

Pesach Seder Guide

Based on a lecture given by Rabbi Raphael Butler
at Holliswood Jewish Center, Queens, NY
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Expanded by Neil Harris

“In every generation one is obligated to see himself as though he himself had actually come out from Egypt.”

Major themes in the Seder and symbolism:

The word Seder means “order”- there is a specific order to the Haggadah. The Haggadah and the Seder are meant to be an educational model to teach our children the importance of Hashem taking us out of Egypt – to give us the Torah. Hashem has reasons why things happen in a certain order in the world and in our life. If you missed a connecting flight, of course, you’d be upset... but what if that plane crashed (God forbid). You’d be singing a different song then.

Matzah- Why does it have to be whole (not broken)? We want to make the mitzvah complete. Every mitzvah I do creates an angel. If I speed through a mitzvah or purposely don’t perform it properly, then the angel created will be incomplete. Matzah is both the free-man’s bread and the poor-man. That’s why we eat it leaning, to symbolize our freedom.

Maror- The bitterness of life. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato (author of Messilas Yesharim and Derach Hashem) states that life is full of ordeals. If we don’t have a Torah and Rabbis to teach us how to live our life fully, then life is bitter.

Egg- Symbolizes the Karbon Chagigah (Festival Offering) during the Beis HaMigdash. An egg is round and symbolizes life, which is a cycle.

Roasted Meat (shank bone)- The Karbon Pesach (Passover offering)- in place of the lamb being sacrificed.

Karpas- Green vegetable with saltwater. Our tears from 210 years of slavery.

The Seder plate is the framework for our experience tonight. It is a time to talk. Freedom is the main theme that is developed through reading the Haggadah and discussion of its contents. Tell the story of what happened. Engage in conversation about the Egypt experience. Did you know that only 1/5 of all Jews left Egypt with Moshe Rabbenu? 80% of our sisters and brothers stayed in Egypt, victims of the “slave mentality”. What does it mean to be free? Ask each person at your table.

Torah Mitzvos:

Matzah
Hagaddah

Rabbinic Mitzvos:

Four cups of wine

Maror

Hallel

Items to be introduced:

Kiddush-freedom with wine. It's a drink of royalty. Wine is a symbol of free choice. It can be used for holy purposes (Bris, Kiddush, Wedding, Havdalah), or abused and become an addiction.

Parsley/ Celery- What does it mean? Tears of enslavement. It's an hor d'ourve. It reminds of that we were slaves and now we are free. Not all life is sweet.

Talk about personal slavery. What do you do to keep your Jewish identity in America? Is having a Seder a way of celebrating freedom? We were freed from Egypt in order to receive the Torah at Mt. Sinai. The freedom we celebrate is the freedom to follow Hashem, to appreciate all that Hashem does for us. We couldn't do it during the Holocaust. It's a good thing to be free. We were given the free choice to decide how to serve Hashem, with the Torah as our guidebook.

Kittle-It's a custom to wear it at the table. White is the color of purity, the symbol of a king.

Separate the Matzah- Put away the Afikomin. Symbol of Moshiach. This is the bread of affliction, not just stomach aches! We had to make it in a hurry. We invite the hungry and needy to our table. This is the only passage in the Haggadah that's in Aramaic. Why? It was the language of the people. We are all entitled to come and participate in a Seder, it's a Mitzvah! Who do you want involved in your Seder? It's all about dialogue and discussion. What does the Seder say to me?

Four Questions and Answers- Judaism has answers. Searching for the answers is part of being Jewish. Let people at the Seder answer.

Rabbis in Bnai Brak- Different groups of people staying up all night and getting caught up in the excitement of the Seder experience.

Four sons- Diverse personalities. Children are different, even twins!! The real theme with the four sons is freedom. What is our role in the world? How can we help people?

Thanking Hashem:

Develop the trait of HaKoras HaTov (Thanking for the good)

Hashem always saves the Jewish people. Never in history has there been a terrible planned out extermination of a nation of people like during the Holocaust. Yet, we survived. What we think as being man driven is really Hashem driven. Use the Seder to talk about the Hand of God and miracles. What miracles have happened to me? How has Hashem directed my life? Reflect on acts of divine assistance.

Ten Plagues- Miracles upon Miracles. Can you top these miracles?

Dyanu- "Enough". This is a history lesson. We didn't deserve anything that Hashem did or does for us. Hashem did 15 steps to help us. We must express HaKoras HaTov. This is a night of appreciation. Hashem sustains us even among challenges and difficulties.

Pesach- Why a lamb? It was the symbol of the main God in Egypt. Hashem command us to destroy it and show that there is only one creator in the world.

Matzah- Poor-man's bread. Can't bake for more than 18 minutes. Time is important. How we use time is very important in Jewish life.

Maror-Bitter herbs are symbols of anguish and enslavement.

Quick story by Reb Nachman of Breslov: Two guys, one Jewish and one not Jewish (vagabonds) wonder into a town Pesach night. The Jewish guy says, "Tonight we can get a great meal. After Shul we'll get invited out and eat a feast." Well, they each get invited to different homes. The non-Jew sits down at the Seder and is served Karpas with salt water. Yuk!! Then they eat Matzah, pretty dry. What a bad cracker! Then they drink wine and sit and read a book and talk for a few hours. Finally the host announces that the meal is about to begin. Great!! What do they eat...maror!! Guy gets up from the table and leaves.

Later that night he meets his Jewish friend. "What a great meal," the Jew says. "We had soup and chicken, vegetables, a meal fit for a king."

"What are you talking about? They gave me salt water, bad crackers, and horseradish."

"You fool. If you had stayed two more minutes, then the real meal would have been served"

Lesson: We are too impatient. Our world is a world of instant gratification. This is not the Jewish way. We need to have patience with people and with Hashem. The Seder reminds us that things take time. Good things come to those who wait.

Bentching-Thanking Hashem

Hallel- Praise and reflect on the greatness of Hashem. It's the highlight of the evening. Most people don't even get past bentching.

Afikoman- We can't finish the Seder without it. It's the dessert and the taste of redemption.

L'Shanah HaBa'ah B'Yershalyim- "Next Year in Jerusalem" This is the final transformation of the Jewish people. Moshiach is coming tomorrow and we must be ready.

A Seder isn't judged by how good the food was, but by how meaningful it was to us. We should leave the Seder thinking that I want to be part of Klal Yisrael (The Jewish people)! I want to find out more about Judaism and Mitzvos! I want to challenge my mind and my soul.

The challenge of the second night, being in exile, and Judaism is to make it just as meaningful and fresh as the first night.