

The Peace of Wild Things

— Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
if fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting in their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

A Note

Wisława Szymborska

Life is the only way
to get covered in leaves,
catch your breath on the sand,
rise on wings;

to be a dog,
or stroke its warm fur;

to tell pain
from everything it's not;

to squeeze inside events,
dawdle in views,
to seek the least of all possible mistakes.

An extraordinary chance
to remember for a moment
a conversation held
with the lamp switched off;

and if only once
to stumble upon a stone,
end up soaked in one downpour or another,

mislaid your keys in the grass;
and to follow a spark on the wind with your eyes;
and to keep on not knowing
something important.”

Pesach

Bracha Meschaninov

House cleaned
more or less
kitchen surfaces covered
more or less
food ready
more or less
an experience of redemption
more or less

The Seder
We chewed the hand-made bread
of redemption
and wine specially made
children primed for performance... performed
and wonderful guests came and prayed
yet his eyes were sad and her skin showed strain
We left *Mitzraim*
but in pain we stayed.

“Poem Without an End”

by Yehuda Amichai

Inside the brand-new museum
there's an old synagogue.
Inside the synagogue
is me.
Inside me
my heart.
Inside my heart
a museum.
Inside the museum
a synagogue,
inside it
me,
inside me
my heart,
inside my heart
a museum.

Human Family **by Maya Angelou**

I note the obvious differences
in the human family.
Some of us are serious,
some thrive on comedy.

Some declare their lives are lived
as true profundity,
and others claim they really live
the real reality.

The variety of our skin tones
can confuse, bemuse, delight,
brown and pink and beige and purple,
tan and blue and white.

I've sailed upon the seven seas
and stopped in every land,
I've seen the wonders of the world
not yet one common man.

I know ten thousand women
called Jane and Mary Jane,
but I've not seen any two
who really were the same.

Mirror twins are different
although their features jibe,
and lovers think quite different thoughts
while lying side by side.

We love and lose in China,
we weep on England's moors,
and laugh and moan in Guinea,
and thrive on Spanish shores.

We seek success in Finland,
are born and die in Maine.
In minor ways we differ,
in major we're the same.

I note the obvious differences
between each sort and type,
but we are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

We are more alike, my friends,
than we are unlike.

We've come a long way toward getting nowhere

by Bob Hicok

My obsession with Jews is an obsession
with one Jew. I look at her walking
and wonder what anyone could have
against Jews, at her sleeping
or hunting for her keys in the morning,
which she does often, lose her keys
when she has to go to work, suggesting
she doesn't want to, and maybe this
is the problem with Jews:
they don't want to leave. Or they eat
lots of chicken. Or worry the black
of their skirts doesn't match the black
of their tops. Or like children more
than babies. Or fret over their mothers.
My Jewish problem is figuring out
why America in 2016 has a dab
of 1930s German Fascism to it—
people at political rallies
yelling crap about the Jews.
If I thought it would do any good,
I'd go to Topeka or wherever
and bring Eve with her troubled wardrobe
and her love of chicken and fascination
with children between two and thirteen,
when they can talk but before
they've begun planning the murder
of their parents, bring her face-to-face
with the screamers and ask, So these
are the freckles you hate? I would—we have
a lot of Amex points and I've never been
to Topeka or wherever, and I'm sure wherever

is very nice. And whenever we travel
to wherever, whatever people say
and however they say it, Eve's freckles
will be the same, kind of cute
and kind of Jewish,
just like all her other parts
that do and do not have freckles,
in an inventory I alone
get to take, though trust me—
after repeated inspection, I can attest
that underneath it all, she, like many
of the people you know or are,
is ticklish, wrinkly, sexy, scarred—
since Jews really are relentless
when it comes to being human.

Rupi Kaur,

the irony of loneliness
is that we all feel it
at the same time
together

The Journey

Kerry Leaf

I eat my way
Through the *seder*.
As my ancestor, Nachshon perhaps,
Dipped his toe in the Sea of Reeds
Or so I read,
I dip my egg into the sea of salt,
Fearlessly and safe from peril,
Reclining in my dining space,
The sweet flavor of lovingly prepared *charoset*,
Still caressing my tongue's memory,
I savor the sharpness of slices of horseradish,
Raw with life,
A wake-up alarm for my palette.
Bitter herbs, disturbing texture,
But, I conjecture, a necessary detour
On the journey to sweet brisket.
And the bread of affliction,
The restriction of a breadless week
Not unspeakable to me,
But rather an excuse
To slather butter and sprinkled salt
On boards of matzah
I willingly transform to less healthy
But delectable challenges
To my Passover cholesterol.
For an evening,
For two evenings,
Seder brings order
Into an otherwise chaotic world
That tilts toward entropy,
That confuses logic with rhetoric,
That forgets the narrative of community
And bravery and justice and equality
And holding hands and carrying the widows
And the children and the stranger,
All of us refugees
In search of the Promised Land
Where we can all recline and dine and recount
And invite and laugh and cry and sing
And eat
And remember
And never forget.

won't you celebrate with me

Lucille Clifton

won't you celebrate with me
what i have shaped into
a kind of life? i had no model.
born in babylon
both nonwhite and woman
what did i see to be except myself?
i made it up
here on this bridge between
starshine and clay,
my one hand holding tight
my other hand; come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed.

What Do We Do—Now

Ellen Hagan

We mourn, we bless,
we blow, we wail, we
wind—down, we sip,
we spin, we blind, we
bend, bow & hem. We
hip, we blend, we bind,
we shake, we shine,
shine. We lips & we
teeth, we praise & protest.
We document & we
drama. We demand &
we flow, fold & hang
loose. We measure &
we moan, mourn & whine
low. & we live, and we
breathe. & some of the time,
we don't.

Tonight, I am here. Here
& tired. Here & awake,
sure, & alive. Yes here &
still, still here, still & here
& still awake & still still
alive.

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AMEN

by Tuvia Ruebner

The betrayer who is betrayed.
The deceiver deceived.
Away! Away!
What away?
Away to where
in the yellow air?
To the meadow that was?
To the lambs just birthed?
To the falling birds?

In our standing up, though a little bent—*dayenu*.
With our eyes seeing though blurred—*dayenu*.
With our ears almost hearing—*dayenu*.
Upon our lying down and our rising—*dayenu*.
On our remembering our beloved's name—*dayenu*.
On our kneeling down—*dayenu*.
By the skin of our teeth—*dayenu*.
In our heart that expands and contracts—*dayenu*.
In our worried heart, fearful and afraid—*dayenu*.
Amen.

(January 2016)

Translated from Hebrew by Rachel Tzvia Back.

Paschal Offerings

— Jen Stein

This year, on the seder plate
instead of the bloodied shank bone
we place a cluster of sweet grapes

which serve as a symbol of fertility,
of new life and abundance.
We choose this, life, and not death:

for before us is set life and death
the blessing and the curse.
Therefore, we choose life

that we may invite not only Elijah
but the spring into our homes,
that we may set an example

of compassion and of love
for the things of His kingdom,
the new fleeced lambs in the fields

whose nurse from their dams
while overhead the winds that pass
bring the snowstars of pollen,

spreading over the land by wind and,
soon, by bee. Proliferation of
new things to delight and teach the old.

Adonai, hu ha-Elohim,
and in Your wisdom You have given us
the Sabbath, the Pesach seder,

the oaks and the pollen, the pink crab
apple blooms that drift, the sting and the honey,
the grapes and the newborn lambs.

The Wicked Child

Rabbi Daniel Brenner

I read the haggadah backwards this year
The sea opens,
the ancient Israelites slide back to Egypt
like Michael Jackson doing the moonwalk
Freedom to slavery
That's the real story
One minute you're dancing hallelujah,
shaking your hips to the j-j-jangle of the prophetesses' tambourines,
the next you're knee deep in brown muck
in the basement of some minor pyramid
The angel of death comes back to life
two zuzim are refunded.
When armies emerge from the sea like a returning scuba expedition
the Pharaoh calls out for the towel boy.
The bread has plenty of time to rise.
I read the hagaddah backwards this year,
left a future Jerusalem,
scrubbed off the bloody doorposts,
wandered back to Aram.

A POEM FOR THE SEDER
BY YEHUDA AMICHAI

Meditations for the Seder night: what is different, we asked
What makes this night different from all other nights,
Most of us grew up and we don't ask anymore, while some
continue to ask questions throughout their lives, like when they ask
How are you? or What time is it? and move on
without hearing the answer. What is different, every night,
like an alarm clock whose tick-tock calms us and puts us to sleep
What has changed, everything will change. Change is God.
Meditations for Seder night: the Torah spoke of four sons
One who is wise, one who is wicked, one who is simple, and one
who does not know how to ask. But it doesn't tell us
about the one who is good or the one who loves.
This is the question that has no answer and if there were an answer
I would not want to know it. I who passed all the sons
in different combinations, I lived my life, the moon shone
on me though I had no need for it and the sun went its way and the
Passover holidays passed without answer. What has changed, Change
is God and death is God's prophet.

Yehuda Amichai, from "Gods Change, Prayers Remain Forever"
translated by Rabbis Rena Blumenthal and Barbara Penzner

PASSOVER - Primo Levi

Tell me: how is this night different
From all other nights?
How, tell me, is this Passover
Different from other Passovers?
Light the lamp, open the door wide
So the pilgrim can come in,
Gentile or Jew;
Under the rags perhaps the prophet is
concealed.
Let him enter and sit down with us;
Let him listen, drink, sing and celebrate
Passover;
Let him consume the bread of affliction,
The Paschal Lamb, sweet mortar and bitter
herbs.
This is the night of differences
In which you lean your elbow on the table,
Since the forbidden becomes prescribed,
Evil is translated into good.

We will spend the night recounting
Far-off events full of wonder,
And because of all the wine
The mountains will skip like rams.
Tonight they exchange questions:
The wise, the godless, the simple-minded and the
child.
And time reverses its course,
Today flowing back into yesterday,
Like a river enclosed at its mouth.
Each of us has been a slave in Egypt,
Soaked straw and clay with sweat,
And crossed the sea dry-footed.
You too, stranger.
This year in fear and shame,
Next year in virtue and in justice.

-Primo Levi, April 9,
1982