

## Pre Pesah #1

We are entering the beginning of our Pesah journey  
Seder planning and invitations  
Looking at recipes  
Making lists  
Making more lists  
Anticipating the few days before the first Seder  
When should I make the chicken soup?  
How many matzah balls?

And the shopping - oy  
Which grocery store has the best Pesah selection?  
What if I can't find the one ingredient I really need?  
Worrying, anticipating, worrying more

And in all the complexities of preparing for Pesah  
We forget to breathe, we forget to pay attention  
We forget to stop, if only for a moment, to notice

To notice that the days are now lighter for longer  
Plants are beginning to surface from their winter slumber  
The trees are budding  
Color is appearing in our world

We have spent many months sighing and wishing for  
Sun and light and warmer temperatures  
Longing for Spring

Pesah heralds the beginning of Spring  
And as we prepare and clean  
May we open our windows to the gentle breezes  
To the warmer light,  
To the hope that Spring awakens in us.

Breathing in the warmth of the sun  
Breathing out a sigh of letting go  
Letting go of the cold  
And the dark winter nights

## Commentary

Each year, the countdown begins on Purim and continues for a month until we arrive at the reenactment of our redemption: the Seder. Sometimes, all these details have made the journey to freedom one that feels devoid of meaning, leaving us in an almost obsessive compulsive state.

Let us not think this is a modern struggle. In fact the Israelites were faced with tasks leading up to the actual Exodus. On the 10 of Nissan (five days before Pesah), a lamb was set aside for the Paschal sacrifice. It had to be watched over carefully and then some of its blood was placed on the doorposts and the lintel of each home. It had to be eaten roasted, in haste, just as the matzah was to be prepared in a hurry.

While God may be found in these details, they serve to increase, rather than alleviate the stress in the lead-up to Pesah.

Where are the moments of mindfulness?

First, we can appreciate the markers the tradition instituted. There are four special Shabbatot - Sabbaths with distinct maftir portions and haftarat leading up to this festival. These serve to highlight the importance of the task that lies ahead and to give us space to consider where we can find deeper meaning.

Without these special days, we might not stop and look around; we might not pause at all.

The final Shabbat before Pesah is called Shabbat Hagadol, the great Shabbat. In the last moments of rest before the Festival, we read a prophetic passage which teaches that Elijah will turn the hearts of all parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents. For us, this includes both biological and chosen families. Intergenerational reconciliation reminds us that the Seder brings us together - family and/or friends with all of our diversity - in a way that no other Jewish ritual does. In fact, it is the most frequently observed Jewish ritual among American Jews. This is why we prepare so diligently - to create space for our guests, for generations to come together in celebration.

And what are we celebrating?

Amidst the preparations, remember what all this is about - it is not just a meal, it is the telling of a story. The quintessential story. Our birth story. The journey from slavery to freedom. A narrative that has inspired people around the globe for thousands of years.

Let us notice how the story is told. By stopping and letting our children ask a question. The Mishnah states that after the second glass of wine is poured, the son asks his father how is this night of Pesah with its Passover seder different from any other night of the year (Mah Nishtanah). Even if the son does not know how to ask the question, his father teaches him to ask. Asking questions is key.

What is behind asking a question? Noticing. As we notice, we stop. We look, listen, smell, touch or taste. We consider. Then we can appreciate what is around us and inquire.

So as we make our lists, stop and notice. Why are we doing this? How will these tasks add to our experience of our feast of freedom and how will others benefit?

Our meditation also hints at another name of Pesah: Hag HaAviv - the festival of Spring. It is not just the annual commemoration of freedom and the birth of the Jewish people, but it is also the yearly rebirth of nature. Light, sun, and warmth return to large swaths of the Northern Hemisphere.

The tradition offers us a pausing ritual during this time of year to appreciate nature. “Rav Yehuda said: One who goes out during Nisan and sees trees that are blossoming recites: Praised [are You, Adonai, Sovereign of time and space] who has withheld nothing from (His) [the Divine’s] world, and has created in it beautiful creatures and trees for human beings to enjoy.” (Brakhot 43b)

Amidst the myriad details of Passover, we are invited to take a break: find a flowering tree, recite Birkat Hallanot (the blessing of the trees) and savor the moment. A moment of blessing!

Even in the mundane, in the details, there are the sparks of redemption, of renewal. Notice them and enjoy them.

That also is reflected in the emended holiday greeting. On the other pilgrimage festivals – Shavuot and Sukkot – we greet each other with “hag sameah, happy holiday.” On Pesah alone we say “hag kasher v’sameah, a kosher and happy holiday.” Does the Jewish tradition suggest that the other holidays should not be kosher? Of course not; every day should be kosher. Why the change? Because the details of kosher for Pesah

are so much more complex than ordinary kosher. After we have completed making things kosher, we can take a deep breath, lean back on our pillowed chairs, and really enjoy the holiday in all its rich traditions and with all our senses. Hag kasher V'sameahh - may it be a happy a kosher Passover.