

# Five Interfaith Passover Readings You Can Add to Your Hagaddah

By Rabbi Geela Rayzel Raphael

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Here are five readings that interfaith families may want to include in their Passover seder.

## **Karpas Kavannah**

Karpas (parsley that is dipped in salt water during the seder) kavannah (spiritual focus)--time for spring awakening, new directions--renewal and bursting forth of new ideas.

We take this time to honor others who travel with us from other faiths and cultural traditions. We acknowledge the fact that they bring a new perspective to our lives and a legacy of their own that enriches ours. We are grateful for the growth that we have experienced because they are in our lives.

As a plant bursts forth with new energy to bloom, so too we recognize that at this time of Jewish history we are blossoming in different ways. As the garden needs tending, so, too, do our relationships with spouses, in-laws and families of other traditions. Weeding out all that is not necessary and loving, we make room for fresh insight and respect. Welcome those who sit around this table for the first time or the twentieth, bringing new understanding to our discussion.

## **Maror/Charoset**

Maror (bitter herbs, such as horseradish)--the symbol of bitterness and slavery of the Israelites in Egypt. Today, in a Jewish community that is free, this bitterness takes on another layer of meaning. We acknowledge that there are many among us who are embittered by their feelings of resentment, discomfort, and fear. We know that there is just cause for some of these feelings of fear, for Jews were "other" for so many centuries and mistreated just because they were different.

This laden history has often contributed to some of our families' inability to accept the idea of intermarriage. We acknowledge that Jewish people have struggled and been enslaved in the past and we stretch to transform this defeated posture.

We also know that sometimes our own enslavement or emotional bondage prevents us from being open to hearing each other in our marriage. Loyalties to families of origin need to be honored, unless they prevent us from creating true intimacy. Bitter places are stuck places, and we commit ourselves tonight to moving beyond our own positions to find new points of intersection and connection.

Tonight we dip our bitterness in the sweetness of charoset. Charoset, the sweet mixture of fruits and nuts, symbolizes the mortar of the bricks of the Israelites. It is also the mortar of commitment and interdependence that enabled the Jewish community to survive through those centuries of oppression. It is the building blocks of hope and tradition, which are sweet. We take our maror of fear, and by dipping it into the sweetness we create a new model that honors the fear and suffering yet holds out hope for the future.

By blending our maror and charoset, we acknowledge the blending of faiths and traditions that sit around this table here tonight. We know it is not always sweet and it is not always bitter, but that life is a mixture of both. Just as our taste buds are designed for sweet, salty, sour and bitter, so we taste the range of textures of our relationships. By our dipping tonight we bring together the bitter and the sweet for something new to emerge.

### **The Artichoke on the Seder Plate**

The seder plate holds the main symbols of a traditional Passover seder-- the shank bone, egg, karpas, charoset, and maror. The Kabbalists of the Middle Ages added hazeret, another kind of bitter lettuce. And in recent years feminists have added an orange on the seder plate to symbolize women's leadership roles and full empowerment in Jewish life.

The artichoke however is a new development. What is an artichoke? Surely a work of God's imagination! Many petals, with thistle and a heart. To me this has come to represent the Jewish people.

We are first of all, very diverse in our petals. We call people Jews who are everything from very traditional Orthodox Hassidim, to very liberal secular. We are Reform, Reconstructionist, Orthodox, traditional, Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Renewal, and, of course, post-denominational. We are social justice activists and soldiers; we are Israelis and Jews of the Diaspora. We are young, old, single, married. Many are vegetarian, while others swear by Hebrew National. Our skin can be white as Scandinavian, dark black as Ethiopian, and we now welcome many Chinese and Latin American adoptees. Lately we add another category, that of interfaith.

Like the artichoke, which has thistles protecting its heart, the Jewish people have been thorny about this question of interfaith marriage. Let this artichoke on the seder plate tonight stand for the wisdom of God's creation in making the Jewish people a population able to absorb many elements and cultures throughout the centuries--yet still remain Jewish. Let the thistles protecting our hearts soften so that we may notice the petals around us.

### **Ten Plagues of Being Intermarried**

1. Not comfortable with Hebrew.
2. Can't stomach the idea of gefilte fish.
3. Songs are unfamiliar.
4. Being dragged into a war in a faraway land.
5. People assuming I'm Jewish when I'm not.
6. Not being recognized as a full citizen.
7. My in-laws' (original) discomfort.
8. Losing my family traditions/identity.
9. Children have different set of beliefs (maybe even body parts) than I do.
10. Not feeling welcomed by the community.

## **Sh'foch Ha Matcha**

At this point in the seder, traditional Jews would open the door and shout angry words at their enemies, those who had persecuted them and had accused the Jewish community of a blood libel--of making matzah with the blood of Christian children. Opening the door at this juncture gave the Jewish family the excuse to open the door to show that there was nothing sinister happening at the seder.

Tonight we are beyond this, for we sit together, Jew and extended family. We sit around one table with an open door, and an outstretched hand. We welcome those who journey from other faiths to sit in peace and acceptance.

Tonight, we take all the pain from our journey--all the pain that women, men, children, Jew, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and all humanity have endured throughout the ages--and bring it into a healing circle of love and forgiveness. With forgiveness for what is past, we move forward in the spirit and energy of creating positive change in our future. Let us acknowledge our grief, mourn for what has been, release the past, and move powerfully forward from a place of love for our families, our communities, our planet, and all humanity. Tonight we pour our blessings into the world.