



Around the Shabbat Table

Shabbat Metzora / Shabbat Hagadol 5763 March 2003

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Introduction

This Shabbat, in the week preceding Pesach, is also called *Shabbat Ha-gadol*, the Great Shabbat. On the Shabbat before Pesach, it became customary for the rabbi of a community to deliver a *d'var Torah* with instructions for Pesach preparations. As a result, this Shabbat took on a special characteristic. In addition, some communities even have the custom of reading parts of the *Hagaddah* on the afternoon of this Shabbat.

Pesach is, of course, the holiday in which we celebrate our people's freedom. At this particular time in America's history, the conflict in Iraq reminds us of how valuable freedom is. Regardless of how we felt about America's decision to go to war, we can all agree that America's actions in both Afghanistan and Iraq were directed to giving people greater freedom. May we see the day in which all peoples will live in peace and freedom.

Questions for Your Family's Discussion

When your family sits down together this Shabbat, or at your *Seder*, here are some questions for you to wrestle with:

1. In the Biblical story of the Exodus, there was a 40-year transition between the time that the Israelites were freed from captivity until they were ready to enter the Land of Israel, taking their places as free people with a nation of their own. Why couldn't they immediately assume the roles of free people, ready to govern themselves and conduct their own affairs? In today's world, do people similarly need transitional periods between the time of their liberation and the point at which they take responsibility for their future as a nation? Are there lessons from this for the current situation in Iraq?

2. Many peoples have used the story of the Israelites' Exodus as a model for how their cultures and societies have achieved liberation from freedom and oppression. Do you think it diminishes or enhances the Exodus from Egypt when it is used in such a way? Why?
3. The traditional Seder (and many contemporary ones) does not mention Moses, and contain little of the Biblical text of the Exodus from Egypt. Instead, it focuses largely on how rabbis and others understand and interpret the Biblical story. Why do you think this is so? Do we continue to understand and interpret the Exodus story? How so?



A Text to Wrestle With

According to the Hagaddah,

The Torah speaks of four children: One is wise, one is wicked (or, according to some translations, contrary), one is simple and one does not know how to ask.

The wise one, what does s/he say? "What are the testimonies, the statutes and the laws which the Lord, our God, has commanded you?" You shall instruct him in the laws of Passover, [up to] `one is not to eat any dessert after the Passover-lamb.'

The wicked one, what does s/he say? "What is this service to you?!" He says `to you,' but not to him! He excludes himself from the community, thus denying a fundamental truth. You, therefore, blunt his teeth and say to him: "It is because of this that the Lord did for *me* when I left Egypt"; `for *me*' - not for *him*! If he had been there, he would not have been redeemed!"

The simple one, what does s/he say? "What is this?" Thus you shall say to him: "With a strong hand the Lord took us out of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

For the one who does not know how to ask, you must initiate him, as it is written: "You shall tell your child on that day, `It is because of what the Lord did for me when I left Egypt.'"

1. It is unclear what these four children represent. Some suggest that they are four different personality types. Others suggest that within each of us are elements of each of the four. Some writers have proposed that they represent stages in a person's life. What do you think?
2. Why do the editors of the Hagaddah go to this length to speak about different types of people who might be in our families? Are they teaching us something about diversity? Why is each "child" entitled to receive an answer that is unique to him/her?
3. At different points in recent years, some writers have added a "fifth child" to this text. For example, some count as a "fifth child" those children who perished in the Holocaust, unable to again be part of a Seder with their families and communities. During the struggle for freedom for Jews in the former Soviet Union, many considered those Jews, who were denied freedom to practice Judaism, as "fifth children." Some speak today of the fifth child representing those individuals who are so far removed from Jewish life that they do not participate in a Seder. What do you think about the idea of a "fifth child?" Can you think of others who might fit this category of Jews who, either by choice, or through tragedy, have not found a place at our Seder table?



Towards an Action Agenda

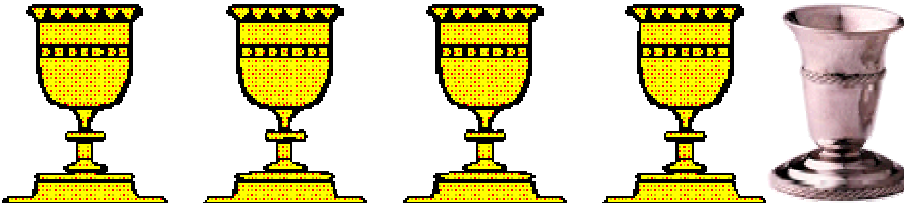
Learn about how UJA-Federation and other organizations funded through its campaign help to provide Pesach needs in places like Argentina and the former Soviet Union:

http://www.ujafedny.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=6149&JServSessionIdr010=t1ky9lfes3.app10a&news_iv_ctrl=1442

Parts of the Passover Seder were written 2,000 years ago in Babylonia, an ancient country located in the area now called Iraq. This year, Jewish men and women stationed with the U.S. armed forces in Iraq will celebrate Pesach. Find out how at:

http://www.ujc.org/content_display.html?ArticleID=75376

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Sameach!



Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: www.bjeny.org

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