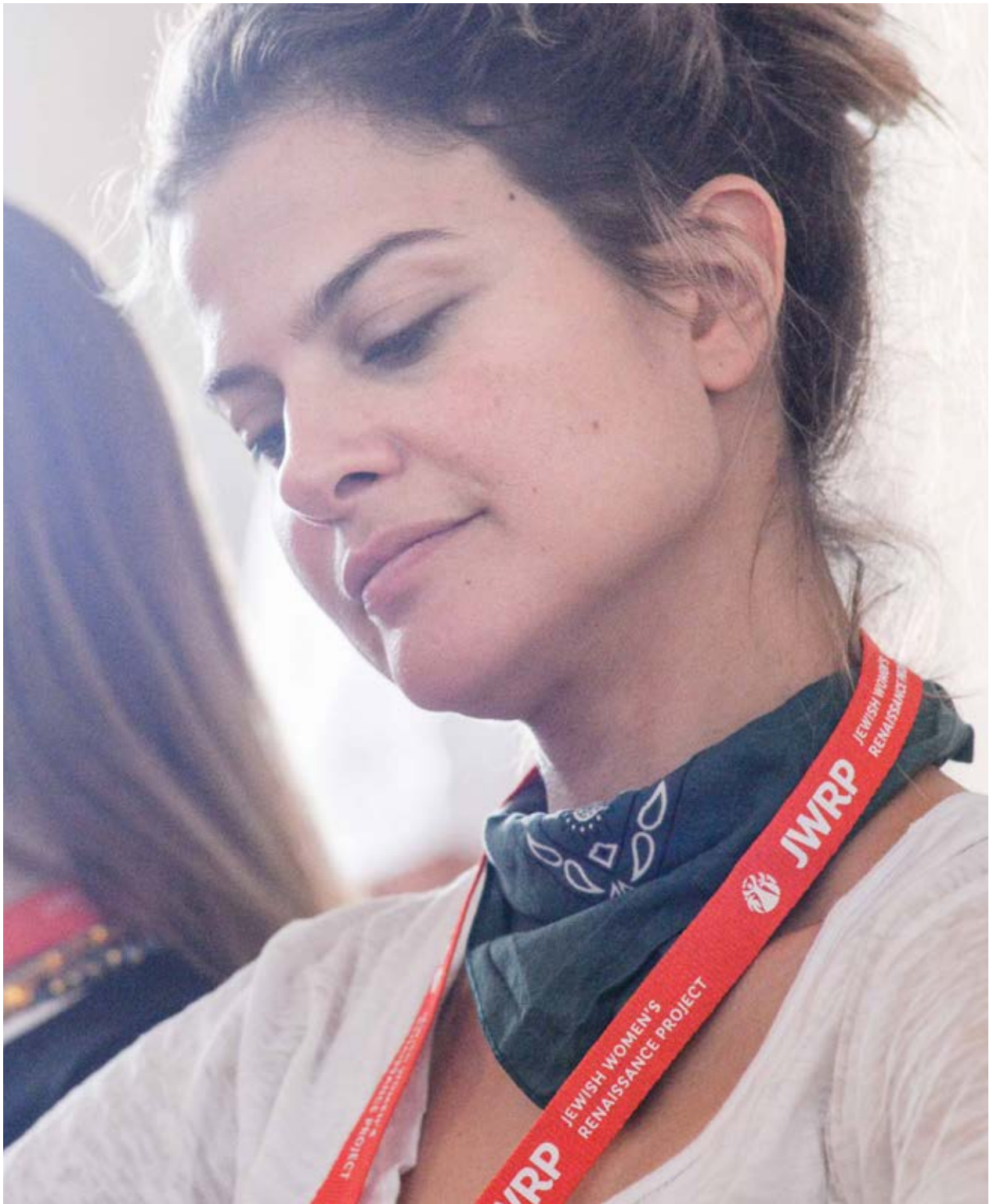




Being Your Child's Best Teacher

*Vehigadeta I'Vincha, Teaching Our
Children – Passover*



PASSOVER

Teaching Our Children

Passover is the ultimate Jewish family story time, when we gather and tell the story of the Exodus experientially. It can be overwhelming as we ask ourselves, “How do I communicate our Jewish story to my children in a way in which they will own it and become part of it?” In this session, we will look at some of the strategies from our tradition on how to communicate the value and joy of Judaism to our children. Using the Seder as a model, we will focus on the importance of setting up special times to create family memories, creating an atmosphere where questions and questioning are expected and welcome, and understanding our children as individuals and treating them in the way that best suits their own personalities.

Some questions to ask yourself as you move through this unit:

- *How can I nurture a warm, welcoming atmosphere in my home, where my children feel valued and cherished?*
 - *How can I continue to appreciate and relate to my children, or children with whom I have a relationship, even if their “ways” are different from mine?*
- *How can I communicate the Jewish story to my children in ways that will show its beauty as something to be treasured and proud of?*
 - *How do I usually respond to my children’s questions and questioning? How can I grow my capacity to welcome questions, even if I do not know all the answers?*



TEACHING OUR CHILDREN

The Torah instructs us, in four different places, to tell our children the story of the Exodus as a way to remember the redemption from Egypt for all time. The Hebrew word used here for telling, *vehigadeta*, comes from the same root as Haggadah, the book we use at the Seder.

Exodus 13:3–8

Moses told the people: “Remember this day that you left Egypt, the house of slaves.... When God brings you to the land that God promised to your fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey, you should perform this service at this time of year.... Eat matzah for seven days, and do not have any leaven in your borders. And you shall tell your child on this day, saying, ‘...God acted for me, when I left Egypt....’”

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָעָם, זָכוֹר אֶת הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר יִצְאֶתֶם
 מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים....
 וְהָיָה כִּי יְבִיאֲכֶם ה' אֶל אֶרֶץ... אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לֵאמֹר לְךָ,
 אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ; וְעַבַדְתָּ אֶת הָעִבְדָּה הַזֹּאת, בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה....
 מִצּוֹת יֹאכֵל, אֶת שֶׁבַעת הַיָּמִים; וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה לְךָ חֶמֶץ, וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה
 לְךָ שָׂאֵר בְּכֹל גְּבֻלְךָ. וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ, בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר: בְּעֵבוֹר זֶה,
 עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם.

- Which important story of your ancestry do you want to relay to your children? Why?
- When in your family ancestry has there been immigration from one country to another? Divide into small groups and take turns sharing for five minutes your connection with immigration.
- Notice that the Torah says the parent should say “God acted for me.” Why say “for me” and not “for my ancestors”? How might you tell the Exodus story as your own personal story, rather than as a history lesson?

In the excerpt on the following page, Maimonides discusses some of the laws of the Seder night, focusing on the mitzvah to communicate the Exodus story to our children.

Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (1138–1204), commonly known as Maimonides or Rambam, was one of the greatest Jewish scholars of all time. He was a legal scholar, philosopher, physician to the Sultan, and leader of Cairo’s Jewish community.

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Chametz and Matzah, chapter 7

It is a mitzvah to make the Exodus story known to your children, even if they did not ask about it, as it says (Exodus 13:8), “And you shall tell your child.” According to the capacity of each child, the parent should teach them.

And we should act differently on this night, so that the children will see and ask questions such as, “How and why is this night different from all other nights?” so that it will be an opportunity to engage them and say, “This is what happened to us.”

And how should one act differently [on Seder night]? Give out goodies and nuts; and clear the table before they eat; and snatch the matzah from one another; and perform other similar actions [to elicit questions].

If one does not have a child, his spouse should ask. If one does not have a spouse, adults should ask each other *Mah Nishtanah* (“Why is tonight different from all other nights?”). If one is alone, he should ask himself *Mah Nishtanah*: “Why is tonight different from all other nights?”

In every generation, we are obligated to act as if we ourselves had left Egypt... as if we ourselves had been slaves and were freed and redeemed.

הלכות חמץ ומצה, פרק ז

ג [ב] מצוה להודיע לבנים, ואפילו לא שאלו-שנאמר “והגדת לבנך” (שמות יג,ח). לפי דעתו של בן, אביו מלמדו...

ד [ג] וצריך לעשות שינוי בלילה הזה-כדי שיראו הבנים וישאלו ויאמרו, מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות, עד ששייב להם ויאמר להם, כך וכך אירע וכך וכך היה.

ה וכיצד משנה-מחלק להם קליות ואגוזים, ועוקרים השולחן מלפניהם קודם שיאכלו, וחוטפין מצה זה מיד זה, וכיצא

דבברים האלו. אין לו בן, אשתו שואלתו; אין לו אישה--שואלין זה את זה מה נשתנה הלילה הזה, ואפילו היו כולן חכמים. היה לבדו, שואל לעצמו מה נשתנה הלילה הזה.

ח [ו] בכל דור ודור, חייב אדם להראות את עצמו כאילו הוא בעצמו יצא עתה משיעבוד מצריים... כלומר כאילו אתה בעצמך היית עבד, ויצאת לחירות ונפדית.

Role-Play

Not only does Maimonides say that questions are an essential element of the Seder night, he also says that we need to act as if we ourselves went out of Egypt. Try this: Turn to the person next to you and pretend that you have just left Egypt, describing the miracles you witnessed and the emotions you are feeling. Then unpack it together: how is pretending that you were there different from telling a story from long ago? How does it influence your life right now?

- *Maimonides tells us that it is a mitzvah to tell the story of the Exodus on Seder night, and that we should do so by eliciting questions. Why are questions so important in Jewish tradition? Why do you think it is so important to stimulate children's questions on the Seder night? Why isn't it sufficient to simply tell them the story of the Exodus? How is the experience of asking questions different from the experience of just hearing a story?*
- *What are some ways that you could stimulate or celebrate questions at your Seder table?*
- *When you don't know the answers to the questions your children ask, what do you do? What would you like to do?*

THE IMPORTANCE OF QUESTIONS

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Necessity of Asking Questions*¹

There is nothing natural about [the Jewish emphasis on asking questions]. To the contrary, it goes dramatically against the grain of history. Most traditional cultures see it as the task of a parent or teacher to instruct, guide or command. The task of the child is to obey. “Children should be seen, not heard,” goes the old English proverb. Socrates, who spent his life teaching people to ask questions, was condemned by the citizens of Athens for corrupting the young. In Judaism the opposite is the case. It is a religious duty to teach our children to ask questions. That is how they grow.

Judaism is the rarest of phenomena: a faith based on asking questions, sometimes deep and difficult ones that seem to shake the very foundations of faith itself. “Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?” asked Abraham. “Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people?” asked Moses. “Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?” asked Jeremiah.

The Torah indicates this at the most powerful and poignant juncture in Jewish history – just as the Israelites are about to leave Egypt and begin their life as a free people under the sovereignty of God. Hand down the memory of this moment to your children, says Moses. But do not do so in an authoritarian



way. Encourage your children to ask, question, probe, investigate, analyze, explore. Liberty means freedom of the mind, not just of the body. Those who are confident of their faith need fear no question. It is only those who lack confidence, who have secret and suppressed doubts, who are afraid.

The one essential, though, is to teach our children that not every question has an answer we can immediately understand. There are ideas we will only fully comprehend through age and experience, others that take great intellectual preparation, yet others that may be beyond our collective comprehension at this stage of the human quest.

- *What has been your experience when you have asked questions in your life? What kind of responses did you receive? How did these responses satisfy or not satisfy you as questioner?*
- *What in this excerpt is surprising or significant to you? Why?*
- *What is the advantage of asking questions? What can be challenging about asking questions?*

¹ Adapted from Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, “The Necessity of Asking Questions” (Bo 5777), <http://rabbisacks.org/necessity-asking-questions-bo-5777/>.

ADAPTING EDUCATION TO THE NEEDS OF EACH CHILD

What's the “north star” for educating a child? The Hebrew for “education,” *chinuch*, provides guidance. It means “dedicate,” “initiate,” “inaugurate,” as in “spark a quest of spiritual growth and meaning-making,” “instruction” for character development. *Chinuch* is also connected to the word *chen*, which means “grace,” “charm,” and “beauty.” True education begins with seeing the unique beauty of the person in front of us and nurturing the unfolding of their unique journey; drawing out their soul's inherent beauty.

Proverbs 22:6

Educate a child in accordance with their own way, and even when they are old, they will not depart from it.

תוֹךְ לְנֶעַר עַל-פִּי דַרְכוֹ גַם כִּי-יִזְקֶנּוּ לֹא-יִסוּר מִקְּמוֹהָ:

Writing Exercise

Take 5–10 minutes to write down your answers to the following questions. Writing in silence allows your thoughts to flow freely, unedited. When you are finished writing, discuss with a partner some of the issues and ideas that came up for you in this exercise.



- *Have you ever had a mentor or teacher who truly understood and interacted with you according to your “way”? How did that relationship affect you?*
- *Think about each of your children, or the children in your life. How might you relate to them according to their ways? What successes have you had? What are your challenges?*
- *Take a few moments to jot down some of the charm, beauty, and characteristics of each child, and what his or her own “ways” might be. Brainstorm some practical ideas for how you can approach and educate each child according to his or her ways.*

MEMORY AND PASSOVER STORYTELLING

By Dr. Ronit Ziv-Kreger

I cherish childhood Passover memories of hearing my mother and grandmother’s stories while cooking together, bringing out the ping-pong table and setting it with holiday tablecloths, and lighting candles with my grandmother. I still sing her unique Bukharian melody for blessing the candles every Shabbat and holiday.

- *What is a meaningful Passover or holiday memory for you?*

I didn’t appreciate the significance of memory on identity-formation until the darkness of memory loss progressively deprived my mother-in-law of her attention and ability to communicate.

According to historian Yosef Yerushalmi, the Torah speaks of memory no less than 169 times. What is the significance of this repetition, as well as the Torah’s invitation on Passover to teach our children through stories?

Contemporary research shows that the resiliency of children is bolstered by their knowing family stories. Hearing stories of parents and relatives going through challenging situations is important. Jewish tradition understands the importance of revisiting core memories and sharing them. Indeed, the main mitzvah of Passover is enacting with our children our people’s foundational shared memory of the Exodus story.



Photo of my Bukharian family, 1942.

Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik notes that the word in Hebrew for story, *sipur*, has the same root as scribe, *sofer* – one who writes a sacred scroll. On Passover, he suggests, parents and grandparents are scribes writing not on parchment, but on the hearts and souls of our children. In doing so, we foster their resiliency and connect them to the Jewish family.

- *What family stories are inscribed on your or your children’s hearts and souls?*
- *What Jewish stories?*

“Narrative connects children to something larger than themselves,” writes Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. “It helps them make

sense of how they fit into the world that existed before they were born. It gives them the starting point of an identity. That in turn becomes the basis of confidence. It enables children to say: This is who I am. This is the story of which I am a part.”

Some of my grandmother’s stories were frightening; she had a challenging childhood, but her stories aroused in me a resolve to stand up for what’s right. Effectively sharing stories can help transform difficult and even devastating experiences into memories that nurture courage and commitment to a better future. Elie Wiesel said, “The challenge of our generation of survivors was, what would we do with our memories? Would we allow them to drown us in despair, or would they somehow give us the strength to respond to other people’s suffering?”

- *Have you seen or experienced a difficult personal memory transformed into strength and an impetus to respond to the suffering of others?*

After the destruction of the Second Temple, the rabbis orchestrated a remarkable transformation of the biblical Passover holiday – one that I’ve taught to business executives as a “case study” in change management. Much of the Seder that we know was conceived by rabbis after the destruction.

To use the language of Kurt Lewin’s change theory, the rabbis “unfroze” the biblical model of Passover.² They looked with fresh eyes at what the Jewish people needed in the new reality, and then solidified a new structure for

the holiday. They gave us a gift that continues to give – a holiday that invites us to look at our past, “consider the narrow constrictions in our lives,” and share stories that help us spring forward with new insights and patterns.

They instructed, “In every generation, we are obligated to see ourselves as if we had personally come out of Egypt.” They sought not only a passive telling of leaving the pressing pain of ancient Egypt, but a telling that comes alive with reenactment and symbolic foods – tasting the suffering and the redemption. Hasidic teachers understood this to mean not only that we reenact the ancient experience, but that we each have stories of emerging from narrow constrictions in our own lives to tell.

- *In planning this year’s Seder, can you provide a chunk of time for sharing personal stories of emerging from narrow constriction?*
- *What experiential telling of the Exodus story this year can make it most meaningful for all present, “unfreezing” patterns that don’t serve your family?*

Master educator Avrahm Infeld asserts, “Assimilation is living someone else’s memory.”

- *How might this Passover help you and your children to live your memories and the memories of our people – into a positive future?*
- *How might your personal memories – including those of being in Israel – foster your family’s belonging to the Jewish family?*

2 Special thanks to Fern Chertok, research scientist at Brandeis University, who directed me to Edgar Schein’s article on Lewin’s change theory.

A TEACHER IS A GARDENER IN THE GARDEN OF GOD



A Student's Obligation: Advice from the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto³

- *While you read this section, or hear it being read, underline phrases that resonate with you.*

Someone who is trying to educate through command and habituation need not pay attention to his child or student – to his nature, to the way he thinks, or to his other distinguishing characteristics. The command itself – do this or do that – is all that is needed. Nor is it necessary to deal with each student separately. A single command can suffice for an entire age group, for it is not the student or the child that is important, but the person giving the commands: he has commanded, and that is everything.

Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira (1889–1943) was a Hasidic rabbi committed to the education of children. He is also known as the rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto. He was murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

An educator, however, who wishes to uncover the soul of the child that lies hidden and concealed within him, who wants to help it grow and to ignite it so it will burn with a heavenly fire, upwards, toward the holy, so that the student's entire being, including his physical body, will increase in holiness and will long for God's Torah, such an educator must adapt himself attentively to the student, must penetrate into the midst of his limited consciousness and small-mindedness, until he reaches the hidden soul-spark. Then he can help it emerge, blossom, and grow.

3 Adapted from Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, *A Student's Obligation: Advice from the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto*, trans. Micha Odenheimer (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).



The education of each and every child must therefore be different, depending on his nature, mind, character, and all his other unique qualities. The educator must become aware of these qualities.... It is not enough to utilize his own mind and his own strength in activating, commanding, and instructing his students; he must grasp the student's mind and the student's strength, working and acting within the parameters of each child's abilities....

Every parent and every teacher knows that their children and students will not remain children forever, but will eventually grow, in years, and possibly in Torah knowledge and spiritual devotion. Yet there exist parents and teachers who are concerned only with what they see right now. Since all they see right now are children, the goal of their efforts is to educate their charges to become good children. They wish to infuse them with only a child's measure of Torah and awe of God. This they consider sufficient. But a teacher or parent who does this is sinning against God and against His people. Parents and teachers must know that their task is to educate

and uncover children of the Lord and giants of Israel. They must see the children sitting in front of them as great souls still immature; their task is to get them to grow and flourish. A teacher is a gardener in the garden of God, assigned to cultivate it and guard it from harm. Even if some of the children seem rebellious, or flawed in their character, the teacher must know that the nature of soul-seeds, of unripe angels, is to taste bitter as they are ripening and to be filled with nectar in their maturity.

- *What are some of the soul-seeds of each of your children, or children who are important in your life? Imagine some beautiful ways in which they can ripen. How can you as a parent or mentor help with that process?*
- *How can you keep this wisdom in mind, even when it is difficult?*
- *What are some practical steps you can take to cultivate your children's souls and help them develop into great people?*

STRATEGIES FOR FACILITATING AN INTERACTIVE SEDER

Here are three strategies for creating a meaningful, personalized, and interactive Seder. Check out the “Learn With Your Sister” articles to learn how Momentum leaders Lori, Nili, Ruchi, and Adrienne have used these strategies (and many others) in their own Seders.

It all begins with preparation! Take some time before Passover to buy Haggadahs if you don’t have them, plan how you will run your Seder, and distribute assignments to your family and guests so that they have enough time to prepare.

1 Choose a Theme

Think of a theme you would like to explore at your Seder table that would be meaningful to the people who attend, and design activities around that theme. For instance, you might want to explore the theme of slavery and freedom. You might ask your guests to come dressed as historical or contemporary figures who symbolize freedom to them; reenact the story of the Exodus by setting up scenes of our Egyptian slavery and redemption around the house; talk about modern-day slavery and trafficking, and what can be done (and send a group donation before or after Passover to an organization that helps contemporary slaves); or sing songs of justice and freedom. Some other themes you could explore: courage, leadership, faith, civil disobedience.

For more information on creating a thematic Seder, see David Arnow’s book, *Creating Lively Passover Seders*.

Dr. Erica Brown’s *Seder Talk: The Conversational Haggada* includes eight essays each featuring a theme. It also includes thought-provoking questions throughout the Haggada. The Jonathan Sacks *Haggada* also has illuminating essays on the themes and motifs of the Festival of Freedom.

2 Give Everyone a Job

A couple of weeks before the Seder, contact everyone who will be participating, and assign them one section of the Seder to facilitate. Tell them they can teach the others about its meaning, share their reactions to the piece, perform a song or prepare a piece of artwork about it, or share in any other way they would like. There are many Haggadahs with fascinating information and stories about all these sections; one Haggadah that people might enjoy is David Dishon and Noam Zion's *A Different Night: The Family Participation Haggadah*.

Some Seder sections you might want to assign are:

- The Four Cups of Wine
- Ha Lachma Anya/The bread of our affliction
- Mah Nishtanah/The Four Questions
- Avadim Hayinu/We were slaves
- The Four Children
- Removing wine from the cup while reciting the Ten Plagues
- Dayenu/"It would have been enough"
- The symbolism of the Paschal lamb, matzah, and maror
- The tradition of the afikoman
- The closing songs

3 Personalize Your Seder

Before Passover, send guests a list of reflection questions related to the Seder. Ask them to take the time to fill out their answers in advance, and bring them to the Seder. At different points in the Seder, ask guests to share their reflections on the relevant passages. (You could also have the guests answer some of the questions in groups of two or three, and present their collective reflections with the whole table.) Some examples of reflection questions are:

"We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt" – What are some of the things to which you are a slave? Have you ever been enslaved to something, and then freed yourself? How can you free yourself in the coming year from the things that are limiting you?

The Four Children – Which of the four children do you consider yourself? In what way? At another point in your life, would you have considered yourself to be one of the other children?

Dayenu (It would have been enough) – What are some of the things in your life that you are most grateful for? Whom would you like to thank and have not yet had a chance to do so? What are some things that you do – or could do – to bring more gratitude into your life?

For more information on creating a personalized, reflective Seder, see Aryeh Ben David's Haggadah, *Hearing Your Own Voice: A Family Haggadah* (<https://bit.ly/2qvGjn5>).

LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

Lori's Tips for A Great Seder



Lori Palatnik

I grew up in Canada. We didn't have four cups at the Seder, we had five: the four cups of wine and the Stanley Cup. (Because before expansion, the playoffs were always around Passover time.) There weren't four questions, there were five. The fifth question was: What's the score?

When we became more observant, we wanted something different. We wanted to make sure that everyone there had fun, was engaged, inspired, and tapped into the opportunity to go to freedom – to realize their own personal potential.

Here are some tips that we picked up along the way:

- Go to the dollar store and buy some “visual aids” for the plagues. When you get to that part of the Haggadah, throw out a pile of frogs... plastic cows and animals... snakes and spiders... ping-pong balls (hail)... sunglasses (darkness). Be creative and fun. The kids (and adults) will love it.
- Buy some dollar store “prizes” for kids. When they ask a good question (which is what you're trying to stimulate), they get a prize. Also give prizes for asking the Four Questions, good singers, etc. The kids will keep busy playing

with their prize (doll, soldier, etc.) until they think of another good question and jump back in.

- Explain to everyone that they are like royalty on Seder night. And since kings and queens do not pour for themselves, everyone gets a “pouring partner” who fills up their glass with wine or grape juice (or a combo) at the appropriate time. People can pair up and have fun with this.
 - Read the Haggadah in the language that you best understand. It's fine if that means English. Share the reading by going around the table and taking turns.
- *It's okay to stop during the reading for a good discussion on the topic at hand. You may want to prepare some questions in advance to throw out at people such as:*
 - *If the Haggadah tells us that we are still slaves and not free, our definition of freedom must be very different. What is the Jewish definition of freedom?*
 - *Next year in Jerusalem? How many of us really want to live in Israel? What does the Land of Israel mean to you?*
 - *The wise son doesn't sound so wise. He doesn't seem to know anything. What is the Jewish definition of wisdom?*

- There is no such thing as a dumb question. Encourage an atmosphere where people feel comfortable asking questions about what's being said in the Haggadah. Once a question is asked, invite everyone to think about a possible answer, and/or to look in their Haggadah to find one.
 - Tell everyone to eat a light meal before coming to the Seder. That way they won't be starving and want to hurry through the Haggadah. This is not a dinner party – the reading and discussion of the Haggadah is the whole point of the evening! Let people know in advance that they will be reading through the Haggadah and discussing issues long before they begin eating. Don't let the meal become the focus.
 - Assign topics to various guests. For example, give someone the section on The Four Sons and get them to learn and discuss the meaning behind each son to present to everyone at the table.
 - Use the same Haggadahs so that everyone can follow. We highly recommend the ArtScroll edition. They also make a kid's version.
 - If you are trying to change the focus of the family Seder toward something more meaningful, try hosting it at your home this year (“home team advantage”), and always invite guests who are not family. When guests are there, even the most cynical family member is on their best behavior. Try it. It works.
 - Use *The Passover Survival Kit* by Shimon Apisdorf. It's available at your local Jewish bookstore and is filled with great tips and insights into making the Seder fun and meaningful. It's also a terrific source of questions to stimulate conversation, ideas on each section of the Haggadah, and more.
 - Play “Passover Bingo.” You can Google and go to sites that let you make your own Bingo sheets, filling in what you want in each square (use pictures for little kids.) When your guests hear the word in the square (“Pharaoh,” “Moses,” “Frogs,” etc.), they can put a chip or plastic “plague” on the square. Get a line? Yell “Bingo!” and get a prize!
- *Which of Lori's tips are you planning on using at your Seder? Share your ideas on our Momentum Facebook page. Learn With Your Sister*

LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

Nili's Seder: Then and Now



Nili Couzens

My earliest memories of Seder were in Brooklyn, New York, at the home of my Yiddish-speaking grandparents, Bubby and Zaide Silver, of blessed memory, on East 21st Street between I and J. We would arrive from Philadelphia the day before Passover, and from that moment on, my grandmother's kitchen was all laughter and memories and arguments as my mother and her brother and sister cracked walnuts for charoset and grated horseradish for maror. It was exhilarating and somehow confusing to see my mother become a child again at her mother's kitchen table.

At the Seder, everything... shone. Not just the thick, plastic tablecloth. Not just the light from the candles in the silver candelabra and the crystal chandelier. Not just the gold and green glasses saved just for Passover. Everything just... shone.

My grandfather would close his eyes, and we all knew he would be picturing his father, my great-grandfather, who had died in a Siberian slave labor camp during the Holocaust. You didn't move when Zaide said Kiddush. It was too holy. His Kiddush was always the same tune, the same intensity. I can still close my eyes and hear it now.

Uncle Shimmy, my mother's younger brother, would say the *Mah Nishtanah* (Four Questions) in Yiddish and make the same mistakes every year. Even though I understood none of it, it was somehow hilarious when the entire table would yell out the correction, somewhat simultaneously; and laughing at himself and shaking his head, Uncle Shimmy would stumble to blurt out the Yiddish words correctly.

But what I remember most about those Seders of my youth is my mother and her two siblings singing together. Fists banging on the table to keep the beat, their heads thrown back, singing the songs of the Seder, the songs of their youth, at the top of their lungs. It was mesmerizing to see the adults have so much fun.

I don't remember any long philosophical discussions about the Exodus from Egypt. The only commentary I remember was little me, proudly, shyly reading through my 3rd grade "Passover Seder Notebook" with all its paste and glitter and crayons, to the adoring smiles of the grownups. We didn't have any props for the Ten Plagues. There weren't candies to keep the kids interested. We were just happy to be at the Seder. Happy to sing and celebrate. Happy to be children with all the adults cocooning us from

the world, not realizing how blessed we were to feel so content and so safe.

Fast forward twenty years to when my kids were little. We would have the first Seder at home with just us and my parents, while the second Seder was reserved for guests, as many people as could fit in our dining room. Later, we spoke at hotels, but always had our Seders privately, as just a family. We had props for the plagues – red jello for the blood and ping-pong balls flying like hail and goofy, dollar-store sunglasses for the plague of darkness. We sang our songs and ate our charoset and maror and tempted (okay, bribed) the kids with marshmallows and jelly beans to ask questions and repeat what they had learned in school. But whether at home or in a hotel, I honestly don't remember exactly what we said or exactly what we ate. What I remember most is the feeling. Happy, blessed, together, content.

In ten, twenty years from now, what will your children remember of the Passover Seders of their youth?

Probably no one will remember exactly what was said or exactly what was served. The only memory that will linger is the memory of how the Passover Seder felt.

If I had to give one piece of advice for the Seder, it would be this: Let go. Free yourself from having to BE anything. You don't have to be deep. You don't have to be creative. You certainly don't have to be the Jewish Martha Stewart.

Don't get me wrong; you should certainly plan to say something meaningful at the Seder. You should plan to serve something delicious.

You just don't have to deliver a brilliant soliloquy or make a seven-layer matzah cake or whatever.

If you want to, if that's fun and relaxing for you, knock yourself out. But if it's stressful and constricting for you? Forget it. That's not what Passover's about.

When the conversation steers toward the Super Bowl instead of the existential struggle for freedom... let it go. When the chicken burns and the matzah is stale... laugh. Shrug your shoulders and wink at God.

Here's the key: If you're relaxed, they're relaxed – whoever the "they" is. Your in-laws, your kids, the neighbors, the world. Passover is about being free. Free from the need to impress anyone, from the need to compete, the need to show off, the need to excel.

The only difference between bread and matzah is a lot of hot air. It's basically the same ingredients.

The mystical significance of matzah is the opportunity Passover provides us to get rid of our ego – our own hot air. Ego blocks true freedom because if there's one thing to which we're all enslaved, it's to that voice in our heads. Don't fall for it.

You don't have to be anything on Passover except real. Let yourself make mistakes and just laugh. Let everyone else be imperfect and just empathize. Just sing. Don't diet. Don't pressure anyone to share or stop talking or hurry up or say something meaningful already. Let God run the world for a night or two and realize... you're actually free to just enjoy it.

- *How can you "let go" this Passover? What is the connection between letting go and freedom? Share your ideas on our Momentum Facebook page.*

LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

Ruchi's Advice: Make Your Seder Your Own



Ruchi Koval

Passover is a holiday filled with “should”s – which is why for many years I was intimidated to “make Pesach” as we called it. My childhood Seders were so joyous, dominated by the huge and loving personality of my Zaidy. His rich baritone filled the air and we sang through the night. My sweet, gentle Zaidy and his smiles and tunes were Passover for me. We used to drive to the Bronx, pull up to 2451 Barnes Avenue to my grandparents’ black-and-white checkerboard garage, do the burning of the chametz in their backyard in a metal trash can (à la Oscar the Grouch), and run away from my uncle grating the maror on their back porch.

How could my Passover hold up? How could I possibly attempt to do something so grown-up as host a Seder? For many years I resisted out of fear, and then finally my husband became a rabbi in Buffalo Grove, Illinois, and we could no longer run away from adulthood (we were 23 and 26). And the stores were filled with crafty things that scared me, because I am not crafty. I don’t know how to do dress-up, Egypt-themed Seders or multi-colored plagues or whatnot.

So we tried many things over many years and eventually came back to this: the mitzvah of Passover is two Hebrew words, *vehigadeta l’vincha* – and you shall tell your child. A Seder is about talking to your child about us, about our history, about our national legacy. About why Egypt mattered and why it still matters. About freedom, and oppression, and God. About matzah and maror and joy and sorrow and laughter and family and love and life. And it doesn’t matter if your voice is as good as my grandfather’s or your matzah balls as fluffy as my grandmother’s, because it’s the love that carries the day.

So some years we go to my in-laws and drink in the love there. Sometimes we do funky Seders at home with just a few guests so we don’t forget to talk to the kids. One year we had the “one-hour Seder” because that’s what got my kids excited that year. One year my husband and I were going to be Rabbi and Rebbetzin at a Passover resort in Orlando, and man, was I excited! Because the kids, it’s all about the kids. It’s about the next generation, and they will never forget this. And I talked about the freedom, to never take for granted, to celebrate a Seder wherever the heck

you want and however works for your family – that's the freedom we celebrate.

We celebrate every member of our family, the ADHD Seder and the Asperger's Seder and the six-year-old singing the *Mah Nishtanah* off-key Seder and the millennials' Seder. And my husband and me, celebrating so many Passovers together with love and harmony, in so many different ways and through so many iterations – because it's about engaging the next generation of Jews, whatever that means today. That Seder.

L'chaim – next year in Jerusalem.

- *What could you do this year for your Seder that will make it “work” for your family? Share your ideas on our Momentum Facebook page.*



LEARN WITH YOUR SISTER

Adrienne's First Seder



Adrienne Gold Davis

Seder night in my house proves without a doubt that unity can occur WITHOUT uniformity.

My fabulous family prides itself on its irreverence and humor... but for all our shtick there is a deep sincerity and mutual respect for one another.

It was about eighteen years ago that my family and I began to move toward a traditional expression of our Jewish identity. I could no longer drive the distance to my mother's or my sister's home... and I knew I had a dilemma. You see, I had changed the rules of the game, so it was incumbent on me to accommodate the others. In absolute terror, I decided to "take on" Seder night. I knew I was facing a tough crowd: There were the "un's" (un-affiliated, un-interested, un-derwhelmed), the "in's" (intermarried, inter-denominational), and the "free's" (gluten, dairy, meat, fat) – but I was determined to make this night memorable. And meaningful. IF IT KILLED ME. (And it almost did!)

I could tell you about the children's activities (little bags of "plagues" from the dollar store to throw around during that part of the Seder. Ice cubes with a cranberry frozen in the middle to represent the hail with fire inside – they got

tossed around too. Plastic lice like confetti on the tablecloth). I could discuss the first course for the kids: a "green" salad made entirely of green candy nestled in a bibb lettuce leaf. I could share about the mattresses under the table so the little ones could rest and even play at their parents' feet (literally!). I could brag about the delicious food and lovingly set table. But that was not what made it special.

The mitzvahs of Seder night are to eat the matzah, drink the four cups of wine (not so tough), and retell the story of the Exodus to the children. But given that none of the adults knew the story either, I felt like I had to ensure that they also left feeling educated and enriched. While my family always "read" the Haggadah in English, no one truly had an understanding of the power of Seder night. That we could draw down the spiritual energy of moving from a place of constriction to a place of liberation. That we could fast-track our goals and unstick ourselves. I wanted to create a think-tank experience, understanding that for every little moment of depth, someone or another would mock it, make *shtick* out of it, or try to derail it. I knew that I would have to get personal in order to get the adults on board. The theme of my first Seder would be Freedom: What is it and how do we achieve it?



I decided to send everyone a message in advance, with a “blessing” for them about something I knew meant a lot to them personally. Was one sibling struggling at work with a difficult boss? Was another in mid-divorce and hurting badly? Was one teen feeling misunderstood? Each blessing message ended with a quote about freedom and self-liberation. I asked them to come prepared to discuss what those quotes meant to them, and how they perceived the concept of freedom. These quotes were not all Jewish sources, but they built a framework for a conversation that would at least move away from the hockey and movies and toward some meaningful growth.

It was outrageously successful. People love to be heard, seen, noticed. The personal touch moved them so much that they DID come wanting to mine the rich seam of Seder night potential.

At everyone’s place was a copy of the message and quote I had sent them, with the personal message praying for their needs to be met, their dreams to be actualized.

Every single person in my house that night left with their blessing envelope and love note from me. They left with a deeper understanding of Passover. But mostly they left with a deep understanding that my commitment to Judaism included respect for them and inclusion of each of us, and a delight that we could create an experience that was true to Jewish law and relevant for each of us!

- *How can you create a Seder that is meaningful and inclusive to all who attend? Share your ideas on our Momentum Facebook page.*

TRY IT OUT

PRACTICAL TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Ideas for bringing the value of Vehigadeta L'vincha, Teaching our Children, into your family life

For Yourself or with a Partner

- Check out the podcasts, videos, and articles on MomentumUnlimited.org.
- Select a phrase that inspires you, write it on a card, and place it where you'll see it. Repeat the phrase to yourself a few times each morning with enthusiasm. Phrases you could consider:
 - I educate my child according to her/his ways (based on the book of Proverbs)
 - I focus on my child's inner beauty before offering guidance
 - I seek to nurture the soul-seeds of my child(ren)
 - I encourage and value my child(ren)'s questions
- Aleph Beta Academy is an online library of videos offering in-depth, text-based Jewish learning. To learn more about Passover, check out the video, "How to Read the Haggadah." (72 minutes)

For Families with Children of All Ages

- Assign everyone in the family a job for Seder night. For the child who loves to decorate: Put her in charge of creating a beautiful Seder table. For the child who loves drama: Task him with creating a Passover play for Seder night. For the child who loves to cook: Ask

him to create one of the dishes for the Seder meal. For the child who loves art: Go together to a pottery painting studio and paint a plate you can use as a Seder plate or matzah tray. For the child who has just learned how to write: Ask her to write everyone's names on place cards for the Seder meal. For the child who can't sit still: Assign her to be the "butler" showing people to their seats, and bringing in food and props.

- In order to teach your child according to his or her "way," it is important to hear from them about the activities they like best and their learning styles. Have a heart-to-heart with your child about what they like and how they learn best. Respectfully listen to your child, responding with loving affirmation. Try to show your child that you remember what they said as you plan family activities, engage in conversations, or talk to them about their schoolwork.
- Praise your children's efforts, letting them know that you value and support them – even if they are very different from you. Let them hear you telling other people about how you notice their effort, how wonderful they are, and specific actions they have done that make you proud.
- Check out ideas from PJ Library's Izzy the Whiz and Passover McClean Reading Guide, available at www.pjlibrary.org.

- Getting ready for Passover is the ultimate spring cleaning ritual. Cleaning can be a fun family experience when you make a game of cleaning unusual spaces such as the family car, the bottom of a closet, or the insides of pockets.
- The night before Passover is traditionally the time for bedikat chametz, a symbolic, seek-and-destroy mission in which families search their homes to ensure that all chametz has been removed. For this fun custom, gather: a candle, a feather, a wooden spoon, and a paper bag. (Kits are often sold in Judaica shops.) Typically an adult hides ten crackers or pieces of chametz around the house. At nightfall the search begins. With assistance, children use the candle to illuminate dimly lit spaces. As each piece of chametz is found, the feather and spoon are used to sweep it into the paper bag. The search concludes the next morning with reciting a blessing and burning the chametz.
- Before the Seder, make written and/or picture clues that give hints to the location of the afikoman. Pair younger children at the Seder with older ones, and make the search for the afikoman something of a "team sport." Depending on the age of

the children attending the Seder, make everyone a "winner" by giving a small gift to each child. There's no need to break the bank; consider out-of-the-ordinary treats, such as an envelope of flower or vegetable seeds, a colorful homemade bookmark, or a "ticket" promising a cookie-baking session.

For Families with Young Children

- Play the Bimbam app, "Let's Get Ready for Passover," available in the Apple app store.
- Play the Bimbam app, "Exodus," a Passover photo scavenger hunt, available in the Apple app store.

For Families with Older Children

- Watch the Bimbam video, "The Passover Seder with the Four Sons." Talk about how all different kinds of people can be included at the Seder table and in Jewish life in general.
- If you are really creative, and your family will like it: Create an "Escape the Room" adventure, where participants have to complete a series of timed tasks to "escape Egypt."

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

In this session we explore the value of vehigadeta l'vincha, teaching our children, in the context of Passover

The guiding questions in this unit are:

- *How can I nurture a warm, welcoming atmosphere in my home, where my children feel valued and cherished?*
- *How can I continue to appreciate and relate to my children, or children with whom I have a relationship, even if their “ways” are different from mine?*
- *How can I communicate the Jewish story to my children in ways that will show its beauty as something to be treasured and proud of?*
- *How do I usually respond to my children's questions and questioning? How can I grow my capacity to welcome questions, even if I do not know all the answers?*

Meaningful Vocabulary

Seder	סדר	literally, “order,” referring to the festive Passover meal
Haggadah	הגדה	literally, “telling,” referring to the framework for the recounting of the Exodus
Pesach	פסח	the Jewish holiday of freedom, literally meaning “to skip”

Facilitating the Session

1. Seek Participant Input

Well before the session, invite a few sisters to take a small role in leading it. For example:

- Sharing strategies for successful Seders – either from their own experience or by reviewing the offerings in the session and ideas from the Trip Leaders (see pp. 304–313)
- Planning an activity to kick off the session or accompany it (see **Extra! Program Ideas**)
- Hosting the event
- Co-facilitating the session
- Having one or more of the women share a way she brought home the learning from your last gathering

Involving participants helps them take ownership over their learning, and prepares them to take the lead in their family and community!

2. Choose Your Session Activities (in advance)

Remember: You know what will best engage your participants, and we encourage you to tailor the session to their interests and needs. **Soul Sparks** activities carry a particular power, and we encourage you to include them where possible!

3. Prep Your Space

Before the session begins, arrange the space or seating to support connection. Think about what materials you will need, and make sure you have everything prepared.

4. Welcome and Warm-Up

Make a ritual of transitioning your participants from their hectic, everyday lives to your safe space of learning and growth. Consider, for example, having women pair up and listen to each other, for two minutes each, as they share what's new and what's on their mind today.

Reminder! Sisterhood Safe Space

Remind everyone that they are in the Sisterhood Safe Space of confidentiality and compassionate listening, free of judgment and unsolicited advice.

5. Intro and Inspiration

Introduce the holiday of Passover, and invite the women to share a sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch from Seders they've experienced in the past. You might have women share ideas for making a great Seder (they could pull from the session or from previous experiences).

Soul Sparks Activities

There are different activities you can try that will encourage learning and growth; we suggest

choosing one or two for your session. Below are some of our favorites:

Adapting Education to the Needs of Each Child (p. 299)

Proverbs 22:6 guides us to educate children according to their own ways. Discuss together what it might mean to teach each of your children in his or her own way. Give the women some time to write out their answers to the reflection questions on the right side of the page. If there is a woman who does not have children, invite her to write about children with whom she has a close relationship or who are important to her. After the women finish writing, bring the group together and ask for volunteers to share their thoughts.

Memory and Passover Storytelling

Have women take turns reading aloud a paragraph of Memory and Passover Storytelling (pp. 300–301). Explore the questions on those pages as a group. When you've finished, break the women into pairs and ask them to share with their partner their goals regarding passing down family stories and values to their children. What is most important? Why? How can they best do that in ways that will resonate with each individual child? How can the Passover Seder be an opportunity? When they're finished, invite women to share their thoughts with the larger group.

6. Reflection and Closing

Recall the main ideas explored in the session, and create an opportunity for reflection.

Reflection Suggestion: Ask participants to reflect on the following possibly by writing or drawing before sharing: “One way I’ll plan for this year’s Seder is by...,” “Something I’ll bring home from our session today is...,” or “I would like to further bring *vehigadeta l’vincha* to my family by...”

Direct the women’s attention to the **“Try It Out: Practical Tips and Resources for Families”** section (pp. 314–315). These suggestions will help them bring home to their families the learning they have done today, in fun and interesting ways. Encourage them to choose at least one thing they will do with their families and to report on how it went at the next session. Give a brief overview of the rest of the unit.

Provide an opportunity for participants to arrange a time to connect with another sister in order to continue exploring, reflecting, and offering each other support and accountability. This **“Learn with Your Sister”** activity (pp. 306–313) serves as an entry point for conversations that may never otherwise happen.

Let all the women know when you’ll be meeting again and what theme will be explored.

Extra! Program Ideas

To enhance your session, you may want to consider the following:

- Facilitating a mock Seder, focusing on the core pieces and developing strategies together to engage the women’s families.
- Utilizing the following experiential reflection activity to add a creative dimension to your session:

Matzah Mosaics Experience the Passover Seder with your family through creative expression with matzah!⁴

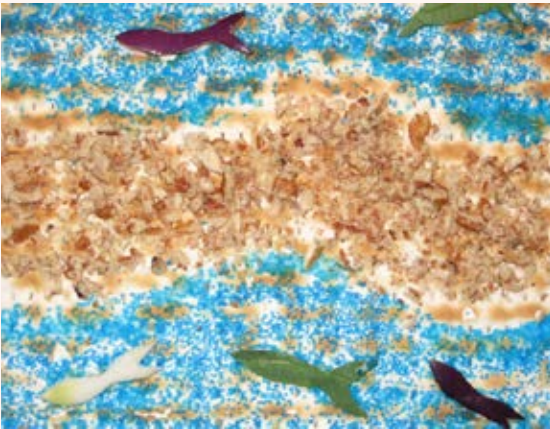
Materials:

One whole matzah and scraps of food traditionally used at the Seder.

Instructions:

Reflect on the Passover story, then recreate story scenes on your matzah with the other food items.

⁴ Created by Jacqueline Serebrani-Kesner, an interdisciplinary and expressive arts educator. More about Jacquie’s Creative Arts Enrichment can be found at www.creativeartsenrichment.org. Jacquie can be reached at jserebrani@gmail.com.





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Momentum Unlimited

6101 Executive Blvd, Suite 240, Rockville, MD 20852

240-747-7080 | info@MomentumUnlimited.org