

A brown and green dream. Every tomato picker holds a bucket. It's his only tool. Cradling the bucket against his belly, he picks pre-ripe tomatoes, tomato after tomato, green with promise. When the bucket is full, 32 pounds of possibility, he throws the bucket up to the truck... for a moment, defying gravity...

And then the bucket is empty.

He gets a token. Good for fifty cents. And an empty bucket. Start again.

A day of slam-dunking tomatoes into that bucket, his body a human backboard, leaves a human stain. Over every worker's heart, a deep brown sun, surrounded by a green halo.

It's our custom to raise up our matzah. **The bread of poverty. The bread of oppression. But also the bread of liberation.**

The tomato, too, is a dual symbol. It reminds us that slavery persists, today, wherever farm laborers have not tasted the sweet freedom made real by the brave men and women of the CIW. And it celebrates the awesome power of those workers, who refuse to forfeit their humanity, who point the way toward liberation. Not just for themselves. But for all of us.

Let us raise up the tomato on our seder plate.

Let us rouse ourselves to stand in solidarity with all who are exploited bringing food to our tables.

And, in doing so, let us raise up our holy tables in a banquet of liberation, affirming wisdom and courage, wherever they are exiled, in any soul — there, or here.

- Rabbi Michael Rothbaum,
Beth Chaim Congregation, Danville, CA



Photo Courtesy of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers.

Rabban Gamliel Says

Why is there a tomato on the seder plate? This tomato brings our attention to the oppression and liberation of farmworkers who harvest fruits and vegetables here in the United States. And it reminds us of our power to help create justice.

A tomato purchased in the United States between November and May was most likely picked by a worker in Florida. On this night, we recall the numerous cases of modern slavery and other worker exploitation that occurred in the Florida tomato industry, which centers on the town of Immokalee, as recently as 2010.

But a transformation is underway. Since 1993, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a farmworker organization, has been organizing for justice in the fields. Together with students, secular human rights activists, and religious groups like T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights, they have convinced 14 major corporations, such as McDonald's and Walmart, to join the Fair Food Program, a historic partnership between workers, growers, and corporations. Not only does the Fair Food Program raise the wages of tomato workers, it also requires companies to source tomatoes from growers who agree to a worker-designed code of conduct, which includes zero tolerance for forced labor and sexual harassment.

Today, the tomato fields are “probably the best working environment in American agriculture,” according to Susan L. Marquis, dean of the Pardee RAND Graduate School, a public policy institution in Santa Monica, CA¹. Since 2011, when more than 90% of Florida's tomato growers began to implement the agreement, nearly \$19 million has been distributed from participating retailers to workers, and not one new case of slavery was discovered in the Florida tomato fields.

But the resistance of holdout retailers, like major supermarkets and Wendy's, threatens to undermine these fragile gains, as they provide a market to farms that continue abusive labor practices.

Since 2011, T'ruah has taken nearly 75 rabbis to Immokalee to learn from the CIW. The stories they hear - and the transformation they see - inspire them to go home and turn their congregations into more than just educated consumers. They become activists; many of the rabbis whose words grace these pages are #TomatoRabbis. They have become part of the larger movement of Fair Food activists, urging corporations to live up to their professed values and join the new day dawning in the Florida tomato industry that is the only proven slavery-prevention program in the U.S.



¹ www.nytimes.com/2014/04/25/business/in-florida-tomato-fields-a-penny-buys-progress.html?_r=0

We are meant to feel the sting of the whip on our back.

We have spent 3,000 years closing our eyes, imagining the hopelessness and outrage of working in that mud. We see ourselves as people who know what it is like to be slaves. We are oppressed. We are born into hardship. We, but for the deliverance of God, are helpless against tyranny.

We relive our slavery each year so that the pain, oppression, and struggle of others living it today will feel more immediate to us. We are “chosen” to be the ones who have seen darkness, been delivered into light, and now will deliver others.

So does Passover truly remind you of your freedom? Do you hear the call to “break the chains of the oppressed?” Is this the night you choose to act?

- Robert Beiser,
Executive Director,
Seattle Against Slavery

We end Maggid with a taste of Hallel, beginning with Psalm 113. The first line sums up all of Maggid in four words:

Halleluyah hallelu הַלְלוּיָהּ הַלְלוּ
avdei Adonai עֲבָדֵי ה'

Praise God, you slaves of God!

This recalls God's declaration towards the end of Leviticus (25:42)...

For they are My כִּי עֲבָדֵי הֵם
slaves, whom I אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי
brought out of the אֶתֶם מֵאֶרֶץ
land of Egypt— מִצְרַיִם; לֹא
they shall not be יִמְכְרוּ
sold as slaves. מִמִּכְרַת עֶבֶד.

...as well as the line by Yehudah HaLevi, the 12th century philosopher and poet:

Slaves of time are עֲבָדֵי זְמַן עֲבָדֵי
slaves to slaves. עֲבָדִים הֵם
Only a slave of עֶבֶד ה' הוּא
God is free. לְבַד חֲפְשִׁי.

Consider singing the first line of Psalm 113 or this popular line from Psalm 100:2: *Ivdu et Hashem besimcha, bo'u lefanav bir'nana* (Serve God with joy, come before God with song). Ethiopian-Israeli singer Etti Ankri has also set HaLevi's poem to music: www.youtube.com/watch?v=FtrYCYfFXTs

We conclude Maggid by blessing and drinking the second cup.

“In every generation a person must see him/herself as if s/he came out of Egypt... Therefore we are obligated...”

This is the seder's fulcrum, the turning point the leverages our collective memories of slavery and turns them into collective obligation. This is the moment when we return to *Ha Lachma Anya* and say:

Hashta avdei הַשְׁתָּא עֲבָדֵי
Leshanah haba'a לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה
b'nei horin! בְּנֵי חוֹרִין!

**Now - slaves.
Next year - free people!**

It is not enough simply to remember, or even to retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. Rather, the Haggadah demands, “in each generation, each person is obligated to see himself or herself [*lir'ot et atzmo*] as though he or she personally came forth from Egypt.”

The text of the Haggadah used in many Sephardic communities demands even more. There, the text asks us “*l'har'ot et atzmo*” – to show oneself as having come forth from Egypt. The difference of a single Hebrew letter changes the obligation from one of memory to one of action.

Showing ourselves as having come out of slavery demands that we act in such a way as to show that we understand both the oppression of slavery and the joy and dignity of liberation. Our own retelling of the narrative of slavery pushes us toward taking public action to end slavery in our time.

- Rabbi Jill Jacobs,
Executive Director, T'ruah