

BCEQ President's Very Abbreviated Earth Seder Haggadah

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At the appropriate moment in the Agenda, the President will welcome all present, and will say the following:

"We celebrate as we join other Grass-Roots Movements focused on concern for The Earth." [Please read along with me]

"This Festival began with shepherds and farmers celebrating the renewal of life in springtime.

The greens and herbs, unleavened bread and roasted eggs that are part of the Seder meal preserve this aspect of the journey.

In the Biblical story of the Liberation and in the tale told during the traditional Seder, we recall that the ancient Pharaoh brought Ten Plagues upon The Earth. All of them were ecological disasters: the rivers became undrinkable; frogs burst all boundaries as their natural predators vanished; cattle were struck by mad cow disease; locusts swarmed and devoured the crops; a climate disaster—unprecedented hailstorms-- befell the Land; even those whose eyes had been closed to suffering were blinded by a sandstorm of darkness so thick it could be felt.

These plagues befell the land because of Pharaoh's stubbornness, his arrogance, his hardheartedness—his addiction to his own power, an addiction so strong that he could not abandon tyranny even when his stubbornness brought destruction on his own people.

"Oppression of human beings and destruction of The Earth go hand in hand. Our ancient forebears could see that there was a connection, *i.e. the Inter-breathing of all life*, but they could not spell out the specific practices and processes by which these two Oppressions were joined.

Today we can. Today we face Plagues that trouble The Earth and all humanity. **Who and What** are the institutional Pharaohs in our time? What are the destructive Plagues of our own generation?"

"What can we do to bring Ten Blessings, Ten Healings, on The Earth in our own lifetimes?" —Rabbi Arthur Waskow, Director Shalom Center

In each table-group, people say their names and in one sentence, explain

why they have chosen to come to this Seder.

(1) By Creating Light

(optional poem) [All say together:]

"We are the generations/That stand between the fires.
Behind us is the flame and smoke/That rose from Auschwitz and from Hiroshima,
From the burning of our Towers/In jet fuel lit by rage,
From the torching of our forests for the sake of fast hamburger;
Before us is the nightmare of a Flood of Fire:
The scorching of our planet/From a flood of greenhouse gases,
Or the blazing of our cities/In thermonuclear fire/
Or the glare of gunfire/Exploding in our children.
It is our task to make from fire/Not an all-consuming blaze
But the light in which we see each other;
Each of us different,/All of us made in the image of God.
We light this fire to see more clearly
That the earth, the human race,/are not for burning.
We light this fire to see more clearly/The rainbow in our many-colored faces.
Blessed are you, our God, Breathing Spirit of the Universe, who gives us light that we may become a light
for peace and freedom and healing for all peoples and our fragile Planet.
Blessed are you, Breathing Spirit of the Universe, who has breathed life into us, lifted us up, and carried us
to reach this moment."

[Light candles at table]

(2) By Breaking Bread and Setting It Aside:

[Someone at table: Break the middle matzah in two. Put the larger piece aside, leaving the smaller on the plate. Uncover the remaining piece of bread, lift up the dish and say:]

"This is the pressed-down bread of the oppressed that our forebears ate in the Land of Egypt, where the Israelites were enslaved. Let all who are hungry eat, and all who are in need come and celebrate the Passover."

[Put the matzah and bread back, covered, on the plate. Then lift the larger piece and say the following.]

"Why do we break this bread in two? Because if we hold on to the whole loaf for ourselves, it remains the bread of Oppression. If we break it in order to share it, it becomes the bread of freedom. We set aside this bread as a reminder that we owe to all fellow humans justice and a share of the Earth's fruitfulness." **"In the same way, if we human beings try to gobble up all the abundance of the world** and leave nothing for the other forms of life to eat and breathe and drink, the abundance withers away into the death of many life-forms and despair for ourselves."

(3) By Drinking the Fruit of the Grape

We will drink from at least four cups of grape juice to honor the Four Stages on the Path of Liberation.

These Stages (Cups) are: (1) Becoming aware of oppression, (2) Opposing Oppression, (3) Imagining alternatives, (4) Accepting personal and communal responsibility to act.

(1) First, the Cup of Awareness: learning to recognize the reality of Oppression.

[Pour cups of wine or grape juice.]

Each person at the table is invited to share a short story about an experience that opened his or her eyes to the suffering of others on account of their gender, ethnicity, physicality, orientation or group association, or ways in which they have experienced suffering imposed upon the earth and other life-forms.

[The youngest person present asks:]

"Why is this night different from all other nights? On all the other nights we may eat either leavened or unleavened bread, but on this night only unleavened bread; on all the other nights we may eat any species of herbs, but on this night only bitter herbs; on all the other nights we do not dip even once, but on this night twice; on all the other nights we eat and drink either tense or relaxed, but on this night we all relax.

[The next youngest person asks:] "How is an Earth Seder different from all other Seders?"

[An Older Person says:] "In all other Seders we tell the story of the liberation of human beings from oppression.

In this Earth Seder we tell of the oppression of the Earth itself and all its living beings."

"God will send us Elijah the Prophet, to turn the hearts of parents to children and the hearts of children to parents, lest the Earth be utterly destroyed."

So tonight we seek to hear not only with our ears but with our hearts. We seek to hear our children ask us, and we seek to ask them, how to save the Earth from the danger of destruction. And we set aside this final cup of grape wine so that when we drink it we become Elijah, turning our hearts to each other.

(2) [Pour a special cup for Elijah, to set in the center of the table]

[Another Older Person says:] "These are not the only questions we could ask. Any question is a way in. And every question is an act of freedom. So let us ask new questions, our own questions, even if we do not yet know the answers."

[Members of the community at the Seder Table ask questions arising from their own life-experience about environmental degradation and healing, etc—the more concrete the better.]

[Someone Asks:] " Why bitterness? "

[Someone Answers:] "The masters embittered their lives with hard servitude in clay and in bricks and with all kinds of servitude in which they made them subservient with crushing-labor.

[Someone Asks:] [Why leavened or unleavened? i.e. Simple or puffed-up?

[Someone Answers:] "Traditionally, in preparation for Passover, we carefully rid our household of "chametz," leavened bread and similar foods. Chametz can also symbolize "puffed-up" pride, greed and jealousy. On Passover, we each eat the simple bread to cleanse our minds and lives of "puffed-upness," to spring-clean ourselves as well as our surroundings. When we use coal and oil to warm ourselves, and let hot air blow out our doors and windows, that is "eating chametz," puffing ourselves up. When we drive an auto belching CO2 where we could bike or walk or share a train, that is "eating chametz," puffing ourselves up. When we burn fossil fuels because it is convenient and ignore that it is lethal, that is being addicted to chametz, even though it is killing human beings and large parts of our planet.

[Someone Asks:] "Why tense or relaxed?"

[Someone speaks of how it feels to physically relax, the connection of the loosened body to a sense of freedom.]

"We will recite the plagues of the ancient story. We welcome you to call out the plague of today that for you echoes with the ancient warning:

[At the table, the group pauses after naming each plague, and drop grape-juice from the cup onto the plate.

Have someone call out the next plague listed, and wait for communal response and the naming of other contemporary plagues.]

- Water into Blood (Pollution and privatization of water; the flood that destroyed New Orleans)
- Frogs (Frogs, dead and maimed by chemicals)
- Vermin (Poverty)
- Beasts (Extinction of thousands of species)
- Mad cow disease
- Boils/Pestilence (asthma epidemic; environmental cancer)
- Hail (Radical climate change, global scorching)
- Locusts (Famine, genetically modified foods, patented seeds)
- Endless night (Plague of blindness to each other, failure of empathy: Electrical blackouts.)
- Slaying of the First-born (War, terrorism, torture, prisons, AIDS, gun-violence dead, especially children).

(2nd)- **Cup of RESISTANCE**--

[Resistance to Destruction of The Earth]

"It's hard for people to realize that climate is an emergency, but climate is changing.

"The ocean is getting warmer, climate zones are shifting. We can see that the extremes of the hydrologic cycle of floods and droughts and storms are becoming more extreme. What has become clear from the science is that we cannot burn all of the fossil fuels without creating a very different planet. The only practical way to solve the problem is to phase out the biggest source of carbon, and that is coal. The science is very clear on that, yet the decision-makers are not taking the actions that are needed to do that. We have to send that message to Congress and the President." —James Hansen, head of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies

(3rd) **Third Cup of Creativity: Envisioning the New World.**

[Pour Miriam's Cup, a cup of water because waters birth new possibility.]
African proverbial wisdom and traditional knowledge teach us not only to refrain from

poisoning our water sources with pollution, but to let the land and seas rest on sacred days, to take only what is necessary and to honor the sources of our substance. Their descendants brought this sense of the sacred to America where they saw holiness when they went down to the river, sought the Spirit in the Wilderness, and used nature to gain their freedom from human hands. The environment has been our shelter, our home, and our refuge.

Those who make themselves an enemy of God's creation, make themselves an enemy of life.

(4) Fourth cup: Responsibility and Action

[Pour the cup. Someone reads:]

"In a free society, some are guilty. But all are responsible." —Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, 1944; 1964.

[At each table, someone pours juice from the Cup of Elijah, sitting untasted in the center of the table, into each person's glass.]

[All say together:]

I take Responsibility to become the Prophet Elijah, "turning the hearts of the parents to the children

and the hearts of the children to the parents, lest The Earth be utterly destroyed."

Barukh atah YHWH elohenu ruakh ha-olam boray p'ri hagafen. Blessed are You, our God, Who creates the fruit of the vine.

[All drink the 4th cup, The Cup of Personal and Communal commitment to Action.] --

And Finally We Bring Blessings (5) By Eating!

[If there is a full-scale meal at this Earth Seder, it is eaten now!]

[At the end of the meal the children are invited to hunt for the *Afikoman* (the piece of matzah that was hidden earlier) and it is redeemed from the children who have found it, **since it is necessary to have this taste of matzah as the last taste at the end of the meal.** One way of redeeming it is to ask the children to name an organization that is working for social justice, freedom, peace, or healing of The Earth, and the adults agree to contribute to that group in accordance with their own means.]

[The Afikoman is distributed among the Seder company, and everyone eats a bite of it.]