



THE 10 PLAGUES

Reducing Our Joy

עשר המכות



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. This year, which plagues feel heavy with new meanings?
2. Some families list additional events that could be considered plagues. What might you add to the list?
3. What resonates with you about the Rabbinic tale and the quote from Proverbs?

By Lori Sagarin

The recitation of the plagues is one of the most memorable moments in the seder. While elsewhere we dip our vegetables or lean to the left side, the practice of reciting each of the plagues as we remove some of our wine is unique.

Perhaps in response to the nature of the practice, families and communities develop traditions around it. Some dip their finger in the wine, others use a piece of cutlery, and still others spill from the side of the glass. There are even traditions about what you do with the wine drops: some wipe it away while others insist that you cannot. Some even have the custom of not licking the wine off their finger or the cutlery for fear of ingesting the plagues.

One practice feels particularly apt today. Some families have the tradition that you cannot lick the wine from your finger, not because of a fear of ingesting the plagues, but rather out of a sense that we should not derive pleasure from the pain of others. This practice aligns with a well-known Midrash about the splitting of the sea when the Israelites pass through on dry land but the sea crashes into the Egyptian army that had followed them. According to the Midrash, God chastises the angels who begin to sing at the downfall of the Egyptians. “How dare you sing for joy when my creatures are dying!”

As we reduce our joy by spilling our wine, let us remember that while we can celebrate being saved, our tradition teaches that we should not sing while God’s creatures are dying. This is echoed in Mishlei (Proverbs): “When your enemy falls, do not rejoice.”