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### March 29, 2010: The New Neo-Hasidism

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Title: Happy Passover

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3/29/2010—Tonight is the Seder. Not having or attending a Seder is one of the most noticeable changes in my newly secular life. I feel a little like those First Century Jewish followers of Jesus eating pork shortly after his death. The odd thing about this absence is that Passover probably is one of the religious ceremonies that secularism in America should celebrate. The Exodus story has been an inspiration to the oppressed for thousands of years. Its message is that reality is somehow on the side of the downtrodden. Or, as Martin Luther King Jr. once said, the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice. Unfortunately, we don't have the right context for a ceremony yet. (The Obama White House has something close, but if you read the stories, you heard about the gefilte fish. I hate references to Jewish foods around holidays. It robs the holiday of its meaning.) The other memorable aspect of Passover is the fact that God only remembers the Hebrew slaves when he hears them. The philosopher Peter Singer has raised the question whether we owe the poor far away the same duty we owe our neighbors closer by. (I think he says yes). But the Passover story suggests that we are stimulated in our empathy by the direct presence of the suffering of the other. (In the story, Moses as well acts only in the direct presence of suffering.) To everyone, then, a happy Passover.