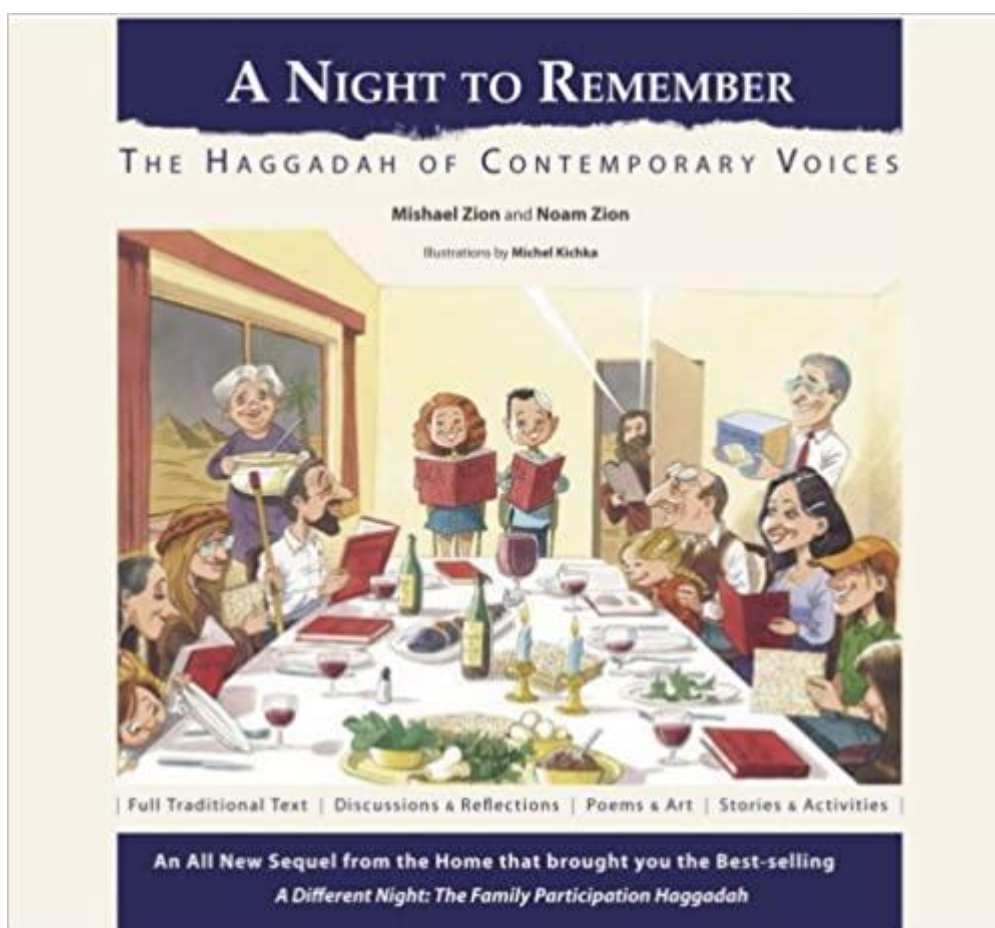


# The Guide to the Perplexed Seder Leader

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**I The Challenge: Why is the Seder Leader Perplexed? How can the leader be empowered and liberated from misconceptions?**

**II 5 Stages in the Evolution of the Seder**

**III 3 CONCEPTS of the RABBINIC SEDER and its Ideal Leader**

**IV Thumbnail History of Three GREAT AMERICAN SEDERS and Beyond**

**I. The Challenge: Why is the Seder Leader Perplexed? How can the leader be empowered and liberated from misconceptions?**

**II. 5 Stages in the Evolution of the Seder:**

1. **Passover in Egypt on Night of Tenth Plague of Firstborn 1200 BCE** - (Home sacrifice with Blood on Doorpost – the first Pesach = Passover sacrifice)
2. **Passover in the Temple – pilgrimage holiday to Jerusalem for sacrifice of Paschal lamb c. 1000 BCE** (Solomon builds first Temple) to 70 CE (Roman destruction of Jerusalem and Second Temple)
3. **Passover of the Rabbis of the Mishnah in Yavneh after destruction of Second Temple - c. 100 CE** (Rabban Gamliel – The first Seder = Order of Worship)
4. **Passover of Exile – first Haggadah** (printed in first prayerbook = Siddur published by Babylonian Geonim, heads of yeshivot in Iraq and of world Jewry of the Muslim Empire) circa 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> c. CE
5. **Modern Passover Seder and its Haggadahs in the Era of Mass Literacy**



## **Exodus 12: The First Seder is Born with the Plague of the First Born**

### **Moses' Public Safety Announcements for the First Passover**

#### **a. Stockpiling for the Coming Emergency**

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat."

#### **b. Sealing the Doors from the Angel of Death and the Seder Menu**

"Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.  
" That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and matzah."

#### **c. The Dress Code for the Seder and the Anxious Mood of Trembling , not Festivity**

"This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in HIPAZON (literally, haste or trembling); it is God's Passover."

"None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning."

"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."

"Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead . . ."

"The Egyptians urged the people [of Israel] to hurry and leave the country. 'For otherwise,' they said, 'we will all die!'

So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing . . . The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves."

#### **d. Commemorating the First Seder Annually in the Promised Land of Freedom and Security**

God kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the Lord for the generations to come.

" This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord — a lasting ordinance. For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast.

"When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as promised, observe this ceremony.

**e. When in the Future Your Children Question You about the Seder on the Night of the Plague**

“And when [in future generations] your children ask you,  
‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’

Then tell them,

‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over /protected/skipped over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’ ”

**Discuss:**

What experiences during Corona 2020/21 echo or vary from the pattern in Egypt? (warnings by Moses in advance of how to prevent the plague; stockpiling; lockdown in the house; harrowing escape from infected areas; terror of one’s neighbors bringing death; social separation into separate houses; special precautions from infection). Both seders are moody with mixed emotions — Fear, Hope, and Uncertainty — since no one knows what the future holds even when sequestration is suspended. Both seders involve high risk age group: family founders (over 60) now and first born sons then.

**The greatest differences are:** We cannot say that God brought the plague of 2020/21 as a means to force a tyrant to liberate his oppressed slaves or as punishment for improper behavior, though the responses of governments to warnings bears some resemblance.

Further, the original seder brought intergenerational families together physically, while Seder 2020/21 separates families. Further, the original plagues distinguished one nation from another (Egyptians/Hebrews), while corona highlights our human solidarity and need for a collaborative solution, though in other ways nations, states, regions are being locked down to avoid sharing in the disease.

**Discuss:** In several years what will you tell your children about Seder 2020 and the Corona Epidemic? What would you place on a **Corona Seder Plate** (comparable to matzah and maror) to recall the souvenirs from that period? Perhaps: toilet paper; yardstick to measure distance between people; zoom invitation; Purell gel, etc.

**Discuss:** What are the moral lessons to be learned from “know the heart of the stranger” (Egypt) and knowing the loneliness, abandonment and vulnerability of those sequestered in isolation (corona). How do we feel about strangers today? Have maintaining social distance, fear of infection and experiencing common vulnerability enhanced or undermined human solidarity?

### III. Passover of the Rabbis of the Mishnah in Yavneh after the destruction of Second Temple - c. 100 CE

#### 3 Concepts the Rabbinic Seder and its Ideal Leader

##### The Leader's Roles:

##### 1) Ritual Director or Master of Ceremonies

like a Temple priest, a synagogue rabbi, or a chief of protocol at a diplomatic dinner

##### 2) Moderator or a Talk Show Host

facilitator of a discussion at a symposium

##### 3) Parent Educator

home schooling

##### 1) *Pesach Seder*:

Ritual "Order" of the Pesach Sacrifice and Protocol of Greek-style Symposium

##### 2) *Aggadah*

Rabbinic discussion or symposium on the Exodus in the Torah - ---  
Oral "midrash" interpreting the written Torah

##### 3) *Hagaddah*

"You shall tell your children."  
(*vhigadta*)

Intergenerational story telling

#### Rabban Gamliel's model of the first Seder = Order of Passover in the Mishna

*Ritual Order of the Four Cups*: They fill a second cup for the seder leader.

*Parent Educator*: At this stage the child questions the parent. If, however, the child lacks intelligence, the parent teaches the child: Why (or how) is this night different from all other nights?! . . .

According to the child's level of intelligence (or mind-set), the parent teaches the child.

*Storytelling (Haggadah)*: Begin with the degrading aspect of the narrative and concluding with uplifting aspect [or psalms of Hallel].

*Rabbinic Discussion of the Exodus in the Torah*: And expound or comment on the verses (*doresh*) from "My ancestor was a wandering Aramean" until the completion of the whole paragraph (Deuteronomy 26:1-10). . . (Mishna Pesachim Chapter 10)

## (1) Priestly Master of Ceremonies: Maintaining the Traditional Protocol

**Ritual Order:** Kadesh Urhatz ....

Recite the Kiddush, Wash the hands, Eat a green vegetable, Break the Middle Matzah, Recite the Passover story, Wash the hands before the meal, Say the blessings for the Matzah, Eat the bitter herb, Eat the bitter herb and matzah together as sandwich, Grace after meal. Hallel= Psalms. Next Year In Jerusalem.

**Rabban Gamliel** was accustomed to say, Anyone who has not said these three things on Pesach has not fulfilled his obligation, and these are them: the Pesach sacrifice, matsa and *marror*.

**Hallel. from the Temple Philharmonic**

**Korekh Sandwich:** In memory of the Temple according to Hillel. This is what Hillel would do when the Temple existed: He would wrap the matza and marror [bitter herbs] and eat them together [with the Passover meat of the lamb], in order to fulfill what is stated, (Exodus 12:15): "You should eat [the Paschal lamb] upon matzot and marrorim."

## (2) The Symposium Seder –

**The Leader as Moderator or Talk Show Host: A Lively, Thoughtful Discussion**



"The leader of the symposium "took pride in gathering about him many persons of culture and entertaining them with conversation ... now proposing topics worthy of enquiry, now disclosing solutions of his own; for he never put his questions without previous study or in a haphazard way, but with the utmost critical, even Socratic acumen, so that all admired the keen observation showed by his question." (ATHENAEUS, *DEIPNOSOPHISTS*, 2ND C. GREECE)

Cicero wrote: "The one who engages in conversation should not bar others from participating in it, as if he were entering upon a private monopoly; but in general conversation he should think it not unfair for each to have his turn."

"Questions should be easy, the problems plain and familiar, not intricate and dark, so that they may neither vex the unlearned nor frighten them from speaking up ... the discourse should be like our wine, common to all, of which everyone may equally partake." (Cicero)

"A symposium is a communion of serious and mirthful entertainment, discourse and symbolic actions .... (It furthers) a deeper insight into the points debated at the table. For the memory of the pleasures arising from the food is short-lived but the subjects of philosophical queries and discussions remain always fresh after they have been imparted." (PLUTARCH, QUAESTIONES, 2ND C. GREECE AND ROME)

#### **Five Rabbis of Bnai Brak: The Rabbinic Seder as Symposium**

A tale is told of Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar son of Azarya, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon who dined (reclined) at the Seder in Bnai B'rak.

The whole night long they spent retelling the story of the Exodus from Egypt,

#### **The Jew is a Dispute Incarnate - Philip Roth, *Operation Shylock*:**

"Why couldn't the Jews be one people? Why must Jews be in conflict with one another? Why must they be in conflict with themselves? Because divisiveness is not just between Jew and Jew – it is within the individual Jew. Is there a more manifold personality in all the world? I don't say divided. Divided is nothing... But inside every Jew there is a *mob* of Jews. The good Jew, the bad Jew. The new Jew, the old Jew. The lover of Jews, the hater of Jews. The friend of the goy, the enemy of the goy. The arrogant Jew, the wounded Jew. The pious Jew, the rascal Jew. The coarse Jew, the gentle Jew. The defiant Jew, the appeasing Jew. The Jewish Jew, the de-Jewed Jew. Shall I go on? So I have to expound upon the Jew as a three-thousand-year amassment of mirrored fragments... Is it any wonder that a Jew is always disputing? He *is* a dispute, incarnate."

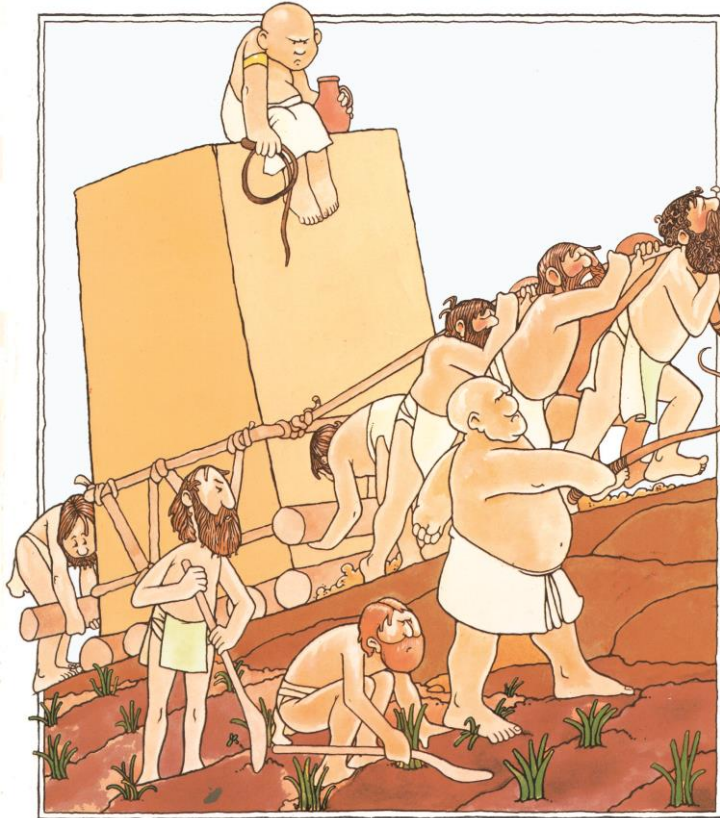


**(3) Leader as Parent Educator:**

**(a) Storytelling (b) Arousing Questions (c) conducting Intergenerational Dialogue**

**(3a) Leader as Parent Educator: The Storytelling Seder –**

***V higadta L'vincha- You shall tell your children - Not Read the Haggadah***



**Haggadah:**

If God had not taken our ancestors out of Egypt,  
then we would still be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt,  
along with our children, and our children's children.

Even if all of us are wise, all of us discerning,  
all of us veteran scholars, and all of us knowledgeable in Torah,  
it is still a mitzvah for us to retell the story of the Exodus from Egypt.

So, the more and the longer,  
one expands and embellishes the story,  
the more commendable it is.





**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.



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

## Three Scripts of the Exodus: Political-Economic or Spiritual?

### Shmuel's Script One:

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."**

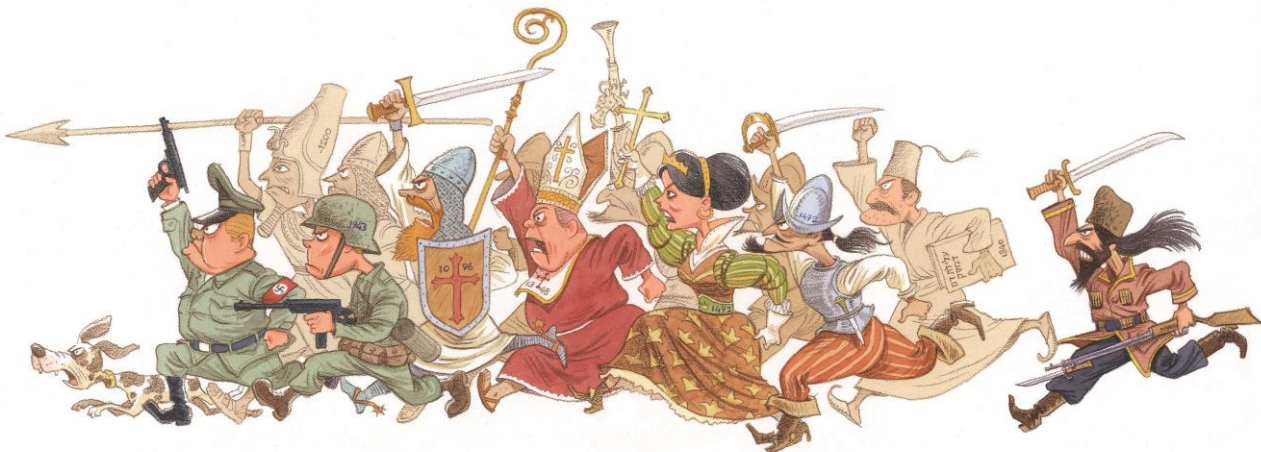
### Rav's Script Two:

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

Joshua said to the people: "Thus said Adonai, the God of Israel:  
Long ago, your ancestors, including Terah, father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates and worshipped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and led him through the whole land of Canaan and multiplied his offspring.(Joshua 24)

### Script Three:

This promise has stood us and our parents in good stead .  
For not only has one enemy stood over us to annihilate us.  
But in every generation enemies have stood over us to annihilate us.  
Yet the Holy One keeps the promise to save us from their hands.



### (3b) Leader as Parent Educator: Arousing Questions - 4 Questions



#### Mishna Pesachim Chapter 10:4

They mixed him a second cup, and here the child questions his parent. If the child lacks the intelligence to ask, his parent instructs him:

- i) On all other nights we dip once, on this night we dip twice?
- ii) On all other nights we eat hametz or matzah, on this night only matzah.
- lii) On all other nights we eat roasted, stewed or boiled meat, on this night only roasted.

According to the intelligence/mind of the child, the parent teaches him.

#### 1. 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)

## 2. The Art of Advertising and Cracker Jacks

Rabbi Judah said: a shopkeeper must not distribute parched corn or nuts to children, because he thereby accustoms them to come to him; the sages permit it.  
 Nor may he reduce the price; but the sages say, he is to be remembered for good.  
 (MISHNAH Bava Metzia 4: 12)



## 3. Uprooting the Table: More Educational Anarchy

Why do we remove/uproot the table?

D'bei Yannai says: So that the little children will notice and ask.

Once [as an orphan child] Abbaye sat before Rabbah [his teacher at the seder]. He saw him remove/uproot the table before him

Abbaye said: But we have not eaten yet, so why remove the table?

Rabbah replied: You have now exempted us from reciting *Ma Nishtana*.

(Talmud Pesachim 115b)

## 4. Asking Yourself Questions: Dialogic Thinking - Talmud Pesachim 117a

If his son is wise – the son asks him.

If not, his wife asks him.

If not, he asks himself.

Even if there are [only] two scholars who know the laws of Pesach = they ask each other. <sup>1</sup>

### **5. No Freedom without Reason(s): The Halachic Definition of "Harsh Labor." (*Befarekh*)**

*The Rabbis wished to distinguish between ordinary slavery as an economic system in the ancient world in general and in Jewish society in particular, and the "harsh labor" imposed by a despot, like Pharaoh, who caused such great suffering to the Children of Israel (Exodus 1:13). A Jewish master is forbidden to impose this type of hard labor on his Hebrew slave (Leviticus 25:46).*

It is forbidden to work a Hebrew slave harshly (*befarech*) (Leviticus 25: 46; see Exodus 1:13) What is the definition of "harsh labor"?

(1) work without end [without a pre-assigned time limit] (2) work without purpose [useless work] whose only purpose is the master's desire to keep the slave working and prevent idleness. For example, the master should not say: rake under these vines until I come back," for that is a task without a set quota [in time or product]. For example, the master should not say: "dig here," when the master has no need of this labor, nor even "heat up this cup of food or cool it off," when there is no need for it. (Maimonides, Laws of Slaves, Chapter 1:6)

### **6. 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)

### **7. Of Questions, Faith and Freedom: A Personal Exodus by Rabbi John Crites-Borak**

Long before I became a Jew and a rabbi, when I was still a Roman Catholic, I achieved a bit of infamy in my parish for asking difficult questions. Why does God value what we believe more than what we do? Why would a loving God create a Hell? If God is all-powerful, why doesn't God defeat Satan and do away with evil? My priest's answer to all of them was uniquely frustrating and unsatisfactory: it's a matter of faith, which I clearly didn't have. I asked the priest how to get it. "Pray," he said. I told him I prayed and all I ever got were questions. "Pray harder." I did. I got harder ones. One morning after Mass I asked about a particularly difficult religious issue. He glared at me in a furious silence, then pointed his index finger at my heart. "You," he finally uttered through clenched teeth, "you ... are going ... to burn ... for this one." Then he turned and walked away. It was the last time I ever saw him.

As it happened, I was scheduled for a haircut the next day. My barber, a long-time friend, was Jewish. She listened as I told the story. "I don't know why you put up with all that *mishigass*," she exclaimed. "You keep trying to be a Christian, but you're the most Jewish man I know. You think like a Jew. You act like a Jew. You treat others like a Jew. You even think about God like a Jew!"

The only things I really knew about Jews were they wore odd little hats, didn't eat pork and didn't believe in Jesus. Moreover, my family and I viewed all of them with vague suspicion. I didn't believe I'd ever met a Jew before I moved to Los Angeles. Was she sure? "I haven't been inside a synagogue in 20 years," she laughed, "but I know a Jew when I see one."

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<sup>1</sup> Italy, 1454. Scribe, Yoel ben Shimeon, wrote into the haggadah directions appearing before Ma Mishtana:

"One places the basket [of matza] or the [Seder] plate on the table. If his son or his daughter or his wife asks about the change that they see, then start Avadim Hayenu. If not, then he asks himself, and recites Ma Nishtana."

That afternoon I called five local synagogues at random. "My name is John," I said. "I'm a Catholic, but someone said Judaism might be a better fit for me. What can you tell me about it?" For the record, this is one of the fastest ways to be put through to a rabbi's voice mail. I left five messages.

Only one person, Rabbi Stewart Vogel of Temple Aliyah in Woodland Hills, California, returned my call. He asked me to tell him my story. I did. When I finished he said, "I have bad news for you. We don't have the answer." Then he laughed and added, "Don't get me wrong - we have answers. More than you can count. But we don't have The Answer. On the other hand," he continued, "if you're looking for a place where you can ask life's most profound, difficult and meaningful questions- be willing to accept whatever responses you get to them - then do a bit of studying, thinking and talking about them with others to formulate new questions - and have that be a way of living-- maybe you'll find a home with us." Then he recommended the Introduction to Judaism Program at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. I enrolled out of curiosity. Studying Judaism began as an adventure in learning. I soon realized it was also a homecoming. My questions were welcomed and encouraged as a road to faith that led both outward and inward. They became my exodus from the narrow straights of dogmatic religious conformity to a rich and fascinating world of unbridled curiosity about God and life. In them I found God, and faith. They led me to Judaism and the rabbinate. They set me free.<sup>2</sup>

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### **(3c) Leader as Parent Educator: 4 Children - Conducting Intergenerational Dialogue**

Good Listener fielding questions, entering into dialogue, and individualized learning for each child by character, personality, background, intelligence

#### **Mishnah Pesachim Chapter 10:4-5**

They mixed him a second cup, and here the child questions his parent. If the child lacks the intelligence to ask, his parent instructs him:..... According to the intelligence/mind of the child, the parent teaches him.



## **The Four Children and Jewish Educational Pluralism**

### **The Haggadah's Four Children**

The Torah alludes in various places to four types of children: one wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who does not know how to ask.

What does the wise child say?

"What are the testimonies, the statutes, and the laws which the Lord your God has commanded you."  
(Deuteronomy 6:20)

"You too must tell him some of the laws of Pesach, up to (the Mishna):

"We do not proceed to any 'afikoman' (dessert or after dinner celebrations) after eating the Paschal lamb."

(Tractate Pesachim X)

What does the wicked child say?

“Whatever does this service mean to you?” (Exodus 12:26)

Emphasizing “you” and not himself! And since he excludes himself from the community and rejects a major principle of faith, you should also “set his teeth on edge” and say to him: “It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.” (Exodus 13:8)

“Me” and not him! Had he been there, he would not have been redeemed.

What does the simple child ask?

“What is this?” (Exodus 13:14)

And you shall say to him:

“By a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” (Exodus 13:14)

As for the child who does not know how to ask, you should prompt him, as it is said: And you shall tell your son on that day, saying: “It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.” (Exodus 13:8)

## Pluralist Educational Approach of the Rabbis

### a. Human Variety: God's Magic Coin Trick

"God created all humanity from one human being to teach us God's greatness. A human ruler mints all the coins in the same image [with the image of the sovereign imprinted on them identically as a sign of the sovereign's power]. However the Sovereign of Sovereigns, God created each human being in the image of the first human being no one is identical with any other." (Mishna Sanhedrin Chapter 4: 5)

### b. Speaking To Each Person: A Multivocal Torah

“All the people saw the voices” (Exodus 20:15) – (שמות כ, יד)

How many voices were there? ...The Torah was meant to be heard in voices according to the strength of each human listener as it says in Psalms ‘*The voice of God is in the power*’ – the power of each human being.”

In the same way God appeared to each generation in a different way and the manna tasted differently to each age bracket.

(Mechilta dRabbi Yishmael - see also Shemot Rabbah 29,1 and Pesikta Drabbati on Exodus 20:15)

### c. The Most Versatile Food: Manna from Heaven

"When the manna fell for Israel, each and everyone tasted it according to his/her capacity: the children according to their capacity, the youths according to their capacity, and the elderly according to their capacity. For the children, it tasted like the mother's milk from the breast as its says: *its taste was like the breast, like rich oil*; וְהָיָה טַעְמוֹ כְּטַעַם לֶשֶׁד הַשָּׁמֶן (Numbers 11:8)

for the youths according to their capacity, as it says *my bread that I gave you with oil and honey I fed you*; וְלַחֲמִי אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לָךְ סֶלֶת וְשֶׁמֶן וְדִבֵּשׁ הָאֶבֶלֶתִּיךְ (Ezekiel 15:19)

and for the elderly according to their capacity, as it says *its taste was like honeycombs* וְטַעְמוֹ כְּצַפִּיחֵת (Exodus 16:31) (Midrash Psikta dRav Kahana, "On the Third Month")

## IV. Thumbnail History of Three GREAT AMERICAN SEDERS and beyond

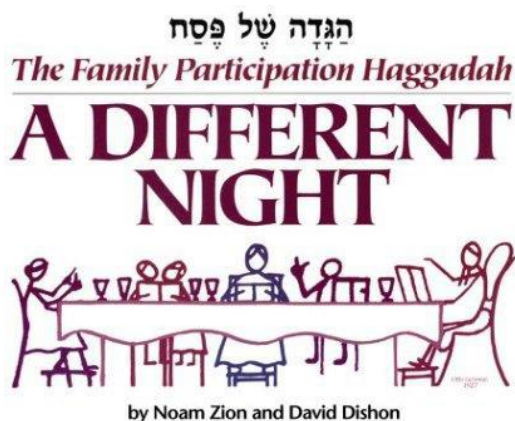
A. Zayde Seder (for Ashkenazi immigrants)

B. Maxwell House Seder (since the 1923) and Denominational Haggadaot



C. 1970s Jewish Catalogue “Do It Yourself” Seder and Partisan Political Haggadot - The Freedom Seder (1969); Women's Haggadot

D. *A Different Night*: A Pluralist Seder - Customize Your Seder, Learn Something New and Experiment , Pick and Choose, and Maximize Participation and Appropriate Variation within your Tradition



The Haggadah was meant to facilitate a lively dialogue between parent and child, leader and participant. Unfortunately, the Pesach Seder becomes, too often, a rote reading — a service to “zoom through” — rather than a drama in which people play creative roles. Don’t let the printed word paralyze the imagination. Talk. Discuss the Exodus. You are free. This Haggadah invites you to shape your own Seder.

— Rabbi David Hartman.