

Reclaiming the Haggadah: Dispelling 5 Misconceptions About the Seder

David Hartman on Liberating the Seder : The haggadah was meant to facilitate lively dialogue. Unfortunately seder too often becomes rote reading to "zoom" through, rather than a drama of creative roles. Don't let the printed word paralyze the imagination. Talk. Discuss. You are free. This haggadah invites you to shape your own seder.

- 1. There is no mitzvah to starve! Not by parsley alone shall we survive.**
- 2. There is no mitzvah for a thirty two year old lawyer who is the youngest at the table to sing *Ma Nishtana* / The Four Questions.**
- 3. There is no mitzvah to read the whole Haggadah, but there is mitzvah to tell stories.**
- 4. There is no mitzvah to set your wicked /rebellious /independent minded /cynical child's teeth on edge.**
- 5. There is no mitzvah to do merely ancient history at the Seder. Make the Exodus contemporary - politically and personally.**

However it is a mitzvah make the Seder fun - "for only the lesson enjoyed is the lesson learned" (Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, editor of the Mishna).

FREE COUPON: It is more important to prepare the content of your seder, than to clean your house and cook your meal. Take this coupon and decrease your cleaning by one hour and devote that hour to thinking about ways to involve the family in a participatory Seder.

3 CONCEPTS of the SEDER

The Leader's Roles:

1) Master of Ceremonies
(rabbi, priest, chief of

2) Talk Show Moderator
(facilitator at a symposium)

3) Parent Educator
(home schooling) protocol at a diplomatic dinner)

Terminology for Pesach Night

1) Pesach Seder:

Ritual "Order" of the Pesach Sacrifice

2) Aggadah

Rabbinic symposium on the Exodus - --- Oral "midrash" interpreting the written Torah

3) Hagaddah

"You shall 'tell' your children." -Intergenerational story telling

The Principle of Educational Disorder in the Seder

Maimonides expanded further the types of changes that should be introduced on Seder night, so that children already used to the usual special Pesach customs would still take notice and ask:

One should make some change in procedure on this night of the fifteenth of Nisan, in order that one's children should notice it and ask, "What makes this night different from other nights?" to which one would reply, "this and this is what happened, and this and this is what took place" [in the story of the Exodus].

In what way might the procedure (*seder*) be changed?

By distributing parched grain or nuts to the children [distributing desert at the beginning of the meal],

by having the table removed before the meal begins [clearing the table before anyone has eaten],

by each trying to snatch away the other's unleavened bread [playing games with the food, like the stealing of the afikoman] and so on.

(Maimonides, Laws of Chametz and Matza, Chapter 7:3)

Asking Questions and the Greek Symposium

"The leader of the symposium "took pride in gathering about him many persons of culture and entertaining them with conversation ... now proposing topics worthy of enquiry, now disclosing solutions of his own; for he never put his questions without previous study or in a haphazard way, but with the utmost critical, even Socratic acumen, so that all admired the keen observation showed by his question." (ATHENAEUS, *DEIPNOSOPHISTS*, 2ND C. GREECE)

"Questions should be easy, the problems plain and familiar, not intricate and dark, so that they may neither vex the unlearned nor frighten them from speaking up ... the discourse should be like our wine, common to all, of which everyone may equally partake."

"A symposium is a communion of serious and mirthful entertainment, discourse and symbolic actions (It furthers) a deeper insight into the points debated at the table. For the memory of the pleasures arising from the food is short-lived but the subjects of philosophical queries and discussions remain always fresh after they have been imparted." (PLUTARCH, *QUAESTIONES*, 2ND C. GREECE AND ROME)

Provoking Questions before Giving Answers – Nelson Mandela

"Some of the [white Afrikan prison] warders [on Robben Island] began to engage us in conversation. I never initiated conversations with warders, but if they addressed a question to me, I tried to answer. **It is easier to educate a man when he wants to learn.** Usually, these questions were posed with a kind of exasperation: "All right, Mandela, what is it you really want?" Or, "Look, you have a roof over your head and enough food, why are you causing so much trouble?" I would then calmly explain our policies to the warders. I wanted to demystify the African National Congress for them, to peel away their prejudices." (Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, about Mandela's 27 years of imprisonment for his struggle for democracy in South Africa)

The Jew is a Dispute Incarnate - Philip Roth, *Operation Shylock*:

"Why couldn't the Jews be one people? Why must Jews be in conflict with one another? Why must they be in conflict with themselves? Because divisiveness is not just between Jew and Jew – it is within the individual Jew. Is there a more manifold personality in all the world? I don't say divided. Divided is nothing... But inside every Jew there is a *mob* of Jews. The good Jew, the bad Jew. The new Jew, the old Jew. The lover of Jews, the hater of Jews. The friend of the goy, the enemy of the goy. The arrogant Jew, the wounded Jew. The pious Jew, the rascal Jew. The coarse Jew, the gentle Jew. The defiant Jew, the rascal Jew. The coarse Jew, the gentle Jew. The defiant Jew, the appeasing Jew. The Jewish Jew, the de-Jewed Jew. Shall I go on? So I have to expound upon the Jew as a three-thousand-year amassment of mirrored fragments... Is it any wonder that a Jew is always disputing? He *is* a dispute, incarnate."

Beware of Complaining about Boring Seders

[In medieval Catholic Europe] religion was not a laughing matter, at least for the officials assigned to enforce orthodoxy. They did not treat even trivial jokes lightly. In France, a villager named Isambard was arrested for having exclaimed, when a friar announced after mass that he would say a few words about God, "The fewer the better." In Spain, a tailor named Garcia Lopez, coming out of church just after the priest had announced the long schedule of services for the coming week, quipped that:

"When we were Jews, we were bored stiff by one Passover each year, and now each day seems to be a Passover and feast-day." Garcia Lopez was denounced to the Inquisition.

(Steven Greenblatt, *The Swerve*, 236)

The Storytelling Seder – Personal Recollections – *V hignadta L'vincha- You shall tell your children*

Let's hear it for Lake Wobegon!
By Garrison Keillor

“When I was a boy the storyteller in our family was Uncle Lew who died a couple of years ago at 93. In a family that tended to be withdrawn, Uncle Lew was the friendliest. He had been a salesman and he liked to drive around and dropped in on people. He would ask us kids how we were doing in school and then there was point when he would launch in and start telling stories about the family, generation upon generation.

My parents would be in the living room and we would be eating popcorn. As it got later I remember lying on the floor so my mother wouldn't see me and send me to bed. I just wanted him to tell more and more. I wanted to know everything. What it looked like and what it smelled like, what they ate and what they wore.

As I got older I looked to those stories about family as giving us some sense of place, that is some way we were meant to be here and had a history. That we had standing.

1. Unusual Seders: 5 Rabbis of Bnei Brak and their Like

2. "In every generation one is obligated to *see oneself as if you went out of Egypt!*"
(Ashkenazi Haggadah)

"One is obligated to *show oneself as if you went out of Egypt!*"
(Maimonidean Haggadah)

3. Souvenirs of the Egyptian Experience: The Edible Symbols of Memory
"Pesach (bone) for what? Matza for what? Maror for What?"

A Second Seder Plate of Personal mementos as a Trigger to Storytelling

Rabbi Nahman: **"The Exodus from Egypt occurs in very human being, in every era, in every year and even on every day."**

Benching Gomel: Passover as Thanksgiving

4. Spiritual Liberation: Abraham and Sarah, Jews by Choice – recounting your identity journey.

5. Naftali Ropshitz and Filling Elijah's Cup with our Hopes: *Hatikvah* – Last Year in Egypt and Next Year in Jerusalem