

BREAD *of* AFFLICTION:
MATZAH, HUNGER, AND RACE

This guide was created in partnership with Hazon, an organization dedicated to creating healthier and more sustainable communities in the Jewish world and beyond.

APPETIZER

FRAMING

Ha Lachma Anya ("this is the bread of affliction") is the first passage from the *magid*[1] section of the Passover *haggadah*. It is at the heart of the *seder,* the ritual Passover meal, where participants tell the story and read interpretations of the Exodus from Egypt. It is fitting that we, too, open up our discussion by looking at this text.

In some North African Jewish traditions, one lifts the seder plate and/or the *matzah* over people's heads and sings: *bibhilu yatzanu mimitzrayim* ("we left Egypt in a hurry") before reciting the passage on the right.[2] In Ashkenazi (Eastern European) Jewish tradition, one lifts up or points to the matzah at the opening line of *Ha Lachma Anya.*[3] If you don't have any *matzah* around, you can use the picture of *matzah* on this page; follow either of these traditions or use your own!

TRANSLATION

This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat; let all who are needy come and celebrate Passover. Now we are here; next year may we be in the Land of Israel. Now we are slaves; next year may we be free.

TRANSLITERATION

Ha lakhma anya, di akhalu avhatana, b'ara d'mitzrayim. Kol dichfin yetei v'yeichol, kol ditzrich yeitei v'yifsach. Hashata hacha, l'shanah haba'ah b'arah d'yisrael. Hashata avdei, l'shanah haba'ah b'nei chorin.

TRADITIONAL ARAMAIC[4]

הָא לַחְמָא עַנְיָא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אַבְהָתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא
דְּמִצְרָיִם. כָּל דִּכְפִין יֵיתֵי וְיֵכוֹל, כָּל דִּצְרִיךְ
יֵיתֵי וְיִפְסַח. הַשַּׁתָּא הָכָא, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה
בְּאַרְעָא דְיִשְׂרָאֵל. הַשַּׁתָּא עַבְדֵי, לְשָׁנָה
הַבָּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין:

DICUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What would it mean for you to fulfill the statement, "let all who are hungry, come and eat"?
2. What is the relationship between the "bread of affliction" and the two commandments that follow?
3. What does it mean for you to say, "now we are slaves"?

1 | Magid is the fifth section in the order of a Passover *seder* (*seder* means "order" in Hebrew). It is the part of the evening where Jews fulfill the core commandment of Passover to tell the story of the Israelites' journey from slavery to freedom.

2 | Rabbi Daniel Bouskila (2005) The Blessing of Bibhilu http://jewishjournal.com/news/world/11266/.

3 | Guggenheimer, H. (1998). The Scholar's Haggadah. New Jersey: Jason Aronson, Inc.

4 | Aramaic is closely related to Hebrew. It served as an important regional language throughout the Middle East from the 10th century BCE to the 7th century CE, and many Jewish texts from that period, including this portion of the *haggadah*, are written in it.

ENTREE

In Exodus, the second book of the Torah (Bible), the ancient Israelites made a hasty departure from Egypt. They did not have time to prepare the food that they saw most fit for their families as they were fleeing from Egypt. Though time is the only barrier that's explicitly mentioned, there certainly were others, just as there are for individuals and families living in poverty today.

In the United States, People of Color experience significantly higher rates of poverty[5] and food insecurity[6] than people who identify as white. Even with access to resources, it takes precious time to purchase groceries, prepare each meal, and eat. Let's peek into the Israelites' experience as a launchpad to think about the experiences of oppressed communities in the United States. The first text describes how and why the Israelites created matzah.

"THEY HAD BEEN DRIVEN OUT OF EGYPT AND COULD NOT DELAY"

So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders…

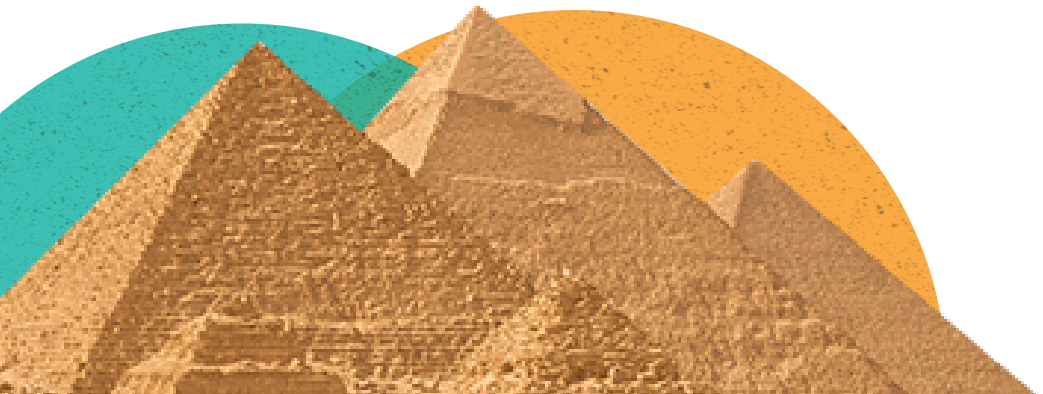
And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.[7]

וַיִּשָּׂא הָעָם אֶת־בְּצֵקוֹ טֶרֶם יֶחְמָץ
מִשְׁאֲרֹתָם צְרֻרֹת בְּשִׂמְלֹתָם עַל־
שִׁכְמָם:
...
וַיֹּאפוּ אֶת־הַבָּצֵק אֲשֶׁר הוֹצִיאוּ
מִמִּצְרַיִם עֻגֹת מַצּוֹת כִּי לֹא חָמֵץ
כִּי־גֹרְשׁוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם וְלֹא יָכְלוּ
לְהִתְמַהְמֵהַּ וְגַם־צֵדָה לֹא־עָשׂוּ
לָהֶם:

5 | https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/acsbr11-17.pdf

6 | https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics.aspx#householdtype

7 | Exodus 12:34, 12:39



THE FOLLOWING STORY, FROM NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE'S SERIES, THE NEW FACE OF HUNGER, RECOUNTS A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A SINGLE MOTHER IN HER EARLY 30'S. IT IS PART OF A LARGER ARTICLE THAT PROFILES THREE DIFFERENT FAMILIES FACING HUNGER IN THE US.

Jacqueline Christian is another Houston mother who has a full-time job, drives a comfortable sedan, and wears flattering clothes. Her older son, 15-year-old Ja'Zarrian, sports bright orange Air Jordans. There's little clue to the family's hardship until you learn that their clothes come mostly from discount stores, that Ja'Zarrian mowed lawns for a summer to get the sneakers, that they're living in a homeless shelter, and that despite receiving $325 in monthly food stamps, Christian worries about not having enough food "about half of the year."

Christian works as a home health aide, earning $7.75 an hour at a job that requires her to crisscross Houston's sprawl to see her clients. Her schedule, as much as her wages, influences what she eats. To save time she often relies on premade food from grocery stores. "You can't go all the way home and cook," she says.

On a day that includes running a dozen errands and charming her payday loan officer into giving her an extra day, Christian picks up Ja'Zarrian and her seven-year-old, Jerimiah, after school. As the sun drops in the sky, Jerimiah begins complaining that he's hungry. The neon glow of a Hartz Chicken Buffet appears up the road, and he starts in: Can't we just get some gizzards, please?

Christian pulls into the drive-through and orders a combo of fried gizzards and okra for $8.11. It takes three declined credit cards and an emergency loan from her mother, who lives nearby, before she can pay for it. When the food finally arrives, filling the car with the smell of hot grease, there's a collective sense of relief. On the drive back to the shelter the boys eat until the gizzards are gone, and then drift off to sleep.

Christian says she knows she can't afford to eat out and that fast food isn't a healthy meal. But she'd felt too stressed—by time, by Jerimiah's insistence, by how little money she has—not to give in. "Maybe I can't justify that to someone who wasn't here to see, you know?" she says. "But I couldn't let them down and not get the food."[8]

DICUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does it feel like when you don't have enough time to prepare a good meal for yourself or eat in a relaxed manner?
2. What does this text highlight about the relationship between time and nutritious food?
3. Is there anything that surprised you from Jacqueline's story? Why?
4. What are the barriers that Jacqueline faces, and what are the origins of some of those barriers? How do they connect to the biblical verses above?

8 | Tracie McMillan (August 2014) The New Face of Hunger, National Geographic Magazine http://www.nationalgeographic.com/foodfeatures/hunger/.

COST	TIME	CULTURE & ACCESS
Junk food gives you more calories for your dollar.	Working two or more low-wage jobs leaves little time to prepare food at home.	The local grocery store doesn't sell the food that you know how to prepare.
Healthy and fresh food is more expensive.	Grocery stores with good options for healthy food and fresh produce are much less common in low-income neighborhoods.	Your culture's food might be (fairly or unfairly) stigmatized as unhealthy by current nutritional standards.
Any time spent buying, transporting, and cooking food is time that you are not working or making money.	Fresh food is perishable and is a greater risk because it might expire before you get around to eating it.	You might not have access to a stove, oven, or refrigerator, or other components of a 'full' kitchen.

DICUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which barrier or group of barriers struck you the most? Why?
2. Are there other ways that you could arrange or categorize these barriers? How does this shed light on hunger and poverty?
3. Do cost, time, culture, or access present barriers in your life? Were there any that you never thought about before? Why?

DESSERT

We opened this discussion with a declaration that matzah is "the bread of affliction," the bread of oppression and poverty, but it isn't just a symbol of the hardships that the Israelites endured. In the Passover story, matzah is what the Israelites ate after they became free[9] *— making it a symbol of liberation, as well as a symbol of oppression.*

The barriers to buying, cooking, and eating healthy foods are real. The damage caused by these barriers, including consequences on health and life expectancy, are far too real for many people in the United States and around the world. Eating matzah at the seder connects guests to cultural memories of barriers to healthy food, as well as the memories of overcoming those challenges as we move from slavery to freedom. Through discussion, learning, and action, we turn our symbols of oppression into symbols of liberation and must support other individuals and groups in their journeys to move from oppression to liberation.



9 | Exodus 12:39