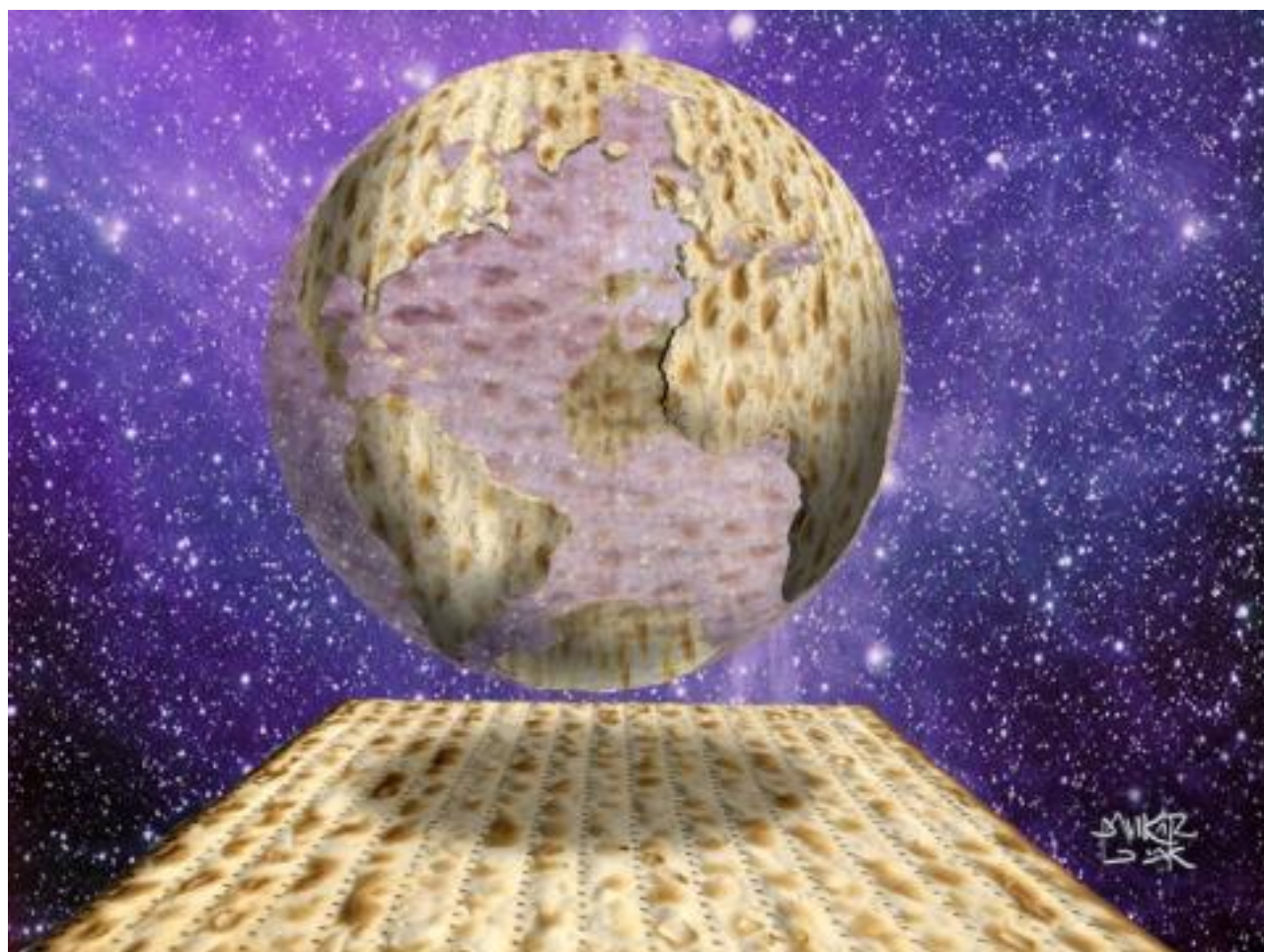


The MLK + 50 Interfaith Freedom Seder



Woven by The Shalom Center

<theshalomcenter.org>

To Reawaken and Renew

**The Prophetic Wisdom of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
During Holy Week and Passover in this 50th Year**

WISDOM FOR THE JOURNEY

“In every generation, a Pharaoh arises to enslave us and destroy us. In every generation we must all free ourselves: It is we who must go forth from slavery to freedom, not our forebears only.”
[From the traditional Passover Haggadah]

“I felt as if my legs were praying.”

(Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, returning home from the voting-rights March in Selma, Alabama, 1965)

“Prayer is meaningless unless it is subversive, unless it seeks to overthrow and to ruin the pyramids of callousness, hatred, opportunism, falsehoods.”

(Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, 1970)

“We as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values. We must rapidly begin the shift from a ‘thing-oriented’ society to a ‘person-oriented’ society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.”

(Dr. Martin Luther King, “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence,” April 4, 1967)



PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

The Freedom Journey is presented here in two parts: a march to challenge Pyramids of Power in the city or community, and a Seder around a table for conversation and celebration. Songs, signs, and other elements mentioned for the March aspect can also be used in the Seder.

This year, as we approach April 4, 2018, the 50th anniversary of the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King and the fourth night of Passover, we honor and seek to renew and re-invigorate his wisdom.

Exactly one year before Dr. King was killed, on April 4, 1967, at Riverside Church in New York City, in his speech “Beyond Vietnam,” he warned that the “triplets” of racism, materialism, and militarism were endangering America. He called for a “radical revolution of values.”

During the last year of his life, Dr. King worked to organize a Poor People’s Campaign that would bring together protest and resistance by poverty-stricken communities both “white” and “colored,” thus connecting racism with one aspect of materialism—poverty.

Today a New Poor People’s Campaign has issued A National Call for Moral Revival, “uniting tens of thousands of people across the country to challenge the evils of systemic racism, poverty, the war economy, ecological devastation and the nation’s distorted morality.” And the National Council of Churches has initiated a major campaign on “Truth and Racial Justice, beginning with interfaith prayer services and a massive rally on April 4 at the National Mall in Washington. (See <https://poorpeoplescampaign.org/> and <https://mlk50.org> and www.rally2endracism.org.)

For the Passover Seder, the ancient Rabbis for many years debated whether to drink four Cups of Liberation or five. They finally decided to prepare a fifth cup but set it aside, waiting for Elijah the Prophet come to herald the Great Turning-point of history. Elijah would decide whether we should drink the fifth cup. So we will drink four cups of wine or grape juice, dedicating these four cups to facing the deadly triplets Dr. King named—and one more.

What distinguishes “triplets” from any other triad, any other group of three? Triplets share a great deal of DNA.

What DNA do these triplets share? The DNA of subjugation by the powerful of those who have been disempowered. So today we add a fourth—a quadruplet—that is more apparent to us now than it was 50 years ago: sexism, the subjugation of women.

Our four cups will address (1) Racial and Economic Justice, (2) Hyper-materialism, devastating Mother Earth for the sake of corporate profit; (3) Militarism abroad and at home; and (4) Sexism.

As we address these deadly quadruplets, we will also lift up the vision of a transformed

society, the Beloved Community that Dr. King worked toward. We will drink a fifth cup, the Cup of Elijah, dedicating the cup and ourselves to activism.

In the Seder room there should be a large inflatable Globe of Earth. Besides wine and/or grape juice on the table, there should be wine cups—one for each participant and one in the center of the table; a bowl of salt water, a bowl of clear fresh water, a plate of *matzot*, and a Seder plate with sprigs of parsley or dill, chunks of horseradish root, chunks of a red beet, an orange, and *charoset*. (*Charoset* is a delicious paste made of chopped fruit, chopped nuts, wine or grape juice, and spices such as cinnamon, and nutmeg. There are many variations and recipes beyond this basic formula.)

Celebrants of the Seder should feel free to add passages of wisdom, and to omit some that are here, especially if they think this version will take too long for the community that gathers.

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PRE-SEDER ACTION: CHALLENGING THE PYRAMIDS OF POWER

The people gather at a central point, perhaps a synagogue, church, mosque, a community center, a school or college building, a union hall.

The people move into the streets. Chanting and singing as they go, carrying a large portable globe of Planet Earth, they walk toward a Pyramid of Power of our own day:

- Perhaps an office of Exxon or BP, or a coal-fired power station, or a bank that invests in pipeline companies that are despoiling sacred Native land and poisoning their regions' air and water.
- Or a Big Pharma company that has greatly multiplied the costs of the drugs it makes or has profited greatly from the opioid epidemic.
- Or a prison filled with Black prisoners who were convicted of smoking marijuana.
- Or an institution faced with public outcries about its treatment of women workers or students.

And as they walk they sing:

One pair of hands can't bring healthcare to all;
Two pairs of hands can't bring healthcare to all;
But when two and two and fifty make a million,
We'll see that day come round;
We'll see that day come round!

One pair of hands can't end the gunfire deaths;
Two pairs of hands can't end the gunfire deaths;
But when two and two and fifty make a million,
We'll see that day come round;
We'll see that day come round!

One pair of hands can't end asthmatic smoke;
Two pairs of hands can't end asthmatic smoke;
But when two and two and fifty make a million,
We'll see that day come round;
We'll see that day come round!

One pair of hands can't make all Black Lives Matter;
Two pairs of hands can't make all Black Lives Matter;
But when two and two and fifty make a million,
We'll see that day come round;
We'll see that day come round!

One pair of hands can't welcome refugees;
Two pairs of hands can't welcome refugees;

But when two and two and fifty make a million,
We'll see that day come round;
We'll see that day come round!

One pair of hands can't make elections just;
Two pairs of hands can't make elections just;
But when two and two and fifty make a million,
We'll see that day come round;
We'll see that day come round!

One pair of hands can't put an end to war;
Two pairs of hands can't put an end to war;
But when two and two and fifty make a million,
We'll see that day come round;
We'll see that day come round!

One pair of hands can't heal our climate wounds;
Two pairs of hands can't heal our climate wounds;
But when two and two and fifty make a million,
We'll see that day come round;
We'll see that day come round!

We have the whole world in our hands.
We have the frogs and the forests in our hands,
We have the wind and the honeybees in our hands,
We have the whole world in our hands

We have the trees and tigers in our hands,
We have our sisters and our brothers in our hands
We have our children and *their* children in our hands/
WE HAVE THE WHOLE WORLD IN OUR HANDS!

At the pyramid of power place they have chosen, after singing and a few short talks and conversation about the reason they are there, they return to the original gathering-place for the Seder.

THE MLK + 50 INTERFAITH FREEDOM SEDER

We light up the path of the Seder and our lives—

[All say together:]

We are the generation
That lives between the fires.
Behind us is the flame and smoke
That rose from Auschwitz and from Hiroshima,
From the burning forests of the Amazon,
From the flames of burning crosses lit by hate
to choke our people in the smoke of terror;
From the glare of gun fire exploding in our children.
From the hottest years of human history
that bring upon us
Melted ice fields. Flooded cities.
Scorching droughts. Murderous wildfires.

Before us is the nightmare of a Flood of Fire,
The heat and smoke that could consume all Earth.
Lit by the deadly triplets named by the Prophet Martin:
Racism, hyper-materialism, militarism:
The scorching of our planet
From a flood of burning fossils,
Or the blazing of our cities
In thermonuclear fire.

It is our task to make from fire
Not an all-consuming blaze
But the light in which we see each other—
Each of us different,
All of us made in One Image, glowing with One Spark.

[Kindling the candles of commitment:]

We light this fire to see more clearly
That the earth, the human race, are not for burning.
We light this fire to see more clearly
The rainbow in our many-colored faces.
Blessed are the Many in the One;
Blessed is the One within the Many.

Blessed are you, Yahh our God, Creative Interbreathing Spirit of the Universe, who makes us holy through connections with each other, and connects us through the kindling of these candles so that we may light up the path toward peace and freedom, justice and healing, for all peoples and our planet.

Blessed are You, Creative Interbreathing Spirit of the world, who fills us with life, lifts us up, and carries us to this moment.

[Light candles.]

[We take into ourselves the foods and meanings of the Seder.]

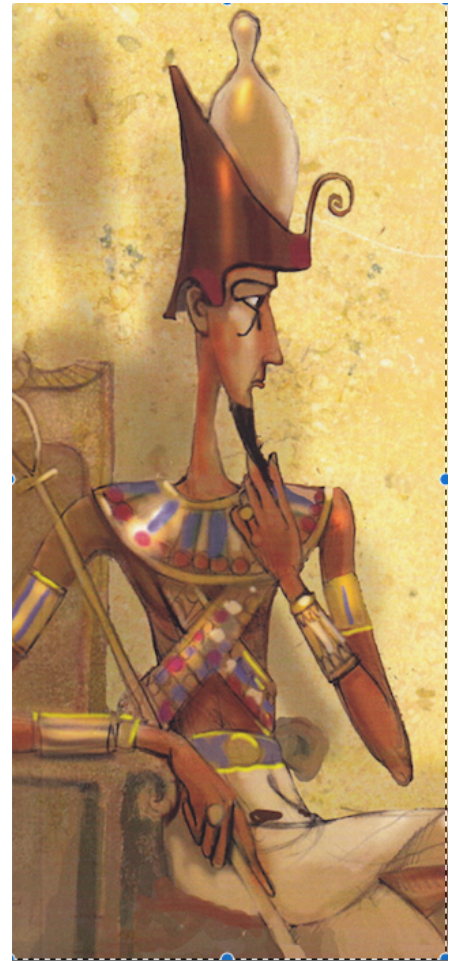
The first cup: We drink to Ending Racism and Poverty, and Birthing Racial and Economic Justice

[Everyone takes a piece of raw horseradish.]

Why do we eat this Bitterness?

“Now a new king arose over Mitzrayim, the Tight and Narrow Space [Egypt]. He said to his people, ‘Here, this people, the Godwrestling folk, the children of Israel, is many more than we and might make war against us. Come now, let us use our wits against it. So the Tight and Narrow Place made the Godwrestlers subservient with crushing-labor; they **embittered** their lives with hard servitude in clay and in bricks and with all kinds of servitude in the field, all their serfdom in which they made them subservient with crushing-labor.

(Exodus 1: 13-14)



All join to say: “Blessed are You, Creative Interbreathing Spirit of the Universe, Who brings forth the fruit of the earth—the bitter and the sweet.”

[Eat a chunk of horseradish.]

“God came into the picture. What was the sign that God had come? A bush that burned and burned and did not stop burning. Moses had had a fire kindled in his heart once, but it died down. God is the Being whose heart does not stop burning, whose flame does not die down.

“What was God all burned up about? The voice said, ‘I have seen the affliction of my people in the Tight & Narrow Place and have heard them cry out because of their oppression.... And the proof that God had entered into Moses, and that Moses had really been ‘converted,’ was that he had to go back and identify himself with his enslaved people: ‘organize them into Brickmakers’ Union Number One’ and lead them out of hunger and slavery into freedom and into ‘a good land, and a large, a land flowing with milk and honey.’” (A. J. Muste , 1943).

Thousands of years later, in the days just before Passover, Rabbi Jesus led a Jewish demonstration against the Roman Empire and its local puppet government. The march wended its way from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem, chanting psalms and waving palm branches. Defenders of the status quo told Rabbi Jesus to tell his followers to shut up.

And the Gospel (Luke 19:40) says: “I tell you,” he replied, “if they keep silent, the very stones will cry out.”

Let us leap forward for a moment to our own generation:

The stones *are* crying out.

The icebergs are groaning as they melt.

The mountains of West Virginia are moaning as they are destroyed in order to produce more coal.

The Coral Reefs are wailing as they blanch and die.

As the planet scorches

and the corn parches,

the price of food climbs.

Those who were hungry, starve.

The children whose bellies swelled from hunger,

whose voices wailed from famine,

grow silent.

Dying. Dead.

And all these silent, silenced voices call on us to speak.

Not only to speak but to act.

To act against the money-changers,

the corrupt banks and other corporations

that are not human beings, persons:

that are NOT created in the Image of God

and are not entitled to the sacred rights of human beings.

They are the Caesars of our day,

The Pharaohs of our day.

The Pontius Pilates and Abu-Jahls of our day—

The Empires of Oil, Tar, Coal, Unnatural Gas.

The Pharaohs of Pharma, Fracking, and Banking.

Returning to the moment of the Palm Sunday demonstration: A few days later, its leaders gathered for a Passover Seder that precipitated an Imperial crackdown—torture

and execution. Repeated risings against Rome during the next century resulted in more repression and in the birth of two new religions, Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity.

Half a millennium later, the Prophet Muhammad—like Moses—fled his city of oppression, learned to be a shepherd of the people, and returned to transform the city of Mecca into a place of justice. His followers today still walk that path of pilgrimage to Mecca:

“Before entering Miquat (where you get ready to start the Hajj [Pilgrimage]) which is the beginning of a great change and revolution, you must declare your intention. It is the intention of a ‘transferral’ from your house to the house of the people, from life to love, from the self to God, from slavery to freedom, from racial discrimination to equality, sincerity and truth, from being clothed to being naked, from a daily life to an eternal life and from selfishness and aimlessness to devotion and responsibility. ”

(Ali Shariati, *Hajj*)

[The community sings “Go Down Moses,” African-American spiritual.]

When Israel was in Egypt’s land, Let My people go;
Oppressed so hard they could not stand, Let My people go;
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt’s land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go!

The pillar of cloud shall clear the way, Let My people go;
A fire by night, a shade by day, Let My people go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt’s land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go!

As Israel stood by the water-side, Let My people go;
At God’s command it did divide, Let My people go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt’s land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go!

When they had reached the other shore, Let My people go;
They sang the song of freedom o’er, Let My people go.
Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt’s land,
Tell old Pharaoh: Let My people go!

*Oh, set all Earth from bondage free, Let all My peoples go;
And let all life be free to Be, Let air and water flow.
Go down, Moses, way down in every land,
Tell ALL Pharaohs: Let My creation grow!*

And in our generation?

In May 2017, new data sets from the economists Piketty, Saez, and [Gabriel Zucman](#) of [University of California, Berkeley](#) demonstrate that inequality runs much

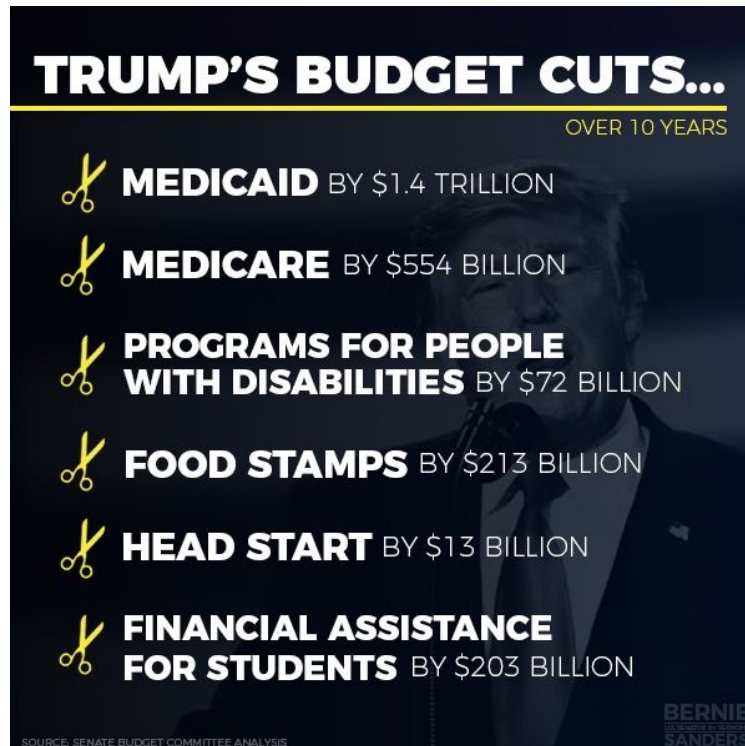
deeper than previous data indicated. The share of incomes for those in the bottom half of the U.S. population stagnated and declined during the years 1980 to 2014 from 20% in 1980 to 12% in 2014. By contrast, the top 1% share of income grew from 12% in 1980 to 20% in 2014. The top 1% now makes on average 81 times more than the bottom 50% of adults, whereas in 1981 they made 27 times more. Pretax incomes for the top 0.001% surged 636% during the years 1980 to 2014.

What does this mean in flesh and blood?

I met with many people barely surviving on Skid Row in Los Angeles, I witnessed a San Francisco police officer telling a group of homeless people to move on but having no answer when asked where they could move to, I heard how thousands of poor people get minor infraction notices which seem to be intentionally designed to quickly explode into unpayable debt, incarceration, and the replenishment of municipal coffers, I saw sewage-filled yards in states where governments don't consider sanitation facilities to be their responsibility, I saw people who had lost all of their teeth because adult dental care is not covered by the vast majority of programs available to the very poor, I heard about soaring death rates and family and community destruction wrought by opioids, and I met with people in Puerto Rico living next to a mountain of completely unprotected coal ash which rains down upon them, bringing illness, disability and death.

(Philp Alston, United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights)

And the poverty is bound to become still more bitter if the proposed new Federal budget is adopted:



[Everyone gets one "sheet" of matzah. Someone reads:]

"Why do we eat this pressed-down bread?"

"Because it begins as the bread of affliction, the bread of a pressed-down people—but becomes the bread of Freedom when we hasten toward our freedom. Hasten to bake it without time for the bread to rise, For then we lived and now we live, as Dr. King taught, in the "fierce urgency of NOW!"—swiftly moving toward our liberation."

[Each person breaks the matzah and hands one piece to a neighbor.]

"Why do we break and share the matzah?"

"Because if we do not share it, it remains the bread of affliction; when we share it, it becomes the bread of freedom."

Together say: "Blessed are You, Breathing-Spirit of the world, who through sun and soil, seed and human sweat, brings forth this bread from the Earth."

[All eat the matzah given them by someone else.]

"A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth."

"We are called to play the good Samaritan on life's roadside; but that will be only an initial act. One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho road must be transformed. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.

"With righteous indignation, it will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of those countries, and say: 'This is not just.'

These are revolutionary times. All over the globe men and women are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression and out of the wombs of a frail world new systems of justice and equality are being born. "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light."

Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism.

With this powerful commitment we shall boldly challenge the status quo and unjust mores and thereby speed the day when "every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain."

[Dr. King, "Beyond Vietnam," April 4, 1967]

[Pour each person a cup of wine or grape juice, but do not yet drink. Everyone pours a drop of wine or juice into the Cup of Elijah, which for now is left sitting full but untasted in the center of the table. Someone reads:]

“Why do we drink this fruit of the vine?”

“Because in the joy we take from this fruit of the vine we recognize the joy of honest work of sowing, nourishing, and bringing us the juice of the grape—when that work is done with fair income, livable leisure, and decent dignity.

[All join in saying:]

Blessed are You, Yahhh, Breathing Spirit of the world, Who breathes our out-breath into the grapevine and breathes the fruit of the vine into our bodies.

[Then each person drinks from her/his own cup.]

The second cup: We drink to ending Materialism and to celebrating Earth and Spirit through Empathy and Justice

[Someone reads:] One of the most dangerous and immoral forms of Materialism was little understood when Dr. King spoke in 1967. That was the insistence of major world corporations on meeting the needs of the world’s human communities for energy by burning fossil fuels without limits for the sake of their enormous profits.

It became clear that this unbridled burning was damaging the sacred Interbreathing of all life, scorching and wounding humankind and many other species by suffusing the Earth with more CO₂ than all the planet’s vegetation could absorb and transmute to oxygen. But even then, the Carbon Pharaohs refused to stop. They lied to the public and purchased politicians to support their obsession with their profits.

Why do we call them Carbon Pharaohs? Because like the ancient Pharaoh, they subjugated Humanity to serfdom and Mother Earth to planetary plagues.

[THE PLAGUES: Someone reads:]

“The ten plagues of the Exodus story were all ecological disasters. The Plagues were not lightning-bolts of punishment flung by a Super-Pharaoh in the sky, but eco-disasters brought about by Hyper-Materialism—consequences of the arrogance, greed, and stubbornness of a top-down, unaccountable ruler, Pharaoh.

“In the ancient past, the Plagues interrupted the flow of food and drink to human beings and other life-forms. In the present as well, there are Plagues that disrupt the flow of food and drink from species to species, Earth to human earthlings. And so today we mark our Plagues by interrupting the food and drink that embody our Seder.

“As the community recites the Plagues, we grieve for the Earth and human beings who have suffered from these Plagues by diminishing our pleasure in the fruit of the vine.

“And we ask ourselves: Today, what Plagues are our own ‘pharaohs’—the 1%, the global corporations—bringing on our Earth and all its earthlings, human and more-than-human life?”

[For each Plague, we drip some wine or grape-juice from our glasses.]

- Undrinkable water poisoned by fracking.
- Asthma: Lungs suffering from coal dust and gasoline fumes.
- Suffering and death for fish, birds, vegetation, and human beings from the oil upheaval in the Gulf of Mexico.
- Smashed mountains and dead coal-miners in the once-lovely hills of West Virginia.
- Unheard-of droughts in Africa, setting off hunger, starvation, civil wars and genocide.
- Drought in Russia, setting off peat-bog fires and scarcity of wheat.
- Summer-long intense heat wave in Europe, killing thousands of elders.
- Unheard-of floods in Pakistan, putting one-fifth of the country under water.
- Superstorm Sandy, killing hundreds in Haiti and America.
- Hurricane Maria, leaving millions of Puerto Ricans bereft of electric power for many months
- Years of drought and the resulting wildfires in California
- Parched fields and dead crops in the U.S. corn-belt

[Participants may add other Plagues of today.]

[Pass the globe from person to person around the table(s). As each person receives the globe, s/he stands to hold it gently for a moment or two, then hands it to the next person.]

CELEBRATION OF GOD’S EARTH

[Take sprigs of dill or parsley, dip them in salt water, pass them around the table, and say:]

“Why do we eat these greens, and why do we dip them in salt water? “

“Because in the spring the Earth sprouts green and fertile, and in the salt seas life began.”

Blessed are you, Yahh our God, Breathing Spirit of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the earth.

[Everyone then eats this sprig of parsley.]

[Share a spoon of charoset to each person around the tables.]

Why do we eat *charoset*? —

“Because by mixing apples, apricots, and raisins, nuts and cinnamon, wine and cloves, we embody the tastes and smells of the Song of Songs, the earthy poem of love and Eros—the springtime when flowers rise up against winter, the juices of love arise from the depths of depression, and the night-time of history gives way to the sunlight of Eden, the garden of delight; the Earth and humans at loving peace with one another.

“Come with me, my love, come away,/ For the long wet months are past, /The rains have fed the earth /And left it bright with blossoms. /Birds wing in the low sky, /Dove and songbird singing /In the open air above, /Earth nourishing tree and vine,/ Green fig and tender grape, /Green and tender fragrance. Come with me, my love, come away.

(Chorus) Do-di li va-a-ni lo; Ha-ro-eh ba-sho-sha-nim (Repeat)

Mi zot olah Min hamidbar, Mi zot olah
M’kituret mor, Mor u-livonah Mor u-livonah
(Chorus)

Uri tzafon u-vo-i teymann Uri tzafon u-vo-i teyman
(Chorus)

[Eat some charoset.]

“What in our past traditions can teach our own generation how to heal ourselves and our wounded Earth?”

“The seventh year shall be a Sabbath of joyful rest for the land, a Sabbath to Yahh, the Breath of life; you shall neither sow your field, nor prune your vineyard. Your harvest you shall not reap, and the grapes of your undressed vine you shall not gather; it shall be a year of joyful rest for the land. For the land is Mine; you are but strangers and visitors with Me.” (Leviticus 25)

“At the end of every seven years you shall grant a Release. Every creditor shall Release what s/he has lent to a neighbor; s/he shall not exact it of the neighbors, because Yahhh, the Interbreathing of all life, has proclaimed a Release from debt.”

(Deuteronomy 15)

[Someone reads each of these passages:]

DAYENU: THE PATH OF MANY STEPS TOWARD FREEDOM

What are the Ten Healings that can begin to make our world a Beloved Community?

[For each of the Ten Healings, we drink some wine or grape-juice and then say L'Chaim!—To Life!]

- Create organic farms in countrysides and cities.
- Purchase home and company electric power from wind-based suppliers.
- Families buy hybrid or electric cars; convince cities, government agencies, and businesses to switch their auto fleets.
- Use public transportation.
- Families and congregations, at Bat/Bar Mitzvah time and teen-age confirmations, study together how to address the climate crisis so as to “turn the hearts of children and parents to each other, lest the Earth be utterly destroyed.” (From last passage of Malachi, last of the classical Hebrew Prophets)
- Move Our Money, Protect Our Planet (MOM/POP) : Colleges, congregations, pension funds, and others shift their investments from fossil-fuel companies to renewable, sustainable energy.
- Vigil, picket, do civil disobedience at sites of mountaintop destruction by coal companies.
- End fracking: Insist on moratoriums or prohibitions.
- Lobby Congress for laws to put prices on carbon-fuel production and pay dividends from the incoming fees to American families.
- Organize neighborhood solar-energy coops where many households band together to stop burning coal for their electricity and generate it from the sun instead.
- Research and choose among proposals not only to end CO2 and methane emissions that are scorching our planet, but restoring for our children and grandchildren the healthy climate that our parents and grandparents lived in, amidst more justice than most of our forebears knew.

[Pour each person a cup of wine or grape juice:]

“Why do we drink this fruit of the vine?” —

“Because the juice begins in sweetness, ferments to sour, and then turns sweet again, this time as wine that can change and lift our consciousness.

“In the same way, our struggle to heal our Mother Earth and all her human earthlings begins in sweetness, turns sour as the Earth and we are wounded, and then becomes a higher sweetness through our activism. This fuller sweetness comes when we act with higher consciousness to heal what has been sorely wounded.”

[All join in saying:]

Blessed are You, Yahhh, Breathing Spirit of the world, Who breathes our out-breath into the grapevine and breathes the fruit of the vine into our bodies.

[Then each person drinks from her/ his own cup.]

The Third Cup: Ending Militarism and Moving toward a Worldwide Fellowship

[Read these reports on what we face:]

There are three aspects to the growing militarization of America: (A) The military overseas, through great increases in military budgets and the longest war in American history; (B) The militarization of domestic U.S. police forces, especially those intended to deal with Black and Latino communities; and (C) the rising number of deaths by gunfire, including by weapons intended for war. Let us look at each:

(A) In the 1960s, Leo Szilard, the physicist who along with Albert Einstein initiated the effort to invent the atomic bomb, asserted that 40 nuclear missiles, distributed in half a dozen nuclear submarines, would be enough to deter any nuclear attack on the United States.

As of July 8, 2017, the United States had 6,800 warheads, according to the Federation of American Scientists. 2,800 of them were retired, 4,000 were stockpiled, and 1,800 were deployed. This nuclear arsenal holds enough explosive and radiation capability to end photosynthesis on Earth, and therefore to wipe out all life.

Nevertheless, calling nuclear modernization the nation's top military priority, the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review <<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-outlines-plan-on-nuclear-weapons-use-1517621791>> demands that some \$1.2 trillion be spent over the next two decades modernizing five elements of U.S. nuclear forces: the submarine force, the bomber force, the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) force, the nuclear weapons production complex itself, and the nuclear command and control infrastructure." The NPR also contemplates the actual use of nuclear weapons in non-deterrence situations, a posture long rejected by U.S. strategy.

On January 28, 2018, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists moved its iconic Doomsday Clock to 2 minutes before midnight, equal to its standing in the most dangerous days of the Cold War.



The U.S. War in Afghanistan began in 2001 (not counting years of intervention to stymie Soviet military presence there by supporting what became Al Qaeda and the Taliban). It is now the longest war in U.S. history, and shows no sign of accomplishing the goals defined by U.S. policy. There are no plans to bring the war to an end.

“A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war: ‘This way of settling differences is not just.’ This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation’s homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into veins of people normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice and love.

“A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death” (MLK, April 4, 1967)

(B) At home, Dr. King’s separate triplets of racism and militarism have melted into one. In Ferguson, Missouri, in August 2014, local police mobilized tanks and other weapons of war to address protests over a killing by police. During the next two years, reporters were astonished to find how difficult it was to gather figures about police shootings. They began to keep track themselves.

“The picture we painted would reveal how common it had become for unarmed black men to be killed by police officers — one unarmed black person shot and killed by police every 10 days.

“The headlines of the Obama years often seemed a yearbook of black death, raising a morbid and depressing quandary for black men and women: Why had the promise and potential of such a transformative presidency not yet reached down to the lives of those who elected him? (Wesley Lowery, *They Can’t Kill Us All: Ferguson, Baltimore, and a New Era in America’s Racial Justice Movement*,)

“In the past year, the Department of Defense has given local law enforcement over 600 MRAPs, the armored vehicles designed to withstand roadside bombs. Texas alone has received 68, Florida 45.

“The Pentagon program has given departments over \$5 billion worth of surplus equipment since the program launched in 1991: helicopters, firearms, protective gear, night vision, even computers and camouflage clothing.” (CBS News, August 15, 2014)

(C) And hundreds of “civilians” bearing rifles, hand guns, and semi-automatic de facto machine guns are each year killing spouses, children, and themselves—in numbers unheard of in other affluent countries. Wikipedia reports these figures of firearm-related death rates per 100,000 population in one year: Japan, 0.06; United Kingdom, 0.23; Poland, 0.26; Australia, 0.93; Germany, 1.01; Sweden, 1.47; United States, 10.54.

What do these numbers look like in flesh and blood?

David Hogg, a 17-year-old student journalist who interviewed his classmates during the rampage in Parkland, said he had thought about the possibility of a school shooting long before shots from an AR-15 started to blast through the hallways. As he huddled with fellow students, he stayed calm and decided to try to create a record of their thoughts and views that would live on, even if the worst happened to them.

“I recorded those videos because I didn’t know if I was going to survive,” he said in an interview here. “But I knew that if those videos survived, they would echo on and tell the story. And that story would be one that would change things, I hoped. And that would be my legacy.” *(New York Times, February 16, 2018)*

“Every single person up here today, all these people should be home grieving. But instead we are up here standing together because if all our government and President can do is send thoughts and prayers, then it’s time for victims to be the change that we need to see. We certainly do not understand why it should be harder to make plans with friends on weekends than to buy an automatic or semi-automatic weapon. In Florida, to buy a gun you do not need a permit, you do not need a gun license, and once you buy it you do not need to register it. You do not need a permit to carry a concealed rifle or shotgun. You can buy as many guns as you want at one time.

“Australia had one mass shooting in 1999 in Port Arthur (and after the) massacre introduced gun safety, and it hasn’t had one since. Japan has never had a mass shooting. Canada has had three and the UK had one and they both introduced gun control and yet here we are, with websites dedicated to reporting these tragedies so that they can be formulated into statistics for your convenience.

“We are going to be the kids you read about in textbooks. Not because we’re going to be another statistic about mass shooting in America, but because, just as David said, we are going to be the last mass shooting. We are going to change the law. That’s going to be Marjory Stoneman Douglas in that textbook and it’s going to be due to the tireless effort of the school board, the faculty members, the family members and most of all the students. The students who are dead, the students still in the hospital, the student now suffering PTSD, the students who had panic attacks during the vigil because the helicopters would not leave us alone, hovering over the school for 24 hours a day.

“If the President wants to come up to me and tell me to my face that it was a terrible tragedy and how it should never have happened and maintain telling us how nothing is going to be done about it, I’m going to happily ask him how much money he received from the National Rifle Association.” *(Emma Gonzalez, a senior at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, February 17, 2018)*

What shall we aim to do?

The prosperous and mighty of our day still live at a dizzying height above the wretched of the earth, yet the latter have made their will felt in ways that have already changed history, and can change it more.

“Their cooperative power has as its chief instrument direct action, both non-cooperative and constructive. This power can be spiritual in inspiration but doesn’t have to be. Its watchwords are love and freedom, yet it is not just an ideal but a real force in the world. It must now be brought to bear on the choice between survival and annihilation. “

(Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World*)

“This call for a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one’s tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all.

(MLK, *April 4, 1967*)

[Pour each person a cup of wine or grape juice:]

“Why do we drink this fruit of the vine?”

“Because war and militarism and the idolatry of guns invite us to get drunk on blood, and instead we drink gently from the vine that twines its way into our hearts.”

[All join in saying:]

Blessed are You, Yahhh, Breathing Spirit of the world, Who breathes our out-breath into the grapevine and breathes the fruit of the vine into our bodies.

[Then each person drinks from her/ his own cup.]

The Fourth Cup: Sexism, the subjugation of women; We drink to women’s freedom

“American society is living now at the moment when an abused wife walks out of the household. It is the moment of greatest possibility for freedom, and the moment of greatest danger that the abusive husband will try to kill her. Freedom depends on her having a community to protect and nurture her.

“Right now, many abused communities are walking out of their abusive households. Almost certainly, there will be attempts by those in power to choke these energies to death. Together, we can nurture them and all of us to greater freedom, greater justice.”

(Gloria Steinem, “*This is What 80 looks Like*,” *The Shalom Center*, 2013.)

This story is not new:

“The king said to the midwives of the Hebrews, whose names were Shifrah and Puah: “When you help the Hebrew women give birth, if he be a son, put him to



death; but if she be a daughter, she may live." But the midwives held God in awe, and they let the children live. God dealt well with the midwives." (Exodus 1: 16-21).

The Narrow Pharaoh tried to subjugate these women, to make them tools of his even broader subjugation—indeed, his genocide—of these foreigners, these immigrants, these followers of a strange religion. But it was these two women—only two!—who through their resistance to the Narrow Pharaoh first gave birth to freedom in the ancient story.

And in our own generation, when our modern Narrow Pharaoh boasted of subjugating women close to him and across the breadth of all America, it was women—millions!—who led the first great wave of Resistance.

I am speaking today, not just for the #MeToos, because I was a #MeToo, but when I raise my hand, I am aware of all the women who are still in silence. The women who are faceless. The women who don't have the money, and who don't have the constitution, and who don't have the confidence, and who don't have the images in our media that gives them a sense of self-worth enough to break their silence that's rooted in the shame of assault. That's rooted in the stigma of assault. Every single day your job as an American citizen, is not just to fight for your rights; it's to fight for the rights of every individual who is taking a breath."

(Viola Davis, Women's March in Los Angeles, January 21, 2018)

Among the heroines of the ancient story there is Miriam, who over and over celebrates her freedom in the flowing, ever-changing water. At the Nile, she conspires with Pharaoh's Daughter to save her baby brother Moses' life. At the Red Sea, she dances in joy at the turning point of liberation. In the wilderness, a mystical wellspring follows

her until her death, quenching the people's thirst. So in her honor we dip our hands into a well of liberating water:

[The bowl of Miriam's Wellspring is passed around the table. Each person lets the water wash away our fears. As they do, one person reads aloud:]

Miriam: The Red Sea

High above shores and times,
I on the shore
forever and ever.
Moses my brother
has crossed over
to milk, honey,
that holy land.
Building Jerusalem.
I sing forever
on the seashore.
I do remember
horseman and horses,
waves of passage
poured into war,
all poured into journey.
My unseen brothers
have gone over;
chariots
deep seas under.
I alone stand here
ankle-deep
and I sing, I sing,
until the lands
sing to each other

(Muriel Rukeyser)

[Pour each person a cup of wine or grape juice:]

"Why do we drink this fruit of the vine?"

"Because the Song of Songs reminds us, 'Your kisses are sweeter than wine.'" So we remember as we drink that equality and love among all human beings—no matter the sexuality or gender of each person, love not imposed or harassed or assaulted—is the sweetest of all tastes."

[All join in saying:]

Blessed are You, Yahhh, Breathing Spirit of the world, Who breathes our out-breath into the grapevine and breathes the fruit of the vine into our bodies.

[Then each person drinks from her/ his own cup.]

The Fifth Cup: The Cup of Elijah, the Cup of Activism to Create the Beloved Community

“On the Shabbat just before Passover, we read the last passage of the last of the Prophets, Malachi, who proclaims on behalf of the Breath of Life:

“Before the coming of the great and awesome day when the Breath of Life may become a Hurricane of Change, I will send the Prophet Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to the children and the hearts of the children to the parents, lest the earth be utterly destroyed.”

[The community goes to open a door to the outside, to welcome Elijah, and they say together:]

“As we open our door to the winds and the air of the world, so we open our hearts to the future, to the hearts of our children and their children. We open ourselves, each one of us, to take on the task of Elijah, to heal the world from its suffering.

“We join with the Prophet Martin (April 4, 1967) in calling on the Spirit to move us into action:

Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism [and today, we add sexism].

With this powerful commitment we shall boldly challenge the status quo and unjust mores and thereby speed the day when "every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain."

A genuine revolution of values means in the final analysis that our loyalties must become ecumenical rather than sectional. Every nation must now develop an overriding loyalty to humankind as a whole in order to preserve the best in their individual societies.

This call for a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all life.

Love has now become an absolute necessity for the survival of humanity. When I speak of love, I am speaking of that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life.

“We can no longer afford to worship the god of hate or bow before the altar of retaliation. **The oceans of history are made turbulent by the ever-rising tides of hate. History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursued this self-defeating path of hate.**

“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.”

[The Cup of Elijah is passed around and each person pours some wine or grape juice from the Cup of Elijah into her/his own cup. All say together:]

“Why do we drink this fruit of the vine?” —

“Because grapes grow not alone but in clusters, and we must work not separately for freedom and justice, peace and healing—not each a lonely, isolated ‘I’—but in clusters of community. WE.

“Together, we take on the task of Elijah.”

[Each person turns to a neighbor and each tells the other one action s/he pledges to take to bring nearer the Beloved Community.]

Blessed are You, Yahhh, Breathing Spirit of the world, Who breathes our out-breath into the grapevine and breathes the fruit of the vine into our bodies.

[Everyone drinks from her/his own cup, which now includes some of the wine or grape-juice from Elijah’s cup.]

[Sing this translation of Psalm 148 to the tune of “Michael Row the Boat Ashore.”)]

Praise God, sun and moon, Hallelu-YAH.
Praise Yah, you stars of light, Hallelu-YAH.
Praise God, you high heavens, Hallelu-YAH.
All that flows in all the world, Hallelu-YAH.

Let them all praise God’s Name, Hallelu-YAH.
For God spoke and they appeared, Hallelu-YAH.
With God they take their stand, Hallelu-YAH.
God’s rhythm none must break, Hallelu-YAH.

Praise Yah from the Earth, Hallelu-YAH.
You sea-monsters and all deeps, Hallelu-YAH.
Fire, hail, snow, and steam, Hallelu-YAH.
Stormy wind to do God’s word, Hallelu-YAH.

Mountains high and tiny hills, Hallelu-YAH.
Trees of fruit and evergreens, Hallelu-YAH.
Wild beasts and quiet flocks, Hallelu-YAH.
Creeping bugs and winged birds, Hallelu-YAH.

Men and women, young and old, Hallelu-YAH!
High officials and whole peoples, Hallelu-YAH.

Every breath whispers Your Name, Hallelu-YAH.
Kol ha'n'shama t'hallel YAH, Hallelu-YAH

"I have been to the mountaintop. ... I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land!"

(Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., April 3, 1968)

[All stand and sing: "We Shall Overcome"]

We shall overcome
We shall overcome
We shall overcome, some day

CHORUS: Oh, deep in my heart
I do believe, We shall overcome, some day

We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand, some day
CHORUS

We shall live in peace
We shall live in peace
We shall live in peace, some day
CHORUS:

We are not afraid
We are not afraid
We are not afraid, TODAY.
CHORUS:

This "MLK + 50 Interfaith Freedom Seder" was woven chiefly by Rabbi Arthur Waskow, who wrote the original Freedom Seder in 1969 and is now director of The Shalom Center <theshalomcenter.org>. For unattributed passages, copyright (c) 2018 by The Shalom Center under Creative Commons Full Attribution required, NonCommercial License. The illustrations are Copyright (c) 2017 by Avi Katz <http://www.aviakatz.com/>. Arlene Goldbard, president of The Shalom Center; Viv Hawkins, its program coordinator; and Rabbi Phyllis Berman provided important research and editorial input.

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