One of the most memorable highlights of the Jewish year is Seder Night, the night on which Jewish households unite to celebrate the nation’s redemption from Egypt. It is a celebration of the Jewish national identity on the night that our nation came into being. In fact, the prophet Yechezkel (Ezekiel 16:4) calls Passover “the day of your birth.” More than just a “birthday party” though, the essence of Seder Night is to integrate and internalize the most fundamental themes of Judaism. The story of the birth of our nation, retold each year as presented in the Haggadah, forms the backbone of our faith, our identity, and our hope. In this class we will discuss the various aspects of Seder Night, as seen through the prism of the Torah, the Haggadah, and the words of our Sages.

This class will address the following questions:

- Why do we celebrate the Passover Seder? What is it meant to accomplish?
- Why are children a focus of the Seder?
- Why does this night contain a wealth of mitzvot and customs, more so than any other day of the year?
- Why is Seder Night always the same (same food, same story, etc.)? How can this year’s Seder be more interesting than last year’s?
- What are the messages of the Pesach offering, matzah, maror, and the Four Cups of wine?
- What is behind the custom of filling a cup of wine for Eliyahu (Elijah) and opening the door for him?
Class Outline:

Introduction. The Invasion of the Green Plastic Frogs

Section I. The Goals of the Passover Seder
Part A. Telling the Events
Part B. Instilling Faith
Part C. Experiencing the Freedom
Part D. Thanksgiving

Section II. An Overview of the Steps of the Seder
Part A. The Order of the Seder
Part B. The Fifteen Simanim (Symbols)
Part C. The Seder Plate

Section III. Making the Seder Meaningful
Part A. Setting the Mood – The Way of the Free
Part B. Piquing the Interest of the Children
Part C. Question and Answer Format
Part D. Tailor-made Education

Section IV. Pesach, Matzah, and Maror
Part A. Pesach
Part B. Matzah
Part C. Maror

Section V. The Four Cups of Wine
Part A. What’s in a Number?
Part B. The Cup of Eliyahu (Elijah)
INTRODUCTION. THE INVASION OF THE GREEN PLASTIC FROGS

A primary goal of the Seder Night is to view ourselves as if we had actually left Egypt. Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits asks: how do we accomplish this? Do we read books? Watch movies and videos? Construct an elaborate re-enactment? If we read fiction books, they produce a consciousness as if the stories are real – so, that can’t be it. Mobilizing an army of plastic frogs on the table might be a cute prompt for kids, but the last thing we want is anyone leaving the Seder thinking it was merely a show.

The Kuzari writes that we need to imagine what it was like to have lived in Egypt. Some Jewish communities wrap the matzah in a sack and toss it behind the shoulder as if they are reliving the Exodus. The participants call out, “Where are you from?”

“Mitzrayim (Egypt).”

“Where are you going?”

“Yerushalayim (Jerusalem).”

That is part of the process, but there is more. Rabbi Reuven Leuchter passionately exclaims, “YOU – WERE – THERE! YOU – WERE – THERE!” The message penetrates – we were all in Egypt, endured the slavery, witnessed the plagues and miracles. Yet, how do we reach that level of recognition that we truly feel WE – WERE – THERE in Egypt and that God took us out through the split Reed Sea and we stood awed at Mount Sinai and received the Torah?

The answer is that we need to cultivate a feeling deep inside of us that we are part of the Jewish people. We need to realize that we are part of the magnificent past, present, and future of the Jewish people and Jewish history. We need to journey carefully and attentively through each step of the Seder – inviting guests, drinking the Four Cups, eating the matzah, reclining as noblemen, eating bitter herbs, searching for the afikoman etc. – and recognize and be inspired by its overflowing Jewish faith. We need to carefully read, question, analyze, discuss, understand, crystallize and integrate the Haggadah’s and Torah’s teachings which strengthen our faith and ultimately reveal, We Were There! (Based on Nesivos Shalom, Vol. II, p. 250-251; Sifsei Chaim, Vol. II, p. 364-366; Rabbi Berkovits; and Rabbi Leuchter)

Let's begin …

SECTION I. THE GOALS OF THE PASSOVER SEDER

In order to make the Seder a lasting and meaningful experience, it is a good idea to come to it with an awareness of what it is supposed to accomplish. Apart from relating the origin of the Jewish nation, the Seder is also a means for transmitting Jewish faith, expressing our gratitude to God, and experiencing the freedom of the Exodus.

PART A. TELLING THE EVENTS

The main focus of the Seder is the mitzvah of retelling the story of the Jewish people's Exodus from Egypt around 3,300 years ago. The Torah instructs us to recall the Exodus daily, but on Seder Night we relate the entire story – the more detail the better!
1. Shemot (Exodus) 13:8 – The Torah tells us to relate the story of the Exodus from Egypt.

And you shall tell your child on that day saying, “And it is because of this that God acted on my behalf when I left Egypt.”

2. Rambam (Maimonides), Hilchot Chametz u’Matzah 7:1 – It is a mitzvah to remember the Exodus on Seder Night and to explain the story as much as possible.

It is a positive commandment of the Torah to relate the miracles and wonders wrought for our ancestors in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan, as [Shemot 13:3] states, “Remember this day, on which you left Egypt,” just as it states, “Remember the Sabbath day” [Ibid. 20:8].

[The mitzvah applies] even if one does not have a son. And even great Sages are obligated to tell about the Exodus from Egypt. Whoever elaborates concerning the events which occurred and took place is worthy of praise.

The Jewish people have been relating the events of the Exodus to one another in an unbroken chain since the time these events occurred.

3. Artscroll Haggadah, quoting from Rabbi Isaac Breuer – Relating the story of the Exodus makes us links in an unbroken chain from that time until today.

[Every year anew, a father has to speak to his children, to make them fully aware of their beginnings and to add them as new links to the unbroken chain of our national tradition. The child is made to experience the happenings of Pesach in stark immediacy – for in retelling what has been passed down through the generations, the father is no purveyor of a legend, but the witness to historical truth and national experience. “He does not speak to his children as an individual, weak and mortal, but as a representative of the nation, demanding from them the loyalty to be expected …”]

PART B. INSTILLING FAITH

The purpose of relating the story of the Exodus is not just to keep historical memory alive. The Pesach celebration of the Jewish national birthday is itself a declaration of faith in the God Whose revelation gave us our national existence. The generation of the Exodus from Egypt experienced faith in God; they saw His Hand and knew His mastery over the world. The purpose of Seder Night is to transmit that inaugural faith from generation to generation, so that it should never be lost.

1. Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah #21 – The events of the Exodus affirm our belief in God’s creation and mastery of the world.

Do not be surprised by how many mitzvot there are [relating to the Exodus from Egypt], both positive and negative commandments, for it is the foundation and pillar upon which our Torah
and our faith stand. That is why we always state when making blessings and praying, “In commemoration of the Exodus from Egypt,” for it is the absolute proof to the Creation of the world, that there is an omnipotent Master to this world Who created everything, Who can alter Creation whenever He wishes to do so – as He did for us in Egypt when He wrought great and unprecedented miracles. It is the rejoinder to anyone who wishes to deny the Creation of the world and it affirms our faith in God's knowledge and providence both in general and in detail.

2. Rabbi Yosef Yashar, Levush Yosef p. 136 – Retelling the story of the Exodus imparts faith to our children.

On Seder Night a person is given the opportunity to instill in his children the fundamentals of faith and of mitzvah performance – “And whoever tells about the Exodus from Egypt at length is praiseworthy.” The principal element of the mitzvah of recounting the Exodus from Egypt is to tell of the great might of God, and the miraculous salvation that He did for us when He took us out from Egypt. And the main intention of this recounting is to implant within the hearts of the members of our families belief in God, and in the greatness of His might and wonders, and to expound on the miracles and the wonders that He did, in order that by doing so their faith should be strengthened.

One might be tempted to ask, if we believe God is all-powerful, then why didn’t He prevent the Jewish people from being enslaved in the first place? Is God like a “superman” who comes to save the day? Couldn’t He have prevented the whole incident from happening?

When we understand the role of the Exodus as a lesson in God’s control over nature then our questions are answered and we can appreciate why the Exodus happened in the first place.

3. Rabbi Isaac Chaver, Yad Chazakah – The experience of witnessing God’s control over nature was much more powerful than any philosophical understanding of God’s existence.

“Had He not taken [our fathers] out …” This teaches us that it was impossible to leave Egypt by natural means, because of the power of the spiritual forces that reigned over Egypt. Through this we know that God, may He be blessed, is the true individual Controller, and that He does everything He desires in the heavens and on earth. This is why “even if we were all wise …
we would still be obligated,” because the Exodus from Egypt is the source of the entire Torah, since God’s control over the world was made known through it. Therefore, even if we are all wise, in the respect that we are intellectually aware that the Creator runs His world, like the level of Avraham (Abraham), who recognized of his own accord that God runs the world, nevertheless “we are obligated to tell about the Exodus from Egypt,” because a person’s senses have a stronger influence over him than his intellect.

Therefore, God placed us in the furnace of Egypt, and did not simply reveal Himself to His nation and give us wisdom and understanding of His powers without us having to endure the harsh labor [of the Egyptian bondage]. This was because the experience of bondage and redemption served to sharpen and clarify the issue [of His control and guidance over the world].

What does it mean to have faith in God?

4. Based on Rabbi Noson Weisz, Faith Among the Pyramids, Aish.com – Having faith means maintaining a personal relationship with God and expressing it in our daily lives.

What does faith in God mean? People have remarked that the obligation to have faith in God is a paradox. Either one already believes in God, in which case the obligation to do so is entirely superfluous, or one does not, in which case it is absurd. If I don’t believe in God in the first place, there is no God in my perception Who can obligate me to believe in Him. But this is a very shallow view of faith.

The obligation to have faith in God is an obligation never to break the connection with Him. Thus, the commandment to believe in God – the first commandment in the Torah – is really a commandment to preserve one’s connection with God at any price on the grounds that the relationship with God is the most important of all relationships. This also explains why the outer expressions of faith are so important.

Why didn’t the Jews of Egypt say to themselves, “There is no need to antagonize the Egyptians with the outward display of our Judaism. After all our faith is in our hearts. Why shouldn’t we adopt Egyptian names, speak the language, and wear the clothes? What do these outward displays have to do with our inner beliefs?”

Connections require expression. Philosophy is in the mind, but relationships must be manifest in the real world.

To be an Egyptian in everything but mind, is to be an Egyptian all the way. The essence of an Egyptian is that he has no faith. But a person of faith must appear like a person of faith. If his faith is not demonstrated in the way he lives his life, it is not the faith that fuels a relationship with God and Judaism, but merely an empty faith of ideology.
See the Morasha classes on Developing and Strengthening Belief in God.

**PART C. EXPERIENCING THE FREEDOM**

Just as the Exodus itself was an experience, so too our commemoration of it must be an experience. On the night of Pesach the Jewish people were born, a birth that came with their miraculous redemption from Egypt. Annually, when the Jewish calendar reaches the same night, we literally relive the wonder of the redemption.

Our children are therefore educated not only by means of words and intellectual lessons, but by a profound personal experience that the master of the Seder leads his family through. That is why the most wise and knowledgeable are no less obligated in telling the tale of our redemption than the uninitiated. The Seder is no mere intellectual exercise; it is rather the means by which the fundamentals of our national faith are instilled within us. Therefore, in order for the Seder to accomplish its goal, everyone there must experience for himself the freedom of the Exodus.

1. **Passover Haggadah – We must see ourselves as if we came out of Egypt.**

   In every generation a person is obligated to see himself as though he had actually come out of Egypt, as it is written, “You shall tell your son on that day, saying, ‘For the sake of this, God did for me when I went out from Egypt.’” Not only did the Holy One, Blessed be He, redeem our fathers, but He also redeemed us with them, as it says, “And He brought us out from there, in order to give us the land which He had promised to our fathers.”


   Every year, when the night of our Exodus from Egypt recurs, it is incumbent upon us to ascend to the level of those who came forth from Egypt, and to relive the freedom, as we learn in the Haggadah, “A person must see himself as if he himself came forth from Egypt.” … And to strengthen the sense of freedom within us by relating the miracles and by fulfilling the other mitzvot of the night, and to recount the great miracles of God in order to instill the fundamentals of faith in our hearts.

3. **Artscroll Haggadah, quoting from Chever Ma’amirim – The purpose of the Seder is to make the experience of redemption personal.**

   On Seder Night everybody should occupy himself with his own Exodus from Egypt … he should experience the bondage in his own body and soul, and he should feel that he himself is going out from Egypt … As a result, the very same benefit and goal that was attained at the Exodus by that generation will also be ours.
To this end, the Seder is much more than simple story time. Embedded within the tapestry of the story are other mitzvot designed to commemorate the Exodus: refraining from chametz (leavened products), eating matzah and maror, and drinking the Four Cups of wine. These mitzvot serve to make the Seder experiential, a memorable and powerful lesson in the fundamentals of Jewish faith.

4. Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 191 – Making it experiential makes the story of the Exodus a real lesson in the fundamentals of Judaism.

Passover is the classic example of a festival in which we eat, drink, and live the ideas that it represents. We modify our home environment by removing all leavened products, we change our diet to eat matzah … and we transform a festive meal into a high-impact, super-charged educational experience – the Seder.

There is no doubt that had the Torah merely commanded us to simply think about the Exodus for one week a year, no one today would have heard of the Exodus from Egypt. The Torah took the Exodus – the story, the history, the philosophy, and the significance – and crystallized it into a multitude of actions, words, foods, songs, and prayers. Making the festival experiential, not merely conceptual, ensured the transmission of this vital story from generation to generation and embedded these ideas within the very essence of the Jewish people.

Beyond the educational impact of the Seder and its practices, however, there is another dimension to the Seder Night that reflects a fundamental truth in all of the Torah’s festivals: that they do not merely commemorate a historical event, but rather represent the spiritual recurrence of that event every single year. Every year on the holiday of Pesach, we encounter the same spiritual energies which existed at the time of the Exodus from Egypt – and thus, we actually experience the Exodus every year anew.

5. Rambam, Laws of Chametz and Matzah 7:6 – A person must consider himself to have just experienced the Exodus from Egypt.

In every generation, a person must conduct himself as if he himself left the enslavement of Egypt now, as the verse states, “… and He took us out from there …” God commanded us about this in the Torah: “You shall remember that you were a slave,” i.e., as if you yourself were a slave and you emerged to freedom and were redeemed.

The Rambam echoes the Haggadah’s injunction upon every individual to view himself as a participant in the Exodus from Egypt, but he adds a very significant word when he states that one must conduct himself “as if he left the enslavement of Egypt now.” Clearly, the Rambam means to indicate that during the Seder, one must consider the Exodus to be taking place at that very moment, in actuality. A similar allusion appears in the following quote from the Talmud.

6. Talmud Bavli, Pesachim 116b, Mishnah and Gemara – At the Seder, a person should consider himself to have personally left Egypt, and should verbalize that sentiment.

In every generation, a person should see himself as if he personally left Egypt, as the verse states, “You shall tell your child on that day: It is for the sake of this that God acted on my behalf when I left Egypt …” Rava says: A person must say, “He took us out from there.”
Once again, we find that Rava emphasizes the need to relate personally to the Exodus, to tell the story in the first person. Thus, Rava requires the leader of the Seder to make the statement that he was personally redeemed from Egyptian servitude. How are we to understand this statement? According to the following Midrash, it is meant to be taken quite literally.

7. **Midrash Lekach Tov, Parshat Nitzavim – At the Splitting of the Reed Sea, as well as at the Giving of the Torah, the entire Jewish nation was present. Even the souls of all future generations were there.**

Moshe (Moses) said to the Jews: Come and I will tell you in how many places you have stood – first at the Sea, as it says, “Stand and you shall see God’s salvation,” and then you stood to receive the Torah, as it says, “They stood beneath the mountain,” and now you are standing here. You should know that even the souls and spirits of the deceased and future generations are here.

The answer, then, is that when we declare at the Seder that God redeemed us from Egypt, it is meant quite literally. God redeemed us from Egypt – not just our forebears, but our very own selves. Our souls and spirits were present at the Exodus; we experienced it just as surely as our ancestors did.

8. **Rabbi Shalom Brezovsky, Nesivos Shalom, Vol. II, Pesach, p. 251 – All of the souls of the Jewish people were present at the Exodus from Egypt.**

With this, we can understand the matter of “In every generation a person must view himself as if he left Egypt,” for how can a person truly see himself in this way? But in truth, all of the souls were there at the time of the Exodus.

There is a further depth to the sentiment we express on Passover, that we consider ourselves participants in the Exodus: that every Passover, the spiritual forces which contributed to the Exodus from Egypt are again in effect, giving every individual the ability to extricate himself from whatever forms of bondage hold him captive throughout the year.

9. **Ibid. – Every year on Passover, every individual experiences his own redemption from Egypt anew. It is a very important part of the Seder experience to inculcate this awareness within oneself.**
was in the merit of faith, similarly, the redemption from Egypt every year is in the merit of faith, i.e., the clear faith that a Jew has that the Exodus takes place every year, and that on the night of Pesach his fate can change from bad to good, through [that faith] he brings about his salvation and the redemption of his soul …

The obligation to view oneself as if he personally left Egypt is one of the most difficult but most central requirements of the commandments of this sacred night. [A person must] belief with clarity that every year, he actually leaves Egypt as if he is leaving Egypt right now, as we know that the expression “one is obligated” means that he must do so even if it entails great self-sacrifice. The more that a person inculcates within himself the faith that he is now leaving Egypt, in the present, the more he will bring about his own salvation and the redemption of his soul.

Clearly, then, the Seder is more than a mere commemoration of a pivotal historical event. In fact, the Seder is more than even a reenactment of that event. Rather, it is a chance to reexperience the Exodus, with all of its power and potential. On the Seder Night, every individual can access his own personal redemption.

PART D. THANKSGIVING

The Seder is also an opportunity for expressing our thanks to God for our freedom, both personal and collective, as well as for our very existence as a nation. We acknowledge that if God had not taken us out of Egypt then there is no reason why we would not still be there today. When we recite Dayeinu we express our gratitude for the acts of kindness God performed for us from the events of the Exodus until the building of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. And finally, the climax of the Seder is the recitation of Hallel, songs of praise and thanks to God.

1. Passover Haggadah – And what if God had not redeemed us from Egypt?

If the Holy One, Blessed be He, had not taken our fathers out of Egypt, then we, our children, and our children’s children, would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. Therefore, even if we were all wise, all men of understanding and experience, all fully versed in the Torah, we would still be obligated to tell about the Exodus from Egypt; and whoever tells about it at length is praiseworthy.

2. Passover Haggadah – At the conclusion of Dayeinu we express our faith and our gratitude.

Thus, how much more so do we owe thanks to God for all His manifold favors! He brought us
forth from Egypt, executed judgments upon them and upon their gods, slew their first-born, gave us wealth, divided the sea for us, led us though it on dry land and drowned our oppressors in it, supplied our needs in the wilderness for forty years and fed us with Manna, gave us the Shabbat, led us before Mount Sinai, gave us the Torah, brought us into the Promised Land and built us a Temple to atone for all our sins.

Therefore, it is our duty to thank, praise, laud, glorify, exalt, honor, bless, extol, and give respect to Him Who performed all these miracles for our ancestors and for us. He has brought us forth from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to festivity, from darkness to bright light, and from bondage to redemption!

Therefore let us recite a new song before Him, Hallelujah!


The Haggadah is not just about the Exodus from Egypt. Look below its surface and you’ll discover a rich subtext that imparts essential lessons about gratitude and how to thank God for Divine benevolence.

The Haggadah’s name comes from the Hebrew verb, l’hagid – to tell. There are other verbs that mean to tell, but l’hagid implies paying attention to details.

On Seder Night we go over the fine points of what actually happened. We dwell on the details.

When we sing Dayeinu, we list what seems like an itemized account of everything God did to take us out of Egypt. After each line, we say “dayeinu,” it would have been enough if that was all God did for us. Then, but wait! There’s more! The next verse lists another. We say, “It would have been enough…” to show that we recognize and appreciate the benefit of every single thing the Almighty did for us.

At our Seder, one of the guests inevitably protests, “But it wouldn’t have been enough if God had divided the sea for us, but not brought us across on dry land. We wouldn’t have been saved, and the whole purpose of taking us out of Egypt would have been negated.”

The itemized list of Dayeinu is not to assert that the steps which follow each item were expendable. Dayeinu is not an intellectual construct, but rather an attitude, a sense of fullness, of having received so much that one feels satisfied.

Dayeinu consciousness is the opposite of the attitude, “He/she/they didn’t do enough for me.” I once had a conversation with a young man who was full of complaints about his parents. I asked, “When you were young, did they take care of you when you were sick?” He answered, “Sure, all parents do.”

“No, they wouldn’t have provided for me if God hadn’t done all he did!”
“Sure, but so what?” he replied. “There were plenty of things I didn’t get.”

The foundation for any loving relationship – with parents, with one’s spouse, or with God – is appreciation. And the foundation of appreciation is noticing and being grateful for each specific thing we receive. Dayeinu.

The lesson of gratitude to God is a crucial lesson which is imparted by the miracles of Passover and all of the observances of the festival. Not only must we be grateful to God for the miracles of Passover; we must also be grateful to Him for everything we have, including our very lives. The following parable illustrates how the miracles of Passover themselves should bring home to us this point.

The good with which God surrounds us every day is too often taken for granted. From the blossoms on the tree, to the rising and the setting of the sun, we accept the beauty of nature with casual indifference. Even in our personal lives, we fail to pause and consider the miracles of our daily existence. Only when these “daily miracles” are taken away do we realize the magnitude of the gift that we had all along, but failed to appreciate.

How often have we heard a person on crutches say, “Now I appreciate the value of a healthy body”; or an older person say, “If only I had taken advantage of youth when I had it.”

The Chasam Sofer (1835-1883) once used the following parable to portray man’s inattentiveness to the “natural” things in life:

A world-renowned sculptor was commissioned to design a statue that would be placed in the city square. After much thought he decided on a work that would pay tribute to the animal that had given civilization its mobility and versatility – the horse. For months he worked meticulously, paying attention to every detail, sculpting every sinew and muscle of his bronze stallion, so that it would be a lifelike replica of God’s miracle.

After two years of painstaking effort, the statue was complete. The artist presented it to the city officials, who agreed unanimously that it was truly magnificent. They promptly placed the bronze stallion in the city square, where people – much to the shock of the sculptor – completely ignored it.

He could not believe it. Each day he would walk by his masterpiece to see if anyone would stop to admire his work, and every day he would return home dejected. No one had given his horse a second glance. In despair, he confided to his friend, “I cannot believe that people are so insensitive,” he began. “I worked on the project for two years, and today it stands in the square ignored. Everyone passes it by without even giving it a second glance.”

“My dear friend, the problem is that your horse is too perfect,” his friend answered. “People think it is a real horse – and who is going to stop to look at a horse!”

“So what should I do?” exclaimed the exasperated sculptor.

“I will tell you,” replied his friend. “Make a crack in it, and then people will realize that it is not a real horse, but a grand piece of art.”

And so, with a heavy heart, the sculptor did indeed chisel a split across one side of the horse. The result was immediate; people stopped everyday to marvel at the work of art that had been there – taken for granted – all along.

This same scenario occurred when God took the Jewish people out of slavery in Egypt. For centuries the world had witnessed the phenomena of nature. Grass grew, cows grazed, brooks flowed, and seas surged – and mankind forgot that it was only by the grace of God that nature took its course every day. And so He made a tumultuous split in the Sea of Reeds, which reverberated around the world. (Rabbi Paysach Krohn, The Maggid Speaks, ArtScroll Publications.)
KEY THEMES OF SECTION I:

☞ Seder Night centers around mitzvot that commemorate the Exodus from Egypt, especially the mitzvah of relating the story of the Exodus.

☞ The story is retold for its lessons about God’s existence, His creation of the world, and His continued interest and involvement in the development of mankind. The experience of the Exodus itself instills these beliefs in the Jewish people in a more fundamental way than any rationalization of these truths could do.

☞ Mimicking the method of the Exodus itself, the Seder seeks to be an experiential endeavor in order to better instill the lessons of the Exodus.

☞ The Seder also offers us an opportunity to express our thanks to God for Jewish national existence and the freedom we have to express ourselves spiritually.

SECTION II. AN OVERVIEW OF THE STEPS OF THE SEDER

The word seder actually means order, and the proceedings of Seder Night have a very specific order and arrangement. In this section we will discuss the advantages of this approach as well as the specific ways in which the Seder is “ordered.”

PART A. THE ORDER OF THE SEDER

1. Rabbi Shimon Apisdorf, Passover Survival Kit Haggadah – Why is it called a Seder?

   The Hebrew word seder means order, or arrangement. The Passover Seder is comprised of fifteen sequential steps, and thus it is quite fitting that the word seder is used to portray the gist of the evening’s proceedings.

   Shortcuts are convenient. They save time, effort, and sometimes even money. They can also be quite illusory. Sure, you can figure out an ingenious back-alley route to sneak by rush-hour traffic, or curl up with a single volume containing three-page summaries of everything from Shakespeare to Fulghum. But don’t try it in life. Not with your children, not with your spouse, and certainly not with yourself.

   If you want self-awareness, personal growth, deeper relationships, and a life of integrity – sorry, no shortcuts allowed. Only seder, only order will do. Deeper living just doesn’t flourish in the land of quick fixes. No child ever reaches adulthood without paying a visit to adolescence and no adult achieves inner maturation without first embarking on an orderly, if daring, course of human development.


   The Seder has fifteen steps. This corresponds to the fifteen steps that led up to the entrance of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The mystical texts teach us that the physical world is an expression of the spiritual. The physical steps of the Temple allowed the people to “go up” into the Temple. So too, there are fifteen corresponding spiritual steps that allow us to “go up” and “grow up.” These are the fifteen steps of the Seder Night. They are a way to self-growth. They fulfill our spiritual need to grow.
PART B. THE FIFTEEN SIMANIM (SYMBOLS)

Since there are many steps in the Seder, a system was devised to keep them all in order. In this system, which is attributed either to the famous Biblical commentator Rashi or to a close contemporary of his, Rabbi Shmuel Falasse (one of the Tosafists), the Seder is divided into fifteen steps. Each one has a title, which is called its siman. Here we will briefly outline the simanim of the Seder Night.

1. **Kadesh** – We take a full cup of wine and pronounce the blessings on the wine and on the holiday of Passover.

   The foundation of self-growth is to recognize that we are unique and therefore intrinsically valuable. **Kadesh** moves us to “set ourselves apart” – to realize we’re unique and worthy of investing effort in our personal growth. This is the first of the Four Cups of wine that we will drink at the Seder.

2. **Urchatz** – We pour water over our hands (without reciting the customary blessing).

   Pouring water represents the purity that we achieve over the course of the night, in which it is as though we are spiritually reborn. It is also a halachic necessity for the eating of the *karpas* dipped into salt-water. Since this washing of the hands is without the traditional blessing that we make before eating bread, urchatz is one of those unusual actions performed on Seder Night that pique the curiosity of the children and inspire them to ask questions.

3. **Karpas** – We dip a small amount of vegetable in salt-water and then eat it (with the customary blessing).

   This serves to whet the appetite for the matzah, or, symbolically, to ready us for the self-growth of the night. The word *karpas* is also reminiscent of the sale of Joseph to Egypt (Joseph’s special tunic is called *karpas*, a tunic of fine wool), which is how the entire Egyptian episode was initiated.

4. **Yachatz** – We break the middle matzah (of the three matzot on the plate) into two pieces, leaving the smaller piece on the plate, and putting the larger piece aside for the *afikoman*.

   The matzah that the tale of Egypt is recounted over must be broken, symbolizing the bondage that broke the body and spirit of our ancestors. Our breaking of the middle matzah at *yachatz* and placing it aside is another unusual action that should pique the children’s curiosity and keep them awake in anticipation of finding out what will be done with this matzah that we hide away. Eventually that half will be used for the *afikoman*.

5. **Maggid** – We recount the tale of our bondage and exodus from Egypt.

   This is the longest and most central part of the Seder. Its purpose is to relive the Egyptian redemption and to pass on the intense experience of faith to our families. At the conclusion of **maggid**, we recite a blessing and drink the second of the Four Cups of wine.

   **Maggid** begins with an invitation to join in the Seder and the posing of the Four Questions, whose answer sets the theme for the evening. The Haggadah mentions, in the passage of Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, that there is an obligation to remember the Exodus throughout the year. Then the Haggadah recounts the history of the Jewish people, the descent down to Egypt and miraculous Exodus from there, the special mitzvot of the Pesach offering, matzah and maror, and finally culminates in expressing our thanks to God. At the end of **maggid** the second cup of wine is drunk.
6. **Rachtzah** – We wash our hands in preparation for eating the matzah, this time reciting the customary blessing over the washing.

Apart from the halachic need to wash the hands, washing is symbolic of the special purity associated with the night’s proceedings.

7. **Motzi** – We recite the blessing, and eat the matzah.

We make the Hamotzi blessing to thank God for “bringing forth bread from the ground.” This syntax is odd because God should be thanked for bringing *wheat* from the ground as it is man who turns it into bread! In truth, God gives us two gifts: (1) the raw materials, and (2) the tools for transforming those materials into a life-sustaining product. When we make Hamotzi, we hold the matzah with all ten fingers – reminding us that while human hands produced this food, it is yet another gift from the Creator and Sustainer of all life.

8. **Matzah** – The matzah is eaten while reclining, indicating the royalty and splendor of the night upon which we emerged from bondage to freedom.

Eating matzah is one of the Torah obligations of the night; apart from its recalling the haste in which our ancestors had to depart Egypt, the matzah is laden with inner significance (as will be discussed below).

9. **Maror** – We eat “bitter herbs” (customarily romaine lettuce or horseradish) to recall the bitterness of the Egyptian exile.

Maror also alludes to the toil that a person must be ready to invest in order to achieve personal growth. Lettuce is customarily chosen because it is “sweet first and bitter later” – although vice and iniquity may seem sweet at first, they ultimately reveal themselves to be bitter.

10. **Korech** – We eat a “sandwich” of matzah and bitter herbs.

The combination of the two is symbolic of the duality of the night, which recalls the bondage of Egypt together with the glorious salvation that followed. Symbolically, we are taught that pain, in the form of intensive toil and labor, can be an integral part of personal and national growth. Moreover, this combination teaches that God is present during our periods of freedom (symbolized by the matzah) as well as during our bitter periods of exile. He will never forsake us.

11. **Shulchan Orech** – A festive meal is served in celebration of the night.

It is not enough to celebrate with words and thoughts. The celebration must reach the most physical level of our being, for our freedom was 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.

12. **Tzafun** (Lit. hidden) – The half matzah hidden at the beginning of the Seder is the last food to be eaten in the night.

The **afikoman** is the larger half of the middle matzah that was hidden at the beginning of the Seder. The taste of matzah is to remain with us even after the Seder’s conclusion. This suggests that Seder Night should make a continual impression on us, which should last throughout the year.
13. **Barech** – We recite the *Bircat HaMazon*, Grace after Meals.

A central part of the night is to realize that everything we have is by the grace of God; this includes the food that we eat, for which we give our thanks and appreciation. *Bircat HaMazon* is followed by drinking the third of the Four Cups of wine.

14. **Hallel** – We sing the Hallel, giving our thanks and praise to God for all the goodness He has performed for us.

As free individuals, it is incumbent on us to appreciate the Divine cause of our freedom and to thank God for it. Hallel is followed by the fourth and final cup of wine.

15. **Nirtzah** – The conclusion.

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

**PART C. THE SEDER PLATE**

The Seder comes alive through the combination of the intellectual, emotional, and physical experiences of the Seder. The Seder plate contains the visual symbols of the Pesach Seder.

1. **K’arah** – The Seder plate.

The Seder plate contains the symbols of the Seder.

2. **Zero’ah** – Roasted bone.

During the times of the Temple in Jerusalem, the *Korban Pesach* (Pascal Lamb) was brought to the Temple on the eve of Passover. It was roasted, and was the last thing eaten at the Seder meal. To commemorate this offering, we place on the Seder plate a roasted chicken bone with a little meat remaining on it. The meat, however, is not eaten at the Seder.

3. **Beitzah** – Roasted egg.

A second offering, called the *Chaggah*, was brought to the Temple and eaten as the main course of the Seder meal. Today, instead of a second piece of meat, we use a roasted egg – which is traditionally a symbol of mourning – to remind us of the destruction of the Temple. The Talmud points out that every year, the first day of Passover falls out on the same day of the week as Tishah B’Av, the day of mourning for the destruction of the Temple.

4. **Maror and chazeret** – Bitter herbs.

These are the bitter herbs which symbolize the lot of the Hebrew slaves, whose lives were embittered by the hard labor. Many people use the horseradish root for maror and romaine lettuce for *chazeret*.

5. **Charoset** – Nuts, apples, wine, and cinnamon.

*Charoset* reminds us of the hard labor that the Jews performed with bricks and mortar. *Charoset* is a mixture of nuts, apples, wine, and cinnamon. The Talmud says this also serves as an antidote to dilute the harsh effects of the maror.
6. **Karpas – Vegetables other than bitter herbs.**

*Karpas* is a vegetable (other than bitter herbs) such as celery or boiled potato. It must be a vegetable on which we recite the blessing, *Borei Pri Ha’Adamah*. Passover is the Spring festival where we celebrate the birth of our nation – and these vegetables are a symbol of rebirth and rejuvenation.

7. **Matzah**

Matzah is what the Jews ate when they were enslaved in Egypt as well as when they were redeemed. Three whole matzot are placed on the table just above the Seder plate or, depending on the design of one’s Seder plate, directly underneath it.

**KEY THEMES OF SECTION II:**

☞ There are many mitzvot and observances performed on Seder Night. In order to keep everything clear, the Seder was organized into fifteen clear and definable steps that guide us through the process. In fact, the title of “Seder” derives from this very organization of the night’s proceedings.

☞ The Seder plate features many of the symbols of the Passover festival, thus serving as a focal point for teaching the lessons of the Exodus.

**SECTION III. MAKING THE SEDER MEANINGFUL**

We have discussed the purpose of the Seder and how it is organized. In this section we will explore the elements of the Seder that transform it from a simple story telling into a multi-faceted, high-impact educational experience for all involved.

**PART A. SETTING THE MOOD – THE WAY OF THE FREE**

The first thing we do on Seder Night is to invite guests. Although in modern times, the likelihood of a pauper actually walking in is slight, the spirit of inviting guests is often upheld by means of large Seder Night gatherings, which often include extended family as well as non-family members.

1. **Passover Haggadah – We begin the Seder by inviting the needy.**

Anyone who is poor should come and eat; anyone who is needy should come and fulfill the Passover.

2. **Rabbi Reuven Leuchter – The invitation to guests is a statement of national unity.**

Although throughout the year, the nation of Israel finds itself divided into different groups and factions, on the night of Pesach, which is the night on which we were nationally born, the nation is united. This unity, which embodies the original state of a new-born nation of Israel, is manifest in the custom of inviting guests. Around the year, we might be quite particular concerning which guests to invite. On Seder Night, however, our doors are open to anyone and everyone. In the final analysis, all members of the Jewish nation are brothers – and a brother is always invited.
The following story is an amazing incident in which two great rabbis nobly engaged in acts of charity and consideration of others in preparation for Pesach.

Rabbi Eliezer Zusia Portugal, affectionately known as the Skulener Rebbe, served as a rabbi in Romania during the time of the two world wars. During this time, there were dire food shortages. This affected the entire population, but especially the Jewish community. Investing time and money, the rabbi was successful in obtaining several hundred kilograms of wheat for the upcoming Pesach holiday. He set up a small matzah bakery to supply the townspeople with matzahs. Two weeks before Pesach he began distributing them, limiting the allocation to one matzah per family, thereby allowing for the maximum number of people to benefit.

Jews from throughout the city gathered daily, and holding firm to his decision, the rabbi distributed no more than one matzah per family. In light of the wartime circumstances, all recipients received their meager supplies eagerly – that is, all except for one.

A young man named Hager reached his turn on the distribution line. As he approached the rabbi, he asked that he be given three matzahs. The rabbi gently informed him that a system was set up whereby each family received just one matzah so that the limited quantity could supply the maximum number of people. The young man, however, insisted that he had received specific instructions from his father that he not settle for anything less than three matzahs. In view of the young man’s assertiveness and in deference to his father, the rabbi acquiesced, despite the apparent stupefaction of his associates.

On the eve of Pesach, late in the afternoon, a messenger arrived at the home of the rabbi to deliver a package. Upon opening it, the rabbi’s family found it to contain two whole matzahs. The messenger explained to the puzzled family members that the man had purposely requested two additional matzahs so that, on the eve of Pesach, he could return two matzahs to the rabbi.

“We’re all aware of the rabbi’s boundless love for his fellow man,” said the messenger. “We felt there is a distinct possibility that in his desire to accommodate every Jew in Chernowitz, he might just hand out the entire stock of matzahs till the very last one. We wanted to make sure that both the rabbi’s family as well as his son’s family are provided with at least one matzah each. The two enclosed matzahs are intended for that purpose.”

The man’s demand was indeed insightful. As a master of human nature, he had sized up the situation correctly. If not for his foresight, both the rabbi’s family and his son’s family would have been deprived of even the barest minimum of matzah for Pesach. (From Rabbi Dovid Silber, Noble Lives, Noble Deeds II, ArtScroll Publications).

Seder Night is performed with trimmings of nobility – the finest tableware is used, food and drink are consumed while reclining on cushions, and participants are waited upon by each other. Redeemed from slavery to become the cherished nation of God, on Seder Night every Jew becomes part of the “royal family.”

3. **Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 472:2** – In honor of the Seder we set the table with our finest utensils.

   A person should set his table with the finest utensils, according to his means. He should prepare his place for reclining, in a manner of freedom.

4. **Maharal, Gevuros Hashem, Ch. 52 Ibid.** – Reclining demonstrates our freedom.

   Since a person must see himself as if he came out of Egypt, he must recline in order to show that he is a free man.
5. **Rambam, Hilchot Chametz U’Matzah 7:6-7 – At the Seder we act our freedom.**

In each and every generation, a person must view himself as if he, himself, has just now left the slavery of Egypt, as it says, “He took us out from there” [Devarim/Deuteronomy 6:23]. Regarding this manner, God commanded in the Torah, “Remember that you were a slave” [Ibid. 5:15] – i.e., as if you, yourself, were a slave and went out to freedom and were redeemed.

Therefore, when a person feasts on this night, he must eat and drink while he is reclining in the manner of a free man.

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**PART B. PIQUING THE INTEREST OF THE CHILDREN**

Of all the special events that highlight the Jewish calendar, none place greater emphasis on children than Seder Night. So important is the presence of children on this night that several rabbinic enactments were made with the explicit purpose of “keeping the children awake.” A child, furthermore, is customarily singled out to ask the Four Questions, and the Haggadah makes explicit reference to four sons, each of whom is addressed in turn.

1. **Shemot 13:8 and 14 – The mitzvah of relating the story of the Exodus is couched in terms of teaching one’s children in response to their questions.**

You shall tell your child on that day, saying, “It is because of this that God acted on my behalf when I left Egypt.”

And it will come to pass if your son asks you in the future, saying, “What is this?” you shall say to him, “With a mighty hand did the Lord take us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

2. **Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Pesachim 109a – One needs to be innovative in order to keep the children awake.**

It is said that Rabbi Akiva would give out nuts on Erev Pesach so that the children should not fall asleep, but would ask questions. Rabbi Eliezer stated, “One grabs [and hides] the matzah on the night of Pesach in order that the children should not fall asleep.”

3. **Rambam, Hilchot Chametz U’Matzah 7:3 – The leader of the Seder should mix things up a bit in order to evoke the children’s curiosity.**

He should make changes on this night so that the children will see and will [be motivated to]
ask: “Why is this night different from all other nights?” until he replies to them: “This and this occurred; this and this took place.”

What changes should be made? He should give them roasted seeds and nuts; the table should be taken away before they eat; matzot should be snatched from each other and the like.

4. Artscroll Passover Haggadah, citing Chasam Sofer – When the children ask questions the answers make a deep impression on them.

The Talmud (Pesachim 114b) says that the reason why we do so many things differently at the Seder is so that the children should ask and be answered, as the Torah states (Shemot 13:14), “And it will be when your son ‘inquires’ of you.” However, why did the Torah specify that the Exodus narrative be told in question and answer form?

It is a pedagogical principle that learning is best understood and longest remembered if it engages the interest and curiosity of the student. He who is driven to inquire after solutions to problems will succeed best.

On the night of Passover, we strive to inculcate in ourselves, and especially in our impressionable children, a firm belief in God, Who brought about the Exodus and demonstrated thereby that only He is the Master of the Universe. In order to instill this lesson and leave a lasting impression, we seek to excite the children so that they will seek answers and reasons. We ensure that they will retain the lesson of the night. By engaging their curiosity and interest, we hope to ensure that the lessons of the evening will have a lasting effect on them.

Many of the customs at the Seder are designed to go against the norm in order to pique the curiosity of the children. Washing hands at the table, dipping food in salt water, breaking the matzah and putting it away for later – all these elements of the Seder serve to catch the attention of the children.

Part of the reason that the Passover Seder is such a powerful educational tool is that it doesn’t rely on mere storytelling to convey its point. Instead, it presents children with tangible experiences and actions to cement its powerful lessons. A popular expression states that a picture is worth a thousand words. An action or example may be worth much more than that. The following story illustrates an incident in which parents communicated their values to their children through actions rather than words, an experience that their children would remember forever.

The Lovitz family was a fine family, and their children were outstanding students and an asset to the yeshivah where they attended school. Their parents had raised them with incredible strength of character and a clear sense of right and wrong. The family, however, was poor, and barely able to pay the private school’s hefty tuition. Every year, they received a significant break on their tuition due to their unfortunate financial circumstances.

One year, Mr. and Mrs. Lovitz called and asked to meet with the yeshivah’s business administrator. He assumed that they needed a steeper discount on their tuition than usual, and prepared himself to give them whatever they would ask for. To his surprise, they asked him to calculate the amount of money that had been discounted from their tuition payments throughout the years that their children were in school. The administrator protested, but they were adamant, and he calculated that their discounts added up to a total of almost $35,000.

The Lovitzes then proceeded to pour a large bag of cash onto his desk. The stunned administrator listened as they explained that Mrs. Lovitz had gone to a Chinese auction, bought a single ticket, and placed it in the ‘Split the Pot’
box. They won that prize, and had decided to give the money to the yeshivah. The administrator was reluctant to accept it, but Mr. Lovitz went on to tell him what they had done the previous night. “Last night we gathered our children around the dining-room table. The children were curious as they knew that we wanted to show them something special. They anticipated a big announcement. Finally we entered the room and I did exactly what I just did now. I poured the entire contents of the bag onto the table. You had to see the astonished looks on their faces. I explained that we had won the Chinese auction’s ‘Split the Pot’ of $36,000. They were awed by the money and wondered what we could possibly buy with all of it. I told them what we had decided to do with the money. We were going to give it to the school they attend, because we want them to know that their education is worth more than anything else in the world to us. In the past we haven’t been able to afford to pay in full, but now we will.”

One can only imagine that the Lovitzes’ heroic act made a far deeper impression on their children than thousands of lectures about the value of education ever could have. (From One Shining Moment, by Rabbi Yechiel Spero, ArtScroll/ Mesorah Publications, p. 51)

**PART C. QUESTION AND ANSWER FORMAT**

As noted above, the Torah relates the mitzvah of retelling the Exodus story as an answer to the questions of one’s child. But the question and answer format must be maintained even when children are not present at the Seder, for there is much benefit in this approach for us all.

1. **Passover Haggadah – The story of the Exodus as related in the Haggadah starts with a simple question.**

   Why is this night different from all other nights?

2. **Rambam, Hilchot Chametz U’Matzah 7:3 – Even if no one else is around, one should ask himself questions about the Exodus.**

   If a person does not have a son, his wife should ask him. If he does not have a wife, [he and a colleague] should ask each other: “Why is this night different?” This applies even if they are all wise. A person who is alone should ask himself: “Why is this night different?”

   The question and answer format is fundamental to the transmission of the message of the Haggadah. If we do not have questions then we will have a hard time appreciating the answers.

3. **Rabbi Shraga Simmons, The Four Questions, Aish.com – Questions create a void for knowledge to enter.**

   The Seder is centered on asking questions. The youngest child asks the Four Questions; we wash our hands before eating the karpas because it is an unusual activity which prompts the asking of questions; the Four Sons are identified by the type of questions they ask.

   Why are questions so important?

   The Maharal of Prague explains that people generally feel satisfied with their view of life. Thus they are complacent when it comes to assimilating new ideas and growing from them. A question is an admission of some lack. This creates an inner vacuum that now needs to be filled.

   At the Seder, we ask questions in order to open ourselves to the depth of the Exodus experience.
Questions can also lead us to uncover our essence.


Toward the beginning of the Seder we create the afikoman. We take a matzah – the bread symbolizing our spiritual salvation – and break it. Part of it remains before us, and part of it is hidden and becomes the afikoman. The revealed matzah, because it is broken in half, represents human incompleteness – we have not yet realized our potential. The hidden part, the afikoman, symbolizes our future growth – it must be sought and found.

The Seder is designed to provoke questions. Jewish law states that even if someone is alone on Seder Night, one must still ask the Four Questions: to simply read the Haggadah is not enough. Why do we ask questions? Because we need answers. Why do we need answers? Because we recognize we are incomplete. Thus the Seder starts the process of searching for completion in our lives.

On Passover the Jewish people became a nation. We must learn to understand our nationhood. On Passover God revealed His special relationship with the Jews. On Seder Night we try to rediscover and become part of that relationship. Incompleteness to completion. The child asks “ma nishtana,” the Four Questions, but everyone must ask in his own way, and search in his own manner. We read of “The Four Sons.” Their questions represent four different paths of growth and development. We then study biblical verses that detail the Exodus from Egypt. Then, rationally and existentially, through questions and answers, through food (matzah and maror [bitter herbs]) and song (Hallel – praises to God), we seek to reunite ourselves to the ideas and goal the Torah communicated to us about ourselves, our nation, and God.

Finally, at the end of the Seder, we acknowledge and affirm that the quest was successful. The afikoman is now returned to the table. Having found what was hidden we can enjoy the fruits of our labors. The joy of discovering self and meaning is the deeper happiness of Passover.

PART D. TAILOR-MADE EDUCATION

Many people dread Seder Night because they fear it will be the same long, drawn out event as in every year. But this is not what our Sages had in mind. In reality, while the Haggadah is a standardized text, no two Seders should really be the same. Each Seder should be tailor-made to inspire the participants. The Haggadah even tells us so!

1. Passover Haggadah – The Haggadah speaks of four sons to illustrate different approaches to relating the Exodus story.

The Torah speaks of four sons: a wise son, a wicked one, a simple one, and one who does not know how to ask.

2. ArtScroll Haggadah, quoting from Malbim – The Haggadah deduces the four different approaches to educating the next generation.

The upbringing of children can only be successful if it is “according to each child’s way” (Mishlei/Proverbs 22:6). Therefore the Torah tells us how to deal with four specific types of children. While it does not actually mention four sons, it instructs us in four passages on how to tell our children about the Exodus, and each of the passages is phrased differently. In the Mechilta quoted by the Haggadah,
our Sages explain that the Torah refers to four different kinds of people. In three of the verses, children address questions to the father; in the fourth one, no question is asked. We infer from this fourth passage that we must even educate children who lack the understanding or interest to inquire about the happenings of the evening.

3. **Rambam, Hilchot Chametz U'Matzah 7:2** – The retelling of the story must be done with the listener in mind.

It is a mitzvah to inform one’s sons even though they do not ask, as it says, “You shall tell your son” [Shemot 13:8]. A father should teach his son according to the son’s understanding.

Since the Seder must be tailor-made to its participants, it is important to recite the Haggadah in a language that everyone present will understand, even if not the original language of the text.

4. **Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, Sefer HaToda’ah (Book of Our Heritage), Ch. 22** – One must recite the Haggadah in a language understandable to all.

Since the Haggadah’s primary purpose is to teach the children about the Exodus and to publicize the miracles and wonders to all those attending the Seder, the leader must explain the Haggadah’s different elements and supply additional explanations in a way that is understandable to all those present. He must be especially careful to make sure that the children, as well as the Seder participants who are unfamiliar with the language and expressions used by our Sages, understand. Outside the Land of Israel, where Jews do not usually speak the Holy Tongue, the language of the Haggadah, [one should recite the Haggadah in the language that is understandable to all]…

Such was the practice of the Chasam Sofer in Pressburg, he recited the entire Haggadah in two languages, Hebrew and German.

**KEY THEMES OF SECTION III:**

打出 For the Seder to be an effective tool for transmitting Jewish faith and values it must be a multifaceted experience. The appropriate atmosphere must be set with this in mind. For a start, it is important to invite guests and demonstrate the unity of the Jewish people, as the Haggadah itself enjoins us to do.

打出 As free people we need to act like it. The table must be set with the finest dinnerware and when we eat or drink we recline in the manner of royalty.

打出 The story must not just be told, it must be absorbed. To that end, it is especially important that
children should be awake and interested in what's going on. To that end, the Haggadah introduces elements of change from the regular routine as a way to keep their attention. The leader of the Seder should find creative means of making the Seder intriguing to the children present.

The message of the Seder must be absorbed by adults as well, and as such the question and answer format is designed to open our minds to the lessons of the Exodus. The manner in which the telling of that story is conveyed must be tailor-made to those participating in the Seder, even if that means reciting parts of the Haggadah in a language other than the original.

SECTION IV. PESACH, MATZAH, AND MAROR

The central feature of the Seder experience is composed of three elements: Pesach, matzah, and maror. We eat the same matzah that our ancestors ate in Egypt. We eat bitter herbs (maror) as an expression of the hardships experienced in Egyptian bondage. And if it were possible, the Pesach offering, which was first brought on the night preceding the Exodus, would also be eaten. Today, a roasted bone placed on the Seder Plate symbolically represents the Pesach sacrifice.

Explaining these three elements of Passover – the Passover sacrifice, matzah, and maror – is one of the central themes of the Haggadah.

1. Passover Haggadah – Pesach, matzah, and maror must be explained at the Seder.

Rabbi Gamliel used to say, “Whoever does not explain the following three things at the Pesach festival [i.e. Seder] has not fulfilled his duty, namely: the Pesach sacrifice, matzah, and maror.”

PART A. PESACH

1. Passover Haggadah – The Passover sacrifice is a commemoration of God’s passing over the homes of the Jews during the tenth of the Ten Plagues, the slaying of the firstborn.

The Pesach sacrifice that our fathers ate at the time when the Holy Temple was still standing – what is the reason for it? Because the Holy One, Blessed be He, passed over the houses of our fathers in Egypt, as the Torah states, “You shall say, ‘It is a Passover sacrifice for God, because He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians, and He saved our houses; and the people bowed down and prostrated themselves’” (Shemot 12:27).

2. Shemot 12:1-14 – The blood of the Passover sacrifice served as the sign for God to “pass over” the Jewish homes during the plague of the firstborn.

Speak to the entire community of Israel, saying:
On the tenth of this month, every man must take a lamb for each extended family, a lamb for each household …

Hold it in safekeeping until the fourteenth day of this month. The entire community of Israel shall then slaughter [their sacrifices] in the afternoon. They must take the blood and place it on the two doorposts and on the beam above the door of the houses in which they will eat [the sacrifice]. Eat the [sacrificial] meat during the night, roasted over fire. Eat it with matzah and bitter herbs … You must eat it with your waist belted, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand, and you must eat it in haste. It is the Passover offering to God. I will pass through Egypt on that night, and I will kill every first-born in Egypt, man and beast. I will perform acts of judgment against all the gods of Egypt. I [alone] am God. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are staying. I will see the blood and pass over you. There will not be any deadly plague among you when I strike Egypt.

3. Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, The Jerusalem Kollel – The Passover sacrifice reminds us that our formation as a nation was miraculous.

Pesach is an unusual name for this festival – God jumping over the homes of the Jews as He killed the first-born Egyptians. In essence, the Jews were not any different than the Egyptians! The Midrash states that both nations were worshipping idols. Furthermore, the Haggadah teaches that the Jews were devoid of mitzvot. (The Torah does teach that the Jews did fulfill the mitzvah of the Pesach offering, and the Midrash also states that the Jews were redeemed on the merit of maintaining their unique dress, language, and clothing; however, this was not considered as central to their essence.) Therefore, on what merit were the Jews redeemed? Only as a tremendous gift by God to enable us to become His nation. The entire formation of the Jewish people was miraculous. Otherwise we would have no existence.

PART B. MATZAH

1. Passover Haggadah – We eat matzah to remember the haste in which we left Egypt.
from Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay there; nor had they prepared for themselves any provisions for the way.”

2. Sfas Emes, Likkutei Pesach – The matzah reminds us that without God’s speedy redemption we would have been lost in Egypt.

“This matzah … Because the dough of our fathers did not have time to become leavened before the King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be He, took us out.” The explanation is as the Sages write, that the Jewish people would have sunk to the “forty-ninth level of defilement” [therefore they had to be taken out hurriedly]. Chametz [leavened bread] hints to the evil inclination – the yeast within the dough [which alludes to haughtiness]. Before the dough became leavened, the light of holiness was revealed upon them. This certainly recurs every year, which is hinted at by our snatching the matzah on Pesach night, as it is written, “You went out hurriedly” (Devarim 16:3). We therefore have to act with haste to perform the mitzvot of Seder Night, at which time this great kindness is annually awakened, as it is written, “It is a night of protection” (Shemot 12:42).

3. Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Derech Hashem (The Way of God), 4:8:1 – Matzah is bread without the additive of physicality.

The reason for [not eating] chametz and [eating] matzah is that until they left Egypt the Jews were mixed with all the other nations, one nation among many. When they left Egypt they were redeemed and separated … When they left, their bodies were able to be purified and able to accept the Torah and service of God. In order to achieve this they were commanded to remove any chametz (leavened bread) and only eat matzah. Bread is the main food for mankind and is the ideal for God’s purpose. The process of leavening is something natural that happens to the bread, which makes it easier to digest and taste better. This is also the appropriate thing for a person, as he must have an evil inclination and a desire for the physical.

However, at a certain particular time the Jews
needed to refrain from *chametz* and to eat matzah in order to reduce the power of the evil inclination and the desire for the physical. This strengthens one's closeness to the spiritual. It is impossible for a person to eat like this constantly, as this is not the goal in this world. However, for these specific days it is appropriate to observe this concept, and through this they will maintain an appropriate spiritual level. This is the main purpose of the festival of matzah. And all of the other mitzvot of the first night are specific concepts connected with this redemption.

4. Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, *The Jerusalem Kollel* – The lesson of matzah is to not rest on one's laurels nor seek physicality as an end in itself.

There is a dual nature to matzah. It is called “poor man's bread” since the Jews ate it as slaves in Egypt. It is also the bread they ate when they left Egypt as a free nation. We would expect that after the redemption, the Jews could now relax, allow the dough to rise and enjoy some bread, what's the rush? However, the purpose of the Jewish nation is always “matzah,” to focus on and pursue our essential spiritual goals in this world. The physical world is only to assist us in this journey, but it is not a goal of its own. The goal of this world is to work hard towards spiritual goals, not to pursue luxury and comfort.

PART C. MAROR

1. Passover Haggadah – Maror reminds us of the bitterness of the Egyptian slavery.

This maror that we eat – what is the reason for it? Because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our fathers in Egypt, as the Torah states, “They made their lives bitter with hard labor, with mortar and brick, and through all manner of labor in the field; all their work at which they made them slave rigorously.”

2. Sfas Emes, Likkutei Pesach – Maror teaches us that, like the Exodus, the exile itself was orchestrated by God for our benefit.

One may suggest the reason of the maror as we have already written: to show our belief that even the exile and the days of suffering were for the good, and to give praise for them, for by means of the exile we entered the Covenant of God, as it is written, “He took you out … to be a cherished nation unto Him …” (Devarim 4:20). After the exile in Egypt, the Children of Israel became a new nation, like a convert who is considered like a newborn child.
The statement, “I took you out of Egypt, to be a God unto you” (Bamidbar/Numbers 15:41), refers even to the descent into exile, but the verse only mentions the redemption because that was the main aim and intention [of the exile]. For it was not by chance that we were exiled in Egypt. Rather, everything that occurred there was a preparation in order that we could gain [spiritual] completeness, as it is written, “From the iron crucible [that was Egypt]” (Devarim 4:20). Just as silver is placed in the fire to purify it [so too God made the Jewish people undergo the Egyptian exile in order to purify them], as we have explained.

3. Rabbi Yitzchak Berkovits, The Jerusalem Kollel – Maror reminds us that our birth as a nation – and our destiny – is not like that of other peoples.

We eat maror since the Egyptians hated us, afflicted us, and embittered our lives. Work is ordinarily a good thing, something productive. However, the Egyptians gave us pointless, torturous work during the day and then at night forced us to work in their homes and fields. So why eat maror? We were built through hardships. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains regarding the Aleinu prayer that we were not formed like other nations – based on common geographical boundaries, to co-exist with common goals. In contrast, we became a nation in a foreign country, tortured, with no rights, and with no foreseeable future. And then God tells us, “Through your blood you shall live.” There was absolutely nothing natural about the birth of the Jewish nation. We became unconditionally the nation of God. This means that we have no place in this world except as a people following the Torah. Nevertheless, we must endure hardships to fulfill our destiny. The beauty of maror is to feel the pain and to feel the joy.

Hillel says that we eat everything together in the korech sandwich – representing the slavery together with the freedom. The Jew has no place in a purely physical world. We exist due to miracles alone. We are not built to exist naturally. This is what a Jew needs to feel on the night of the Seder. It is not enough to just talk about it, we need to ingest it.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV:

☞ Central to the retelling of the Exodus story is the explanation of the Passover sacrifice, matzah, and maror.

☞ The Passover sacrifice reminds us of the miraculous nature in which the Jewish people became a nation.

☞ Matzah focuses us on the spiritual mission of the Jewish people.

☞ Maror reveals to us that our bitter struggles are all part of the process of our growth and ultimate redemption.
SECTION V. THE FOUR CUPS OF WINE

In addition to the three principal mitzvot of the Seder of Pesach, matzah, and maror, the Rabbis instituted a fourth: the Four Cups. These cups are drunk at various stages during the Seder, as pointed out in the overview above.

PART A. WHAT'S IN A NUMBER?

1. **Shemot 6:6-7** – The Torah uses four different expressions of redemption in reference to the Exodus.

   “Therefore say to the Israelites [in My name], ‘I am God. I will take you away from your forced labor in Egypt and free you from their slavery. I will liberate you with a demonstration of My power, and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to Myself as a nation, and I will be to you as a God. You will know that I am God, your Lord, the One Who is bringing you out from under the Egyptian subjugation.’”

2. **Talmud Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud), Pesachim 10:1** – The Four cups correspond to the four expressions of redemption used in the Torah.

   "What is the source for drinking the Four Cups? Rabbi Yochanan taught in the name of Rabbi Benayah: It is derived from the verse that mentions four stages of redemption: “Therefore say to the Israelites [in My Name], ‘I am God. I will take you away from your forced labor … I will take you to Myself as a nation …’” – ‘I brought forth,’ ‘I saved,’ ‘I redeemed,’ and ‘I took.’

What is significant about the number four that God brought about the redemption from Egypt in four distinct phases?

3. **Maharal, Gevuros Hashem, Ch. 60** – The number four represents the Divine influence coming into this world; as such, the Four Cups correspond to the spiritual element of the Exodus.

   “Everything that descends from an upper world into our world is divided into four parts, because this is the number of multiplicity, corresponding to the four directions. There are therefore four Scriptural expressions of redemption. The secret of this can be learned from the Torah: “A stream came forth from Eden … there it divided, and became four branches,” which demonstrates that anything which descends from the upper world, such as the river which emanated from Eden..."
to water the Garden, divides into four upon reaching our world, the world of diversity. Therefore, the redemption, which descends from the upper, separate world, divided into four heads, which are the four expressions of redemption.

This explains the Four Cups of wine that the Sages enacted should be part of this meal. The eating of matzah recalls the redemption, as we have explained, and to this eating we add drinking, which is further removed from coarse physicality than eating, as we have explained … It is for this reason that the Four Cups of wine are drunk, corresponding to the spiritual redemption, just as the eating [of the matzah] corresponds to the physical redemption, as we have already explained.

PART B. THE CUP OF ELIYAHU (ELIJAH)

Though the essence of the Seder is to relive the original Exodus from Egypt, we also look ahead to the Final Redemption of the Jewish nation – a redemption destined to take place in the same spirit as the Egyptian redemption. Although only four cups of wine are mandatory, we also pour a symbolic fifth cup, which is not drunk during the Seder. This cup is customarily known as the Cup of Elijah the Prophet (Eliyahu HaNavi), who will herald the imminent coming of the Mashiach (Messiah) in the future; it is also customary to open the front door in anticipation of his imminent arrival.

1. Rabbi Eliyahu Kitov, Sefer HaToda’ah, Ch. 22 – The Cup of Eliyahu corresponds to the fifth expression of redemption, an allusion to the Final Redemption in the future.

When the fourth cup is poured, over which Hallel is recited, it is customary to pour an additional cup, one bigger than the others. This fifth cup is called the Cup of Eliyahu. Its basis is a Talmudic debate (Pesachim 118a): Rabbi Tarfon maintained that one must drink five cups of wine at the Seder, the fifth being the one Hallel is recited over. Since the dispute is unresolved, the custom is to pour the fifth cup – as per Rabbi Tarfon – but not to drink it – as per the Sages. When Eliyahu comes and clarifies all of our halachic doubts, this too shall be resolved. That is why it is called the Cup of Eliyahu.

And just as the first four cups parallel expressions of redemption in the Torah, so too does the fifth. It parallels a fifth expression, “And I will bring you to the Land,” which is written at the end of the verse. This itself is a hint about the redemption.
The Sages of the generation have explained that the fifth cup of “I will bring you” hints at the complete and Final Redemption that will be ushered in by Eliyahu and the Final Redemption with the fall of the fifth Kingdom of Gog and Magog.

This is in line with the fact that the Torah calls the Seder Night “a night of watching for God” and then also, “a night of watching for all Israel for all generations.” The first part of the night is devoted to the redemption from Egypt while the next part is reserved throughout the generations for the future Redemption. That is why we recall Eliyahu, “the angel of the covenant” as he is called, for it is he that testifies about us that we have kept the mitzvot of Brit Milah and Pesach – on the merit of which we will merit the Redemption he will usher in.

On Seder Night, we look forward to the Final Redemption, which will see miracles and wonders like those experienced in Egypt.

2. Michah 7:15 – God promises to show us wonders in the Final Redemption just like the Exodus from Egypt.

Just as in the days of your coming out of Egypt, I will show you wonders.

3. Ramchal, Ma’amor HaChochmah – The energy of Seder Night has the power to set the wheels of redemption in motion.

On the night of Pesach all that happened in Egypt renews and bestirs itself; this itself is a help to bring the final redemption.

The Seder ends with a resounding expression of our desire for the Final Redemption to arrive: “Next year in Jerusalem!”

KEY THEMES OF SECTION V:

☞ One of the Rabbinic mitzvot of Seder Night is the institution of the Four Cups of wine.

☞ The number four corresponds to the expressions of redemption used by God in describing how He would bring about the Exodus. This number reflects the spiritual nature of the redemption wrought by the hand of God alone and not by human means.

☞ There is also a fifth cup, the Cup of Elijah. This cup corresponds to a possible fifth expression of redemption and alludes to the coming of Elijah to herald the Messiah at the Final Redemption.
CLASS SUMMARY:

WHY DO WE CELEBRATE THE PASSOVER SEDER? WHAT IS IT MEANT TO ACCOMPLISH?

The Seder is the birthday party of the Jewish people, the venue for transmitting the story of our national birth to the next generation. The story itself teaches us the foundations of our faith in God as Creator of the world and Master of its destiny. It also shows us that our national life exists only by virtue of God’s kindness, and as such the Seder is an opportunity for us to thank and praise God for it.

WHY ARE CHILDREN A FOCUS OF THE SEDER?

It is the children who will be leading the Seders of the future, transmitting the story of the Exodus to their children, as we have taught it to them. Such has been the chain of tradition since the events themselves occurred. On Seder Night we all become links in a chain more than 3,300 years long.

WHY DOES THIS NIGHT CONTAIN A WEALTH OF MITZVOT AND CUSTOMS, MORE SO THAN ANY OTHER DAY OF THE YEAR?

It is not sufficient just to tell the story; it must be relived. The mitzvot and customs of Seder Night are designed to help us experience the redemption from Egypt ourselves. We have to taste the bitterness, enjoy the freedom, and ultimately see ourselves as personally coming out of Egypt. Just as our ancestors gained their knowledge of God experientially, so too must we on Seder Night.

WHY IS SEDER NIGHT ALWAYS THE SAME (SAME FOOD, SAME STORY, ETC.)? HOW CAN THIS YEAR’S SEDER BE MORE INTERESTING THAN LAST YEAR’S?

Well, it shouldn’t be the same every year. The Haggadah, while a standardized text, should be viewed as the instruction manual on how to make a Seder rather than as a prayer book to be recited from year to year. The Haggadah itself tells us that we must tailor-make the Seder experience to the needs of our children and all those present. Doing so will ensure that no two Seders are alike.

WHAT ARE THE MESSAGES OF THE PESACH OFFERING, MATZAH, MAROR, AND THE FOUR CUPS OF WINE?

The Passover sacrifice reminds us of the miraculous nature in which the Jewish people became a nation; matzah focuses us on the spiritual mission of the Jewish people; maror reveals to us that our bitter struggles are all part of the process of our growth and ultimate redemption.

The Four Cups, corresponding to the stages of redemption and the expressions of those stages as described by God to Moshe, hint toward the spiritual nature of the redemption.

WHAT IS BEHIND THE CUSTOM OF FILLING A CUP OF WINE FOR ELIYAHU (ELIJAH) AND OPENING THE DOOR FOR HIM?

The Cup of Eliyahu reminds us that while we celebrate redemption, the world is still far from perfect. We still await the coming of the Messiah to witness the ultimate redemption and perfection of the world – may we see it speedily in our days!