

B"H
TOWARD A MEANINGFUL SEDER

A PRACTICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL GUIDE TO THE PASSOVER EXPERIENCE

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*Making Passover Relevant
and Bringing the Seder Alive*





PASSOVER

A BLUEPRINT FOR FREEDOM

The greatest challenge facing Passover today
is **experiencing its relevance**.

The only way that it will be fully embraced is if it's seen as indispensable –
as a resonating experience that addresses our personal lives
with profound relevance.

And the only way to understand Passover's relevance is to probe into its soul.
Like everything in life – if you only look at its surface you
will not appreciate its true personality.

The main priority of this guide is to infuse the Seder experience with a dynamic,
interactive, dimension – and turn it into a **personal experience**, rather than
just another event we sit through.

Just imagine experiencing the Seder in this personal way –
how much more powerfully would our families and our communities
experience the evening?

Some food for thought as we prepare to celebrate a
“night that is different than all other nights.”...

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WHAT IS PASSOVER

WHAT IS PASSOVER?

The Hebrew word for Egypt, "Mitzrayim," is rooted in the word "Meitzar," which means boundaries, limits, restrictions. Thus Egypt represents all forms of constraints and confinements: psychological, emotional and spiritual. Any trap, any enemy from within or from without that inhibits our free expression is a form of mitzrayim.

Yetzias Mitzrayim: Freedom from Constraints.

The Exodus from Egypt is the single most important element in life: The ability to "pass over" and free ourselves from our confines and traps and give us each the power to achieve personal and collective freedom from all our constraints, whether it is an unhealthy relationship, a state of emotional despair, or anything that is blocking us from achieving our goals.

Transcendence:

Passover, like all Jewish tradition, has a body and a soul. The body consists of the rituals, laws and structure of tradition. The soul is its inner meaning and significance. The body of Passover is commemorating the Exodus from bondage in a land called Egypt. The soul of the holiday is freedom: The entire objective of the Passover Seder is to achieve transcendence. The exodus from Egypt was not just a technical matter, about a nation leaving a country that enslaved it. Exodus from *mitzrayim* is freedom from bondage to our fears, inhibitions and addictions. We are therefore instructed to always "envision as if we just left Egypt."

The ultimate secret to real emancipation lies in our sublimation, humility, empathy and self-respect – all made possible when we recognize that we are not

WHAT IS PASSOVER CONT'D

self-made creatures, but part of a higher reality, as eloquently stated in the first and foundation of the Ten Commandments: I am your G-d Who freed you from Miztrayim.

On the first night of Passover – this year Friday, April 22 – a new energy enters the world, the energy of freedom and transcendence. How do we tap into this energy? How do we access this power that allows us to transcend and eliminate our personal and global *miztrayims* freeing ourselves from their shackles?

The Passover Seder is the answer.

WHAT IS THE SEDER

1. The Seder is a profound mosaic that provides us with the keys to open the doors of freedom on Passover Eve.

2. The actual name "Passover Seder" is an oxymoron: The word Pesach (Pass-over) means to jump, to pass over the normal order, whereas Seder means order and organization! The Seder is actually a systematic order that allows us to transcend order, a structure that allows us to transcend structure. Like music: By playing the defined structure of the musical scale we have the power to create music that defies all structures, and to play an infinite number of combinations and songs.

3. One of the objectives of the Seder is to connect us to our inner child. That is why there is so much emphasis on children during the Seder. Just as the innocence of a young child has not been tarnished by the harsh responsibilities and emotional entanglements of adult life, so too each and every one of us has an inner child which has not been negatively affected by the coarseness of the physical world. The steps of the Seder help to connect us to this unblemished innocence that is at the core of every person.

4. The entire Seder is a journey, providing us with tools to achieve personal transcendence; to experience emotional and spiritual freedom. As such, the Seder is actually a snapshot of your life; a microcosm of your psyche; a reflection of your soul.

WHAT IS THE SEDER CONT'D

Pre-Seder Exercise

Write down **three inhibitions** (chometz; mitzrayim) you would like to rid yourself of.
Make sure that these are three internal impediments or fears, not people or situations outside of yourself (like an intolerable parent or an obnoxious boss).

Write down **four aspirations and dreams** you would like to achieve.
Four areas (like the four cups of wine) in which you wish to celebrate freedom. Here too focus not on the means (like making a lot of money) but on the ends.

Write down **three areas** in which you are especially egotistic, and three (like the three matzot) in which you have a special dose of humility.

As you go through the Seder, drinking the cups of wine, asking the questions, and eating the matzo and maror, think about these lists.

PASSOVER INSIGHT

A Talmudic Mind

It was several days before Passover, and the Rabbi's waiting room was full of people with questions about the observances of the upcoming festival.

Hesitantly, a young girl entered the Rabbi's study. "My mother sent me to ask," she said, "whether it is permitted to use milk instead of wine for the Four Cups at the seder."

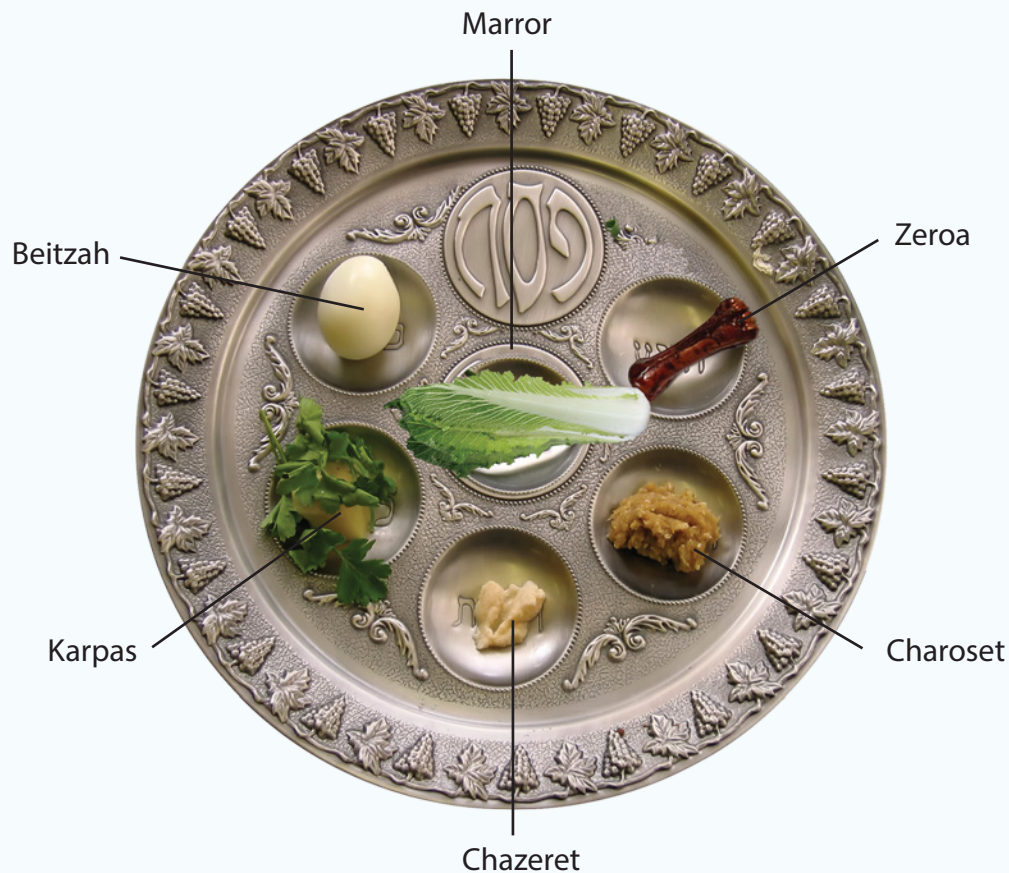
"Just a moment," said the Rabbi, and slipped out of the room. In the kitchen, he filled a basket with a large bottle of wine, two chickens and a generous cut of meat. He covered the basket with a cloth, returned to the waiting child, and said to her: "Tell your mother that hers is a most difficult question, and I do not know if I will succeed in resolving it before the seder night. So in the meantime, I am sending her some wine to use instead of the milk."

Later, when the Rabbi's wife wondered about the depleted seder supplies, the Rabbi explained: "A poor woman sent to ask if she could use milk for the Four Cups; obviously, then, she could afford neither wine nor meat for her seder table."

THE SEDER PLATE

A MICROCOSM OF OUR LIVES

The first thing we do Passover night, before the actual Seder begins, is construct the Seder Plate (*ke'ara*). The Plate consists of ten items.



Thus, the final Seder Plate is comprised of three matzot, lying one on the other, which cradle the six food items that form two triangles.



WHAT IS THE SEDER PLATE

1. On the “body” level: The matzot are the centerpiece of Passover, symbolizing the unleavened “food of humility” that the Jewish people ate as they escaped Egypt. The shank bone symbolizes the Passover lamb offering in the time of the Temple, which was roasted and eaten as part of the Seder night meal.

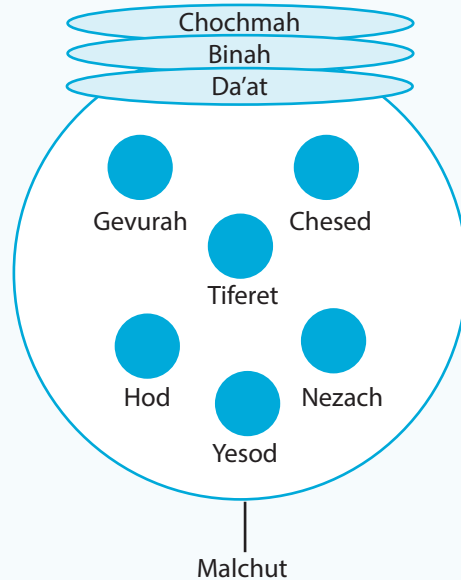
The hard-boiled egg represents the festival offering (*Chagigah*) in the Temple, which was also roasted and eaten on the Seder night. The maror commemorates the bitterness and harshness of the slavery which the Jews endured in Ancient Egypt. The pasty *charoset* represents the mortar used by the Jewish slaves to build the Egyptian cities. Finally the letters of the word Karpas, when reversed (*samech perach*), allude to the sixty myriads of Jews subjected to harsh labor.

2. On the “soul” level: The Arizal teaches us that the ten elements of the Seder Plate reflect the structure of human consciousness, which is comprised of ten dimensions – the ten sefirot, the “spiritual DNA” of all existence, and of man, who is a “universe in microcosm.” Three intellectual faculties and seven emotional ones.

3. The Seder Plate is the quintessential you. How you were meant to be and how you would be at your best. When you assemble the Seder Plate you should actually be (re)constructing your personality, your soul and your psyche, and reconfiguring it to its ideal, healthiest state.

4. The Rebbe Rashab, assembling his Seder Plate, once put it this way: “[We have] saddled the wagon,” meaning that the Seder (Plate) is like a wagon which takes you on a journey to your desired destination. He then went on to explain the power of the material world (the food items on the Seder Plate), which, when harnessed, has the ability to become a “vehicle” that carries you to a spiritual destination far greater than the place that the soul on its own can reach.

THE SOUL OF THE SEDER PLATE



CHOCHMA, BINAH, DAAT

Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge. Harmony in life – and any form of transcendence – requires a proper alignment between mind and heart. The three matzot represent the three intellectual faculties, the three steps of the cognitive process: Conception, comprehension and application, or wisdom, understanding and knowledge. First comes Chochma, the spark of an idea, then the idea is developed through Binah, and finally it comes to a resonating conclusion through Daat.

Most human mistakes originate from impulsive and subjective emotions that get the better of us. The mind at its best is meant to be the reflective force that objectively directs the subjective emotional impulses, like a captain directing a ship.

When the intellect is infused with humility (matzot) it becomes an objective “captain” of the ship of emotions, reflecting and ensuring that the emotions not be manipulated and that they be channeled in healthy directions.

THE SOUL OF THE SEDER PLATE CONT'D

As the curved matzot carry the six items, the humble intellect serves like a container that cradles and protects the six emotions. We too must ensure that our minds – infused with humility – control our emotions, passions and desires. When we allow the humility of the matzot to permeate our emotions, each of these emotions will function optimally, with the right balance between them all.

CHESED: LOVE

The outstretched arm of the zeroa (which actually means arm, from the verse “outstretched arm”) expresses the giving nature of love. Love is the root and single most important of all emotions – the ability to give, reach out and care for others.

GEVURAH: DISCIPLINE

The hard-boiled egg (which also reminds us of the Temple’s destruction) symbolizes discipline, which is necessary to temper and balance the transmission of love. Unchecked love can hurt the person you love, just like a flood can destroy fields. For love to be effective it needs to be measured.

TIFERET: EMPATHY

The bitter herbs of maror elicit empathy. Eating the bitter herbs is not about us feeling the bitterness of bondage (what would be the point? And can we actually compare the discomfort of eating bitter herbs to the trauma of slavery and genocide?). It’s about the empathy that it elicits – the Divine empathy and the compassion that we must feel for each other.

Even in our present time of blessed prosperity, we do not need to have actual bondage to feel sadness; today our sadness is about not feeling close to the Divine. In addition, our challenge today is complacency: never to take our freedoms for granted and remember that as long as we live in any form of constraint, we must cry out and that cry will evoke channels of empathy.

THE SOUL OF THE SEDER PLATE CONT'D

NETZACH: ENDURANCE

The pasty *charoset* reminds us of the clay and mortar used by the Jewish slaves to make the bricks and build the cities. Mortar (like cement) is known for its strength and endurance. Yet, the primary result of the hard work was that it taught the Jews to be strong and enduring in their faith. And the “more they were oppressed the more they proliferated.” That is why we use for *charoset* a mix of ground apples, pears, nuts and wine – all symbols of Jewish strength and virtue – to teach us the lesson of endurance, how to withstand and grow through every challenge.

HOD: HUMILITY

The vegetable (*karpas*), which grows low, reminds us of the humility required in life, and especially the yielding necessary to balance the driving force of endurance.

YESOD: BONDING

The Chazeret eaten in the sandwich represents the emotion of bonding – uniting with those we love and with G-d. It's not enough to experience each of the emotions independently, but also bond them together like in one “sandwich.” Bonding, like empathy, is a center force that integrates the right and the left. And like empathy which is elicited through the bitter cry (of the bitter herbs), bonding is also an experience that requires a cry from the depths of the soul, a deep feeling of need that fuels bonding.

MALCHUT: DIGNITY

Finally – the Seder Plate itself, is the dignity and sovereignty of *malchut*, which encompasses all the ten faculties. Malchut is selflessness. Like the moon it has no light of its own. But precisely due to its selflessness it reflects and contains all the light of the previous nine levels. The same is with the Plate: Without the

THE SOUL OF THE SEDER PLATE CONT'D

three *matzot* and six items the Plate is empty on its own. But in its “emptiness” it becomes the tray that encompasses all the others, and the source of dignity. Dignity also has no substance of its own. True dignity and self-confidence comes from a sense that you were created in the Divine Image, and being a channel of something greater than yourself gives you the ultimate dignity.

Exercise

The Seder Plate gives us the opportunity to review, throughout the 15 steps of the Seder night, each of these emotions and assess where we stand – in our love, discipline, empathy, endurance, humility, bonding and selflessness.

Even if you cannot focus on all these dimensions (which can be quite a task), choose one or two that you relate to or you feel needs work.

As the Seder proceeds concentrate on these characteristics and look for ways to repair or improve your attitudes.

THE STEPS OF THE SEDER

15 STEPS TO FREEDOM*

The fifteen Seder steps are fifteen keys which each of us can use to open up doors that help free us of our own limits and confinements, fifteen steps that we can climb to reach a greater place.

1. KADESH – RECITING KIDDUSH

We start the Seder with *Kadesh*, making a blessing over a cup of wine. *Kadesh* (from the word *kedushah*) means to sanctify – we sanctify G-d's name and the wine by blessing it. *Kadesh* also means 'to separate,' referring to the separation between good and bad, holy and profane. The first step of the Seder process (and of every process) is to create a new space so that the journey toward freedom can begin. We separate ourselves from the mundane past that enslaves us and enter the sacred spiritual experience of the Seder which frees us.

On a cosmic level *Kadesh* is the counterpart of *chochmah* (wisdom), the first of the ten sefirot – the beginning of a new order, the first step in a process.

2. U'RCHATZ – WASHING THE HANDS

The second step is *U'rchatz*: washing your hands before dipping a vegetable (*Karpas*) in saltwater. Following the separation between the mundane and the sacred, we wash and submerge our hands in water, cleansing our 'tools' in preparation for the following 13 steps. Every new process always requires a cleansing.

U'rchatz is the only one of the 15 steps to have a connecting letter *vav*, which adjoins *Kadesh* to *U'rchatz*. This is because they are twins: *Kadesh* is *chochmah* and *u'rchatz* is *binah* (understanding), the "two friends that never separate." *Kadesh* is the commencement (*chochmah*), a mental separation from the past, *U'rchatz* is the development (*binah*) and tangible implementation of that separation. Together they help us create the transition from the confinement (*mitzrayim*) of the mundane to spiritual freedom.

THE STEPS OF THE SEDER CONT'D

3. KARPAS – EATING A VEGETABLE DIPPED IN SALT WATER

The third step, *Karpas* consists of dipping a piece of onion or potato in salt water. This is done to provoke the children to ask: why? The Seder begins by stimulating the child to ask questions because a critical component of freedom is the encouragement and empowerment to ask questions. (More on this – see *Maggid*).

Why Karpas? The earthy vegetable (which grows from the ground) represents the body, which comes from the dust of the earth, and the salt water represents the salty tears shed in times of pain (the tears of those enslaved in Egypt then and now). We must take our physical body, made of earth, and dip it in salty tears. Salt is a cleanser, and tears are an expression of the soul. We cleanse our bodies with our soul's tears.

After *Kaddish* and *U'rchatz* move us into the Seder "space," *Karpas* teaches us the secret that freedom is only possible by freeing ourselves from the illusion that binds and enslaves us to the material world. Our physical needs, which are vital for our survival and sustenance, consume us to the point that we can often feel completely dependent on them. The very nature of the material world is a narcissistic one, that cries out "I exist and nothing else." As long as we are deluded by this perception, we can never be free. Freedom comes when we realize that the material world is like a "vegetable" that needs to be dipped in spiritual "salt water." *Karpas* reminds us that the body is merely a means, not an end in itself. Like the vegetable being dipped in salt water, the body's purpose is to transcend the world that it lives in, by connecting itself to the soul, and thus elevating and freeing both the body and the soul.

4. YACHATZ – BREAKING THE MIDDLE MATZAH

But even after we have this awareness, how do we actually release ourselves from the tight grip of materialism's tentacles?

THE STEPS OF THE SEDER CONT'D

The answer is: *Yachatz*. We break the middle of the three matzot of the Seder plate. Matzah symbolizes *bittul*, suspending oneself for a higher purpose. Matzah is made of water and flour; water represents the soul and the Torah, and flour represents the body. The antithesis of Matzah is chometz (leavened bread). Chometz is bread that is allowed to rise. This represents the inflated ego, which is mostly "air." Matzah on the other hand is the bare minimum of flour and water without any inflated air.

The subjective ego is the biggest trap that biases and blinds us from seeing a broader perspective. Matzah empowers us with *bittul*, the ability to transcend your own viewpoint and allow in a higher truth.

Breaking the matzah (*yachatz*) emphasizes this *bittul* even further. Breaking the matzah is breaking the self. Even the self as represented by matzah is broken to ensure that even the selflessness does not become another expression of self.

5. MAGGID – RECITING THE HAGGADAH

After the first four preliminary steps are in place, we now have earned the right to actually tell (*Maggid*) and relive the story of Exodus. *Maggid* includes the largest part of the Haggadah.

Telling the story – *Maggid* – begins with the child (both inner and outer) asking the Four Questions. As mentioned above, the first and perhaps greatest freedom of all is the freedom to ask questions. To probe, explore and challenge. Not only are we free to ask, we must ask. Healthy questions are an expression of the search and the striving for something higher, reaching for a place that is beyond us. If you are complacent and not curious, you remain stuck in your own space. Questions allow us the opportunity to truly grow.

THE STEPS OF THE SEDER CONT'D

After the child asks the Four Questions, we begin the answer by telling the story of Exodus. The story begins with the bitter Egyptian exile and ends with the liberation. *Maggid* is not just telling a story-tale of past events; it is reliving and re-experiencing them, recognizing how they play themselves out in our lives today.

Maggid – and indeed the entire Haggadah (which is rooted in the word *maggid*) – **is the story of our lives**, the story of all harsh and oppressive forces in our personal “*mitzrayims*,” and our liberation from them.

The first and most critical element in achieving redemption is awareness that we are in “prison”. As long as we convince ourselves that our constraints are “normal” and “healthy” we cannot even begin freeing ourselves. So, we tell the story. Our story. By relating and recreating the story we recognize the limits of our personal struggles and challenges. And once we define the parameters of our own internal “exile,” then, and only then, can we start the process of redemption.

6. RACHTZAH – WASHING THE HANDS

After we recite the story (*maggid*), we reach a new sublime level. And just as we washed our hands at the beginning of the Seder process (*u'rchatz*), we wash our hands again at this new stage. Once we are elevated to a higher level of holiness through the first five steps (*kadesh* through *maggid*), we need to submerge our hands once again in water, preparing ourselves for the next stage of spiritual growth and freedom.

What does this new stage consist of? The first five steps help put us into a psychological frame of mind of a free person, and to give us a taste of that freedom. Actual freedom is only possible when our minds and hearts are open to being free,

THE STEPS OF THE SEDER CONT'D

when we have the hope and sense that there is more than our previous limited state. Once we reach that point psychologically and we have had a taste of it, we are then ready to begin manifesting and implementing this new-found freedom in our physical and material lives, and not just a taste of it but in a way that we can maintain it. Because after all, we live in a material world, and for freedom to be complete in this world it needs to be not just psychological but expressed in a real and tangible way, where the material world no longer holds us hostage. On the contrary, the material is transformed and even becomes a vehicle for spirituality.

7. MOTZI – RECITING THE BLESSING HAMOTZI

After washing our hands, we begin the process of transformation with *Motzi*: the first blessing on the matzah, *HaMotzi lechem min ha'aretz*, blessing G-d, 'who brings forth bread from the earth.' This first blessing emphasizes the 'earthiness' (the body) of Matzah (the primary ingredient of matzah is flour – which comes from grain of the earth – mixed with water). But unlike *karpas*, where the focus is on the negativity of materialism, matzah focuses on the positive side of materialism; on its great potential which is released when we reveal the Divine spark within it. "It is not on bread alone that man lives, but on the word of G-d," the Divine spark within the bread. Indeed, the Kabbalah teaches us that the highest Divine sparks fall in the lowest places. Earth – symbol of all materialism – contains the greatest spiritual energy. But it remains locked and trapped in *mitzrayim*, until we begin to release it.

Lechem (bread) also means "to battle". A meal is like a war between the material and the spiritual sparks that lie hidden within the food, between our temptation to indulge and our ability to transcend and elevate the material meal by revealing

THE STEPS OF THE SEDER CONT'D

and releasing these sparks. And when we release them, *lechem* turns into *cholom* (the same letters as lechem rearranged), the power to dream and reach a greater place.

The first step of releasing and freeing these sparks is through making the blessing *HaMotzi* on the matzah.

8. MATZAH – RECITING THE BLESSING ON THE MATZAH AND EATING IT

The next step is the second blessing, the special additional blessing which is unique to matzah, blessing G-d for “sanctifying us with Your mitzvot and connecting (commanded) us through the eating of matzah”. This blessing emphasizes not the “earthiness” of matzah, but its spirit – the power of bittul and selflessness (see step 4, *yachatz*).

Then we eat the matzah. We ingest it and make it part of our body, sustaining our body and soul. You assume what you consume. By eating and consuming matzah – the food of *bittul* – we assume its qualities. As the Rebbe MaHaRash writes, eating matzah is like “eating G-dliness”. On the first night of Passover matzah is called the “bread of faith.” On the second night it is called “bread of healing.”

Matzah is the first real food we eat Passover. And being that Passover is the beginning of a new year, matzah – the food of bittul and faith – is the first food that initiates us into a new year of meals, infusing us with the power to elevate all the food we will consume to its higher Divine purpose. This in turn help us achieve true freedom in our lives, integrating the material and the spiritual, body and soul.

THE STEPS OF THE SEDER CONT'D

9. MAROR – EATING THE BITTER HERBS

However, materialism – including our food – still holds us in a powerful stranglehold. Therefore, following the matzah we eat the bitter maror, which reminds us that we are still enslaved in a world of selfishness, and the resulting bitterness.

Eating *maror* and feeling its stinging effect projects and transfers the bitterness of life into our tangible experience. It demonstrates our awareness of it, freeing us from the need to have to experience any more serious form of bitterness in our lives. Additionally, the bitter *maror* teaches us the process of growth. An olive does not produce oil until it is pressed. So too, *maror* hardens our mettle – the setbacks and pain in life strengthen us. Like steel that is hardened in fire and heat.

The maror is dipped into *charoses* (a sweet conglomeration of ground apples, pears, nuts and wine), sweetening it a bit (but not in a way that eliminates its bitterness). This demonstrates that even when we need to feel bitterness, its purpose and objective is not bitter, but to reach a greater freedom. As it was in Egypt – “*The more they were oppressed, the more they proliferated and grew.*” And today, 3314 years later, millions of their descendants sit around the Seder table all over the world celebrating freedom.

10. KORECH – EATING A SANDWICH OF MATZAH AND MAROR

We now unite both the matzah and *maror* experience all in one sandwich. Combining both the matzah’s earthiness and bittul and the *maror*’s bitterness (dipped in sweet *charoses*).

There is a time to sing and a time to cry. A time to celebrate and a time to feel the harshness of life. A time for the sweet and a time for the bitter. But then we must learn to join them both into one seamless experience called life – the mission for which we

THE STEPS OF THE SEDER CONT'D

are sent here by G-d. And then we have freedom. Not through denial of the difficult and bitter, not through escape into the spiritual, not merely through either the material or the sublime, but through integrating them into one unit.

11. SHULCHAN ORECH – LIT. “SET TABLE” – EATING THE FESTIVE MEAL

And now, finally, we are ready... to eat.

After the first 10 steps (corresponding to the ten sefirot) of training to integrate spiritual freedom into our material lives, we are now ready for the first real test: Eating an entire material in an entirely new way, one permeated with a sense of Higher presence and G-dliness.

Let's see how we do.

Why is the meal called “Shulchan Orech (set table)”? Because a meal is not just a meal. It is not merely an exercise in self-sustenance or self-indulgence. It is a complete experience – like a set table, that has everything set and ready for all the participants to sit down and partake in the meal. When we feed ourselves and others – both physically and spiritually, when we educate and offer services to other – we must always do so in a manner that prepares and anticipates everything in advance, everything is ready and prepared like a shulchan orech, a set table.

When we recognize that we have been blessed and we have received so much, including the gift of the Passover Seder table, we must in turn share the gifts with others. As Moses was told, that he must present the teachings to the people like a “set table”, so too do we have the responsibility to set the table for others who may not have the opportunity (for whatever reason). We must offer them a prepared meal – both physically and spiritually, sharing and teaching all that we know, and setting the table by applying ourselves to provide all the necessary elements.

THE STEPS OF THE SEDER CONT'D

12. TZAFON – EATING THE AFIKOMAN

Following the meal we eat the afikoman (the larger half of the middle matzah that we broke and then hid away in *Yachatz*). *Tzafon* means “hidden”. It also means “north”, where it’s cold and seemingly void of spirituality.

After we have eaten a complete meal – the first meal of Passover and of the entire year – and we have eaten it as free men, women and children, a material meal eaten in a spiritual and refined way, we now have the power to reveal that which is hidden and unconscious – *tzafon* – within ourselves and those around us.

Furthermore, we have the power to conquer not just the revealed dimensions of materialism as adversary, but also its hidden dimensions. And we can reveal the enormous spiritual energy that lies hidden in the “north”, in the places that seem so spiritually barren.

As discussed earlier, that the highest sparks are to be found in the darkest and coldest places.

The Afikoman is eaten as a dessert; not for sustenance but for pleasure. The matzah eaten earlier is *bittul* on the conscious level (for sustenance). The Afikoman matzah is *bittul* on the unconscious (hidden) level. Another point: The earlier matzah helps acclimate us to the *bittul* experience, as we learn to tame the ego and narcissism of materialism. Once we have reached *bittul*, we then can integrate it into the pleasure of our lives, where even our pleasures become permeated with higher purpose, with G-dliness.

Complete freedom is achieved only when we have been freed not just on the conscious levels but also the unconscious and hidden ones.

THE STEPS OF THE SEDER CONT'D

13. BEIRACH – RECITING GRACE

We conclude the meal with reciting grace. The meal is thus punctuated by the two spiritual poles – the first ten steps prior to the meal, including the washing of the hands and the blessings made on the matzah, and the grace said after the meal. This gives us the power to ensure that the meal – which is symbolic of all our material experiences – will yield the spiritual energy that lies within its Divine sparks. *Beirach* (to bless) means “to draw down” – to draw down into this physical world spirituality and G-dliness.

14. HALLEL – RECITING PSALMS OF PRAISE

Hallel also means “to shine”, from the expression “*behilo nero* – when His candle shone forth”. *Hallel* is recited on those occasions when G-d's truth shines forth into our material world, revealing and manifesting that G-dliness is the ultimate reality and that the material is naught.

After we have done everything in our power to achieve freedom in the first 13 steps of the Seder, we now say *Hallel* and through these words of praise we place ourselves in G-d's hands. We surrender to G-d to complement whatever we cannot do on our own and to conclude the process of reaching complete freedom.

15. NIRTZAH – G-D'S PROMISE TO ACCEPT OUR SERVICE

Unlike the previous 14 steps, this last and final step does not manifest itself in any prayer or action. We have reached a point that transcends words and praise. After we have completed our Seder service, we are accepted favorably – *nirtzah* - by G-d.



Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the Alter Rebbe, did not include at the conclusion of the Haggadah the passage “the order of Pesach is concluded,” because the Passover Seder never ends. Instead, it continues throughout the year. The illumination of every festival radiates every day; but Pesach extends continuously. Every day we must leave mitzrayim, transcend out previous limitations and reach higher levels of holiness.

THE STEPS OF THE SEDER CONT'D

Exercise

The fifteen steps of the Seder each reflect a "personality type" which imparts one piece of the Passover transcendence story. Together, all fifteen parts weave a beautiful tapestry, leading us to personal freedom and universal emancipation.

Before the Seder begins, each attendee should choose one of the "personality types" listed below corresponding to the fifteen Seder steps. When your respective stage in the Seder comes around, communicate to the group the "personality type" you have chosen to portray. Be creative and find ways to express your "personality" – role-play, tell a story, or act out the part. Engage the group and invite them to comment – and together, personalize the fifteen steps and bring the Seder alive.

- Kadesh: The Sanctifier – Distinguishes between the holy and the mundane.*
- U'rchatz: The Cleaner – Cleanses the mind, body and heart of clutter and distractions in life.*
- Karpas: The Dipper – Dips and sublimates the material (vegetable) in the saltwater/tears that come from remembering a more spiritual state.*
- Yachatz: The Breaker – Breaks his subjective self to see a broader perspective.*
- Maggid: The Storyteller – Relates the story of life, in dialogue form.*
- Rachtzah: The Washer – Submerges the mind, body and soul, as a prelude to the next steps.*
- Motzi: The Earthy One – Blesses and recognizes that even things earthy (bread) are heavenly.*
- Matzah: The Selfless One – Does not allow the ego (dough) to rise and always remains selfless.*
- Maror: The Empathizer – Feels another's bitterness and pain.*
- Korech: The Binder – Sandwiches selflessness and empathy into one experience called life.*
- Shulchan*
- Orech: The Implementer – Sets the table and ensures that that we have all the tools to eat the "meal" of life.*
- Tzafon: The Knower of Secrets – Reveals that which is hidden – the unconscious.*
- Beirach: The Gracious One – Blesses and acknowledges life's gifts.*
- Hallel: The Praiser – Sings praise and places complete trust in G-d's hands.*
- Nirtzah: The Acceptor – not action – but complete surrender to being accepted and received by G-d.*

As such we are ready for the final and complete freedom and redemption.

NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM!

PASSOVER INSIGHT

Dealing With Adversity

Here are four different approaches in dealing with adversity:

- 1. Escapists**
- 2. Conformists**
- 3. Fighters**
- 4. Believers**

Which type are you?

Would you believe that all four options are limited? The first time in history when a people were “stuck between a rock and a hard place” was when the Jewish people stood before the Reed Sea with the Egyptians pursuing them close behind. What to do? The people were divided into four groups:

Some said: “Let’s jump into the sea; it’s simply not worth the effort.”

Others argued with resignation: “We should return to Egypt where we lived for so many years. True, we were enslaved, but anything is better than this stuck place where we will either be killed by the Egyptians or drown in the sea. And besides, a known evil is better than an unknown one. The challenges of life are just too overwhelming. Conformity, surrender, assimilation is the only realistic option.”

Yet another group felt: “Let us go to war with the Egyptians.”

And finally the “religionists”: stated: “Let us pray to God” All were wrong. Not only conformity and escapism, but also battle and prayer are not complete options. Was life given to us so that we spend most of our time at war? And is prayer enough when faced with challenge? We are blessed with resources to deal with every challenge. So coupled with prayer we must do our utmost to rise to the occasion.

What was the correct approach: “Move forward.”

And when they did, the sea parted before them.

G-d told them: “I who have given you life, and promised you that you can and will achieve your objectives and reach Sinai and the Promised Land, have also given you all the faculties and resources necessary to fulfill your life’s mission.”

When faced with challenge, with adversity, with the difficulties each of us encounter in life, instead of spending time ruminating about any or all of these four options, instead of being paralyzed by doubt, FORGE AHEAD. Movement is the key to success. Moving forward will bring a breakthrough. How we may not always know. But move – and things will open up.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

SOUL SEARCHING EVALUATION

The entire Haggada is structured in question and answer form: The children begin by asking the four questions, and the adults respond by telling them the story in all its detail. Indeed, the word “Haggada” itself means “to relate,” to tell the story.

Questions and answers are one of the most powerful tools we have to explore and probe, to unearth and discover the true nature of things. Often the right question is even more important than the actual answer. “The wise question” – we are told – “is half the answer.”

So asking the right questions is crucial to accessing the powerful Seder experience and truly having a unique experience on this night, which is “different than all other nights of the year.”

Like buckets that allow us to draw out precious fuel deeply embedded in the ground, good questions help us burrow into our psyches and our traditions and draw out life transforming experiences.

In this spirit, here is a suggestion of some questions to ask yourself before and during the Seder to help you tap into the rich resources of the Seder night.

The four questions asked at the Seder capture the primary ingredients that distinguish Passover night from all other nights of the year.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS CONT'D

WHY FOUR QUESTIONS?

These four questions have both a body and a soul.

THE BODY OF THE QUESTIONS:

"Why is this night different from all other nights?"

- 1** "On all nights we need not dip even once, on this night we do so twice."
- 2** "On all nights we eat chometz (leaven) or matzah, on this night [we eat] only matzah."
- 3** "On all nights we eat any kind of vegetables, on this night maror (bitter herbs)."
- 4** "On all nights we eat either sitting upright or reclining, on this night we all recline."

THE SOUL OF THE QUESTIONS:

These four elements – Dipping, Matzah, Maror, Reclining – represent four fundamental soul searching questions that each of us must ask ourselves.

Dipping is the sublimation of our material lives (symbolized by the vegetable, the "fruit of the earth") to spiritual ends. Like immersion in a *mikveh* (a ritual bath), in which we submerge our bodies in a higher state of being.

Matzo is the "food" of humility.

Maror is empathy.

Reclining is symbolic of comfort and freedom.
Instead of the tightness of sitting upright, we let go and relax.

Thus, the soul of the four questions compels us to ask the following questions:

- 1** Do I see materialism as an end in itself, or "dipped" – as a means to spiritual goals?
- 2** Do I have humility?
- 3** Do I have empathy and compassion?
- 4** Am I comfortable with myself?

THE FOUR QUESTIONS CONT'D

Exercise

Obviously, each of these questions is but a mere headline to a series of more comprehensive questions that evaluate our psyches, and help us recognize what keeps us enslaved and what we need to experience transcendence.

Dipping: Evaluation of the balance between the material and spiritual dimensions of your life

Do I value the importance of "dipping"?

What are my spiritual goals?

How do I use my work or my other physical activities as a stepping-stone to higher objectives?

How do I maintain this "dipping" all year round?

For example: Giving charity daily.

Why is it difficult for me to sublimate my bodily needs and instant gratification?

Matzah: Evaluation of your ego vs. your humility and modesty

Do I understand the importance of humility?

Do I appreciate that it is the single most important element in freeing myself from any fear and emotional resistance?

Are there any areas in my life where I feel more humble?

Why? And what areas need special work to tame my ego?

What is the root of my arrogance? Is it due to my strengths or my weaknesses?

Is my arrogance just a smokescreen for my insecurity?

THE FOUR QUESTIONS CONT'D

Exercise (Cont'd)

Maror: Evaluation of your level of empathy and compassion

How empathic am I to others? To myself?

Does my compassion come with "strings attached, i.e. my own personal gain?

When was the last time that I shed tears for another's predicament?

Do I realize that empathy equals sensitivity – the very essence of being alive: feeling and experiencing the heartbeat of all life? That when I have no compassion to strangers, it will also impact the kindness I show to myself and to close ones?

Reclining: Evaluation of your self esteem

Why am I not always comfortable in my own skin?

Are there times or situations when I reach a deep calm?

When I am sure of myself?

If yes, do I understand what brings that level of tranquility?
And can I access it at will?

Are my friends and associates adding to my tension or to my peace of mind?

Do I put myself in situations that feed my insecurity?

Can I for this one night lean back and recline, knowing that I put my trust in G-d?

The questions go on. These are but a sampling of questions – a catalyst – that each of us can use to enhance our Seder experience. Allow yourself to ask as few or as many questions that help you personalize – really personalize – the Passover Seder.

Remember, even if you cannot answer all these questions or answer then satisfactorily, the mere fact that you allow yourself to enter the arena of your soul and your emotions is in itself the first step of freedom.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS CONT'D

4 STEPS TO FREEDOM**Is it possible to achieve true freedom?**

1. The word freedom captures the essential progress of the modern Western world – the free world. But what does freedom actually mean? And are we actually free? Even when we have no enemies without, aren't we enslaved to our needs and desires, our own fears and inhibitions – our internal, psychological enemies? And what about all the forces and demands imposed upon us by work, material responsibilities, obnoxious bosses and all those that we are dependent upon, the constant inundation of marketers intruding into our psyches – forces of oppression that can debilitate us no less than an opponent wielding a weapon?

2. To truly experience freedom we must associate with it not in superficial terms. When we move closer to internalize and experience freedom in an intimate way, we come to recognize that freedom actually has more than one name, more than one manifestation.

3. All life's problems begin by allowing ourselves to be subjected and enslaved to man-made conventions. When you worship money, power, connections and social status – you have brought upon yourself an imposing "master" that will subjugate your freedom and ultimately annihilate your inner dignity.

4. Ultimate freedom is to not be bound to human devices; to discover your Divine calling and serve it with all your faculties and resources.

THE FOUR CUPS OF WINE

There are actually four different expressions for the word freedom. When G-d tells Moses that He will redeem the Jewish people from their Egyptian bondage, G-d uses four different terms for the word redemption (which correspond to the four cups of wine we drink at the Passover Seder):

***"I will take you out** from the suffering of Egypt; **I will deliver you** from their bondage; **I will redeem you** with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. **I will take you to Myself** as a nation, and I will be to you a G-d..."*

(Exodus 6:6-7).

Practically speaking, these four expressions of freedom reflect four stages of Exodus:

- 1.** First, the end of the long 210 year oppressive bondage – "I will take you out from the suffering of Egypt."
- 2.** The end of all hard labor, which stopped six months before the Jews actually left Egypt – "I will deliver you from their bondage."
- 3.** The actual exodus, physically leaving Egypt and the elimination of the Egyptian enemy – "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments."
- 4.** The Jewish people become a free nation, driven by a higher mission, servant only to G-d – "I will take you to Myself as a nation, and I will be to you a G-d."

THE FOUR CUPS OF WINE CONT'D

Four steps are necessary to be free from any given “trap” in our lives, all with the help from above:

1. “I will take you out from the suffering of Egypt.”

First you must get out of the immediate line of fire. As long as you remain in an abusive situation, in range of a force that is hurting you, you cannot begin the journey toward freedom. This first step away from the immediate cause of your suffering is only a first step, but it is critical: If you don’t “stop the bleeding,” healing cannot begin. This step is often the hardest of them all, because after protracted years of pain you can become resigned and even accustomed to the oppression, to the point that it becomes so much part of your life and your being that it is hard to recognize the “enemy,” or even acknowledge that there is an “enemy” (what we call today: denial, but what was called back then: de (River) Nile), and distinguish friend from foe.

2. “I will deliver you from their bondage.”

After you are taken out of the actual destructive situation, you must be delivered from the hold of the oppressive force. Even after their hard labor ended the Jewish people still remained in Egypt, under the effect of extensive exposure to their depraved culture and centuries of genocide. Thus the need to be delivered and break free from the psychological hold of being a “slave” for so long.

3. “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.”

Finally you get out of “prison,” but the enemy (or a similar one) is still lurking. At this stage you need an “outstretched arm” to embrace you and hold you tight and secure, reassuring you that you will be safe. And “great judgments” that eliminate the enemy, and ensure it does not return. Even after the Exodus, Egypt remained a superpower and indeed, they pursued the Jews. Until they were utterly defeated at the Red Sea.

THE FOUR CUPS OF WINE CONT'D

4. "I will take you to Myself as a nation, and I will be to you a G-d."

The first three phases were all about freeing yourself from the enemy. But you still are not free until you discover who you are. Freedom is not merely the absence of slavery – getting away from the past and escaping the negative. True freedom is a state of being on its own – the ability to be true to yourself, your true self, and live up to your inner calling and spiritual destiny.

Even after the enemy is vanquished you want a life that is not defined by the negative, even by being opposed to the enemy (like anti-anti-Semitism). You want to build your life in a way that stands for something great (not against something), and a life that will never again allow you to be enslaved, exploited or constricted in the first place.

Only then can you call yourself a free man or woman.

THE FIFTH CUP

As usual in Torah thought, after hearing about four stages, there is always a footnote to add: Some commentators explain that at the Seder Table we pour a fifth cup for Elijah the Prophet, corresponding to the fifth expression in this week's Portion: "I shall bring you to the land."

After we finish our hard work in allowing ourselves to be freed from our own personal "mitzrayim" – constraints, corresponding to the four levels of the soul (biological Nefesh, emotional Ruach, cerebral Neshomo and transcendental Chaya), the fifth dimension (unified Yechida) emerges – the Essential level of the Divine "brings you to the land," with the coming of the Moshiach in the final redemption, announced by Elijah the Prophet. This fifth level is not accessible directly through our efforts. It only surfaces after we travel through the first four phases.

PASSOVER INSIGHTS

Leap to the Future

The Baal Shem Tov would eat three festive meals on the last day of Passover. The third meal, which would be held toward the evening, was called "Moshiach's meal," because on the last day of Passover there is a revelation of the light of Moshiach. - Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch

Passover is an eight-day festival, with two opening and two closing days of heightened observance and commemoration. While the theme of freedom runs as a current through the entire festival, the first days of Passover focus primarily on the first redemption – our liberation from Egypt thirty-three centuries ago – while the last days highlight the final redemption – the future era of divine goodness and perfection heralded by Moshiach.

Thus our transcendence of time enters a new, heightened phase: it is one thing to vitalize memory to the point of actual re-experience, but quite another to make real an event that lies in the future, especially an event that has no precedent or parallel in the history of man. Yet in the closing hours of Passover, we enter into the world of Moshiach: having vaulted over millennia of past, we now surmount the blank wall of future, to taste the matzah and wine of redemption.

Candlelit Search

Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch told:

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi returned from his first visit to Mezeritch – where he had first been exposed to the teachings of Chassidism as a disciple of Rabbi DovBer of Mezeritch – just prior to Passover of the year 5525 (1765). Though a young man of but twenty years at the time, Rabbi Schneur Zalman was already a respected figure in his hometown of Vitebsk, and many of the town's young scholars regarded him as their teacher and mentor.

Upon his return to Vitebsk, Rabbi Schneur Zalman said to his disciples: "Soon we shall conduct the search for chametz, which Torah law instructs to be held 'On the eve of the fourteenth, by the light of a candle' and to cover all 'recesses and crevices' of our homes. Searching for chametz involves more than removing every particle of physical leaven from our domain; it also means eradicating every last vestige of spiritual leaven – self inflating pride – from every 'recess and crevice' of the fourteen elements of our personality: the seven character traits of one's 'animal self' and the seven character traits of one's 'G-dly self.' This, too, is a search to be conducted 'by the light of a candle' – by the light of one's 'Candle of G-d, the soul of man.'"

On the thirteenth of Nissan of that year, Rabbi Schneur Zalman was so preoccupied with his preparations for the search for chametz that he ate nothing the entire day (he did not fast – it is forbidden to fast during the month of Nissan – he just didn't eat). The search took all night, though Rabbi Schneur Zalman and his wife lived in a single room at the time.

PASSOVER INSIGHTS CONT'D

The Emancipation of G-d

In our prayers, we refer to Passover as the “season of our freedom.” The plural “our,” of course, refers to us, the people of Israel. But on a deeper level of interpretation, “our freedom” is the freedom of G-d and of Israel. As our sages point out, G-d’s promise to Moses, “I will bring you out from under the hardship of Egypt...,” also reads (by an alternate vowelization), “I will be brought out with you from under the hardship of Egypt...” For the essence of man is “literally a part of G-d above”; as long as man is imprisoned, his deepest yearnings stifled and denied actualization, G-d, too, is not free.

In general, the Torah’s commandments fall under two categories: laws that govern relations between man and man (“good for man”), and those that outline the duties of man to his Creator (“good for G-d”). On Passover, as befits the “season of our freedom,” the two categories fuse into one: “good for G-d” is synonymous with “good for man,” and vice versa.

This is most poignantly demonstrated in the organization of the seder, conducted each year on the night of our liberation from Egyptian slavery. The purpose of the seder is to “remember the day on which you left Egypt” and reaffirm our commitment as G-d’s people. To this end, we eat the matzah and the maror and review the story of the Exodus. Yet the entire seder is constructed as a dialogue, as answers to questions posed by the “four sons” – the wise son, the wicked son, the simple son, and the son who does not know how to ask. One remembers the Exodus not in meditative communion with G-d, but by fulfilling the commandment to “tell your child” – including “your child” in the broader sense of the term: any individual whom you are in a position to teach and enlighten, including “children” who are antagonistic or indifferent to the essence of Passover.

The freedom attained at Passover emphasizes the superficiality of the dividing line between the “social” and “religious” spheres of life. On the day that G-d became free through the redemption of the human soul, it is most obvious that no relationship can be forged with G-d that does not include a commitment to one’s fellow man.

Passovering Time

True freedom is freedom from limitation – whether external or internal, whether physical, psychological or spiritual. *Mitzrayim*, the Hebrew word for “Egypt,” means “boundaries” and “constrictions”; yetziat mitzrayim, “going out of Egypt,” is the endeavor to transcend limitation, to rise above all that inhibits the soul of man.

One of the most constricting elements of the human condition is the phenomenon of time. Time carries off the past and holds off the future, confining our lives to a temporal sliver of “present.” But on the first night of Passover, we break the bounds of time, having received a mandate to experience the Exodus “as if he himself has come out of Egypt.” We recall the Exodus in our minds, verbalize it in the telling of the Haggadah, digest it in the form of matzah and *maror*. As we passover the centuries, memory – those faded and anesthetized remnants of past that generally constitute our only answer to the tyranny of time—becomes experience and history is made current and real.

PASSOVER INSIGHTS CONT'D

The Freedom to Ask Questions

As a child I remember being called upon to ask the Four Questions that begin the Passover Seder. However, it was only in more recent years when my own children asked me the questions, I realized that not all of them are directly answered. Why encourage children to ask and then not give direct answers?

The greatest freedom of all is the right and the ability to ask questions, and not be silenced. The beauty of the Passover questions is precisely that: Questions. Life's journey is learning how and what to ask. And after all, the wise question is half the answer. Jewish tradition alters many activities on the Seder night for one reason only: to provoke and motivate children from the youngest age to question, to probe, to ask and ask again. The Four Questions invite children on a journey of inquiry so that from a young age they are imbued with the confidence that asking is not just for adults. From childhood on questions become the cornerstone of the story of Passover, the story of Freedom.

Our education system today can learn a compelling lesson from the Passover questions. We need to encourage children's natural inquiry so as to cultivate the unique talents in each of our kids rather than boxing them into certain standards. How many casualties result from schools that are generally geared toward the average child, the ones that "fit in"? What about all those unique individuals that stand out, are different, too advanced, too slow or gifted in different ways? And what does a conformist system do even to the 'regular' kid? Is there such a thing as a 'regular' kid?

So this Passover demand of your children to ask and challenge. Allow them to express their unique selves. Indeed this also includes the "child within." As adults we too could use a heavy dose of childhood fascination to explore new horizons, new challenges and greater hopes. This year let us teach ourselves, our children and our communities to celebrate the beginning of our glorious human quest to search, to question and to discover our unique place and contribution in this world.



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