

BLAZING YOUR TRAIL: Walking through the Haggadah and 101 Ideas to Make the Seder More Participatory

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Introduction: The walk through of the Haggadah is a medieval custom usually performed the Shabbat before the seder, but it is worthwhile in our society of planning well in advance to do so at least two weeks before seder, so you can delegate roles to as many participants as possible. This walk-through is based on my haggadot *A Different Night* (AD N) and *A Night to Remember* (NTR) available at the website along with *Seder Planner* pamphlets for each Haggadah (see page references below). Further, see ideas and handouts which I shared with those who invited me to prepare this talk and extensive seder supplement added to the revised edition of *A Different Night*.

6 Stops on the Haggadah Trail from Slavery to Freedom, from Fear to Hope

Stop #1: From Bread of Poverty and Brokenness to Tzedakah and Healing:

YAHATZ, HALAKHMA ANYA, AFIKOMAN

Stop #2: Arousing Questions - 4 Kushiots (Four Questions) – MA NISHTANA

Stop #3: “We were slaves”: AVADIM HAYENU - Two Narratives of Liberation: Political Economic and Spiritual Psychological

Stop #4: The Four Children: Advice for Intergenerational Dialogue

Stop #5: Symposium on the Cunning of Oppression and the Resources for Resistance: ARAMI

Stop #1: From Bread of Poverty and Brokenness to Tzedakah and Healing:

YAHATZ, HALAKHMA ANYA, AFIKOMAN

Ha Lahma Anya (This is the Bread of Poverty) – mini-haggadah in a paragraph

PAST MEMORY: This is the bread of poverty and persecution that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. As it says in the Torah “*seven days shall you eat . . . matzot – the bread of poverty and persecution*” (Deut. 16:3) so that you may “*remember that you were a slave in Egypt . . .*” (Deut. 16:12).

PRESENT MORAL SOLIDARITY:

Let all who are hungry, come and eat

Let all who are in need, come and share the Pesach meal.

FUTURE HOPE: This year we are still here – Next year, in the land of Israel.
This year we are still slaves –Next year, free people.

Yahatz (Breaking the Middle Matza) – social justice and economic slavery

- NTR 14-15, 22-23; AD N Seder Supplement 7-8

Ha Lahma (Bread of Poverty and Persecution) – NTR 20-23

Afikoman – NTR 104-105

Share: Pass out a whole matza to every Seder participant, inviting them to take a moment to ponder this entrance into a broken world, before they each break the matza themselves

Personalizing: What is broken in your life and that of our society in year Corona and other tragedies? What are the narrow straits of your life in your personal Egypt (Mitzriam)? What new opportunities or aspects of yourself have “broken open” this year?

Poverty: What have you learned about poverty or discrimination? What have you or people you know done for the needy this year? (volunteer work)

Tzedakah certificate: To what tzedakah did you contribute in honor of this seder?

Stop #2: Arousing Questions - 4 *Kushiot* (Questions) - NTR 24-27 A DN 40-43



a. The Principle of Educational Disorder in the Seder: Maimonides

One should make some change in procedure on this night of the fifteenth of Nisan, in order that one's children should notice it and ask, "What makes this night different from other nights?" to which one would reply, "this and this is what happened, and this and this is what took place" [in the story of the Exodus].

In what way might the procedure (*seder*) be changed?

By distributing parched grain or nuts to the children [distributing desert at the beginning of the meal],

by having the table removed before the meal begins [clearing the table before anyone has eaten],

by each trying to snatch away the other's unleavened bread [playing games with the food, like the stealing of the afikoman] and so on.

(Maimonides, Laws of Hametz and Matza, Chapter 7:3)



b. Professor Isidor I. Rabi, the Nobel laureate in physics

"Why did you become a scientist, rather than a doctor or lawyer or businessman, like the other immigrant kids in your neighborhood?" "My mother made me a scientist with-out ever intending it. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school: 'Nu? Did you learn anything today?' But not my mother. She always asked me a different question. 'Izzy,' she would say, 'Did you ask a good **question today?**' **That difference - asking good questions - made me become a scientist.**"

c. Philosopher Primo Levi's Icicle

"Driven by thirst, I eyed a fine icicle outside the window, within a hand's reach. I opened the window and broke off the icicle but at once a large, heavy guard prowling outside brutally snatched it away from me. "*Warum?*" I asked him in my poor German. '*Hier ist kein warum*' (there is no why here), he replied, pushing me inside with a shove.'" (Primo Levi, his memoir *Survival in Auschwitz*, 24)

Techniques to personalize:

- prepare jeopardy game – prepare 20 questions – bring a question and place in question box and draw questions
- contemporary questions about a world of poverty, slavery and injustice

Stop #3: “We were slaves”: Avadim Hayenu - Two Narratives of Liberation: Political Economic and Spiritual Psychological



Shmuel's Script One: NTR 28-36, 143-147; AD N 44-45, 50-53

When, in time to come, your children ask you: "What is the meaning of the decrees, laws, and rules that Adonai our God has enjoined upon you?"

You shall say to your children:

**"We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt
and Adonai freed us from Egypt
with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm."**

Rav's Script Two: NTR 56-59

In the beginning our ancestors were idol worshippers
But now God has brought us near to serve Adonai.

TECHNIQUES to Personalize Story Telling

Let's hear it for Lake Wobegon! by Garrison Keillor

"When I was a boy, the storyteller in our family was Uncle Lew who died a couple of years ago at 93. In a family that tended to be withdrawn, Uncle Lew was the friendliest. He had been a salesman and he liked to drive around and dropped in on people. He would ask us kids how we were doing in school and then there was a point when he would launch in and start telling stories about the family, generation upon generation.

My parents would be in the living room and we would be eating popcorn. As it got later I remember lying on the floor so my mother wouldn't see me and send me to bed. I just wanted him to tell more and more. I wanted to know everything. What it looked like and what it smelled like, what they ate and what they wore.

As I got older I looked to those stories about family as giving us some sense of place, that in some way we were meant to be here and had a history. That we had standing.

1. Stanislavsky's Drama Workshop and the Actors Guild:

"In every generation one is obligated to see oneself as if you went out of Egypt!"
(Ashkenazi Haggadah)

"One is obligated to show oneself as if you went out of Egypt!" (Maimonidean Haggadah)

2. Ask participants to share their most unusual Seders (like 5 Rabbis of Bnei Brak or Seder in Nepal) of favorite or worst moments of family seders in order to share memories and air concerns NTR 36-39, A DN 47, Seder Supplement 25-28

3. My Exodus: Techniques to Personalize Storytelling at the Seder

- **A Second Seder Plate of Personal Mementos as a Trigger to Storytelling.** Ask each family to bring a souvenir representing a key moment in family identity, such as a passport of immigrant great-grandparent, or special recipe, etc. Raise it and ask *Al Shum Ma* – what is its significance to me?
- **Rabbi Nahman: "The Exodus from Egypt occurs in very human being, in every era, in every year and even on every day."** Egypt in Hebrew *Mitzraim* means tight spot, straits. In what way were you constricted, oppressed, or suppressed, and how have you emerged to greater freedom, breadth?
- ***Benching Gomel: Passover as Thanksgiving*** - When was your life in danger and how were you rescued and what did you learn from that experience?

- **Spiritual Liberation: Jews by Choice** – recount your identity journey in becoming a Jew or in becoming Jewish in new ways? NTR 58-59
- **You were strangers.** When did you experience or see others who felt alien in their environment? How were they treated?
- **Shifra and Puah Award for Resisting Injustice (The First Righteous Gentiles, the Midwives in Egypt).** Name your favorite courageous person who struggled for justice , bring their photograph, tell their story, explain what you would learn from them.
- **List ten plagues of 2020!** Study 10 plagues to discover which one Michel Kichka forgot – NTR 79

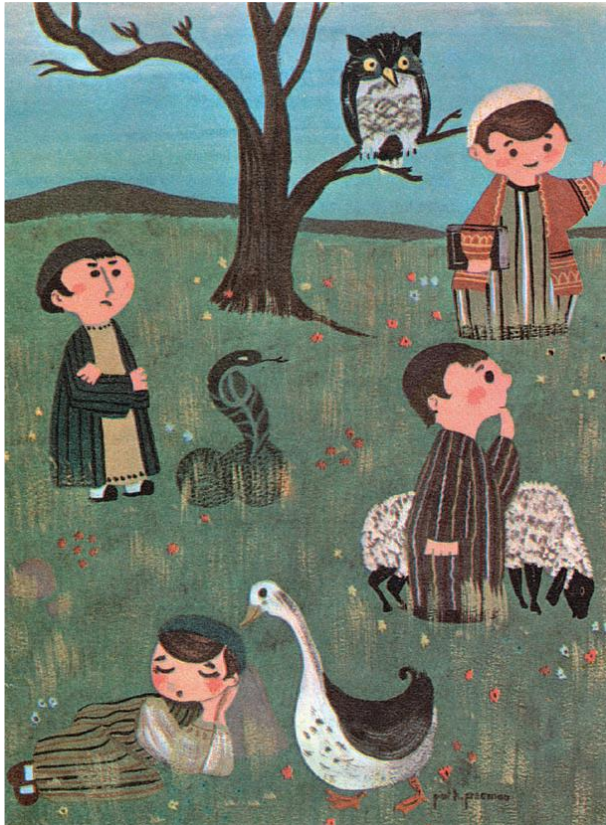


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“You shall see yourself as if you went out of Egypt”

Stop #4: The Four Children: Advice for Intergenerational Dialogue

NTR 40-55; A DN 56-71

There is no mitzvah to set your wicked /rebellious /independent minded /cynical child's teeth on edge but to speak to each one where s/he are at.



Art, politics and psychology of the Four Daughters and Sons

(See diverse modern illustrations in Zion haggadot A DN 56-71 NTR 40-55)

Delegate: ask art buff, educator or psychologist to interpret one type of child (such as a challenging teenager or special needs child). Discuss and analyze art and make suggests for approaches to each kind of child of whatever age in order to build bridges.

Modern Commentators on Four Children

a. The Pitfalls of Labeling

I instinctively recoil from static stereotypes that label persons simplistically. Therefore, I choose to interpret the midrash of the four children as a diverse set of strategies for addressing four different facets of each and every child. Each personality combines these facets in different ways. For example, the wise and the rebellious facets can be combined for evil. Then the cunning mind is used to inflict pain on one's parents. Alternatively, the combination can produce a revolutionary chalutz (pioneer) seeking not just to undermine the traditional order but to create new frameworks of meaning. This requires an intelligence which is not conservative like the traditional "wise child" but which looks beyond the horizon, beyond the existing laws and their pat rationale (Yaariv Ben Aharon, Kibbutz author).

I do not view labels as static pigeonholes. I believe in the power of the educational act to release locked up potentials. For example, one who does not know how to ask may be silenced by the rules of society. The silence may hide an exceptional, sensitive child whose questions are choked. A parent can "open the child up," remove the obstructions, enable personal growth and break stereotypes (Yaariv Ben Aharon, Kibbutz author)

b. The Blessing of Diversity

The artist and calligrapher David Moss explains his depiction of the Four Children:

"Every child is unique and the Torah embraces them all. As in a game of chance like playing cards, we have no control over the children dealt us. It is our task as parents, as educators, to play our hand based on the attributes of the children we are given. It is the child, not the parent, who must direct the process. This, I believe, is the intent of the midrash of the four children. (David Moss, 20th C. artist, U.S.A. and Israel)

c. The Wicked Son or the Wicked Father? Franz Kafka composes a letter to his father after a fight at the family seder table

"I could not understand how, with the insignificant scrap of Judaism you yourself possessed, you could reproach me for not making an effort ...to cling to a similar, insignificant scrap. It was...a mere nothing, a joke- not even a joke ...at home it was...confined to the first Seder, which more and more developed into a farce, with fits of hysterical laughter.... How one could do anything better with that material than get rid of it as fast as possible ... precisely the getting rid of it seemed to me to be the devoutest action."

d. David Hartman: Making Room for our Children, yet Giving Your Children "Baggage"

Judaism imposes a vital task on the parents: to tell the children their people's story. What the child does with this past, no parent can decree. Parents provide their children with luggage. Whether the child will open up the suitcases and use their contents is beyond the reach of parents. They have no right to enter the child's future. Parents must aim at instilling memories that haunt the child an entire lifetime; their bequest is a weight of generations, awareness that one's biography began with Abraham and Sarah.

Stop #5: Symposium on the Cunning of Oppression and the Resources for Resistance - NTR 64-77; AD N 78-91

**Last Stop: Next Year in Jerusalem: Hope – “Hatikvah”
– From Persecution to Justice, From Alienation to Home**

1. **Elijah’s Cup and a Hasidic Custom:** Sharing Personal Hopes for the Future – personal, family, nation, Israel - Rabbi Naftali Ropshitz: Filling Elijah's Cup with our Hopes
– NTR 112-113: AD N 138-140
2. **Personalizing:** Open the door and sharing: What doors do you wish to shut and to open?

The Door of Hope by Professor Michael Walzer, "Exodus and Revolution":

The "door of hope" is still open; things are not what they might be = even when what they might be isn't totally different from what they are.

We still believe, or many of us do, what the Exodus first taught:

first, that wherever you live, it is probably Egypt;

second, that there is a better place, a world more attractive, a promised land;

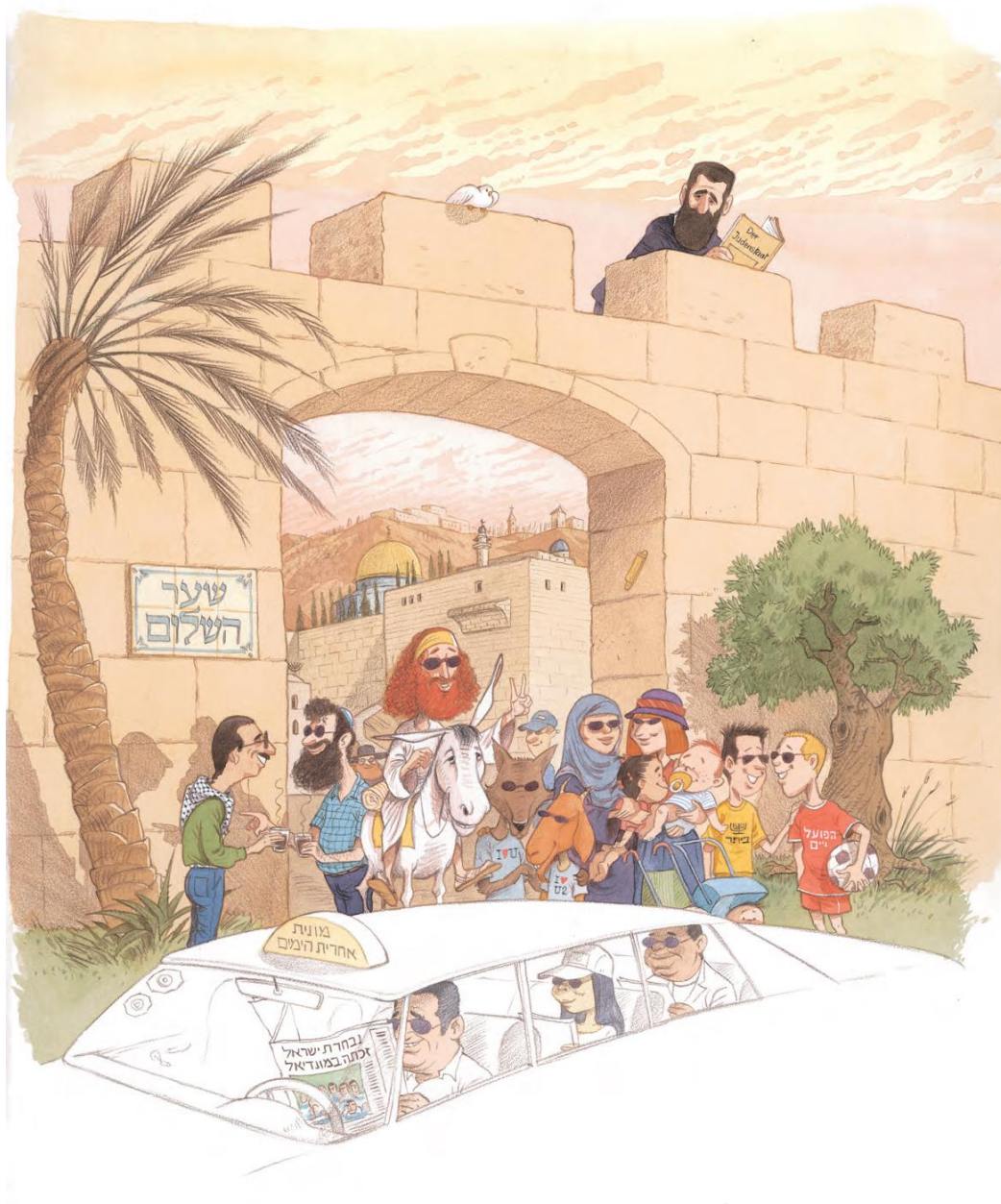
and third, that "the way to the land is through the wilderness."

There is no way to get from here to there except by joining together and marching.

3. Dreams and the Poetry of Hope – NTR 138-142. A DN Supplement 28-33

4. Read from Amanda Gorman Inauguration Poem 2021





Michel Kichka, *A Night to Remember Haggadah* 137

Concluding Advice for a Lively Seder

1. The real question is not why do we keep Passover but how do we continue to keep Passover year after year and keep it from becoming stultified! How can we be privileged to plan the seder, so that, as Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook said:
"The old may become new and the new may become holy." – Ira Steingrut
2. Only the lesson which is enjoyed can be learned well. One does not learn unless one's heart is drawn to the subject. – Rav Judah HaNasi, editor of the Mishna
3. Ah, Jews are very impatient with doing the same thing over and over again. It's gotta be different. – Arthur Miller, American Jewish playwright
4. 10% Rule – never change more than 10% at any one seder
5. Recall: The haggadah is a how-to manual that invites you to shape your own seder and customize it each year to your guests
6. Try conducting the Seder as a symphony or as a Jazz Jam Session so as to maximize participation

Beware of Complaining about Boring Seders

[In medieval Catholic Europe] religion was not a laughing matter, at least for the officials assigned to enforce orthodoxy. They did not treat even trivial jokes lightly. In France, a villager named Isambard was arrested for having exclaimed, when a friar announced after mass that he would say a few words about God, "The fewer the better."

In Spain, a tailor named Garcia Lopez, coming out of church just after the priest had announced the long schedule of services for the coming week, quipped that:

"When we were Jews, we were bored stiff by one Passover each year, and now each day seems to be a Passover and feast-day." Garcia Lopez was denounced to the Inquisition.

(Steven Greenblatt, *The Swerve*, 236)