

SEDER INSIGHTS

SHORT QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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OPENING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are children the centerpiece of the Seder?

- *The Seder is the time to access our “child within” and experience the night with a sense of fresh eyes and excitement.*
- *Our present is defined by both our past and future. The aim of the Seder is to extend those values into the future.*

2. The word “Seder” means order. Why do we sing the order of the Seder (the “Table of Contents”) at the outset? Who cares?

- *Shortcuts are convenient. They save time, effort, and sometimes even money. But don’t try it in life... Only Seder, only order will do. Deeper living just doesn’t flourish in the land of quick fixes. (Passover Survival Kit Haggadah)*
- *The Seder has fifteen steps. This corresponds to the fifteen steps that led up to the entrance of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem... These fifteen steps are a path to self-growth. They fulfill our spiritual need to grow. (Seder for the Soul)*

KADESH: *We recite Kiddush over wine (Artscroll Family Haggadah, “AFH,” pg. 20)*

Drinking wine is called “Kiddush” sanctifying? Does alcohol make us holier?

- *As Jews, our mission in life is to engage life and find holiness in the world around us. The physical world is a springboard for the soul. That’s the first message of the Seder.*
- *Kiddush is the sanctification of time and our first step to freedom. A slave is not a master of his own time.*

URCHATZ: *We wash our hands without a blessing (AFH pg. 22)*

If we’re not eating bread why are we washing our hands? Why no blessing?

Pouring water represents the purity that we seek to achieve over the course of the night. The blessings must wait until after we experience true freedom later in the meal.

KARPAS: *We dip a vegetable in salt water (AFH Pg. 22)*

What does dipping parsley in salt water have to do with freedom?

It may just be an ice breaker to pique the interest of kids, but some relate this to Joseph's coat that was dipped into blood (and was called Karpas!) when he was sent to Egypt. We recall how disunity among brothers set in motion our downfall.

YACHATZ: *We break the middle Matzah & put aside the larger piece for later (AFH Pg. 24)*

Why do we wrap & hide the Matzah for later?

Rationing is the manner in which slaves eat. On a deeper level, freedom is not about instant gratification. A free man must have the vision to actualize long term goals.

MAGID: *Telling the Story (AFH Pg. 24-48)*

The longest and most central part of the Seder. Its purpose is to tell & reenact the Egyptian redemption.

1. **Ha Lachma...** *Anyone who is poor should come and eat; anyone who is needy should come and fulfill the Passover." (AFH Pg. 24)*

How can you invite guests to sit around your table in the middle of the meal?

- *This represents an attitude rather than an invitation. Jewish freedom is the ability to share with others. The invitation to guests is a statement of national unity. Throughout the year, Jews find themselves divided into different groups and factions. On the night of Pesach, which is the night on which we were nationally born, we open our doors and declare we are one nation.*
2. **"Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said..."** (AFH pg. 26) *We begin the answer by contrasting the mitzvah of the Seder with the general obligation to remember the Exodus every day throughout the year.*

If there is a mitzvah to remember the Exodus every morning and night, how is the Seder different?

On this night we need to fully experience freedom, not simply remember the concept.

3. **Mah Nishtanah:** *Four Questions (AFH Pg. 24)*

Why is the Seder presented in question and answer form?

- *Is a slave able to question the world around him?*

Are questions linked to freedom?

- **Isidore Rabi**, winner of a Nobel Prize in physics, was once asked why he became a scientist. He replied, "My mother made me a scientist without even knowing it. Every other child would come home from school and be asked, 'What did you learn today?' But my mother used to ask a different question. 'Izzy,' she always used to say, 'did you ask a good question today?' That made the difference." (*A Night of Questions*)

- **Albert Einstein:** *If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask, for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes.*
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4. **Avadim Hayinu** - "If not for God, we would still be slaves." (AFH Pg. 26)

If the Exodus occurred 3,300 years ago how could we possibly still be slaves?

Freedom is far more than political emancipation. Mitzrayim literally means constraints. Countless forces prevent us from actualizing our potential. On Passover night, God redeemed us and showed us our inner worth.

5. **"It happened that Rabbi Eliezer..."** (AFH Pg. 26)

The Haggadah shares a story of Rabbis talking the whole night. Didn't they know it all already?

- *The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing - Socrates. The more we learn, the more we realize how much we don't know.*
 - *The Seder is a journey of the soul, not an exercise of the mind.*
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6. **Four Sons** (AFG pg. 28)

The original source of the Four Sons is found in the Torah where it describes four ways to share the story with your children. Yet, the answers in the Haggadah don't match the ones in the Torah. Why were they changed?

- Education has no cookie cutter responses. While words may sound the same, each person is unique and requires a distinct approach. On Pesach we celebrate the unique contribution of each individual.
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7. **Vehi She'amdah:** (AGH pg. 30)

Why do we raise our glasses & sing a song about anti-Semitism?

We celebrate the miracle of Jewish survival and recognize we will ultimately triumph. In the words of Tolstoy: 'The Jew is the emblem of eternity. He whom neither slaughter nor torture of thousands of years could destroy... He who has been for so long the guardian of prophecy, and who transmitted it to the rest of the world – such a nation cannot be destroyed. The Jew is as everlasting as eternity itself'. (What is a Jew? Leo Tolstoy.)

8. **"Terach the father of Abraham.. served idols"** (AFH Pg. 31)

Why start with the story with Abraham centuries before the slavery begins? Get to the point!

- *The Seder is not only about how we were liberated but understanding our story and realizing our place in history.*

9. **"And they cried out to the Lord..."** (AGH pg. 34)

Why did it take them so long to cry?

- *Far too often we simply accept the status quo and fail to believe change is possible. What limiting beliefs are still stopping us?*
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10. **Rabban Gamliel said whoever has not explained the following three things (the Paschal Lamb, Matzah & Marmor) has not fulfilled his obligation** (AFH Pg. 42)

The experience of freedom is not complete without fully engaging the totality of the person. The Torah requires us to literally "taste" our freedom and contemplate the significance of the moment.

RACHTZAH: *Washing a second time for the Matzah* (AGH pg. 48)

Didn't we already do this?

- *There is no limit to our process of purification and growth. The initial washing was the initiation of the process with no blessing. With our newfound liberation & perspective we can now begin to express the blessings.*
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MATZAH: *Matzah is Eaten* (AGH pg. 50)

What can a cracker teach me about Freedom?

- *Everything we pursue in life can be divided into necessities and luxuries. Enslavement is the point where luxury becomes a necessity. Matzah is literally free of all additives - it is bread without the fluff and hot air. It represents the essential elements of life.*
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MARROR: *Marmor is Eaten* (AGH pg. 50)

Why remind me about my pain if I'm supposed to feel liberated?

- *Liberation is the ability to harness the challenges of our past to propel us to higher heights. In the words of Dale Carnegie: "We have to learn to profit from our mistakes."*
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KORECH: *The Matzah/Marmor Sandwich* (AGH pg. 50)

After eating both separately, why do we need to eat them together?

- *We're lifting up our pain (Marmor) with the symbol of liberation (Matzah) and transforming it into "gain."*
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SHULCHAN ORECH: *A Festive Meal (AGH pg. 52)*

Why do Jews always need to eat?

- *It is not enough to celebrate with words and thoughts. Celebration must envelop all aspects of our being. Freedom must be experienced at all levels, and with all our senses. Moreover, the festive meal teaches us that true freedom is the ability to sanctify the physical world.*
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TZAFUN (Lit. hidden): *The half hidden at the beginning of the Seder returns to be eaten as the last taste. (AGH pg. 52)*

Why is the end of the Seder tied with the beginning?

We can't forget where we came from.

BARECH: *We recite the Birkat HaMazon, Grace after Meals. (AGH pg. 52-62)*

- *A central part of the night is to realize gratitude. Birkat HaMazon is followed by drinking the third of the Four Cups of wine.*
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HALLEL (AGH pg. 62-76)

- *We sing the Hallel, giving our thanks and praise to God for all the goodness He has performed for us. Hallel is followed by the fourth and final cup of wine.*

Why not thank God before the meal? *It's important to feel gratitude even when your belly is full.*

NIRTZAH & CLOSING SONGS: *The Conclusion (AGH pg. 76-92)*

- *Having been rejuvenated on Seder Night, the anniversary of our redemption, we commence a new cycle of both personal and national growth and achievement.*
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