The Blue Dove
FOUNDATION

MENTAL HEALTH PASSOVER SEDER COMPANION

Experience Freedom of
the Mind, Body and Soul



PASSOVER AND MENTAL HEALTH

The chaos of our escape from an oppressive overlord in the Passover story is not just a piece of our past but a part of our present. We all, at one point in our lives, have found ourselves in some kind of Egypt, where we felt burdened by the weight of something we never thought we would be free from. These might be stories about challenging relationships, difficult work or living situations, chronic physical illness, or mental health conditions. They are stories from our past we often prefer to bury rather than relive. In a way, locking those experiences up and living in fear of those parts of ourselves is like constructing an inner "Egypt." But unlike the original Egypt we had to escape from, we need to open ourselves up to let it out.

BY TELLING THOSE STORIES — BOTH TO OURSELVES AND TO OTHERS — WE CAN QUIET THE SILENCE SURROUNDING OUR INNER "EGYPTS," RELEASE THOSE INNER "EGYPTS," AND ENCOURAGE OTHERS TO DO THE SAME.

We created this companion to help individuals utilize the themes and motifs of Passover traditions to examine their internal stories of slavery and experience true freedom.



SUBSTANCE ABUSE ADVISORY NOTICE

Please keep in mind that for many reasons, holiday get-togethers can be difficult (some might use the word “triggering”) and stressful, particularly around issues like substance abuse. There are several explanations for what the four cups of wine represent, but the underlying significance is that drinking wine is symbolic of a newfound freedom we are celebrating. For those who struggle with addiction, however, drinking these cups can actually further embed them in a slavery of their own. For that reason, we remind all participants that alternatives like grape juice are perfectly suitable and even encouraged for the Seder. Furthermore, one should recognize that doing so is one of the greatest expressions of freedom someone under these circumstances can perform. Please keep these factors in mind when planning your Seder, and offer alternatives that allow your guests to take care of themselves and participate in the way that is healthiest for them.



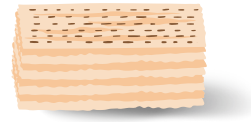
PRELUDE TO THE SEDER

On the night before the Seder, we are tasked with searching our homes for any chametz, or leavened bread, and disposing of it the following day.

Judaism teaches us that everything in the physical world mirrors the spiritual world. In other words, the reciprocal relationship between the finite and infinite empowers us to take actions in the physical world and create, through those actions, infinite transformations. It's cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) in its earliest form. The Pavlovian theory is a core concept in Jewish self-development and self-actualization. The author of Chovot Halevavot (Duties of our Hearts), a 16th-century sage, put it this way: "After the actions, the heart will follow." If you act, your actions will affect your thoughts and feelings, and lead to spiritual transcendence.

After we search physically for the leavened bread (Spiritually, leavened bread represents ego, arrogance, judgment, pettiness, and jealousy, because what defines it as leavened is that it is essentially "full of hot air.") and remove it, we utter a prayer in the hope that our external actions of search and destroy are mimicked by our spiritual actions. Imagine a world in which everyone searches the depths and the nooks and crannies of their hearts to discover any shred of arrogance, judgment of others or cruelty. Where one makes an honest reckoning and then sets about to invest great efforts to free their hearts by chipping away at the shackles holding them back from becoming all they can be.

WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL CHAMETZ?



By Batsheva Gelbtuch Co-Director of JWC Atlanta

THE SEARCH FOR CHAMETZ

Chametz also symbolizes other things like the yetzer harah (the ego, the self, mental clutter, negativity) that live within us and distract us from our true goals. We are tasked with cleansing ourselves of that kind of "chametz" as well, as it allows us to focus on what matters in our lives. In a way, this is a mental cleanse as much as it is a physical cleanse.

Much like chametz, a mental cleanse involves taking a critical look at your mental space, determining which feelings are serving your larger goals and which are holding you down. You can also take a look at your physical space to identify relationships or behaviors that are functioning as triggers for negative thoughts and then create boundaries between those people and things.

By creating boundaries and ridding yourself of negative thoughts and triggers, you can excise the clutter from your mind and focus on what truly matters to you. Recite the first blessing before starting your search, and the second when your search is over.



בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יה אֱלֹקינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל בִּעוּר חָמֵץ.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with Their commandments and has commanded us concerning the removal of chametz.

כָּל חֲמִירָא וַחֲמִיעָא דְּאִכָּא בִּרְשׁוּתִי, דְּלָא חֲמִתֵּהּ וּדְלָא בִעַרְתֵּהּ וּדְלָא יְדַעְנָא לֵהּ לִבָּטֵל וְלֶהֱוֵי הֶפְקֵר כַּעֲפָרָא דְּאַרְעָא.

Any leaven that is in my possession, whether I have seen it or not, whether I have removed it or not, shall be unclaimed and considered as the dust of the earth.

THE SEARCH FOR CHAMETZ

ACTIVITY ONE - FIND CHAMETZ IN YOUR MIND



- Identify the thoughts and feelings that weigh heavily on your mind and write them down on a piece of paper.
- Now, write a list of things you want to bring into the next year.

ACTIVITY TWO - FIND CHAMETZ IN YOUR WORLD



- Identify the people and things in your life that are triggering you, and create an action plan for setting boundaries with them.
- This can mean unfollowing people who hurt you on social media or asking a certain friend for some space, even if it's hard. Sometimes you need to take time to heal for the sake of your mental health and even the relationship itself.

Once you have your list of mental chametz for the next year, save it along with your physical chametz until you burn everything the next day. Read each item out loud, and then release it from your mind. Then, proclaim the Kol Hamira, the prayer in which you relinquish ownership of any chametz you couldn't find. No search is perfect, and whether it is mental or physical chametz, there is always a chance we missed something. Therefore, we say the Kol Chamirah blessing below and release those fears to make room for the freedom of Passover.



כָּל חֲמִירָא וַחֲמִיעָא דְּאִכָּא בִּרְשׁוּתִי, דְּחֲזִתֵּהּ וּדְלָא חֲזִתֵּהּ,
דְּחַמְתֵּהּ וּדְלָא חַמְתֵּהּ, דְּבַעַרְתֵּהּ וּדְלָא בַּעַרְתֵּהּ, לִבָּטֵל
וְלֶהֱוֵי הֶפְקֵר כְּעַפְרָא דְּאַרְעָא.

All leaven and chametz that is in my possession, whether I have seen it or not, whether I have disposed of it or not, is hereby nullified, and shall be ownerless as the dust of the earth.

THE MENTAL HEALTH SEDER PLATE



WHAT GOES ON THIS SEDER PLATE?

Just as the symbols on the Seder plate keep us engaged with the story of Passover, each of us has self-care tools that keep us engaged with our mental health. Self-care refers to ways we attend to our mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being. The more of these tools we have, the better prepared we are for days when we are at our most vulnerable.

We can use Passover as a time to stop and reflect not only on the Exodus story but on our own mental health. On those difficult days when we feel stuck in a metaphorical Egypt, this mental health Seder plate can offer us inner peace.

THE MENTAL HEALTH SEDER PLATE



FILL IN YOUR SEDER PLATE

THE MENTAL HEALTH SEDER PLATE

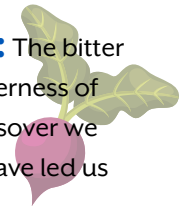
Shank Bone (Zeroa): This roasted bone represents both the sacrifice Jews made to be spared from the 10th plague and the "outstretched arm," which brings the Jews out of slavery in the story of Passover. The shank bone symbolizes the helping hand lent to those who need it most. We all struggle; that's part of being human. We all will have tough times when we need that helping hand. If we can remember to accept help, we can move forward and start to heal. And when we are in a stable place (free from what kept us stuck and oppressed) we can reach out to those still struggling, remembering that, as humans, we will go back and forth between freedom and oppression.

Egg (Beitzah): The egg represents the life cycle. It reminds us there are times of sacrifice but also times of hope! After winter comes spring, and so it goes for mental health. It's traditional to roast or char the egg, leading to a fun interpretation — an egg, just like us, is resilient. The hotter the flame, the tougher we get. We aren't weakened by struggle; we overcome it and become stronger.

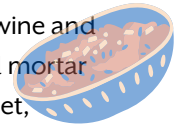
Vegetable (Karpas): The vegetables represent spring and regrowth, but we also dip them in saltwater to remind us of the tears of slavery. At the same time, we are meant to keep in mind the sorrow of pain and the joy regrowth brings, remembering all the while we can both struggle and love ourselves. At any given time, we are struggling and we are growing. We may feel broken, but we are worthy. We acknowledge our past, accept ourselves for who we are and then face forward, working on ourselves to help us get to a better place.



THE MENTAL HEALTH SEDER PLATE



Bitter Herbs...Twice! (Maror and Hazeret): The bitter herbs we eat (sometimes begrudgingly!) remind us of the bitterness of slavery. We aren't meant to forget our struggles; rather, at Passover we bravely look them square in the face and acknowledge they have led us to this moment.



Haroset: This reddish or brownish mixture of apples, wine and cinnamon symbolizes the clay used to make the bricks and mortar during slavery. Although it calls to mind hard work, it's sweet, representing the joy of freedom. In the Seder, we mix the bitter herbs with haroset, a reminder that freedom, like resilience, is hard work. It's bitter and it's sweet and, most important, it requires being an active participant in our own lives.



KADESH

The 12th century medieval commentator, Rashi, shares one possible origin for the practice of drinking the four cups of wine at the Seder:



These four cups correspond to the four descriptions of redemption stated during the exodus from Egypt: "I will free you," "I will deliver you," "I will redeem you," and "I shall bring you out" (Shemot 6:6-7) in Parshat VaYera. (Rashi on Pesachim 99b)

At first glance, this seems somewhat redundant. If we are commemorating one event — our escape from slavery in Egypt — and emphasizing our newfound freedom and appreciation for it, why not drink a single glass of wine (or alternative beverage) like any other holiday? Additionally, why not drink the four cups of wine at once rather than over the course of the Seder?

By identifying these four cups with different descriptions of redemption, Rashi may be suggesting the Jews' journey to recovery and freedom did not happen in one awesome moment; rather, it was achieved in stages that took time and effort. For that reason, we spread the four cups — the four stages of redemption, as explained by 16th-century scholar Judah Loew ben Bezalel, also known as the Maharal of Prague — out over the course of the Seder.



KADESH



I SHALL FREE YOU

Even if we had remained slaves, but the burden had been removed, we would have raised a cup of gratitude to God.



I SHALL DELIVER YOU

We drink another cup, because God completely nullified our servitude.





I SHALL REDEEM YOU

Because God defeated our pursuers so they could no longer afflict us, we drink the third cup.





I SHALL BRING YOU OUT

We raise the fourth cup in honor of the redemption and freedom that come with the giving of the Torah — the Jew's introduction to Judaism — and the freedom that comes with the purpose and meaning our tradition provides.

This highlights the fact that freedom from the things that oppress us and hold us back takes time, and we should feel grateful for and celebrate each step in our journeys out of our personal "Egypts."

Is there a personal Egypt in which you found yourself trapped in the past or are still dealing with? Can you identify and feel gratitude for the steps you took to escape that Egypt and the people who helped you do it — or the steps you have taken so far? Or, should you still find yourself in Egypt, what steps can you begin to take during the Seder to escape that Egypt? Each of the four cups should be poured for the person drinking it by someone else, showing us the steps we take toward freedom don't have to be — nor should they be — made alone.

ACTIVITY

Try describing your personal Egypt. This can be a challenge you have faced, a mental or physical health condition you overcame or a difficult time in your life you didn't think you'd make it through. Describe the steps you took to escape that Egypt. Then concentrate on the steps toward freedom you are grateful for or hope to take with each cup you drink. Consider sharing that gratitude with the table and asking the others who feel comfortable to share the steps in their journeys to freedom they are grateful they were able to perform.



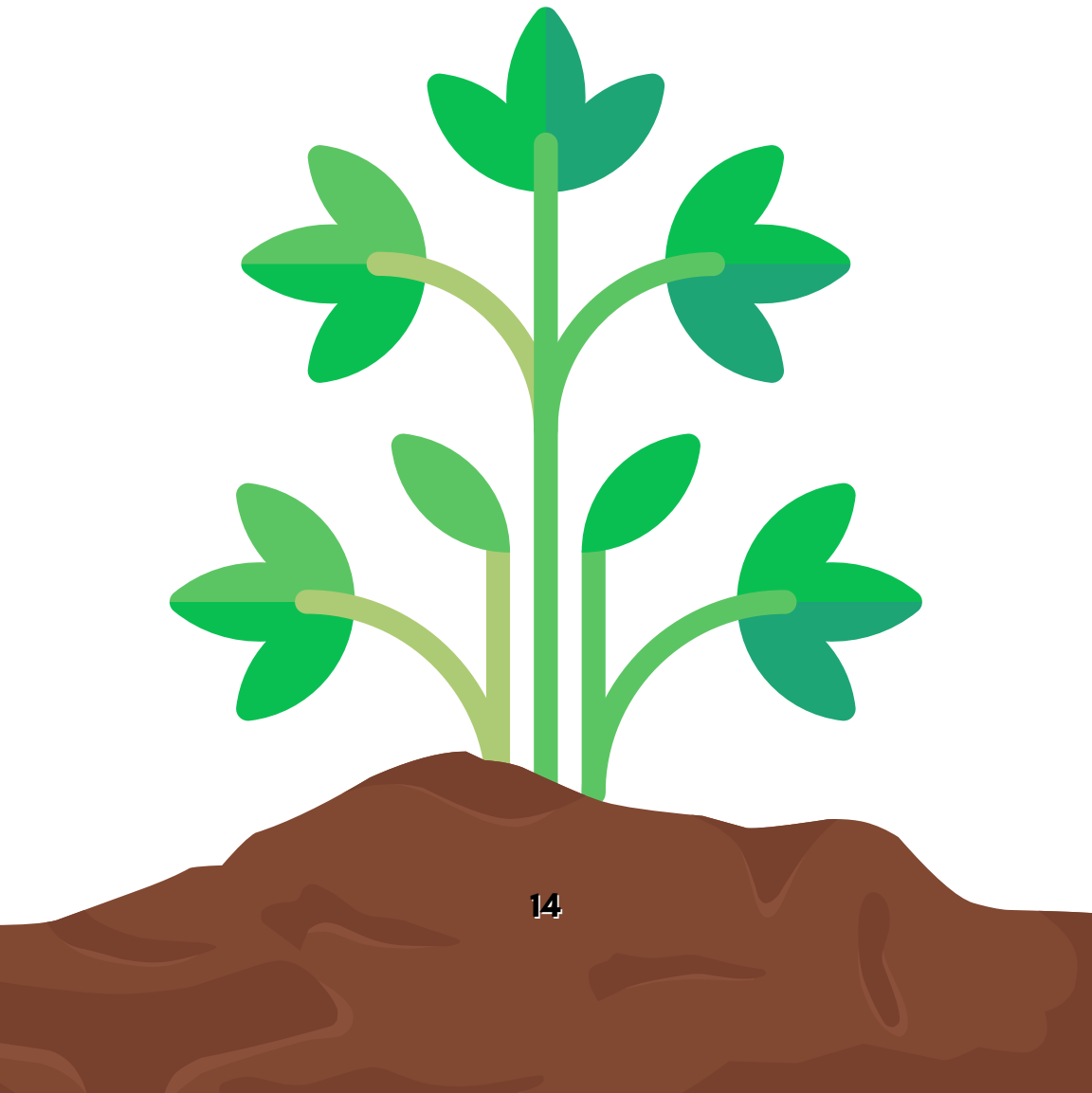
URCHATZ

Jewish tradition prescribes the ritual of washing our hands of any impurities before beginning the meal. As you're washing, meditate on what you're trying to wash away as you explore the story of your redemption.



KARPAS

What is a bitter part of your past you've been refusing to pay attention to? While remembering pain can be difficult, it is the only way you can work toward healing and growth.

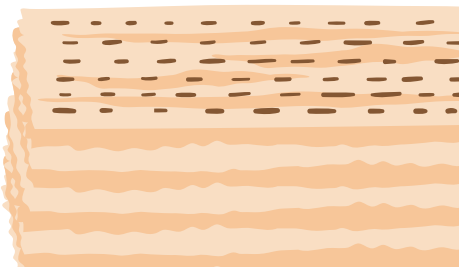


YACHATZ

As we begin retelling the story of our redemption, we take the three pieces of matzah before us, remove the center piece, and split it in half. We eat the first half at the beginning of the Seder and hide the other half, which serves as the afikoman we eat at the conclusion of the Seder. It is worth noting the bread of slavery consumed at the beginning of the Seder and the bread of freedom we eat at the end of the Seder both come from the same piece of matzah.

Sometimes the difference between the things that cause us pain and those that give us pleasure is simply a matter of perspective. When seen through the lens of miraculous redemption and a recognition of the larger picture of our path to freedom, the bread of slavery transforms into the bread of freedom it was always intended to become. We must also remember — or hope — the potential for recovery is inside of us, waiting to be recognized or — like the afikomen — found.

Prompt: What experience in your own life caused you pain but, in hindsight, can be seen as a blessing? Or, if you currently find yourself in the midst of a painful experience, can you try to identify one positive aspect or lesson you can learn from it?



MAGID

During the Seder, one might notice something puzzling about the way tradition chooses to tell the story of Exodus on Passover. Moses, the primary character of the story in the Torah, is largely absent from the narrative presented in the Haggadah, and for centuries Jews have wondered why. Perhaps had Moses been included in the retelling of the Passover story, our psychological focus would have shifted from seeing it as being about how WE left Egypt to how Moses took us out of Egypt.

In removing the figure most of us see as the main character, we as readers and participants become the main character, helping us to see ourselves more clearly in the story. Leaving our personal "Egypt" is something we need to do on our own, and on Passover, we remember we have the power to do that.



MAGID

הָא לַחְמָא עַנְיָא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אַבְהָתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְמִצְרָיִם. כָּל דִכְפִין יֵיתֵי וְיֵיכֹל, כָּל דְצָרִיךְ יֵיתֵי וְיִפְסַח.

This is the bread of destitution that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Anyone who is famished should come and eat, anyone who is in need should come and partake of the Pesach sacrifice.

"Let all who are hungry come and eat." Rather than ask the hungry and unfortunate to join us as we begin the eating portion of the Seder, we invite them to come right before we tell the story of the Exodus. Why? Perhaps this highlights that we are inviting members of our community who may be emotionally or spiritually hungry and yearning for community and support in addition to those of us who are physically hungry.



FOUR MENTAL HEALTH QUESTIONS FOR PASSOVER

Am I still in Egypt today or am I free now?

Mental health is not linear. Most of us oscillate day by day or even hour by hour. How are you doing at this moment? Take a breath and check in with yourself.

From which struggles have I freed myself?

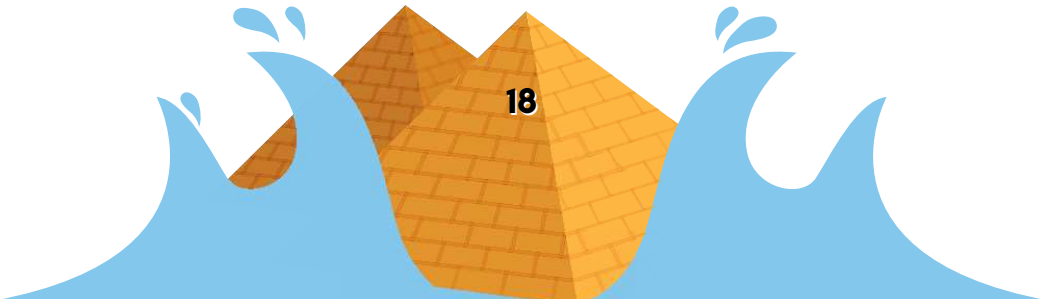
We all struggle; that's how we grow. What have you done this year that made you proud? How have you grown? What have you done to take care of yourself?

Who in my life can be my outstretched arm?

We all struggle. Anxiety, grief and failure affect us all. When you are struggling, who do you turn to for help, and how do you ask? Choose one person you can trust to help you when you're having a bad day. How would you reach out to them? Consider having a conversation with that person about what supporting you might look like.

What's on my mental health seder plate?

Just as the symbols on the Seder plate keep us engaged with the story of Passover, each of us has self-care tools that keep us engaged with our mental health. The more self-care options we have to improve our mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being, the better prepared we are for days where we are most vulnerable. What tools do you hold front and center in your life? Is there one you might want to add?



THE FOUR MENTAL HEALTH CHILDREN OF THE SEDER

The Haggadah speaks of four children who react differently to the Passover Seder. It is our job to create an inclusive space where we can provide answers to the questions raised by all of these children and help them engage in the Passover traditions. Each one is immersed in their own way, and we can learn from all of them something about mental wellness, how to build community, and our role in passing Judaism and its traditions l'dor va dor (from generation to generation).



THE FOUR MENTAL HEALTH CHILDREN OF THE SEDER

The wise child asks, "What are the testimonies, statutes and judgments we learn through the Passover story?"

This question shows they are reaching out. The wise child has trust in their community, and we need to respond to, validate, and build on that trust. On the surface, this child appears to be the easiest child. They are engaged, ask the question the way we want to hear it, and listen to us speak. But we must be mindful; we never know what's going on under the surface and should not assume a person who is smiling is okay.



The wicked child asks, "What is this service to YOU?"

This child has a purpose. Although they are trying to test our patience, they teach us to examine our own behavior. We can learn from this child how to support our loved ones and become their allies. But first we need to learn to listen, reflect, and understand why the wicked child feels this way. When a child feels like they don't fit into their own community, it's up to us to change it.



THE FOUR MENTAL HEALTH CHILDREN OF THE SEDER

The simple child asks, "What is this?"

The simple child teaches us empathy. We all think and react differently, and when communicating with someone, we need to try our best to really see them, to validate their understanding of the world, and to seek connection. We don't try to change the simple child. We don't tell them their question is silly, childish, or naive. We don't give them a vocabulary lesson. We learn to make space for them by putting ourselves in their shoes. By acting as a role model in answering questions as they are asked, we can prevent shame and stigma from developing.



The fourth child doesn't know how to ask.

We live in a world with a great deal of shame and stigma around mental health disorders and substance abuse, and the child who does not know how to ask questions might not have been given the language or have the courage to share what's going on for them. They allow us to enact the Jewish value of kol Yisrael arevim zeh la eh (All Jews are responsible for one another) and tikkun olam (repairing the world), and to help give them the words and tools they need to thrive.



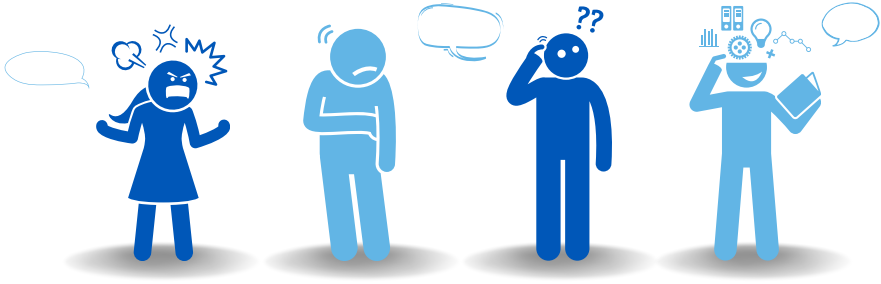
THE FOUR MENTAL HEALTH CHILDREN OF THE SEDER

Questions for discussion:

We are not just one child; we are often a mix, and we change over time. Currently, which one represents you most closely?

Keeping in mind the child who currently represents you, does this change the way you understand yourself?

How do you think we can invite all types of people to sit at our tables
and connect?

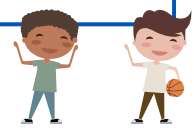


THE FOUR MENTAL HEALTH CHILDREN OF THE SEDER

It is customary in the Jewish tradition to bless our children, and in the spirit of this ritual, we have created a prayer with these four children in mind.

Blessed are you, Holy Source of Wisdom, bless us so we may know, understand and accept our inner child. Guide us as we ask the questions to better understand ourselves and our world as we try to make sense of our emotions. **Guide us as we try to find our place in a caring community, even when we resist those who want to help.** Guide us to find the safe and brave spaces filled with people who can show us empathy. **Guide us as we learn the language we need from those who model vulnerability.** Blessed are you, Holy Source of Love, bless us so we may know, understand and accept the children among us. **Help us to notice the message behind the questions others may ask, ensuring each person gets the help they need.** Help us to create shame-free and stigma-free environments for each other, developing a culture of understanding. **Help us to approach others with empathy so they can feel safe.** Help us to offer support to those who may not know what they need. **May we each approach our inner child with curiosity and insight.** May we each be compassionate toward our inner child from moment to moment. **And may we each learn what we need from the inner child of those around us.** Amen.





MAGID

Go out and learn what Lavan the Aramean sought to do to Ya'akov, our father; since Pharaoh only decreed [the death sentence] on the males but Lavan sought to uproot the whole [people]. As it is stated (Deuteronomy 26:5), "An Aramean was destroying my father and he went down to Egypt, and he resided there with a small number and he became there a nation, great, powerful and numerous."

The 20th-century Lithuanian scholar Rabbi Baruch Epstein expounded on the meaning of the phrase, "Go out and learn what Laban the Aramean sought to do to Jacob our father":

What does the expression “Go out and learn” mean? It is a way of expressing there is a great deal to say about this particular matter, but this is not the time or the place to dwell on this topic. The expression is similar to the one used in the well-known story of Hillel and the gentile (Shabbat 31a) who asks to be taught the whole Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel answers, “What is hateful to you, don’t do to others. All the rest is commentary. Now go out and learn.” Hillel tells the gentile questioner, “Listen, there’s a lot to say about this matter. I can teach you the basic idea right now, but you’ll have to learn the rest on your own!”

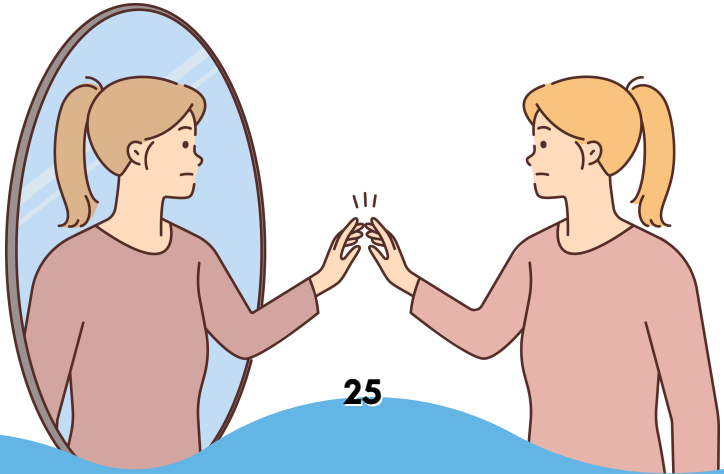
There is a time and a place for everything. On the road to wellness, there will always be distractions, but it is up to us to stay on task and stick to our goals.

MAGID

In the Haggadah, we recite an excerpt from the book of Shemot:

"And we cried out to God, the God of our ancestors" - As the verse states: "After many days had passed, the king of Egypt died. The Children of Israel groaned from the hard work, and they cried out. And their prayers, prompted by hard work, rose up to God."

One might find it striking that, despite having been enslaved for centuries, it is only when the ruler who imposed these harsh circumstances dies, and the Hebrew slaves have a momentary pause from their labor, that they begin to groan. Sometimes we are so consumed by our own suffering that we don't stop to think about the things that are hurting us. We choose to run from our problems instead of facing them. When we finally pause and feel the full force of the trauma we are experiencing, the process of healing can begin.



THE TEN PLAGUES

We now begin an exploration of the ten plagues and the rabbinic perspective on them. While we know them as ten plagues, the rabbinic tradition sees the text as referring to more than ten. While this may seem unnecessary, it is an exercise in emphasizing the incredible nature of the Exodus and an opportunity for a greater appreciation for God's justice.

It is customary for those at the Seder to dip their finger into their cup and drop some liquid onto a plate or napkin when reciting "blood and fire and pillars of smoke," the ten plagues, and "detsakh," "adash," and "ba'achab."

R. Yirmiyahu Löw (1812–1874) of Hungary explained one idea behind this custom: While we appreciate the miracles of the Exodus and our freedom from enslavement, we are saddened by the significant loss of life they came with. "Therefore, through this custom our joy is diminished to show that Israel is merciful, and we are the children of the Merciful, and we pour out a little [wine] at every plague. And this is simple to understand."



YOUR 10 MENTAL HEALTH PLAGUES

The 10 plagues in the story of Exodus signify the start of freedom. When we remember the plagues of Egypt at the Seder, we are remembering the miraculous things God did for us there. But many of us have things plaguing our lives, and as we spend Passover talking about the plagues in Egypt, we should talk as well about the mental health plagues of today. As you recite the traditional 10 plagues in your Haggadah, consider adding the following list:

Fear | Self-Judgment | Imposter Syndrome | Burnout | Substance Use | Depression | Trauma/Stressor-Related Symptoms | Isolation/Loneliness | Anxiety | Suicidal Ideation



1 Fear

Fear is a reaction we have to an immediate threat (AJP). Fear can activate our "fight, flight or freeze" response, which is how our body reacts to help us navigate the threat and stay safe. The body's response to fear affects both our physical and mental health. With the steady increase in antisemitism over the past few years, we may be experiencing increased response to fear (ADL).



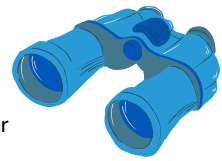
YOUR 10 MENTAL HEALTH PLAGUES

2 Self-Judgment



So many factors affect the way we live our lives, and the constant change of life's pace can have an impact on our daily routines. Our productivity may change in moments of flux; we need to be kind to ourselves when that happens.

3 Imposter Syndrome



Many of us fear being exposed as a “fraud.” It can be easy to compare ourselves to others and their perceived success, especially with the constant nature of social media. Remember that we all have moments of self-doubt about our abilities to get things done and our accomplishments — despite evidence of our success.

4 Burnout



It can be difficult to find balance in our lives. Burnout doesn't only occur in the workplace; it can happen to anyone going through periods of constant stress. Burnout can lead to an increased risk of physical health conditions and affect our behavior. We can create balance through setting boundaries, leaning on our social supports and engaging in mindfulness activities. It is OK to rest.

5 Substance Abuse



In 2022, 70.3 million people (24.9%) aged 12 or older in the United States used illicit drugs and 48.7 million people (17.3%) aged 12 or older had a substance use disorder (SAMHSA).

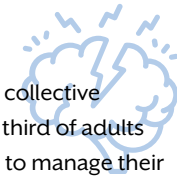
6 Depression



Depression is a leading cause of disability worldwide. In 2022, 21 million adults in the United States experienced a major depressive episode, but only 61% of those suffering received treatment (NIMH).

YOUR 10 MENTAL HEALTH PLAGUES

7 Trauma/Stressor-Related Symptoms



Many people are in the process of recovering from the various collective traumas we've experienced over the past few years. In 2023, a third of adults said they feel completely stressed out no matter what they do to manage their stress. This increase in long-term stress affects both physical and mental health. It requires a different set of skills to manage than temporary stressors, making it challenging to navigate (APA).

8 Isolation/Loneliness



In May 2023, the U.S. surgeon general released a new advisory on the public health crisis of loneliness, isolation and lack of connection in the United States. Persistent loneliness can negatively affect physical and mental health, leading to increased rates of depression and anxiety (APA).

9 Anxiety



Anxiety is one of the most common mental health disorders in the United States. It affects more than 40 million adults aged 18 and older, or 19.1% of the population every year. Anxiety disorders affect 31.9% of adolescents (those between 13 and 18) in the United States (ADAA).

10 Suicidal Ideation



In 2021, an estimated 1.7 million adults attempted suicide (SAMHSA), and more than 48,000 died. In 2022 nearly 50,000 people died by suicide, about a 3% increase (CDC). Among people aged 10-14 and 25-34 in the United States, suicide is the second leading cause of death (NIMH).

WHAT IS PLAGUING YOU THIS YEAR?

MAGID: TELLING YOUR OWN STORY



And you shall explain to your child on that day, 'It is because of what God did for me when I went free from Egypt.' (Exodus 13:8)

Judaism is an oral tradition as well as a written one, passing down messages and stories in such a way that evokes our emotions and helps us retain both our history and our identity as a people. The core of Passover, the Seder, is the retelling of the Jewish people's journey from slavery to freedom. We regale the moments of struggle, joy, awe, and unexpected twists and turns in our story of freedom — learning something new every year. **This process of retention connects us with our ancestors and helps us carry their memories and lessons with us as we move forward.**

But perhaps even more important, storytelling allows us to cultivate a deeper connection with ourselves as a means of mental wellness. It lets us take ownership of our own stories, allowing us to tell them how we want them to be told. **Storytelling grounds us in our past and allows us to determine how we carry our stories, letting us sit in our vulnerability while simultaneously giving us power.**

MAGID: TELLING YOUR OWN STORY

Using the questions below, think through how you would like to share your story, and share it if you're comfortable.

What story do you want to share?

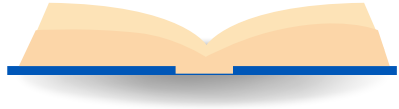
Where are you sharing this story?

- Who is your audience? Is it a more intimate or public setting?
- What adjustments might you need to make based on the setting you are sharing it in?

How can you use this to ground yourself regardless of the reactions people have to your story?

What is the arc or flow of your story?

- What key points will help get your story across?
- How are you introducing the story?
- What are the closing or take-home points to end your story?



WRITE YOUR STORY

THE MENTAL HEALTH DAYENU

אִלּוּ סִפֵּק צָרְכֵּנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר
אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה וְלֹא
הֶאֱכִילָנוּ אֶת הַמָּן דַּיֵּנוּ

If They had supplied our needs in the desert for forty years, and had not fed us the manna *Dayenu*, it would have sufficed us!

אִלּוּ הֶאֱכִילָנוּ אֶת הַמָּן
וְלֹא נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת
הַשַּׁבָּת דַּיֵּנוּ

If They had fed us the manna, and had not given us the Shabbat *Dayenu*, it would have sufficed us!

אִלּוּ נָתַן לָנוּ אֶת
הַשַּׁבָּת וְלֹא קֵרְבָנוּ
לִפְנֵי הַר סִינַי דַּיֵּנוּ

If They had given us the Shabbat, and had not brought us before Mount Sinai *Dayenu*, it would have sufficed us!

(An Excerpt from the Dayenu Song)



THE MENTAL HEALTH DAYENU

The Dayenu song is an important and meaningful part of the Passover Seder. It gives us a chance to express gratitude, to feel joy and, maybe, to have a little fun.

"Dayenu" means "it would have been enough," and in the song, we express gratitude for everything God did for us as we escaped Egypt.

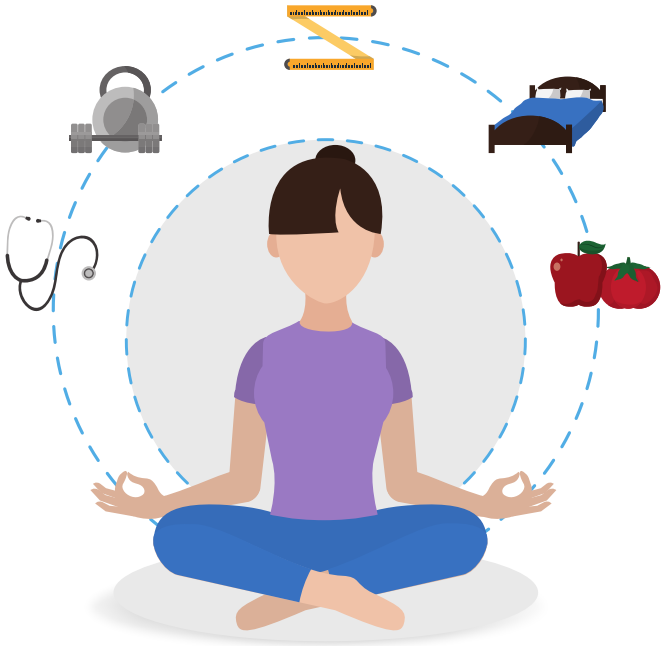
Gratitude does not come naturally to everyone, and it is good for our mental well-being to call attention regularly to the things in our lives for which we are grateful. It is a great way to reinforce positive thinking. The act of expressing gratitude can encourage our body to produce chemicals that improve our mood and build more cognitive pathways for positive thinking in our brains.

In addition to the things we express gratitude for in the Dayenu, why not try thinking about more things you are grateful for? They can be something you did for yourself or someone else did for you. Then make a version of the Dayenu song unique to you!



RACHTZAH

The Seder is a unique situation in Jewish tradition when we wash our hands twice instead of once during a meal. This serves as a small reminder that the habits we perform to rid ourselves of our impurities can take time to catch on.



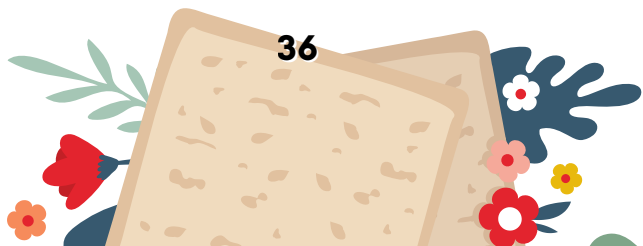
MOTZI

There is something about the blessing we make over bread — or, in this case, matzah — that is distinct from other blessings we make over food. What do you think it is?

When we say the blessings over fruits and vegetables, we are thanking God for something in its purest form. But when we say the blessing over bread, we are thanking God for a finished product. Why do you think that is?

One answer is that bread is made from the collaboration between God (who provides ingredients that, on their own, are unusable) and humans (who complete the product). In making this blessing, we recognize and appreciate our role in the creation of the blessings in our lives in addition to the tools God gave us to produce them.

Prompt: We have a tendency to ascribe our successes to luck or the effort of others more so than to ourselves. But we need to show ourselves self-love and be proud of what we have accomplished. When making this blessing, consider and appreciate the role you played in achieving or moving toward your own successes and achievements.



MATZAH

There are moments when we have a vision or an expectation for our lives that doesn't turn out the way we intended. When that happens, we have two choices: We can refuse to move forward until circumstances perfectly match our vision, or we can appreciate what we were able to accomplish and recognize things don't have to be perfect. Sometimes perfect is just what works, no matter how messy it is.

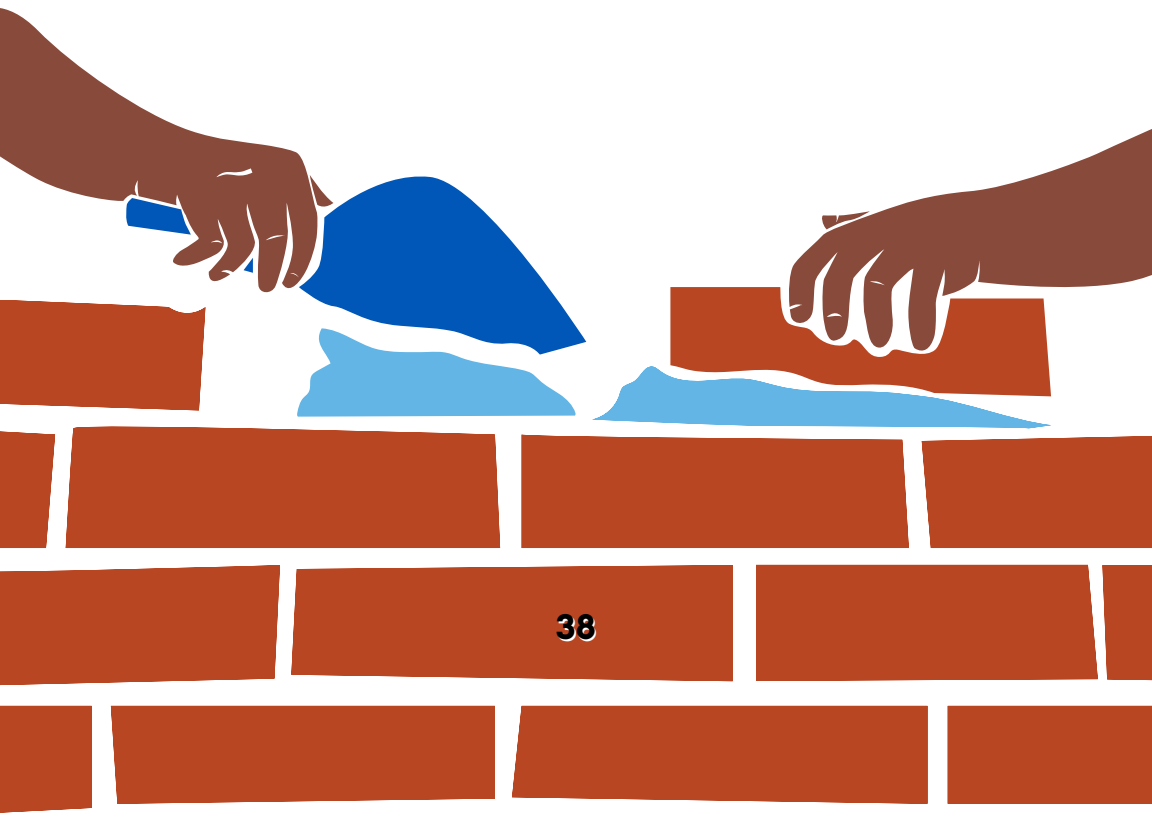
Prompt: Can you identify a time when this was true for you?



MAROR

It may seem counterintuitive to recall the pain of our slavery while celebrating our freedom. But consider that through the process of engaging honestly with the pain of our past, we can utilize the mud bricks represented by the charoset to build the necessary foundation for our growth. As you eat this bittersweet food, think about the lessons you learned from past mistakes and how they propelled you forward rather than holding you back.

"There is a crack in everything; that's how the light gets in." — Leonard Cohen



KORECH

The Hillel sandwich of maror and charoset is an opportunity to hold space for the good/sweet and challenging/bitter things in life. The value of hakarat hatov, or gratitude, invites us to actively recognize and appreciate the things we have been blessed with in our lives. It is easy to express gratitude during simchas or happy occasions, but doing so during our most challenging moments can be difficult. The Hillel sandwich helps us remember the importance of practicing gratitude during our sweetest and most bitter moments.



SHULCHAN ORECH

According to Jewish law, the afikomen, representative of the "taste" of the freedom we are celebrating and hope to fully achieve one day, is the last thing one should eat at the Seder and the taste that should be in our mouths as we sing the final songs. It is imperative that participants in the main course — the shulchan orech — not fill themselves in order to leave room for the afikomen, so it can have its full experiential and spiritual impact. It would be worthwhile, then, to consider practicing intuitive eating and mindful eating at this point in the Seder.

Eating intuitively generally involves being in touch with hunger and fullness cues. This means eating when we are hungry, stopping when we are full, and eating only to sufficiently meet our nutritional needs. Mindful eating is similar to many other mindfulness practices; it is when we take the time to be present in the moment and appreciate the food we are eating. We explore the food with all our senses and eat slowly.

We encourage you to practice both of these skills — and to notice both what that is like for you and what it brings to your Pesach experience.



SHULCHAN ORECH

The Katie Hate Hunger Scale is a fantastic tool to help you be mindful of how you are feeling as you eat your meal.

1. Starving: You are extremely hungry, dizzy, and weak.
2. Very Hungry: Your stomach is rumbling, and you have a strong desire to eat.
3. Hungry: You are beginning to feel hungry and think about food.
4. Slightly Hungry: You feel a little hungry but could still go a while without eating.
5. Neutral: You are neither hungry nor full.
6. Satisfied: You have eaten enough to feel full but not overly stuffed.
7. Comfortable: You feel a bit full but not uncomfortable.
8. Full: You feel full and could not eat another bite.
9. Very Full: You feel very full and may even feel some discomfort or bloating.
10. Sickeningly Full: You feel uncomfortably full to the point of feeling sick.



TZAFUN

At this point, we find the afikomen - the piece of hope - we hid at the beginning of the Seder. As we eat the afikomen, let's reflect on the experience. What hope have you found? Where did you find it?



BARECH

We begin the Seder with an invitation to anyone who is hungry or lonely to come and join our celebration and again, according to tradition, invite Elijah the prophet into our home. We repeatedly make such invitations in recognition that not everyone who needs you will respond to the first invitation, and that is OK. We need to make room for those members of our community who come late, and we need to let them know it is better to come late than never. When it comes to getting help, voicing our pain, and beginning our recovery, we all are on our own timelines.



HALLEL

When the Jewish people crossed the sea of reeds and were freed from Egyptian slavery, their journey wasn't over. They still had some time before they fully realized their freedom and entered their promised land. Yet they took the time to praise God and appreciate the freedom they achieved, serving as a model for us all. It is healthy — and often crucial — to identify moments of joy and celebrate your victories, even when they haven't come fully to fruition. Without those moments of joy on the road to recovery, we run the risk of giving up before we reach the end of our journeys.

Prompt: As we sing praises to God for the miracles of the Exodus, what other miracles are you singing for that you have not yet taken the opportunity to rejoice in?



NIRTZAH

At the height of our celebration of freedom, we proclaim our ultimate dream: to return to the messianic Jerusalem in a utopic future, performing the practice of envisioning and manifesting the futures we want for ourselves.

Prompt: As the Seder comes to an end, consider what your personal Jerusalem is. What are your goals? What is the future you hope to reach? In calling out "Next year in X," you solidify your vision and allow for the path forward to begin to form.

לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָׁלָיִם!

Next year in Jerusalem!

בְּשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּבְרִיאוּת הַנֶּפֶשׁ!

Next year in mental wellness!



PERSONAL REFLECTIONS AND INSIGHTS

ABOUT US

The Blue Dove Foundation was created to address mental illness and addiction in the Jewish community and beyond. We work with organizations and communities — both Jewish and interfaith — across the country and around the world.

Our Mission

Transforming the way the Jewish community understands and responds to mental illness and addictions.



Our Vision

A healthy, vibrant Jewish community that is welcoming and knowledgeable about mental health.

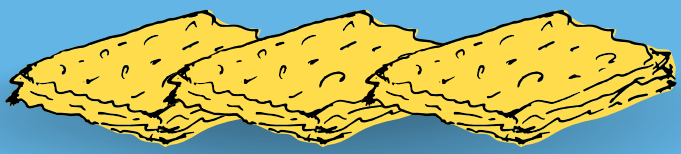
Our Work

1. Educate the community about mental health through a Jewish lens.
2. Produce powerful and engaging educational resources about the connections between mental wellness and Judaism.
3. Spearhead and design programs that can be replicated easily in communities across the country: mental health Shabbat dinners, various training programs, interactive events with speakers, and more.

Our Website

Resource Library

> The Exodus from Egypt Occurs in Every Human Being, in Every Era, in Every Year, and in Every Day.
> – Rabbi Nachman of Breslov



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