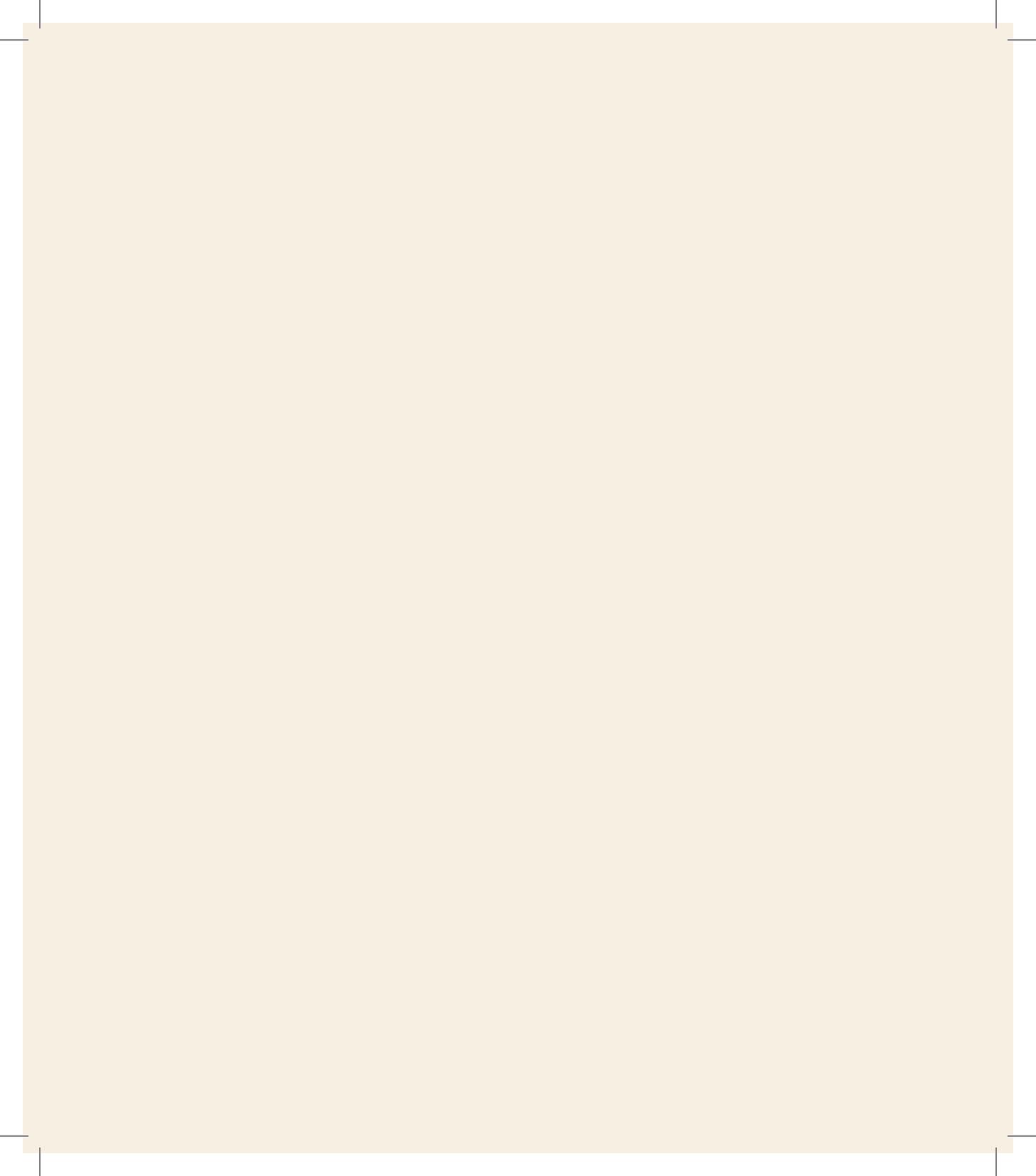


DISCOVER PESACH

Your guide to meaningful Seder with a selection of themes and ideas to help frame your Seder Experience as a dynamic and relevant journey.

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INTRO

The underlying theme of Passover is that we are not just retelling an historical account, but reliving and experiencing a dynamic journey to inner freedom. We have highlighted some themes to frame the Seder and its many lessons and insights. We hope you enjoy, and encourage you to further explore the many ideas within the Seder Haggadah.

IT'S PERSONAL

Back in the shtetl, the villagers would hire a teacher, a melamed, who would be tasked with teaching the youth. Most of the villagers themselves were illiterate, and the melamed served as the source of higher education. One day a particular villager receives a letter. Unable to read it himself, he enlists the melamed to read him his letter. The melamed reads to him the unfortunate news of his father's passing. The villager breaks into tears upon hearing the news.

Chasidim would relate this parable to illustrate the importance of internalizing an idea. They would ask: "The very same news that the villager received so emotionally, the melamed calmly read. Why did their reaction differ so greatly?"

The chasidim answered with the following lesson: "While the melamed was able to read, and perhaps able to understand more – the news was removed from him and impersonal. To the villager, it was his father, and the news struck home.

This is the key to engaging with the Passover story in a meaningful and relevant way. We must make it personal, and take it personally. We must not only ask, "what does this mean" rather "what does this mean to me".

Throughout the Seder we see this idea played out. While during a regular Shabbat or holiday the leader can make kiddush for all, on Passover each one of us drinks the four cups of wine. Each step of the seder is done by all in attendance. The different items on the Seder plate do not only serve as a symbol, but are consumed and internalized as part of our journey to freedom.

We don't just talk about the harsh conditions of slavery and oppression, we



taste the bitterness of the maror. We don't just talk about the great haste which we left Egypt, we eat the flat matzah partaking of the very food we brought with us as we left so hastily. We see the pasty mix of mortar in the charoset, we dip our appetizer into the salty water recalling the tears of our exile, and lean in luxury experiencing our freedom anew. We don't suffice with a simple retelling of the story, we each ask questions to elicit our own curiosity and interest in discovering how our past liberation relates to our present freedom.

The Talmud teaches: "In every generation one must look upon himself as if he personally had gone out of Egypt ."

On Passover night, we challenge ourselves to find what freedom means to us in the here and now, what our past suffering can teach us, how our gratitude can grow, and how our empathy and faith still guide us in our journey through life.



FREEDOM REVISITED

Under communist rule soviet Jewry experienced severe hardship and relentless persecution. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Shneersohn worked tirelessly to keep Judaism alive, at great personal danger. The Rebbe was arrested by the communists in 1927, and imprisoned in the infamous Spalerno prison in Leningrad. After three weeks of brutal interrogation, he was initially sentenced to death, but after international outcry, his sentence was eventually

commuted to 3 years of exile in the city of Kostrama. The Rebbe was taken to the train station in Leningrad to begin his journey to Kostrama, and hundreds of chassidim gathered at the station to bid him farewell and catch a parting glance. As one can imagine, the mood in the station was somber. At the train station, under heavy guard, the Rebbe delivered a famous and defiant address:

Only our bodies have been sent into exile and subjected to alien rule. But our soul will always remain ours, free to serve God, and no amount of force or coercion can take that away from us.

Or in the words of Victor Frankel:

"We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing, the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given circumstances, to choose one's own way.

Passover challenges us to redefine how we think of freedom. While many of us do not face the threat of slavery, annihilation, or religious prosecution, we

are still challenged to to truly experience our freedom.

Our experience of freedom lies in our attitude – rising above our emotional and psychological inhibition and barriers and allowing our soul's expression to elevate and transform our behavior and mindset.



A NIGHT OF QUESTIONS

"Isidore Rabi, winner of a Nobel Prize for physics, was once asked why he became a scientist. He replied: "My mother made me a scientist without ever knowing it. Every other child would come back from school and be asked, 'What did you learn today?' But my mother used to say, 'Izzy, did you ask a good question today?' That made the difference. Asking good questions made me into a scientist."

You will notice that there is a strong emphasis on the four questions in the Haggadah. Each child (and adult) asks the questions, and many have the custom to award the children with presents for their reneiditions.

Throughout the Haggadah there are other numerous customs and rituals that are solely in place to capture and elicit interest from the children. The Afikomen is hidden, there is unusual food and dips, and songs galore for the children to join.

The strong focus on children frames the Seder as night not only of commemoration or ritual, but a night celebrating education.

In fact, the very name of the Haggadah, and the source for the Seder experience comes from the verse "And you shall (vehiggadeta) your child on that day" [the story of our Exodus] (Exodus 13:8).

Thus, the Seder not only ensures that we experience our freedom anew each year, but that we transmit and communicate our rich rich heritage and birth story with our family and children on their terms – in an engaging and meaningful way.

This is the first step of the Passover story – co-authored by you and your family, on this Seder night.



THE FOUR SONS

"A man came to see the Lubavitcher Rebbe and complained that one of his children had chosen to reject Jewish values and life. "Rebbe! Where did I do wrong? I raised all my children in exactly the same way!" The Rebbe responded: "That's exactly the problem. You raised them all in exactly the same way, failing to appreciate that each child is unique and possesses their own personality, interests, and needs...!"

One of the most glaring and insightful teachings of the Haggadah on education is the four sons. We read four renditions of a questioning child looking for insight and meaning in our tradition. More importantly, we see four different answers and approaches in responding to the questions.

We must not resort to uniform or rigid education. We must engage our children in the beauty of our heritage – sharing the lessons and teachings in a way that relates to them. The verse in Proverbs (22:6) puts it this way: *"Train the youth according to his way, so that even when he ages he will not deviate from it."*

The Four Sons



The Wise Child



The Wicked Child



The Simple Child



**The Child Who Doesn't Know
How To Ask A Question**

THE MATZAH'S HUMILITY

Someone once wrote to the Rebbe in a state of deep depression. The letter went something like this: "I would like the Rebbe's help. I wake up each day sad and apprehensive. I can't concentrate. I find it hard to pray. I keep the commandments, but I find no spiritual satisfaction. I go to the Synagogue but I feel alone. I begin to wonder what life is about. I need help." The Rebbe wrote a brilliant reply that did not use a single word. All he did was this: He circled the first word of every sentence and sent the letter back. The disciple understood. The Rebbe had answered his question and set him on the path to recovery. The ringed word was 'I'.

The Matzah and Chametz are very similar, and differ only in one component - whether the dough was given time to rise. The Chasidic masters teach that this "rising of the dough" symbolizes the ego or arrogance.

Matzah teaches us the importance of humility. When we allow ourselves to be taught by those around us we our truest potential can be unleashed. Putting our self-entitlement aside allows our experiences and challenges to become tools in our growth. When we are able to see beyond ourselves is when we can come face to face with the Divine.

We don't denigrate or deface our abilities or capabilities, rather we look to the source of our blessings and energy. It is the space that we vacate when we focus on humility that makes room the light of hope and faith to enter.





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