A set of hand-washing rituals and blessings to use for your Seder

INTRODUCTION

Pass this text around the table and read the following:

On Passover we are asked to relive the story of Exodus, to experience for ourselves the story of how our people emerged from generations of systemic oppression — and how our people left everything they knew and headed into the unknown.

Our ancestors didn’t know what was ahead, they only knew that it must be better than continuing to live in the land of mitzrayim — the narrow place of constriction and brutality they had become used to. They were not without fear. But together, they took extraordinary risks to forge a path towards freedom.

Today in America we are standing at the edge of the sea. We have a choice to make. Will we stay in the narrow place — in a society defined by xenophobia, racism, and oppression — or will we cross the sea to build a society where we are all safe? We aren’t sure if the sea will part. And we aren’t sure what’s on the other side. Are we each prepared to make the choice to enter the water?
FIRST HAND WASHING
URCHATZ
WHAT ARE WE WASHING AWAY?

Pass this text around the table and read before washing your hands.

The first hand washing at the seder is traditionally done without a blessing. Tonight, we will reflect on what we are washing our hands of — as people and as a society.

How do we celebrate Passover in America in 2019? What does it mean to recount the horrors of how our people were treated in Egypt when so much of this country’s politics are fueled by a deep-seated fear of the other? When our government is demonizing immigrants, separating families, and holding children in cages?

Leaders of our country have embraced white nationalism, a movement that seeks to erase communities of immigrants, people of color, Muslim people, and Native people. And who do white nationalists blame for enabling migration and changing society? Jewish people. The shooter at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh wasn’t just driven by a hatred of Jews: he was driven by anger over Jewish support for refugees.

We know that we are not safe or free while others are not safe and free.

In order to prepare ourselves to leave mitzrayim, this narrow place, we need to wash away that which separates us from each other, that which we must leave behind to move forward together.

Read each of these aloud and then repeat as a group.

We wash away the idea that any human being is not worthy of dignity.

We wash away our own fears that separate us from other people and communities.

We wash away our inaction.

We wash away our guilt for not doing enough.

We wash away our doubts that we will not make it across the sea.

Pass a pitcher of water and an empty bowl for each person to wash their hands. Each person should pour water over the hands of their neighbor. As you wash your hands, name something that you want to work to let go of.

Continue through the Seder and return to this text for the second hand washing before the meal.
Pass this text around the table and read the following before washing your hands.

The second hand washing at the seder is traditionally said with a blessing as we prepare to eat. Tonight, we also wash our hands to prepare ourselves for the work ahead of us. We know that crossing the sea will not be easy. We need to prepare ourselves for more honest conversations, deepened relationships, bold actions, risk-taking, and visions of the world to come.

Read each of these aloud and then repeat as a group.

We bless the work of our hands and our hearts.
We bless our commitment to justice.
We bless our partners in this work.
We bless our ancestors who have given us the wisdom and courage to fight.
We bless the dreams of future generations who will inherit this work from us.

One person can wash their hands on behalf of the group, symbolizing our interconnectedness.

Together we say the blessing:

Baruch atah Adonai, eloheinu Melech ha-olam, asher kid’shanu b’mitzvotav v’tsivanu al n’tilat yadayim.

Blessed are You, Source of Life, who makes us holy with your instructions and commands us to wash our hands.

May this ritual prepare us to talk to our neighbors, show up in the streets, call and visit our elected officials, get loud, be consistent and persistent, as we seek to leave mitzrayim to build a democracy where we are all safe to live, love, and thrive.
TAKE ACTION NOW
JOIN THE CAMPAIGN TO #DEFUNDHATE

Bend the Arc is proud to be a Jewish community organizing alongside our immigrant partners to #DefundHate. We are lobbying our members of Congress to cut funding for detentions and deportations of our immigrant neighbors, and to fund the infrastructure that our communities actually need.

Congress must cut funding for abusive immigration enforcement agencies and the construction of a border wall of any kind, and they must hold the Trump Administration accountable. If Congress doesn’t cut funding for detention and deportation, or authorizes any more funding for Trump’s wall this year, then they are putting immigrants, refugees, and all of us who are targeted by white nationalism at risk.

We need you to join us to #DefundHate, mobilize more of our Jewish community, and pressure more Members of Congress to prevent tax dollars from being used to tear communities apart, jail people exercising their legal right to seek asylum, or separate children from their parents. Our safety is bound up in each other’s future — let’s take action together to build real safety together.

Join the campaign: bendthearc.us/immigration

BEND THE ARC
jewish action