

Bread for the Journey
Sunday, April 2, 2023
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists
Summerfield, FL
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lake County
Eustis, FL
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A Passover joke: A Jewish Brit is waiting in line to be knighted by the Queen. He is to kneel in front of her and recite a sentence in Latin when she taps him on the shoulders with her sword. However, when his turn comes, he panics in the excitement of the moment and forgets the Latin. Then, thinking fast, he recites the only other sentence he knows in a language other than English, which he remembers from the Passover Seder:

"Ma nishtana ha layla ha zeh mi kol ha laylot."

Puzzled, Her Majesty turns to her advisor and whispers, "Why is this knight different from all other knights?"

If you understood my mangled Hebrew you know what the British Jewish knight said was the introduction to the four questions asked by the youngest child at the Passover seder. Why is this night different from all other nights?

1. On all other nights we eat either bread or matsah. Why, on this night, do we eat only matsah?
2. On all other nights we eat herbs of any kind. Why, on this night, do we eat only bitter herbs?
3. On all other nights, we do not dip our herbs even once. Why, on this night, do we dip them twice?
4. On all other nights, we eat either sitting or leaning. Why, on this night, do we eat while leaning?

Different haggadahs or Passover ritual services will word the answers differently. These answers are from A Humanist Modern Version of Haggadah by Eszter Hargittai,

"1. MATZAH:

Matzah is the symbol of our affliction and our freedom. Legend has it that when Moses and his followers fled Egypt, they moved so quickly that the bread they baked did not have time to rise. However, scholars have noted that long before the Jews celebrated Passover, farmers of the Middle East celebrated Khag Ha-matsot, the festival of unleavened bread, at this time of year. This was a festival where unleavened bread was made from the new grain harvest that took place at this time of the year. The old fermented dough was thrown out so that last year's grain would not be mixed with this year's. Therefore, the new season began with the eating of unleavened bread--matsah. Later on, the Jewish people incorporated this agricultural festival into the celebration of freedom and renewal we now call Passover. Let us all eat a piece of matzah.

"2. BITTER HERBS

Tradition says that this root is to remind us of the time of our slavery. We force ourselves to taste pain so that we may more readily value pleasure. Scholars inform us that bitter herbs were eaten at the Spring

festival in ancient times. The sharpness of the taste awakened the senses and made the people feel at one with nature's revival. Thus, the horseradish is the stimulus of life, reminding us that struggle is better than the complacent acceptance of injustice. Let us all eat bitter herbs.

"3. DIPPING

The first time, the salty taste reminds us of the tears we cried when we were slaves. The second time, the salt water and the green help us to remember the ocean and green plants and the Earth, from which we get air and water and food that enable us to live. Let us all dip the parsley in salt water twice.

"4. RECLINING

This question goes back to ancient times in Rome, when it was the custom for rich people to eat while lying on a couch leaning on one elbow as slaves and servants fed them. The Jewish people thought of this relaxed type of eating as a sign of freedom and prosperity, so they would lean to one side eating at the Seder on Passover, the festival of freedom. Today, we ... are free eat while sitting up, even at Passover, but the question remains in the service as a reminder of how it was when our people longed for freedom." [4 questions & answers | Passover haggadah by Alida Liberman \(haggadot.com\)](#).

Passover begins this Wednesday at sunset and lasts till sunset on Thursday, April 13. When the Hebrews left Egypt, they prepared for the short term by making bread quickly enough that they did not even have time to let it rise. They couldn't exactly make bread and keep it against the day when they had the chance to go. But they knew that day was coming. They prepared for that day ahead of time in ways that they could. In Exodus chapter 3 it is written, "Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians." Depending on your point of view you could say it was plunder or you could say it was reparations for time spent in servitude.

(UUCLC ONLY) Today is this congregation's annual meeting and the start of the pledge drive for your fiscal year that begins in July. Taking a cue from the Exodus story it is important to think both of immediate needs and long-term ones. In the midst of the COVID pandemic illustrator, textile designer and writer Micaela Ezra wrote, "This Pesach the spiritual concept of AYIN—'nothingness'—has been popping up a lot in things I am listening to and reading. When the Israelites left Egypt, their destination was unknown. They had no map, no guideline for what lay ahead, no idea how long it would take them, how they would sustain themselves. They entered a desert and the realm of AYIN, which required complete surrender, trust and faith on their part. Globally, we've entered our own version of this AYIN—as all the structures, plans and calendars we've come to depend on are suspended, we enter new territory without any promise as to its length or form. But we have a belief and a tradition which teaches us that out of the AYIN the most beautiful and surprising manifestations can arise. That the empty spaces are potent grounds for rebirth and discovery. I hope this Pesach brings us closer to that." Vaccines were developed and we got them. You could say that was our matzah, what got us out of Egypt. But now comes the journey through the wilderness. How do we come back as a congregation from years of being only online? That is going to take a commitment of time, talent and treasure. Think about what you can offer as you participate in the annual meeting and consider your next year's pledge.

To escape Egypt, to cross the wilderness, to enter the Promised Land the Hebrews needed bread, literal bread and dough or bread in the sense of things that could be exchanged for other needs. For them it was gold, silver and clothes. For us it is money.

Short term needs and long-term needs needed to be considered. There would be various phases of this journey.

On the required reading list for the first of the required training classes for interim ministry, “Transition Ministry: The Work of the Leader” was a book by William Bridges, Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change. It is a book for business management, but one of the references throughout is to Moses. Bridges says there are three phases of transition, “1. Letting go of the old ways and the old identity people had. This first phase of transition is an ending and the time when you need to help people to deal with their losses. 2. Going through an in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn’t fully operational. We call this time the “neutral zone”: it’s when the critical psychological realignments and repatternings take place. 3. Coming out of the transition and making a new beginning. This is when people develop the new identity, experience the new energy, and discover the new sense of purpose that makes the change begin to work. Because transition is a process by which people unplug from an old world and plug into a new world, we can say that transition begins with an ending and finishes with a beginning,” Bridges, William; Bridges, Susan. *Managing Transitions* (25th anniversary edition) (p. 19). Hachette Books. Kindle Edition.

Bridges says, “The neutral zone is like the wilderness through which Moses led his people. That took forty years, you remember—not because they were lost but because the generation that had known Egypt had to die off before the Israelites could enter the Promised Land. Taken literally, that’s a pretty discouraging idea: that things won’t really change until a whole generation of workers dies. But on a less literal level, the message of Moses’ long journey through the wilderness is both less daunting and more applicable to your situation: the outlook, attitudes, values, self-images, and ways of thinking that were functional in the past have to “die” before people can be ready for life in the present. Moses took care of transition’s ending phase when he led his people out of Egypt, but it was the forty years in the neutral zone wilderness that got Egypt out of his people. It won’t take you forty years, but you aren’t going to be able to do it in a few weeks either,” Bridges, William; Bridges, Susan. *Managing Transitions* (25th anniversary edition) (p. 73). Hachette Books. Kindle Edition.

Moses along with his brother Aaron got the people to flee Egypt physically, but when things got hard in the wilderness the book of Exodus says, “The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death,” Exodus 16:3. As Bridges puts it the ending wasn’t finished until not only were the people out of Egypt but Egypt was also out of the people. But even when this ending was complete the people weren’t ready for the Promised Land. Bridges says there is an in-between phase that involves “Going through an in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn’t fully operational. We call this time the “neutral zone”: it’s when the critical psychological realignments and repatternings take place.”

What does it mean to be Israelites and not Egyptian slaves? That is a big change and is not going to happen overnight. Moses goes to Mount Sinai to receive a new code of ethics for this new people, but the book of Exodus says, “When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this

fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.'...Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt,'" (Exodus 32:1,7-8). Following this incident there is a back and forth between Moses and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This God will not go with this stiff-necked people. But Moses pleads that these are God's people and God needs to go with them. In this story it takes some time for these people to become this God's and for this God to become this people's.

The Israelites do eventually enter the Promised Land. There is a beginning of this people as a new nation. And all of the story, the ending-leaving Egypt, the transition- the 40 years in the wilderness, and the new beginning- entering the Promised Land make this people who they are.

In Deuteronomy chapter 24 rules for living in the new land are laid out, "Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.

"When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this," Deuteronomy 24:17-22.

When the people first left Egypt they longed for a life of slavery if it meant they wouldn't go hungry. By the time they entered the Promised Land they did not propose the common solution of the time for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow- sell yourself to us as our slaves. They found ways to provide for these people while still allowing them their dignity and freedom.

All of us as individuals and all of our institutions regularly go through Bridges' three phases of transition, "1.Letting go of the old ways and the old identity people had. This first phase of transition is an ending and the time when you need to help people to deal with their losses. 2.Going through an in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn't fully operational. We call this time the "neutral zone": it's when the critical psychological realignments and repatternings take place. 3.Coming out of the transition and making a new beginning. This is when people develop the new identity, experience the new energy, and discover the new sense of purpose that makes the change begin to work." Beating an addiction, having a baby, retiring from a job, going from no minister to a minister or from one minister to another, moving from one building to another, building a building; all require endings, transitions and beginnings.

The Passover Haggadah ends, "Next year in Jerusalem." Dasee Berkowitz, another organizational consultant, says, "I am always struck when Israelis, especially Jerusalemites, say "Next year in Jerusalem" with the same intention as their Diaspora (kin). Jerusalem surely cannot only represent a physical destination. It must represent more: an ideal, a hope, a possibility, [What Does "Next Year in Jerusalem" Really Mean? | Reform Judaism](#). Next year in Jerusalem. Just remember it takes quite a journey to get there.