

Rethinking The Seder

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1. שמות י"ב:כ"ד-כ"ז

(כד) ושמרתם את הדבר הזה לחקל ולבניד עד-עולם: (כה) והיה כיתבאו אל-הארץ אשר יתן יי לכם כאשר דבר ושמרתם את העבדה הזאת: (כו) והיה כיתאמרו אליכם בניכם מה העבדה הזאת לכם: (כז) ואמרתם זבח-פסח הוא ליי אשר פסח על-בתי בני-ישראל במצרים בנגפו את-מצרים ואת-בתינו הציל ויקד העם וישתחוו:

Exodus 12:24-27

(24) "You shall observe this as an institution for all time, for you and for your descendants. (25) And when you enter the land that Adonai will give you, as God has promised, you shall observe this rite. (26) And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this rite?' (27) you shall say, 'It is the passover sacrifice to Adonai, because God passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when God smote the Egyptians, but saved our houses.'" The people then bowed low in homage.

2. שמות י"ג:י"ד

(יד) והיה כיתאשאלך בנו מחר לאמר מה-זאת ואמרת אליו בתזק יד הוציאנו יי ממצרים מבית עבדים:

Exodus 13:14

(14) And when, in time to come, your child asks you, saying, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'It was with a mighty hand that Adonai brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage.'

3. פסחים ק"ח ב

תנו רבנן הכל חייבין בארבעה כוסות הללו אחד אנשים ואחד נשים ואחד תינוקות אמר רבי יהודה וכי מה תועלת יש לתינוקות ביין אלא מחלקין להן

Pesachim 108b

The Sages taught in a baraita: All are obligated in these four cups, including men, women, and children. Rabbi Yehuda said: What benefit do children receive from wine? They do not enjoy it. Rather, one distributes to them

4. פסחים ק"ט א

תניא אמרו עליו על רבי עקיבא מימיו לא אמר הגיע עת לעמוד בבית המדרש חוץ מערבי פסחים וערב יום הכפורים בערב פסח בשביל תינוקות כדי שלא ישנו וערב יום הכפורים כדי שיאכילו את בניהם

Pesachim 109a

It was taught in a baraita: They said about Rabbi Akiva that in all his days he never said to his students that the time had come to arise from their learning in the study hall. Instead, he would continue to teach as long as they were willing to listen. This was true except for the eves of Passover and the eve of Yom Kippur, when he would stop teaching. On the eve of Passover, he would stop on account of the children, so

that they would go to sleep during the day, so that **they would not** be tired and **sleep** at night. **And on the eve of Yom Kippur**, he would stop **so that** his students **would** remember to **feed their children**.

5. פסחים קי"ד ב
ה.
 קמשמע לן דאפילו חזרת בעינן תרי טיבולי כי היכי דליהוי ביה היכרא לתינוקות

Pesachim 114b

Therefore, the mishna **teaches us** that **even** if one has just *hazeret* **he requires two dippings**, so that there be **a conspicuous distinction for the children**.

6. פסחים קט"ז א
ה.
 תנו רבנן חכם בנו שואלו ואם אינו חכם אשתו שואלתו ואם לאו הוא שואל לעצמו ואפילו שני תלמידי חכמים שיודעין בהלכות הפסח שואלין זה לזה:

Pesachim 116a

The Sages taught: If his son is wise and knows how to inquire, his son asks him. And if he is not wise, his wife asks him. And if even his wife is not capable of asking or if he has no wife, he asks himself. And even if two Torah scholars who know the *halakhot* of Passover are sitting together and there is no one else present to pose the questions, they ask each other.

7. **Dr. Erica Brown, Spiritual Boredom (106)** – Boredom occurs when we run out of questions because it demonstrates that we have run out of interest. Combating boredom in the Jewish classroom, or any classroom for that matter, is ultimately about the stimulation of questions. Returning to the Seder table, that ancient classroom of Jewish history, we find that Maimonides encouraged us to place objects, educational props, on the table and to use the complexity of the Haggadah —to make the children ask. The purpose of Passover is not to tell our children the story of Jewish peoplehood; it is to make the evening interesting enough for them to ask questions. Telling especially repeated telling, leads to a flat story with a dull landscape. Asking leads to exploration, further questioning, engagement, creativity. Boredom will only leave the classroom when we have done a good enough job of making —the children ask.

8. **Questions for Discussion:**
 What modern traditions or additions to the Pesach Seder are you familiar with, and what is the reasoning behind them?
 What Seder traditions from Jewish communities around the world have you heard of?
 What Seder traditions do have in your own family, friend group, or home?
 This year, we are in a new situation with our Pesach observance. What changes might you make to the way you observe Pesach in order to fulfill the original intents of the Seder?

9. ה.
 1. In India, guests traditionally dip their hand in red paint, symbolizing the Passover sacrifice, before pressing them onto paper to create a *hamsa*. These symbols, believed to offer protection from evil, are hung around the room to protect seder participants.
 2. In a custom from Yemen, romaine lettuce, a form of *maror* (bitter herb), is spread all over the seder table. According to halachah (rabbinic ruling), horseradish is not to be used as *maror*. Instead, lettuce that truly is bitter is to be used as *maror* on the seder plate. (When greens weren't in season in the spring in Europe, horseradish became the replacement for bitter herbs.) Ancient communities, however, continue to use lettuce for *maror*.
 3. To symbolize the weight of slavery, in a Tunisian tradition, the seder plate is laid gently atop the head of each seated guest before it is set onto the table.

4. Lacking the ingredients to make *charoset* (a sweet mixture of fruit and nuts), Union soldiers used a brick to symbolize it at their seder in a field during the United States' Civil War.
5. In Gibraltar, artichokes are used for *maror* (and I'm sure they debate whether to garnish them with melted butter or mayonnaise!)
6. In Iraq, it's traditional to pour a little wine – representing each plague – into a glass and then smash the glass against an outside wall to break it.
7. A Moroccan custom involves passing the matzah over the heads of all the seder participants before reciting *Ha lachma anya* (This is the bread of affliction), alluding to the Angel of Death “passing over” the houses of the Israelites.
8. Jews living in Afghanistan developed the tradition of using scallions or leeks to stand for the Egyptian slavedrivers' whips, using them to lightly "whip" each others' backs.
9. In the British territory of Gibraltar there's a special recipe for charoset: the dust of real bricks, ground up and mixed in.
10. In Marrakesh, dishes are prepared using the wine from Elijah's cup.

10.

במדבר ט':ה'-ר"ד

(ה) וַיַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת־הַפֶּסַח בְּרֵאשׁוֹן בְּאַרְבַּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בֵּין הָעֲרֵבִים בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי כָּל־לַיְלָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יי אֶת־מֹשֶׁה בְּנֵי עֲשׂוֹ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: (ו) וַיְהִי אֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ טְמֵאִים לְגִפְשׁ אָדָם וְלֹא־יָכְלוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת־הַפֶּסַח בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיִּקְרְבוּ לְפָנָי מִצֵּה וּלְפָנָי אֶהְרֹן בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא: (ז) וַיֹּאמְרוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים הַהֵמָּה אֵלָיו אַנְחֲנוּ טְמֵאִים לְגִפְשׁ אָדָם לָמָּה נִגְרַע לְבַלְתִּי הַקָּרֵב אֶת־קִרְבָּנוּ יי בְּמַעַדְוֹ בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: (ח) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מֹשֶׁה עֲמַדוּ וְאַשְׁמְעֵה מִה־יִּצְוָה יי לָכֶם: (ט) וַיִּדְבֹּר יי אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (י) דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר אִישׁ אִישׁ כִּי־יִהְיֶה־טָמֵא | לְגִפְשׁ אוֹ בְּדַרְדַּר חֲקָה לָכֶם אוֹ לְדַרְתֵּיכֶם וַעֲשֵׂה פֶסַח לַיּוֹם: (יא) בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בְּאַרְבַּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם בֵּין הָעֲרֵבִים יַעֲשׂוּ אֹתוֹ עַל־מִצּוֹת וּמִרְרִים יֹאכְלֶהוּ: (יב) לֹא־יִשְׂאִירוּ מִלִּנְוֹ עַד־בֹּקֶר וְעֶצֶם לֹא יִשְׁבְּרוּ וְכָל־חֲקַת הַפֶּסַח יַעֲשׂוּ אֹתוֹ: (יג) וְהָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־הוּא טָהוֹר וּבְדַרְדַּר לֹא־הָיָה וְחָדַל לַעֲשׂוֹת הַפֶּסַח וּנְכַרְתָּה הַגִּפְשׁ הַהוּא מֵעַמִּי כִּי | קִרְבָּנוּ יי לֹא הִקְרִיב בְּמַעַדְוֹ חֲטָאֵו יִשָּׂא הָאִישׁ הַהוּא: (יד) וְכִי־יִגִּיר אִתְּכֶם זָר וַעֲשֵׂה פֶסַח לַיּוֹם כַּחֲקַת הַפֶּסַח וּכְמִשְׁפָּטוֹ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲקָה אַחַת יִהְיֶה לָכֶם וּלְזָר וּלְאֻזְרַח הָאָרֶץ: (טו)

Numbers 9:5-14

(5) and they offered the passover sacrifice in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, in the wilderness of Sinai. Just as Adonai had commanded Moses, so the Israelites did. (6) But there were some people who were unclean by reason of a corpse and could not offer the passover sacrifice on that day. Appearing that same day before Moses and Aaron, (7) those people said to them, “Unclean though we are by reason of a corpse, why must we be debarred from presenting Adonai's offering at its set time with the rest of the Israelites?” (8) Moses said to them, “Stand by, and let me hear what instructions Adonai gives about you.” (9) And Adonai spoke to Moses, saying: (10) Speak to the Israelite people, saying: When any of you or of your posterity who are defiled by a corpse or are on a long journey would offer a passover sacrifice to Adonai, (11) they shall offer it in the second month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, (12) and they shall not leave any of it over until morning. They shall not break a bone of it. They shall offer it in strict accord with the law of the passover sacrifice. (13) But if a person who is clean and not on a journey refrains from offering the passover sacrifice, that person shall be cut off from their kin, for they did not present Adonai's offering at its set time; that person shall bear their guilt. (14) And when a stranger who resides with you would offer a passover sacrifice to the Adonai, they must offer it in accordance with the rules and rites of the passover sacrifice. There shall be one law for you, whether stranger or citizen of the country.