

Rutgers Hillel – First Seder – April 12, 2006 – Joseph Rosenstein

**The following passages can be recited between Birkat Hamazon and Hallel,
with each person in turn reading a few lines.**

In Every Generation

Pharaoh's attempts to enslave and destroy us have been repeated again and again throughout the generations. Under tyrants like Haman, Nebuchadnezzar, and Titus, under both Moslem and Christian rule, and at the hands of the barbarians who are responsible for the Holocaust.

Yet we survive. And, despite our profound questions about how God could allow such destruction, we continue to affirm that the reason that we are still here, the reason that we still exist, is because of God's promise. Ba-ruch sho-meir hav-ta-cha-to l'Yis-ra-eil. Ba-ruch hu.

Chant: V'hi she-am-da v'hi she-am-da la-vo-tei-nu v'la-nu (2)

"It is this promise that has sustained our ancestors and that sustains us. For not just one enemy has tried to destroy us. Indeed, in every generation, there are those who seek our destruction. But the Holy One, praise God, always saves us from their hands."

Our Strength

On this night of the Seder we remember with special reverence and love the six million of our people who died in the Nazi Holocaust.

We recall the spiritual strength of those who could not defend themselves physically – for example, the Chasidim who when ordered to dance and sing by their captors did so spontaneously with words of faith: "Mir vellen zei iberleben – we will outlive them."

We recall the spiritual strength of those who defended our people against overwhelming odds, Jewish fighters in the ghettos, concentration camps, and forests of Europe. They fought and died with honor.

The source of their strength was the belief that better days lie ahead, that messianic times will someday arrive, that even though it seems to be taking forever, one day the world will be repaired.

Chant: A-ni ma-a-min (3) be-e-mu-nah sh'lei-mah,
b'vi-at ha-ma-shi-ach, b'vi-at ha-ma-shi-ach a-ni ma-a-min.
V'af al pi she-yit-ma-mei-ah, im kol zeh a-ni ma-a-min.

"I believe completely that mashiach time will come.
Even though it is long delayed, I believe that it will happen."

The secular version of this belief is expressed in the anthem of the partisans:

Zog nit kein mol as du geyst dem letzten veg,
Chotsh himlen bleyene farshtellen bloye teg.
Kumen vet noch unzer ausgebenkte sho,
S'vet a poik ton unzer trot mir zaynen do!

Never say that you're on your final way,
Tho leaden skies conceal a bright blue day.
The day we're all yearning for will appear.
Our march will proclaim that we are here!

Our Role

We are here! Our tradition teaches us that it is up to us to fix the world, that an important part of our life must be to engage in tikkun olam. Each of us, in his or her own way, must strive to create a world that reflects our messianic vision.

Take a moment to reflect on your own life and ask yourself this question, “How am I acting as God’s partner in tikkun olam?” Fixing the world doesn’t have to be your whole life, but it should be part of your life. If you don’t have an answer this question, think about how you can develop an answer that is meaningful to you.

[Pause for a minute.]

You might help feed the hungry in your community, you might raise your voice against the genocide in Darfur, you might speak against the destruction of our planet, you might work with people of other faith communities towards mutual understanding, or you might do all of these things and many more.

The traditional Haggadah quotes Psalms 79 and 69 and Lamentations 3:

Sh’foch chamat-cha el ha-go-yim a-sher lo y’da-u-cha

Sh’foch a-lei-hem za-me-cha, va-cha-ron ap-cha ya-si-geim.

Tir-dof b’af v’tash-mi-deim mi-ta-chat sh’mei Adonai.

“Pour your wrath over the peoples who do not know you, let Your fury overtake them. Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under the heavens of Adonai.”

Many of us have come to understand that God does not act in this way, that it is actually our role to pursue evil wherever we find it and to do what we can to destroy it.

This is not a task that we can hope to finish, but it is not a task that we can avoid.

Chant: Lo a-le-chah ha-m’la-chah lig-mor, v’lo at-tah ben cho-rin l’hi-ba-teil mi-me-na.

“You are not responsible for completing the task, but you are not permitted to abandon it.”

The Role of Elijah

The persistent injustice of this world reminds us of Elijah, who fearlessly challenged power in the defense of justice. In many Rabbinic tales Elijah reappears to help the weak, and will reappear to introduce the messianic age.

Let us open the door for Elijah!

Chant: Ei-li-ya-hu ha-na-vi, Ei-li-ya-hu ha-tish-bi, Ei-li-ha-hu, Ei-li-ya-hu, Ei-li-ya-hu
ha-Gil-a-di. Bim-hei-ra b’ya-mei-nu ya-vo ei-lei-nu im ma-shi-ach ben
Da-vid, im ma-shi-ach ben David. [Repeat first sentence.]

“May Elijah the prophet join us soon!”

For every undecided question of unpunished evil and unrewarded goodness, for the endlessly agonizing problem of the existence of pain and sorrow in God’s world, Elijah will somehow, someday provide the answer.

Chant: Ha-ra-cha-man hu yish-lach la-nu et Ei-li-ya-hu ha-na-vi (2) za-chur la-tov,
vi-va-seir la-nu, vi-va-seir la-nu, b-so-rot to-vot v’ne-cha-mot.

“May You send us Elijah the prophet so that he may bring us good messages of consolation.”

May we find answers to all of our questions and resolutions to all of our difficulties.