



FROM OUR RABBI

A Reading for Passover: Caring for the Hungry and Needy Among Us

In the Passover Haggadah, after we break the middle matzah, we begin telling the story of Passover with *Ha Lakhma Anya*:

This is the bread of poverty that our ancestors ate when they were slaves in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry enter and eat; let all who are needy come to our Passover feast. This year, we are here; next year may we be in the Land of Israel. This year we are slaves; next year may we be free.

We then recite the four questions. Many might have questions before we even get to the Four Questions!

1. How can we invite people to our seder *now*? We are seated; we've already begun the rituals!?
2. How can we invite the poor to our feasts? What does it mean to invite in "the hungry?"
3. Why do we say we want to be in the Land of Israel next year? Some of us might want to be there next year; some of us might not.
4. What enslaves us now? Aren't we celebrating freedom?

This *Ha Lakhma Anya* section expands the timeframe of the seder. We are talking about the past, the present and the future. We were oppressed. We were enslaved. We have been persecuted. Because of our history, we have an obligation to work against oppression, inequity, injustice and intolerance. We cannot ignore the poor and needy—*today*. We need to look for them and invite them to the feast—*today*.

We should collect and distribute food for the needy so they can have a feast at Passover. Or, we should look for those in the community who are *in need*—in need of company, comfort or Jewish traditions. And, we should invite them into our homes—*today*. Then, when we read this section of the haggadah, we will know that we have already fulfilled this part of the proclamation.

Who do you know who is "hungry" for meaning in their lives, hungry for the life-giving, life-affirming traditions and teachings of Judaism? Now is the time to invite them to your seder! And, if you are reading this and you yourself are "hungry" and longing for a place at a table to share friendship and tradition, please call Cheryl Slutzky in the office. We will serve as matchmakers to help everyone fulfill this teaching of the seder.

The *Ha Lakhma Anya* section also reminds us that our work is never done. Yes, we sit in this moment and celebrate freedom. But we cannot become complacent. "Next year in Israel" is a statement of hope for a bright future. The Israel of the future is the vision of Jewish unity, Jewish freedom and Jewish peace. This vision is not yet complete. The State of Israel has come a long

way and it has a long way to go. We must continue to work for the perfection of Israel so that her citizens can all live in peace and practice their religion in peace. The month of Nisan was the month when the children of Israel were redeemed from slavery. The month of Nisan has now become the time when we pray for redemption and work for it as God's partners.

Ha Lakhma Anya is a prayer and a call to action. Enjoy this seder. Feast on these foods of poverty and the rich foods of freedom. And, keep on going. Do not be satisfied. There is a better world that can be created from our efforts. Prayer is one step. Identifying and proclaiming the challenges of oppression, injustice and hard-heartedness is another. The next step is action. Welcome the stranger, for we were once strangers. Feed the hungry, for we were once hungry. We are not so different from "the needy." We are all created in God's image. We all desire freedom and a good life.

What is holding us back? Maybe you can discuss this at your seder this year?!

As the holiday of Passover draws near, may we all be blessed with a fulfilling feast of freedom. May we all hear the call to remove the pharaohs from the world. May we soften our hearts to care not only for our own needs, but also for the needs of those around us who are hungry for sustenance, connection and meaning.

The Roston Family wishes the Beth El Family a sweet, joyous Pesach!

With Blessings,

Rabbi Francine Roston

Please visit www.bethelni.org to read a selection of Rabbi Roston's sermons, divrei Torah and special prayers. If you know of a Beth El member who is ill, hospitalized, or homebound, please call Rabbi Roston to let her know. Beth El members are our source of information.

Below are related handouts from Rabbi Roston's Shabbat sermon on March 20, 2010.

5th question placemat from Mazon

<http://mazon.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/5Q-Placemat-BW.pdf>

Dayenu & Haiti reading from AJWS

http://ajws.org/what_we_do/education/publications/holiday_resources/passover_seder_reading_2010.pdf

Afikomen hunt reading (for kids 7-11) from AJWS

http://ajws.org/what_we_do/education/publications/holiday_resources/afikomen_hunt_now_and_later.pdf