

# **PASSOVER WRITING SAMPLES**

**The Writer's Beit Midrash**

**North Suburban Synagogue Beth El, Highland Park, IL**

**Nisan 5772/2012**

The Writer's Beit Midrash meets in the Maxwell Abbell Library every other Wednesday morning, 10:00-11:30 am. All fiction, non-fiction, poetry, memoir, and essay writers (published or not yet published) are welcome for discussions, exercises, camaraderie, and critique. Contact Rachel Kamin at [rkamin@nssbethel.org](mailto:rkamin@nssbethel.org) or 847/432-8903 x 242 for meeting dates and to be added to the mailing list.

**Battle Cry of the Jewish Mother**  
**By Judith Bernstein**

Dishes to the right of me,  
Dishes to the left of me,  
Passover panic has set in!  
Matza Kugel or potato?  
Just what veggies do I serve?  
How many hagadahs  
for *how* many guests?  
Where will we get all the chairs?

Bring on the crowd,  
the droning Zayde,  
mettlesome mother-in-law,  
The kissy aunts,  
and the battling cousins.  
I'm ready to face them  
across the Seder table,  
dishes unpacked and  
hagadahs at the ready.

Butcher, two more  
soup chickens, please,  
and maybe a veal breast  
and another brisket.  
Add to the list 3 dozen eggs,  
A five pound box of matza  
And a large can of matza meal.  
Do we really need  
the pesachdic potato chips,  
as long as we have enough  
pareve chocolate bars?  
And *no*, you're not old enough  
for real wine this year.

Set my alarm for 5 AM,  
I'll be getting up to make  
The matza balls,  
Just like bubby used to make.  
And in between the  
batter and the balls  
I'll whip up a dozen egg whites  
For Nanny's special sponge cake

## Crumbs of Wisdom By Betsy Dolgin Katz

Ten-year old Deena had three very important responsibilities in helping to prepare their one-room home in Krutya for the holiday of Passover. Her first was getting on her hands and knees, and, using a big wooden spoon, she and her brothers and sister would scrape an assigned section of the dirt floor searching for crumbs, for *hametz*, that may have fallen and been pressed into the ground.

A second task was to *kasher* their few dishes and utensils so they could be used for Passover meals. *"In America,"* she said when she was 100 years old and told me the story, *"ve could just soak dem in our tub. It vasn't dat easy in Krutya. My sisters and I, ve vud shlep dishes to da strem. Ve vud put dishes and pots in de vasser. Sometime ve vud chop a hole in da ice. And den, after three days ve chop dem out. Oy, so cult!"*

Deena's third responsibility, she considered very important. On a windy day she would take *siddurim* and *gamorahs*, prayer books and books of Talmud, from a corner cupboard and gently place them on a worn blanket outside their house. When the books lay open on the cloth, she would watch as the wind blew through their pages removing the *hametz*, the crumbs that may have fallen into their crevices as her father and brothers studied.

A one-room house with a dirt floor. Pots soaking in the stream. Books. No matter how poor or unadorned life was, there were *s'forim*. Deena grew up to love them and passed that love on to her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. Today as Passover approaches, I too look for crumbs that may have fallen in my books.

**The Story of the Exodus**  
**A Short Play to be Performed by Children at a Passover Seder**  
**By Julie Rosenfeld**

CAST OF CHARACTERS (Host to assign roles)

God

Moses

Aaron

Pharaoh

Pharaoh's magicians

Narrator

Snake

Required props: a cane, or long stick, broom

Hats for magicians

ACT 1

**Narrator:** Moses was out tending sheep when he noticed a bush on fire. He approached the bush and heard a voice.

**God:** Moses! Moses!

**Moses:** I'm here God.

**God:** Stop right there you idiot. Don't come any closer. You are in the presence of God. Just listen to me. I have seen all the pain my people suffer and I want to free them from slavery and take them to a land of milk and honey. I'm sending you to free the Israelites from Pharaoh.

**Moses:** You must be joking, God. I'm just a common, ordinary man. Pharaoh won't listen to me.

**God:** I'll help you out. But you have to be patient. Pharaoh is stubborn. Then go tell the Israelite what the plan is.

**Moses:** Ten to one the Israelites won't listen to me either, God. They'll say I never talked to you.

**God:** You have no faith, Moses. Throw your staff on the ground.

**Moses:** (throws his staff on the floor and it turns into a snake.) Holey Moley – get that thing away from me God. (he jumps around) It’s crawling up my leg – TAKE IT AWAY GOD. PLEASE – PLEASE!

**God:** Pick it up by the tail.

**Moses:** You want me to pick up that slimy thing. YUCK. (Picks up staff by the wrong end.)

**God:** Okay. I think you got the idea. I’ll send your brother, Aaron, to help you and I’ll give you the words to say to Pharaoh.

## ACT 2

**Narrator:** Moses and Aaron went to see Pharaoh. In front of Pharaoh Aaron threw down his staff and the same thing happened – it became a snake.

**Pharaoh:** Listen to me, guys. I don’t put up with that kind of nonsense. My magicians can do that too. MAGICIANS GET IN HERE NOW.  
(two magicians enter). Throw your staffs on the ground guys – I want them to become dinosaurs.

**Magician #1:** You’re crazy boss. Dinosaurs are extinct you know.

**Magician #2:** Would you settle for vampires my lord?

**Pharaoh:** Don’t question me. Just do as I say.  
(Magicians throw their staffs on the floor and Aarons’ snake eats them up.)

**Snake:** Yummy – got any more big shot?

**Moses:** Pretty neat trick wasn’t it Aaron.

**Aaron:** Yeah but he still won’t let us leave.

**Moses:** Wait – let’s see what trick God comes up with tomorrow.

**Narrator:** The next day Moses and Aaron returned to Pharaoh.

**Aaron:** Because you still won't listen, God is going to change all the water in Egypt into blood. The fish will die, the river will stink and there won't be any water to drink. If that doesn't work he's going to fill up your country with – GET THIS BUDDY – frogs. Frogs everywhere – in your bed, in your food – in your toilets.

**Pharaoh:** I double-dog-dare-ya!

**Narrator:** After the bloody water and the frogs Pharaoh decided he'd had enough. He called Moses and Aaron.

**Pharaoh:** I beg you Moses, take the frogs away and I'll let you go.

**Narrator:** But when the frogs were gone Pharaoh changed his mind. God then sent more plagues. Locusts came and ate all the grass; it became pitch black – no light – and the Egyptians could not leave their homes.

(Host douses all lights momentarily.)

Pharaoh would still not let the Israelites leave. Stubborn wasn't he? Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh one more time.

**Moses:** Listen you idiot. If you thought those plagues were bad there one more coming that's worse. God is going to kill all your first born sons.

**God:** You're doing just fine, Moses. Not go tell the Israelites what the deal is.

**Narrator:** Moses then went to speak to the Israelites.

**Moses:** Listen up people. Here's the deal. Kill your best sheep or goat and smear the blood on your doorposts. That's so God won't kill your sons when he kills the sons of the Egyptians. Then make a whole lot of matzo to eat when we leave.

**Narrator:** And so it happened just as God said it would.

**Pharaoh:** Okay – you guys can leave. Go worship God as you want. Take all your animals and get out of here.

**Narrator:** The Israelites left but Pharaoh changed his mind and sent an army after them. They got as far as the Red Sea and suddenly Aaron called out:

**Aaron:** Wonder of wonder, miracle of miracles – look at that – the sea split in half and we can walk across it. I'll betcha a million gold bars when we get to the other side, it'll close up again and the Egyptians will drown. HA, HA, HA.

**Narrator:** And that's what happened. So we celebrate Passover to remind us of the time we became free people. In a way it's like a birthday party and we are 2000 years old.

**A Shtetl Pesach**  
**By Sandy Strauss**

I pull my chair  
In front of the window,  
And sit in the square  
Patch of spring sunshine,  
Hashem has draped a golden shawl  
Over my bony shoulders,  
I feel the warmth of His hands  
Blessing my scarf-shrouded head.

I peer across our muddy road  
Through Pesach-clean glass  
And rain washed air,  
At tree silhouettes  
Sprouting leaf buds  
Like tufts of pale green fur.

I have wiped winter's grime  
From my heart and my window,  
Springtime hope  
Blossoms in my soul.

Pesach gives me an opportunity  
To scrub away anger and disappointment  
And face the future  
Down daffodil studded paths,  
To start anew  
The circle  
Of hardboiled eggs,  
Matzahballs  
And life.



**In Esther's Kitchen**  
**By Judith MK Tepfer**

No longer the toddler playing on the floor, making music with pots and pans, putting together the puzzle that was Grandma's small metal percolator,

once again she was in Grandma's kitchen, trying to inject something new and vegetarian into the usual Pesach fare: baked chicken, moist and sticky with its coating of French dressing; squash pancakes & yams (aren't they really the same basic substance?); home made gefilte fish; and Grandma's famous chicken soup.

As she mixed the ingredients for a Pesach Nouveau offering, Rachel kept one eye on the matriarchs: Grandma Esther, stressing over which tablecloth to use, annoyed that her grinder was giving her trouble, and wondering how she could allow these two usurpers to take over kitchen;

Mother, perhaps channeling her biblical namesake, Judith, was telegraphing with body movements her thoughts of orally editing the male-centered Hagaddah with a discussion of the women of the Exodus. She *was* thinking about the seder, and remembering last year, when *she* led the seder. She wondered if her nephews would remember what she had taught them about Miriam's role in the story, and why today we put an orange and a potato peel on the seder plate.

But Judith was also looking at her mother and worrying. How much longer could she remain in the house where her children grew up, the place where she catered to the cutest man who ever lived, the home where she warmly welcomed guests from everywhere, practically running a bed-and-breakfast for the world?

Esther, between her frustrations with machinery and offspring, squeezed in a thought about *her* role in the seder: were they really going to insist upon her rendition of the four questions? At 82, she had completed the traditional Jewish lifespan twelve years ago, and thus qualified as the youngest person at the table. She couldn't admit that she really liked the fuss.

Esther was tradition, Judith rebellion, Rachel a bit of each.

After the seder, Esther began to consider becoming a bat mitzvah next year, something she missed the first time around; Judith decided there was hope for the next generation after all; and Rachel, before heading upstairs to the bedroom that once was her mother's, stopped to open the drawer that still housed that old fashioned little coffee pot and, for a few minutes, took it apart ... and put it together.

**Your Presence**  
**By Judith MK Tepfer**

Gathered around the seder table,  
our number is lessened by one,  
but we are not diminished.

There you are: in sweet chicken soup,  
not the clear broth my friends serve,  
but with all the *junk* –  
petrushke, carrots, onions  
and fragrant dill.

And there you are again:  
in not-too-sweet fingers of  
mandelbrot, loafed, then sliced  
and returned to the oven for  
just-the-right crispness.

You observe us carefully from  
your pose on the wall,  
chin resting on elbows,  
making sure we still follow  
the traditions of your father.

After the afikomen,  
I sit in your rocker, the pink antique  
that fit you so well,  
soothing your great-grandson,  
at peace in your presence.