



Torah Reflections on *Pesach*

15-22 Nisan 5781

March 27 – April 4, 2021

(*First Seder on March 27th*)

As the night of the first *seder* draws near, our thoughts may turn toward the symbols and memories we associate with the festival.

This year most people in the Jewish community are again isolated in some way – alone, or perhaps with a roommate or caregiver, or sheltering with immediate family. Many will not be able to celebrate with friends and family communally, in a home environment, or even over Zoom. Even for those not in a hospital bed or in an institution away from home, the imagery of liberation and the yearning for an exodus from our *mitzrayim*—our places of struggle and oppression (*mitzrayim* means “narrow straits” and is also the Hebrew name for the land of Egypt) may hold particular resonance.

Now may be an opportune time to visualize a seder plate, replete with the central symbols of Passover that are discussed through the reading of the *haggadah*: the shank bone, the *matzah*, the *maror* (bitter herbs), the roasted egg, the parsley or other spring greens, the sweet *charoset*, and also the salt water. All these items represent aspects of the Israelites’ experience in journeying from Egyptian slavery to freedom.

Taken together, everything on the seder plate can represent different parts of ourselves as well. What new questions, and what ancient wisdom are embodied in these ritual foods, for us to discover and ponder at this season?

The egg represents the cycle of life and birth; and the parsley symbolizes spring’s reappearance. What is yet growing in me, or what do I find renewed within myself?

The salt water asks: what has been the source of my tears?

The roasted shank bone is a reminder of the sacrificial animal whose blood was used to mark the Jewish doorposts. It allows us to ask: what are the risks I have taken, and what are the sacrifices I am willing to make, in the name of greater freedom?

(over)

We all carry the bitterness of maror within us. Where and how am I bitter? The charoset complements the maror. What brings me sweetness and joy?

Matzah symbolizes our affliction and impoverishment at the beginning of the seder. We turn to the same food as the quintessential symbol of our liberation and redemption by the seder's end. What elements of the experience of my illness or my broken-heartedness have been openings for healing? What elements might yet be redeemed or transformed into gateways for loving connection?

May the questions, the reflections, and the answers raised during the Passover season be a source of growth and learning, comfort and healing.

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This Torah Reflection was written by Rabbi Natan Fenner, BCC of the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center in San Francisco. The Torah Reflections series is published by the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center, a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation and Endowment Fund. More information and healing-oriented resources can be found at www.JewishHealingCenter.org.

