



Seder Conversation Starters

According to the Talmud,* this time of year is not only a time to recall and retell the freedom from Egypt, which occurred years ago, it's also a time to envision new and future freedom. The Seder provides a spiritual opportunity! It's encoded with a spiritual toolset. These resources offer a guide to using this toolset.

“Through the Haggada more than a hundred generations of Jews have handed on their story to their children. The word haggada means ‘tell’ but it is closely related to another Hebrew root that means ‘join,’ or ‘connect.’ By reciting the Haggada, Jews give their children a sense of connectedness to Jews throughout the world and to the Jewish people through time.”

- Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

These cards have been designed to get the whole family engaged in asking questions around the Seder table, with the goal of bringing the Seder ideas into our lives.

* Babylonian Talmud, *Rosh Hashanah* 11a.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Print and prepare the cards before the Seder.
- Share them among everyone around the table.
- Give everyone a chance to read their card at the appropriate time in the Seder.
- There are no right or wrong answers – just opportunities to ask questions and share ideas.

Chag sameach (happy holiday) to you and your families!

1.

Kadesh

Making holy

The blessing over the wine speaks of the completion of a creative process.

- What creative process or activity did you complete this year?
- What creative ability of another person around the table have you benefited from or has inspired you?
- What is something you do that makes you feel incredibly alive, or makes you feel that you are fulfilling the purpose of your creation?
- What was a holy, awe-inspiring moment for you this year?



3.

Karpas

Vegetables

We begin the Seder with a taste of spring. After the cold and darkness of winter, the rejuvenation of spring reveals itself. But why would we dip the symbols of growth and renewal in salt water, which symbolizes tears?

- What's the value of acknowledging pain and sadness during a celebration of freedom and hope?
- Why begin with that?
- What are the different reasons you get teary?
- When are tears purifying, and what do we want our tears to purify us from – and for what purpose?

Children may enjoy doing the following science experiment: See how much salt must be added to a bowl of warm water to make something float.



2.

Urchatz

Washing

This is handwashing without a blessing, in memory of ancient times.

- What memories and meaning will be drawn from this year's extensive handwashing when we look back at it?

Some families have the custom that water is brought to the leader of the Seder (or for everyone at the table), so that like royalty their hands are washed without needing to get up.

- Turn to someone sitting near you and take turns treating each other like royalty. Why is the experience of feeling like royalty part of the Seder? How does it feel? How is it related to freedom?



4.

Yachatz

Breaking

The Seder leader breaks the middle matzah of the three into two pieces. The bigger piece is put aside to be the afikoman which will be eaten after the meal. The smaller piece is put back in between the other two matzot.

- Can you think of an example of when something broken led to more wholeness?
- What feels fragile now for you?
- Consider this saying from Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk: "There is nothing as whole as a broken heart." What might this mean for you?
- How might this line reframe how we look at each other during challenging moments?



5.

Maggid

Retelling the story

- Why are you telling the Passover story this year?
- What about your own family story would you want to retell?

Kol Dichfin

Let all who are hungry come and eat!

- Whom would you like to have invited to or included in your Seder this year?
- Is there a story about or from that person that you can retell?
- While the physical isolation this year prevents us from inviting anyone hungry into our homes to come and eat, it is still a time to consider those in need. Whom might we want to help nourish, and how?
- *Ahavah*, the Hebrew word for love, is related to the word *hav*, which means “give.” How might you grow the love for others and yourself through generosity?
- The act of giving brings joy to the giver, not only to the recipient. How can we be extra welcoming to those who are in our homes (ourselves included)?
- When during this year did you take part in or witness generous giving?



6.

Maggid

Retelling the story

Mah Nishtanah

- What is different about this night?
- How is this night different from the Passover we experienced last year and the year before?
- What important, challenging, or inspiring questions are coming up for us at this time?
- What gives you hope that things that need to change will change?
- What’s your favorite song about hope or change?



7.

Maggid

Retelling the story

The Four Children

- How is each of the four children present within each one of us?
“Who is wise? He who learns from every person.”*
- What beliefs about ourselves and others can draw us toward learning from every person?
- Where else in the Haggadah and Jewish life is the number four featured?

* Mishnah, *Pirkei Avot* 4:1.



8.

Maggid

Retelling the story

Vehi She'amdah

God's promise has stood

This is a song of resilience, standing up to persecution and overcoming challenges. The Haggadah reminds us that God helps and is with the Jewish people when they are in trouble.

- Who are your heroes, and what challenges have they overcome?
- What challenges have you overcome? Who supported you?
- Whom have you supported to overcome a challenge?
- Was there a time this year when you sensed God helping the Jewish people?*

One way to acknowledge the theme of “standing up” is to invite everyone to stand up and incorporate some movement into the Seder. Each person, in turn, can share one stretch that others follow.

* From Aryeh Ben David, *The Ayeka Haggadah: Hearing Your Own Voice*, 2017.



9.

Maggid

Retelling the story

Dayeinu

It would have been enough

- Which things, people, places, experiences, and learning opportunities are you grateful for this season?
- How can you sing about them?
- Can you use the tune and structure of the traditional *Dayeinu* to add your personal feelings of gratitude?
- For what are you grateful to the Jewish people?



10.

Maggid

Retelling the story

Pesach, matzah, and maror

Shank bone, matzah, and bitter herbs

- Which foods play a special role in your family story?
- At the beginning of the Seder, matzah symbolized the bread of poverty, affliction, and pain. Now the same matzah symbolizes the bread of freedom. When have you seen someone transform a challenge into an opportunity?
- What challenges with coronavirus are you hoping to remember as having been transformed into some type of goodness, healing, love, or the like?



11.

Maggid

Retelling the story

In every generation

“In every generation, each person should see themselves as having personally gone out of Egypt.”

Maimonides, a medieval Jewish philosopher, adds the Hebrew letter *heh* to the word “see” in this phrase.* Instead of *lirot*, “to see,” he thinks that it should be *le’harot*, “to show.” This changes the meaning from “see themselves” to “show themselves.” Our posture can show the stature of a liberated person.

Invite everyone at your table to use body language first to show an enslaved person, and then to show a liberated person.

- How would you like to see – or show – yourself in the future after experiencing the coronavirus pandemic?

* From David Dishon and Noam Zion, *A Different Night: The Family Participation Haggadah* (Jerusalem: The Shalom Hartman Institute, 1997), p. 115.



12.

Rachtzah

Washing hands

- What's the difference between washing our hands clean and washing our hands to ritually prepare for something?
- How can the handwashing ritual help us prepare for a quiet, mindful experience of eating matzah as a spiritual experience?

Consider reading the next cards before the handwashing.



14.

Maror and Korech

Bitter herbs and the "Hillel sandwich"

- Ask the children, what is something "bitter" they would like to fix in the world?
- The Seder is designed to be a multisensory experience, with opportunities for taste, song, and movement; and an experience that evokes emotions – laughter, yearning, hope, and sadness.
- How might all this help bring forth empathy?
- Toward whom might you direct that empathy now?



13.

Motzi Matzah

Blessing on matzah

Try having a quiet, mindful moment as you chew the matzah, reflecting on its simplicity and tasting its plain flavor.

What can help you be fully present for this potential spiritual peak of the Seder?

What nourishment does our world need now?

Might slow, meditative chewing of the matzah of transformation give you hope?

Take time to consider and pray for what you most yearn.



15.

Shulchan Orech

The festive meal

Literally, "the set table"

- What's your favorite food memory from a Seder you participated in?



16.

Tzafun

Hidden

Afikoman – dessert

- What are we hiding from ourselves?
- Moses' life began with being hidden for three months. Miriam, Moses' sister, hid behind the reeds when Moses was placed in the basket. We hide the afikoman early in the Seder and then find it at the end.
- What lost part of ourselves, our family, or our Jewish tradition might we have found in the process?
- Why is it important to finish the meal by finding what's hidden?
- How might we all find our inner child's playfulness to make this favorite Seder step for children also engaging for the adults?



17.

Barech

Blessing after the meal

Jewish tradition is loaded with many blessings – for every life passage and for many daily and seasonal events. Of all the blessings, only one is explicitly commanded in the Torah* – the blessing after a meal.

- Why, of all possible blessings, did God focus on the blessing after eating?
- To whom and how do you offer gratitude when you enjoy a meal?

* The rabbis count the blessing on studying Torah as being from a biblical source as well, but the reference is less explicit.



18.

Hallel

Praise and gratitude

- Sing your favorite song of gratitude. Invite each person to share something from this past year for which they are grateful to God.



19.

Nirtzah

Conclusion

- What does Next Year in Jerusalem mean to you?

We've told our story of leaving Egypt. We touched our personal pain, stepping from our "inner Egypt" toward expansive freedom. In each of us, there is a Jerusalem that is still shattered. But with the sensitivity awoken this night, we remember that there is also a perfect wholeness radiating from our soul. There is a built Jerusalem, or as the rabbis put it, an upper Jerusalem, which reminds us who we are and toward what we are moving. It reminds us of our eagle's wings which can lift us to freedom.

- How can we hear the tender and powerful whisper of that upper Jerusalem, which reminds us that we are awesome and can help build what another might be missing? How can we express a yearning for this built Jerusalem, which is wholly loving, expansive, and encompassing everybody's inner freedom?*

* Adapted from Rabbi Yaakov Varshavski, *Haggadah of Freedom*, pp. 190–191, levlomedahava.com.

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