Approaching Our Second COVID Seder

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Everything on pages 2-11 inclusive can be used as an introduction / bridge into seder. If you choose to do that, you might pick up your haggadah for seder step 4, "Yachatz," breaking the middle matzah. Or, use these pieces however best meets your needs.

Opening: The Passover of This Pandemic Year

Long ago, at this season, the journey toward freedom began.

After darkness and death, liberation's light shined through bloodied doorways.

Under the first full moon of spring, our ancestors walked out of the house of bondage.

Under a desert sky full of stars, they dared to look up: infinite potential at last!

Into the future they pushed, destination unsure, led forward by promises they barely believed:

The end of suffering and fear, the holiness of equal dignity, the human right to be free.

On this Passover night, we renew history's call to keep these promises – for us and for all.

This sacred night rouses us to release the bound – both here and everywhere.

Exactly one year ago tonight, that same first full moon of spring rose over a world transformed.

Plagues swept through the land. Darkness and death returned.

Bondage took new forms – global lockdowns, quarantines and digital goodbyes.

Bondage took old forms stubbornly strong – racial injustice, cruelty and lies that enslave.

With tonight's first full moon of spring, we yearn again for a just and righteous freedom.

And like our ancestors before us, we feel weary and worn, unready and unsure.

This Passover mixes grief and joy – and our ancestors have been here before.

They turned mourning into dancing. They turned bitterness into resilience.

With our ancestors at our backs and eternal promise before us, let us open to Passover's light.

May the full moon of freedom shine on us, and all who are bound, and all the world.

R. David Markus

The prayer that follows is designed to be read before lighting the Yizkor candle -- a candle that this year evokes COVID-19 deaths in addition to the earlier losses we remember four times a year at festival seasons. That candle, in turn, may be used to kindle the festival lights.

A Prayer to Release Trauma

We have been in a narrow place
a pandemic prison
forced to change the way we live our lives

Like our ancestors, we are on a journey from bondage to freedom.
We long to be together to enjoy the physical company of our loved ones.

Tonight, gathered – virtually, physically, spiritually – with friends, family and community,
We retell the ageless story of the exodus from Egypt.

As we remember the trauma of this past year,
May we look back with compassion and release what no longer serves us.

As we yearn for the freedom to come and go as we please,
May we reach out in love and friendship to those who are struggling.

As we seek connection and strive to hold on to hope,
May we be gentle with ourselves and forgiving of others.

As we do our part to help heal the world,
May we remain fully present to the simple joy of being alive.

As we face whatever new challenges will arise,
May we be blessed with the courage, strength and resilience to meet them.

Joanne Fink

קַדֵּשׁ Kindling Lights

Remembrance, Commitment and Hope

Tonight we kindle two sets of lights. The first honors millions worldwide who died from covid-19, and the millions more who mourn them. In their merit, and with tender hearts of care and resolve, we commit ourselves to acts of charity and loving kindness, which we now speak aloud for our own ears to hear:

Speak commitment of acts of charity, advocacy, care and/or support.

With these promises to keep, we kindle this flame of memory and dedication, and we hold a moment of silence:

Light memorial candle, and honor a moment of silence.

With the power of our ancestors' bravery and resilience, we now prepare to kindle the festival lights of Passover. We dedicate these flames to the light workers of this year – doctors and nurses, researchers, food bank volunteers, essential workers both seen and especially unseen – and to every brave soul working tirelessly to help set our world free.

Use the memorial flame to kindle the Passover candles.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יהו״ה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַדְלִיק נֵר שֶׁל יוֹם טוֹב.

Barukh atah YHVH Eloheinu melekh ha-olam
asher kidshanu bʼmitzvotav vʼtzivanu lʼhadlik neir shel yom tov.

Blessed are You, YHVH our God, sovereign in all time and space,
Who makes us holy with connecting command, and commands us to kindle the festival light.

R. David Markus

The meditation that follows is designed to accompany a second seder plate filled with COVID-related items. This could be recited here, in the introduction to the seder, or it could be offered during Maggid alongside explanation of the traditional seder plate and its meanings.

A COVID Seder Plate for This Pandemic Season

We begin our Passover journey exactly where we are. Alongside the Seder Plate we will explain in its traditional place later in the Seder, we also honor these symbols of where we've been and where we are now:

- **Hand sanitizer** For care and compassion amidst hidden danger
- **Face mask** For protection until all can breathe together safely
- **Vaccine card** For science lifting the world on eagles' wings
- **Toilet paper** For precious things we took for granted
- **Credit card** For food banks*:* "Let all who hunger come and eat"
- **Gift card** For underpaid essential workers often unseen

These items evoke the narrow straits of this COVID year. We remember the hurts, and we give thanks for the miracles. We pause at the threshold of tonight's Seder, thankful for everyone whom plague has "passed over." Even as we mourn, we also can celebrate in gratitude as the Festival of Liberation begins.

Illustration by R. Allie Fischman

This seder plate poem that follows could be offered alongside the COVID Seder Plate meditation, as part of the introduction to seder. Or it could be offered during Maggid, the part of the seder when we traditionally explain the seder plate and its meanings.

My Seder Plate 2021

This year I don't need symbols on my Seder plate.
This year I am very literal.
An egg is just an egg,
A bone represents only bones.
This year I'm all *pshat*.
Hate, Lies, Anger, Fear, Pain, Isolation,
Death
Only an empty Seder plate can hold all that truth.

Trisha Arlin

Empty plate, R. Rachel Barenblat

The seder plate meditation that follows could be offered alongside the COVID Seder Plate meditation, as part of the introduction to seder. Or it could be offered during Maggid, the part of the seder when we traditionally explain the seder plate and its meanings.

A Seder Plate For Covid Times

***Beitza*:** The roasted egg - a symbol of renewal and rebirth, also a comfort food in trying times. What do we need to rebirth? What comfort are we seeking?

***Z'roa*:** The shankbone symbolizes the Paschal lamb offered as the sacrifice in Viblical times. It also symbolizes redemption from slavery, from the narrows of *Mitzrayim*. During this holiday of freedom, many of us are still locked down, because of the virus and because of societal ills. How can we bring about salvation?

***Charoset*:** The Mishnah describes a mixture of fruits, nuts and vinegar/wine symbolic of the mortar used by Israelite slaves to build. Mortar also connects us. In this crazy year, what is the charoset, the sweet mortar, that has kept us going throughout the pandemic and social upheaval we have experienced?

Maror: Bitter herbs symbolize the bitterness of slavery, of confinement. Eating bitter herbs, even smelling them, can bring tears to our eyes, a release. What bitterness do we need to let go?

Karpas: Greens symbolize spring, growth, hope and faith. At the Seder we dip greens in salt water, a reminder of tears shed during slavery in *Mitzrayim*. How can we ensure that next Pesach we are all free, easing the unseen bondage of essential workers, especially those unseen by dint of race, class, or gender: food harvesters, teachers, market staff, and more?

The traditional Seder plate's symbols are organic, alive. This year, our table will include hand sanitizer and face masks to protect us, an extra candle of hope and connection in memory of days when we put candles and rainbows in our windows to cheer each other, and an empty chair – not for Eliyahu or Miriam, but for those no longer with us or still unable to celebrate in person. Our computers will be open to Zoom, and we'll maintain connection to each other and Hashem however we can.

R. Dara Lithwick

This explanation of Passover's four names could be read in the seder's opening or before the first cup. It draws on the four worlds paradigm, and on this year's lived experience.

Four Names of Passover - a Liberating Journey

Zman Heiruteinu: "Season of our Liberation." This name is anchored in the world of *assiyah*, action and physicality and celebrates our release from physical bondage. This past year's focus on essential workers, the need for a living wage, and combating systemic racism shows how much there is to do for us all to be truly free.

Chag haPesach: "Festival of Passing-Over." We remember the sacrifice of the paschal lamb and the angel of death passing over homes marked by the sacrifice. This name represents the world of *yetzirah* - emotion, relationship, and flow. This year, many of us have been marked by COVID, indiscriminately so, and Chag haPesach evokes the empathic connection that we must have to overcome COVID's impacts.

Chag HaMatzot: "Festival of Unleavened Bread." Matzah calls us to lose the "hot air" of ego's puffery. This name represents the world of *briyah*, thought and intellect, and reminds us to scrap the "fake news" and get to the essence of what's real.

Chag HaAviv: "Festival of Spring." This name links us with *atzilut*, spirit. We welcome spring, renewal, re-creation, rebirth. With all we have lost, we have also learned. The seasons continue. We who are a part of this ritual are still here. We bless life, love, divinity, interconnection.

R. Dara Lithwick

וּרְחַץ Urchatz:
Immersing in Sweetness

Infuse the water with a pleasant fragrance – essential oil, a sprig of rosemary, lemon juice, or a few drops of a meaningful perfume or cologne

With intention to dedicate our hands to sacred service on this Passover night, we now immerse our hands – as have millions of health care workers and billions of others around the world trillions of times during this pandemic year.

But this night is different from all other nights, and this immersion of our hands is different, too. On all other nights this year, we have cleansed hands for sterility. On this night, we cleanse for the holiness of joy and celebration, knowing that what's on our hands can change the world.

For this sweetness, we immerse our hands in scent-infused water, to cleanse and purify our hands for holy joy, to breathe deeply the sweet scent of freedom.

Psalm 90:15-17

שַׂמְּחֵנוּ כִּימוֹת עִנִּיתָנוּ שְׁנוֹת רָאִינוּ רָעָה׃ יֵרָאֶה אֶל־עֲבָדֶיךָ פָּעֳלֶךָ וַהֲדָרְךָ עַל־בְּנֵיהֶם׃
וִיהִי נֹעַם אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ עָלֵינוּ וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדֵינוּ כּוֹנְנָה עָלֵינוּ וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדֵינוּ כּוֹנְנֵהוּ׃

Samheinu kiy'mot initanu sh'not ra'inu ra'ah. Yera'eh el-avadecha paolekha va-hadarkha al-b'neihem. Viy'hi noam Adonai Eloheinu aleinu uma'aseih yadeinu konenah aleinu, uma'aseih yadeinu koneneihu.

May our joy far exceed this season of affliction and far outlast this time of suffering. May all who serve the sacred see the help of heaven. May the beauty of Adonai our God be on us and prosper the works of our hands, and may the works of our hands help the holy flourish.

R. David Markus

Karpas כַּרְפַּס

There is no magic in this beginning
And no sweetness to the taste of new.
It is surprising, refreshing, maybe
A little bitter,
It leaves a hunger for more
At the back of your tongue.

You may not like that taste,
you may even loathe it;
It may excite you; you may want to cry;
You may have never tried it, but this year,
it is coming;
Sit down,
Get your bitterwaters ready,
May the journey begin.

Newness is starting,
Whether you planted it and nourished it daily;
Whether it overwhelms you;
or whether you are prepared;
Now
Is when we begin the story,
Breathe in the newness, and dig in.

R. Sonja K. Pilz, PhD

Illustration by Steve Silbert

bodies of water

This poem could be used as a prelude to the bracha over karpas or as an intention between the 7th to 8th day of Passover to mark the crossing of the red sea, as a way of signifying the re-entry into spring and liberation but also, the complicated circular return at the heart of any Exodus, let alone in the midst of our current pandemic.

Recalling Miriam's dancing at the sea and Joseph's history in Egypt, this intention allows for the recollection of settling in the land during drought, the economic upturn during his years of plenty and the eventual degradation of the Isralites through the yoke of slavery. Through the remembrance of water, we are called to the principles and practices that honour life and re-extend the Source of Life that nurtured our ancestors to all of creation.

i measure
my life
in
bodies
of
water

the Nile
new babe's tears
a well
the Sea

oh
i have crawled
and called
and danced
and dreamed

i have been
and i am aging
ageless
aged
and free

but the griefs
are as waves
to me

and i wonder
some days
if i am not merely
the passing
thought

at the bottom
of someone else's
watery
stream

g-d will i live
g-d will i tell
g-d will i write
g-d will i die well

listen
the flood is speaking
now

i am still young
the cup
this life is not a shell!

Devon A. Spier

The poem that follows could be used before the Hillel sandwich / eating of matzah and maror (some say: matzah, maror, and haroset).

From Bitter to Sweet

We began with bitterness
already burning our tongues.

One full year of pandemic.
We can't pretend it away.

Another seder separate and separated,
grieving limitless losses.

Only when we taste what's bitter
can we approach liberation.

But this year we rebalance:
merely touch matzah to maror,

ladle on extra haroset,
the promise of sweetness:

vaccines to spark our safety,
softening air, lengthening days,

and the hope of embracing
one day on the shores of the sea.

R. Rachel Barenblat

For the Seventh Day: Entering the Sea

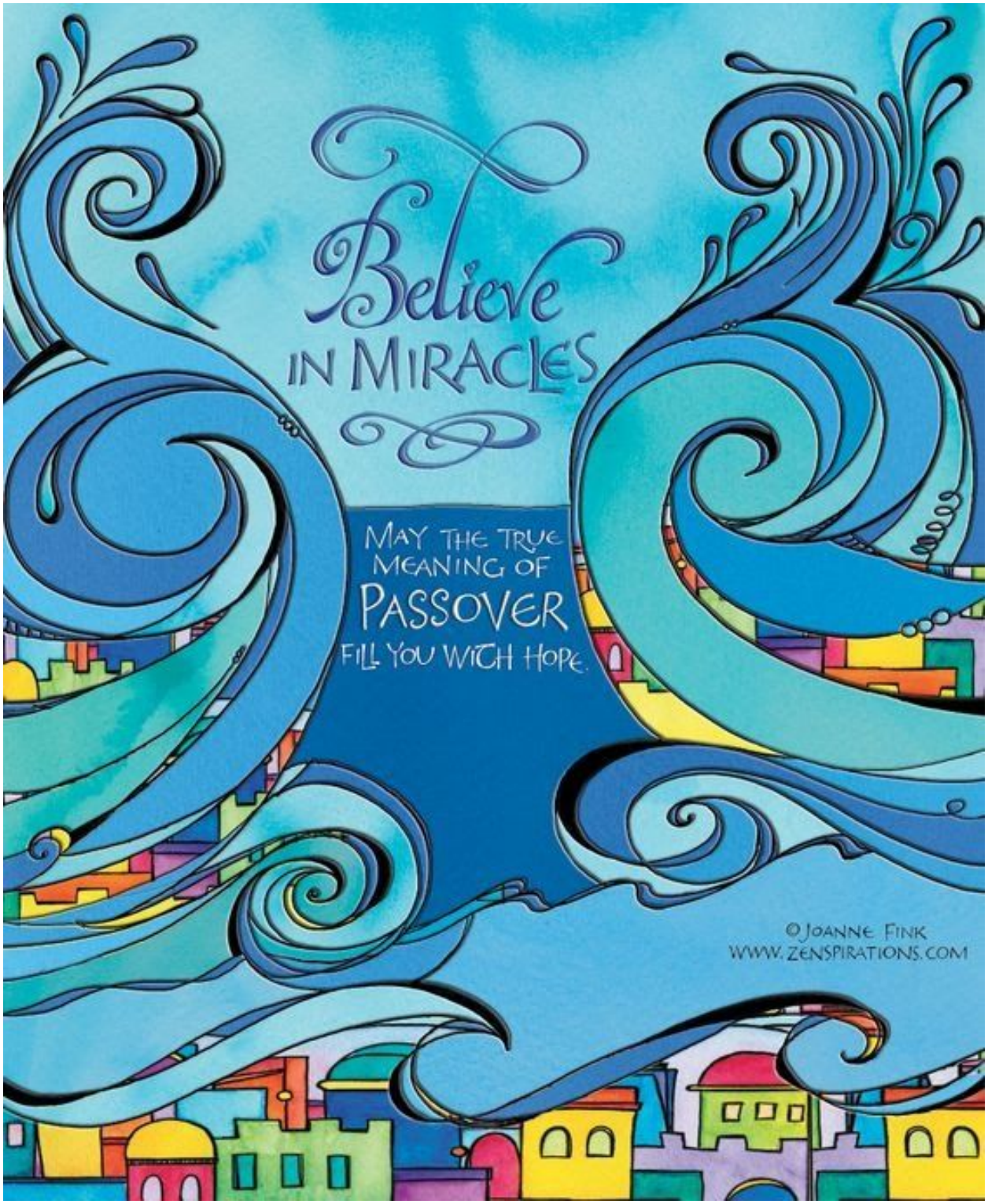


Illustration by Joanne Fink

Tradition teaches that we crossed the Sea and escaped the pursuing Egyptian forces on the seventh day of Pesach. Here are readings for the seventh day: remembering that ancient crossing then-and-there, and setting forth in our own crossings-over even now. Whether or not you hold a festive meal on the seventh day, we hope these readings will help you cross the sea. (You could also choose to use these as part of your seder on first or second night, too!)

In the Sea

Here we are, in the sea. We can't see the far shore.
Sand shifts beneath our feet. Who can trust it?
We don't know how long this journey will be.
Will this next step drop us down into She'ol?

Sand shifts beneath our feet. We don't trust it.
There are vaccines now, but not enough doses.
Will this next step drop us down into She'ol?
This much uncertainty clouds everyone's vision.

There are vaccines now, but not enough doses.
So many deaths, and the earth just keeps turning.
This much uncertainty clouds everyone's vision.
Sometimes it's all we can do to keep going.

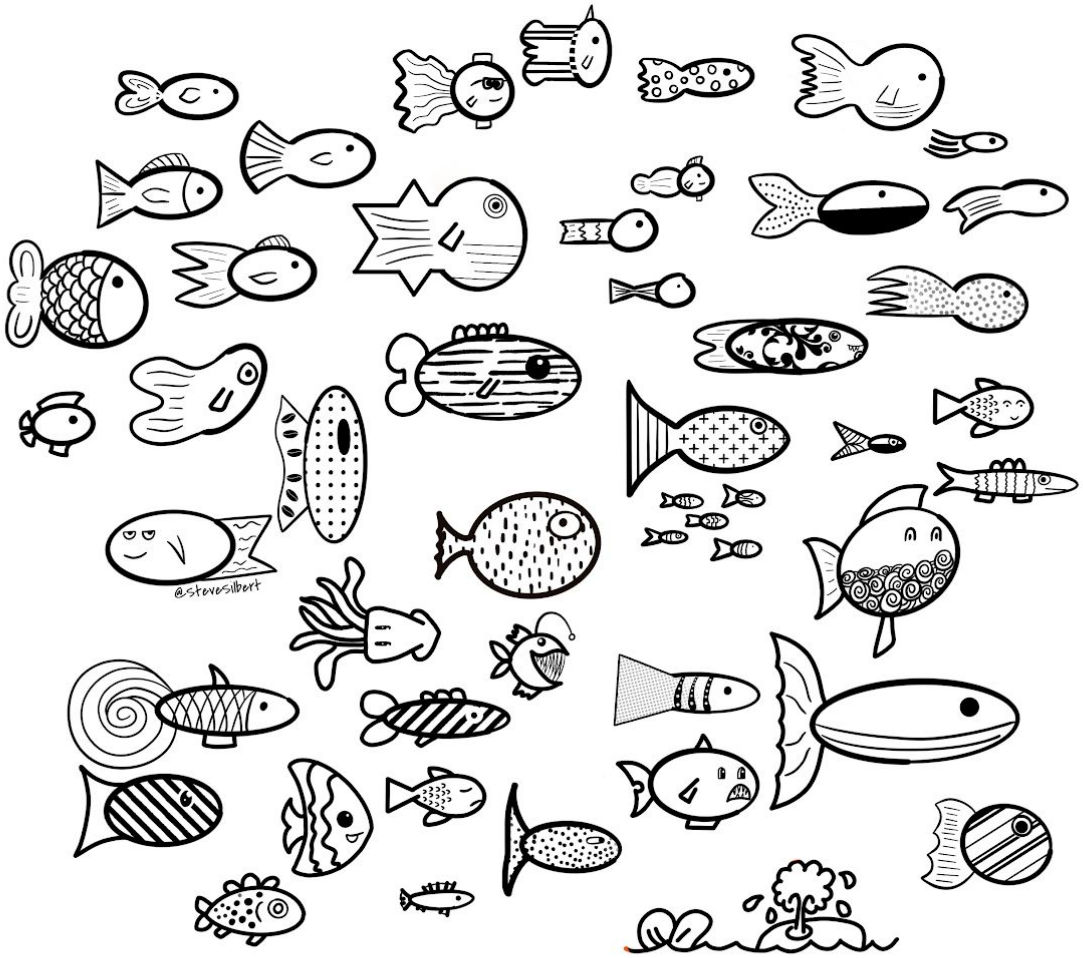
So many deaths, and the earth just keeps turning.
Remember restaurants, and singing, and theaters?
Sometimes it's all we can do to keep going.
It's easy to feel we're alone in the journey.

Remember restaurants, and singing, and theaters?
Soon winter will be past, the snow over and gone.
It's easy to feel we're alone in the journey, but
look: we're together, and God is here with us.

One day winter will be past, the virus over and gone.
We don't know how long the journey will be, but
at least we're together, and God is here with us.
Here we are, in the sea. We will reach the far shore.

R. Rachel Barenblat

Fish דָּגִים Dagim



When God parted the Sea of Reeds, did the fish notice?
What miracles might we be missing, right before our eyes?

Illustration by Steve Silbert; find more contemplative coloring pages like this in Color The Omer!

7th Day: Water

I am drawing water from wells, from rivers,
from the sea.
The Mediterranean has always been
My puddle on this planet.

However, stories take winding ways.
This one leads from the Nile, the Ya'or,
To a salty section of the Red Sea.
We wander, with and without amazement,
Our feet still muddy,
Our mouths and the water
Overflowing with song.

Then, we cross again.
The Jordan, wild or boring,
A narrow watershed, in the north of
Our home
Leading into the salty bitterness
Of smooth and oily
Deadly waters.

We remember
The soft and healing palms
Of the woman that brought us water
And a sense of joyous abundance
In the midst of despair.
We loved to listen to her voice
Only when singing.

We draw waters
From the springs at the foot of the walls
To remember fertile waters
To remember fury seas
To remember the borders that were rivers
The water that quenched our thirst.

We pour water to remember the woman,
To remember the ritual,
To remember You.

I am pouring water,
Cup after cup,
Into the Atlantic/Pacific, but not be home

But instead, to continue the journey.
Where will fresh water be?

R. Sonja K. Pilz, PhD

BEFORE AND AFTER

Before The Sea

What I'm willing to leave behind in the narrow place:

Bricks, Whips, Forced labor
Blood, Packing, Yeast
Slavery, Racism, Masters
Danger, Weakness, Servitude
Plagues, Lies, Jew Haters

Netflix, My Room, Two-dimensions
Distance, Masks, Chapped Hands
Racism, Conspiracies, Death
Worry, Fear, Loneliness
Plagues, Lies, Jew Haters

I put it all in my backpack
And put the pack down on the beach
Before I step into the Sea.

After The Sea

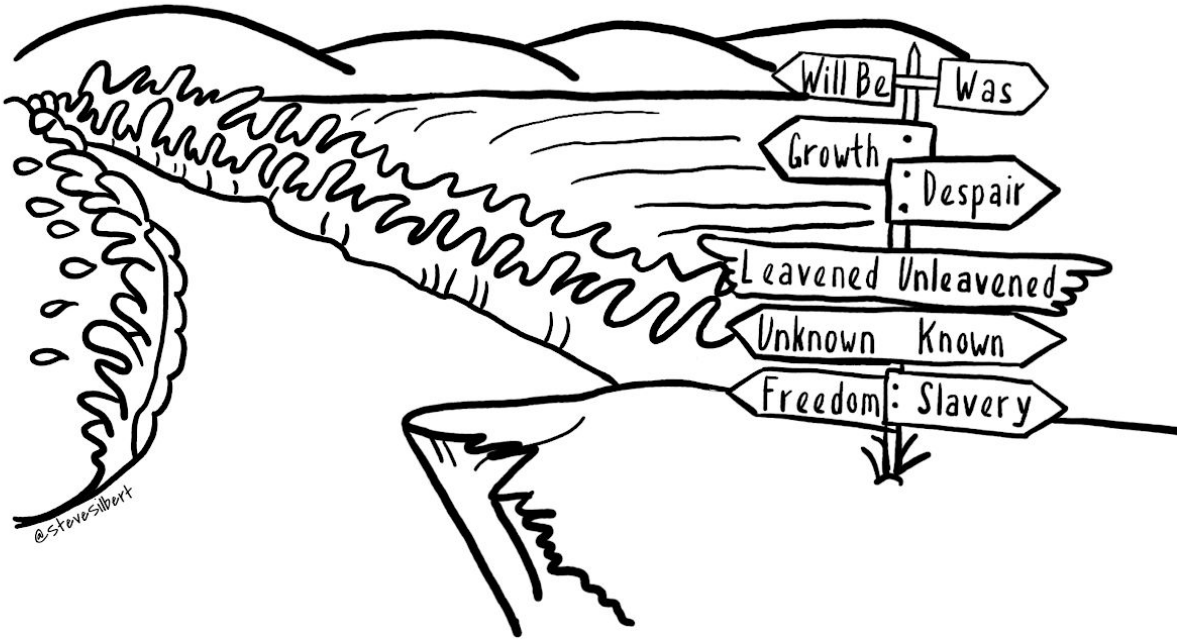
Now what?
We've stepped into the water,
We've crossed the Sea of Reeds.
We said we would go and we went
We're here in the desert
Now what?

What are we supposed to do now?
Go out into the world,
Talk to people?
You want us to talk to people?
In person?!
Do we have to touch them?
Are we supposed to touch them?
Do we want to touch them?
And ewww, they're all so…three dimensional.
And in the new world of freedom there is
Body odor
And decisions.
We need to do stuff.

We didn't want to leave our rooms.
We miss our pajamas.
We miss knowing that nothing was going to happen.
We miss the cucumbers of Egypt.
We will need to think about this,
It could take years.

Trisha Arlin

The Way דֶּרֶךְ Derech



The unknown is always before us,
and our choices determine our path.
What path do you want to walk toward freedom today?

Illustration by Steve Silbert; find more contemplative coloring pages like this in Color The Omer!