-GID LA-nu to-RAH; | שׁוֹר הַבָּר יִלְוִיָּתָן אָכַל נֹאכַל— |
| We will eat the Primeval Ox and the Leviathan— | YA-yin hamshu-MAR sha-TOH nish-TEH; | בַּסְעוּדָה הַזֹּאת! |
| All at this meal! | SHOR ha-BAR velivya-TAN a-KHOL no-KHAL— Ba-se'u-DAH ha-ZO! | |

we're each getting blessed by the first man to see the Holy of Holies, Aaron the High Priest.

Now, how's that for a meal?