



## **A Jewish High Holiday Seder for Modern Times**

*(For a slightly cynical, irreverent crowd)*

Now, you're probably asking yourself, "Hmm....Seder....Seder.... wait just a minute! Wrong season? No, not really! The truth is that in the Sephardic Tradition it is customary to have a Seder during the High Holidays, and in fact, there are still many Sephardic Jews around the

world who have a High Holiday Seder each year. So, are we here this evening for a Sephardic Seder? Ah...no way! We're here for a humorous, meaningful, irreverent and sacred Seder—a High Holiday Seder that you will not soon forget!

### **I. THE INTRODUCTORY BLESSINGS**

#### **Blessing Over the Festival Lights: *(as the candles are being lit)***

*Baruch atah Adonoi, elohaynu melech ha'olam, asher kid-shanu b'mitzvah-sov v'tsi-vanu, l'hadlik ner shel yom tov.*

Blessed are you O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us by Thy commandments, and has commanded us to kindle the festival lights.

#### **The She-he-che-yaw-nu:**

*Baruch atah Adonoi, elohaynu melech ha'olam, she-he-che-yaw-nu, v'ki-y'yonu, v'hi-g'yanu la-x'man ha-zeh.*

Blessed are you O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who has kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this season.

#### **The Kiddish**

Blessed are you, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who has created the fruit of the vine.

*Baruch atah Adonoi, elohaynu melech ha'olam, bo-ray p'ri ha-goffen.*

## II. THE SIX TRADITIONAL CULINARY BLESSINGS

*[The traditional culinary blessings in the Sephardic Rosh Hashanah Seder are called "Yehi Ratzon" ("May it be your will" in Hebrew). Before eating each symbolic food, we recite: "Yehi Ratzon" ("May it be G-d's will"). The first four symbolic foods that we will offer blessings with—are already on the table. The final food will be brought to you after we say the blessings about it.]*

### 1. Apples and Honey

*"Yehi Ratzon: May it be Your will, Lord our G-d and the G-d of our fathers, that You renew for us a year, good and sweet like honey."*

### 2. Pomegranate

*"Yehi Ratzon: May it be Your will, Lord our G-d and the G-d of our fathers, that we be filled with mitzvoth (good deeds) like a pomegranate is filled with seeds."*

### 3. Dates

*"Yehi Ratzon: May it be your will, Lord our God and God of our Fathers, that those among us who are single, get many sweet dates in the coming year. As for those of us who are already coupled, if you decide you would like to be romantic and have a lot of special "dates" this coming year with your Beloved—then Mazel Tov—go for it! But, if you are coupled and decide you are going to go and have "dates" with other people this year, then knock yourself out and we hope you choke on a pit!*

### 4. Challah Bread

*"Yehi Ratzon: May it be your will, Lord our God and God of our Fathers, that we eat a lot of delicious challah bread in this High Holiday season of Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah—and on all of the Shabbats in September and October—culminating with biggest holiday of all, at the end of October, when we ween ourselves away from eating all that Challah bread—that holiday is, of course—Challah-ween!*

*Baruch atah adonai, eloheynu melech ha-olom, ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz.*

### 5. Matzo Ball Soup

We eat Matzo Balls on Rosh Hashanah, to prepare us for the trials of the coming year: *"Yehi Ratzon: May it be Your will, Lord our G-d and the G-d of our fathers, that in the coming year, whenever the need arises, we will have the balls we need to cope with any situation."*

## **MATZO BALL SOUP IS SERVED AND EATEN**

*[At the right time, just before everyone is finished, the Seder continues]:*

### III: High Holiday Theme #1: Testing and Confirming our Faith

*Every year, on Rosh Hashanah, we read in the Torah of how God tested Abraham's faith and commitment to him, and afterward, made the Jews his chosen people. Tonight, we are going to re-visit how God tested Abraham, followed by that first Rosh Hashanah, when the Jews were named, "God's Chosen People." Here are the roles in this Reader's Theatre reenactment:*

<b>GOD:</b>	<b>SARAH:</b>	<b>ABRAHAM:</b>	<b>ISHMAEL:</b>
<b>ISSAC:</b>	<b>HAGAR:</b>	<b>HARAN:</b>	<b>NARRATOR:</b>

**NARRATOR:** One day, Abraham was tending his sheep, when the voice of the Lord came to him as it had done before.

**GOD:** Abraham!                      **ABE:** What? Huh? Oh, my God!

**GOD:** That's right.                      **ABE:** What's right?

**GOD:** I'm your God.                      **ABE:** What? Oh, it's you, Lord, I didn't recognize you, it's been so long.

**GOD:** You forgot me?

**ABE:** Well.....no.....but.....ah.....you look like you've lost a little weight....and a....you startled me. You know, you shouldn't sneak up on people that way.

**GOD:** Are you trying to tell me how to do my job?

**ABE:** No, but I just.....

**GOD:** Good, well that settles that. Now, I want you to do me a favor.

**ABE:** Sure thing, by the way, are you still considering making me and my clan your chosen people? You know, me and my people would love to be your chosen people, and would absolutely love to have you be our Chosen God.

**GOD:** *(loud and angry)* ONLY GOD, YOU GOT THAT? THERE IS NO CHOICE—THERE'S ONLY ONE GOD—ME!

**ABE:** *(stumbling to recover)*...er...a...of course...I meant to say that, our ONE AND ONLY GOD! Of course, there's only one God—you. Those other Gods, like Shiva in India, Zeus in Greece, Mars in Rome, Ra in Egypt, and Lü Dong-bin in China are all cheap imposters!

**GOD:** Never mind that. Well, that's what this is about. I'm just about to name you and your ancestors to be my Chosen People, but first I need to give you one last test—a test of true faith.

**ABE:** Okay, great, what do I have to do? What's the test?

**GOD:** I want you to give back to me the son I gave to you and Sarah nearly thirteen years ago.

**ABE:** What! Are you nuts?

**GOD:** I beg your pardon?

**ABE:** Oh....ah.....I didn't mean that....it's just that.....what kind of sick, twisted, God are you anyway?

**GOD:** You better be careful or I'll turn you into a goat.

**ABE:** Couldn't I have a different test, maybe like that fairytale, where the guy has to guess the little man's name in three tries or else, the little man gets to take the child away?

**GOD:** *(pauses)* Okay, you have three tries to guess my name.

**ABE:** Rumpelstiltskin!

**GOD:** No, that's one guess, now hurry up with this nonsense, I don't have all day.

**ABE:** Yahway!

**GOD:** Where on earth did you hear that name?

**ABE:** Somebody came to my door the other day with a magazine and mentioned it.

**GOD:** Now, you have one last try and make it snappy.

**ABE:** How about Elvis.

**GOD:** Okay, that's it, now back to the real test of faith.

**ABE:** All right, but before we do, what is your name?

**GOD:** It is too hard for human beings to read or hear or understand. It has been represented by the Hebrew letters: Yud, Hay, Vov, Hay, but it is not meant to spell anything. In future generations, if you pass the test today, your people will refer to me in your worship services as "Adonai," which means, "My Master," and all other times, as "Hashem," which simply means, "The Name." *(pause)* Now, it's time for you to go get the boy. It's time to go get Isaac.

**ABE:** But, how can you do this? How can you do this to Sarah? How can you take her only son from her?

**GOD:** You and she have had Isaac and enjoyed him for years now. How old is he again?

**ABE:** He's in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

**GOD:** Oh, I thought he was older.

**ABE:** Yeah, well he's been held back some—he's not that bright. I forget how many years old he is. He's somewhere between 10 and 13.

**GOD:** You're kidding!

**ABE:** Look, I've needed him to help me with my flock. He hasn't had much time to work on trigonometry and French.

**GOD:** Never mind that. The point is, you've had a lot of wonderful years with Isaac. Some parents lose their children in infancy, and some parents are never blessed with children. Are you not grateful for the years you've had with him? Must you dwell on what you will not have?

**ABE:** This doesn't seem right.

**GOD:** Not right? I've watched over and protected you and your people thus far. Miraculously, I have given Sarah a beautiful child--at 90 years old. I am now asking you to give up that child and sacrifice it to me as a demonstration that you are truly committed to me, not just conveniently involved. This is a true test of your faith. Nothing less than this would be.

**ABE:** *(slowly)* I guess you're right. You mentioned the word, "sacrifice," what exactly did you have in mind there?

**GOD:** You're a shepherd. You know very well what I mean. You sacrifice animals from your flock to me all the time. It's just like that. Only this time, instead of a ram on the fire, it'll be Isaac.

**ABE:** *(pause)* Holy Moses! What happens if I decide not to sacrifice Isaac to you.

**GOD:** Not much. Your people—the Jews—will not become my chosen people, so they will not be under my loving protection. In a few years, the Moabites or the Philistines or the Bedouins will wipe out you and all of your extended family..... As a result, your ancestors will never travel down to Egypt, never receive my law, and never experience the taste of smoked salmon on a bagel, with a schmear of cream cheese, tomatoes, capers and onions.

**ABE:** Okay, I'll do it. I'll go get Isaac.

**NARRATOR:** Well, as you know, Abraham did pass the test. So, Abraham gathered his whole family together, to sit down with God to work out the details of the Chosen People thing. We're here at that dinner now. Now, let's all introduce ourselves, shall we? Let's begin with Hagar here, Sarah's handmaiden, who really helped out a lot, especially when she had sex with Abraham to bore him a son, before they found out Sarah could conceive.

**HAGAR:** *(waving her hand wildly and childishly)* Hi, so happy to be included. You know handmaiden-ing can get pretty boring and thankless sometimes.  
*(To Abraham)* Did you call me to have sex with you again?

**ABE:** *(Looking at Sarah)* No, that's all right. *(whispering to Hagar)* Call me later.

**NARRATOR:** *(Continuing the introductions)* Thank you Hagar. I see you brought along your son, who you conceived with Abraham. What's his name?

**HAGAR:** Ishmael!

**NARRATOR:** Hello Ishmael.

**ISHMAEL:** Please....call me Ishmael.

**NARRATOR:** Also, there that evening was Abraham's sister, Haran.

**HARAN:** *(haughty)* I'm Haran. I'm here to keep my brother Abraham in line and make sure he doesn't give away the store in this deal. He's got no head for business. Me, I'm a super salesperson. I'll get us the best deal.

**GOD:** Yes, yes, well, be that as it may, I want to thank you for all making the time to sit down with me today. I think you are going to be very pleased what I am going to tell you.

**ABE:** *(eagerly)* Yes, yes, we're all happy to be here this evening to celebrate this very first Rosh Hashanah, commemorating me passing your test and becoming your Chosen People.

**SARAH:** Hold on there a minute. I've spent a lot years in the business world, so I've learned to be skeptical about contracts, deals, and agreements. We all have questions about what exactly we are getting and giving up by becoming your Chosen People.

**HARAN:** *(To Sarah)* You tell him, Sarah! *(Proudly, to the group)* Sarah is my business and life coach! Don't let him get away with selling us a bill of goods.

**GOD:** *(Amused and chuckling a bit)* That's what I love about you Jews, not afraid to speak up and ask the hard questions. Okay, fire away.

**SARAH:** Okay, what are the benefits of being your Chosen People, what do we get?

**GOD:** You get my total love and protection. Many other groups for many years to come will try to destroy you, but against all odds you will survive.

**HARAN:** Wait a minute, what's this "destroy you" thing. Why would all those groups for many years into the future want to destroy us?

**GOD:** Good question! Well, first and foremost, you will be accused of having horns and of killing the personal savior of Christianity, of one of the largest religions in the world. After that, for many years, you will be accused all over the world of using the blood of Christian children for your religious observance. In the middle ages, the Jews in Spain will be forced to renounce their religion and convert to Christianity or be killed. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century you will be called bloodsuckers by the King of England and most of his subjects, because the only job they will let you do was to be moneylenders. Of course, vicious beatings, and even murder will be the result of all of that.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it will be determined by all of the countries of Europe, that the Jews are the cause of the Black Plague that will wipe out nearly half the population. Jews will continue to be universally-hated and persecuted throughout Europe. In Russia, they will force you to live in isolated substandard villages called ghettos.

Then, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a man named Adolf Hitler will decide that the Jews were the cause of all the problems of the world, so they needed to be rounded up and exterminated. It won't be too hard to convince everyone that this is a good idea, since the Jews were already hated by just about everyone. Hitler will be very successful in systematically rounding up, torturing and gassing to death over six million Jews, over half the world's population. After that the blatant anti-Semitism will pretty much go underground for seventy years, until a man named Donald Trump will give all the anti-Semites to resurface and renew acts of hate and violence.

*[Everyone sits in stunned silence for a moment, then an agitated, uncomfortable Abraham speaks and tries to change the mood]*

**ABE:** *(nervously)* Well, that IS interesting. Perhaps you better tell us what we get out of being your Chosen People.

**GOD:** Well, as a result of enduring so much, your descendants will survive long after all the other cultures in Western Civilization die out.

**SARAH:** Wow, I guess that means that someday everyone will be Jewish.

**GOD:** Well, not so much. You see, your son, Ishmael here will become the father of a whole new nation, which will eventually become called Islam, and the followers will be called Muslims. They will actually grow much larger than the Jews.

**SARAH:** What?

**HAGAR:** *(excited)* ALL RIGHT! Do you hear that, Ishmael, my boy?

**ISHMAEL:** *(dully)* Call me Ishmael.

**HAGAR:** So, that must mean that Islam will be the world's largest religion!

**GOD:** Well, no. You, Ishmael and your descendants, will indeed become the mighty nation. But, in 1900 years from now, a descendant of Isaac, a wonderful man and great teacher will be born named Jesus. His followers will start a new religion called, Christianity. That religion will by far become the world's largest religion, followed by Islam as a distant second. The Jews will be tiny compared to them—partly because Christians and Muslims will regularly try to convert them, subjugate them and kill them.

*[Dead silence again]*

**ISSAC:** This is so screwed up!

**SARAH:** Issac! You can't talk that way in front of the Lord Almighty!

**ISSAC:** Why not? I'm not using his name in vain.

**SARAH:** Because it isn't proper. I taught you better than that.

**ISSAC:** Yeah, well since you let dad take me up to that mountain to sacrifice me, I've decided to individuate and rebel against both of you. It's either cursing, piercings, or tattooing. You choose.

**ABE:** I think it's time to move on.....Lord, I think I'm missing something here. It doesn't sound very good to be your chosen people.

**GOD:** Not so fast. Even though the Jews will be small in number, they will be amazingly successful. They will dominate the fields of economics, finance, and entertainment—winning many international prizes in all these areas. They will be one of the most learn-ed, educated, and successful people the world has ever known.

**ISAAC:** What about sports?

**GOD:** They will dominate the fields of economics, finance, and entertainment—

**ABE:** Well, now, there you go, that is impressive.

**GOD:** Also, in addition to your unparalleled success, competence and achievement, most of your people will be assertive, amazingly creative, excellent communicators, and great in bed.

**ISSAC:** Now, you're talking!

**ABE:** Alright, sounds pretty good. So, what do WE have to do in return?

**GOD:** Well, for starters, all of your male children, like Isaac here, will have to have the tips of their penises cut off!

**ISAAC:** (rising to leave) I'm out of here!

**ABE:** (*Emphatically*) Sit down son!

**GOD:** Earlier today, you were about to take a knife to Isaac and kill him. Cutting off the tips of their penises, is an important symbol of your test of faith and our agreement to make you my Chosen People.

*[Stunned silence]*

**ISAAC:** Where the heck did you find this God, Dad?

**GOD:** I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that.

**ABE:** Okay, let's continue with our requirements for us to be your Chosen People.

**GOD:** Some other important requirements are that you must focus on doing deeds of loving kindness toward your fellowman—actively help and support people less fortunate than yourselves, and be the most philanthropic people in the world—continually donating to social issues and the arts.

**SARAH:** That doesn't sound too bad. Anything else?

**GOD:** Yes, once a year, you must come together as a community and atone for your sins; and when each person reaches the age of 13, they must stand before the community and decide whether or not they want to accept the responsibilities and benefits of being my Chosen People, or not.

**HARAN:** Well, that's reasonable!

**GOD:** And last, but not least, each Jewish man is commanded and required to make love to his wife at least once a week, but preferably more, and it is the law that he makes sure his wife has an orgasm first, before he does. *[Note: This is absolutely true]*

**SARAH:** I'm in!

**HARAN:** Me, too

**NARRATOR:** Sign me up!

**HAGAR:** Can I convert?.....*(pause)*

**ABE:** So, is that it? Are there not any other requirements to being your Chosen People?

**GOD:** Not requirements, per se. There are a few other things I'd like you to try to do, if you can make them meaningful to you—and not do them out of obligation.

**HARAN:** Like what

**GOD:** Not eating pork or seafood, resting on and honoring one day a week as holy, and a bunch of other things that you can do if you find meaning in them.

**SARAH:** And what if generations from now, some Jews doubt your existence or don't believe in you?

**GOD:** You don't have to believe in me.....I believe in you.

**NARRATOR:** And with that, the deal was made and the contract signed..... and the Jews became the Chosen People. Now let's eat!

### **THE MEAL IS SERVED!**

*[At the right time, just before everyone is finished eating,  
the Seder continues on the next page]:*

#### IV. High Holiday Theme #2: Forgiveness

The first day of Rosh Hashanah begins the “*Ten Days of Awe*,” where we are commanded to look at babies and small pets and say: “*Awwwww!*” Wait a minute, that’s not right. The “*Ten Days of Awe*,” are the time we are commanded to reflect upon and “take stock” of all the things in the past year we did, that we should not have done—and all the things we failed to do that we should have done. During these ten days, we try to think about and remember the things that we need forgiveness for on Yom Kippur.

*[Leader passes out a piece of paper and pens to everyone]*

##### **Leader**

On your piece of paper, which is for your eyes only, write-down your answers to the following five questions:

1. What is a significant thing you did in the past, that you wish you had not done?
2. What is something that you have intended to do, but have never gotten around to doing?
3. What is a significant thing you have done that hurt another person that you’d like to be forgiven for.
4. What is a significant thing another person did to you that really hurt you—that you really need to forgive.
5. What is a significant thing you have done in your past, that you have not yet been able to forgive yourself for?

After you have finished writing down all your answers, turn your paper over and place it face down on the table.

#### **DESSERT AND COFFEE ARE SERVED**

*[After everyone is finished with their dessert and coffee, the dishes are cleared away, and candles are brought to the table]*

#### **The Power of Forgiveness**

**LEADER:** There is great power in the act of Forgiveness. When hurts stay inside you, they fester and generate feelings that distort your thinking. It seems you could never forgive the monster who hurt you. But, as soon as you express your pain in an honest and constructive way, then it is possible to let it go—and then you can begin the process of healing.

### **Fire Ritual Part 1: Community Acknowledgement**

**READER #1:** We will begin by lighting all the candles that are on the table, and turning off all the other lights. *[Do so]* Now, one at a time, we will go around the table, and when it is your turn, either say: 1) nothing, 2) something from your paper that you want to give more power to, by saying it in community, or 3) anything meaningful for the moment you would like to add.

*[Everyone, in turn, goes around and says their piece]*

### **Fire Ritual Part 2: Letting Go**

**READER #2:** We will now go out to the porch to perform the “letting go” ritual. Please take your candles with you. *[Everyone goes outside with their candles. There will be a big bowl of water on a table out on the porch. We gather around the table]*

**READER #3:** Now, one at a time, light your paper, as an act of letting go of the pain of these past hurts. Then, as the paper starts to burn, throw it into the bowl of water, while saying: *“I forgive these people and myself and want to move on without pain, guilt or shame.”* *[Everyone, in turn, does so]*

### **Forgiving Partners with God**

**READER #4:** God has said to us that he can only wipe the slate clean once we have done our job first.

**READER #5:** Next week, on Yom Kippur, God can forgive us for something, if and only if, we have asked the person we have wronged (*including ourselves*) for forgiveness. Otherwise, no dice—forget it!

**READER #6:** That’s why these next ten days are so important to Jews all over the world.

**READER #7:** After taking stock of what we have done that we should not have done.....and what we failed to do that we should have done, we need to ask for forgiveness, before Yom Kippur, so that God can wipe the slate clean and we can start again with a fresh chance.

**READER #8:** If we don’t fulfill our obligation, God will not fulfill his.

**LEADER:** Don’t take these next ten days lightly.....

---