



A Passover Message of Freedom from Hiddush

Dear Friends,

Passover's themes of liberation and redemption inherently express so many of our hopes and aspirations that the Jewish people have to finally fulfill the promises of freedom, justice and equality in our lives. Every year, we include additional prayers, poems, and other thoughtful pieces to include in our Passover seders; We look for the themes that express our vision of how our society should look.

Believing that religious freedom and equality are at the core of the struggle to create equitable societies, both Jewish and non-Jewish, Hiddush asked Rabbi John Rosove and Gordon Silverman to compose inserts to be supplement the Passover seder this year.

Rabbi Rosove's composition is appropriately titled "Imagine". It focuses on his vision – and ours – of Jewish communities, in Israel and around the world, that are dedicated to equality and inclusion. He emphasizes the principle of *b'tzelem elohim*, that every human is created in the Divine image.

Gordon has focused on the traditional Jewish ritual of counting the Omer, the seven-week ceremony begun at the end of the second seder and ending on the holiday of Shavuot. He chose that theme because it serves as a reminder of the holy task of building a just society. As we "turn our eyes toward Sinai" he writes, we, today, dedicate ourselves to the fulfillment of the dreams of Israel's founders for a Jewish state in which everyone has equal rights and "the richness of Judaism is celebrated".

We wish everyone a *chag kasher v'sameach*—a wonderful Passover rich with the warmth of family and full of seder rituals that awaken our desires for freedom and equality.

Stanley P. Gold
Hiddush Chair

Rabbi Uri Regev, esq.
Hiddush President



Imagine: Liberation, Marriage and Gender Equality in Israel and the Diaspora

Rabbi John Rosove

After 3250 years since our people's Exodus from Egypt

- Imagine that all citizens of Israel and the Diaspora will be able to fully celebrate their religious freedom and social equality as promised by Israel's Declaration of Independence, America's Constitution and Bill of Rights, and natural law!
- Imagine that in our Jewish national home and all Diaspora communities that all branches of Judaism will blossom in their respective nuanced shades and colors, where religious and secular movements dedicated to Jewish renewal will flourish side-by-side thereby forging new spiritual paths within Judaism!
- Imagine that in Israel and the Diaspora that every couple will be free to marry the person they love in a ceremony of their choice, whether religious or civil, gay or straight, and that their marriages will be recognized by the civil authorities of their country as authentic expressions of their love and commitment to each other!
- Imagine that in every community in Israel and the Diaspora, that Judaism will be embracing and inclusive of all those who wish to share their future as part of the People of Israel!
- Imagine an Israel and Diaspora in which gender equality fully guides the state, and women are not demeaned nor otherwise disadvantaged by religious dictate, prejudice, violence, or fear - in Israel on public bus lines, in personal status proceedings, in leadership of their communities, at the holiest site in Judaism, the *Kotel* (Western Wall) and other public venues – and everywhere that they will be paid equally for equal work while fulfilling their personal, familial and professional dreams!
- Imagine in all our communities that the fundamental promise of a society founded upon principles of freedom, justice and peace according to the vision of the prophets of Israel will be accepted by all because there is respect for religious freedom and individual conscience as a reflection of the principle of *b'tzelem Elohim*, that every human being is created in the Divine image!

Just imagine!

Sefirat Ha'Omer: Turning our eyes toward Sinai



Gordon Silverman, Hiddush US representative

Our Seder is near its conclusion. We have recounted the story of the Exodus, the story of our ancestors' Exodus to freedom – the freedom to pursue a new life for the Jewish nation in our homeland. Like our ancestors, it is time now to turn to Sinai where we will renew our commitment the responsibilities *peoplehood*, seeking to bring together the best tenets of our historic tradition with modernity, democracy and egalitarianism. Their journey was not easy; neither is ours.

Contemporary Jewry experienced the worst kind of oppression at the hands of the Nazis. A few years later, in 1948, we thankfully experienced redemption with the establishment of the State of Israel. Years after, Israel has accomplished much.

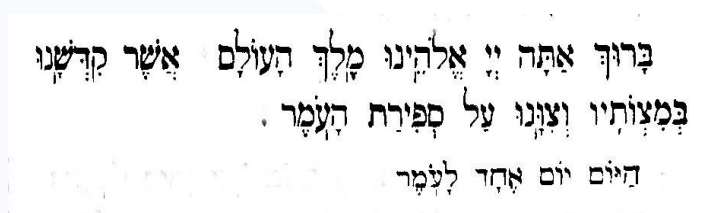
But the journey to the Promised Land has not ended.

So many Israelis still suffer because they choose to celebrate their Judaism and Jewishness outside the strictures of extreme Orthodoxy, which, until today, has controlled so many critical aspects of the Jewish life of the individual and the community in Israel: because one of their forebears was not Jewish; because they are of African descent; because they expect the democratic right to determine whom they will marry; because so many women are refused a divorce from an unhappy and destructive marriage.

Until all Israelis are seen – and treated – as equals, our task will not have been completed. Only then, will we be able to proudly say that our Jewish State has consummated the promise of its founders, when they signed the Declaration of Independence, to “ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants...to guarantee freedom of religion and conscience”.

As we begin the *counting of the omer* this evening, we commit ourselves to completing the journey to make Israel the democratic and inclusive Jewish state that its founders envisioned, that the overwhelming majority of its citizens aspire to, a nation in which all are equal and the richness of the Jewish rainbow is celebrated – not oppressed. *If only we will it, it will become a reality in our time.*

Together, we begin our journey to Sinai as we begin the 49-day recitation of the *Sefirat Ha'Omer*.



You are blessed, Our God, Creator of the Universe, who has made us holy with your laws and commanded us regarding the counting of the Omer

Today is Day One of the Omer