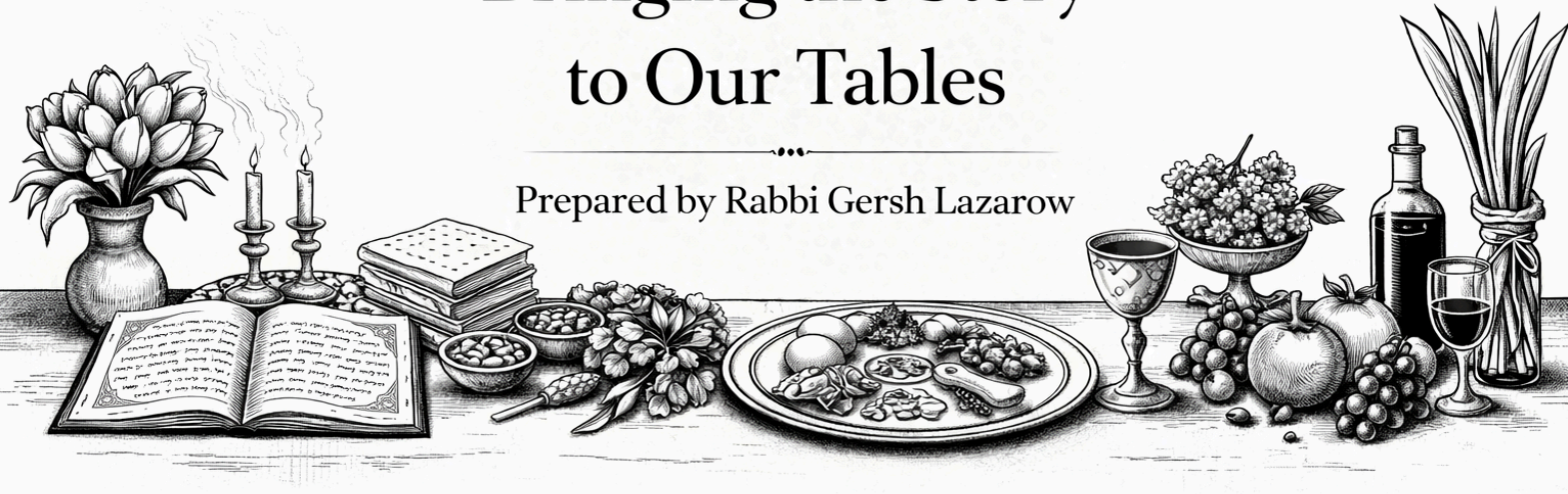


Bringing the Story to Our Tables

Prepared by Rabbi Gersh Lazarow



For centuries, Jewish families have gathered around the Seder table to retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. The Haggadah offers us a carefully structured ritual, one that holds memory and responsibility together. As the Torah teaches, “You shall tell your child on that day, saying: It is because of what God did for me when I came out of Egypt.” Each generation inherits not only the obligation to remember but the responsibility to tell the story in ways that can be heard, felt, and understood by those sitting around the table.

For that reason, the Seder has never been a fixed script alone. Across generations and communities, families have added songs, questions, commentaries, symbolic foods, and creative rituals. Orangs, olives, new readings, personal reflections, moments of silence or song. These additions are not departures from tradition. They are expressions of it. They are how the mitzvah of *v'higadeta l'vincha* – telling the story to our children – is fulfilled in real and living ways.

The Haggadah itself is, in many ways, already a supplement. It takes the brief biblical telling of the Exodus and expands it into a textured, layered experience designed to engage curiosity, provoke questions, and invite participation. Each addition we bring to the Seder continues that work, helping the story land not only as history, but as something that speaks directly into our present lives.

The readings and rituals that follow are offered in that spirit. One invites us to acknowledge the narrowness many of us feel in the world around us, reminding us that the story begins in Mitzrayim, a place of constriction. One looks outward in hope, as we open the door for Elijah, affirming that the world as it is today is not the world as it must always be. And one turns us inward, drawing on the tradition of Miriam's well, reminding us that Jewish life is sustained through the care, courage, and commitment we bring to one another.

These offerings are not intended to replace anything that already lives at your table. They are simply invitations. You may choose to use one, all, or none of them, adapting them as you see fit.

If they help the story of Pesach speak a little more clearly this year, if they open even a small space for conversation, connection, or reflection, then they will have served their purpose.

Wishing you a Chag Kasher v'Sameach

Rabbi Gersh Lazarow & Tammy Cohen RJE
Shtiebel Melbourne

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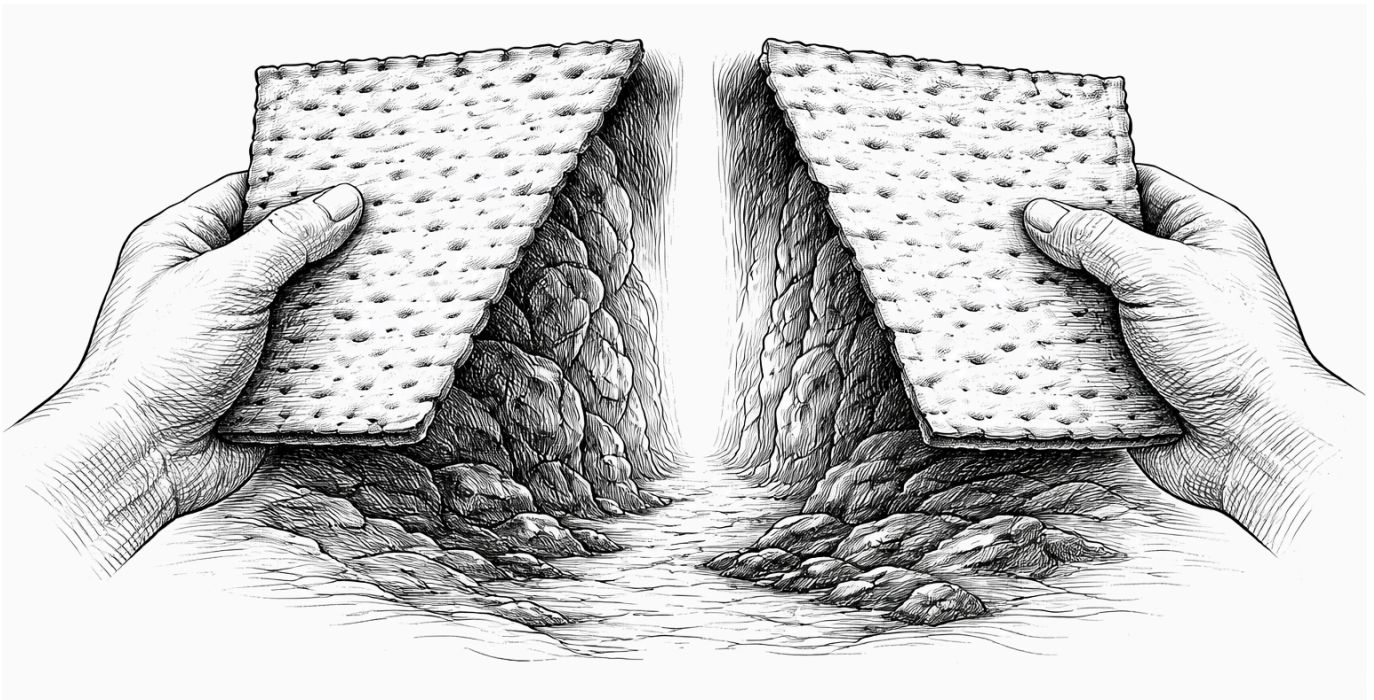


A Moment of Mitzrayim - Naming Our Narrow Places

(Place after Ha Lachma Anya)

Ritual

Invite everyone at the table to hold a small piece of matzah in their hands. Explain briefly that matzah is both the bread of affliction and the bread of freedom. It reminds us of the narrow place of Egypt and of the possibility of liberation that begins there.



Reading

This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. The Hebrew name for Egypt is *Mitzrayim*, a narrow place. Not only a place on a map, but a moment in time when the horizon felt tight and the future uncertain.

Tonight, we remember that the Jewish story begins in such places. We also acknowledge that in our own time, many of us feel that we are living through a narrow moment.

Israelis living under sirens and missiles.

Families are still carrying the trauma of war.

Jewish communities confronting antisemitism.

A world that often feels unsettled and uncertain.

Tonight, we do not pretend that these realities do not exist.
We bring them to the table with us.

Jewish tradition gives us words for moments like this.

**מִן הַמֵּצָר קָרָאתִי יְהוָה,
עֲנֵנִי בְּמִרְחֵב יְהוָה**

*Min ha'metzar karati Yah,
anani vamer'chav Yah.*

*From the narrow place, I called out to God;
God answered me with expansiveness.*

– Psalm 118:5

The story of Pesach does not begin with freedom.

It begins in *Mitzrayim*.

Reflection

Invite those at the table to briefly share:

“What narrow places do we carry into this Seder tonight?”

Allow a short moment for reflection or sharing.

Opening the Door for Elijah

(Place before opening the door for Elijah and singing Eliyahu HaNavi)

Context

At this moment in the Seder, we pour a cup for Elijah the Prophet.

In Jewish tradition, Elijah appears at moments when the world feels unfinished. He is the messenger of redemption, the one who reminds us that history is still moving and that the future can yet be different from the present.

Reading



Tonight, as we gather at our Seder tables, we do so in a world that feels unsettled and fragile. Here in Australia, Jewish schools and synagogues have stood under threat and attack, and many in our community have felt the shadow of hatred in places that should be safe. Beyond our shores, war and conflict continue to scar the lives of millions.

And so, as we lift the cup of Elijah, we open the door of our homes and the door of our hearts, inviting the presence of Elijah the Prophet – the messenger of redemption, the bearer of hope.

Elijah, enter this place.

Sit with us at our table.

Witness our telling of the ancient story of liberation.

For tonight, we remember that across our world, countless people yearn for redemption from the conflicts and crises that consume their lives.

We hold in our hearts the people of Israel who long for security and peace.

We remember the people of Gaza, Lebanon, and Iran who dream of futures different from those shaped by violence and fear.

We remember all those across the Middle East who hope for lives guided not by war or extremism, but by dignity, opportunity, and possibility.

And we remember Jewish communities across the diaspora who continue to live with the shadow of antisemitism and the fragile reality of safety and belonging.

Elijah, messenger of hope, reminds us that the world as it is today is not the world as it must always be.

As you stand at our door and among our people tonight, awaken within us the courage to bring nearer the day when suffering is lifted, when oppression is broken, when broken worlds are healed, and when humanity learns to live together in dignity and peace.

May the day come soon.

And let us say: Amen.

Replenishing the Well

(A ritual before Miriam's Cup)

Context

In many Seders today, alongside Elijah's cup of redemption, we place a cup for Miriam. Jewish tradition teaches that as the Israelites journeyed through the wilderness, a miraculous well travelled with them in Miriam's merit, sustaining the people with water throughout their wandering.

Miriam's well has come to represent the quiet, sustaining strength that carries a people through uncertain times – the courage, care, and resilience that nourish life even in the desert.

Tonight, we honour Miriam and the tradition that remembers her well. But we also recognise that the well does not sustain itself.

Ritual

Place an empty cup on the table. Give each person a small cup or pitcher of water.

Reading

The story of the Jewish people is often told through the voices of prophets and leaders. But the endurance of Jewish life has never rested on leaders alone.

It has been carried forward by countless ordinary people who refused to let Jewish life disappear – by those who continued to teach, to gather, to celebrate, to remember, and to hope even when doing so was difficult.

In every generation, it has taken effort to sustain Jewish life.

In times of exile.

In times of danger.

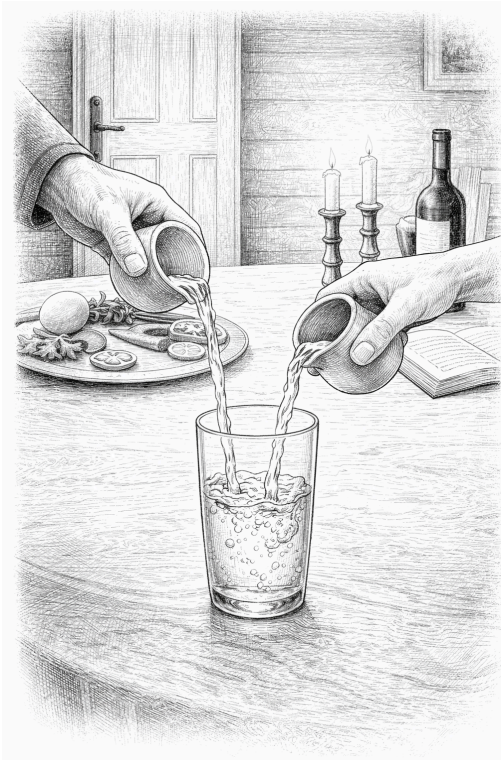
In times when fear or hatred threatened to silence us.

And in our own time as well.

Across our communities today, Jewish life continues not because it is easy, but because people choose – again and again – to sustain it.

Through those who open the doors of synagogues and schools, even when security guards stand outside. Through those who teach our children, lead our prayers, and strengthen our communities through acts of justice and righteousness. Through those who show up, speak up, and refuse to let fear define who we are.

Much of this work happens quietly.
It rarely makes headlines.
But it is the work that keeps the well flowing.



Tonight, we begin with an empty cup.

An empty cup reminds us that wells must be replenished.

As each of us adds water to this cup, we recognise that the strength of Jewish life does not come from any one person alone.

It comes from the small acts of courage, care, and commitment that each of us brings.

Each act of learning.
Each gathering at the table.
Each moment of choosing to live Jewishly and openly in the world.

Together, these small offerings fill the well.

Tonight we place this cup beside Miriam's – honouring her example and committing ourselves to continue the work she began.

May we never grow weary of replenishing the well.
And may the waters of Jewish life continue to flow for generations to come.

הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנָשׁוּבָה חֲדָשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם

Hashiveinu Adonai eilecha V'nashuvah Chadeish yameinu Kekedem

Return us to You, Adonai, and we will return. Renew our days as of old.

- *Lamentations 5:21*