

# Red Seder

## הַגְּדָה שֶׁל פֶּסַח

אף איורע-טייטש.



בדקת חמץ

*Bdikas khomets* (Search for leaven). Illustration from the first edition of *Hagadah far gloybers un apikorsim* (Passover story for believers and atheists). Kharkov, 1923.

## *The Seder*

1. **Kadesh** – Sanctification of the gathering

*First cup of wine: L'chayim to Friendship!*

2. **Ur'chatz** – Washing hands before eating green vegetables
3. **Karpas**- Eating a piece of vegetable dipped in salt water
4. **Yachatz** – Breaking the middle matzah
5. **Maggid** - Telling of the story

*Second cup of wine: L'chayim to Solidarity!*

6. **Rach'tzah** - Washing hands before eating matzah
7. **Motzi** – Blessing over matzah as food
8. **Matzah** – Blessing over matzah as a special mitzvah
9. **Maror** – Eating the bitter herbs
10. **Korech** – Eating a sandwich of haroset & bitter herbs
11. **Shulchan orech** – Eating the festive meal
12. **Tzafun** - Eating the afikomen
13. **Barech** - Grace after meals

*Third cup of wine: L'chayim to Discipline!*

*Fourth cup of wine: L'chayim to Hope!*

14. **Hallel** - Song and Praise!
15. **Nirtzah** - Conclusion

## *The Seder Plate:*

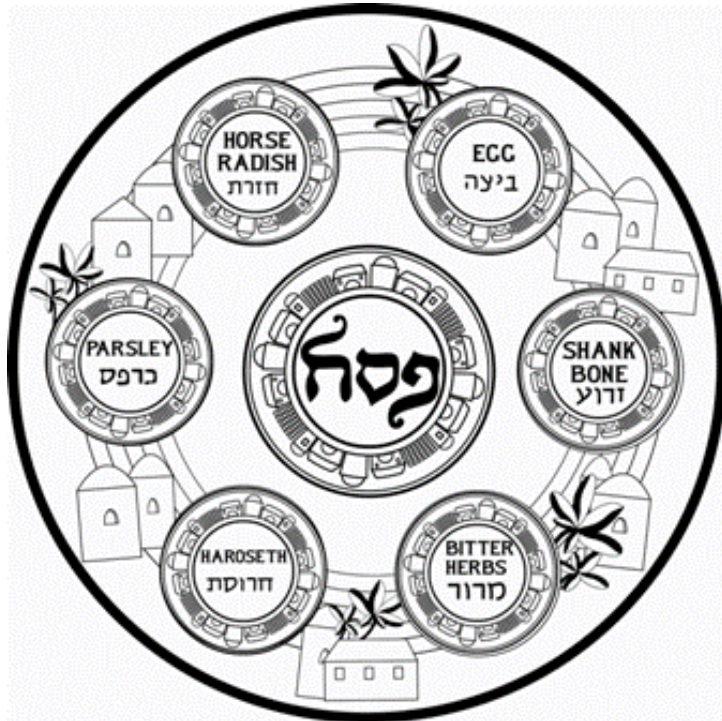
**Maror** - Bitter Herbs, Horseradish (hazeret): A symbol of the bitterness of wage slavery.

**Karpas** - Green Vegetable, Parsely: A symbol of spring, the possibility of new growth, including the welcoming of new comrades and friends, and the strengthening of friendships already consummated.

**Charoset** - Mixture of Fruit and Nuts: A symbol of the means of production, which we seek to collectively own.

**Beitzah** - Egg: A symbol of the cycle of life—of past, present and future, of the cycles of time and cycles of struggle.

**Zeroa** - Lamb Bone, (beet): The lamb bone symbolizes three ideas: 1) It is a tool for marking, a way of understanding our comradeship as the ancient Hebrews understood theirs. Through this we may understand who our comrades are, and who aren't. 2) It both represents the danger of marking people as with us or against us, but also the hope of finding a way to survive the coming apocalypse with others in solidarity. Finally, 3) it is a symbol of sacrifice and death, of what remains after our brief breath on this rock is extinguished.



## Candle Lighting:

*Baruch atah adonai eloheynu melech  
ha'olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav  
v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel yom tov.*

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר  
קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל  
(שַׁבָּת ו) יוֹם טוֹב. (On Friday)

*Blessed is October, dictator of the proles, who has blessed us with communist measures, and ordered us to ignite a revolutionary fire.*

## 1. Kadesh - Sanctification of the day, marked by blessing the first cup of wine.

There are four mandatory cups of wine on Passover, spaced out over the course of the Seder. One interpretation of them is that they signify God's four promises of liberation to the Israelites. Since God died in the 19th century, and since there were probably no Israelites in Egypt, nor an exodus, we will interpret the four cups as representing the four virtues required for revolution in the present moment.

The first cup signifies the virtue of Friendship.

הַגָּפֶן פָּרַי בּוֹרֵא הָעוֹלָם מְלֶךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יי אַתָּה בְּרוּךְ  
*Baruch atah adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam borei p'ri hagafen*

*Blessed is October, dictator of the proles, who produces, distributes, and consumes the fruit of the vine.*

The celebration of Passover is traditionally associated with the spirit of freedom and independence. The seder ceremony features a special menu, the reading of the Haggadah (the retelling of the story of Exodus), songs, and even games. Passover is also the only Jewish celebration whose ritual requires dialogue between children and parents. All this creates an ideal basis for the introduction of new concepts in a popular, well-known format. By the end of the nineteenth century Jewish radicals in Poland, the United States, and Canada were employing the Passover seder for the promotion of political views as well as a way to criticize their opponents. Various political movements organized political seders in interwar Poland.

Soviet Jewish activists, too, did not miss the opportunity to use Passover as a propaganda tool. In 1921 the Central Bureau of the Bolshevik Party's Evseksii sent instructions to all local branches to organize "Red Passovers." Popular brochures that came to be known as "**Red Haggadahs**" were published, specifying how to conduct the alternative celebrations. Many were written by local activists following a series of centrally directed patterns. One of these was the *Komsomolische Haggadah* (Komsomol Haggadah), published in Moscow in 1923 by Moyshe Altshuler. Traditionally the start of Passover (an eight-day holiday during which the consumption of bread or leavened products and yeast is forbidden) is marked with the *Bdikas khometz* —a search for all remaining traces of leavened food, followed by its burning. In Altshuler's *Komsomolische Haggadah*, this ceremony was transformed as follows:

Ten years ago [in 1917] the working class of Russia with the help of peasants searched for *khometz* (leaven) in our land. They cleaned away all the traces of landowners and bourgeois bosses in the country and took power in their own hands. They took the land from the landowners, plants and factories from the capitalists; they fought the enemies of the workers on all fronts. In the fire of the great socialist revolution, the workers and peasants burned Kochak, Yudenich, Vrangel, Denikin, Pilsudskii, Petlyura, Chernov, Khots, Dan, Martov, and Abramovich. They recited the blessing: "All landowners, bourgeois and their helpers—Mensheviks, Esers, Kadets, Bundists, Zionists, Esesovtzes, Esovtses, Poaley Zionists, Tsaarey-t sienikes, and all other counterrevolutionaries should be burned in the flame of revolution. Those who are burned should not ever survive, and the rest should be given to us and we shall transfer them to the hands of the GPU.

The Komsomol Haggadah combines all enemies of the Soviet regime as *khometz*, and recommends burning them. Equating antagonists who were notoriously anti-Jewish, such as the commander of the White Army Alexei Denikin, to Jewish Soviet opponents, such as Bundists or Zionists, was a popular method of Soviet propaganda. It was not important why or how but simply that they were portrayed as being equally obnoxious.

## 2. Ur'chatz - Washing of hands before the vegetable.

We pass a bowl of water around the table; each person pours water over their neighbor's hands, helping them wash.

Every seder ritual was transformed in the Soviet Haggadah. The traditional handwashing and blessing before the meal became a political statement:

*Wash off all the bourgeois mud, wash off the mold of generations, and do not say a blessing, say a curse. Devastation must come upon all the old rabbinical laws and customs, yeshivas and khaydorim, that becloud and enslave the people.*

### 3. Karpas - We dip a green vegetable in salt water. We take a bite. We discard the rest.

The salt water on our table traditionally represents the tears of the Israelite slaves. The green vegetable usually represents the possibility of new growth. This year, let the salt water remind us of our own wage-slavery in capitalism, and let the green vegetable remind us of our own revolutionary potential for overthrowing it.

הַאֲדָמָה פְּרִי בּוֹרָא הָעוֹלָם מְלֶךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יי אַתָּה בְּרוּךְ  
*Barukh atah adonai, eloheinu melek ha'olam borei p'ri ha'adamah*

*Blessed is October, dictator of the proles, who produces, distributes, and consumes the earth's harvest.*

### 4. Yachatz - Breaking the middle matzah.

We break the matzah into two pieces, and hide one half, called the *Afikomen*. The Afikomen represents the rupture that we seek with the current state of things. This rupture, this break, comes from within the traditions we have, and yet it is hidden from them as well.

*“From struggles over immediate demands to revolution, there can only be a rupture, a qualitative leap. But this rupture isn't a miracle . . . This rupture is produced positively by the unfolding of the cycle of struggles which precedes it, and we can say that it still forms a part of it. [Theorie communiste]*

*A rupture is, by definition, a break — a break that is qualitative in*

*nature — but a break with or within what? Where do we locate the rupture that is synonymous with the advent of a revolutionary period?*  
[Endnotes]

We exist in this rupture.

Soviet ideologists saw a clear need to create viable alternatives to established rituals and holidays for Jews. They considered that, during the transition period, these rituals had to be based on Jewish traditions and then gradually lead to the establishment of completely new Soviet holidays. In the 1920s these holidays were used both as propaganda against the old religion and promotion of the new political system and ideology. The most notable attempt was the organization of alternative Passover and Yom Kippur celebrations.

An editorial, *“Far vos zaynen komunistn kegn religye”* (Why Communists are against religion), and an article, *“Fun vanen shtampt roshashane un yomkipur”* (The origins of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur), both by I. Yakhin, argue that Judaism specifically uses the fall holidays to exploit poor. Caricatures and skits, which parodied Jewish holy books and traditions, supplemented these theoretical explanations. The point was driven home by labeling books, songs, and even prayers as “capitalist.” For example, the thirteen principles of the Jewish faith (ani maamin) were called *“Der kapitalistisher ani maamin”* (The capitalist principles of belief) in an article written by P. Lafarg in *Der apikoyres*.

“Der kapitalistisher ani maamin” predictably replaces God with money:

1. *I believe that capitalism rules over body and over soul.*
2. *I believe in spirit (the capitalist child) and in credit (that originates from it).*
3. *I believe in gold and silver, from which an altar is made in order to breathe a soul into paper money.*
4. *I believe in a 5 percent rent increase and also in a 4.3 percent inflation of paper money.*
- ...
9. *I believe in extending the working day.*
10. *I believe in a constant decrease in salary.*
11. *I believe in fooling the public and falsifying products.*
- ....
13. *I believe in the eternal principles of our holy faith, the official political economy.*



“Der kapitalistisher ani maamin” expresses the essence of Soviet arguments against capitalism in a form familiar to traditional Jews. Ironically this form derives from the text that summarizes the essence of Judaism. Yet the new ani maamin is not offered as a surrogate replacement for the religious text. Rather, it works as an aid to the transition from religion to atheism, capitalism to socialism and “backwardness” to “modernism.” Once these goals are achieved, texts like this one will not be needed.

A similar principle is used in rewritten popular short stories, jokes, articles, theatrical performances, and songs, which are parodied in order to convey a new Soviet message. An example is a remake of the Yiddish song “Zol ikh zayn a rov” (Let me be a rabbi). Here is the original song:

*Zol ikh zayn a rov,  
Ken ikh nit keyn toyre!  
Zol ikh zayn a soykher,  
Hob ikh nit keyn skhoyre.  
Vil ikh zayn a shoykhet,  
Hob ikh nit keyn khalef,  
Vil ikh zayn a melamed,  
Ken ikh nit keyn alef.*

*Let me be a rabbi,  
I don't know the Torah!  
Let me be a merchant,  
I don't possess goods.  
I want to be a shoykhet,  
I don't have a ritual knife.  
I want to be a melamed,  
I don't know the alphabet.*

The published Soviet parody reverses the meaning of the old song:

*Zol ikh zayn a rov,  
Keyner darf mayn toyre!  
Mitsves un maysim toyvim  
Iz gor a knape skhoyre!  
Keyner efnt nit mayn tir,  
Nit keyn khupe, nit keyn get,  
S'bageyt zikh shoyn on mir!*

*Let me be a rabbi,  
Nobody needs my Torah!  
The commandments and  
good deeds  
Are now useless goods!  
Nobody opens my door,  
No wedding, no divorce,  
People get along without me!*

## 5. Maggid - Telling of the Exodus from Egypt.

Raise the Matzah and say:

עֲנִיָּא לְחֶמְא אַתָּא - *Ha Lachma Anya*  
*Here is the bread of our Affliction*

The Komsomol Haggadah at times altered the order of activities. Its style also differed from the traditional Haggadah, as the Soviet publication was geared for a different audience, a meeting of friends rather than family. The following provocative questions are modeled after the four questions in the original Haggadah

*Why is Passover not a true festival of the Jewish people if all Jews celebrate their release from slavery? Is it not harmful for young workers to refuse to celebrate it? You always teach us to hate slavery and show how necessary it is to struggle for freedom. You have festivals like May Day and the [anniversary of the] October Revolution, and all the workers go to demonstrations, so why can't we celebrate the liberation from Egypt and regard this as the national day of Jewish freedom?*

Indeed, some Soviet Haggadah texts provide more moderate explanations. They simply replace "God" with the "October Revolution":

*We were slaves of capital until October came and led us out of the land of exploitation with a strong hand, and if it were not for October, we and our children would still be slaves.*

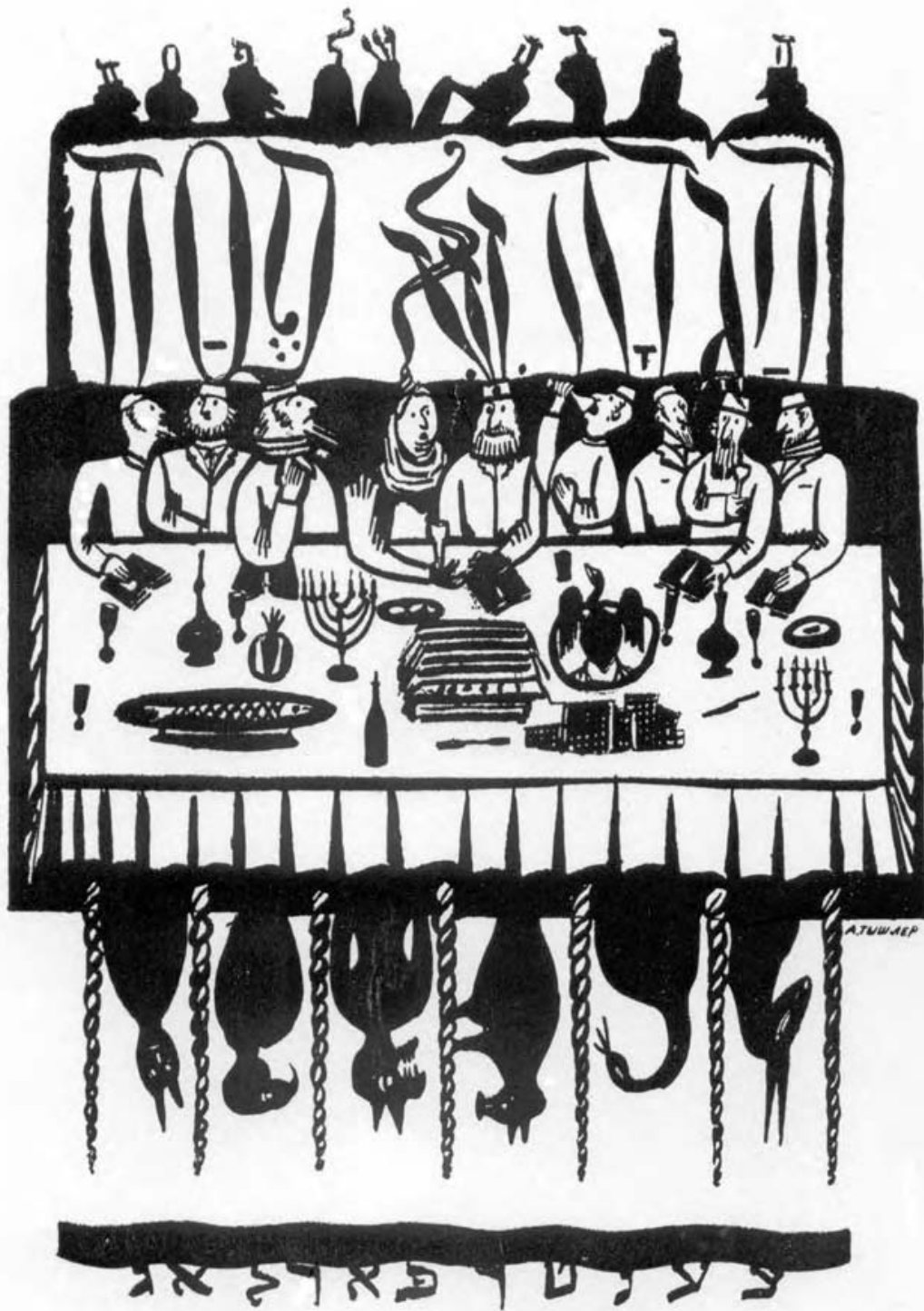
At this point, usually the youngest of the table asks the following four questions.

**The 4 questions:**

1. Why do we eat Matzah on this night?
2. Why do we eat Bitter Herbs on this night?
3. Why do we dip our vegetables twice?
4. Why do we recline on this night?

Instead, let us ask these four:

1. Why do we go to work?
2. Why do we belong to states?
3. Why do we believe in genders?
4. Why do we have religions?



*Haggadah shel pesakh* (Story of Passover), cover from the second edition. Drawing by Alexander Tyshler. Moscow, 1927.

## **The 4 Children:** The Wise, Wicked, Simple and Silent

The 4 children normally represent the four personality types of life, to whom we have to explain the story of Passover, or four kinds of ways of telling a story. But tonight they represent the four classical subjects that emerge in the revolutionary process.

*the Wise* – the intelligentsia

*the Wicked* – the reactionaries

*the Simple* – the peasants

*the Silent* – the middle classes

## **What's the Story of Passover?**

Jacob, grandson of Abraham, the first yid, had 12 sons with two women. One of those sons, Joseph, was cast out of Canaan, where they all used to chill, and had to flee to Egypt, where he became the second-most powerful dude after pharaoh (because he could read dreams like Freud). Well, 470 years later, there were lots of his descendants hanging around, the Hebrews. A new ruler arose who never heard of Joseph, and didn't like all these immigrant taking jobs, so he ordered all the midwives to kill the new Hebrew babies and enslave the rest.

One Israelite mother put her son in a basket and sent him down the river. The daughter of the pharaoh took him out and named him Moses ('to draw out'). He grew up with lots of royal privilege, but he knew he was a Jew. One day, he saw some Egyptians beating some Hebrew slaves, and he got mad and killed one in a rage. He fled to the mountains, became a nomad, met his wife, had some babies, and then saw a burning bush that wouldn't die.

God spoke to him through this bush (he was hallucinating), and said: You will lead the nation of Israelites to freedom in their promised land. Moses says ok, but what's your name, there's lots of Gods around here. God says: You know me. I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. My name is *I-am-what-I-am*. Moses says: Oh, ok, I'll go tell them 'I am-what-I-am' sent me.

Aaron, Moses' brother, helped him, because Moses couldn't talk so good. They formed a union and demanded that Pharaoh let them take the Jews home; Pharaoh said no, I like slaves. So Moses and Aaron did some magic tricks: turning rivers to blood, darkness, frogs, lice (petitions, work stoppages, sabotage, pickets). Pharaoh didn't care at first. But then the tricks got very good (general strikes, riots). Pharaoh finally agreed once the last plague struck, the killing of the first-born (armed struggle). Jews protected themselves from this last plague by marking their doors with lamb's blood, so the angel of death would just 'pass over' and skip them when going around slaughtering babies.

The Jews ran away pretty fast once they got the green light, so fast that they forgot to finish cooking their bread. They left with it on their backs as they ran, and it became matzah. They got to the red sea, it parted for them, and they were safe (not so lucky for the Egyptians). The Israelites wandered for 40 years through the desert, no google maps yet. God talked to Moses again on a mountain, gave him some laws, and then they all went back to canaan to kill lots of people and be unhappy together.

### **What Really happened?**

*ON November 7th 1917—four years ago!—the impossible happened. The organised workers of Russia, acting through the All-Russian Congress of Workers' Councils (Soviets), and led and inspired by the Communist Party (the "Bolsheviks"), declared themselves the ruling authority of Russia, making good this declaration by deeds with whose echoes the world has been ringing from that day to this.*

*Till that day all the learned ones of the earth had convinced themselves and most of those whom their teaching could reach that such a thing was impossible. The workers, they said, were too ignorant, and too undeveloped to do any such thing as rule.*

*The workers, soldiers, and peasants of Russia have refuted their theories, and confounded their wisdom. That the workers once they bring themselves to the point of making the attempt, can make themselves rulers of the State, and can retain power and control in spite of all that can be done against them—in spite of war, invasion, insurrection, assassination, economic exhaustion, sabotage, calumny, and intrigue—that the workers can hold their own if they have but the necessary will, the Russian Workers' Revolution has proved past all possibility of question.*

*On this, the fourth anniversary of their triumph, the Workers of Russia stand faced with their last and greatest foe. By the end of 1919, they had beaten off the attacks of the Allies and of the Germans. By the end of 1920 they had overthrown and destroyed the armies of the counter-revolutionary adventurers who one after the other sought to bring them again beneath the yoke of Capitalist Imperialism. Alexeyeff, Korniloff, Kolchak, Denikin, Von der Goltz, Petliura, Dutoff, Yudenitch, and Wrangel—one after the other they broke and scattered, smashed against the impregnable solidarity of the armies of the Workers' Soviet Republic. They have broken through the "barbed-wire fences" of Clemenceau. They have pierced the blockade set up by the Curzon' and the Churchill's. They have out-worn the lies and the pretences of the Miliukoffs, the Martoffs, the Kerenskies, and the rest of the allies of plunder-imperialism. All this they have done.*

*In doing this they have spared neither strength nor effort, life, nor limb, nor health, nor rest. All that men can give—courage, self-sacrifice, devotion, heroism, unremitting toil, heartbreaking privation—all these the heroes of the Russian Workers' Revolution have given, and given without stint, to save for mankind the splendour of hope embodied in the fact of a Workers' Republic triumphant over the assaults of that hideous Capitalist Imperialism which still holds the rest of the world in its grip.*

*Wearied and spent with toils incredible and victories unmatched, they, on the fourth anniversary of their initial triumph, face the horrors of famine.*

*No fault of theirs—a natural calamity made inevitable and intense by the villainy of their foes has brought them to this pass. They stand, these heroes of the most magnificent effort in the world's history, all but exhausted before a tragedy so vast that even their foes are appalled.*

*In the hope that even at the eleventh hour, the workers of Britain may be roused into action that will lessen their affliction, and lift from them somewhat of their burden, we tell again the story of what they have done. What they have done, not for themselves only, but for me and for you—for us and for all who toil and suffer in any part of the earth.*

*- Communist Party of Great Britain 1921*

## 10 PLAGUES

While saying the name of each plague, remove a drop of wine with your finger and place it on your plate.

1. *Dam* (blood)—All the water was changed to blood
2. *Tzefardeyah* (frogs)—An infestation of frogs sprang up in Egypt
3. *Kinim* (lice)—The Egyptians were afflicted by lice
4. *Arov* (wild animals)—An infestation of wild animals (some say flies) sprang up in Egypt
5. *Dever* (pestilence)—A plague killed off the Egyptian livestock
6. *Sh'chin* (boils)—An epidemic of boils afflicted the Egyptians
7. *Barad* (hail)—Hail rained from the sky
8. *Arbeh* (locusts)—Locusts swarmed over Egypt
9. *Choshech* (darkness)—Egypt was covered in darkness
10. *Makkat Bechorot* (killing of the first-born)—All the first-born sons of the Egyptians were slain by God

What do the plagues signify? The sins of the world, as some activists think (war, poverty, crisis, etc.), or *insurrectionary strategies* for accomplishing a revolution?

The Komsomol Haggadah, however, provides another answer. It explains the appearance of the ancient holiday of spring and how it was transformed into Passover for the benefit of priests and, later, rabbis. It introduces historical and ethnographical “facts” to show that a similar festival existed among some “Arab tribes” and that the custom emerged entirely because of illiteracy. It provides “logical” explanations for every detail of the story. Thus the fire on Mount Sinai is not a reflection of the divine appearance but rather an eruption of an old volcano; the matzo are flat because this is a traditional spring bread; the exodus is the wandering of a nomadic tribe; and so on. The final exclamation of the seder, “Next year in Jerusalem,” symbolizing the connection of the Jewish people to the Promised Land and the hope that the Messiah will come, is substituted by “This year a revolution here; next year—a world revolution!” The Komsomol Haggadah argues that Passover is not a celebration of real freedom but rather of spiritual slavery, because the holiday comes only from heaven. In contrast, genuine freedom is in the hands of the proletariat, and therefore one must celebrate May Day.

According to the Komsomol Haggadah, Passover deals with only Jewish matters whereas May Day is an international holiday meaningful to all. Therefore Altshuler also internationalized the Haggadah:

*Instead of the story of how the sea was divided, we speak about the brave heroes of the Red Army near Perekop. Instead of the groaning of the Jews in Egypt and God’s miracles, we speak about the real sufferings of the proletariat and peasants in their resistance against their exploiters and their heroic struggle.*

The final part of the Komsomol Haggadah instructs followers to cast away “the mold of generations”—the clergy and nationalist festivals—and praise the revolution and workers’ holidays. In later years additional variations of the Red Haggadah appeared as supplements to the Moscow Yiddish monthly *Der apikoyres*. They are predominantly in verse form and stray further from the traditional version than Altshuler’s rendition. The Red Haggadah of the 1930s consists of new stories of the Exodus connected with Soviet reality, which were to be accompanied by the singing of the *Internationale* and the eating of bread (strictly forbidden during Passover). Some traditional motifs, however, are retained, including the popular seder song “Dayenu” which recites all the benefits the Jews have received from God. After each verse the refrain says: “If You [God] had done only this for us, it would have been enough!” The Red seder presents this song as being sung by counterrevolutionaries. It explains, in popular form, the reasons for the interruption of the NEP campaign and shows that “capitalist elements” will survive if they are given the slightest opportunity:



*Ven bolshevikes voltn kumen,  
Un voltn gornit tsugenumen  
VOLT geven, az vey tsu undz gor . . .  
dayenu.*

*If the Bolsheviks just came,  
And did not take anything  
It would be for us quite . . . enough.*

*Ven zey voltn yo genumen,  
Nor zey voltn lozm handlen,  
Voltn mir alts tsurik bakumen,  
Un s'volt geven . . . dayenu.*

*Even if they took something,  
But only let us trade,  
We would get everything back  
And this would be . . . enough.*

*Bay dem umgliklekh handl,  
Ven s'volt nit geven keyn finotdiel,  
Voltn mir fun zey gemakht a tel,  
Un s'volt geven . . . dayenu!*

*We would trade unsuccessfully,  
And if there were no financial [e.g.,  
taxation] department,  
We would do away with them,  
And for us it would be . . . enough!*

In the parody dishonest entrepreneurs criticized the Soviet regime, incidentally revealed the flaws in its economic system, and plotted its destruction. In this way the authors of the parody attempted to convey that opponents of the Soviet regime used religion and religious songs to mask their intentions. Thus religion and religious observance are subtly equaled with economic sabotage. Generally this is how religious songs are parodied in Soviet propaganda texts. Yet a notable exception is a version of the four questions in the same Haggadah in which a positive character transforms the four questions into an accusation: the son blames his father for observing the “dark” tradition and not struggling with the rabbis:

*Kh'freg dikh tate, ma nishtane,  
Bist oysvaksn gor gevorn  
Host keyn deye un di meye  
Iz oykh nit vi in yene yorn!*

*I ask you, father: “How does it differ?”  
You are completely grown up,  
But you don't have any standing,  
and your business is also not like it used to  
be.*

Following his speech, the son does not wait for a response but begins telling the story of the Red Exodus. The action takes place in Soviet Russia. Those who are expelled are “evil,” whereas, ironically, the heroes are identified with the Egyptians, signifying that, during the Exodus, Jews did not deserve to stay in Egypt and were therefore discarded. The villains in this Haggadah are “Rabbi Denikin” and “Rabbi Kolchak,” who are attempting to ruin the lives of the proletariat. By equating White Army generals such as Denikin and Kolchak, who were known antisemites, with rabbis, the Red Haggadah tries to demonstrate that both groups are dangerous enemies.

Kolchak and Denikin continued to be represented as enemies in Soviet ideology many decades after the Red Haggadah and Red seders were discarded and forgotten. Yet the principles used in the construction of Red seders, such as across-the-board negation, played an important role in the formulation of Soviet propaganda messages.

Alternative seders were conducted through the mid-1930s. Gradually these activities moved to Jewish schools and aimed to attract children rather than to convince adults. New Soviet holidays such as May Day and the anniversary of the October Revolution finally replaced modified versions of Jewish holidays in the mid-1930s. Some families continued to celebrate the Passover seder, often in its modified form (without prayers), and although red seders disappeared from public memory, their message still lived in the minds of many of those who witnessed them.

## **SECOND CUP of WINE: Signifies – Solidarity**

הַגָּפֶן פְּרִי בּוֹרֵא הָעוֹלָם מֶלֶךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יי אַתָּה בָּרוּךְ

*Baruch atah adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam borei p'ri hagafen*

*Blessed is October, dictator of the poles, who produces, distributes, and consumes the fruit of the vine.*

## **We drink the second cup of wine**

*Dayenu (Enough!).*

If He had brought us out from Egypt,

*Ilu hotzianu mimitzrayim,*

אֵלֹהֵינוּ הוֹצִיאָנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם

and had not carried out judgments against them

*v'lo asah bahem sh'fatim,*

וְלֹא עָשָׂה בָהֶם שְׁפָטִים

— Dayenu, it would have been enough!

*dayeinu!*

דַּיְנוּ

If He had carried out judgments against them,

*llu asah bahem sh'fatim*

אֵלֹהֵי עֲשֵׂה בְּהֵם שְׁפָטִים

and not against their idols

*v'lo asah beloheihem,*

וְלֹא עֲשֵׂה בְּאֱלֹהֵיהֶם

— Dayenu, it would have been enough!

*dayeinu!*

דַּיְנוּ

....

## דַּאִינוּ

ווען באַלשעוויקעס וואָלטן קימען  
און וואָלטן גאַרנישט צוגענומען  
וואָלט געווען. אז ווי אז אונז גאָר... דאַינוּ

ווען זיי וואָלטן יאָ גענומען  
גאָר זיי וואָלטן לעזן האַנדלען,  
וואָלטן מיר אלץ צוריק באַקומען  
און ס'וואָלט געווען ... דאַינוּ

באָ דעם אומגליקלעכן האַנדל.  
ווען ס'וואָלט גיט געווען קיין סיגאַטוריעל,  
וואָלטן מיר טון זיי געטאַכט אַ סעל  
און ס'וואָלט געווען ... דאַינוּ

ווען ס'איז דאָ סיגאַטוריעל.  
גאָר די געפֿעראַו וואָלט אויסגעריינען.  
וואָלט מען אָן איצע שוין געפונען  
און ס'וואָלט געווען ... דאַינוּ

*Dayenu* (Enough), a page from a special Passover  
edition of *Der apikoyres*. Moscow, 1929.

Most of the children knew how to celebrate Passover and did so every year; the families obtained American matzo and saw Passover as the only festival of Jewish national solidarity. The inhabitants liked the festival much more than May Day because during Passover they received gifts, the entire family gathered at home, and they ate delicious food. May Day, on the other hand, was a day full of boring meetings and lectures. Typical responses included: “My father was angry because he had to attend the official gatherings”; “My mother was angry, too, because Father was not at home”; “The children were not in a festive mood, especially since they did not fully understand why it was a holiday.”

Efim G. remembers a song of the Red seder conducted in his shtetl of Parichi:

*Mi asapru, mi adabru,  
Hey, hey, lomche dreydl,  
Ver ken visn, ver ken tseyln  
Vos dos eynts batayt, vos dos eynts  
batayt*

*Eyner iz Karl Marx, un Marx iz eyner,  
Un mer nit keyner.*

...  
*Vos dos tsvey batayt, vos dos tsvey  
batayt  
Tsvey iz Lenin-Trotsky  
Un eyner iz der Karl Marx,  
Un Marx iz eyner, un mer nit keyner.*

...  
*Vos dos dray batayt, vos dos dray  
batayt  
Dray iz internatsional, tsvey iz Lenin  
Trotsky,  
Eynts iz Karl Marx, un Marx iz keyner,  
un mer nit keyner.*

*Who will tell me, who will say  
Hey, hey, turn the dreidel  
Who can know, who can count  
What does one mean, what does one  
mean?*

*One is Karl Marx, Marx is one  
There is no one else.*

...  
*What does two mean, what does two  
mean?  
Two is Lenin-Trotsky  
One is Karl Marx,  
Marx is one, and there is no one else.*

...  
*What does three mean, what does three  
mean?  
Three means Internationals, two means  
Lenin-Trotsky,  
One is Karl Marx, and there is not one  
more.*

This song is a parody of a traditional Passover song. The original words say: “One is God, two are two scrolls of Torah, given to the Jews on the mount of Zion, and three are the number of the Jewish fathers [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob].” Efim G. actually thought that this was a Soviet Jewish song. He did not know that this was an adaptation of a much older Jewish song until he came to the United States in 1989, where he was invited to a traditional Passover dinner.

The structure of this “Red Passover” song differs markedly from that of officially published antireligious songs. Official songs retain old melodies and commonly substitute religious themes with negative images, such as in the “Red Dayenu,” which portrays NEPmen, or capitalists, as enemies. Consequently songs adapted from religious sources were designed to satirize those people who were still observant (and who were also presumed to be anti-Soviet). Here, the content of the Soviet Passover “counting” song clearly reflects the popular, even subconscious understanding of Soviet ideology that replaced old sacred symbols with the new gods (positive images of Soviet leaders). In the 1920s this type of substitution occurred only in unpublished songs. The government did not want to “replace gods”; rather, it wanted to attack religion through the creation of negative associations. It was not until the mid-1930s that Stalin replaced God in many officially published Yiddish folksongs.

Despite the antireligious content of the Red seders, they were distinctly Jewish events, organized for Jews, by Jews, and, equally important, they were conducted in Yiddish. Even the building in which the event took place was frequently a former synagogue. Most Jews did not perceive these activities as anti-Jewish. They saw them as Soviet Jewish events, created for their entertainment, and also as traditional holidays. Even after the most successful Red seders, which were attended by large audiences, the majority would go home and celebrate traditional Passover seders. Furthermore, those who conducted the Red seder often hurried to conclude the event since their families were waiting for them at home to celebrate the traditional seder. This was described by participants at such events. Velvl K., for example, was one of the organizers of the Red seders:

While I was at the Yiddish teachers’ training college [*tekhnikum*], my fellow students and I were sent to the shtetlach in the Ukraine to help organize anti-Passover campaigns. We prepared long lectures and discussion meetings. Sometimes even khometz food (such as bread) was provided for distribution. Many people came to join us. People in the shtetlach liked to see us, educated young men and women, who came to their shtetlach from Kiev. They were extremely friendly. I remember that, by the second day after our arrival, each of us had several invitations to private Passover seders in different houses... We enjoyed the holiday just as everyone else did after the official part of the day was over.

## 6. Rach’tzah - Washing hands before the meal

*Wash off all the bourgeois mud, wash off the mold of generations, and do not say*

*a blessing, say a curse. Devastation must come upon all the old rabbinical laws and customs, yeshivas and khaydorim, that becloud and enslave the people.*

## 7. Motzi - The Blessing over matzah as food

What does matzah signify? It's traditionally called the "bread of affliction," and is meant to signify the oppression and suffering of our ancestors, their daily absence of food. But, in the context of the myth, what does matzah actually mean? Matzah is the unleavened bread that the Israelites fled with on their backs, when they finally began their exodus through the red sea and across the desert. The matzah is the sign of the hastiness of the revolution, its rushed timing. The matzah is the objectification of an experience of accelerated time, an experience that is always felt in revolutionary processes. In those processes, revolutionary time is radically different than the experience of work-time. Matzah reminds us that revolutions always rush ahead of themselves, unplanned, chaotic, overcoming their own problems and demands in the process itself.

הָאָרֶץ מִן לֶחֶם הַמוֹצִיא הָעוֹלָם מִלֶּךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יי אַתָּה בָּרוּךְ  
*Baruch atah adonai eloheynu melech ha-olam ha-motzi lechem min haaretz*

*Blessed is October, dictator of the proles, who produces, distributes, and consumes bread from the land.*

## 8. Matzah - The Blessing over matzah as a special mitzvah

אַצֵּמְ אַכִּילַת עַל וְצִנָּנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו קִדְּשָׁנוּ אֲשֶׁר הָעוֹלָם מִלֶּךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יי אַתָּה בָּרוּךְ  
*Baruch atah adonai eloheynu melech ha-olam asher kid-shanu b'mitzvotav  
vitzivanu al achilat matzah*

*Blessed is October, dictator of the proles, who has blessed us with communist measures, and ordered us to eat matzah.*

**We eat a piece of Matzah**

## 9. Maror - eating the bitter herbs

We taste the bitter herbs, traditionally, in order to allow more of our senses to experience the things we're talking about. But can we taste the bitterness of (wage)slavery? EVERY SINGLE DAY!

**Taste some Maror.**

## 10. Korech - eating a sandwich of matzah and bitter herbs

We make a sandwich with both bitter maror and sweet charoset, sometimes called the Hillel sandwich. One interpretation of this ritual is that in our struggles, we taste the sweetness of liberation in the midst of oppression, and we should remember the bitterness of other people's oppressions even in our liberation.

Another interpretation is that the path of revolution will itself be double. It is not an overcoming of pain and suffering, but the inclusion of suffering within a human community that is capable of finally accommodating it. We taste the bitter with the sweet not to remember others, but to know that we ourselves can never escape bitterness and negativity. We are creatures of despair, and the pathway of liberation is simultaneously the pathway of negation.

**Make and eat the korech.**



קוירצן

עמנט אליף, כאווייריב, די כויערן פון דער פראלעטאו ישער מעלוכע און  
 ווייזט אלע ארבעטער און פויערים פון דער גאנצער וועלט, וואס גע ובען זיך  
 נאך אונטערן יאך סון קאפיטאן, ווי מיר האבן פאר אונזער ברייהייט גע-  
 קעמזט, און ווי מיר האבן די מאכט אין אונזערע איגענע הענט גענומען.  
 רופט צו אלע ארבעטער פון דער גאנצער וועלט: שטייט אליף קעגן

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Koyrekh (The ritual of matsa and bitter herbs sandwich). The Red Army soldier eats a sandwich "made" of Yulii Martov (the former leader of the Menshevik movement), Raymond Poincar, and Neville Chamberlain. Illustration from the first edition of *Hagadah far gloybers and apikorsim* (Passover story for believers and atheists). Kharkov, 1923.



# 11. Shulchan Orech - eating the festive meal

Before we joyfully eat and practice that ancient tradition of commensality, let us pause for the

**THIRD CUP OF WINE:** This cup designates the revolutionary virtue of Discipline.

As Makhno said, “I take revolutionary discipline to mean the self-discipline of the individual, set in the context of a strictly prescribed collective activity equally incumbent upon all.”

Or as Lukács wrote in *History and Class Consciousness*:

The conscious desire for the realm of freedom can only mean consciously taking the steps that will really lead to it. And in the awareness that in contemporary bourgeois society individual freedom can only be corrupt and corrupting because it is a case of unilateral privilege based on the unfreedom of others, this desire must entail the renunciation of individual freedom. It implies the conscious subordination of the self to that collective will that is destined to bring real freedom into being and that today is earnestly taking the first arduous, uncertain and groping steps towards it. This conscious collective will is the Communist Party. And like every aspect of a dialectical process it too contains the seeds, admittedly in a primitive, abstract and undeveloped form, of the determinants appropriate to the goal it is destined to achieve: namely freedom in solidarity.

The unifying factor here is *discipline*. Only through discipline can the party be capable of putting the collective will into practice, whereas the introduction of the bourgeois concept of freedom prevents this collective will from forming itself and so transforms the party into a loose aggregate of individuals incapable of action. More importantly, even for the individual it is only discipline that creates the opportunity of taking that first step to the freedom that is already possible even though it is freedom, of a very primitive sort, corresponding as it does to the stage of societal development. This is the freedom that works at overcoming the present.

With that said, let us raise our glasses again and say:

הַגָּפֶן פְּרִי בּוֹרֵא הָעוֹלָם מְלֶכֶּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יי אַתָּה בָּרוּךְ  
*Baruch atah adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam borei p'ri hagafen*

*Blessed is October, dictator of the proles, who produces, distributes, and consumes the fruit of the vine.*

### **And now let's eat the meal!**

---

*During the meal:*

At this point in the seder, we traditionally open the doors to allow the **prophet Elijah** in to have a cup of wine, to bring his vision to us all to guide us. Let us face the door, and welcome in *our* prophets of revolution

### **POUR A GLASS FOR ELIJAH and OPEN THE DOOR**

From the Red Seder:

*Kak po seyderam Iliia  
Nalizalsia kak svin'ia.  
Za evreiskoi p'ianoj paskhoy,  
Byl k butylke ochen' laskov.*

*During [many] seders [the prophet] Elijah  
Got as drunk as a swine.  
During the Jewish drunken Passover,  
He was very tender to the bottle.*

Here the prophet Elijah—God's messenger, herald of the Messiah—is said to have gotten "drunk as a swine" and the holiday itself is labeled "drunken Passover" from the tradition of having four glasses of wine during the seder, both pointed references to alcoholism. In addition to criticizing Judaism, the author wishes to demonstrate that everyone, whatever their religion, is subject to a similar problem, namely, alcoholism. The aim of the poem is also to encourage people of various religions to unite based on the common problem of alcoholism.

## **12. Tzafun** - eating the afikomen.

The afikoman is the last thing eaten at the seder. It's the matzah we've broken apart, hidden, and will now bring back together to eat as a whole. One common interpretation of this part is that it signifies the unification of the 12 tribes of Israel to one whole. Instead, let us find the Afikoman, and bring it back to the table to show how we cannot survive together without recognizing the divisions, ruptures, and breaks that constitute a human life. The Afikoman, the negativity that makes life possible, must be brought out from the shadows and made explicit.

**We hand around pieces of the afikoman, and eat it**

#### **FOURTH CUP OF WINE: Hope**

הַגָּפֶן פְּרִי בּוֹרֵא הָעוֹלָם מְלֶכְךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יי אַתָּה בָּרוּךְ  
*Baruch atah adonai elohaynu melech ha'olam borei p'ri hagafen*

*Blessed is October, dictator of the proles, who produces, distributes, and consumes the fruit of the vine.*

### **13. Barekh** - Blessing after the meal

Let's sing a Yiddish anarchist song. "Hey, hey, daloy politsey!\_(Down with the Police).

### **14. Hallel** – Praise

We praise *geist*, that is, our social bonds, the I that is We and the We that is I, which we make as we are made by it.

### **15. Nirtzah** - Conclusion

The traditional closing of the Seder is to say "next year in Jerusalem", but instead, we will say, "next year in revolution!"

## Songs:

### *CHAD GADYA*

One kid, one kid that Father bought for two zuzim; One kid, one kid.

The cat came and ate the kid that father bought for two zuzim; One kid, one kid.

The dog came and bit the cat that ate the kid that father bought for two zuzim; One kid, one kid.

The stick came and beat the dog that bit the cat that ate the kid that father bought for two zuzim; One kid, one kid.

The fire came and burned the stick that beat the dog that bit the cat that ate the kid that father bought for two zuzim; One kid, one kid.

The water came and quenched the fire that burned the stick that beat the dog that bit the cat that ate the kid that father bought for two zuzim; One kid, one kid.

The ox came and drank the water that quenched the fire that burned the stick that beat the dog that bit the cat that ate the kid that father bought for two zuzim; One kid, one kid.

The butcher came and killed the ox that drank the water that quenched the fire that burned the stick that beat the dog that bit the cat that ate the kid that father bought for two zuzim; One kid, one kid.

The angel of death came and slew the butcher that killed the ox that drank the water that quenched the fire that burned the stick that beat the dog that bit the cat that ate the kid that father bought for two zuzim; One kid, one kid.

The Holy One, blessed be He, came and slew the angel of death that slew the butcher that killed the ox that drank the water that quenched the fire that burned the stick that beat the dog that bit the cat that ate the kid that father bought for two zuzim; One kid, one kid.

**In Ale Gasn/Hey Hey Daloy  
Politsey (Everywhere You  
Look/Hey Hey Down with the  
Police)**

Everywhere that you go  
the streets are full of strikes  
boys and girls, everyone  
are talking higher wages  
boys and girls, everyone  
are talking higher wages

Enough of breaking backs  
and still having to borrow  
call a strike comrades  
let's free ourselves  
call a strike comrades  
let's free ourselves

Brothers and sisters, all gather  
round  
together we are strong enough  
to bring the tsar down

Hey hey down with the police  
Down with the autocracy in  
Russia  
Hey Hey Daloy Politsey  
Down with the autocracy in  
Russia

Sisters and brothers we can do  
this together  
Bury Nikolai along with his  
mother

Hey hey down with the police  
Down with the autocracy in  
Russia  
Hey Hey Daloy Politsey  
Down with the autocracy in  
Russia

Only yesterday, he pushed a  
garbage cart  
and now he's become a  
capitalist

Hey hey down with the police  
Down with the autocracy in  
Russia  
Hey Hey Daloy Politsey  
Down with the autocracy in  
Russia

in aleh gasn, vu men geyt,  
hert men zabastovkes.  
yinglech, meydlech, kind-un-keit,  
shmuzen fun nabovkes.

genug shoy'n, brider, horeven,  
genug shoy'n borgn-laien,  
macht a zabastovke,  
lomir, brider, zich bafraien!

brider un shvester,  
lomir zich gebn di hant,  
lomir mikolaiakelen  
tsebrechn di vent!  
hey, hey, daloy politsay,  
daloy samoderzhavyeh v'rosey!

brider un shvester,  
lomir geyn tsuzamen.  
lomir mikolaiakelen  
bagrobn mit der mamen!  
hey, hey, daloy politsay,  
daloy samoderzhavyeh v'rosey!

nechtn hot er gefirt  
a vegele mist,  
haint iz er gevorn  
a kapitalist.  
hey, hey, daloy politsay,  
daloy samoderzhavyeh v'rosey!

אין אלע גאסן, ווו מען גייט  
הערט מען זאבאסטאָווקעס  
ינגלעך, מיידלעך, קינד־און־קייט  
שמועסן פֿון נאַבאָווקעס.

גענוג שוין, ברידער, האָרעווען  
גענוג שוין באַרגן־לייען  
מאַכט אַ זאַבאַסטאָווקע  
לאָמיר, ברידער, זיך באַפֿרײען!

ברידער און שוועסטער  
לאָמיר זיך געבן די הענט  
לאָמיר מיקאָליַיקעלען  
צעברעכן די ווענט  
היי, היי, דאָלוי פּאָליציי  
דאָלוי סאַמאָדערזשאַווייע וו'ראָסיי

ברידער און שוועסטער  
לאָמיר גיין צוזאַמען  
לאָמיר מיקאָליַיקעלען  
באַגראָבן מיט דער מאַמען  
היי, היי, דאָלוי פּאָליציי  
דאָלוי סאַמאָדערזשאַווייע וו'ראָסיי

נעכטן האָט ער געפֿירט  
אַ וועגעלע מיסט  
הײַנט איז ער געוואָרן  
אַ קאַפּיטאַליסט  
היי, היי, דאָלוי פּאָליציי  
דאָלוי סאַמאָדערזשאַווייע וו'ראָסיי

## *Mah Nishtanah*

Mah nishtanah halaylah hazeh mikol halaylot

- 1) *She-bechol halaylot ain anu matbilin afilu pa'am echat, halaylah hazeh shtei pe'amim?*
- 2) *She-bechol halaylot anu ochlim chametz o matzah, halaylah hazeh kulo matzah?*
- 3) *She-bechol halaylot anu ochlim she'ar yerakot, halaylah hazeh maror?*
- 4) *She-bechol halaylot anu ochlim bain yoshvin u-vain mesubin, halaylah hazeh kulanu mesubin?*

## *Eliyahu haNavi*

*Eliyahu haNavi  
Eliyahu haTishbi,  
Eliyahu haGil'adi  
Bim'hera v'yameinu yavoh eleinu,  
im mashiach ben David. (x2)*

## *Miriam's Song*

Debbie Friedman

*And the women dancing with their timbrels  
Followed Miriam as she sang her song  
Sing a song to the One whom we've exalted  
Miriam and the women danced and danced the whole night long  
And Miriam was a weaver of unique variety  
The tapestry she wove was one which sang our history  
With every strand and every thread she crafted her delight  
A woman touched with spirit, she dances toward the light*

*When Miriam stood upon the shores and gazed across the sea  
The wonder of this miracle she soon came to believe  
Whoever thought the sea would part with an outstretched hand  
And we would pass to freedom and march to the promised land*

*And Miriam the prophet took her timbrel in her hand  
And all the women followed her just as she had planned  
And Miriam raised her voice in song  
She sang with praise and might  
We've just lived through a miracle  
We're going to dance tonight*

## More Stories about the *Red Seder*:

The children often did not see any contradiction between their religious upbringing at home and antireligious propaganda in school. They thought that the family followed certain rules, and society followed others. Ian D. further explains:

My family was traditional. My father used to go to the synagogue. She [my mother] kept a good kosher house. Everything was kosher at home. We lived a Soviet way of life [*sovetish shteyger*], but it was all kosher.

....

Sometimes children were forced to perform antireligious actions in school that were organized in the form of a game. Many respondents reported that the idea of Passover was connected with various unconventional activities. Samuil G., who took part in these events in a shtetl in the Ukraine, remembers:

As a child I loved Passover very much. I loved the kugel [baked pudding, as of potatoes or noodles] that my mother baked for the holiday. She made it in a very special way that I have never tasted since. I loved how everything went crazy in the house as we were changing dishes for Passover and my grandmother was cleaning the house ferociously. The atmosphere at the [Yiddish] school was different, too. Of course, we didn't have the day off or anything like that. Still, we had many interesting activities taking place in school. First, older children, the *komyugistn* [Komsomol members] would come to conduct some activities for us. They explained how religion oppressed the masses in other countries. We played many interesting games together. For example, on the first day of Passover, they would gather us together and give each of us ten pieces of bread. We were given the task of going to Jewish houses and throwing a piece into the window of ten different houses. The one who was the fastest would receive a prize. We enjoyed the game very much, especially when the old, angry women came out of their houses and ran after us screaming "*Apikorsim!*" ["Heretics!"]. We felt like heroes of the revolution and were very proud. But in the evening we would all go home and celebrate the traditional seder with all the necessary rituals.

Children were not the only ones who faced the complexities of this dual existence. Adults, too, had to make compromises between their traditional ways of life, modern changes in society, and, perhaps most important, their possible sources of income. Here is the testimony of a former Byelorussian resident, Efim G.:

My father could do any job. He was a jack-of-all-trades. He was a tailor, a barber, and a baker. After the revolution he became a professional atheist and the chairman of the working committee. Then he became a chairman of the shtetl council. My father had an especially good income during the time of Passover, when he worked as a *zetser* [matzo bakery assistant]. The fact that he was also a professional atheist didn't prevent him from carrying out his job. It was a very good source of income because all our neighbors were believers. We didn't even think there were any contradictions in this.



On a cultural level, Passover and May Day were viewed not as contradictory but as fulfilling different functions. Passover was a family holiday, with specific rituals and traditions that celebrated national freedom from slavery. May Day, similarly, signified deliverance from servitude but on a class level. Yurii B. asserts:

Passover was only for the Jews and it was celebrated at home, whereas May Day was celebrated at the club. There were people of different nationalities there. There were Ukrainian, Polish, and Czech villages around us, so inhabitants of these villages would come to the club to celebrate the holiday. The club was a cultural center for them, too. Because it was situated in a Jewish shtetl [Romanov], it united Jews with all other nations. May Day was the perfect opportunity to celebrate something together with other nationalities

The coexistence of Soviet and Jewish holidays created mutual influences on the rituals associated with these celebrations.

...

Another popular theme in anti-Passover propaganda concerned how the holiday allegedly fostered social and economic injustice. Many publications accused rabbis of organizing Passover rituals for personal financial gain. Various stories spoke of the covert techniques rabbis employed to approve food as kosher for Passover, including a “guarantee” that was purportedly based entirely on bribes. Further, ordinary believers are portrayed simply as victims who lose their money to the schemes of the religious elite, while atheists are portrayed as the wisest citizens of all. One story made the comparison explicit in the portrait it draws of two friends: the one who observes Passover is constantly in debt, and the other is a thrifty atheist, able to save enough money for his family to build a new house.

...

Etya G. (b. 1920) took part in the staging of an oral newspaper when she was in school in the Ukrainian shtetl of Kopaigorod in 1928. She describes it as follows:

The most popular of the children’s activities in the club was the *zhivaia gazeta* (living newspaper). Each child received his or her own lines to recite. We staged a living newspaper against religion. It was in Yiddish. I even remember the words . . . I remember we were fighting against Passover, against these Jewish religious ceremonies. We used to sing:

*Vi ikh efn a Peysekhdik zekl,  
Gefin ikh an apikoyres a brek.*

*When I open the Passover bag,  
I find there a piece of a heretic.*

Etya also remembers that Komsomol members in her shtetl used to throw pieces of bread into the Passover bags that children were given. These pieces of bread

(which were forbidden to be eaten during Passover) were called “a piece of a heretic” (*apikoyres a brek*).

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For example, during Passover living newspapers often criticized people who baked matzo and sold it to their neighbors. Such testimony, however, actually helped members of the audience find out where matzo was being baked and how to get it.

...

The mass production of Yiddish propagandistic plays began in 1925 and reached its peak in 1931. During this period buffooneries (*bufanades*), typically short, one-act comedic plays with political undertones, became a popular genre that was used for propagandistic purposes. . . . Yiddish performances also attacked Judaism, Jewish political parties (especially Zionists), Trotsky, and kulaks. The plays often promoted policies of the Soviet regime that were directed toward Jews, such as the organization of agricultural settlements. Most of these performances were musicals, consisting of alterations of traditional Yiddish songs, rewritten so as to make them simple to learn and easy to remember.

Many parodies were based on the story of Passover. For example, Avrom Vevyorke (1887–1935) first published the play *In midber* (In the desert) in 1925. This anti-Passover parody revolves around two competing groups of Jews. One group includes members of the Komsomol, and the other brings together their opponents, notably Zionists and Bundists. The head of the second group is Moses, who wants to lead them to Palestine. The Komsomol group, in an effort to convince other people to join them, offers to build a socialist state instead. The Komsomol members use various arguments and methods, including the sexual seduction of Moses by one of the Komsomol members. The play ends with a complete victory for the Komsomol. All the members of the second group repent and go on to build the Socialist Soviet country. Even Moses refuses to go to the “Arab land” and stays to help establish the new Communist state with his new Komsomol girlfriend.

The sharpest conflict of the play is in the area of international politics. The lyrics of the songs used in the performance often incorporate idiomatic Yiddish expressions combined with Soviet ideological messages. For example, the “villains” explain their agenda as follows:

*Mir zaynen sheyne yidn,  
Gehandlt in dem mark,  
Ver a shoykhet, ver a rov,*

*Un ver a feter kark—  
Firt undz Moyshe iber yamen  
In Balfurs medine,*

*Vet men vayzn dort di tir,  
Geyen mir keyn Khine,  
Marsh, marsh, marsh!  
Oy, Oy, Khine,*

*A goldene medine,  
Chan Kay Shi un Chan Tsai Li  
Tsienistn fun bestn min!*

*We are good Jews,  
We were trading in the market place,  
Some are ritual slaughterers, some are  
rabbis,*

*Some are just fat necks.  
Moses leads us across the seas,  
To Balfour's country,*

*If they don't let us in there,  
We will go to China,  
March, March, March!  
Oy, Oy, China,*

*A golden land,  
Chiang Kai Shek and Chiang Tsai Lee  
Are the best Zionists!*

The Yiddish expression *sheyne yidn* (literally, “beautiful Jews”), which usually refers to “respectable Jews,” here applies to market traders, one of the least respected professions according to Soviet ideology. In the next two lines, “the rabbi” and “the butcher” are called “fat necks.” In Soviet jargon “fat” meant “bourgeois” or “capitalist,” that is, antisocialist. The Yiddish expression *feter kark* (fat neck) also refers to an “insensitive person.” Therefore, by calling butchers and rabbis “fat necks,” the author of the play created a negative association with these professions and made them an object of satire. In the play Moses, an acknowledged Jewish leader, only assists market traders and “fat necks,” not the poor Jews in need of help. This implies that Moses is not a leader of all Jewish people but rather only the rich

The play *In midber* equated Chinese leaders (who were hostile to the Soviet government at the time) with Zionists, and suggested that both were equally harmful to the Jews. To summarize, Avrom Vevyorke’s creation effectively rejected Passover, ridiculed Jewish customs and social structure, and informed the audience about the latest trends in Soviet policies.

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For example, Dovid Edelshtadt describes the rebellion of the Jews in Egypt as a social revolution:

*In dem land fun piramidn  
Geven a kenig beyz un shlekht.  
Zaynen dort geven di yidn,  
Zayne diner, zayne knekht.*

*In the land of pyramids  
Was an angry and evil king.  
The Jews were there,  
As his servants and his slaves.*

Later in this song the author draws parallels between the exodus of Jews from Egypt and social revolution. He describes a new Jewish rebellion that allows the Jews to build a free society. Even though the Soviets presented the story of Passover entirely differently, the song still was published many times during the Soviet period, perhaps because of its revolutionary spirit.

...

*Zing zhe arbeter, freylekh lebedik,  
Breyter makh di trit,  
S'kumt a naye glik, s'kumt a naye lid,  
Zing a frayhayt lid!*

*Sing, worker, happily, merrily,  
Make your step wider,  
A new happiness is coming, a new song  
is coming,  
Sing a freedom song!*

...

All text on Red Seder from Anna Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*



The sacrifice of Pesakh. Illustration from the second edition of *Hagadah far gloybers un apikorsim* (Passover story for believers and atheists). Moscow, 1927. Drawing by A. Tyshler.