

CEREMONY & CELEBRATION FAMILY EDITION

Based on the teachings and writings of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks זצ"ל



PESACH

Seder Night Companion

Seder night is a highlight of the Jewish calendar for parents and children alike. It is the night that revolves around children, and parents are reminded of the importance of their role as educators. (Thankfully the Haggadah gives them lots of tools and tips!)

Rabbi Sacks זצ"ל explains that on the eve of the original Pesach, at the very moment when a new chapter in the life of the Jewish people began, we found out what it means to be a Jew: "About to gain their freedom, the Israelites were told that they had to become a nation of educators" (*Radical Then, Radical Now*, p. 32).

Being a Jew means being both a student and an educator, and Seder night is our opportunity to focus on both these roles.

This educational companion to Seder night will give you some ideas and thoughts on several of the core pages from the Haggadah and how Rabbi Sacks understands them. As well as educational insights, like all *Ceremony & Celebration: Family Editions*, this Pesach instalment also includes activities, stories, and reflection questions in each section, designed to engage all the participants around your Seder table, young and old alike.

You will notice many extracts from Rabbi Sacks' writings, all sourced from *The Jonathan Sacks Haggada*, published by Koren. This guide is designed to be used in conjunction with a Haggadah; it is not a replacement for one.



EDUCATIONAL COMPANION TO THE QUESTIONS

HA LACHMA ANYA

1. As Rabbi Sacks explains in his Haggadah, the root of the word “*haggadah*” means not only ‘to tell’ but also ‘to bind’ and the Seder evening binds us together as a people. Jews from all walks of life and religious backgrounds will find themselves at a Seder table and should be made to feel welcome. In fact, the biblical command to sacrifice the Pesach lamb had to be done in a *chaburah*, which is more than one family coming together. The freedom we celebrate on this night is not just about leaving Egypt where we were slaves, but also about journeying to the Promised Land and building a society based on the values of the Torah, where kindness to strangers is a core value. This starts tonight.
2. The beauty of matzah is that it can represent both. In fact, without slavery we would not appreciate our freedom, so both concepts can co-exist in this experience.
3. Although some families choose to have Seder night on their own (especially if they have young children, to allow the parents to focus on them) many people will find themselves at a Seder night with others from outside of their immediate family. It has always been a tradition that people come together for this ritual. But more than this, it is a powerful thought that the entire Jewish People find themselves at a Seder table at the same time, and if we take a moment to extend that thought, we can also visualise and feel connected to the many generations who came before us who also celebrated this festival in exactly the same way.

QUIZ ANSWERS: 1. Pharaoh; 2. Hashem; 3. Moshe; 4. Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Akiva, and Rabbi Tarfon; 5. Rabbi Yehudah; 6. Rabbi Yossi HaGelili, Rabbi Eliezer, and Rabbi Akiva; 7. Rabban Gamliel; 8. Hillel; 9. Eliyahu HaNavi; 10. My father.

MA NISHTANAH

1. Learning through questions makes the educational process engaging and empowering for the learner.
2. Any question asked from a desire for knowledge without secondary agenda is a good question. There are no bad questions in this case.
3. Not all questions have answers, or at least answers that we as finite humans can find or understand. Some questions only the infinite God can answer. But we don’t stop asking the questions. The questions are more important than the answers.

AVADIM HAYINU

1. As a nation, we have a national memory and identity. So when the Haggadah speaks of our experience in Egypt as slaves, while this refers to a specific generation and historical time period, as a nation we have that experience implanted in our memory and identity. The Haggadah encourages us to re-experience this every year on Seder

night, and *Avadim Hayinu* reminds us that the experience does impact us directly, for if God had not redeemed us, we would be slaves ourselves to this day.

2. A good story told well can have a big impact. A powerful story is experiential, in that the listener can imagine they are living the story, or at least empathise and identify with the characters. The longer and more detailed the story is, the more chance this will happen. So the Haggadah encourages us to tell the story at length, and engage with it, so we can experience the story as fully as possible.
3. Because Seder night is not about “learning” or “reading” or “understanding” but rather about experiencing and living the story, the Haggadah tells us that even wise and experienced people who have done this many times before still have to tell the story. Because each year it is a new experience.

THE FOUR CHILDREN

1. Obviously all answers are legitimate, but in the ensuing discussion it is worth encouraging everyone to realise that each of us is all of the four children at different times in our lives (or even at different times of the day!)
2. All children are different and have different educational needs. Insightful parents and teachers realise this and try their hardest to cater to those individual needs.
3. Children are the main focus of the evening because this night more than any other is when we pass on our national heritage to the next generation. Even though the process of learning about and re-experiencing the Exodus is a task which takes a lifetime, it begins when we are children, laying the foundation of our Jewish identity and allowing the national narrative to become part of our very core. We take our cue from the Torah itself, which focuses on the questions children will ask about the Exodus.

THE TEN PLAGUES

1. Each plague attacked a different aspect of the Egyptian society’s physical and spiritual needs. The Egyptians could probably have managed without one or two or even more of the elements that were attacked, but this was a systematic destruction of their way of life.
2. Every plague was terrible and designed to attack a different aspect of Egyptian society and cause problems. If you have to choose one... it doesn’t get more terrible than the final plague.
3. God could have taken the Israelites out of Egypt without any miracles or fuss. But He chose to take the Egyptians on an educational journey, because the process was important. And even more important than the direct impact on the Egyptians was the impact on the rest of the world as they watched (or at least heard reports) and the effect on the Israelites themselves. The plagues were as much for these other groups as they were for Pharaoh and the Egyptians, if not more so.

DAYEINU

1. Full redemption from Egypt was the establishing of a sovereign nation in the Promised Land, with the Temple at the centre of its religious life. If God had stopped short of this at any of the previous stages, then it would not have been complete redemption.
2. The message behind *Dayeinu* is that each individual stage was miraculous and magnificent, and worthy of praise and gratitude.
3. While the physical redemption ended with the liberation from slavery and leaving the geographical boundaries of Egypt, and the spiritual redemption took place at the Giving of the Torah on Sinai, the full religio-social redemption was only achieved once the Jews entered the Land of Israel and built a society there based on the Torah.

PESACH, MATZAH, AND MAROR

1. They are experiential. We don't just talk or learn or read about the story, but we experience it through food and other rituals (such as leaning, pouring for each other, etc.) in order to full immerse in the story.
2. Yes, all the *chaggim* in Judaism do, although to a lesser extent than Pesach. For example, we sit in the succah, and we stay up all night learning to prepare to receive the Torah.
3. While some of our educational institutions do practice experiential education (camp is an excellent example) and some of our schools find opportunities to do this as well (e.g. by having *shabbatonim*), perhaps institutions of formal Jewish education could find more creative ways to incorporate the methodology of experiential education.

QUIZ ANSWERS: 1. Wine; 2. Pesach; 3. Karpas; 4. Salt Water; 5. Afikoman; 6. Maror; 7. Charoset; 8. Korech; 9. Matzah; 10. Shulchan Orech.

HALLEL

1. It is hard to know where to start. But it is important to articulate all the things God did for the Israelites and how we benefit from these acts until this day. In the words of the Haggadah itself, "And if the Holy One, blessed be He, had not brought our fathers out of Egypt – then we, and our children, and the children of our children, would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt."
2. If one is comfortable finding words that articulate genuine emotion, then there is room for that in our prayers. But for many this is a challenge, and so we fall back on the exquisite words of our greatest poets and spiritual

leaders, to give us the words we need. Our challenge is then to channel our emotions into these words.

3. For some, words capture the feelings and emotions that we need to express. But for others, only music can connect to our soul to do this sufficiently. While Rabbi Sacks was a masterful wordsmith and orator, he acknowledged that music has a spiritual power far beyond words to allow us to feel, and express, what is in our soul.

NIRTZAH

1. They should (and do) because this section refers to a rebuilt Jerusalem in Messianic times when the Temple exists (allowing us to celebrate Pesach as originally described in the Torah) in a redeemed world of peace. This has clearly not been achieved yet, and so to pray for this at the end of the Seder night, even while sitting in the beautiful rebuilt modern city of Jerusalem, is appropriate.
2. The Exodus is the beginning of a journey that we are still on. The destination of this journey is a rebuilt Jerusalem in a redeemed world of peace. We hope that this can be achieved in time for next year's Seder.
3. All the *chaggim* are special and unique in Israel. There is something very powerful about celebrating a Jewish festival in a Jewish state. It is also easier to remember that we are closer to the final destination of the Jewish journey now than at any point in history, when sitting in the ancient Jewish homeland, rebuilt in modern times.

CHAD GADYA

1. The whole of the Seder is focused on children, and on transmitting our heritage to the next generation. This song (and the others at the conclusion of the Seder) are fun to sing, and also contain a strong educational message. A great way to end the Seder night journey.
2. The message of *Chad Gadya* is that while it may seem during our history that there are powerful forces who will dominate and even destroy us, these forces come and go, and only God decides who survives in the long term. And if you consider Jewish history, it is clear that He has decided that the Jewish people have a destiny to fulfil, and therefore we have outlasted all these powerful nations who have tried to destroy us.
3. Modern Jewish history reflects this same message. In the 20th century, an enemy of the Jewish people came closer than ever before to wiping them out, yet not only did the Jewish people survive, but in fact just three years later returned to their ancestral homeland, and re-established sovereignty there, and are now thriving like never before. We are part of a generation that is living the fulfilment of the message of this song.

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