

## Yachatz Divide the Matzah

*Take the middle matzah, break it in two.*

*The larger of the two pieces is put away (until after the meal) for the Afikoman.*

*Replace the small piece between the two matzahs.*

## Maggid Tell the Passover Story

*Raise the seder tray, uncover the matzah and begin reciting the Haggadah.*

This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt.

Let all who are hungry, come and eat.

Let all who are needy, come and celebrate Passover.

This year we are here – next year, may we be in the Land of Israel.

This year we are slaves – next year, may we be free.

### This is the bread of affliction

**This is a strange invitation:** 'This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all that are hungry come and eat.' What hospitality is it to offer the hungry the taste of suffering? In fact, though, this is a profound insight into the nature of slavery and freedom. As noted above, *matzah* represents two things: it is the food of slaves, and also the bread eaten by the Israelites as they left Egypt in liberty. What transforms the bread of affliction into the bread of freedom is *the willingness to share it with others*.

Primo Levi was a survivor of Auschwitz. In his book, *If This Is a Man*, he describes his experiences there. According to Levi, the worst time of all was when the Nazis left in January 1945, fearing the Russian advance. All prisoners who could walk were taken on the brutal 'death marches'. The only people left in the camp were those who were too ill to move. For ten days they were left alone with only scraps of food and fuel. Levi describes how he worked to light a fire and bring some warmth to his fellow prisoners, many of them dying. He then writes:

'When the broken window was repaired and the stove began to spread its heat, something seemed to relax in everyone, and at that moment Towarowski (a Franco-Pole of twenty-three, typhus) proposed to the others that each of them offer a slice of bread to us three who had been working. And so it was agreed.

'Only a day before a similar event would have been inconceivable. The law of the Lager said: "eat your own bread, and if you can, that of your neighbour," and left no room for gratitude. It really meant that the law of the Lager was dead.

'It was the first human gesture that occurred among us. I believe that that moment can be dated as the beginning of the change by which we who had not died slowly changed from *Haftlinge* [prisoners] to men again.'

Sharing food is the first act through which slaves become free human beings. One who fears tomorrow does not offer his bread to others. But one who is willing to divide his food with a stranger has already shown himself capable of fellowship and faith, the two things from which hope is born. That is why we begin the seder by inviting others to join us. Bread shared is no longer the bread of affliction. Reaching out to others, giving help to the needy and companionship to those who are alone, we bring freedom into the world, and with freedom, God.

**This year we are here – next year, may we be in the Land of Israel.**

**At the very moment that we gather to remember the past,** we speak about the future. The seder brings together the three dimensions of time. Before the meal we tell the story of redemption in the past. During the meal we experience it in the present. After the meal, as we conclude Hallel and say 'Next year in Jerusalem', we look forward to redemption in the future.

יַחַץ

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מַגִּיד

*Raise the seder tray, uncover the matzah and begin reciting the Haggadah.*

הָא לַחֲמַת עֲנִיָּא דִּי אָכְלוּ אַבְהֵתָנָא  
בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם. כָּל דְּכַפִּין יִיתִי  
וְיִכַּל. כָּל דְּצָרִיךְ יִיתִי וְיִפְסַח. הַשְׁתָּא הָכָא  
לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּאַרְעָא דִּישְׂרָאֵל. הַשְׁתָּא עַבְדִּי  
לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין:

### Yachatz: Break the middle matzah

**Of the three matzot,** the upper and lower represent the *lechem mishneh*, the double portion of manna that fell before Sabbaths and festivals in the wilderness so that the Israelites would not have to gather food on the holy day itself. The third – the middle *matzah* – represents the special duty to eat unleavened bread on Pesach.

There are two reasons why we break it in half. The first is that it is described as 'the bread of affliction' or, as the sages interpreted it, 'the bread of a poor person'. One who is so poor that he does not know where his next meal is coming from does not eat all his food at once. He divides it into two, saving half for later.

The second is that, with the destruction of the Temple, *matzah* takes the place of the paschal offering. Just as the paschal offering was eaten at the end of the meal – so as to be experienced as holy food, not just food eaten to satisfy hunger – so we reserve half of the *matzah* (the *afikoman*) to be eaten at the end of the meal. The custom that children hide the *afikoman* is part of the spirit of the seder service, which contains many elements designed to attract and sustain the interest of a child.

However, there is also a third significance to breaking the middle *matzah*. *Matzah* represents two apparently contradictory ideas. At the beginning of the seder we describe it as 'the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt'. Ibn Ezra explains that slaves were given unleavened bread because, being hard, it takes longer to digest. It removes hunger for longer than ordinary bread. Later in the seder, we describe it as the bread which the Israelites ate as they were leaving Egypt, in too much of a hurry to allow the dough to rise. We divide the *matzah*, therefore, to show that it has two symbolisms, not one. Now, at the beginning of the seder, it is the bread of affliction. Later, once we have relived the exodus, it becomes the bread of freedom. The difference between freedom and slavery does not lie in the quality of bread we eat, but the state of mind in which we eat it.

### Maggid: Narration

**This is the beginning of the seder narrative,** known as *Maggid*, from the word *Haggadah*, 'to relate, recount, declare, proclaim'. The story of the Exodus is known as *Haggadah* because of the verse, 'And you shall tell (*vehigadta*) your son on that day saying, "I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt"' (Exodus 13:8). However, the word *haggadah* derives from a verb that also means 'to bind, join, connect'. The story of the Exodus is more than a recounting (*sippur*) of things that happened long ago. It binds the present to the past and future. It connects one generation to the next. It joins us to our children. Jewish continuity means that each successive generation commits itself to continuing the story. Our past lives on in us.