

# Community Pride Seder

Sha'ar Zahav  
Pride Haggadah



16<sup>th</sup> Annual Pride Seder

June 13<sup>th</sup> 2021

Co-sponsors:

## Kadesh – Sanctification



When you hear the words “Pride Seder” you might think – “A Seder is for Passover!” In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Kabbalists in Safed created a Seder for Tu B’Shevat, the New Year of the Trees. And it says in the Talmud that at the New Year we should eat foods that grow abundantly, like pumpkins, beans, leeks, beets, and dates. To this day some communities hold a Seder on the first night of Rosh Hashanah which includes those foods.

So even if there were no other Seders, it would be entirely appropriate for LGBTQ Jews to create a ritual meal to celebrate our liberation from Mitzrayim, The Narrow Place of exclusion and oppression, as we’ve been doing at Sha’ar Zahav since 2005.

Some elements of this Seder will be familiar. There’s a Seder plate, with different items on it than those found at Passover. We’ll drink several glasses of water, not wine, because it’s the source of life, and in solidarity with those in recovery. At traditional Seders we wash our hands. Because Queer Jews have been told for so long that we’re impure, tonight there will be no ritual hand washing, to affirm that we come to this table whole and pure. At Passover a piece of matzah – the afikomen – is broken in two and half is hidden to be found later. At this Seder there will be no afikomen. We, our lives, and our stories, were hidden for too long. Tonight, we sit together in community, out, free, and proud. So come, sit, and join us for this Seder of Freedom. Chag Sameach!

## The Rainbow Candles



We begin our Seder, not by lighting these rainbow candles but by letting them stand unlit, in all their radiant potential. These rainbow candles are a symbol of who we are in our different queer clans, and represent the full spectrum of the Jewish community, from Orthodox to Humanistic, from Ethiopian to Burmese Jews, along with everyone who is working for inclusion, here and around the world.

We invite you to close your eyes and breathe in the primal light that filled the universe before ever there were suns or stars. Now open your eyes again and let us recite together the traditional blessing said upon seeing a rainbow.

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech haolam,  
zokair habrit veneman brito, vekayam bemaamaro.*

*Bountiful are You, Eternal our God, ruler of the  
universe, who remembers the covenant, is faithful to  
Your covenant, and keeps Your promise.*



On this night that is different from other nights, let's recite our traditional words of celebration:

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melech haolam,  
shehechianu, vekiyimanu, vehigianu, lazman hazeh.*

*Blessed are You, Eternal our God, Ruler of the Universe, who has kept us in life, and preserved us, and enabled us to reach this season.*



## **The First Cup**

This cup is for the past. The water in this cup is clear, to remind us of our long historical invisibility. We drink tonight to those who were left out of the stories of our people. We drink to those who labored to restore their memories. And we drink to those who did not live to see this moment, knowing that we're part of a chain of generations who will not complete the work, but are still obliged to continue it.

*Brucha at-Shechinah, Yo-tzer-et ha-olam  
Bo-reit ma-yim cha-yim.  
Blessed are you, Shechinah, Creator of the  
Universe, Who made living waters.*

## **♪ All the World is a Narrow Bridge**

Reb Nachman of Bratzlav

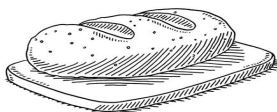
*Kol ha'olam kulo, gesher tzar meod,  
v'haikar lo l'fached klal.  
All the world is a narrow bridge, and  
the essential thing is to not succumb to fear.*

## **The First Breakout Group**

## Our Pride Seder Plate

We will now explore the symbolic meaning of the various items on our Seder Plate, and on yours if you created one.

### An Uncovered Loaf of Bread



The uncovered loaf of bread reminds us of the sensuous sacredness of our own bodies, and that the physical world, which includes our bodies, is holy too. We acknowledge the deep spiritual nourishment of physical connection, as we are being kept apart from it in this time.

*Baruch ata Adonai Elohenu melech haolam  
hamotzi lechem min haaretz  
Blessed are You, Eternal our God, ruler of the  
Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.*



One way in which this Seder is unlike any other Seder – is that you don't have to wait to eat. Now that we've said a blessing over the bread, please eat as we're reading and talking – and enjoy your meal.

### A Pink Triangle

Under the Nazis, homosexuals wore pink triangles in the work camps, as Jews wore yellow stars. Today, some queer people have turned what was a badge of shame and a mark of death into a badge of honor, resistance, and identity.

*Blessed are those who have been marked, in all times and all places. May they always be remembered, through us and through our lives.*

### **A Bundle of Sticks – the Faggot**

To remind us of the men, bound together and burned at the stake for their love of one another, and of the burning of women called witches, because they chose to live their lives outside the realm of the patriarchy, and by extension, everyone who is now oppressed, anywhere and everywhere.

*Cursed is the flame that destroys, that kills. May it be snuffed out forever. And blessed are all of our siblings who died in years past. May their memories be a blessing, even if we do not know their names.*

### **Bricks and Stones**

The bricks thrown at the police at the Stonewall Uprising in New York in 1969 remind us of these words from Psalm 118: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” and we ask what stones we’ve rejected. We remember the Western Wall of the Temple, which has stood through centuries of triumph and tears. If you have any stones, jiggle them in your hand as we ask ourselves: What walls must we build anew, what walls must we tear down?

*In Egypt we made bricks as slaves. At Stonewall we used bricks to free ourselves. Blessed is the spirit of freedom and blessed is the One who moves us to free ourselves. Blessed are the bricks and stones, of Earth and from Earth, given voice by our actions.*

## A Cup of Coffee



Before Stonewall there were several earlier protests, led by trans people, at Cooper's Donuts in LA in 1959, and in San Francisco at Compton's Cafeteria in 1966. In response to violence, coffee cups were thrown at the police. At Pesach we have cups for Elijah and Miriam. Tonight we pour a cup of coffee to honor our heroes, past, present, and future. Coffee beans are the seeds in the fruit of the coffee tree, so inhale the aroma as we recite the blessing said over fruit:

*Baruch ata Adonai Elohenu melech haolam, borei pri haetz.  
Praised are You, our Eternal God, ruler of the  
Universe, Who creates the fruit of the tree.*

## A Sea Shell



In this strange time, when so many lives have been lost and we're sealed away from each other and meeting on screens – let's remember the power of a sea shell, its strength and endurance, which echoes our own down through time. If you have a sea shell, hold it, feel its solid beauty, and let us remember that just as our ancestors once crossed a sea to freedom, freedom is what we're moving toward – together.

*Bountiful are you, Eternal Parent of all that is, who created creatures whose bones are on the outside of their bodies, to remind us of our own inner strength, endurance, beauty, and vitality, now and for all times. Amen*





## **The Second Cup**

This cup is for those who fought back. The water in this cup is strong enough to carve great canyons from solid rock. The water of this cup gave our people the courage to rise up at Stonewall and other places. We drink this cup to remember them and be inspired by them. As we drink in this cup we take in its power.

*Brucha at-Shechinah, Yo-tzer-et ha-olam  
Bo-reit ma-yim cha-yim.  
Blessed are you, Shechinah, Creator of the  
Universe, Who made living waters.*

## **The Four Questions**

The four questions we ask at Passover begin with: “Why is this night different from all other nights?” Tonight we will ask four different questions.

### **Why are we different from all other people?**

We are different from all other people because we come from every other people. Hitler could have killed all the Jews in the world, but if another Hitler were to rise up tomorrow who sought to kill all the LGBTQ people in the world, his solution would fail, for we are born into every family, nation, faith, on every part of the planet.

### **What is our sacred role?**



Because we come from all other peoples, we are bridge-builders and connectors. Because we live our lives in many different ways, between genders and sexes and varied ways of loving, we stand at the doorway of Possibility, and it is from this that we derive our sacred role in the world.

### **How are we the same as all other people?**

We bleed as all people bleed, and we love and laugh and cry and sing as do all human beings. We want what everyone wants – peace and prosperity, freedom and equality, families and communities. Before we are transgender, bisexual, intersex, lesbian, gay, we are human, and we share our humanity with everyone in the world.

### **What is our story?**



We were once slaves of our own people, left out of our people's story. We were unseen, hated, called an abomination worthy of death. But with mighty hands and outstretched arms, we have taken control of our destinies. Had our ancestors at Stonewall and other protests not begun our liberation, we and those who follow us might still be enslaved to the pharaohs of the present.

So even if all of us were endowed with wisdom and were thoroughly versed in the Torah, it would still be our duty to tell of our movement toward rights, inclusion, and freedom from oppression in the Narrow Place. We cannot tell it all, cannot name all the names of the people who led us out of oppression and into Freedom.

For each tale we tell, others shimmer behind them. And for each name that we remember, other names call out from the past. May all who are hungry for this story come and listen. For to dwell on the story of our liberation is indeed praiseworthy and part of the journey toward freedom for all of us.

## **The Second Breakout Group**



### **The Third Cup**

Like rain, like streams, like rivers flowing toward the sea, the water of this cup is about change, about movement, about transformation. This is the cup we drink to honor what we are doing in our lives right now. We take it into ourselves and merge with its fluid creativity, for life began in water and we are mostly water ourselves.

*Brucha at-Shechinah, Yo-tzer-et ha-olam  
Bo-reit ma-yim cha-yim.  
Blessed are you, Shechinah, Creator of the  
Universe, Who made living waters.*

### **♪ Sing to God a New Song - Psalm 96:1**

*Shiru l'Adonai shir chadash.  
Shiru l'Adonai kol ha'aretz.  
Shiru l'Adonai barchu shemo.  
Basru m'yom l'yom yeshuato.*

Sing to the Eternal, Sing a new song.  
Sing to the Eternal, all across the land.  
Sing to the Eternal. Bless the Eternal's name.  
Sing every day of the Eternal's salvation.

## **Kaddish: Remembering Our Ancestors**

The world's first homosexual and transgender rights organization was formed in Berlin in 1897 by a prominent Jewish doctor, Magnus Hirschfeld. You've probably seen the photograph of Nazis burning books, which was taken in 1933 at the institute he founded. Over 12,000 books were destroyed. Hirschfeld was lecturing in France, never returned to Germany, and died in 1938, a broken man.

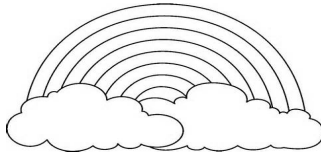
It isn't customary at a Seder to say Kaddish, the prayer recited by mourners. But this isn't a traditional Seder, and now, when in this nation and around the world we're in mourning for those who died from hatred, from violence, and from disease, let's pause for a moment to remember Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld and all the people down through time who have given their lives in this struggle.



### **The Fourth Cup**

This cup is for those yet to come. The water in this cup is clear, but this isn't the cup of invisibility. It's a cup that holds clarity of sight, clear hearts, clear minds, clear action. Let all who are thirsty come and drink.

*Brucha at-Shechinah, Yo-tzer-et ha-olam  
Bo-reit ma-yim cha-yim.  
Blessed are you, Shechinah, Creator of the  
Universe, Who made living waters.*



We will now continue our Seder with the Birkat HaMazon, the Grace After Meals.

In the ancient Grace after Meals we say: “Blessed are you, Eternal One, Creator of the universe, who feeds the world with Your goodness, with grace, with loving kindness and tender mercy. You give food to all flesh, and Your loving kindness endures forever.”

We say these words knowing that many people, including our people, Jewish and queer, have often lacked food, comfort, safety, and spiritual sustenance. Gathered together, we say these words, after telling our stories and sharing this meal, with a commitment to do our part to make them true. As we have been given food and drink, may all who are hungry and thirsty be nourished, in body and in spirit, through Your bounty and through our actions. And let us say: Amen.

♪ *B’rich rachamana malka d’alma  
ma-reh d’hai pi’ta.  
You are the Source of Life for all that is,  
and Your blessing flows through me.*

## **Nirtzah: Conclusion**

At Passover we open our doors to Elijah. Tonight our doors are open to everyone, in this mystical way, and we are

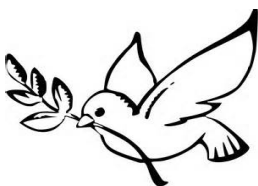
gathered here together, out and proud. We are the teachers and prophets the world has been waiting for. Take a minute to scroll through the screens and look at everyone gathered here. And now let us breathe together for a moment in silence, and feel the blessings of who we are flow through us, and then out into the world.



## The Seal of Completion

Though neither the work nor the remembering  
will ever be finished in our lifespan,  
we have completed this Seder.  
May our words here tonight  
have meaning throughout the coming year;  
may all of us feel a deep sense of pride  
when the calendar next swings to the end of June.  
May we recognize that liberation is not a destination,  
but an on-going labor of love,  
and that no one is free until everyone is free.  
May it be so, speedily and soon, and let us say,  
‘Next year in...’  
Not next year, but: ‘Now.’  
Not anywhere else, but here and now,  
everywhere and always.’

Amen. Amen. Selah.



It's an old Sha'ar Zahav tradition at the end of a service for everyone to rise, link arms, and join together in song. We began doing this in the years when we were a new community, in a time when it was dangerous for people like us to touch in public, as it still is in many places in the world.

From its founding in 1977, at Sha'ar Zahav, reaching out to touch each other was a powerful form of healing and an affirmation of who we are and about the ways that we're all connected. So please rise as you are able and joyously reach out your arms across your screen, and, linked together in this way, soulfully and energetically, please join us in our closing song.

♪ **Oseh Shalom**

*Oseh shalom bimromav  
Hu ya'aseh shalom aleynu  
Ve'al kol yisrael / Ve'al kol ha'olam  
Ve'imru Amen*

The One who makes peace in the high places  
Shall make peace upon us  
And upon all Israel / upon all the world  
And say Amen

## ***The Story of this Seder and Haggadah***

In July 1995 at the 6th Aleph Kallah in Colorado, at a meeting of the Gay& Lesbian Mishpocha, Ray Schnitzler shared copies of the Berkeley Queer Minyan's *Queer Pride Seder*, written with Susie Kisber. Mark Horn brought a copy back to the Gay and Lesbian Committee of B'nai Jeshurun in New York, and wrote a text unique to them, using elements of the Berkeley Haggadah. That text, *The Stonewall Shabbat Seder*, was 1<sup>st</sup> used in 1996 at a Seder held on the Shabbat before Gay Pride Day in New York.

Mark Horn gave a copy of that text to Andrew Ramer. In 2004 he gave copies to Rabbi Angel and Joss Eldredge, a member of Sha'ar Zahav's Queer Torah Study Project, who began writing a Haggadah based on it for Sha'ar Zahav which she shared with Andrew. With guidance from Rabbi Angel they created an expanded text. A call was put out and many members responded with words that were used for the first SZ Pride Freedom Seder in 2005. Sha'ar Zahav has hosted a Pride Seder every year since then, except for 2018.

Over time texts were edited and passed back and forth between Ramer and Horn so many times that it's often impossible to know who wrote what. The text we read tonight has been edited and condensed from previous versions. With thanks to everyone whose work shaped and reshaped this Haggadah over the years, and to everyone who helped to create and manifest this Seder. And we thank all of our tribe, known and unknown, who had the vision, strength, and courage to leave the Narrow Place in order to claim our seats at the Jewish table.

For permission to reprint anything in this  
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