



# THE CARNEGIE SHUL SHOFAR

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## Covid: A Plague, or Another Excuse for Anti-Semitism?

Passover begins this Friday evening and for many of us it will be a time to have a more normal Seder after the Covid pandemic caused some to hold a down-sized Seder during the past two Passovers.

When Covid first surfaced, many people referred to Covid as a plague, akin to the plagues that were inflicted upon the Egyptians when Pharaoh refused to let our people go. Some said God was punishing mankind just as he punished Pharaoh. But the Covid pandemic is not the first time that people have equated an illness or a disaster with retribution from God. There were those who even said that Hurricane Katrina was God punishing the people of New Orleans for their sinful ways. Really?

The plagues against Egypt were the direct result of Pharaoh's defiance of God. Covid is a horrible dis-

ease, it is not a punishment like the plagues against Egypt. God's mighty power that was demonstrated against the Egyptians, a power that humans could not overcome, is certainly different than

the scourge of Covid, a disease that humans are finding ways to combat with both human-made vaccines and medications.

Covid is a bad disease, but it is not a plague like these unleashed against Pharaoh.

And what about Covid and anti-Semitism? Flyers blaming Jews for COVID-19 were found in multiple cities in Florida and in San Francisco last week, less than two months after similar ones were found in at least eight states nationwide. Distributed by a group that calls itself the Goyim Defense League, the flyers are only the latest attempt to blame the Covid pandemic on Jews. Here is a copy of the flyers that were

distributed in Sarasota, just a few miles from my winter home in Florida.

DISGRACEFUL!

**EVERY SINGLE ASPECT OF  
THE COVID AGENDA  
IS JEWISH:**

**CDC DIRECTOR - ROCHELLE WALENSKY - JEWISH**  
**CDC DEPUTY DIRECTOR - ANNE SCHUCHAT - JEWISH**  
**CDC CHIEF OF STAFF - SHERRI BERGER - JEWISH**  
**CDC CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER - MITCHELL WOLFE - JEWISH**  
**CDC DIRECTOR, WASHINGTON OFFICE - JEFF RECZEK - JEWISH**  
**COVID CZAR - JEFF ZIENTS - JEWISH**  
**COVID SENIOR ADVISER - ANDY SLAVITT - JEWISH**  
**HHS SECRETARY - XAVIER BECERRA - JEWISH**  
**HHS ASSISTANT HEALTH SECRETARY - RACHEL LEVINE (A TRANSGENDER) - JEWISH**  
**HEAD OF PFIZER - ALBERT BOURLA - JEWISH**  
**PFIZER CHIEF SCIENTIST - MIKAEL DOLSTEN - JEWISH**  
**MONDERNA CHIEF SCIENTIST - TAL ZAKS - JEWISH**  
**BLACKROCK CEO - LARRY FINK - JEWISH**  
**BLACKROCK PRESIDENT - ROB KAPITO - JEWISH**  
**VANGUARD CEO - MORTIMER J. BUCKLEY - JEWISH**

**BLACKROCK AND VANGUARD ARE THE  
TWO LARGEST SHAREHOLDERS  
OF BOTH PFIZER AND GLAXOSMITHKLINE,  
AS WELL AS PRACTICALLY ALL OF THE MSM.**

**REMEMBER... THOSE WHO ARGUED THAT  
"IF YOU'RE AGAINST LOCKDOWNS, YOU'RE AGAINST STATE POWER"  
WERE LITERALLY SHABBOS GOY CARRYING OUT  
THE WILL OF THE JEWS, WITTINGLY OR UNWITTINGLY.**

  
WWW.GOYIMTV.TV

# Haggadah'ya at Leading the Seder?

There are many different Passover Haggadahs to choose from. I really like the Haggadah for the American Family but I don't have enough of these for everyone who comes to our Seder, and most of the participants would rather not share, so this year I will be using the old reliable Maxwell House Haggadah.

Haggadahs must all include the same required elements of the Seder, but Haggadahs now come in all styles, shapes and sizes. Some families with younger children even use comic book style Haggadahs. The important thing is not so much which Haggadah we choose, but that we retell the incredible story of our delivery from slavery in Egypt.

Note that I said our delivery from slavery in Egypt. For, as the Haggadah tells us, "In every gener-

ation, each Jew must look upon himself as though he, personally, was among those who went forth from Egypt. Not our fathers alone did the Holy One, Blessed be He, redeem from suffering, but also us and our families."

The story of Passover is an incredible story. It is the story of a humble man, Moses, who was chosen by God to confront Pharaoh and lead the Jews out of Egypt and through the desert to the Promised Land.

It is the story of a people, enslaved in a foreign land for 400 years, who are freed from slavery by our great, powerful, and merciful God.

It is the story of the plagues that God sent upon Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea to allow us to escape Pharaoh's pursuing army.



And it is a story that culminates in the giving of the Ten Commandments, the Torah, and freedom in the land that God promised to Abraham and his descendants.

And so, it doesn't really matter which Haggadah you prefer, just as long as you tell the story, listen to the story, and share the story with all who gather in your home to share the miraculous holiday of Passover.

## Dayanu

We all love to sing the song Dayenu at Passover. It is a song that reminds us of many things that God has given us, things like the Torah and the Sabbath, and for each one we sing the chorus "dayenu" which means, quite simply, "That would have been enough."

And yet sometimes, in our daily lives, nothing seems to be enough for any of us. We never seem to be satisfied.

Now I am not saying that it is bad to want more in life. We all work hard to get a better life for ourselves and for our children, but when is enough... enough?

What happens to us when greed rears its ugly head? When do we do real harm to ourselves by not being content with what we

already have? Why do some of us put the pursuit of material things ahead of our spouses, our children and our friends? Why does there sometimes appear to be never enough time to get things done?

Why does a ballplayer making \$18 million a year uproot a family and move to another city because there is a chance to earn \$20 million? How much money do you really need? Why isn't \$18 million enough?

Why does the CEO of a corporation make \$25 million a year



while his employees have to go on strike to make minimum wage?

Why do we often want more, more, more for ourselves when others need to beg just to get by?

Dayenu does not have to be just the words to a song we sing on Pesach. It does not have to be something that applies only to miracles from God. It can also apply to our everyday lives.

Passover might be a good time for each of us to take a step back from the rat race of life and to really look at all of our blessings in order to determine when enough is enough and when we have obtained Dayenu.

# Passover Reminds Us That Time Is Not The Enemy

**If Moses had to judge his future by what he could come up with in the five seconds after he saw the bush on fire, he'd have given up, become an accountant.**

*By Eve Fairbanks | For The Washington Post*

As a Jew, I always found something funny about Passover. Why, for a holiday about celebrating freedom, are there so many restrictions? We have to eat unpleasant things; we have to drink this many glasses of wine and no more; we have to eat a horrible crackerbread all week, no pasta, no peanut butter, no bread.

But it occurs to me that Passover is all about time. It's about the way we have to have faith in time, and live time, and trust the way it turns things over: It turns water to blood, and then back again; it turns darkness to light, restriction to freedom, suffering to joy. Time is a chemist. Time is, perhaps, even an alchemist, with powers we human beings have never been able to harness for ourselves.

In our modern world, it seems we don't really believe in time. Perhaps that's because we're so alienated from nature, time's avatar in the world: We no longer regularly observe the way the hard seed faithfully, with time, becomes the soft flower, and the juicy leaf, inevitably, the dry one, and then the dust. We think we can conquer time. We can make things happen faster, happen now, as proof of our power. There's a self-help book, one of the most popular today, called "The Five-Second Rule": If you have an idea, it says, start working on it within five seconds, so time doesn't have a chance to slip in there and work its inevitable decay. This presumes time is the



adversary to creativity, to hope, to growth, to all good and fruitful things; it is a philosophy stuck in an eternal anxious September, imagining that summer and autumn are the only seasons there are, working furiously against time.

In the Passover story, though, everything takes time. More than that, time reveals that difficult things – bad things – are a passage, a preparation for goodness. Moses, at first, is a stutterer, no man ready to lead a people. If he had to judge his future by what he could come up with in the five seconds after he saw the bush on fire, he'd have given up, become an accountant. His rebirth as a leader took time. The work of time on him wasn't linear, but a kind of cyclical process, or a pendulum. It wasn't manifested as a simple step-by-step trudge out of low self-esteem. It was down before up: a journey through his anxiety and uncertainty, through challenges that deepened him, taught him compassion, and allowed for a fuller, rounder ultimate becoming.

The Jews' liberation from Egypt took time. They weren't sprung after the first plague. At the many-hour Passover Seder, we say so many things. But we don't recite the prayer Moses sang to God after crossing the Red Sea, despite the fact that we say it at every other Jewish holiday. At first blush, this seems odd. But it's yet another gesture toward time: This all ain't over yet. There are still 40 years wandering in the desert ahead, another passage through a winter before the spring.

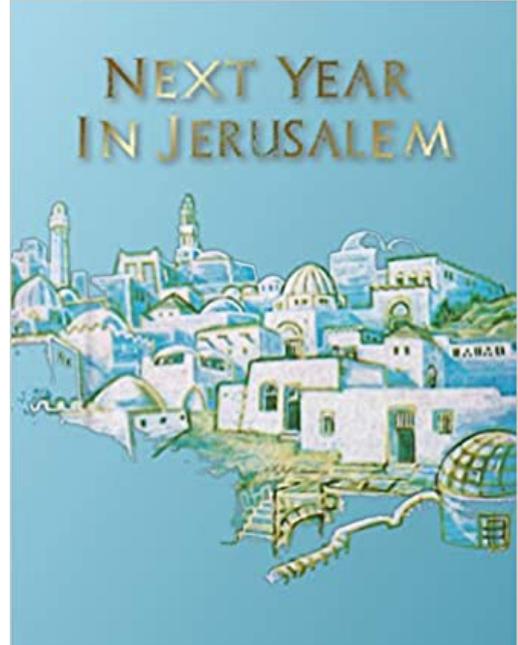
During Passover, we're also celebrating spring. There are hints of this on the Passover table: an egg, a young sprig of parsley. But mostly, during this holiday, we consciously entrap ourselves in a bodily sense of winter, denying ourselves. We scrub our houses bare of cakes and cookies, like the wind scrubs the plains clean in December. Like subsistence farmers in the winter, we live off preserved and dried things, food that just barely nourishes us, and doesn't please us – not yet. We live in a state of

self-imposed slavery, of self-denial. Often it's said we do this just to recall what it felt like for people to be slaves. I think we do it for a deeper reason, too: to remind ourselves that accomplishment and achievement can depend on periods of difficulty, that sometimes we have to wait for goodness and let time do its work and not try to beat it.

If you want to think about it this way, time is an instrument in the hands of God. Perhaps it is God's most powerful instrument. It does things we cannot do, produces effects in societies and in our souls we cannot manufacture with "The Power of Now" or "The Five-Second Rule." Last year, I ran a Seder for 75 non-Jews. My first impression of the Seder as a child was that it was incredibly, mind-numbingly, achingly long. Worried about boring people, I cut out big swaths of the Seder last Passover. Still, toward the end, my friend Simon leaned over and whispered to me, "I think this is just long enough. Longer than that and people would get restless and want to go home."

But I woke up the next day feeling my Seder was not nearly long enough. The restlessness, the waiting, the irritated feeling that things are being repeated and drawn out: These are all things meant to teach us about what it means to live in time, the discomfort and the patience and, at the end, time's unanticipated gifts, which are unimaginable while we are mired in a lengthy explanation of prayers or choking down little bits of horseradish with dry, unleavened bread.

At the Seder's end, we shout together: "Next year in Jerusalem!" If we said this at the Seder's beginning, it would have no weight. But at the end, after all that pain and discomfort and fatigue, it comes as a truly emotional moment, deep and felt, pervaded by a physical experience of excitement and relief. When we say it, it's not just a rote religious statement. We can dare to believe its literal and metaphorical meaning, because we have just experienced a night that shows us how hope can be real. We've experienced the way that suffering drags on but then ends.



The poet Charles Péguy called hope the "frailest" virtue, yet also the one that "vivifies" the others. He called hope "that little flame in the sanctuary." The possibility of light held within, and visible only because of darkness: It's a typically Christian image, but it is Passover, too; Passover finally. Hope and possibility are substanceless words without the perception of time. And this is the gift this holiday gives.

## The Unasked Question

**On a night built around inquiry, there's one question that is never posed at the Passover seder.**

*By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks*

Passover is a night of questions, but there is one we do not ask, and it is significant. Why was there a Passover in the first place? Why the years of suffering and slavery?

Israel was redeemed. It regained its freedom. It returned to the land its ancestors had been promised centuries before. But why the necessity of exile? Why did God not arrange for Abraham or Isaac or Jacob simply to inherit the land of Canaan? If the Israelites had not gone down to Egypt in the days of Joseph, there would have been no

suffering and no need for redemption. Why Passover?

The question is unavoidable, given the terms of the biblical narrative. The Torah indicates that there was nothing accidental about the events leading up to Passover. Centuries before, Abraham had been told by God, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated for four hundred years" (Genesis 15:13).

We make repeated reference in



the course of the Haggadah to the fact that the whole sequence of events was part of a pre-ordained plan. God "had already calculated the end" of suffering. When Jacob went down to Egypt he was, we say, *anus al pi ha-dibbur*, "forced by divine decree." God himself

told Jacob, “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there” (Genesis 46:3) without giving him an intimation of the sufferings his children would endure. The sages say that at the end of his life, when Jacob wanted to tell his children what would happen to them at the end of days, the gift of prophecy was taken from him.

Without knowing it, the Israelites were part of a narrative that had been scripted long before. A mid-rash – one of the few places in which the sages expressed their disquiet about this strange stratagem of providence – expresses the problem very acutely:

*The Holy One blessed be He sought to bring about the decree He had spoken of to Abraham, that “your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own.” So He arranged that Jacob should love Joseph more than his other sons, that the brothers would be jealous and hate Joseph, that they would sell him to the Ishmaelites who would bring him down to Egypt, and that Jacob would hear that Joseph was still alive and living there. The result was that Jacob and the tribes went to Egypt and became enslaved. Rabbi Tanhuma said: To what can this be compared? To a herdsman who wishes to place the yoke on a cow, but the cow refuses to have it placed on her. What does the herdsman do? He takes a calf from the cow and leads it to the field where ploughing is to take place. The calf begins to cry for its mother. The cow, hearing the calf cry, rushes to the field, and there, while its attention is distracted and it is thinking only of its child, the yoke is placed upon it. (Tanhuma, Vayeshev, 4)*

The script God writes for His people is sometimes circuitous and terrifying. The sages applied to it the pointed phrase “How awe-

some is God in His dealings with mankind” (Psalm 66:5). Why did He want His people to experience slavery? Why was exile in Egypt the necessary prelude to their life as a sovereign nation in the promised land?

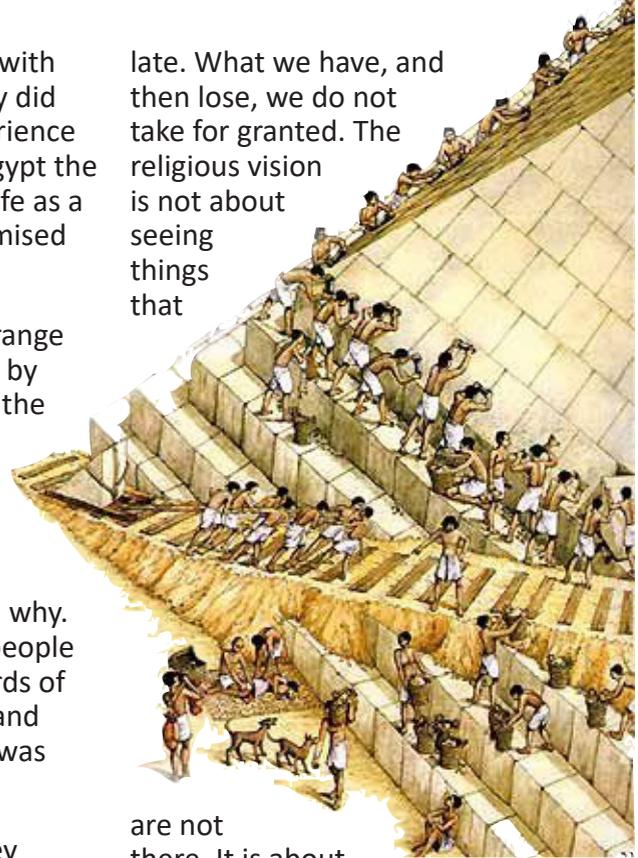
The Book of Jonah tells a strange story. Jonah has been asked by God to convey a warning to the people of Nineveh. Their ways are corrupt; the city will be destroyed unless they repent. Jonah flees from his mission, and in the course of the book we learn why. He knew, he says, that the people of Nineveh, hearing the words of the prophet, would repent and be forgiven. For Jonah, this was unjust.

When people do wrong, they should suffer the consequences and be punished. This was particularly so in the case of Nineveh, a city of the Assyrians who were to be the cause of so much suffering to Israel. God’s forgiveness conflicted with Jonah’s sense of retributive justice.

God decides to teach Jonah a moral lesson. He sends him a gourd to give him shade from the burning sun. The next day He sends a worm that makes the gourd wither and die. Jonah is plunged into suicidal depression. God then says to him: “You have been concerned about this gourd, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?” (Jonah 4:10-11).

God teaches Jonah to care by giving him something and then taking it away. Loss teaches us to value things, though usually too

late. What we have, and then lose, we do not take for granted. The religious vision is not about seeing things that



are not there. It is about seeing the things that are there and always were, but which we never noticed, or paid attention to. Faith is a form of attention. It is a sustained meditation on the miraculousness of what is, because it might not have been. What we lose and are given back we learn to cherish in a way we would not have done had we never lost it in the first place. Faith is about not taking things for granted.

This is the key to understanding a whole series of narratives in the book of Genesis. Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel long to have children but discover that they are infertile. Only through God’s intervention are they able to conceive. Abraham goes through the trial of the binding of Isaac, only to discover that God, who has asked him to sacrifice his child, says “Stop” at the last moment. This is how the covenantal family learns that having children is not something that merely happens. It is how the people of Israel learned, at the dawn of their history, never to take children for

granted. Jewish continuity, the raising of new generations of Jews, is not natural, inevitable, a process that takes care of itself. It needs constant effort and attention.

The same is true of freedom. Freedom in the biblical sense – responsible self-restraint – is not natural. To the contrary, the natural order in human societies, as it is in the animal kingdom, is that the strong prey on and dominate the weak. Nothing is rarer or harder to achieve than a society of equal dignity for all. Merely to conceive it requires a massive disengagement from nature. The Torah tells us how this was achieved, through the historical experience of a people who would ever afterward be the carriers of God’s message to mankind.

Israel had to lose its freedom before it could cherish it. Only what we lose do we fully pay attention to. Israel had to suffer the experience of slavery and degradation before it could learn, know, and feel intuitively that there is something morally wrong about oppression. Nor could it, or any other people, carry this message in perpetuity without reliving it every year, tasting the harsh tang of the bread of affliction and the bitterness of slavery. Thus was created, at the birth of the nation, a longing for freedom that was at the very core of its memory and identity.

Had Israel achieved immediate nationhood in the patriarchal age without the experience of exile and persecution, it would – like



so many other nations in history – have taken freedom for granted; and when freedom is taken for granted, it has already begun to be lost. Israel became the people conceived in slavery so that it would never cease to long for liberty – and know that liberty is anything but natural. It requires constant vigilance, unceasing moral struggle. Israel discovered freedom by losing it. May it never lose it again.

*While we all hope the worst of the pandemic is behind us, this article that appeared on Aish.com last year has timeless lessons for all of us.*

# Despite Pandemic Challenges...

**What better way to overcome the challenges we are facing than drawing upon the wisdom of our past?**

*From Aish.com*

## Realize the Force of Seder, Order

We begin the night with the recitation of the 15 steps of the Seder. In Hebrew ‘Seder’ means order, routine. As we recall the miracles of redemption despite slavery and hopelessness, we call out the carefully arranged order of the night. Each step counts. Every act is significant. At the culmination of the night we have created a symphony of holiness and rebirth. Some steps we understand and some may be beyond our comprehension. Yet, we trust and believe that this is our sacred legacy.

This past year has been filled with confusion and chaos. We struggle to know what is normal. Is it nor-

mal to send children to school? Is it normal to go to work? Is it normal to kiss grandparents?

The Passover Hagaddah is teaching us to find seder, order in our lives.



Passover night we utter the 15 steps towards discovering who we are. We begin with “Kadesh” —raising your glass and reciting Kiddush. Kadesh literally means ‘Be Holy’. Each of us has the ability to find that spiritual hidden spark that lies within. This is our starting point. We climb higher, one step at a time, until we reach the end of the night. This is what life is about.

Begin with the knowledge that no matter who you are, where you’ve come from, what your education has been – you are innately holy. Live life with seder, order. Don’t lose yourself to a life of mindless havoc. Wake up in the morning and know that you have real purpose. Create a routine. Get dressed

even if you are not leaving your home. Wake up with a thought of thankfulness for your life and the people whom you love. Try to do one act of kindness a day. Set aside some time to study wisdom. Speak to a friend or family member each day. Every step becomes moments that are elevated from morning till night. The seder gives us a list of actions we will be taking so that we understand that a goal driven life grants us meaning. Every little step encourages us.

## Loneliness is Toxic

As we recite the story of our people we uncover our matzahs and say, "Let all who are hungry come and eat. All who are needy come and celebrate." What kind of invite is this? Here we are sitting down at our beautiful table and now we invite the poor to come and join us? Is this a joke?

The greatest poverty is poverty of the soul. The Hagaddah is asking us to look around our table. Before we begin to speak, before we eat our delicious meal, we are asked to see the pain that is right in front of our eyes. There is someone sitting beside you who is hungry. Someone needs a smile, an encouraging word, a message of hope. Don't ignore the pain that has settled in their heart.

Many people have experienced a sense of loneliness this year unlike anything they have ever experienced before. There has been grief, sadness, and fear. Connections have been lost. It is possible to live with others and yet feel all alone.



Take a good look around you. Open your heart and reach out to those aching for your love.

## Plug Into the Blessing of Enough

One of the most famous songs of the Hagaddah is 'Dayenu' – 'Enough!'

We speak about every kindness God has given us from the moment He brought us out of bondage in Egypt. We are asked to see blessings that are easily overlooked. Observing life through a lens of gratitude creates joy that cannot be taken away when going through tough times. It is a spiritual lens that becomes life changing.

An attitude of gratitude is the anchor we hold onto through turbulent times. We can either walk around saying, "This is crazy," or we can focus on the good. Our forefathers experienced the suffering of Egypt and then the greatest of miracles at the Sea. Even they needed to be reminded of God's constant kindnesses so that that their spiritual awakening would not diminish with time.

If we think about the past year, we can choose to either dwell on the hardships or we can contemplate the good that has come. Some of us may have to think hard but the 'blessing of enough' is waiting to be discovered. I know that I eagerly await every facetime call with my grandchildren. Perhaps these precious moments were not as appreciated before. Now I hold onto them as delicate sweets, savoring the laughter and conversations we share. Every Zoom class I give has connected me to thriving communities around the world. I have met my 'family' across the globe and am grateful for each soul who has become a part of my circle. I have found pockets of peace, taking long walks and thinking in the quiet that surrounds me. The blessing of enough.

## We Have Strong Roots

At the Seder we have three matzahs and drink four cups of wine. Elijah's cup adorns the center of our table. All this has deep significance.

We have deep roots that ground us. Heavy winds may be pushing us down but our tree remains strong. We have been given the gift of spiritual DNA. Fire of faith runs through our veins. Three matzahs and four cups of wine remind us



of our three forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and our four matriarchs, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. Their courage and sacrifice has allowed us to survive against all odds. We have been exiled throughout the four corners of this earth. We have been hated, persecuted and vilified. I, myself, am born upon the ashes of the Holocaust.

I wonder sometimes: Where did my parents and grandparents find the strength to go on? How did they hold onto their faith?

The Seder table calls out to us: Know my children that you are not alone. You have been born through struggle. Those who walked before you created footsteps. You may stumble but you will find your footing and continue your journey.

Do not fear. Elijah is waiting to come, next year in Jerusalem.