

## RAISING UP, RISING UP

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 workers of 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, Congregation Beth Elohim, Acton, Mass.

When we see ourselves in relationship with the people who grow our food — and poor people as powerful social change agents in their own right — we become more fully whole ourselves, as the prophet Hosea taught, “Plant righteousness for yourself, harvest the fruits of goodness” (10:12), and as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms, “Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

## What we learn from CIW

- To center the leadership and solutions of the people most affected.
- How faith communities can be effective allies.
- Ways to make change outside government channels; the Fair Food Program works through consumer advocacy aimed at corporations.

For more details on the Fair Food Program, visit [www.truah.org/fairfood](http://www.truah.org/fairfood) and [www.ciw-online.org](http://www.ciw-online.org)

Since 2011, T'ruah has brought over 100 rabbis and cantors to Immokalee to learn from CIW and return to their communities as leaders in the Campaign for Fair Food. Since the very first delegation, they have been known as the #TomatoRabbis.



## Rabban Gamliel Says

**Lift up the tomato on the seder plate and say: “This tomato on our seder plate: What does it mean?”**

It represents the workers who picked it and the organizing that has changed their lives.

Farm work has always been done — to this very day — by our country's most vulnerable people and has often resulted in labor exploitation, up to and including modern slavery. But Florida's Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) is changing that through their groundbreaking Fair Food Program. The partnership they have created — with the support of faith communities like T'ruah — between farmworkers, growers, and corporations has won labor protections, independent enforcement of human rights, and a recognition of the basic human dignity of farmworkers.

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## WORKER-DRIVEN SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (WSR)

*Tikkun olam* tells us that, as Jews, we are responsible for not only our own welfare and wellbeing but also the welfare of our neighbors and our societies. Worker-driven Social Responsibility is a model based on the idea that oppressed peoples should be empowered to combat their own oppression. WSR programs empower workers to hold corporations accountable for the working conditions those companies create — and to improve those conditions. These programs are created by and for workers and are enforceable and transparent. For instance, the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, a leading WSR program in the garment industry, has transformed safety in factories there, making two million covered workers safer. “Social responsibility” programs without worker participation are not enough. To fight the modern plagues of inequity and exploitation, we need models like WSR that enable those who are exploited to lead their own liberation.

- Chelsea Rudman, Director of Development and Strategic Partnerships, Worker Rights Consortium

## “Seeing ourselves” — Who are you?

In a 2017 d'var Torah for T'ruah, Rabbi Katie Mizrahi of Or Shalom Jewish Community in San Francisco wrote:<sup>23</sup>

“The story of the Exodus is in us, and we are in that story. But where exactly? Every year the seder asks us to imagine our answers.

Are you a midwife, commanded by an evil authority to commit an immoral act, finding a way to resist? Are you young Moses lashing out at injustice, going too far, knocking down a pawn without impacting structural evil? Are you the kind daughter of Pharaoh, drawing a miracle child out of the waters, using your privilege to protect the vulnerable? Are you standing on holy ground marveling at a burning bush, hearing a call to be more than you have been? Where are YOU in the story?”

We should be open to the likelihood that, in this world of globalized capitalism, in addition to these liberatory roles, we in North America are also on Team Pharaoh. We always play multiple roles simultaneously: oppressor, victim, enabler, freedom fighter, bystander, and more. When we come to own that responsibility, we can face the cognitive dissonance our multiple identities create; instead of going with the flow, we begin to direct our energies deliberately.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.truah.org/resources/who-are-you-in-the-passover-story/>

*“In every generation a person must see themselves as if they came out of Egypt... Therefore we are obligated...”*

**This is the seder’s fulcrum, the turning point that 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*

*Leshanah haba'a*

*b'nei chorin!*

הַשְׁתָּא עֲבָדֵי

לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה

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 to see themselves as though they personally [*lir'ot et atzmo*] 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

# רחצה

## Rachtzah

Our hands were touched by this water earlier during tonight's seder, but this time is different. This is a deeper step than that. This act of washing our hands is accompanied by a blessing, for in this moment we feel our people's story more viscerally, having just retold it during Maggid. Now, having re-experienced the majesty of the Jewish journey from degradation to dignity, we raise our hands in holiness, remembering once again that our liberation is bound up in everyone else's. Each step we take together with others towards liberation is blessing, and so we recite:

- Rabbi Menachem Creditor,  
Pearl and Ira Meyer Scholar-in-Residence,  
UJA-Federation of New York

*Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu  
Melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu  
bemitzvotav vetzivanu al  
netilat yadayim.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ  
מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ  
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל  
נְטִילַת יָדַיִם.

**Blessed are You ETERNAL our God, Sovereign of time and space,  
who has sanctified us with commandments and instructed us  
regarding lifting up our hands.**

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*              עַבְדֵי ה'

**Praise God, you slaves of God!**

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

**For they are My  
slaves, whom I  
brought out of the  
land of Egypt —  
they shall not be  
sold as slaves.**

כִּי עַבְדֵי הֵם  
אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי  
אֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ  
מִצְרַיִם; לֹא  
יִמְכְרוּ  
מִמִּכְרַת עֶבֶד.

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

**Slaves of time are  
slaves to slaves.  
Only a slave of  
God is free.**

עַבְדֵי זְמַן עַבְדֵי  
עַבְדִּים הֵם  
עַבְד ה' הוּא  
לְבַד חֲפְשִׁי.

Consider singing the first line of Psalm 113 or this popular line from Psalm 100:2: *Ivdu et Hashem besimchah, bo'u lefanav bir'nanah* (Serve God with joy, come before God with song). Ethiopian-Israeli singer Etti Ankri has also set HaLevi's poem to music: [www.truah.org/haggadah-songs](http://www.truah.org/haggadah-songs)

**We conclude Maggid by blessing  
and drinking the second cup.**

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,  
Director of the Strategic  
Initiative on Sex Trafficking,  
Polaris Project