

השיבנו יי אליך ונשובה, חדש ימינו כקדם.

Help us turn to You, and we shall return.

Renew our lives as in days of old.

*Seder
of
Safe Return*

For the families of American Jews
who served our country
in the cause of freedom

2003 – 5763

“And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, When you or any of your posterity are unable to share in the Passover offering because of a long journey or contact with a dead body, you shall celebrate Passover in a later month, eating the unleavened bread and the bitter herb.” (Numbers 9:9-11)

We are gathered for this most unusual ceremony, an enactment of the biblical *Pesach Sheni*, in the presence of our military servicemen and women who were not with us in April because of distance and the eruption of war and death. We are gathered to offer our heartfelt thanks for their safe return, to grieve together for those of their comrades who will not be coming home, and to pray for the safe return to their families of all who are still overseas.

Our gathering takes the form of a Seder because what these people have undergone shares so much with the story of Passover. It is an account of freedom gained through sacrifice, of plagues rained down on an entire nation because of the stubbornness and cruelty of their ruler, and finally a story of people who went through fire and water and had to cross a desert to reach their goal.

We thank God for their safe return, and we feel intensely the holiness of these moments of reunion, expressed in the *Kiddush* over the first cup of wine and the prayer *She-he-che-ya-nu*.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן:

Ba-ruch a-ta A-do-nai E-lo-hei-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, bo-rei pe-ri ha-ga-fen.

Praised are You Adonai our God, who rules the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. שְׁהַחַיֵּנוּ. וְקִיַּמְנוּ.
וְהַגִּיעֵנוּ לְזֶמַן הַזֶּה:

Ba-ruch a-ta A-do-nai E-lo-hei-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, she-he-che-ya-nu ve-ki-ye-ma-nu ve-hi-gi-a-nu la-ze-man ha-zeh.

Praised are You Adonai our God, who rules the universe, who has kept us alive, upheld us, and brought us to this time.

Our Jewish tradition recognizes that war is sometimes necessary but is never good. It is always the result of the failure of some leaders to live and act as human beings were meant to. Our Jewish tradition understands that there is something defiling about war, about being given permission to kill, whether with a bomb or with a rifle, even when that killing is necessary and unavoidable. To mark the separation between the world of war and the world of normal living, to cleanse ourselves of the contamination of death, even as we do on returning from the cemetery, we ritually wash our hands, and afterward invite our returning servicemen and women to offer the *Gomel* blessing, thanking God for having brought them home safely.

Birkat Ha-Gomel

ברכת הגומל

This blessing is recited by the service person who has returned home safely from his/her deployment or survived a life-threatening situation.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
הַגּוֹמֵל לְחַיִּיבִים טוֹבוֹת, שְׂגַמְלָנִי כָּל-טוֹב.

Ba-ruch a-ta A-do-nai E-lo-hei-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, ha-go-mel le-cha-ya-vim to-vot, she-ge-ma-la-ni kol tov.

Praised are You Adonai our God, who rules the universe, showing goodness to us beyond our merits, for bestowing favor upon me.

The participants in the seder respond:

מִי שְׂגַמְלָךְ (שְׂגַמְלָךְ / שְׂגַמְלָכֶם) כָּל-טוֹב,
הוּא יְגַמְלָךְ (יְגַמְלָךְ / יְגַמְלָכֶם) כָּל-טוֹב סְלָה.

Mi she-ge-mal-cha (she-ge-ma-leich, she-ge-mal-chem) kol tov, hu yig-mal-cha (yig-ma-leich, yig-mal-chem) kol tov se-lah.

May God who has been gracious to you continue to favor you with all that is good.

Karpas

כרפס

Spring is the season of life, the time of year when the earth is freed from the cold, dead hand of winter and comes to life again. Tonight (today) even as we did at the Pesach Seder in April, we taste the green vegetable of spring, symbolizing our hope for the triumph of life over death, of hope over hatred.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הָאֲדָמָה:

Ba-ruch a-ta A-do-nai E-lo-hei-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, bo-rei pe-ri ha-a-da-mah.

Praised are You Adonai our God, who rules the universe, creator of the fruit of the earth.

Yachatz

יחץ

This is the *matzah*, sometimes called *lachma anya*, the bread of affliction, but more appropriately thought of as the bread of freedom, the bread eaten by people who had been released from bondage. On Passover eve, we proclaimed “may all who are hungry come and share this with us.” And you men and women of the military, by your willingness to serve, proclaimed “may all who hunger for freedom, for the right to live and speak without fear, come and share the freedom that we enjoy in America.”

We break the *matzah* in half to say that ours is still a broken world, an incompletely redeemed world, even as we give thanks to you for your efforts to expand the reach of freedom in the world.

We invite our returned military personnel to share the memories of their service if they choose...

We turn now to our second cup of wine. Before we drink it, we pour off several drops in recognition of the suffering and death among the people of Iraq, Afghanistan and others. They were not our enemy; their governments were. And we grieve for them.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם. בורא פרי הגפן:

Ba-ruch a-ta A-do-nai E-lo-hei-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, bo-rei pe-ri ha-ga-fen.

Praised are You Adonai our God, who rules the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

Motzi U'Maror

מוציא ומרור

We eat our *matzah* now, combined with a bitter herb, symbolizing the loss of life, the injuries, the separation from family, the fears and nightmares that are a necessary part of our struggle to bring freedom wherever it has been denied.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם. המוציא להם מן הארץ:

*Ba-ruch a-ta A-do-nai E-lo-hei-nu me-lech ha-o-lam,
ha-mo-tzi le-chem min ha-a-retz.*

*Praised are You Adonai our God, who rules the universe,
who brings forth bread from the earth.*

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם. אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצננו על אכילת מרור:

*Ba-ruch a-ta A-do-nai E-lo-hei-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, a-sher ki-de-sha-nu
be-mitz-vo-tav ve-tzi-va-nu al a-chi-lat ma-ror.*

*Praised are You Adonai our God, who rules the universe, who sanctifies us with His
mitzvot and commands us to eat the bitter herbs.*

Shulchan Orech

שלחן עורך

If you like, this is the appropriate point for a meal or refreshments followed by Birkat Ha-Mazon.

Elijah

A successful military effort can eliminate a threat and remove a source of evil. But even the best of wars can only remove something bad; it cannot bring about the kind of world we yearn for. Even as we set a place for the prophet Elijah at our Seder table to express our hope that this will be the year of the messianic deliverance, so do we now open a door for Elijah, as we seek to invite into our world the one who will teach the generations, the races, the nations to live in peace, fulfilling the vision of the prophet that a day will come when young men and women will no longer have to don battle gear and risk their lives in combat, for

“nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

Hallel

הלל

Before beginning the Hallel we raise the cup of wine for the third time.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן:

Ba-ruch a-ta A-do-nai E-lo-hei-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, bo-rei pe-ri ha-ga-fen.

Praised are You Adonai our God, who rules the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

הָלְלוּ אֶת־יְיָ כָּל־גּוֹיִם שְׂבַחְוּהוּ כָּל־הָאֲמִים: כִּי גָבַר
עָלֵינוּ חֶסֶדוֹ וְאֶמֶת־יְיָ לְעוֹלָם הַלְלוּיָהּ:

Ha-le-lu et A-do-nai, kol go-yim, sha-be-chu-hu kol ha-u-mim

Ki ga-var a-lei-nu chas-do ve-e-met A-do-nai le-o-lam, Ha-le-lu-ya!

Sing Hallel to Adonai, all peoples! Praise God, all nations!

For God's love empowers us, God's truth immortalizes us, Hallelu-Ya!

We thank You this day for all the good You have provided for us. You have again freed the captives and liberated the enslaved. You returned our loved ones safely to our midst and enabled freedom to shine once more in the land which was the cradle of civilization. As instruments of Your peace, we praise You and glorify Your name each day for all the good You do for us morning, noon and night.

One last time we lift our wine cups of rejoicing and praise Your Name.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם. בּוֹרֵא פְּרֵי הַגָּפֶן:

Ba-ruch a-ta A-do-nai E-lo-hei-nu me-lech ha-o-lam, bo-rei pe-ri ha-ga-fen.

Praised are You Adonai our God, who rules the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.

Nirtzah

נרצה

Our Seder of Safe Return has concluded. May families everywhere be able to celebrate the return of their loved ones, and may God bless His world with peace.

עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן:

O-seh sha-lom bim-ro-mav hu ya-a-seh sha-lom

a-lei-nu ve-al kol Yis-ra-el, ve-im-ru a-men.

May the One who makes peace in the high places make peace over us,
over all Israel, and over all the world. Amen.