



the light lab podcast

Episode 62: S.P.A.R.K. - the Pesach Edition

Eliana (00:00)

Shalom everybody, welcome back to the Light Lab Podcast. My name is Eliana Light and I am here with my dear friend Cantor Ellen Dreskin.

Ellen Dreskin (00:08)

A wonderful thing to be back with you today, Eliana.

Eliana (00:12)

It's wonderful to be back with you. Josh is still on Abba leave and we're sending him a lot of love, but we're really glad that you are with us listeners for our Spring S.P.A.R.K. Ta -da! S.P.A.R.K. is a different kind of episode, a little more freewheeling one might say, where we talk about some things that have been on our hearts and minds, share them with each other and share them with you, hopefully to spark some new learning, some new conversations and questions, something new within you, especially as we look forward to the holiday of Pesach, of Passover, as we are recording this. We are exactly one week from the first day of Chag, from the first day of the holiday.

So first of all, to ask you, Ellen, because people feel differently leading up to this holiday. Does thinking about Pesach being in one week fill you with joy, fill you with dread? Something in between, something else?

Ellen Dreskin (01:13)

I have put aside this week to do all things Pesach. so I'm quite excited. I have been thinking though, actually about how we have a whole month before the high holy days to prep between Passover and Shavuot. We have seven weeks of the counting of the Omer that's just really built right into the Jewish calendar. And I'm wondering why a holiday such as Pesach, doesn't have this whole buildup to it in the calendar. And then I was speaking to a friend the other day who said, what are you kidding? The minute the Purim carnival is over, you have four weeks to prepare for Pesach. So that's pretty much it. I am looking forward to it though. How about you?

Eliana (01:47)

I am as well. I kind of want to stick on this idea actually about preparation because you're right. It feels like Elul is this kind of spiritually infused timer. At least we have

spiritually infused it with meaning and the Omer has been spiritually infused. And Pesach, the first thing that came to my mind is just like, it's like an extended Friday afternoon. Like if you need to...

clean your house and cook and that's what you have time for. Like that's what you do and you rush and you do it until it's done. And if some of those things are taken care of or you're going somewhere different and you want to kind of infuse it with spirituality your Friday afternoon, you can, but you know that the main thing is coming, right? Like we're working towards Seder. So the buildup to Pesach seems a little more utilitarian for me.

I suppose, like we're just trying to check off the boxes and get everything done so that we can move into the holiday and then have that freedom there just as, you know, the Israelites were busting their butts and they didn't, they didn't totally know when it was going to happen. So they had to scramble. Maybe so were we.

Ellen Dreskin (03:05)

That's right.

True. Truly, it occurs to me that they had absolutely no warning. It was kind of like, and we're leaving tomorrow morning. So perhaps that's what we're modeling here. I can't tell you that because I can get rather grumpy, you may be surprised to find about moving every stick of furniture out of our living and dining room and replacing it, you know.

Eliana (03:38)

Mmm.

Ellen Dreskin (03:45)

the buildup, the cooking and the cleaning and the setting up all the tables, et cetera, I get a little peevish sometimes, particularly because I leave it until the last moment, such as these. But last year, I found a blessing that is not specifically for Passover, but it went up on my kitchen cabinet last year.

Eliana (03:55)

Hmm.

Hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (04:11)

year at this time and it's going up today. I just pulled it out of a folder and it's a cooking bracha by Leah Koenig and Anna Stevenson and it says blessed are you creator of the world who brings forth fruit from the earth blessed are you who gives

us knowledge of cooking and time to cook and who has blessed us with the need for nourishment so that we can fully understand your gifts may it be your will that the food I cook

Eliana (04:20)

Hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (04:39)

bring nourishment, fulfillment, and happiness to those who eat it, and bring honor to the land and all the people that make this meal possible. And so when I'm running through my kitchen looking for the ingredients and think that I don't have enough time, I stop and I read this and I say, yes, whatever preparation I do at whatever pace I do it, it can also be a spiritual practice.

Eliana (04:48)

Wow.

I mean, that's a beautiful way to start that the preparation in and of itself can be that spiritual work. Even if it's just stopping and taking a breath and noticing how wonderful it all is, even the opportunity to clean our house.

Ellen Dreskin (05:24)

Yes, yes, I don't want to be grumpy. And if it's something that has to be done, I really all I can control is the attitude with which I do it. So I just try to plant little reminders around the house to say, hello, there's a reason for all of this.

Eliana (05:34)

Mm -hmm.

Hmm. Now I do have to say, I consider myself in a bit of a privileged position in that I go away for Pesach every year and I have for the past eight years, nine years, not counting 2020, but we don't really talk about that one. So while I will be cleaning my house, I won't be kashering my house. I won't be making it fully kosher for Passover. I will do the ritual that I'm thinking has very little spiritual meaning for me. I wonder if we can like spiritually infuse the selling of chametz, the kind of law ordained well, I don't want to get rid of all of my chametz and so I will sell it, quote unquote, to someone else, meaning I will make a donation to the synagogue who will sell it on my behalf or some such. And then I get it back at the end.

Ellen Dreskin (06:39)

And there's the selling it and then the taping up of all the cabinets. And I see this big yellow caution tape every time I think about it just plastered over the front of some cabinets or everything goes down in the basement and everything else

comes up out of the basement. It is a process. It is an enormous process.

Eliana (06:46)

Mm -hmm.

My kitchen, I know, and then we'll get to the S.P.A.R.K. We're getting ahead of ourselves, but I was just thinking about that, that my plates and silverware and kitchen stuff was our family's old Pesach stuff. So long time ago, I got it from our friends who had had it in storage. And so now I have not all here because now some of it is in storage at my friend's house. Like a lot of things that...

Ellen Dreskin (07:10)

Mm -hmm.

Eliana (07:33)

a young person wouldn't necessarily have in their kitchen, like a bag of 50 tiny spoons, like the tiniest spoons, or 30 tiny salt shakers and pepper shakers. Why do you need so many salt and pepper shakers? Because if you're having like 50 people over for Seder, like we used to in my house, you have little salt and peppers all along the way.

So it's just funny for me to have these kind of like physical reminders even though I don't host Seder at my home. Perhaps I can find a use for lots of tiny little spoons and lots of salt and pepper shakers.

Ellen Dreskin (08:14)

Now you have to answer my age old question that I don't know about Seder. How many cups of wine are there in a bottle of wine?

Eliana (08:21)

Oh, we'll see if I know.

Depends how big you pour them, I guess.

Ellen Dreskin (08:29)

Boy, that's, I never, I never gauge anything like that correctly. And to this day, I do not know how many glasses of wine, how many Passover.

Eliana (08:42)

That's true. You got to pace yourself, especially if you're leading. I pace myself, especially when I'm leading. I will be leading. This will be the third year. I'll be going to Camp Ramah Darom for their Passover retreat. That's my kind of Pesach home and singing and learning with everyone there. And I'll be leading for the third year

in a row, the Light Lab Seder, which just means that we get to apply our...

t'fillahsophy to the Seder itself to slow down, to do less with more, to do some deep learning. It's really been such a joy and I'm really excited to get to do it again.

Ellen Dreskin (09:25)

a gift for everyone there, I'm sure. What fun to spend the whole week of the whole Passover week in that, immersed in that, as opposed to, you know, having to get up the next morning at the third morning and say, oh, it's Chol HaMoed. So I now the week, other than what I'm eating and what I'm not eating, the week continues. But if you're away and you're really soaking in it, that sounds like a lovely place to be.

Eliana (09:27)

Hehehe.

Right.

That's true. And you know I love Chol HaMoed, Ellen, because it means that we get to use my favorite twice a year greeting.

Ellen Dreskin (09:56)

Oh, *Moadim L 'Simcha!*

Eliana (09:57)

Chaggim u'zmanim v'sasson. We're practicing. It's not time yet, but we're practicing. If you don't know what we're talking about, we'll put a song for you in the show notes. Speaking of songs, here we go. This will take us into the S of our S.P.A.R.K, which is song. Ellen, what's a song that is on your mind or heart as we move into this season?

Ellen Dreskin (10:01)

Woohoo!

I think one of my favorite pieces of the Seder of Passover liturgy is the passage that begins, *B'chol Dor VaDor*, in every single generation. And it's always been in the Seder, in the Haggadot that I have used. *Chayav adam lirot et atzmo.* Every person, male leaning, is obligated to see himself as if he came out of Egypt.

Now, I try not to let things like that get in the way of my understanding of the prayer. And so first and foremost, the idea that each one of us is supposed to, through the tool of the seder, really understand what it means to be enslaved. There is an ulterior motive to everything that we do for Passover, and it's in this verse.

What I'd love to share about it now is that our teacher, Debbie Friedman, back in the mid -90s already was saying, what's up with the *chayav adam lirot et atzmo*? that a man should see himself. And so what's lovely about this particular melody written by Debbie Friedman for B'chol Dor VaDor is you'll hear, *B'chol Dor VaDor, chayavim anu*.

We are obligated, *lirot et atzmeinu*, to see ourselves as if we came out of Egypt. And we use this melody now exclusively at our center.

Eliana (12:35)

So beautiful. I love this melody. I love that it brings it into the plural. This is off of, I believe, The Journey Continues, which is music from the Ma 'yan Women's Seder. You could definitely speak more to this about kind of the history of that seder and Debbie's involvement. The one time, I think, or at least the one time I was old enough to be aware that I was in a room with Debbie Friedman was when I was living in New Jersey, so I was in high school at some point, we went to one of the last women seders that she did in New York City. And it was a really, really powerful experience. I had never been to something like that before. And it was very powerful to be led in this music that had been really created for this particular ritual moment.

Ellen Dreskin (13:24)

Yes, if you can find this music, so many melodies. One is called the Journey Song. There's all sorts of good material there. Debbie was instrumental, literally and metaphorically, in beginning women's seders, much as she was in the more liberal Jewish communities in making Mi Shebeirach for healing an institution again. So we really...

owe her a lot in this and to realize that years before people were having problems with gender specific liturgy, Debbie was having problems with gender specific liturgy and was really working to do something about it. So we're very grateful, very grateful indeed.

Eliana (14:14)

Very grateful. Speaking of grateful, good, we're not doing these segues on purpose, my friends. They're just kind of happening. Of course, on my mind and heart as we enter into Pesach is Dayenu. And from a couple of angles, I think first is that gratitude in some ways in this time can be really hard.

And it can be a challenge and Dayenu can feel like a challenge to say, oh, when the world feels so tenuous, when there is so much violence, when our communities feel so fraught, how is there what to feel grateful for? And I'm thinking now as I'm

talking out loud that it's almost, it can be a challenge, but it can also be an invitation.

You know what? Find one thing, that's enough. Okay, so you might not have 15 steps, right? There are 15 things that we're grateful for in the prayer Dayenu that correspond to the 15 steps up to the temple. But also in its enoughness, can I find even one, even one, right? Because that's the whole metaphorical or kind of...

poetic conceit of Dayenu is just one of those things would have been enough. Even though of course we know literally it's not, but it's a way of looking at all of the steps along the journey as each being an integral piece and each being a blessing. I'm thinking also about how I like to teach or explore Birkot HaShachar from the morning liturgy. We stop and we name all of the pieces of our morning as a blessing as a way to say, each of these pieces on their own might not have been enough, but they were each integral. And by putting our awareness on each piece, we kind of infuse it with that blessing. We realize the gratitude potential that is there. So to say, yeah, sometimes we're not gonna get to 15. One is enough. Like, Dayenu for us, like it's enough for us to have just one.

Ellen Dreskin (16:33)

Yes, it makes us realize and that it is a journey at each. I'm seeing a lot of variations on Dayenu this year, as I'm sure everybody is because of the times in which we are living. That's saying those things are enough to a certain point and there are many things that it's no, it's not enough yet. And so in our gratitude, it kind of also

Eliana (16:42)

Hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (17:02)

says to us, but don't get too complacent. You still have, you've been given all of this stuff, Dayenu for you, but now, alla Passover, turn around and make sure that there is Dayenu, that there is enough for everybody else as well.

Eliana (18:15)

So fun to listen to that with you.

Ellen Dreskin (18:18)

Wait, Eliana, that wasn't Dayenu. I know how Dayenu goes. What was that?

Eliana (18:25)

What was that? What was that? That was my melody for Dayenu off of the album, Orah Hi. Yeah, it is the first, I was trying to think, I guess we released the album this past September. So this is the first Pesach with Dayenu actively out in the world,

even though it's a very old melody. I wrote it like eight years ago. I just didn't think it had any legs.

Like I sang it to a couple of friends and then I was like, well, this isn't going to go anywhere. No one's, and I'd had people told me, no one is going to want another Dayenu. Nobody needs this. There's seder once a year. No one's going to teach it. It's not helpful. And I was like, okay. But really it was my friend Gideon and his family, I think that he's like, well, I taught it to them and now we do it every year and it's great. Oh, okay. So maybe one person's opinion shouldn't dictate.

Ellen Dreskin (19:14)

Mm -hmm. Yes.

Eliana (19:19)

how this song gets to move out in the world.

Ellen Dreskin (19:22)

Well, and I have to tell you that I was found myself in the United Kingdom a few weeks ago where someone was teaching it in preparation for their Passover Seder. So I think it's really, I love, well, I guess we don't have to tell any of the people who might be listening that we enjoy new melodies, but it really does wake, it just wakes you up to a different way of looking at it. And,

Eliana (19:31)

Oh my god.

right?

Ellen Dreskin (19:49)

You know, our quote unquote traditional melody, Dayenu is lovely. And I think that I will speak for myself. I tend to go on autopilot now and I would rather not predict in any year spend too much of my seder on autopilot.

Eliana (20:00)

Yeah.

And this melody, I mean, the reason that I wanted a new one in the first place is I wanted one where you could sing without doing too much shmushing all of the verses because it's kind of hard and then you have to add a bunch of things and a bunch of things, dayenu, right? It doesn't totally fit. And so I just wanted one with more expansiveness. And the reason I started it from the beginning is that one of my favorite things about it is it calls attention to the intro line of Dayenu which,

We also don't really sing with the other melody. *Kama ma 'alot tovot la makom alenu*. Wow, there are so many levels of goodness, ascending levels of good for us. And here we call the Holy One *Makom*, which I love the nickname for g?d that is place in a story that is so much.

about moving from one place to another, but actually stays most of its time in the liminal space, in the wandering space in between here and there. And *Makom* comes up in other places in the Haggadah too. *Baruch hamakom, baruch hu, baruch shanatan Torah*. Blessed is the place, g?d as, blessed is g?d as place, g?d as place that gave the Torah to us. We can think about how, even in our wanderings when we are feeling unmoored, what does it mean to call upon the divine as the place that is right here, wherever I am, that I can be grounded wherever I am? And gratitude is one of the ways to do that.

Ellen Dreskin (21:47)

Good advice when you're about to be wandering for any number of years. I don't have to worry that I've left g?d behind in that territory back there, but I'm carrying the territory with me.

Eliana (22:03)

Right, like the Mishkan is portable. I remember you did a post about this, I think, after the first Hava Nashira that we did at Greene Family Camp. Oh, by the way, friends, come to Hava Nashira. Why not? Registration is still open. Come sing in May in Texas, but it used to be in Wisconsin, and I think it was, and it still can be, and I totally get it, very hard for people that have...

Ellen Dreskin (22:05)

There you go.

Eliana (22:31)

put their kind of minds and hearts in that place and built so many memories in one place to then move to another place. That can be very challenging, but it moves with us. Yeah.

Ellen Dreskin (22:43)

Yeah, Hava Nashira is like heaven on earth. Thank g?d, Gan Eden travels with us wherever we go, perhaps. But it's interesting that even in our release from slavery, there were people who were grumbling who were wanting to go back because it's just the loss of the familiar. No matter how miserable you were, you have to let go of something in order to make room for that something new. It's not, it's very challenging.

Eliana (22:50)

Hmm.

Oh yeah.

Mm.

It is, so how can we call upon in those moments, Makom, divine as place. Speaking of calling to the divine, this isn't gonna work for everything, but I'm gonna see how long I can keep the chain going.

Ellen Dreskin (23:27)

I think you're doing a really good job so far, I gotta say.

Eliana (23:30)

I appreciate your encouragement. P in S.P.A.R.K. is for prayer. So what is a prayer that has been on your mind and heart?

Ellen Dreskin (23:41)

It's surprising to me how, as much as I just said that B'chol Dor Vador is always a prayer from the Seder that's on my mind, from year to year, different steps pop up and become important to me. And I find myself this year thinking about opening the door for Elijah. I find myself really wanting to nourish that hope that things...

will get better, that we can bring about that betterness in maybe any variety of ways, who knows. But I just recently came upon a kavana for opening the door for Elijah written by Rabbi Naomi Levy. And if it's okay, I'll share it now. And we'll of course put a link to it in the show notes.

It is aptly called Eliyahu Hanavi, opening the door for Elijah. And Rabbi Levy says, Elijah the prophet is the one who will herald in the Messiah. Our tradition offers us many visions of what messianic days will look like. Some say it will be a time of supernatural events and miracles. But the haftorah we recite just before Passover describes a great gift Elijah will bring this way. And he will restore the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents. Restoring love is the greatest miracle of all. It's a messianic dream. Elijah comes to every bris and baby naming to teach us the same lesson that every single soul has a sacred role to play in the healing of hearts across the world. Let that healing begin tonight in this home. Come Elijah, bless our hearts with love and forgiveness. Come Elijah, remind us how precious life is and how fragile. Come Elijah, enter this home, enter every home and drink from your honored cup. Redeem us Elijah, free us from resentments, heal us from anger. Bring an end to all war and bloodshed. Bring peace to Israel, peace to our world. Let a new time of hope begin tonight. Welcome Elijah, pull up a chair. We seek your blessing tonight. Come now Elijah, heal our

world.

Amen.

Eliana (26:05)

Amen

Ellen Dreskin (26:06)

It's so, you know, even though it's all metaphorical, there's an urgency and there's a plea in this that says.

Yes, I should not take it literally and please when I open the door, this is even if I don't think it can literally happen for sure right now, I'll take it. Dayenu, perhaps.

Eliana (26:29)

Yeah, Dayenu, there's something so powerful. I was just talking about this with my students on Sunday and I might have brought this up on the pod before. I'm also thinking, Ellen, we were talking before we started recording about what we should do after our Shabbat at Home series of Havdallah. No? Maybe? Perhaps?

Ellen Dreskin (26:49)

Sounds good. I would go there.

Eliana (26:52)

Perhaps, right? We invite Elijah to every havdalah also. We invoke his name as if to say, hey, did we do it? Did we get to the time where it will be Shabbat forever? And Elijah's like, sorry guys, not this week. And we say, okay, we'll try again. See you next week.

Ellen Dreskin (27:07)

Yeah.

Okay, that's right. We'll keep trying. We'll keep trying. Thank you for letting us know.

Eliana (27:19)

And there's, I won't tell the whole story, but there is a real thing that happened, the family lore of when we opened the door for Elijah and there was a cat sitting there. Have I told you this story? I might. My dad turned it into like a sweet little children's book. I might see about publishing it, but really there was a cat. And of course all of us kids were like, it's Elijah, it's Elijah the cat. And we already had three cats who had just shown up in places that we were. My mom was like, no more cats. We shooed it away.

Ellen Dreskin (27:32)

Thanks.

Eliana (27:49)

And then we were at our friends, the Schoenbergs were at our house that first night. We went to their house the second night and they said, we think the cat followed us home. So we're gonna open, and they really did not like cats. We're gonna open the back door instead of the front door. And Ellen, we opened the back door and guess who was there? The same cat. It was Elijah. Okay, so then it was like too much. We had to find the cat. We got the cat and got it taken care of and ended up being adopted by our friend.

Ellen Dreskin (28:06)

No way.

Oh my goodness.

Eliana (28:19)

Jennifer who told us this part might be apocryphal, that Elijah, of course she named the cat Elijah, there's nothing else to name the cat. Just had to be. She was studying for conversion at the time and Elijah would meow along with her when she was practicing her Haftarah, but not when she was practicing anything else, only the prophets. Only he knew, he knew. Anyway.

Ellen Dreskin (28:27)

Please, I'm so glad that you told me because it just had to be.

Okay, okay.

Eliana (28:49)

That is the truncated story of Elijah the cat. I'm really glad I got to share it with you.

Ellen Dreskin (28:53)

You know, why not? I have to tell you that we had a favorite book at the Seder table when our kids were growing up. So maybe we'll put a link to this somewhere. It's a book called Not Yet Elijah. And it's all written in rhyme. It's great illustrations. Very funny about Elijah wanting to come in sooner than, you know, before we ever actually opened the door. It should only be right that Elijah should be banging on our door to.

Eliana (28:59)

Mm -hmm.

Hmm, I don't know this one.

Ellen Dreskin (29:23)

bring about the world to come. Someday, someday, you never know. What prayer is on your mind, Eliana?

Eliana (29:29)

someday. That's beautiful.

I've been drawn to Psalm 147, both on its own and it's part of the morning liturgy of Pesukei d'Zimra, the Psalms that prepares for the morning service. Psalm 150 is, I guess, the most well-known in the series, but we have kind of leading up behind it, this series of Psalms in chronological order, and this one is...

147, and these are the lines.

And especially in these challenging days, I love these lines. The line before is about rebuilding Jerusalem and gathering the exiles. But what does that look like? It's saying it looks like a g?d that sits with us and can help us heal in whatever way that looks like, binding up their wounds, not preventing their wounds, not saying their wounds...

will never happen, they happen, but sitting with and binding, there's an intimacy there, a closeness that I find very comforting and also very challenging. And this idea that the Holy One has named every star and knows them by name, then surely, g?d knows my name and your name and can call each of us by name. In the next line, we call upon g?d's power and wisdom. But again, what is g?d using g?d's power and wisdom for? In line six, *Me 'oded anavim adonai mashbil reshaim aday erez* giving courage to the lowly, bringing the wicked down to the dust, not saying the wicked will not exist, but giving courage to those who face them. And...

I think it can be really challenging. I talk to my students about this a lot. If we have an idea of prayer saying, make it go away or make it not happen, it being the big bad, whichever big bad we're talking about, war, climate change, disease, there's a lot of big bads. And to say, what is it that we actually can pray for and how meaningful that might be the divine that sits with us and is with us and what it means to be made in the image of the divine and to sit with others in their brokenheartedness and to sit with others in their, with their wounds, not trying to make it go away, not trying to make it like it didn't happen, but being with them.

That's where my heart is.

Ellen Dreskin (32:22)

I'm really glad you shared that. When we say, have that, dear g?d, please make it go away, of course that's in our hearts. We'd love it if all of the terrible things would be going away, as you said. And there's a real acknowledgement. And it's not the old school may have been, I asked g?d to make it go away, it didn't go away, therefore g?d doesn't exist.

As opposed to I ask for it to go away, I don't really think that that's how g?d works, that it's gonna just magically go away. However, that doesn't mean that I can't call upon other qualities, other faces of the divine to help me journey through whatever the big bad is. That g?d is not a magician in that sense, but can still be a certainly a Makom.

Eliana (33:11)

Mm -hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (33:17)

a source of inner strength, a sacred place.

Eliana (33:22)

And with that, we'll be right back.

You could tell I couldn't think of a segue because I went with the music.

Ellen Dreskin (33:35)

Oh, come on, Eliana, you're slipping up there.

Eliana (33:37)

I know, I probably could have stretched a little more, but that's okay. We are on the, yeah? Do you have, you got a segue to A? All right, take us there.

Ellen Dreskin (33:44)

I've got a segue for you. I got a segue. I got a segue to A because you were just talking about being with someone who was in a certain state of mind or being in the healing with someone, bringing in the difficult places with someone. And being is very active. Being in that way in the A of Spark is action.

Eliana (34:08)

Mm -hmm. Yeah.

Ellen Dreskin (34:13)

And so just the ability to be with someone, you know, I am with you in your distress kind of feeling can be extremely active, providing that full presence.

Eliana (34:27)

Beautiful. Thank you. Yeah, I I phone a friend in this instance and call upon you So what action? Where's the where's the action at?

Ellen Dreskin (34:31)

You

Wow. Well, for me, the action each year, and it feels different each year, is the search for chametz

So I find that the search for *chametz* a really important activity for me. That being said, while I do a pretty good job of cleaning my house for Passover, I don't do an actual search for *chametz* with the feather and the candle. And because the *chametz* that I'm searching for is inside of me as well. There's a...

Eliana (35:14)

Hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (35:15)

all sorts of commentary that the *chametz* is our own leavening, our own puffed up egos that we allow to build up all year long. And part of the remembering that I was once a slave in Egypt is already a humbling experience. And each year as Passover rolls around,

I tried to get myself to that space of humility, not humiliation, but humility, two very different things. And I realized that I need to reflect on getting myself out of the way before Seder so that I can have space for whatever is going to happen and whatever the Haggadah has saved me this year.

Eliana (35:53)

Hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (36:14)

I am concentrating this year on Shema 'ing. I expect there will be any number of opinions and perspectives on the state of the world today, all sitting around our Seder table this year. And I really am concentrating on my ability to hear, I've said the word before,

Eliana (36:20)

Hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (36:43)

the Echadity of it all, to hear nuance, to hear opinions, to hear things that I wouldn't

hear coming out of my own heart or my own mouth, but may I please not dismiss it just because it's not my take on the subject, right? I want to be hearing it new this year, big time.

Eliana (36:44)

Mm -hmm.

Hmm, beautiful. This would make a really good segue into the R for ritual if I didn't have my thing to talk about. So I'll just share that quickly. It has nothing to do with Pesach. And then, or maybe you can find a way to have it do with Pesach. First of all, I want to say, because I keep thinking about it and forgetting it, listeners, if we made a t-shirt that said the Echadity of it all, would you buy one? Because I keep thinking about it sounds like it would be a great shirt, right? The Echadity of it all.

and then have like Ellen Dreskin, the Light Lab logo. I think that would be rad. Let us know if you would buy that shirt.

Ellen Dreskin (37:39)

Uh, well.

I might buy that shirt. I don't know if it needs my name on it, but I might buy the shirt. I think someone came up with the idea of echad before me. However, the Echadity, Echadity, I might take credit just for that word.

Eliana (37:47)

Okay.

Certainly someone did. Echadity is right.

Yeah, take the credit. Very quick, I was having a hard time thinking about action. And I was thinking, right, Pesach brings with it spring. And spring in Durham is the sneeziest and also the most beautiful time of the year. It's so gorgeous. The flowers and the trees driving around today. Like, I didn't know there were so many shades of green until I moved to North Carolina. Just such...

beautiful vibrancy and the birds. I mean, they were here throughout winter, but now they are all here. And I love that in my house, in this like residential neighborhood, it feels like I'm in the woods sometimes because of how loud the birds are. And there was this one very loud one right outside my window. And I thought, there's gotta be an app to identify birds by bird calls. So my friend asked me if I was a birder. I said, not really, I like them, but like I couldn't tell you anything about them.

And it is, there's this app, we'll link to it. It's called Merlin, it's by the Cornell Lab, and it's a sound ID for bird calls. And so I just pressed sound ID and I held it up to the window and it told me that it was a Carolina Wren making that beautiful noise. It certainly does. We have all types of birds here. Robins and, well, I haven't seen a Blue Jay in a long time, but.

Ellen Dreskin (39:14)

Well, that certainly sounds appropriate.

Eliana (39:26)

There's one sort of woodpeckery thing that I don't know what it is that like makes this drilling sound. Now I'm really excited to get to ID all these birds. It reminds me of a silly rhyme that my Bubbe used to say. It was passed down to my mother. It goes like this. Spring is sprung, the grass is riz. I wonder where da birdies is.

Ellen Dreskin (39:50)

I think I might have heard that growing up.

Eliana (39:50)

Yeah, I have no idea where it's from, but it is certainly a meaningful poem for me. It's true.

Ellen Dreskin (39:57)

So, yes, next time someone asks you, are you a birder? Now you can say, not yet, not yet.

Eliana (40:04)

yet. Exactly. But let's pretend I say that first and go back to the part about people having different thoughts and opinions at your seder as we move into the R of ritual.

Ellen Dreskin (40:16)

Wow, well, we always go around the table and ask people what they're gonna add to the Seder plate this year. And I just have a feeling that there are gonna be any number of things that people might want to add, keeping in mind that we add things to the Seder plate that help us to remember that story of liberation and that reminder that...

Eliana (40:22)

Hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (40:44)

the fact that we can sit around a table and remember that story as something from

our past or something that is not currently happening. We've already been talking about gratitude. That's a great deal of privilege right there. And as I mentioned before, my inbox is crowded with new sources of liturgy and variations on rituals for this year.

What are this year's plagues? What are this year's questions? What are this year's versions of the four children? I don't have all the answers, but I know there's going to be some good conversations.

Eliana (41:28)

I'm looking forward to those conversations and I'm also kind of nervous, Ellen, I'll say, partially because I have noticed my deep discomfort with mapping what is going on now in Israel, Palestine, and now with Iran and other players. I feel very uncomfortable mapping it as a one -to -one onto the Passover story. I have read...

Granted listeners, I did not read the piece, but I saw the title and the blurb and the thing that this person was talking about. The gist of it was, the plagues were necessary for our liberation. So the violence that Israel is inflicting on Gaza is necessary for our liberation. And that made me very angry. It made me a little angry, I'll say.

It frustrated me because of how easy it would be to turn that around. And I think this...

perspective has also been shared in a number of different ways, which is to say the plagues and the violence was necessary for liberation. So the violence that Hamas inflicted is necessary for their liberation. It's just a, it's a shift in narrative. I don't like either of those listener. That's what I'm meaning to say. I don't like either of those ideas. I think mapping what's going on now, onto the Passover story is dangerous. In the same way, I think that Netanyahu calling our current enemies Amalek is also dangerous. It's a different scope and it can be very easy to say g?d is on a side and it's not your side. As if there isn't just one human side, like all of us, right? To me, it very clear, maybe not clearly, but it feels like it's war versus peace in a way. Violence versus not violence, not the violence on one side versus violence on the other side. But the forces of violence and the forces of not violence, at least how it seems to me, and a lot more complicated and a lot more nuanced than the story that we are given.

I don't like thinking of g?d as being on one side or another. I think g?d sits with us and binds our wounds no matter who we are, no matter where we come from. And this idea of narrative that it so depends on the story that you're telling yourself about yourself has also come up a lot because the Seder is all about narrative. It's less about the story itself and more about how we tell the story and how the story is

told.

And Chava Alberstein's version of Chad Gadya has been in my head on this point. Ellen, you made a face. Is this a song that is familiar to you?

Ellen Dreskin (44:42)

somewhat familiar, but I'm hoping that you'll give us a synopsis of the perspective that makes it so controversial.

Eliana (44:51)

Yeah, this song came out in 1989 and for a long, for a little bit, and we'll link more to this, it was banned from state radio. And according to this beautiful article on Ritual Well that we'll share, it was banned, but public pressure called it to be lifted. And now it's a fixture on playlists before Pesach. But what Chava Alberstein does is take the framework of Chad Gadya, partially in Aramaic, but also bringing it into Hebrew, which is also different, singing that to this very kind of dark and haunting melody that is also the melody to the Yiddish song, Shira Lapirala, which I knew this Chad Gadya before that. So when I heard Shira Lapirala, I was like, wow, people think one came from the other or they both originally came from a different folk melody. But here's what Chava Alberstein ends on and we'll play a little bit of the song as well.

This is the translation in English, the translation by Juliet Spitzer:

Why are you singing this traditional song? It's not yet spring and Passover is not here. And what has changed for you? What has changed? I have changed this year. On all other nights, I ask the four questions, but tonight I have one more. How long will the cycle last? How long will the cycle of violence last? The chaste and the chaser, the beaten and the beater, when will all this madness end? I used to be a kid and a peaceful sheep.

Today I am a tiger and a ravenous wolf. I used to be a dove and I used to be a deer. Today I don't know who I am anymore. Dizavon Aba bitre zuze and we start it all over again.

I found it an incredibly powerful song, especially this year, in the production and the way she sings with her whole heart and being. And in the way that even as we can argue and have discussions around what the best path forward is and how to prevent violence in the future and who should be doing what to keep who safe. To cry out that the cycle of violence must end and to allow ourselves to feel that with our whole hearts and to think about less mapping it onto the story, but inspired by something I heard Yael Kanarek of TorahTah say about reading the Torah spiritually. Like, in what ways am I Moses? In what ways...

Am I Pharaoh? When am I an Israelite? When am I an Egyptian? When am I Miriam? Taking that onto our hearts and minds and seeing what blossoms from there. Trying that out narratively.

Ellen Dreskin (48:51)

I have noticed myself in the last couple of days being very sensitive to calling the names of countries as if they were human beings who all had one mind and one heart. So Iran did this. Israel believes that. The United States is sending X to it. These are.

Eliana (49:04)

Hmm.

Right. Hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (49:19)

The leaders who are making these decisions are individual people. And I have to believe that there are many, many, many in all of these countries and hopefully all around the world, individuals who are crying out at the top of their lungs for change, for comfort, for...

Eliana (49:40)

Yes.

Ellen Dreskin (49:48)

acting not out of the sense of such fear and such narrow places and such urgency. Can we just be human? I'm so naive. I'm so very, very naive to think that it could happen. But these are not, you know, when I say the United States is doing X, Y, or Z, that doesn't mean anything. We are, you know,

Eliana (50:04)

Me too. Me too.

Ellen Dreskin (50:18)

All these countries and all these decisions are being made by individuals. And we do have an obligation and we do have a chance. And...

And I don't know, that was not a segue from or to anything, but I just felt particularly following that Chava Alberstein melody to, you know, there's a sense of this is the time of year that says, wake up folks, you have a hand here. Big time.

Eliana (50:46)

Hmm.

Big time. Thank you for that challenge. I'm gonna pay attention to how I start saying that too, because you're totally right. We saw it, we've seen it in the protests last week and the week before that, and Israel people who are tired and angry and sad. And what does it mean to attempt to hold leaders accountable?

And I think part of that is recognizing the ways in which we have power or wield power. I've mentioned this on the podcast before, but I love this idea of softening the heart, that one of the things *t'fillah* can do is soften the heart. And that is in direct contrast, of course, I thought, duh, it's in direct contrast to hardening the heart of what Pharaoh does. So if we are to be...

not like Pharaoh, and Rabbi Shai Held talks about this too, like part of the goal is building a community that is the anti -Pharaoh, that is the anti -Pharaoh's kingdom, to say, if Pharaoh hardens his heart, then we shall soften our hearts, and how can we do that?

Do you want to find some sort of connection to the knowledge to K?

Ellen Dreskin (52:14)

Well, we mentioned before that it really is a journey. I mean, there's no going back. There's never any going back. I was speaking to someone earlier this week that it was talking about the commentary on why when we left Egypt, were we taken on such a terribly roundabout way and not just even directly to the Red Sea or anything like that. And it was because our commentators

thought that there was a concern that if it were easy to go back, we would have gone back to slavery because it was familiar and it was unknown and that this is the long and winding road that's taking us wherever it is that we're gonna end up.

Eliana (52:50)

Hmm, wow.

Ellen Dreskin (53:07)

And it's always a journey forward. It's never a going back. So I'm thinking in terms of knowledge this year, I'm already trying to anticipate what the counting of the Omer will feel like for me. Those seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot, if I succeed in widening any of the narrow spaces that I'm in during the course of Passover, can I keep that Makom

Eliana (53:16)

Hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (53:36)

Can I keep it wide open? Can I keep a softened heart in the face of what I'm sure will be a number of additional challenges and complications and tragedies in terms of the world? Can I keep going forward? And can I not harden my heart? Can I not let that calm makes let that ego?

Eliana (54:00)

Hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (54:05)

puff me up so that I don't have room to consider caring about others and to consider being concerned about staying open and soft and listening. So I'm hoping that the Omer is a time for us to get ready for Sinai and see, you know, well, what am I hearing this year? And may it please g?d be very different from things that I'm used to hearing.

Eliana (54:32)

Hmm, that's beautiful. Yeah, that's getting me excited for the Omer. I'm not always excited for the Omer, but there's just so much beautiful Torah, new rituals, new tools that are coming out to help us in these ways. And may it be new. I wanted to share a book that I'm reading slash listening to, because I'm listening to it on audio book. And it is a remarkable book that is called, *Loving Our Own Bones, Disability Wisdom and the Spiritual Subversiveness of Knowing Ourselves Whole* by Julia Watts Belser. And we'll put a link in the show notes. I think I saw my friend Salem post about this book and I'm so, so glad she did because it is, at least to me, it's been remarkable, this reading our tradition and...

ideas from Talmud and stories from the Torah through the lens of disability. Her writing is so poetic and lyrical. I find it to be just, it's a joy to listen to. I am learning so much, so many new perspectives, and it's given me new ways of thinking about my own body. I have chronic pain, I have arthritis, and also living in a fat body.

This idea that liberation and healing can come not just when I have a different body, because that's not gonna happen because this is my body, but in being in, and as the title says, loving our own bones. Since I'm listening on audio book, I haven't picked up many quotes, but the one that I did put in my phone where she's talking about, a disabled dance troupe, this beautiful piece that she saw as the artistry of the actual, when we allow ourselves to love what is. The beauty of what is, not some other imagined way that things could be, but what is.

Ellen Dreskin (56:51)

What it reminds me of when you say that is the interpretation of *Olam Haba*, which we often say the world to come. *Haba* means it's coming right now, right here while

you and I are talking. This is the world that is coming in five seconds, in 10 seconds, et cetera, that it's constantly present tense. The reality of now is at every moment, *olam haba*. And again, it's...

Eliana (56:57)

Hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (57:21)

like as we've been saying today quite a bit, what stories are we telling ourselves? Both from our own past and from our own reality right now and how we are looking at our existence here. And it's becoming more and more important, I think, for us to examine that and be *chayav*, and be, you know, *chayavim anu*. We're obligated to...

Eliana (57:28)

Mm -hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (57:49)

have all of this affect us deeply and move forward in a healthy, holistic way.

Eliana (57:56)

On that note, I'm wondering, Ellen, if you could leave us with a little blessing based on what we've been sharing today, if anything comes to your heart for us.

Ellen Dreskin (58:06)

Well, I do have a prayer that I'd love to share. It's quite, it's not the most pleasant to hear. It's kind of a prayer for uncomfortable times. And it's called prayer for healing and for containing vengeance. And if it's not the way to end the podcast, Eliana, then we'll have to see. This is,

Eliana (58:17)

Hmm.

I'm feeling, I'm there with you, Ellen. Let's do it.

Ellen Dreskin (58:35)

written by a very important teacher in my experience, Professor Melila Hellner Eshed. She teaches Zohar in Jerusalem. And she says,

Divine One, Source of the spirits for all flesh, we are before you as spirits rent and weary from sorrow. Pity us humanity created in your image.

Guide us in this time of fracture and tragedy, fear, death and panic. Please, please, we beg that you reveal our own mercy and love beyond the judgment, vengeance

and evil that lies within us. For the pain is so severe, searing, that it only seeks unconsolable retribution. Keep watch, Shekhinah, our strength over our scorched spirits, our frightened souls. Our furious flesh. May the image of divinity within our crumpled hearts rise and shine like the dawn. And here we go with something from Psalm 27, surprisingly enough, she closes with, that we may yet still believe that we deserve to see Hashem's goodness and the goodness of humanity in the land of the living.

Amen.

Eliana (59:55)

Hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (1:00:00)

That last verse is *Lulei He 'emanti Lerot, betuv Adonai, be 'eretz 'chayim*. And Eliana, I want you to know that we're going to be using your melody for Lulei to close our Seder this year with that hope of seeing g?d's goodness and the goodness of humanity now in the land of the living, not in some future time to come. But may we help to bring it now.

Eliana (1:00:01)

Amen.

Oh wow.

Hmm.

Ellen Dreskin (1:00:29)

That's my blessing.

Eliana (1:00:31)

I mean, thank you so much, Ellen. Thank you, listeners. Thank you to our podcast team, Rachel Kaplan and Yaffa Englander. Thank you for bringing your hearts and your minds. I hope something was sparked in you. You can find links to the things that we talked about on our website or in our show notes.

Wishing you a joyous and meaningful and productively challenging and liberatory Passover. We'll see you soon.