

Liberation Seder

Thursday 9 April 2020



Rabbi Danny Rich

Ian Saville, Socialist Magician

Alexei Sayle

appealing for the British Shalom-Salaam Trust Emergency

and a supporting cast

Hosted by:

- The British Shalom-Salaam Trust
- Jewish Socialists' Group
- Jews for Justice for Palestinians
- Jewish Voice for Labour

Introduction

This seder takes place at an unusual moment in our own lives. On one thing we can be agreed: we are living in an extraordinary and challenging moment and each one of us faces one or more difficulties: our own mortality and the possible death of a loved one, illness and un(der)employment, loneliness and isolation, changed patterns of work and ways of communication – new routines for every one of us.

As we seek to mark the Jewish festival of Pesach (Passover) which recalls the Biblical Hebrews' exodus from Egypt and the survival of Jews and Judaism, we do so conscious of its own particular resonance for Jews past and present but aware too of its universal hope: the liberation of all who are enslaved.

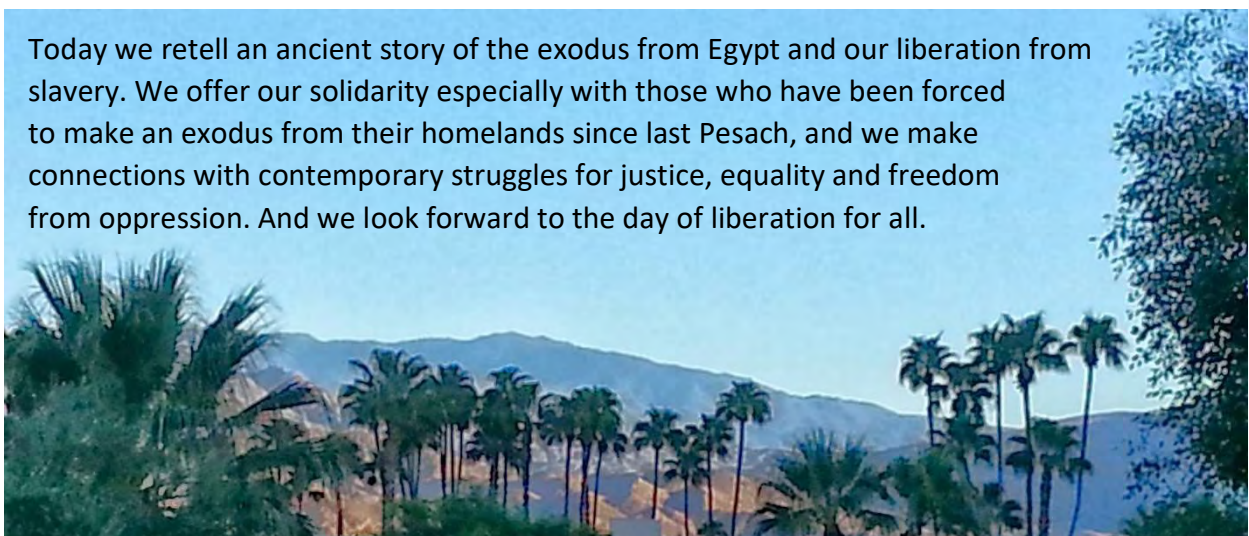
The creators of this seder welcome everybody, Jewish, of another faith or of no particular religious understanding of the world. It is said that 'where two Jews gather there are at least three opinions' and, in welcoming Jews to this seder, there is no test of levels of Jewish belief or observance or of denomination or politics. If this is your first seder or your ninety-first seder you are equally welcome.

The organisers trust you will be inspired by its content and our solidarity.

Finally, the organisers make no apology for a break in our proceedings at a couple of minutes to eight o'clock when you will have an opportunity to join the national 'Clap for the NHS'. Interestingly the Exodus story really began with the civil resistance of two midwives, Shifrah and Puah, unacknowledged heroines of the Book of Genesis (1: 15-20), and it is to today's heroines and heroes, the medical and non-medical staff of the NHS, to whom our thanks are due.

This Haggadah is, in good socialist tradition, a collective work but it is to its editor, Danny Rich, that you can send comments: d.rich@theliberalrabbi.org

Today we retell an ancient story of the exodus from Egypt and our liberation from slavery. We offer our solidarity especially with those who have been forced to make an exodus from their homelands since last Pesach, and we make connections with contemporary struggles for justice, equality and freedom from oppression. And we look forward to the day of liberation for all.

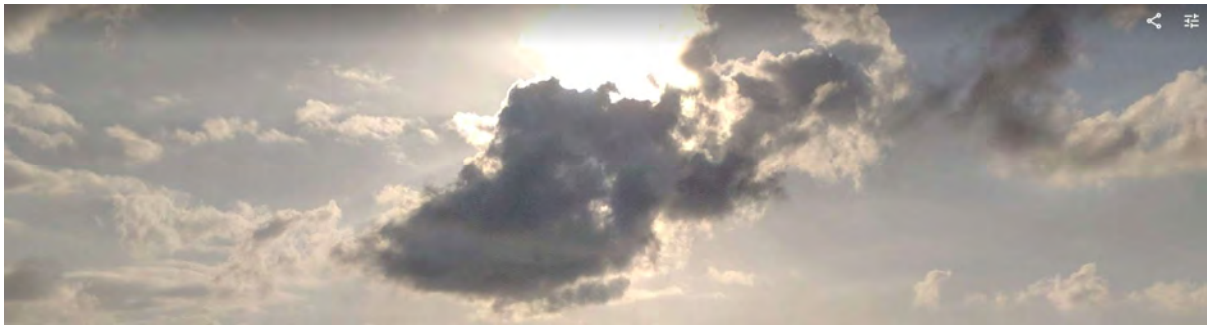


Candle lighting

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe: You sanctify us by Your commandments and enjoin us to kindle the (Sabbath and) festival lights.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם,
אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצונו
להדליק נר של (שבת ושל) יום
טוב.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher kidd'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivvanu l'hadlik neir shel (shabbat v'shel) yom tov.



She-hecheyanu

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, that You have kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך
העולם, שהחיינו וקימנו והגיענו
לזמן הזה.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam she-hecheyanu v'kiyy'manu v'higgiy'anu la-z'man ha-zeh.

First cup of wine

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם,
בורא פרי הגפן.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam borei p'ri ha-gafen.

Green vegetable dipping

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the earth.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך
העולם, בורא פרי האדמה.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam borei p'ri ha-adamah.

Matzah

Food, as everyone from a Jewish background knows, is hugely important in Jewish families. And Jews always feel that it is uniquely important to us - it's woven into our writings, our humour, and of course, our religious rituals, prohibitions and requirements relating to food (plus, of course, ways of working around those requirements so as to make life feasible)!

But, of course, food matters greatly to all families - as well as essential sustenance, it represents security, love, plenty, generosity. As anyone who has been to the West Bank will know, it is hugely important to our Palestinian hosts that they can lay far more out on the table than we visitors could ever eat. And always, what they lay out are their traditional foods, a showcase for a culture that remains vibrant today.

Central to Passover is one food, Matzah: the bread of affliction, a flat biscuit baked in extreme haste by those fleeing oppression who had no time to wait for the dough to rise. The matzah reminds us that when the chance for liberation comes, we must seize it even if we do not feel ready — indeed, if we wait until we feel fully ready, we may never act at all. A timely message for all who hope that whatever world emerges from coronavirus, it will be one where liberation, the end of occupation, discrimination and persecution, are centre stage.

This is the bread of affliction our
ancestors ate in the land of Egypt.

Let all who are hungry come and eat;
Let all who are in need come and share
our Passover.

This year here, next year in the land
of Israel;

This year oppressed, next year free.

הָא לַחְמָא עֲנִיָּא דִּי אָכְלוּ
אֲבֹהֵתָנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם.
כָּל-דִּכְפִּין יֵיתִי וְיֵכֹל,
כָּל-דִּצְרִיךְ יֵיתִי וְיִפְסַח.
הַשָּׁתָא הָכָא,
לְשָׁתָא דְּאַתְיָא בְּאַרְעָא דִּישְׂרָאֵל.
הַשָּׁתָא עַבְדִּי,
לְשָׁתָא דְּאַתְיָא בְּנֵי חוֹרִין.

Ha lachma anya di achalu avhatana b'ar'a d'mitzrayim.

Kol dichfin yeitei v'yeichul

Kol ditzrich yeitei v'yif'sach.

Ha-shata hacha – l'shata d'atya b'ar'a d'yisra'el

Ha-shata avdei – l'shata d'atya b'nei chorin.

The four questions

How different is this night from all other nights!

מה נִשְׁתַּנָּה הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מִכָּל הַלַּיְלוֹת!

On all other nights we eat either leavened or unleavened bread; why only unleavened bread tonight?

שֶׁבֶּכֶל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין חָמֵץ וּמַצָּה, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כָּלוּ מַצָּה?

On all other nights we eat different types of herbs and vegetables; why bitter herbs tonight?

שֶׁבֶּכֶל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין שְׂאֵר יֵרָקוֹת, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה מָרֹר?

On all other nights we do not even dip once; why do we dip twice tonight?

שֶׁבֶּכֶל הַלַּיְלוֹת אֵין אָנוּ מְטַבִּילִין אֶפִּילוֹ פַּעַם אֶחָת, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה שְׁתֵּי פַּעֲמִים?

On all other nights we eat either sitting or leaning; why do we all lean tonight?

שֶׁבֶּכֶל הַלַּיְלוֹת אָנוּ אוֹכְלִין בֵּין יוֹשְׁבִין וּבֵין מְסֻבִּין, הַלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה כָּלוּ מְסֻבִּין?

Ma nishtanah halailah hazeh mikol haleilot?

Sheb'khol haleilot anu okhlin hametz umatzah; halailah hazeh, kuloh matzah.

Sheb'khol haleilot anu okhlin sh'ar y'rakot; halailah hazeh, maror.

Sheb'khol haleilot ein anu matbilin afilu pa'am ehat; halailah hazeh, shtei f'amim.

Sheb'khol haleilot anu okhlin bein yoshvin uvein m'subin; halailah hazeh, kulanu m'subin.

How different is this Passover from all other Passovers!

On all other Passovers we have celebrated with family and friends. This year we celebrate with only our immediate household – which may mean that we are totally alone.

On every other Passover we have sat down to share with many. This year, our sharing must be done via a screen.

On every other Passover we opened our door to and our hearts to the stranger. This year, we must close our door to the world, so we must therefore open our hearts to the stranger with even greater love and generosity.

On every other year we have spoken of our redemption from the prison of slavery. But this year we realise that we all, as humans, face a similar foe and the only way to vanquish that foe is to work together across all the human divisions we have chosen over the centuries to erect.

The Exodus story

'Each year Jewish families sit down together at a seder to remember the Exodus from Egypt and to celebrate freedom. We recite the story of the Israelites, slaves in Egypt under Pharaoh, who refused to allow them to leave. Only after God rained down ten plagues did Pharaoh relent and allow the Exodus from Egypt.

The Exodus story of oppression and liberation has resonated through the ages, particularly among the African American slaves whose spiritual, "Go Down Moses," is a reminder of their identification with the Exodus

Our seder lauds the Israelites willing to undergo privations to achieve their redemption. But sadly, while the Pharaoh of their oppression *was* vanquished, he has many modern successors: Xi Ping and the Uighurs, the Burmese Junta and the Rohingya, Modi and the Indian Muslim minority, Orban and the Roma (with the fear that the Hungarian Jewish population may be next), Bolsonaro and the tribal nations and Netanyahu and the Palestinians under occupation.

Indeed, the occupation even incorporates coronavirus. **B'tselem**, the Israeli human rights monitor, reported that on 26th March: "officials from the Israeli Civil Administration came to the village of Khirbet Ibziq in the Jordan Valley, with a military escort, bulldozer and two trucks equipped with cranes to demolish a community clinic and emergency housing, and to confiscate materials designated **to build a clinic to deal with the coronavirus outbreak.**"

But there are also stories of an unbreakable universal humanity which we must not forget. That is why we celebrate tonight all the essential workers who are keeping us going, putting their own lives on the line.

Every life lost by coronavirus is a personal and family tragedy: I hope, though, that the families of others who have died, will forgive my highlighting four doctors, all black and minority ethnic and of a foreign origin who died from coronavirus while still working. After years of a 'hostile environment' towards immigrants, foreign workers, outsiders, asylum seekers, let us especially remember who were the first four NHS doctors to lose their lives for us.

Will coronavirus change the way we live? Will we become more inclusive, more aware that there *is* such a thing as society? The answer is, only if we make sure it happens. I come from South Africa and I want to finish with words in the District 6 Museum in Cape Town. Written by the local community, who also suffered house demolitions, they say:

'We do not want to recreate District 6, but to work with its memory . . . We wish to remember so that we can all together and by ourselves, rebuild a city which belongs to all of us in which all of us can live not as races but as people'

Appeal on behalf of the British Shalom-Salaam Trust

We now have a short but very timely appeal from the British Shalom-Salaam Trust, a tiny Jewish charity of which I am a proud Patron, which builds hope in Israel and Palestine. It supports dozens of grassroots projects in Israel, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Golan. Many projects serve children whose families are refugees and asylum-seekers, and whose vulnerability in today's situation is huge. Alexei Sayle, another long time Patron of BSST, will be appealing for emergency funds for those children. To donate, go to www.bsst.org.uk/donate/ (Please choose an electronic donation method, as BSST cannot process cheques during the lockdown). Every penny BSST gives away, it first has to raise. Please help it respond to this unprecedented emergency.

Second cup of wine

Here we will have three readings which will come out of the Bundist tradition of Jewish liberation politics and which will honour anti-racist and antifascist fighters past and present. The first will celebrate the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which began on the first day of Passover. The second will reflect on on the Warsaw Ghetto and Jewish-Black Solidarity, while the final reading will honour specifically, women's resistance to fascism.

Warsaw Ghetto Pesach 1943

After the ghetto was established acts of resistance were primarily cultural – underground schools, plays, poetry, anti-fascist newspapers. Summer 1942 saw mass deportations to Treblinka. By April 1943 barely 30,000 starved, weakened Jews remained, but among them a few hundred aged from 40 down to 13 years old - Bundists, Communists and Left-Zionists, had secretly formed a united Jewish Fighting Organization.

The Nazis planned to completely destroy the ghetto on 19th April the first night of Pesakh, so they could give Hitler a birthday present the next day – a Warsaw empty of Jews. But as the mighty German army entered the ghetto they were suddenly attacked by resistance fighters using smuggled and improvised weapons. It took the Nazis three weeks to completely subdue a guerrilla war by Jewish fighters.

Warsaw and Jewish-Black solidarity

The Black American sociologist and civil rights activist, W E B du Bois, made three visits to Poland including one in 1949 which transformed his understanding of racism and oppression:

I have seen something of human upheaval in the world: the scream and shots of a race riot in Atlanta; the marching of the Ku Klux Klan; the threat of the courts and police; the neglect and destruction of human habitation; but nothing in my wildest imagination was equal to what I saw in Warsaw in 1949. ... complete, planned and utter destruction.

... [O]ne afternoon, I was taken out to the former ghetto. Here there was not much to see. There was complete and total waste, and a monument. And the monument brought back again the problem of race and religion, which so long had been my own particular and

separate problem. Gradually ... I rebuilt the story of this extraordinary resistance to oppression and wrong ... a resistance which involved death and destruction for hundreds and hundreds of human beings; a deliberate sacrifice in life for a great ideal in the face of the fact that the sacrifice might be completely in vain.

The result of [my] three visits ... was not so much clearer understanding of the Jewish problem in the world as ... a more complete understanding of the Negro problem. ...[T]he problem of slavery, emancipation, and caste in the United States was no longer ... a separate and unique thing as I had so long conceived it.

Excerpt from "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto"

Jewish women anti-fascist fighters

"We honour the memory of our brave sisters who fought so courageously against Nazi horrors. We remember Hannah Senesh who parachuted behind enemy lines to organise resistance and rescue Jews. We remember Frumka Plotnicka, Hanna Fryshdorf, Chaika Grossman, and Vladka Meed, who served as couriers and smuggled arms for the Ghetto fighters..."

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign
of the universe, Creator of the fruit of
the vine.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
בּוֹרֵא פְּרִי הַגֶּפֶן.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam borei p'ri ha-gafen.

Seder plate

Matzah

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign
of the universe: You cause the earth to
bring forth bread.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam ha-motzi lechem min ha-aretz.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign
of the universe: You sanctify us by Your
commandments and enjoin us to eat
unleavened bread.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ עַל
אֲכִילַת מַצָּה.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam asher kidd'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivvanu al achilat matzah.

Maror

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe: You sanctify us by Your commandments and enjoin us to eat bitter herbs.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו, וצונו על אכילת מרור.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam asher kidd'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivvanu al achilat maror.

Hillel sandwich

This is what Hillel used to do when the Temple still stood: he would combine the paschal lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs and eat them together to fulfil the verse: 'with unleavened bread and bitter herbs shall they eat it.'

בן עשה הלל בזמן שביית המקדש היה קיים: היה כורך מצה ומרור ואוכל ביחד לקיים מה שנאמר "על מצות ומררים יאכלהו."

Afikomen – Ian Saville

'Hunt the Afikomen - a magical mystery'

Birkat Hamazon

We praise You, Eternal One, our God, Sovereign of the universe, whose goodness sustains the whole world. With grace, love and compassion You provide food for all Your creatures, for Your love is everlasting. Through Your great goodness we have never lacked our daily bread; may we always have sufficient, for Your great name's sake. Your goodness is the source of sustenance for all who live. We praise You, O God, Provider of food for all.

ברוך אתה יי, אלהינו מלך העולם, הון את העולם בלוי בטובו בחן בחסד וברחמים, הוא נותן לחם לכל בשר פי לעולם חסדו. ובטובו הגדול תמיד לא חסר לנו, ואל יחסר לנו מזון לעולם ועד. בעבור שמו הגדול, פי הוא זון ומפרנס לכל ומטיב לכל, ומכין מזון לכל בריותיו אשר ברא. ברוך אתה יי, הון את הכל.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam ha-zan et ha-olam kullo b'tuvo b'chein b'chesed u-v'rachamim hu notein lechem l'chol basar ki l'olam chasdo u-v'tuvo ha-gadol tamid lo chasar lanu v'al yechsar lanu mazon l'olam va-ed ba'avur sh'mo ha-gadol ki hu zan u-m'farneis la-kol u-meitiv la-kol u-meichin mazon l'chol b'riyyotav asher bara. Baruch atah Adonai ha-zan et ha-kol.

Third cup of wine

"Resistance, battles for social justice, defeat, victory - and compromise - are central to our history. They can be messy. They can be inspirational. Tonight, we will remember just four events that happened in and around Passover.

In 1960, three weeks before Passover, sixty-nine black South Africans, including dozens of children, were massacred in Sharpeville at a peaceful protest against the Pass Laws. It sparked the growth of a huge international anti-apartheid movement leading eventually to the first democratic elections in South Africa, which were held shortly after Passover 1994.

In 1978, a few days after Passover ended, 24-year-old Altab Ali was murdered on his way home from work in the early evening. The killing sparked the start of a fightback by the local Bengali community. Today one of the few parks in the East End is dedicated to Altab Ali's memory. It was the assembly point for a march on the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street, when Bengali and Jewish speakers spoke together there at a rally.

And twenty years on from 1978, in 1998 the start of Passover saw the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. While Northern Ireland's peace is fragile, green shoots of hope for a just and sustainable way forward remain alive.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign
of the universe, Creator of the fruit of
the vine.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם,
בורא פרי הגפן.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam borei p'ri ha-gafen.

Elijah's cup

Skyping Elijah

So maybe don't come?
Should you be out anyway, Eliahu
wandering the world
in search of seders?
Someone born in the Bronze Age
definitely falls into the at-risk category
of Over-Seventies
and are you sure your connections in high
places
protect you from any underlying health
problems?
So you ask me
"In that case what happens
when they pour that third cup of wine

and open the door to welcome me in and
the glassful set out for me
does not as on all other Seder nights,
mysteriously lose a smidgen of the volume
as carefully measured in advance
by eager children
who will therefore be so disappointed...?"
And who will, no doubt,
have enthusiastically handled it
with their particularly infectious fingers.
So maybe this year, Eliahu,
just stay home....

Ellen Galford 20/3/20

Fourth cup of wine

Bella Ciao! Goodbye beautiful! Translated into Yiddish by Barry Davis (2010)

A sheyn frimorgn hob ikh gekhapt zikh,
Bella ciao! Bella ciao! Bella ciao ciao ciao!
A sheyn frimorgn hob ikh gekhapt zikh,
Un der soyne shteyt arum.

A partizaner, nem mikh avek mit,
Bella ciao! Bella ciao! Bella ciao ciao ciao!
A partizaner, nem mikh avek mit,
Vayl tsu shtarbn bin ikh greyt.

Un az ikh shtarb vi partizaner
Bella ciao! Bella ciao! Bella ciao ciao ciao!
Un az ikh shtarb vi partizaner
Mustu mikh mekaber zayn.

Bagrob mikh in berg, in berg di hoykhe
Bella ciao! Bella ciao! Bella ciao ciao ciao!
Bagrob mikh in berg, in berg di hoykhe
Dem keyver a kveyt farshotenem.

Un az di mentshn veln farbaygeyen,
Bella ciao! Bella ciao! Bella ciao ciao ciao!
Un az di mentshn veln farbaygeyen
Veln zey zogn "a sheyner blum".

"Es iz di blum fun partizanen"
Bella ciao! Bella ciao! Bella ciao ciao ciao!
"Es iz di blum fun partizanen,
A korb'n far undzer kheyru"

This morning I awakened
Bella ciao! Bella ciao! Bella ciao ciao ciao!
This morning I awakened
And I found the enemy.

Oh partisan, take me away with you,
Bella ciao! Bella ciao! Bella ciao ciao ciao!
Oh partisan take me away with you
Because I feel death approaching.

And if I die as a partisan
Bella ciao! Bella ciao! Bella ciao ciao ciao!
And if I die as a partisan
Then you must bury me.

Bury me up in the high mountains
Bella ciao! Bella ciao! Bella ciao ciao ciao!
Bury me up in the high mountains
The grave covered by blossoms.

And all those who walk past my grave
Bella ciao! Bella ciao! Bella ciao ciao ciao!
And all those who walk past my grave
They will say what a beautiful flower.

This is the flower of partisans
Bella ciao! Bella ciao! Bella ciao ciao ciao!
This is the flower of partisans
A sacrifice for our freedom

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign
of the universe, Creator of the fruit of
the vine.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם,
בורא פרי הגפן.

Baruch atah Adonai eloheinu melech ha-olam borei p'ri ha-gafen.



Conclusion

Our seder is now completed: we have followed the order, told the story, performed the rites, sung the songs, and reflected on the particular relevance of the message of Pesach to the Jews and of its universal resonance for all peoples.

We conclude with a paragraph from *The Passover Haggadah* (Liberal Judaism, London, 1981 pp61-2):

Liberty or freedom has been abused, as other good things and put to ignoble uses, but is none the less a good thing in itself. Whenever and wherever there is oppression of the weak by the strong, of the poor by the rich, or of one race by another, they who are knit together by the common celebration of the Passover ought to feel righteous indignation, and do all which lies in their power to remedy the wrong. The Jews should ever be foremost in the cause of freedom, of justice, and of charity. Otherwise, they are false to the very foundations of their history and of their creed. Each coming Passover should remind us to ask ourselves, Have I done my best to help those whom I can help? Have I cared my best for those for whom I ought to care?...Have I remembered the poor and sought to help them wisely, if such help be within my power, through my gifts, my time and my thought? Have I made any sacrifice for their sakes? If we cannot say something of a 'yes' to questions such as these, are we fit to rejoice at and take our part in the celebration of the Passover? Let, at any rate, the season of the festival not pass away without our doing something in it, during the very week it lasts, to make somebody or other a little happier, and to lessen for a little while or in a small degree the load of care or sorrow which so many people around us have quietly and patiently to bear.

Next year in a world redeemed!