

Over the past years, I have had the good fortune to attend many incredible Pesach seders including those led by my beloved father (z"l) and by good friends in this community and others. And so today I want to share a wonderful tradition introduced to me by Bob Lebeau, Leora Batnitzky, and family of Princeton with whom my Mom and I had the pleasure of celebrating Passover a number of years back. On the Lebeau-Batnitzky seder-plate each year there is the requisite *haroset* and bitter herbs, the salt water and *karpas* for dipping, the shank-bone and the egg. But in addition to all of these items, sitting in a proud place of prominence, is something that I had never quite seen before in this context – a well-worn, well-loved, dirt-encrusted baseball! Why a baseball on the seder plate, you might ask? Bob explained to me that there are actually two reasons. The first is that in his family, where sports play such an important role, baseball is the quintessential symbol of spring – a reminder of the hope, possibility, and renewal that the holiday of Pesach is meant to invoke. More importantly, however, the baseball sits on the seder-plate to do exactly what it did for me – to inspire guests to ask questions, for this, truly, is the goal of the seder ritual.

Seder night is meant to be a time to tell the story of the Exodus, catering the way in which this narrative is delivered to the unique ages and personalities sitting around one's own personal family table. It is a time to engage participants through discussion and song, through study and drama, through asking and eliciting questions and searching for their answers. While many of us have become reliant on the wonderful *haggadot* which exist to help us craft the seder rite, these books are simply meant to be resources rather than scripts – jumping off points to which we might add and subtract, embellish and augment. As seder leader, our job is to create a "lesson plan" for seder night – drawing from the *haggadah* and other places to organize a series of readings, activities, songs, and experiences that will allow our guests to enter into the drama of the Passover story.

This all sounds like a very tall task, you might say, and indeed it is! Which is why I am sending this message today, with still some time to go until seder night. Much like the cleaning, cooking, and shopping for Passover often begins weeks before the holiday, so too might we start thinking about the seder experience in advance as well. In my office (and in our synagogue library), we have many books, *haggadot*, Passover resources, and other materials to help enhance the seder ritual, and I hope that you will let me know if I can be of help in any way. Below, I also offer 14 quick suggestions -in honor of the 14 steps of the seder ritual - to help reinvigorate and re-imagine seder night, although these are by no means exhaustive. (These ideas were also published in the Passover supplement of our last congregational newsletter but I include them below for those who may have missed them!) Please let me know if you have other great ideas of your own – it is always wonderful to share from our collective wisdom and experience.

May your seder table this Friday night be filled with baseballs, questions, and the joy of being together!

An early Chag Sameach,  
Rabbi Annie Tucker

### **14 Ideas for Enhancing the Seder Ritual**

1. Creative Introductions: Ask each guest to come to seder with an object that represents freedom. Begin the seder by going around the table and sharing these selections.

2. Paper-bag Dramatics: Place paper-bags filled with a small number of random household objects underneath the chair of each guest (or each child). As the seder continues, the goal is to find a way to

connect each item in the bag to something in the seder and creativity is most certainly encouraged! (For example, one could pull out a paper fastener as the group starts to talk about *matzah* because this is the food that “binds our people together as Jews.”)

3. Assignments in Advance: Give each guest a small task or piece of preparation that she/he is to bring to seder in order to enhance the ritual. For small children, this could be as easy as drawing a picture or practicing a song; for older children, preparing a short skit (or rap or haiku) or researching a modern day freedom-fighter to which we might dedicate one of the cups of wine. Adults can also be given homework in advance, ideally assignments which connect to their particular areas of interest or expertise (i.e. a history professor could be asked to research archeological/other evidence that exists regarding the events in Egypt whereas a feminist could be asked to come up with ways to incorporate women’s voices into the seder ritual).

4. Tweeting the Exodus: Send the following video to participants before seder night - [http://www.aish.com/h/pes/mm/Passover\\_Google\\_Exodus.html](http://www.aish.com/h/pes/mm/Passover_Google_Exodus.html). Encourage each guest to write (and bring with them) the story of the Exodus in 140 characters or less.

5. Food, Glorious Food: Extend the *karpas* (green vegetable/appetizer) course by having lots of hors d’oeuvres out on the table during the first part of the seder so that participants don’t get too hungry.

6. Engaging Young Children: Check out this *terrific* resource put together by Rabbi Rob Scheinberg of the United Synagogue of Hoboken: <https://sites.google.com/site/sederideasforkids/home>.

7. Mad Libs (this idea is courtesy of the Feldstein family of Princeton): In advance of the seder put together a Mad Libs style version of the Exodus story, strategically removing key nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc. from the narrative and asking guests to supply such words. On seder night, read the story complete with the participants’ substitutions – much humor will ensue!

8. Pesach Jeopardy: Check out the following website which contains real, live Pesach questions that have been used on Jeopardy throughout the years: <http://babaganewz.com/games/jewparady-pesach>. Write down the questions in advance and intersperse them throughout the seder as a way of keeping things lively.

9. Chad Gadya (this idea is courtesy of the Feldman family of Princeton): Assign each guest a particular verse (and character) of the song Chad Gadya. As the group comes to that line, the guest is responsible for making a sound that corresponds to his/her character. For extra fun, purchase (or make) masks that also correspond to each character and have guests wear them during the song.

10. Multiple Haggadot: In addition to the haggadot that you, as a group, are using, have copies of other books on the table and encourage guests to use/peruse them at will. Invite participants to share interesting tidbits that they find and especially places in which different haggadot seem to have different approaches to a particular element of the seder.

11. The Four Children and the Four Questions – Check out the two seder source-packs, one on the Four Children and one on the Four Questions, that can be found on our website: [http://bhcbe.org/cpt\\_sermons/burning-book/](http://bhcbe.org/cpt_sermons/burning-book/)  
[http://bhcbe.org/cpt\\_sermons/2451/](http://bhcbe.org/cpt_sermons/2451/).

12. Order of the Seder: Find a creative way of depicting the 14 different steps of the seder ritual and marking one's progress through them. My professor, Rabbi Steve Brown, designed 14 different baseball caps that he would successively pile on top of his head. Others have used bookmarks, flip charts, hand-motions or other methods to indicate one's movement through these different stages.

13. Afikoman Scavenger Hunt: Rather than simply hiding the afikoman, design a scavenger hunt for children that eventually leads them to this piece of hidden matzah. Bonus points for using clues that come from the Bible such as "Lot's wife looked back and she thereupon turned into a pillar of salt" (near the salt shaker), or "The altar of burnt offering, its copper grating, its poles and furnishings..." (next to the oven). Extra, extra bonus points for having children decide together on a charity to which they would like to donate in lieu of (or in addition to) receiving a gift for finding the afikoman, extending the haggadah's message of social justice into our day.

14. My Most Memorable Pesach Ever: Have guests (especially older ones) share the most unique or memorable Passover seder that they ever experienced. Who knows, perhaps with all these new ideas it will be this one. 😊