Racial Justice & Inclusivity Haggadah

USF Jewish Studies and Social Justice Program
in partnership with Be’chol Lashon
Be’chol Lashon

Be’chol Lashon means “in every language” in Hebrew, reflecting that Jews are a multicultural people who live all over the world. Be’chol Lashon is a non-profit organization that grows and strengthens the Jewish people through racial, ethnic, and cultural inclusiveness. We celebrate the diversity that has characterized the Jewish people throughout history, and through contemporary forces including intermarriage, conversion and adoption. GlobalJews.org

USF Jewish Studies and Social Justice Program

The Swig Program in Jewish Studies and Social Justice minor engages students in both theoretical and practical applications of social justice and activism rooted in the Jewish traditions. Our interdisciplinary curriculum examines Jewish culture, history, politics, philosophy, and language to better understand and strengthen marginalized communities around the globe. usfca.edu

Special thanks to Andrew Elias Ramer, a Maggid (Jewish sacred storyteller), living in San Francisco. Born in Queens in 1951, he believes that the prophetic tradition and storytelling are one and the same. The job of a storyteller is to create a narrative that holds a group together, forms the fabric of thought that a community or village of people inhabit.
OPENING

Leader: Welcome to our Seder.

“Know from whence you came. If you know whence you came, there are absolutely no limitations to where you can go.” — James Baldwin

For more than 3000 years, Jews have gathered together to retell the story of their deliverance from bondage under a cruel ruler. We do this in hope that remembering our history will help us create ways to prevent such atrocities from happening in our own time.

In Hebrew, Seder means “Order,” as every traditional Seder unfolds in a series of steps that we will explore this evening by reading from a text called a Haggadah, which means “The Telling” in Hebrew. There’s one copy of the text on each table and it will also be projected up on the screen. When it says Reader, one of you will read. Please let your tablemates know if you don’t want to read. When it says Leader, it comes back to one of us, and when it says All we’ll all read together.

There’s food on each table. But please wait until we’ve said the blessings over the food before you begin to eat.

The first step we take is called Kadesh – Sanctification – lighting the festival candles. Afterward, we thank God for allowing us to share this occasion together.

Baruch Atah Ado-nai, Elo-heinu Melech Ha-olam, Asher Kid’shanu B’mitzvotav V’tzivanu L’hadlik Ner Shel Yom Tov.

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us with Your commandments and commanded us to kindle the festival lights. Amen.

Baruch Atah Ado-nai, Elo-heinu Melech Ha-olam, shehecheyanu vekiymanu vehigi’anu lazman hazeh.

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion. Amen.
QUESTIONS

Leader: On Passover we tell our freedom story so that we can pass it on to new generations. Jewish tradition teaches that it is important to ask questions. We are often taught that the questions are more important than the answers, for it is only through inquiry that we can truly understand ourselves and the world around us.

On Passover it is traditional to recite four questions. One key question is: Why is this night different from all other nights?

All: Because tonight we remember that the things that divide us — race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, among others — also have the power to unite us.

Leader: Whether it be questions about this ritual or story, or questions about the experiences of others at our communal table, tonight is an opportunity to learn.

All: Tonight we pledge to engage with openness, understanding, and respect for all, because we learn and grow from many points of view and a variety of experiences and understandings strengthen the conversation about Jewish ideas.

And we also pledge to share the values expressed in the answers to our questions and pledge to live them out for all the rest of our days.

THE FOUR CHILDREN

Leader: At Passover we speak of four children. The wise child asks: Why do we ascribe privilege to some racial groups? Why do we elevate the traditions, foods and languages of some ethnic groups and not others?

Reader: School the wise child in the history of slavery and hatred, as it existed in ancient times, about the role of slavery in building the ‘New World.’ Teach them about the patterns of migration, the exiles, the migrations, the hard choices and the lack of choices and how they shaped the ways we see each other. Teach them that beyond the history and institutions there are individuals, each with their own experiences. Help them to learn how to recognize what they do not know, how to respect the needs of others, and how to find strength from the diversity of humanity.
Leader: The wicked child says: You are much too sensitive. You make too much of this. There are always winners and losers in every society and in every era, we cannot expect to all have the same experiences.

Reader: Take a deep breath and remember that a closed mind is often attached to a closed heart. Engage this child by asking open-ended questions with curiosity and compassion. Listen for the places of fear. Ask questions that may widen the narrow spaces that they may expand, if not now then in the future.

Leader: The simple child says: I am colorblind. We are all human. I do not see the differences between people, I just see our humanity.

Reader: Gently teach the simple child of the value of color and difference. Teach them the value of their own experience that they may see the value in the experiences of others. Help them celebrate the many ways we can be human.

Leader: The child who cannot ask says: Nothing.

Reader: With the child who cannot ask, share generously of the world. School this child in their own heritage but also in the heritage of others. Expose this child to many kinds of people, cultures, and customs. Let them taste many dishes, hear many types of music, and see a variety of arts and crafts so that they may build a broad and bountiful understanding of all that is beautiful in the world.

All: All of us are created in the image of God. Let us remember this as we move through the world. And with friends, family, in our conversations with others in school, let us talk about the many ways that hatred and assumptions diminish the holiness of others. Let us remember as we move through the world that we cannot know everything about others—until we begin to ask them questions.
SEDER PLATE SYMBOLISM

**Leader:** On the main table is a plate with some unusual items on it, some of which will also be found on your table. This is the Seder plate. As you hear about each item, we will hold up that item so that everyone can see it, or direct you to eat it if it’s on your own table.

**Reader:** This is the shank bone. In ancient times our ancestors brought sacrifices at Passover. Today we recognize the many sacrifices people have made and continue to make in order that we will be free.

**Reader:** The maror, the bitter herb, is symbol of the bitterness of slavery. Long after the herb has been chewed and swallowed the bitter taste stays in your mouth—this is true of every experience that dehumanizes us. There’s maror on every table. Now let us all taste some of the maror.

**Reader:** This is the Karpas, the green herb, which we dip in salt water. The herbs of spring represent hope and potential and the saltwater the tears of affliction—for all the hope in the world that is present despite the tears. In this we acknowledge our strength and persistence in the face of injustice. And now we will all dip our greens in the salt water and eat them.

**Reader:** And this is the matzah, the bread of affliction, made in haste as our ancestors left ancient Egypt, may we eat of it as a symbol of urgency, to bring freedom to all.

**Reader:** This is the charoset, a sweet paste that represents the mortar the Israelites made by hand when they were enslaved. It is sweet because even when we are enslaved we are not without our humanity, we can find moments of creativity and sweetness. We eat the charoset to recognize the many cultural contributions enslaved people have gifted to the future generations. Now, please dip a piece of matzah in charoset and eat it.

**Reader:** This is the egg, a symbol of the cyclical nature of life. It is a reminder to each of us that conversations about slavery, about diversity and inclusion need to be had continuously.
BLESSINGS

Leader: We now recite three traditional blessings: over bread, matzah, and wine/grape juice:

ברוך אתהibraltar מלך העולמים המופקד על התורה.

Baruch Atah Ado-nai, Elo-heinu Melech Ha-olam, hamotzi lechem min haaretz.

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

ברוך אתה Gibraltar מלך העולמים, אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וציוונו על אכילה מצה.

Baruch Atah Ado-nai, Elo-heinu Melech Ha-olam, al achilat matzah.

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning the eating of matzah.

ברוך אתה Gibraltar מלך העולמים בורא פרי גפן.

Baruch Atah Ado-nai, Elo-heinu Melech Ha-olam, borei pri hagafen.

Blessed are You, Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

AVADIM HAYINU

Leader: Avadim Hayinu means “We were slaves.” This how we begin to tell our story of the liberation from oppression.

All: We were slaves to Pharaoh in the land of Egypt. And the Eternal our God, took us out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched forearm. And if the Holy One, blessed be He, had not taken our ancestors from Egypt, behold we and our children and our children’s children would [all] be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. And even if we were all sages, all discerning, all elders, all knowledgeable about the Torah, it would be a commandment upon us to tell the story of the exodus from Egypt. And anyone who adds [and spends extra time] in telling the story of the exodus from Egypt, behold he is praiseworthy.

Leader: The Haggadah sets forth the theme that we, not just our ancestors, were slaves to Pharaoh but God delivered each of us “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.”
Reader: Jews are a people of memory and action. On Passover, we use stories and rituals to remember and retell the narrative of our collective liberation. We share the ancient Exodus story, year after year, so that it resonates through the generations as a narrative of deliverance from slavery to freedom.

Reader: In some Jewish communities, exodus and liberation are not just metaphors but lived experiences in their lifetimes. For some of us reading this story tonight, we are living through or have survived our own Exodus. But even if we have not lived through a literal Exodus, we have an obligation—and an opportunity—to consider the meaning of this story in our own lives.

Reader: In Hebrew, Egypt is called Mitzrayim, which means “a narrow place.” Every year, the Haggadah asks us not only to share the story of the Exodus, but challenges us to actively engage with the process of combating oppression. We are encouraged to connect the biblical story of Exodus to communal and individual struggles for liberation and are reminded that the fight for freedom is ongoing.

Discussion 1: Why do you think the text starts with “We were slaves” instead of “Our ancestors were slaves?” How does this quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "no one is free until we are all free," connect to avadim hayinu? How are we free today? How are we still struggling? Share something that you are doing or can commit to doing to help move yourself or others from “a narrow place” to a place of shared freedom.
STORYTELLING

Leader: The Exodus story, though ancient, also resonates through the generations because it is the story of liberation and deliverance. For the Jewish communities of Ethiopia and Uganda, it is not hard to imagine themselves as coming out of Egypt, as they have experienced liberation and exodus not just as metaphors but as experiences in their lifetime.

Davi Cheng
Recently at work, one of my co-workers, who is Chinese originally from Taiwan, stopped by my desk to ask me a question. He spotted the calendar on my desk.
“You have a Jewish calendar,” he said.
“Yes?” I replied.
“A Jewish calendar?” he asked again.
“I am Jewish,” I said.
He looked at me and smiled, “You are? Really?”
“Yes, I am Jewish”
“Really? You are Jewish?”
“Yes.”
“Really?” he asked again.
This has been my normal experience. Jews and non-Jews alike ask me exactly three times if I am really Jewish. I am a Hong Kong-born Chinese immigrant. I came to the United States with my family in 1971. I embraced the covenant and became Jewish in 1997. I am also a lesbian. At times I am too Chinese to fit in with my American friends, or I am too American to fit in with my Chinese friends. I’m too gay to the Chinese, and too Chinese to the Jews! One way to look at this is that I don’t fit in anywhere, the other way to see it is that I belong to multiple communities and can serve as a connector to the differences.

Yeganyahu Avishai Mekonen
In 1984, the Beta Israel—a secluded 2,500-year-old community of observant Jews in the northern Ethiopian mountains—began a secret and dangerous journey of escape. His family embarked on the dangerous walk across Ethiopia to Sudan. This was a life-defining event for Avishai in many ways. Then 10 years old, he was kidnapped by slave traffickers in a Sudanese refugee camp. He was found by an Israeli special agent and returned to his family in time for them to board the plane to Israel as part of the Israeli airlift called Operation Moses. He made a documentary film about his experience, breaking his 20-year silence about the traumatic kidnapping he, along with other children, endured in Sudan. “400 Miles to Freedom” chronicles Avishai’s exploration of what it takes to claim one’s own identity. From Israel to the United States he connects with other Jews of color with similar struggles, and discovers how his community’s trek across Africa, and what happened to him along the way, is part of larger histories of people affected by immigration, war, and Diaspora.

Sarah Aroeste
The times in my life when I have most often struggled to retain that feeling of being grounded, I have turned to music. It is not coincidence that the first song I ever wrote is about a young girl trying to find her way home. The song “Chika Morena” is about the iconic Sephardic girl who has been kicked out of her homeland and has been searching the world over to return home. Along the way, she longs to be guided by her ancestors to return to the comfort of her roots. Aroeste writes and sings in Ladino, the Judeo-Spanish dialect that originated by Spanish Jews after their expulsion from Spain in 1492. Those who left Spain, including
Aroeste’s family, carried the medieval language with them to the various places where they later settled, primarily along the Mediterranean coast and North Africa. In time, Ladino came to absorb bits and pieces of languages all along the Mediterranean coast, including some Greek, Turkish, Portuguese, French, Italian, Hebrew, and more. Inspired by her family’s Sephardic roots in Greece and Macedonia, she has spent the last decade bringing her contemporary style of original and traditional Ladino music to audiences around the world. “I have extra inspiration to grapple with my feelings of connectedness.”

**Rabbi Gershom Sizomu**

Rabbi Gershom Sizomu is the leader of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda, which means “people of Judah.” This 2,000 strong community in Eastern Africa has only been in existence since 1919. According to Rabbi Sizomu, “At Passover, every person is supposed to feel as though he himself left Egypt. But we do not need to imagine, we were rescued from ‘slavery’ and saved by divine intervention in order to celebrate. When dictator Idi Amin Dada took power in Uganda in 1971, the practice of Judaism was outlawed. My father was caught studying Torah and only survived after the officer demanded a bribe. Three leaders of the community were arrested and tortured for collecting iron sheets that had been blown off the roof of the Synagogue. In April 1979, on Passover, Ugandan rebels kicked Idi Amin out and declared freedom of worship. This was considered a miracle from above and Passover remains a special moment for all us. It is amazing that the reign of terror ended and that freedom of worship was reinstated at this season of freedom. That, Amin, like Pharoah, was humiliated on the Eve of Pesach could not have simply been a mere coincidence. It was our Passover miracle.”
CUP OF REDEMPTION

At a traditional seder we fill a cup of wine for the prophet Elijah who is a symbol of redemption. At this seder we are raising a cup of water as a symbol of the redemption that women have brought through the generations.

All: Water is the symbol of life.

Reader: The biblical prophet Miriam saved her brother from the waters of the Nile, she led the song of victory after the waters of the red sea parted and God gave abundant water to the people.

Reader: We remember Miriam the prophet, who danced at the Sea of Reeds to celebrate the Exodus, a well of fresh water was said to follow her in the desert so that the Israelites always had water to drink. We remember Prophet Miriam

Reader: Instead of being enslaved, Harriet Tubman, known as a conductor of the Underground Railroad, set out with her two brothers, and followed the North Star in the sky to guide her north to freedom always walking near the water’s edge.

Reader: We remember, Harriet Tubman, conductor on the Underground Railroad, who led 300 captured Africans from slavery to freedom, as she sang Wade in the Water, a warning to those who followed that the water would protect them from trouble and offer redemption.

All: We acknowledge that water itself is necessary to sustain life. Water is the symbol of redemption
TEN PLAGUES

Leader: As a result of enslaving the Israelites, ten plagues reigned down on the ancient Egyptians: blood, frogs, lice, beasts, disease, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and the killing of the firstborn.

Traditionally, we remove a drop of wine from our glasses for each plague to show that our cup of joy is diminished because our redemption came through the suffering of the Egyptians.

Sadly, plagues are not a thing of the past. Take a moment to consider the plagues that you see in the world today.

Discussion 2: Have each person at your table share their modern plague. As they do, remove a drop of wine/grape juice from your cup with either your finger (or utensil) as a symbol of the price we all pay for this suffering.
SONGS OF FREEDOM

“Dayenu” (It Would Have Been Enough)

*Ilu hotzi hotzi'anu hotzi'anu mi’mitzrayim
Hotzi'anu mi’mitzrayim dayeinu
Dai-dai-yenu, dai-dai-yenu, dai-dai-yenu, dayenu, dayenu!

*Ilu natan natan lanu natan lanu et ha'shabbat
Natan lanu et ha'shabbat dayeinu
Dai-dai-yenu, dai-dai-yenu, dai-dai-yenu, dayenu, dayenu!

*Ilu natan natan lanu natan lanu et ha'torah
Natan lanu et ha'torah dayeinu
Dai-dai-yenu, dai-dai-yenu, dai-dai-yenu, dayenu, dayenu!

Had God brought us out of Egypt, it would have been enough.

Had God given us the Sabbath, it would have been enough.

Had God given us the Torah, it would have been enough.
“Feeling Good” by Nina Simone

Birds flying high
You know how I feel
Sun in the sky
You know how I feel
Reeds drifitin' on by
You know how I feel
It's a new dawn
It's a new day
It's a new life
For me
And I'm feeling good

Fsh in the sea
You know how I feel
River running free
You know how I feel
Blossom on the tree
You know how I feel
It's a new dawn
It's a new day
It's a new life
For me
And I'm feeling good

Dragonfly out in the sun, you know what I mean, don't you know
Butterflies all havin' fun, you know what I mean
Sleep in peace when the day is done, that's what I mean
And this old world is a new world
And a bold world
For me
And I'm feeling good

Stars when you shine
You know how I feel
Scent of the pine
You know how I feel
Oh freedom is mine
And I know how I feel
It's a new dawn
It's a new day
It's a new life
For me
And I'm feeling good