



# A FEMINIST HAGGADAH FOR NEW ORLEANS 2007



## THE CUP OF ELIJAH

*The fourth cup is poured for everyone. A cup is also filled and placed next to the cup of Miriam for the Prophet Elijah. The front door of the house is opened to welcome Elijah.*

We pour this cup for Elijah to show that both women and men are equally represented at our Passover Seder. We pour this in hopes that the Prophet Elijah will come soon to herald the Messianic Era; a time without war and poverty, but consciousness and kindness. We hope that the future will bring peace.



## FOURTH CUP OF WINE.

We drink the fourth cup of wine, saying: "I have been in Egypt. I have been in the desert. I have learned our history. And I am still on my journey."



## NIRTZAH

Accomplished is the order of the Passover according to its precept,

To all its law and its custom,

To the ways of the past and our lives of today.

Even as we have had the merit to order it,

So may we have the merit to fulfill it.

As we are saplings here,

Speedily lead the branches

As free people to Zion, with songs of rejoicing.

Next year, peace in Jerusalem!

# TZAFOON

*At the conclusion of the meal, the member who hid the afikoman shares it with the other members at the table.*



# BOREKH

*The cups are filled with wine and grace is said.*

Blessed be She, the Holy One our Shekinah, who sustains the whole world with goodness, with grace, with kindness, and with mercy; She gives food to every creature, for Her mercy endures forever. Through Her great goodness, food has never failed us; may it never fail us at any time, for the sake of Her great name. She is the One that nourishes, sustains, and deals graciously with everyone one, and She provides food for all the creatures that She has created. She is our mother, our Mother Earth and we must love and protect Her as she protects and gives to us. We must see that our food comes from her womb and as we hurt her, we hurt ourselves. Blessed be the Shekinah, who gives food to everyone.



# THIRD CUP OF WINE

We drink the third cup, saying, "I drink to the dregs the cup of knowledge."



# ORDER OF THE SEDER

The Passover Seder begins with the singing of the Table of Contents, the Order of the Seder. We sing a new order:

NEROT We light the candles  
KADDESH We bless one another  
U'RHATZ We wash each other's hands  
KARPAS We dip greens in salt water

And wash pain with tears.

YAHATZ We divide matzot

TAPUZ And hide our past.

MAGGID We tell Haggadah

And each her own tale.

RAHATZ We rinse again,

MOTZI MATZOT To bless matzot

And paths in the sand.

MAROR We eat maror,

KOREKH Of the bitter past.

SHULHAN OREKH We set the table

For the women's supper.

TZAFOON We find the halved matzot

That dropped from our lives.

BOREKH We end with grace,  
NIRTZAH With blessing and song.

We greet the night  
And the following dawn  
In the bosom of friends,  
The seder of our own.



## NEROT

It is said, there is nothing new under the sun,  
yet nothing remains the same.  
Against the backdrop of eternity  
the earth displays an ever-changing countenance.  
The sun rises and the sun sets,  
yet each day and each season is fresh and new.

Slowly, one season emerges from another.  
The harshness of ice and snow  
yields to gentle, nourishing showers.  
Inevitably, the cold, dark days succumb  
to the warmth and light of Spring.  
We rejoice in the warm light and rich blessings of this season.

The celebration of Passover represents the perennial rebirth  
and survival of the Jewish people and the world of nature.  
The light of these candles symbolizes a renewal of life, a reaffirmation of freedom.

Tonight, these flames represent our commitment to the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast.

Let us bless the light  
As we gather together  
To kindle the festival candles  
With the light of liberation  
Let us bless life.

*The candles are lit.*

Blessed be she, our Shekinah, who brings forth bread from the earth. Blessed be she, our Shekinah, who sanctified us with Her word, and has given us unleavened bread.



## MAROR

*Each person receives some bitter herbs dipped in ahroseth, and before partaking, says the following:*

Blessed be she, our Shekinah, who sanctifies us with Her word and has taught us to observe eating bitter herbs.



## KOREKH

*Each person places some of the bitter herbs between two pieces of the lower matzot and says the following:*

With unleavened bread and bitter herbs, we temper the bitterness and ourselves as per Rabbi Hillel's instruction. We begin our dinner all as friends: welcoming, tolerant and loving as we share this meal.



## SHULHAN DREKH

*Dinner is now served.*



phorical obligation not to the wheat or the vegetable, but to remember our history, and ourselves; to fulfill our obligation to our past.

We must see the beauty of our city as it once was and will be. We must see its flaws and the suffering of people, but also the ways in which those that were suffering have overcome. We must see the celebration in places of liberation, whether that be a women's shelter, a place of worship or historic Congo Square. We must see these neutral grounds as places of peace and camaraderie where we can meet our friends and neighbors, as well as our enemies in understanding and compassion.

Passover is our story, the unleavened bread our sustenance and the bitter herb represents the tears that we shed to purge the suffering of all peoples from this planet.



## RAHATZ

*Wash the hands pronouncing the benediction:*

Blessed be She, our Shekinah, who has sanctified us with Her commandments and has commanded us to observe washing the hands.



## MOTZI MATZOT

*The upper matzot and the portion of the middle matzot is distributed among those present, each one pronouncing the following before partaking:*



## KADDESH

### WHY WE ARE TOGETHER TONIGHT

We have come together this evening for many reasons. As the Mississippi rises, we are reminded of the cycle of rebirth after the hardship of winter. As we witness the rebirth of nature, we hope for the rebirth of New Orleans. We are here because we are feminists, we are Jews, we are New Orleanians and most importantly we are part of humanity. All with deep historic roots and valuable memories and stories.

We are here to remember the old story of the liberation of the ancient Hebrews from slavery in Egypt—a great struggle for freedom and dignity.

We are here because the struggle for equality never stops. We are here to recognize in solidarity all people who are still struggle for their freedom in New Orleans: African-Americans, gays, Latino immigrants, sex workers, the impoverished, the elderly and disabled and all those who are waiting to receive the help they so desperately need.



## QUESTIONS TO ASK:

How can we support each other through the lessons learned from the Passover story?  
How can we recognize our oppression and use these lessons to counter the oppression of others?  
In what ways can we see the experience of New Orleans as analogous with the Exodus of the Jews?



## FIRST CUP OF WINE

Let us all fill our cups with wine. Tonight, we drink four cups of the fruit of the vine. They represent, the four corners of the earth, for freedom must live everywhere; the four seasons of the year, for freedom's cycle must last through all the seasons and the four matriarchs: Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel.

*Everyone:*

Here we are, prepared to observe the mitzvah of the first of the four cups of wine for the sake of the Shekhinah, Blessed be She, who kept us alive and has sustained us to reach this festive season.

We drink the first cup saying, "We return to Egypt."



## U'RHATZ

*Together, we wash each others hands.*



## KARPAS

*Dip parsley in salt water and recite:*

Blessed art Thou, Shekhinah, Creator of the fruit of the earth.



welcome her. As we think of Miriam, we admire her unusual strength and give honor to her leadership. As we open the door, we are also mindful of its being a symbol of hospitality and friendliness; a sign that no woman is shut off from other human beings; and as a symbol for all women who are going forth with dignity and pride; making a Jewish future for all our people.

In honor of Miriam's merits, a mysterious well, created on the eve of the first Sabbath, accompanied the children of Israel in the desert. It followed here everywhere, easing the group to rest, and springing from hidden places in their wanderings. They were always thirsty, and she would stamp her feet angrily when they wailed. The group even drank from the pools of her heelprints. Once in anguish, she bat the rocks with her bare hands again and again, weeping. Water gushed from the rocks, cleansing her wounds soaking her hair and her robe. She cupped her hands, rinsed her mouth, and spat; splashing and playing. Laughing, the group drank. Miriam was the one the Israelites followed, and she healed them with her drink. She was the well. In their hearts they did not call her Miriam, bitter sea, but Mayim, water.

Tonight we shall pour a little of our own water into Miriam's Cup, to symbolize Miriam's well and give thanks not only to Miriam, but to the women who have made a difference in our lives.

The cup is passed around the room. Each woman pours in a drop of water as she thanks the woman (or women) who have influenced her.



We next come to the recitation of the Passover, the unleavened bread and the bitter herb, as obligated by Rabbi Gamaliel. These are crucial pieces of our Passover Seder, but are a meta-

If women bonding, like Naomi and Ruth  
Were the tradition  
And not the exception,  
Dayenu.

If women had been in the Tribal Council  
And decided on the laws  
That dealt with women,  
Dayenu.

If women had written the Haggadah  
And brought our mothers forth,  
Dayenu.

If every generation of women  
Together with every generation of men  
Would continue to go out of Egypt,  
Dayenu.

If we were aided by rabbinical decree  
And treated with dignity,  
Dayenu, Dayenu.



## SECOND CUP OF WINE

We drink the second cup, saying: “We return to the desert.”



## THE CUP OF MIRIAM

We are told that Miriam, the prophetess, visits every home  
where a women’s Seder is being held. We open the door to

## YAMATZ

*The next member breaks the middle matzah, leaves one half in its place and hides the larger half to be eaten as the afikoman at the end of the meal.*



## TAPUZ

Tonight, we place an orange on the Seder plate and tell the following story:

In the early 1980’s, while speaking at Oberlin College, Susanna Heschel was introduced to an early feminist Haggadah that suggested adding a crust of bread to the Seder plate as a sign of solidarity with Jewish lesbians as a retort to the belief that “There is as much room for a lesbian in Judaism as there is for a crust of bread on the Seder plate.”

Heschel felt that to put bread on the Seder plate would be to accept the view that homosexuals violate Judaism like chametz violates Passover. Instead, she chose an orange as a symbol of inclusion of homosexuals and other marginalized groups within the Jewish community. The orange represents the fruitfulness of all Jews. Each segment includes seeds, which must be spit out as a gesture of repudiating the homophobia and exclusion of Judaism. In our own time a new Passover tradition was born.



## MAGGID

This is the bread of affliction that our mothers made in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry—let them come and eat. All who

are needy—let them come and celebrate the Passover. Now we are here, but may we be in our Israel next year. Now we are slaves, but next year may we be freed people.



## WHY IS THIS NIGHT DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHER NIGHTS?

On all other nights, we eat either leavened or unleavened bread;  
on this night, we eat only unleavened bread.

On all other nights, we eat all kinds of herbs;  
on this night, we eat only bitter herbs.

On all other nights, we do not dip even once;  
on this night, we dip twice.

On all other nights, we eat upright or in a reclining position;  
on this night, we all recline.



On August 29, 2005, we were all able to understand the meaning of exodus. As our lives had been pulled out from under us, we turned to our family and friends for help in these troubled times. The stories of Katrina and Rita still continue to profoundly affect our daily lives. While we have not wandered for forty years, we are homeless, but home.

Traditionally, the Passover Seder has included a conversation among four sons or more recently in feminist texts, four daugh-



## DAYENU

If Eve had been created in the image of God  
And not as helper to Adam,  
It would have sufficed.  
Dayenu.

If she had been created as Adam's equal  
And not as temptress,  
Dayenu.

If she were the first woman to eat from the Tree of Knowledge,  
Who brought learning to us,  
Dayenu.

If Sarah were recognized as a priestess,  
Royal in her own lineage,  
Dayenu.

If our foremothers had not been considered  
As hardened roots  
Or fruit-bearing wombs,  
But as women in themselves  
Dayenu.

If Miriam were given her prophet's chair or the priesthood,  
Dayenu.

If the Just Women in Egypt  
Who caused our redemption  
Had been given sufficient recognition,  
Dayenu.

The fate of every person is bound up with the fate of women. And the destiny of every woman cannot be separated from the destiny of all humanity. We cannot be truly feminists unless we recognize that we are also a part of greater humanity.

Because Pharaoh prevented our ancestors from leaving Egypt freely, he plagued his land with hatred and oppression. We do not rejoice, however, over his downfall and defeat. Even as we celebrate our victory in Exodus, we cannot be glad when any life needlessly suffers, even that of our enemies who would seek to destroy us.

We are a world people, living in many lands and among many nations. We are all victims together of enormous social problems. We share in their effects and in the responsibility to overcome them.

We spill wine from our cups at the mention of each of these contemporary plagues. We cannot allow ourselves to drink a full measure since our own lives are sobered by these ills, which darken our lives and diminish our joy. As the pain of others diminishes our joys, let us once more diminish the wine of our festival as we repeat the names of these modern plagues:

Indifference to human suffering

Hatred

Violence against women

Oppression of Mother Earth

Lack of access to education

The patriarchy

Poverty and hunger

War

Man-made disasters

Decimation of the fragile Gulf Coast

ters. In our story of exodus, we will discuss the parallels between the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt and the people of New Orleans following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Our lives as feminists and as New Orleanians are woven into this story so that we may see the parallels for ourselves, but to also inform others of how very literal and necessary the concept of “leaving Egypt” is today. May we continue to retell this story so that we too can continue to metaphorically leave Egypt, and in that, return to find our homes here in New Orleans.

As the Jews left the famine in Canaan and headed to Goshen, they put their trust in the Pharaoh of Egypt, but the covenant between the peoples of Canaan and Goshen was broken when Pharaoh began to fear that their strength would overthrow Pharaoh if war broke out. He made the Jewish people into slaves and this is the story that we now retell so that we will never forget the hardship of our ancestors or of others.

The Shekinah saw the affliction of the Jewish people and liberated them from the bondage of Pharaoh, but we have not seen the end of oppression here. We have neither the equality for all nor has the Shekinah sent us a strong leader to stop the suffering of the people of New Orleans. May the Holy One, Blessed be She, bring each of us the strength to overcome our suffering as women, as people, as New Orleanians, so that we may each lead the way to our own freedom as well as the freedom of others.



## SPILLING THE WINE

A full cup of wine symbolizes complete happiness, but our celebration today is shadowed by our awareness of continuing sorrow and oppression in all parts of the world. Ancient plagues are mirrored in modern tragedies.