

JEWISH RESISTANCE AT THE SEDER TABLE

J E W S F O R R A C I A L & E C O N O M I C J U S T I C E

Passover is a night of questions. This year, we are especially considering the questions: What is the liberation we are fighting for today? What is the Jewish Resistance? What is my role in it?

During *Pesach*, Jews remember and retell our stories of resistance to oppression. In this terrifying political moment we are vividly reminded that our safety and resistance as Jews is intimately bound up with the safety and resistance of others. **We are compelled by our ancestors, our values, and our convictions as a people to resist the unabashed white supremacy of the current administration** and its policies—the ban on immigrants and refugees from six predominantly Muslim nations, the building of a wall between the U.S. and Mexico, attacks on LGBTQ, Jewish, immigrant, refugee, Black, Muslim, Arab, worker, and poor communities (among others), and the systematic undermining of the safety net and democratic institutions.

All across the country, Jews are rising to this challenge. **We are the Jewish Resistance of our time.** We resist by refusing to cooperate with unjust laws, by marching in the streets, by lobbying officials, by donating resources, and by taking risks. We resist through action, prayer, commitment, rebuke, and a care perfected over thousands of years. There is a role for everyone in this movement—we are multi-racial, multi-class, intergenerational, and we come from every Jewish tradition. We are the overwhelming majority of the Jewish community, we live in big cities, mainstream suburbs, and small towns. We know where we come from and where we are going, and we believe that we can win.

In New York, Jews For Racial & Economic Justice (JFREJ) organizes and mobilizes the Jewish community to fight for justice. We often incorporate ritual into our work, such as this haggadah supplement that you hold in your hands. We hope that the wrestling, thinking, and feeling it provokes—in the great tradition of our people—will be a powerful part of your seder and will lead to meaningful action for the liberation of all people.



Join JFREJ's
SEDER IN THE STREETS
Thursday, April 13th

4:15

Gather for Opening
Program on City Hall
steps

5:30

Seder Begins at
Foley Square

A COMMENTARY ON EXODUS

Adapted from the 5775 Mizrahi Caucus Haggadah

We read at the start of Exodus that the oppression and enslavement of the Israelites in the land of ancient Egypt stemmed from Pharaoh's fear that they would overwhelm the Egyptian nation. Our community is all too familiar with a telling of the Passover story that inaccurately compares ancient Egyptians to the modern day Middle East. We regularly hear the narrative that in order to be free, our ancestors needed to flee Arab lands, Arab culture, and Arab rule. In this telling of the story, Arab Muslim people are, and always have been, the perpetual enemy of the Jewish people.

As Mizrahi Jews, in particular, we can feel this tension in our bones. For thousands of years, our ancestors lived in Muslim-majority countries—the very same lands that are now included in Trump's Muslim travel ban—many of them in relative peace and safety. Yet most of us have been taught that our own Exodus as Jews was our version of liberation. That we therefore must erase all parts of ourselves that are Arab. That to be both Arab and Jewish at once is impossible. But we work to reject that.

On this Passover, we have the opportunity to reflect on a different reading of what makes liberation possible—not only for ourselves, but for everyone. As Pharaoh's fear echoes again today—that Arab, Muslim, and South Asian communities, queer and trans folks, immigrants, and undocumented communities will once again “overwhelm” the nation we live in today—we recommit as a community to fighting for true sanctuary for all people facing criminalization, displacement, and deportation. We know that none of us are free until all of us are free.



A CUP TO #NoBanNoWallsNoRaids

To vision, to strength, to sweetness along the way. Our ancestors, the mixed multitude of Israelites and others who fled Egypt, tore down walls, refused deathly bans, and protected each other along the way. May their legacy be our strength as we in our time block the building of walls, resist Islamophobic bans, support and protect refugees and immigrants, and resist police violence and broken windows policing. May this cup ignite our dreams, fuel our courage, grant us strength for the fight ahead.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו רוח העולם בורא פרי הגפן:

***Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu ruach
ha'olam borei p'ri hagafen.***

Blessed are You God, Spirit
of the universe, creator of
the fruit of the vine.

פרי הגפן - אתו נשתה לחיים!

P'ri hagafen, ito nishteh, "l'chayim!"

The fruit of the vine, with it
let us drink “to life!”

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PLAGUES AS ESCALATION

According to tradition, God brought ten plagues against the Egyptians, culminating in the death of all first-born males. At progressive seders, many have also listed contemporary plagues of injustice and oppression.

An alternate reading is that the plagues were the escalating tactics used to release the Israelites from bondage in Mitzrayim.

They were used to agitate Pharaoh, to push towards the inevitable freedom for the Israelites and for all who were also oppressed in Pharaoh's narrow kingdom. We offer for today our ten principles of escalation for the resistance we bring to our fight against walls, bans, and raids, as well as to the broader systems of racism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism.

For each escalation tactic, dip your finger into your cup, and drop the wine or juice onto your plate or napkin.

These escalation tactics are not the traditional plagues that caused destruction and death for those in Pharaoh's kingdom; we know that as we escalate our tactics we also escalate risks and sacrifice, and might be required to put ourselves on the line in new and uncomfortable ways. Escalation requires creativity and flexibility in ourselves, and it also often requires disruption and discomfort for others.

1. We frame and reframe the issue.
2. We build awareness with our people and the public.
3. We inspire outrage; we inspire urgency.
4. We inspire moral courage; we claim the moral high ground.
5. We make the invisible visible.
6. We disrupt in order to push our target into a narrower decision dilemma.
7. We entice toward another future—towards the world as it should be.
8. We use new tactics and bring in new allies.
9. We engage more people, more often, and draw in more attention.
10. We make unprecedented sacrifices and take unprecedented risks until all are free.

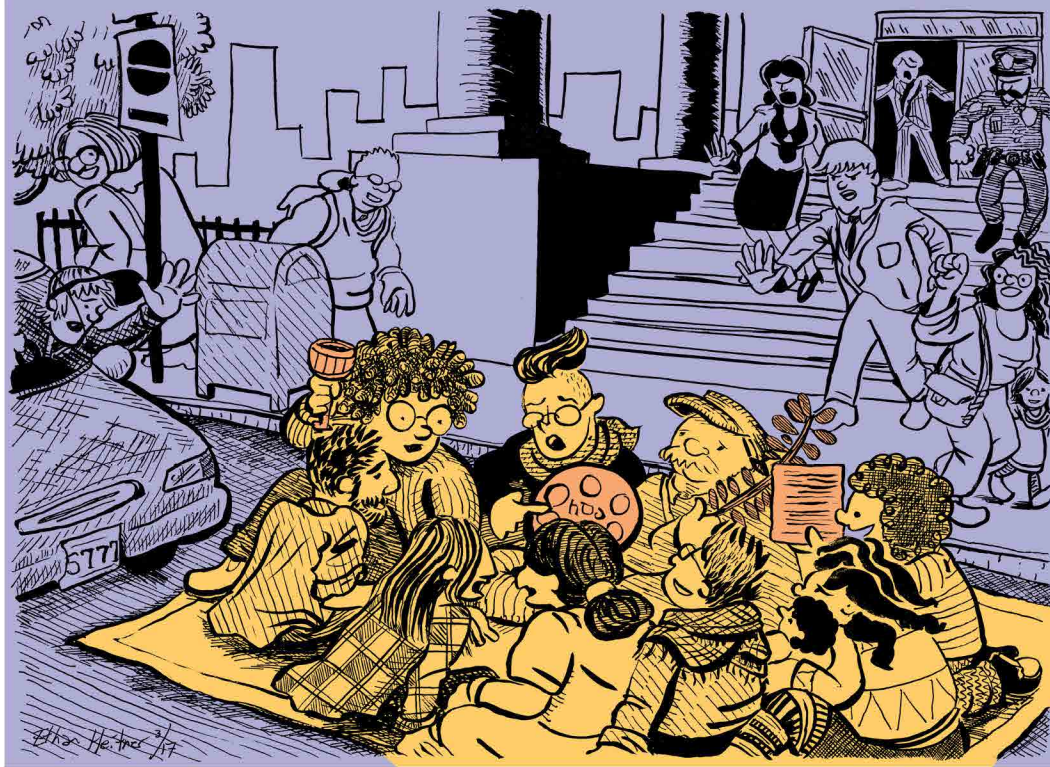


Illustration by Ethan Heitner

DISCUSSION:

Strategy is a broad, resilient framework for achieving our goals. Tactics are the specific activities that mobilize a specific type of power, are directed at a specific target, and are intended to achieve a specific objective.

People often misunderstand or dismiss social actions because they don't think of them as tactics that fit into a broader strategy, which in turn is a broader approach towards a goal. It can be hard to understand and make informed decisions about tactics, because strategy is complex and elusive. Sometimes it can be hard to tell the difference between what we want to achieve and our strategy for achieving it.

In the resistance movement against Trumpism, what is our strategy? How is it different from our goal itself? How do our tactics fit together to advance a strategy?

Given the threats of this current moment, how do we effectively escalate our resistance? Can we move from a defensive stance of fighting back against attacks on our community and others to one where we are on the offensive, putting out a clear vision of collective liberation? What are the kinds of tactics we need to consider in order to get there?

A DISCUSSION OF PASSOVER, SOLIDARITY, & HATE-FREE ZONES

*with Dania Rajendra, JFREJ board member, and
Nayim Islam, Desis Rising Up and Moving (DRUM)
Immigrant Rights Organizer*

Passover is at its heart about solidarity—the solidarity of Pharaoh’s daughter with the Israelites by rescuing Moses, the sometimes invisible role of Egyptians who worked alongside Jews and facilitated and joined our escape, the boundary crossing of Moses to rejoin the Jews. In this context, this Passover, we think about Hate-Free Zones, DRUM’s effort to ensure that immigrants and Muslims in particular—as well as all others—feel safe in New York City neighborhoods. Hate-Free Zones are about relationship building, so our communities become self-sustaining with active participation from everyone. You can put a sign in the window of your home or business, host or join a dinner to get to know your neighbors or local workers, participate in self-defense and bystander intervention trainings—so many ways to help people get to know one another and see that their neighbors are looking out for them.

Solidarity is a process—it’s hard to have solidarity with a person you don’t have a relationship with. Solidarity is also sacrifice, especially now. Solidarity is something we need to actively practice. DRUM thinks about solidarity on several levels. First, symbolic: saying publicly you’re in solidarity with someone. Then, transactional: when JFREJ encourages members to come to a rally focused on the experience of another community, or when DRUM does the same. Finally, transformative: mass-based, on a bigger level, a whole community level—where almost everyone feels, “Hey, we need to show up for them because we understand what they’re going through and we need to be with them to fight against it.” It is critical to understand the oppressed history of another group. By learning the history of Jews, of Muslims, of South Asians, of Arabs—Jewish, Muslim, and Christian—we’re making connections between what’s happening in synagogues, mosques, schools, subways, and streets.

***A Hate-Free Zone is not just a
declaration but the practice of building
a community defense system that will allow us
to defend our communities from workplace raids,
deportations, mass criminalization, violence, and
systemic violation of our rights and dignity. – DRUM***

TEFILAT HA'DERECH

Traveler’s Prayer for the Road Ahead

Miriam Grossman

May it be your will

**Our God and God of our ancestors,
that you lead us in peace and direct our steps
(our marching,
Rebellious, organized,
queer dance-partying,
prayerful steps)
in peace**

**and guide us in peace
and support us in just peace
(and in the tearing down of walls,
and in the rising up of peoples),
and cause us to reach our destination in life and joy
and peace
(all of us together, no one left behind).**

**Save us from every enemy and ambush,
from robbers and wild beasts
(And from tear gas and flash-bangs,
and sound cannons
and night sticks and rubber bullets,
from furious hands that reach
towards unarmed bodies).**

**May You confer blessing upon the work of our hands
(and our movements
and our histories: uplifted, remembered, redeemed).**

**Grant us grace, kindness, and mercy in Your eyes
and in the eyes of all who witness us,
(Let human bodies be seen as human bodies.)**

**and bestow upon us abundant kindness
(remind us there is no scarcity of vision, power,
strength)
and hearken to the voice of our prayer,
for You hear the prayers of all.**

**Blessed are You G-d, who hearkens to prayer
(and peace seeking and rabble rousing.
Blessed are we who journey in action and prayer.)**