

A Seder for the Final Day of Passover (DRAFT)

We must get it out of our head that this is a doomed time
That we are waiting for the end.
We love apocalypses too much.

Very tired of the modern form of historicism which sees in this civilization
the defeat of the best hopes of Western religion and thought,
the question of ordinary human experience is the principle question,
the strength of virtue
or spiritual capacity measured by ordinary life.

Saul Bellow *Herzog*

Proem

Passover is the time to discuss the Pascal offering, the bread of affliction, and the bitter dispute between religions about the messiah. This Seder is a continuation of the traditional Passover Seder. We discuss the past two thousand years of western civilization to imagine a redeemed world. We all dream of a time without war jealousy or strife. We are not doomed. A Seder meal is the ideal time to discuss the virtue that leads to salvation . Our holyday and ordinary meals are the time to discuss what our traditions say about the messianic era and the type of leadership required to achieve *Tikkun Olam*, the reconstruction of our broken world. We have chosen this night to discuss these issues because we cannot end our Passover without talking about the Messiah. They may be discussed every night.

Introduction

The tradition of a Seder on the final day of Passover is an innovation of Rabbi Israel (BAL Shem Tov) the founder of the Chassidic movement. The Rabbi taught that the wellsprings of salvation would overflow when his teachings quenched the thirst of all. In our time the Chabad Lubavitch movement celebrates this Seder as a focus on the leadership of their Grand Rabbi (Rebbe) Menachem Mendel Schneerson. The Rebbe has been declared Messiah, sparking controversy in the Jewish community. Chabad Lubavitch, following Jewish law understands that the Jewish messiah is expected to be a literal savior. This means that the Messiah leads the people from exile back to the Promised Land, rebuilds the Temple and inspires world peace. Since the Rebbe has ascended to heaven he will have to return to finish his work. The idea of a Second Coming strikes most Jews as very Christian. On the other hand, after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem

God gave the children of Israel a second chance and a Second Temple. The Second Temple was destroyed because of sectarian fighting. The pattern is set by the destruction of the First Set of Tablets and Moses second ascent up Mount Sinai to receive the second set of tablets. In a way this is the second coming of the law. The children of Israel carried the shattered pieces of the first set in an Ark, as a reminder of the incident of the Golden Calf, and a forgiving merciful God. We all live in a shattered world and do well to learn the lessons of the second chance.

The Christian Bible is split into Old and New Testaments. This implies that the old world order is based on ruined sacred truths that have been replaced by a newer better version.

I think of the Bible as a library of books bound in one volume. The Hebrew Bible is the Prime Testament and the Gospels a re-vision. I do not use the terms Old and New. The New Israel does not supercede and triumph over the Old. I am open to all new teachings, excluding the notion that I am a Semitic fossil.

If you google The Final Testament you will find references to The Quran, the sacred scripture of Islam. This makes sense if one accepts the logic that the latest model is always the best.

Also, following the logic that the latest is the best, we must consider another final trump, communism, *Das Kapital* and its messianic visions superseding Jerusalem. Furthermore the Book of Mormon supercedes all that it precedes, following the concept of strict progressive revelation. Then, at some point we wonder if Freud was preaching a replacement religion.

To reconstruct our sacred truths this Seder is the beginning of a discussion on religion revelation and redemption. We do not expect to fix two thousand years of misunderstanding in one night of dialogue.

Approaching my fortieth year as a master teacher (Rabbi) I do think it is essential that I mention how I read all sacred scriptures. I consider The Torah, Gospels, Quran and all other texts of revelation "scription". Scripture is a unique genre, scriptural fiction. Scription is description. All scripture is the handwriting of humans who imagine Gods plan for this world. God is created in the image of the human mind. God and the imagination are one. Scripture is fiction. Literalism creates fundamentalism and dogma. Dogma and dialogue do not mix. I am open to how others read, and welcome opening our discussion on that topic.

Preparations

The preparation for this Seder begins with a review of all the other Seders. This Seder cannot be scripted for you. You must make time to prepare your own text. Also, a real symposium is not over scripted so you may have an open ended discussion as your Seder. You are invited to also use “Who is driving Elijah’s chariot? A role playing game” found in the Seder.

Passover begins with Shabbat Hagadol and the first appearance of Elijah. The presence of Elijah is essential at this Seder. Elijah appears only after extensive preparation. Be prepared and ready to make time. When you make time, time becomes holy, opening to an understanding of eternal truths. A simple meal becomes a sacrament when you make time holy. Make Kiddush. Break bread. Experience the presence of your creator waiting to be your redeemer.

Elijah has the answers if you have the questions. The focus at this Seder is the announcement of the messianic redeemer. All other Seders are about past events. This Seder ascends to the Arête at the top of the mountain. This Alpine (Arête) event is called a peak experience by Abraham Maslow. An Arête is a sharp crested dangerous place like the highest ridges of the Alps. The lofty ideas of messiahs often fall off these high ridges. Still, we agree with Martin Buber that the concept of the messiah is “Judaism’s most profoundly original idea.” This is also true of Christianity.

Step one is the ascent. On the Arête we find the sum of all good qualities that create character. Arête means the perfection of excellence valor and virtue. Arête is virtue that gives arms and hands to our most cherished human ideals and dreams of a better world. Elijah comes to teach us how to interpret that dream.

Step two in your preparation is being ready to receive the message of Elijah. This means leaving outdated ways of thinking at the door. We humbly admit that religion has been powerless over tyranny and tyrants. Whatever our religious belief or political affiliation we admit that Gods face seems hidden. Manslaughter murder and war are the headlines every day. Our history is about the abuse of power. We seem to have no modern prophets to speak truth to this power. We turn to our comedians for comic relief from the news, and often give up hope for any real change in the daily reporting of our history.

If the Messiah is The Arête on the arête, how will she or he transmit her teachings? Ask Elijah.

This Seder begins a dialogue about the future of humanity and history. People from all religious traditions are invited. We also invite atheists and agnostics. Unlike our Seder at the beginning of Passover this Seder is not necessarily for children. In fact, we are going to discuss topics way beyond a Sunday school understanding of religion, history, and the future of humanity.

Ten Topics and Questions before beginning

(Kindly make your own list)

- 1.) Why is Moses not mentioned in The Passover Haggaddah?**
- 2.) Was Moses the first Messiah?**
- 3.) Why is Elijah the announcer of the Messiah?**
- 4.) Is John the Baptist Elijah?**
- 5.) Was Jesus the Messiah? A Messiah? How do Jews understand Jesus?**
- 6.) Is Christian worship based on Jewish foundations?**
- 7.) Why have Christians failed to understand the Jewish experience?**
- 8.) Why have Jews failed to understand the Christian experience?**
- 9.) How do Jews and Christians dialogue with Islam?**

Finally, prepare notes on what you think of Hans Kung's formula to discuss at the Seder:

**No Peace among the nations
Without peace among the religions.**

**No Peace among the religions
Without dialogue between the religions.**

**No dialogue between the religions
Without investigation of the foundations of the religion.**

Introduction

This Seder is structured according to Jewish tradition. The Christian community transforms the Seder into a commemoration of events in the life of Jesus. The early church fathers often mention temptations to attend Jewish worship. Judaizing was discouraged as a new religion differentiated the old from the new. Now Judaizing is not a pejorative and is part of the task at hand.

In the Jewish home meals are the foundation of liturgy and ritual. Ritual washing before the meal is required. As water flows freely for all so does the wisdom of Torah. Life comes from water, as does purity. The earliest apostles attended the Temple daily and ate communal meals. (Acts 2:46)

The early Christian understanding of the Eucharist is an offering of praise and thanksgiving, much like the Rabbis' Grace after meals. Christian worship is a love

feast and the Seder of Messiah on the Seventh day of Passover an ideal time to compare worship and to worship together.

The Messiahs Feast

A local Chabad House has invited all Jews to *Moshiachs* (Messiahs) Feast on the final day of Passover. The word “final” appears over and over again. The final day of Passover is about the final liberation. The Founder of the Chassidic movement, as explained, created the concept of a Seder for Messiah.

Is this the year we will be redeemed from the final exile?

If so, how will the final liberation take place?

Has the Messiah, finally, arrived?

Is Menachem Mendel Schneerson the Chabad Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi) the Final redeemer?

The announcement that the rabbi is Messiah is discussed heatedly.

Chabad is criticized for proclaiming a Messiah who has passed away and will be returning. Most Jews are skeptical that a true messiah will ever come since all previous messiahs have been false. The doctrine of a personal Messiah has fallen on hard times in the Jewish community. The Messianic dimension of Judaism causes many great embarrassments.

This Seder is the ideal time to reopen discussion about the Messiah.

Rabbinic legalists admit that Christianity and Islam served the interests of the God of history. Maimonides discusses The Messiah at the end of The *Mishna Torah* including a complete job description with qualifications.

This is the starting point of all traditional Jewish discourse about the messiah.

Reviewing the worldview of Maimonides in the Mishna Torah I am struck by its being limited to ancient models of government and leadership. As an orthodox Rabbi I considered his rulings the final word. I no longer do.

The Messiah is evaluated in the final section called The Laws of Kings and Their Wars. Twenty three commandments are listed, including the appointment of a king. The laws also outline the need to exterminate the Amalakites and rebuild the Temple.

The final chapter (eleven) refers to Messiah as King, one who will return us to the good old days of King David, gather the dispersed of the Diaspora back to Israel and reconstitute the ancient judges and Sanhedrin. King David is referred to as Messiah, so, in a way, Messiah is the second coming of David.

The returned Messiah is not required to walk on water or to show any sign or wonder. Also, Maimonides reminds us it is human to err on the identity of the Messiah, as did our great rabbi Akiba who proclaimed a warrior, Bar Kochba, the redeemer.

Of course, the Messiah must be a success. Maimonides did not consider Jesus the Redeemer. Maimonides seems to accept as fact the verdict of the *Bet Din* (Court) that Jesus should be put to death. In other words our great Rabbi accepts the myths of his times as facts. Did the Rabbis kill Jesus? This needs further discussion since Maimonides, our greatest legalist was not a historian. This opens him to accepting the a historical as fact.

The facts are not clear from any source. Also, the Sadducees of the story no longer exist and the Pharisees are only precursors to the Rabbis. Every effort must be put forth not to connect whatever happened at the trial of Jesus to today's Jews. We must be careful quoting our own sources. We are not responsible for the death of the Christian Messiah.

Maimonides does see positive Christian and Muslim contributions to Tikkun Olam.

Messiah will declare that the New Testament does not supersede the "Old". Maimonides knew that the Quran is called a "Final Testament" but Messiah will teach that it does not have the last word.

As in these Seders Elijah plays a key role in the future of religion. Maimonides teaches that Messiah comes to bring peace to the world, as Elijah announces. We do not know the details of the coming of the Messiah or how Elijah knows the identity of the true messiah. This gives the real power to Elijah.

One may wonder why people who think they are Jesus not have the far loftier fantasy of being Elijah.

Why Elijah?

Elijah welcomes us all in to the covenant of Abraham and Sarah.

Elijah attends every Seder, which he considers the table of God.

Elijah is the moderator of the final symposium on the end of the violence of history.

Elijah teaches all that they are messiahs, leaders, capable of transforming secrets into basic teachings. Elijah brings us from mystery to mastery.

Elijah teaches the transformation of dream into reality.

Our greatest dream is to accomplish Tikkun Olam under the leadership of God almighty. This is the role of messianism. Cynics scoff at the dream, modern Professors teach that Death is the Messiah, or, after the holocaust, the angel of death. We restate with Martin Buber that Messianism is "Judaism's most profoundly original idea." Messianism is the dream and hope of creating a better world.

To Read

Kindly contact me for suggestions for further reading.

Prepare to read and discuss the Song of Songs at your Seder.

As with every holyday the prophetic reading for that day defines the supreme themes of the day. We read Isaiah 10:32-12:6.

A discussion of the Haftorah is essential for this Seder.

The final day of Passover celebrates the final redemption. The final liberation according to tradition is inspired by the leadership of the Messiah. Commenting on the Passover Haggadah the Lubavitcher Rebbe teaches that ultimately personal redemption leads to the collective redemption from our final exile. Lubavitcher Chassidim believe the Rebbe is Messiah. Hopefully this will inspire dialogue between Jews and Christians about the fulfillment of messianic prophecy. In the end we ask ourselves about the role of a human messiah in the drama of redemption. Remember, if we think of all of recorded history as a Seder we have not completed the meal. The table remains the focus of fellowship as we let the bread and wine speak. Praise God who is always our salvation and hope.

Sealah: Master the Mystery

Our sages teach that “the first redeemer is the final redeemer”. This does not mean we are awaiting the second appearance of Moses. Moses is a Levite and the messiah, according to tradition comes from the tribe of Judah. Genesis 49:10 is often quoted as a verse that refers to the final redeemer of Israel and the nations. Jacob gathers his twelve sons to tell them, in a prophetic vision what will happen “In the end of days”. Leadership will come from a descendent of Judah according to verse ten:

The scepter shall not depart from Judah
Nor the rulers staff from between his feet
Until the coming of *Sheloh* (Shiloh)
To messiah shall the obedience of the people be.

Many widely varying readings are given this verse. It is a fact of history that the Kings of Judah ceased after the destruction of the Temple. Does this mean the scepter of ruler ship did depart from Judah? Christians believe that Shiloh is Jesus, the new and future King of the Jews. The Rabbis and Christianity understand *Sheloh* (Shiloh) to be a title of Messiah. The word *Sheloh* may be compared to the word Sealah a word that is often

listed as not translatable by biblical scholars. Rabbinic commentators, including Rashi read *Sheloh* (in Genesis 49:10) without the Hebrew letter yould, as if it is a poetic form of 'peace'. My reading of the word is that the Messiah will bring tranquility to the soul, peace in the home, between the tribes, and finally between the nations.

The word *Sealah* occurs mostly in the Book of Psalms with a few mentions by the prophet Habakkuk. *Sealah* in the Psalms means either pause, or "lift up your voices". Open the Book of Habakkuk and read the three chapters. Notice in Chapter three the prophet punctuates his prayer with "*Sealah*". Prophecy and poetry walk arm in arm, and prayer is set to music. The coming of Shiloh means the birth of a leader who is a prince of peace. Habakkuk prays that God pour out wrath and judgment on the tyrants of history and then remember compassion. This is Elijah's cue at the Passover Seder to enter the door and sit with your family before singing The Hallel. Silence comes after the storm, and then song. The coming of Messiah is a splendor no words describe. The righteous have always danced in Gods presence and absence, patiently awaiting a messiah with firm faith. This is described by our great rabbi poets, and by Habakkuk.

So 'Sealah' means the uplifting of voice and hands to our creator, and describes our coming prince of Shelo. In our prayers we say:

All the living shall ever thank Thee, *Sealah*
And sincerely praise Thy name, O God,
Who art always our salvation and hope, *Sealah*

In the final analysis *Sealah* is a reminder that God is our savior and the messiah, like Moses, is Gods Shepard.

A *Sealah* Seder

A prayer before beginning:

O God who is our Lord, we pray for heaven on earth. We share our daily bread at this Seder. This home is a place of searching study. Sanctity and innocence and beauty are born in the customs of this ceremony. We rebuild your Temple when our homes are sanctified and become a house of prayer for all people. Amen. *Sealah*.

Bless the meal and eat.

At the meal discuss

**The fundamentals of religion.
Peace between the religions.
Peace among nations.**

Inviting the Presence to your Table:

“Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai said;” Three who eat at one table and engage in Altartalk places God at their table as Ezekiel teaches;

“This is The Table in The Presence of the Lord.”

Rabbi Chalfta adds,“ How do we know this applies to two? Malachi teaches:

“Those who revered The Lord spoke to one another.”

How do we know the above applies to one?

Moses teaches, after the Ten Principle teachings (Exodus 20:24)

**“In every place my Name is mentioned
I will come to you and bless you.”**

Grace

Grace after meals: All say grace of their tradition and add:

“If the only prayer you say is “thank you” that is enough.” Meister Eckhart

Thank you.

The All Merciful Lord our God has sent us Elijah the prophet who teaches the Path and announces the good news of redemption.

May we all merit life in the days of our Anointed.

May we have a vision of the messiah within so we recognize the messiah without.

Texts for discussion

Rabban Gamaliel taught: The spirit of the ritual of the Seder includes three supreme themes:

- 1.) The Passover Sacrifice**
- 2.) The Matzah**

3.) The *Maror* Bitter herbs

Discuss.

This is the same Rabbi who appears in the New Testament. Rabban Gamaliel in Acts: 5(33-40). This is the discussion that lasts an evening.

Who is driving Elijah's chariot? A Role Playing Game

Randomly assign the following parts in this role playing game:

Elijah:

An Atheist

An Agnostic

A Rabbi

A Priest

An Imam

Reader One, two three etc. as needed. In my version they are called arête hikers.

You may add to, or take away from any words of the script. (I have added Republican and Democrat to this version.) Print out one version per participant.

Atheist: Listen, I thank you for the meal but I am skeptical about welcoming any messiah. We must all save our own lives. No knight in shining armor is coming to redeem anything. I am thankful that we no longer sacrifice animals as a form of prayer. I no longer take Holy Communion because I do not want to reenact any ancient ritual involving blood. I thought blood was forbidden.

I do not deny that Jesus is the main character of our play for the past two thousand years. I do think some have been lead away by diverse and strange teachings. In my opinion the very idea of a messiah is false.

Agnostic: Atheists are as dogmatic as fundamentalists. If one has a proof that God does not exist we all will become atheists and we have no reason to discuss a redeemer and redemption. Agnosticism is a far more rational opinion.

Atheist: In the name of God nation lifts up sword against nation. Religion is responsible for more deaths the past two thousand years than any political movements.

Agnostic: There you go again with the dogmas of the atheist. More people were killed in the 20th Century than in all the wars up to that time. Your argument is based on fantasy not fact. The truth is the wars of the 20th Century have been political, inspired by secular tyrants.

Elijah: Let's stay focused on fundamentals. Following chronology we will let the Rabbi speak first, followed by The Priest, then the Imam then the Reverend.

Rabbi: The Judaism's have no consensus about the Messiah. Maimonides orthodoxy that we believe with perfect faith in the coming of messiah was never accepted as an article of faith, even by the orthodox community. After Jesus, Bar Kochba and Shabbatai Zvi we tend to focus more on the sparks of the Messiah within. The Bal Shem Tov taught that the messiah would come when Chassidic teachings filled the world. This explains the good works of Lubavitcher Chassidim.

The Priest: First I would like to thank you for inviting me to your domestic church. Passover is the essence of my religion. Death is not The Messiah. Redemption from death is the Messiah. For me, being here this evening is a homecoming.

Rabbi: Amen.

Elijah: Imam, what is the view of Islam concerning the messianic era, Jesus and the Messiah?

Imam: In the Name of Allah may we all submit to Peace. The fundamental teachings of Islam have little in common with the Islamic fundamentalists who hijack our religion. I can speak for all of Islam since we have no hierarchy. This is a blessing and a challenge since Imams play on a level playing field. Many Imams confuse politics and religion.

Shia Muslims, who are in the minority (less than twenty percent of my people are ***Shia***) do have messianic teachings very close to those of Judaism and Christianity. The ***Mahdi*** of the Shia is a type of second coming who will reign until the return of Jesus and Judgment Day.

The majority of Muslims await a great leader who will inspire a revival of the faith. I personally believe ethical monotheism is the true religion, but as with Jews and Christians Muslims focus mainly on the redemption of their own community.

Elijah: Well said Imam.

Reverend: Thank the good Lord that we have more in common than many realize. I speak for all Protestants, in saying we are ready for the Messiah, whether one believes it is the first or second coming.

A Republican: Personally I am more focused on the next election. The President of the free world is the closest I can imagine a messiah to be, unless Jesus himself returns, and I do not think he will be on the ballot.

A Democrat: The messiah must be a democrat since he comes riding on a donkey, not an elephant.

Elijah: We see from politics that leadership is crucial and who becomes President a key to our future.

Republican: Say, Elijah, you're the answer man. Is my man going to win the next election?

Democrat: Elijah is the expert on messianic election not mundane elections.

Elijah: Back to our discussion of Peace between the religions.

ReaderArête hiker one: Yes, foundations. Teach us Elijah.

Elijah: The first is that God is Lord. Existence is meaningful. Each of us has a purpose. The First of the Ten Principle teachings is that God is the Lord of history. The Final Redemption, which is announced at this Seder, perfects the first redemption of the first Passover. The Messiah finishes the task Moses began.

Arête hiker two: Will Messiah fashion a New (or Final) Set of Tablets or start a New Religion?

Elijah: No. You have all the wisdom and knowledge necessary to redeem the world. You need an understanding of how to live the teachings. Think of the first revelation of the Tablets that were shattered by our idolatry. Tradition teaches that they were placed in the Ark of the Covenant. They represent our shattered lives. We are given a second chance.

Arête hiker three: So tell us already who is the Messiah and when is he coming?

Elijah: Asked and answered.

Arête hiker four: What? Where?

Elijah: The Messiah will come when the teachings are fluent on every persons tongue. The waters that are drawn from the wellsprings of salvation are found in every religious tradition. The Messiah will come when the greatest individualism in religion is taught and the Messiah teaches and represents this individualism. On that day the graves open themselves and the angel of death is defeated as we learn at the end of every Passover Seder.

Arête hiker five: So when does this all happen?

Elijah: Today, if you hear the voice.

Rabbi : With all due respect that does not answer the question.

Elijah: Why do you think I alone merit knowing the answer?

Rabbi: That is our tradition.

Elijah: This is the mystery I reveal: The messiah comes when we ignite the spark of messiah within. God is the Messiah. Moses is the prototype of his agent on earth. Moses set the stage for future redeemers.

Rabbi: We were hoping for a name.

Elijah: Religions speak of the Messiah within. Listen to the Elijah within.

Arête hiker six: How?

Elijah: Simple. Order your meals into sacraments like this final Seder. Talk. Teach. Learn. This year we are slaves. Next year we will be free. Amen. Sealah.

Finally, a reading from Rabban Jacob Neusner. This reading will be discussed for generations to come:

A Final Word

(My versification)

The ancient rabbis look out upon a world destroyed
And still smoking in the aftermath of calamity
But they speak of rebirth and renewal.
The holy Temple lay in ruins
But they ask about sanctification.

The old history was over
But they look forward to future history.

**Theirs is a message:
What is true and real
Is the opposite of what people perceive.**

**God stands for paradox
Strength comes through weakness
Salvation through acceptance and obedience, sanctification from the ordinary
and profane
which can be made holy.**

**Now to informed Christians
This mode of thought
Must prove remarkably familiar
For the cross that stands for weakness
Yields salvation
And the crucified criminal
is king and savior.
That is the foolishness
to which the apostle Paul makes reference.**

**Yet the greater the “nonsense”
Life out of the grave
Eternity from death
The deeper the truth
The richer the paradox!**

**So here with these old Jews
One group speaking of sanctification of Israel, the people
The other of salvation of Israel and the world
Separately they are thinking along the same lines
Coming to conclusions remarkably congruent to one another
Affirming the paradox of God in the world
of humanity in Gods image
In the rabbinical framework
of God in the flesh of Christian.**

**Is it not time
For the joint heirs of ancient Israel’s scripture and hope
To meet once more
In humility
before the living God?
Along with all humanity
Facing backward towards Auschwitz and total destruction
And forward toward total annihilation
Of the world as we know it
Is it not time?**

(*Judaism in the beginning of Christianity*, concluding remarks, used with authors permission.)