



Pesah
5777
at PAS

The Power of Protest

PAS
Haggadah
Supplement

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Hag Pesah sameah!

The seder is about many things: family, food, traditions, and questions. It is also about a group of people standing up to an oppressive power and freeing themselves with God's help. We are told in the Torah time and time again that we must remember that we were once slaves in the land of Egypt. This phrase is taken by rabbis both ancient and modern to mean that we Jews must act to correct injustice that we see in the world. What should that action be? How do we stand up to power or to the status quo? No matter what the cause, there must be a way to work for it.

This Seder night we invite you to explore the forms and uses of protest, using as many of the readings and questions in this Haggadah supplement as fit your seder participants. But the conversation doesn't have to stop there. You can also use the texts and discussion questions on Shabbat during Pesah and on into the weeks ahead.

Rabbi Ethan Witkovsky and the PAS Clergy



Must we protest?

Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 54b-55a

כל מי שאפשר למחות לאנשי ביתו ולא מיהה – נתפס על אנשי ביתו, באנשי עירו – נתפס על אנשי עירו, בכל העולם כולו – נתפס על כל העולם כולו. אמר רב פפא: והני דבי ריש גלותא נתפסו על כולי עלמא. כי הא דאמר רבי חנינא: מאי דכתיב (ישעיהו ג) ה' במשפט יבא עם זקני עמו ושריו, אם שרים חטאו – זקנים מה חטאו? אלא, אימא: על זקנים שלא מיהו בשרים.

Anyone who is able to protest against the transgressions of their household and does not protest, is held accountable for the actions of the members of their household; against the people of their town and does not, is held accountable for the transgressions of their townspeople; against the transgressions of the entire world and does not, is held accountable for the transgressions of the entire world. Rav Papa said: The house of the Resh Galuta (leader of Jewish community in Persia) was held accountable for the transgressions of the entire world. As Rav Hanina said, “What is the meaning of the verse, ‘God will bring judgment on the elders and the officers of the people?’ (Isaiah 3:14) If the officers sinned, how could the elders have also sinned? Rather, say that God brings judgment on the elders for not having protested against the transgressions of the officers.”

Frank Herbert, *Dune*

“Who asks for justice? We make our own justice . . . let us not rail about justice as long as we have arms and the freedom to use them.”

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- **Ask the oldest person in the room if they have ever protested something. What was it, and how did they protest?**
 - **Ask the youngest person in the room the same question, or ask what they think it means to protest.**
 - **Why is protesting something important? What is the goal of protesting?**



Can you protest through persistence?

Haggadah

(from Feast of Freedom, the Haggadah of the Rabbinical Assembly)

ואת עמלנו. אלו הבנים. שפרעה גזר: כל הבן
בילוד היארה תשליכהו וכל הבת תחיון. היו
ישראל מלים את בניהם במצריים: למה אתם
מלים אותם, שלאחר שעה אנו משליכים אתם
בנהר? אמרו להם: אף על פי כן נמול אותם.

“**Our misery.**” This refers to the drowning of the sons, for Pharaoh decreed, “every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.” (Exodus 1:22) The Israelites would circumcise their sons in Mitzrayim. The Egyptians would ask, “Why do you insist upon circumcising them? In a little while we shall throw them into the river.” The Israelites would respond, “Nevertheless we shall circumcise them.”

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- **Are the Israelites here being brave or foolish? How is this a protest?**
 - **Whom is the protest for, the Egyptians or the Israelites?**
 - **Go around the table and say something that you would still do even if it became illegal.**



Can protest be violent?

I Maccabees 2:23-25

23 καὶ ὡς ἐπαύσατο λαλῶν τοὺς λόγους τούτους, προσήλθεν ἀνὴρ Ἰουδαῖος ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς πάντων θυσιάσαι ἐπὶ τοῦ βωμοῦ ἐν Μωδεῖν κατὰ τὸ πρόσταγμα τοῦ βασιλέως. 24 καὶ εἶδεν Ματθαθίας καὶ ἐζήλωσεν, καὶ ἐτρόμησεν οἱ νεφροὶ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀνήνεγκεν θυμὸν κατὰ τὸ κρίμα καὶ δραμῶν ἔσφαξεν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸν βωμόν. 25 καὶ τὸν ἄνδρα τοῦ βασιλέως τὸν ἀναγκάζοντα θύειν ἀπέκτεινεν ἐν τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ καὶ τὸν βωμὸν καθεῖλεν.

23 Now when he had left speaking these words, there came one of the Jews in the sight of all to sacrifice on the foreign altar which was at Modin, according to the king's commandment. 24 This thing when Mattathias saw, he was inflamed with zeal, and his reins trembled, neither could he restrain his anger according to judgment: he ran, and slew him upon the altar. 25 Also the king's commissioner, who compelled men to sacrifice, he killed at that time, and the altar he pulled down.

Exodus 2:11-12

יָא וַיְהִי אֲבִימִים הָהֵם וַיֵּגְדֵל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל-אֶחָיו וַיֵּרָא בְּסִבְלָתָם וַיֵּרָא אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם מַכֵּה אִישׁ-עִבְרָיִ מֵאֶחָיו: יָב וַיִּפֶן כֹּה וְכֹה וַיֵּרָא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ וַיִּדֹ אֶת-הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ בַחֹל:

11 And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown up, that he went out to his brethren and looked on their burdens; he saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his brethren. 12 He looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he smote the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.

- **What does it mean that Moses “looked this way and that way”?**
- **Did Moses do the right thing? Why or why not?**
- **Is violence ever justified? When?**
- **Are we responsible for our reactions?**



Can generosity be a form of protest?

Haggadah

הָא לַחֲמַא עֲנִיא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אַבְרָהָמָא בְּאַרְעָא
דְּמִצְרַיִם. כָּל דְּכָפִין יִיתֵי וַיְכוּל, כָּל דְּעָרִיד יִיתֵי
וַיִּפְסַח. הַשְּׁתָּא הָכָא, לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה בְּאַרְעָא
דִּישְׂרָאֵל. הַשְּׁתָּא עַבְדֵּי, לְשָׁנָה הַבְּאָה בְּנֵי חוֹרִין:

This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. All who are hungry should come and eat; anyone who is in need should come and partake of the Pesach sacrifice. Now we are here, next year we will be in the land of Israel; this year we are slaves, next year we will be free people.

Ursula LeGuin, *The Dispossessed*

You cannot buy the revolution. You cannot make the revolution. You can only be the revolution. It is in your spirit, or it is nowhere.

- ***In what way is feeding the hungry a protest?***
- ***What are we protesting by welcoming all to partake of our seder?***
- ***How can one “be” the revolution?***



Can you protest by disobeying?

Exodus 1:15-21

טו וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְמִילְדוֹת הָעִבְרִית אֲשֶׁר שָׁם הָאֵחָת שִׁפְרָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית פּוּעָה: טז וַיֹּאמֶר בְּיִלְדוֹכֶן אֶת־הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וּרְאִיתֶן עַל־הָאֲבָנִים אִם־בֵּן הוּא וְהַמְתֵּן אֹתוֹ וְאִם־בַּת הוּא וְחָיָה: יז וְתִירְאֵן הַמִּילְדוֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וְלֹא עָשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵיהֶן מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וַתַּחֲיֶינָן אֶת־הַיְלָדִים: יח וַיִּקְרָא מֶלֶךְ־מִצְרַיִם לְמִילְדוֹת וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶן מַדּוּעַ עָשִׂיתֶן הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וַתַּחֲיֶינָן אֶת־הַיְלָדִים: יט וַתֹּאמְרֶינָן הַמִּילְדוֹת אֶל־פְּרֹעֶה כִּי לֹא כַּנְּשִׁים הַמִּצְרַיִת הָעִבְרִית כִּי־חַיּוֹת הֵנָּה בְּטָרֶם תָּבוֹא אֲלֵהֶן הַמִּילְדוֹת וַיִּלְדוּ: כ וַיִּיטֹב אֱלֹהִים לְמִילְדוֹת וַיִּרְבּ הָעָם וַיַּעֲצְמוּ מְאֹד: כא וַיְהִי כִּי־יָרְאוּ הַמִּילְדוֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים: כב וַיִּצְוּ פְּרֹעֶה לְכַל־עַמּוֹ לֵאמֹר כָּל־בֶּן־בְּלִיָּד תִּשְׁלַכְהוּ וְכָל־בַּת־תַּחֲיֶינָן:

15 And the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, the name of the one was Shifrah, and the name of the other Puah; 16 and he said: "When you perform as a midwife to the Hebrew women, look upon the birthstool: if it be a son, then you shall kill him; but if it be a daughter, then she shall live." 17 But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men-children alive. 18 And the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said to them: "Why have you done this thing, and have saved the men-children alive?" 19 And the midwives said to Pharaoh: "Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwife come to them." 20 And God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. 21 And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that God made them houses. 22 And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying: "Every son that is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive."



Can you protest by disobeying?

Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from a Birmingham Jail, 16 April 1963

I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that “an unjust law is no law at all.”

Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority. Segregation, to use the terminology of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, substitutes an “I-it” relationship for an “I-thou” relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. Hence segregation is not only politically, economically and sociologically unsound, it is morally wrong and sinful.

In our own nation, the Boston Tea Party represented a massive act of civil disobedience. We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was “legal” and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was “illegal.” It was “illegal” to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler’s Germany. Even so,

I am sure that, had I lived in Germany at the time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers. If today I lived in a Communist country where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I would openly advocate disobeying that country’s antireligious laws.

One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.

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- ***The midwives’ actions were brave because they defied Pharaoh. Martin Luther King’s actions were brave because he put himself and others in danger. Does protest always require bravery?***
 - ***The term “Hebrew midwives” is ambiguous as to Shifrah and Puah’s religion. Does whether they are Israelites or Egyptians change the meaning of their actions?***
 - ***Shifrah and Puah’s disobedience was private while Martin Luther King’s was public. Does that matter?***



What do you stand for?

Exodus 2:11-12

מִתְחִלָּה עֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה הָיוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ. וְעַכְשָׁיו
קָרַבְנוּ הַמָּקוֹם לְעֲבוֹדָתוֹ. שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה
אֶל־כָּל־הָעָם. כֹּה אָמַר יי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּעֶבֶר
הַנָּהָר יֵשְׁבוּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם מֵעוֹלָם, תֵּרַח אָבִי אֲבֹרָה
וְנָחוֹר. וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים:

From the beginning, our ancestors were idol worshippers. And now, God has brought us close to God's service, as it is said: "Joshua said to the whole people, so said the Lord, God of Israel, 'over the river did your ancestors dwell from always, Terah the father of Avraham and the father of Nahor, and they worshiped other gods.'" (Joshua 24:2-4)

Genesis Rabbah 42:8

וַיִּגַּד לְאַבְרָם הָעֵבֶרִי . . . רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר כֹּל
הָעוֹלָם כּוֹלּוּ מֵעֵבֶר אֶחָד וְהוּא מֵעֵבֶר אֶחָד.

"And God said to Avram the Hebrew (*ha-Ivri*) . . .
Rabbi Yehudah said: (he was called "*Ivri*" because)
the entire world stood on one side and he stood on the
other. [The root of the word *ivri* means "to cross over,"
thus, "to be on the other side from."]

Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

- **What set Abraham apart from the rest of the world?**
- **How did it feel for him to stand on one side against the entire world?**
- **Were our American Founding Fathers anything like our Jewish forefathers? How?**
- **What do you care about so much you would stand against the world for it?**

