

READING #1

Rabbi Elazar said that Rav Oshaya said: Anything that is dipped in a liquid before it is eaten requires the ritual of washing of hands, preventing people from making food ritually impure.

– *Talmud Pesachim 115b*

Ritual-Handwashing in preparation for the Seder **ורחץ**. This moment to cleanse and refresh, so that we can begin the Seder intentionally. As you wash your hands, imagine washing away any distractions, leaving your mind clear to engage fully in tonight's ritual.

– *Kate Groob, K. Cohen*

READING #2

There are many different versions of the Four Questions, which were in fact never meant to be anything more than examples of questions that could be asked. The Talmud tells a story to emphasize this point. A student, Abaye, was at the Seder of his teacher, Rabbah. Sometime during the early part of the Seder, Rabbah had all the dishes, including the Seder plate, cleared from the table. “Why are you clearing the Seder plate from the table when we haven't even eaten the meal?” Abaye asked. According to the Talmud, Rabbah responded that Abaye's question was the equivalent of the *Mah Nishtanah*, which now did not need to be recited (Pesachim 115b). So we learn that the goal of the evening is to ask questions, particularly new and different questions.

– [Michael Strassfeld “A Night of Questions”](#)

READING #3

Four Children

1. One who sees the pain of others and works to relive suffering.
2. One who cares only about him/her/their-self.
3. One who cares only about other Jews but not other populations.
4. One who doesn't know where to begin.

– [*Religious Action Center: A Season of Justice*](#).

Four Adults

1. The Angry Adult
2. The Ashamed Adult
3. The Fearful Adult
4. The Compassionate Adult

– [*Love and Justice Haggadah*](#)

READING #4

When the Israelites brought the fruits of their first harvest to the Temple in Jerusalem, they proclaimed the formula that began with the words, “My father was a wandering Aramean.” It is recited not from the perspective of slaves, but successful farmers in the Promised Land. Why was it important to recite this formula? “When you have eaten your fill and built fine houses to live in, and your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold have increased, and everything you won has prospered, beware lest your heart grow haughty and you forget יהוה your God, who freed you from the land of Egypt, the house of slavery...and you say to yourselves. ‘My own power and the might of my own hand have won this wealth for me’” (Deuteronomy 8:12-14; 17). As we celebrate our freedom and our bounty, we are reminded never to forget the many sources of our privilege, and the covenantal obligations that these privileges impose upon us.

– [*Toba Spitzer “A Night of Questions”*](#)

READING #5

The Modern Plagues

The Passover Haggadah recounts ten plagues that afflicted Egyptian society. In our tradition, Passover is the season in which we imagine our own lives within the story within our lives. Accordingly, we turn our thoughts to the many plagues affecting our society today. Our journey from slavery to redemption is ongoing, demanding the work of our hearts and hands. Here are ten “modern plagues”:

1. **Homelessness:** In any given year, about 3.5 million people are likely to experience homelessness, about a third of them children, according to the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty... We are reminded time and again in the Torah that the Exodus is a story about a wandering people, once suffering from enslavement, who, through God’s help, eventually find their way to their homeland. As we inherit this story, we affirm our commitment to pursue an end to homelessness.
2. **Hunger:** About 49 million Americans experience food insecurity, 16 million of them children. While living in a world blessed with more than enough food to ensure all of God’s children are well nourished, on Passover we declare, “let all who are hungry come and eat!” These are not empty words, but rather a heartfelt and age-old prayer to end the man-made plague of hunger.
3. **Inequality:** Access to affordable housing, quality health care, nutritious food and quality education is far from equal. The disparity between the privileged and the poor is growing, with opportunities for upward mobility still gravely limited...Unequal access to basic human needs, based on one’s real or perceived identity, like race, gender or disability, is a plague, antithetical to the inclusive spirit of the Jewish tradition.
4. **Greed:** In the Talmud, the sage Ben Zoma asks, “Who is wealthy? One who is happy with one’s lot. “These teachings evidence what we know in our conscience- a human propensity to desire more than we need, to want what is not ours and, at time, to allow this inclination to conquer us, leading to sin. Passover urges us against the plague of greed, toward an attitude of gratitude.
5. **Discrimination and hatred:** The Jewish people, as quintessential victims of hatred and discrimination, are especially sensitized to this plague in our own day and age. Today, half a century after the civil rights movement in the United States, we still are far from the actualizations of the dream Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. articulated...a vision rooted in the message of our prophets. On

Passover, we affirm our own identity as the once oppressed, and we refuse to stand idly by amid the plagues of discrimination and hatred.

6. **Silence amid violence:** Every year 4.8 million cases of domestic violence against American women are reported. Each year, more than 108,000 Americans are shot intentionally or unintentionally in murders, assaults, suicides, and suicide attempts, accidental shootings and by police intervention. One in five children has seen someone get shot. We do not adequately address violence in our society, including rape, sex trafficking, child abuse, domestic violence and elder abuse, even though it happens every day within our own communities.
7. **Environmental destruction:** Humans actively destroy the environment through various forms of pollution, wastefulness, deforestation and widespread apathy toward improving our behaviors and detrimental civic policies...Our precious world is in need of repair now more than ever.
8. **Stigma of mental illness:** One in five Americans experiences mental illness in a given year. Even more alarming, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, nearly two-thirds of people with a diagnosable mental illness do not seek treatment, and minority communities are the least likely to search for a or have access to mental health resources. Social stigma toward those with mental illness is a widespread plague. Historically, people with mental health issues have suffered from severe discrimination and brutality, yet our society is increasingly equipped with the knowledge and resources to alleviate the plague of social stigma and offer critical support.
9. **Ignoring refugees:** We are living through the worst refugee crisis since the Holocaust. On this day, we remember that “we were foreigners in the land of Egypt.” And God liberated us for a reason: to love the stranger as ourselves. With the memory of generations of generations of our ancestors living as refugees, we commit ourselves to safely and lovingly opening our hearts and our doors to all peace-loving refugees.
10. **Powerlessness:** When faced with these modern plagues, how often do we doubt or question our own ability to make a difference? How often do we feel paralyzed because we do not know what to do to bring about change? How often do we find the world as we know it should be, overflowing justice and peace?

– [*JewishBoston with Rabbi Matthew Soffer*](#)