



THE EMPTY SEDER PLATE

A RITUAL TO REMEMBER SLAVERY IN OUR DAY

Put an empty seder plate on the table at the beginning of the seder (or a regular plate if one is not available). After Ha Lachma Anya, or later in the seder at a chosen time, raise the empty seder plate and read together.

Together: This is the *seder* plate of millions of people around the world. Their *seder* plate is empty tonight, because they don't have rituals to remember their redemption from slavery. Why? Because they are still enslaved today. They cannot accept our invitation to join us here tonight at the table of freedom, because they don't have the freedom to do so.

Put the plate down...

Reader 1: Our ancestors were brought forth from slavery in *Mitzrayim* thousands of years ago. The trans-Atlantic slave trade was abolished almost two hundred years ago. But today, there are more human beings enslaved than at any point in history - approximately *27 million*.

Reader 2: On *Pesach*, the story of leaving *Mitzrayim* becomes a significant metaphor for all kinds of oppression and freedom. But when we speak of slavery now, we are not talking about a metaphor. We are not talking about a symbol. Tonight we recall those who literally live as slaves in our world today. Some are child slaves, taken from their families and forced to fight as soldiers in the Congo. Some are slaves forced to work for no pay making parts for cars in Brazil, or clothing in India. At least 3 million are women and girls who have been kidnapped or sold as sex slaves throughout the world. Some are enslaved far away from where we live. Some are enslaved very close to us, even in the Land of Israel or here in our own state in our own country. They live in the shadows, but they are real, just like each of us.

Reader 3: When Moshe was in the wilderness and turned aside to face the flames of a bush on fire, God spoke to him, telling him to free the Israelites. If he had not turned aside to look, we would not be free today. If he had not listened, even though he felt inadequate for the task, we would not be here today.

Reader 4:
Will we turn aside to look, like Moshe, and see that which calls out to our souls to pay attention? Will we listen to the voice of God that yet speaks today? Will we respond to that voice, despite feeling powerless or inadequate?

Reader 5: Tonight we are commanded to tell the story of our redemption. We tell the story in order to remember what it means to be enslaved and what it means to be free. To remember our story is to remember who we are as Jews. We are a people obligated by our experience to help others. We remember that we were slaves, and so we cannot stand by as others are enslaved today.

Raise the seder plate and read together...

Together:
This is the seder plate of the women, men and children who are slaves today. This year they are not free to sit with us here tonight. Next year may they be free to join us. This year their plate is empty. Next year may it be full. This year we are *bnei chorin*, free people, and they are *avadim* – slaves. Next year may we all be free.

Learning More and Taking Action

“Which is greater, study or action? Rabbi Tarfon answered, saying: Action is greater. Rabbi Akiva answered, saying: Study is greater... because it leads to action.”

- What is one way you will educate yourself or others this year about modern day slavery, or take real and tangible action in the year ahead?
- Who can you partner with to make sure you follow through?