

INTRODUCTION

Passover, 2008

The Seder is not a service in the traditional sense. Rather, it is an outline of the major points to be covered. The goal is to personalize the exodus from Egypt as the haggadah itself says: "In each generation one should see himself as if he personally left Egypt." To that end, the Seder is designed to use foods, tastes, questions, discussions and song to keep the memory alive.

The Seder does not have to be conducted in Hebrew if participants are uncomfortable reading in Hebrew or if they do not understand it. Nor must it be said verbatim. Creativity and planning are critical to memorable Sedarim.

The Seder is designed to illicit questions and discussions. Symbols abound for that very purpose. In this booklet, I've included some of the answers given by CHHS students. In some cases, their responses echo the views of the rabbis of long ago. In other cases, their answers are unique and personal.

Over the last few weeks, I spoke with a number of CHHers informally to get their sense of the Seder. I sought out questions they had about the Seder and then asked them to think about possible answer. Some of their questions and answers are included in the section "The Number Four."

In addition, there are some tips, suggestions and explanatory materials included. It is by no means exhaustive. Rather, it is designed to be a beginning. Feel free to use it or adapt it as you see fit.

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Chag Samei-ach,

Rabbi Ed Prince

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9 STEPS FOR A MEANINGFUL PASSOVER SEDER

INTRODUCTION

The Seder is not a service in the traditional sense. Rather, it is a summary of major points which you are expected to use as an outline. This requires making some decisions. What kind of Seder do you want? Traditional, creative, somewhere in between? A successful Seder requires some thought and advanced planning. Below are 9 steps which will help you make your Passover Seder a special experience:

1. **Invest in good haggadot (haggadas) for all your participants.** It is important that everyone at the table have an edition that is attractive and easy to read. Avoid the temptation to pick-up free ones in the supermarket or use a collection of whatever happens to be in the house. Choose one with a clear text and interesting commentaries rather than one that may be artistically beautiful but difficult to use. This is a one-time investment that will bring years of dividends. Most synagogues and local Jewish gift shops will have a selection to choose from as well as major book stores such as Barnes and Noble, Borders and Amazon. However, the ultimate haggadah may be one you put together yourself. There are multiple sites on the web that have free haggadot you can download A few years ago, USA Today listed a number of open source haggadot available (see: http://www.usatoday.com/tech/news/2006-04-05-passover-online_x.htm). You can easily combine traditional texts with modern interpretations and readings, songs and information. This will take some time, but the reward will be a Seder experience that is meaningful and memorable.
2. **Choose a theme.** There is so much more to the Seder than simply reading the text and eating. By choosing a theme (freedom, Passover throughout history, etc,) you bring focus to the material. Feel free to use props or have people prepare questions in advance.
3. **Plan.** A great Seder does not happen spontaneously. Map out in advance what parts of the Seder you will include or leave out. There is no requirement to recite every word from the haggadah. Where will you follow the haggadah and where will you allow for creativity? How will you allow for the participation of those at your table? Coordinate your timing with the person in charge of the kitchen so that you are not blamed for burned tzimmes or cold chicken soup. Give attention to how you will conclude the Seder after the meal so that everyone is not asleep right after dessert or ready to go home.
4. **Know your participants.** Make sure people know what to expect. If someone is expecting a very short Seder followed by a very long meal, or the reverse, let him or her know what will be different. If your Seder will take an hour or more, and there are young children, have lots of vegetables to serve before the meal or suggest that they eat something before arriving.

5. **Get others to prepare.** Have all of your participants prepare something in advance of the Seder which they will contribute at the Seder. Children might prepare a few songs; teenagers can create their own creative skit about the Exodus such as a take-off on a television show. Adults can be given a topic to prepare in advance such as the role of women in the Exodus or theories about the plagues or the parting of the Red Sea.
6. **Draw on the group's experience.** Everyone has a favorite Seder story. Sharing personalizes the experience. After all, the haggadah tells us that in each generation we must think of ourselves as being personally liberated from slavery. Encourage other people to ask and answer.
7. **Ask questions.** Don't limit yourself to the four questions in the haggadah. One of the best ways to elicit the telling of the story of the Exodus is by asking questions. We have learned a lot and had a lot of good laughs by asking questions such as: What was a typical day during the plague of frogs? If you could only pack three things when you left Egypt, what would you take? What would be the first thing you would say after emerging from the far side of the Red Sea? In a different vein, go round the table and ask people to share one way they feel enslaved or one aspect of their lives in which they would like to feel freer this year. The level of self-disclosure is up to each person, but it is a great way to equalize participation around the table.
8. **If you love Pesach, set them free.** When choosing a menu, please keep in mind that everyone should be able to enjoy the Seder. No one should be enslaved in the kitchen. Timing counts, so plan accordingly.
9. **The Boy Scouts are right – BE PREPARED.** The more advanced planning and preparation you do, the easier, smoother, and more rewarding your Seder will be. There are a number of excellent handbooks available which provide wonderful background as well as step-by-step instructions. The Internet is also a wonderful resource.

THE ESSENTIALS

A cracker. A vegetable. A glass of wine. A roasted bone. These are hardly the items one would expect to figure prominently in a re-enactment of history's grandest epic. But the spiritual adventure we call the Passover Seder is experienced in our dining rooms, at the table, with friends and family. At the Seder, matzah, wine, and bitter herbs are our keys to freedom, and the haggadah--the telling and retelling of the story of the Exodus--is our road map for a journey begun over 33 centuries ago.

In our day and age, for many American Jewish families, if there were a fifth question, it most likely would be: "How long does a Seder have to be?" There is no set answer. However, the rabbis who created the Seder established what they considered to be the essentials of the Seder.

THE TELLING OF THE STORY/THE PASCAL OFFERING

At the Seder, each person considers himself as if he were going out of Egypt. We begin with our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; we are with our people as they descend into exile, and suffer cruel oppression and persecution. We are with them when G-d sends the ten plagues to punish Pharaoh and his nation, with them as they leave Egypt, and with them at the crossing of the Sea of Reeds (Yam Suf). We witness the miraculous hand of God as the waters part, allowing the Israelites to pass, and then return, thundering over the Egyptian legions.

WINE

"Wine," King David tells us, "gladdens the heart." One of the principal mitzvahs of the Pesach Seder is to drink four cups of wine (or grape juice). No, this is not simply an experiment in altered states of consciousness; the four cups actually have profound Biblical significance.

THE MEANING OF MATZAH

The mitzvah of eating matzah on the Seder night is of paramount importance. What could be so significant about any food—especially one so plain?

But utter simplicity of matzah is precisely the point. Matzah is the humblest of foods—flat and unpretentious, unadulterated and unadorned. Eating Matzah on Passover actually helps us to cultivate the trait of humility ... and humility is the beginning of liberation.

THE BITTER HERBS

Another basic mitzvah at the Seder is the eating of the bitter herbs, to remind us of the bitter taste of slavery. Though today we may live in relative ease and comfort, we must

never forget what it was like to live under the whips of the Egyptian taskmasters. And we must remember that many people still live in fear, in captivity, or in our need.

PRAISING GOD

The Jewish view of the world requires acknowledgement of the goodness and generosity of others. Within the haggadah is the Hallel, which is composed of psalms of praise.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

The answer below was provided by the chaplain of the Israeli Army to this question asked by a soldier:

Due to my duties on Seder night, my time is very limited. Are there certain parts of the Hagada that can be omitted in my case?

The following is an instruction guide as to what to do if you have only limited time on the Seder night:

The most basic:

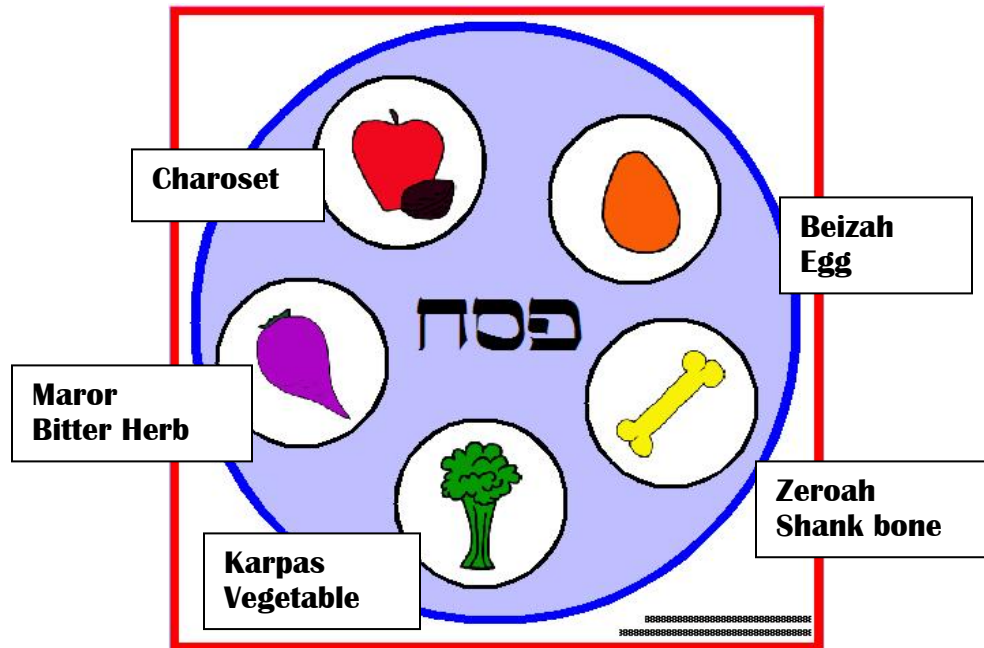
1. **קדוש** Kiddush and drinking the first cup of wine,
2. **מה נשתנה** Ma nishtana – The Four Questions
3. **עבדים היינו** Avadim hayinu – We were once slaves
4. **רבן גמליאל אומר** Rabban Gamliel Omer: Pesach, Matza and Maror,'
5. **מוציא מצה**, **מוציא** Motzi Matza
6. **ברך** Barech - Grace after meals

It should be noted that while this is intended as an answer because of military constraints on time, It provides insight into the priorities of the Seder.

SEDER TABLE CHECKLIST

1. Three Matzot (covered). The Matzot can either be part of the Seder Plate) or left separately. Also, they should be whole.
2. Haggadot. One for each person. Additional copies for exploration or consulting can be passed around throughout the evening.
3. Wine or grape juice.
4. Seder Plate. Some people have a full Seder plate for each family.
5. Kiddush cup. One for each person.
6. Saucer (for spilling wine when plagues are mentioned.)
7. Extra Matzah (covered-optional; This Matzah need not be on the table.)
8. Cup of Elijah.
9. Salt Water.
10. Extra Marror. (This Marror need not be on the table.)
11. Pillow (for leaning). Traditionally, we lean on the left when we drink all four cups of wine.

THE SEDER PLATE



The Seder Plate is a relatively new addition to the Seder. It contains 5 or 6 items (some plates have Chazeret-the grated maror used in the maztah and maror sandwich). Each item has special symbolism:

Why does the Charoset taste good if it represents the mortar which was bad?

What your teens answered:

- So kids would be curious and ask.
- Because out of bad came good.
- Things are never as bad as they seem.
- We dip the maror into the charoset and during a holiday nothing should be all bad.

Charoset – a mixture of apples, wine, spices and nuts, which symbolizes the mortar used by the Hebrews to make bricks.

Maror – the bitter herb, which recalls our life of bitterness.

Karpas – any vegetable (although most people use green vegetables), which symbolizes spring.

Zeroah – the roasted shank bone, which reminds us of the Passover offering.

Beitzah – a roasted egg, which reminds us the special holiday offerings of the Temple.

In addition there are three pieces of maztah which are said to represent the three groups of Jews: Priests, Levites, and everyone else. Another explanation is that they represent the two "breads" that are used for Shabbat and festivals, as well as a third "bread." This third piece is the lechem oni, the bread of affliction.

THE NUMBER FOUR

The number four has special significance for the Seder. There are:

- 4 cups of wine
- 4 Questions
- 4 Sons/Children

Four Cups of Wine/Elijah's Cup

Wine was not a luxury slaves usually enjoyed. Indeed, the rabbis required everyone, even those living off of charity, to drink four cups of wine at the Seder in Exodus 6:6-7, God uses four expressions of freedom to describe the liberation of the Jewish People from Egypt:

Should there be a 5th cup?

What your teens answered:

YES:

- Because you can't be free if you don't have your own place.
- Because God took us out of Egypt so we could go to Israel.

NO:

- We appreciate the fact that God took us out of Egypt. That was enough.
- Because the generation which left Egypt died in the desert so they never went to Israel.

1. V'hotzaiti – “and I will remove you”
2. V'hotzalti – “and I will save you”
3. V'go-alti – “and I will redeem you”
4. V'lakachti – “and I will take you”

But in the next verse, it is written “And I will bring you to the land which I promised your forefathers.” Some rabbis note that this is also an expression of freedom since true freedom involves more than merely not having to serve others. They therefore thought that we should drink five cups. As a compromise, we fill a fifth cup but don't drink from it. We call this cup “Elijah's cup” because there is a tradition that Elijah will precede the Messiah and answer questions of Jewish law that have been in dispute.

In class, we spoke about the value of compromise and being inclusive. For this reason, some families have the custom of filling Elijah's cup with wine from

all the other Seder participants. So if your children no longer believe that a shaken table is “proof” that Elijah is actually drinking from his cup, it may be because they understand that Elijah has something rather more important to teach.

SEDER TIP: One need not drink four full cups of wine especially since getting drunk on Passover is forbidden. Grape juice may certainly be used by those who might become sleepy or tipsy during the Seder and is especially encouraged for young children.

The Four Questions

The four questions go back to at least the Second Temple Period when Jerusalem was filled with pilgrims coming to offer their required Passover sacrifice and share the offering with family and friends. In those days, the telling of the exodus from Egypt occurred as part of the meal. We even know that after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in the year 70, one of the questions was replaced. The Four Questions offer us a snapshot of the Seder during those times but as our students discovered when exploring them, some of the questions are problematic.

QUESTION	What Your Children Asked	What Your Teens Answered
Why is this night different from all other nights?	Is this really a separate question or an introduction?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's the only question. The others are statements so it must be an introduction. • Perhaps it's really a hint to the importance of the number 5, like the cups of wine.
On all other nights we eat chametz or matzah, but on this night, we eat only matzah.	The Jews ate matzah because they didn't know when they would be leaving. What's the big deal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They had to be proactive and believe they would be leaving. • They understood that becoming a nation meant starting with just the basics.
On all other nights, we eat all kinds of vegetables but on this night, we eat only bitter herbs.	This is wrong. We also eat greens.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe the maror is so important that it overshadows other vegetables. • Maybe when the questions were first asked, it was not common to eat greens.
On all other nights we don't dip even once, but on this night, we dip twice.	Who says we don't dip on other nights?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perhaps individual dipping bowls were put out instead of a big one. • Dipping is usually optional, at the Seder, everyone does it.
On all other nights, we eat any way we want, but on this night, everyone reclines.	Who reclines when they eat?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It must have been common to recline at the time the question was first asked at the Seder.

SEDER TIP: The text of the haggadah does not formally answer these questions. The actual answers are: 1. We eat matzah to remind us that the Hebrews left Egypt quickly without their bread having time to rise; 2. We eat bitter herbs to remind us of the bitter life our ancestors had in Egypt; 3. We dip the maror into the charoset and the vegetable into salt water; 4. We recline because in ancient societies, only free people were permitted to recline when they ate.

The Four Sons/Children

In our exploration of the four sons/children, we realize that we had a lot of questions. For example: Where did these four kids come from? Why four? Who decided which son was wise or wicked?

The Mishnah of the Talmud (Pesachim 10:4) gives a formula of four questions which are asked by the child to the father. The father then replies to the child "according to the child's intelligence." This is where the story of the Four Sons comes into play. The Four Sons is a story that describes four different types of Sons according to their personality. The parent chooses the appropriate type of personality from among the four types of personalities that fits his son's personality and then replies to each of the four questions posed by the child according to the chosen personality that fits his child's personality.

<p>What makes the Wise Child so wise? What your teens answered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He is interested in the details. People ask detailed questions only when they're really interested; • We may not be able to see it in writing but you can tell a lot by the way a question is asked. 	<p>What makes the Simple Child simple? What your teens answered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He asks a complicated question in a simple way. • His question is really like that of the wicked child. Maybe he is simple only because he's looking for a simple way out where he won't get into trouble.
<p>What makes the Wicked child so evil? What your teens answered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He's really making more of a statement than asking a question. • He calls the Seder a "service" and services are often boring. • He does not even want to try to take part in the Seder. 	<p>What kind of child can't ask a question? And if he can't ask, what kind of answer can he get? What your teens answered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe he's afraid to ask because he doesn't want to be considered wicked. • Because he's afraid to do it wrong, he stays quiet.

SEDER TIP: Consider whether there might be a fifth child today. What would s/he ask? What would be an appropriate answer?