

הָא לַחְמָא אַנְיָא

HA LACHMA ANYA



IN A NUTSHELL

It is a mitzvah to tell the story of the Exodus on Seder night. We call this mitzvah *maggid*, and it is the key to Seder night. This is why the Haggadah begins with *Ha Lachma Anya*, which is an invitation to others to join our Seder and tell the story with us. This paragraph is written in Aramaic (instead of Hebrew) because this was the spoken language at the time the Haggadah was written. To make it a genuine invitation, it is important that it is stated in a language that is understood.



DEEP DIVE

If we examine the wording of the invitation, we notice something strange: "This is the bread of

oppression our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come in and eat."

What sort of hosts offer the hungry a taste of suffering? This may seem odd, but in fact it is a profound insight into the nature of slavery and freedom. Matzah represents **two** things: it is both the food of slaves, and also the bread eaten by the Israelites as they left Egypt in liberty. What transforms the bread of oppression into the bread of freedom is *the willingness to share it with others*.

Sharing food is the first act through which slaves become free human beings. Someone who fears tomorrow does not offer their bread to others. But those who are willing to divide their food with others have already shown themselves capable of fellowship and faith, the two things from which hope is born. That is why we begin the

Seder by inviting guests to join us. Bread shared is no longer the bread of oppression. By reaching out to others, by giving help to the needy and companionship to those who are alone, we bring freedom into the world, and with freedom, God.

Commentary on 'This is the Bread of Affliction',
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

What can you share in your life to show you are truly free?



FURTHER THOUGHTS

Ha Lachma Anya is the beginning of the Seder narrative, known as *Maggid*. The word *maggid* has the same root letters as the word *haggadah*, meaning relate, recount, declare, or proclaim. The story of the Exodus is known as the Haggadah because of the verse "You shall





tell (*vehigadeta*) your child on that day, '[I do this] because of what the Lord did for me when I went out of Egypt'" (Shemot 13:8). However, the word *haggadah* derives from a verb that also means bind, join, connect. The story of the Exodus is more than a recounting (*sipur*) 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.

Commentary on 'This is the Bread of Affliction',
The Jonathan Sacks Haggada

Do you feel more connected to your parents and grandparents when you sit at the Seder table? If so, why?



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT AND ASK AT YOUR SEDER

1. Why is it important to share your Seder table with others from outside of your close family?
2. Does matzah represent freedom or slavery to you?
3. How does the Seder night connect you to other Jews?



EXPERIENCING THE SEDER

If you have guests at your Seder table who are not from your immediate family, turn to them now and make sure they feel comfortable and welcome. Are they sitting comfortably? Do they know the names of everyone around the table?



A STORY FOR THE NIGHT OF STORIES

Primo Levi survived the horrors 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 the concentration camp in January 1945, fearing the Russian advance. All prisoners who could walk were taken with them on the brutal "Death Marches." The only people left in the camp were those 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 [concentration camps] 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.



A QUIZ FOR THE NIGHT OF QUESTIONS

PEOPLE

1. Who is the first person to be mentioned in the Haggadah (in the *Maggid* section)?
2. Who is the second?
3. Who is not mentioned anywhere in the Haggadah (even though he is a key part of the story)?
4. Who was at the famous Seder night in B'nei Brak?
5. Who grouped the Ten Plagues into groups of three?
6. Can you name the three Rabbis who argued about how many plagues there really were?
7. Who gave us the minimalistic way to fulfil the mitzvah of telling the story of Pesach?
8. Whose sandwich do we eat on Seder night?
9. Who is the surprise guest at the Seder?
10. Who bought the little goat?