

Passover seder — lighting up the night

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The Passover seder for me is the single most meaningful night of the year. It's not only because it's the anniversary of *Yetzias Mitzrayim* — the Exodus, which was the birth of the Jewish people — it is because Pesach is the night that connects our past to the future. You see, everything about our seder is drawn from the past and as we relive it we make it real for the future. When I recline at the seder table with my 200-year-old Haggadah that I received from my grandfather, I open it to read the same words that my ancestors read for thousands of years. I raise my voice in song with the ancient melodies passed down throughout the ages at the seder tables of my forbears.

Everything about the seder is steeped in tradition, even the food and drink. Although red wine is finer than white and considered more appropriate for the seder, my grandfather uses white wine to remember the blood libels where Jews were accused of slaughtering Christian children and filling their wine bottles with blood. The food we serve is prepared as it was for hundreds of years, passed down from mother to daughter — chicken soup with matzo balls, boiled brisket with traces of cinnamon, nutmeg and ginger (not roasted, to remind us that we do not have a roasted Paschal offering which was brought when the Temple stood), honey-glazed carrots and homemade applesauce.

My wife and I then focus our attention on our children and we begin the process of educating them about their history and their people. Each year we deepen their knowledge and understanding. We tell them about their past to help prepare them for the future.

There is no mitzvah quite like that of *Sippur Yetzias Mitzrayim* — recounting the story of the Exodus at the seder. The Torah tells us that we must do it as a family; the children must be constantly engaged in a dialogue format rather than a storytelling session; sweets and other stimuli are recommended to ensure that the children relish the experience.

Each and every year since the Exodus we have told this story, in the same format, parent to child, grandparent to grandchild, and even when we are by ourselves we must tell the story so neither we nor our children ever forget how God brought us out of Egypt, made us into a nation and gave us the Torah at Sinai. We are enjoined to be careful not to limit this experience to a mere history lesson; we must rejoice that we remain Jews and feel as if we ourselves were freed from bondage.

As I lean back in my chair and look around my table after the meal, everyone is sitting a little straighter in their seat with a certain glow of pride on their faces. There is an awe and a wonder — the spiritual euphoria that comes with a mitzvah. The look on their faces says, "We are Jews, God's chosen people! We will never forget that." Tears come to my eyes as I think of how my grandparents were saved from the horrors of the Holocaust because they too experienced the seder and knew that the Jewish people have a God-given purpose and must survive. We break into song, just as we did in the Temple Courtyard in Jerusalem

thousands of years ago and we sing *Hallel* and praise God for all of his blessings. We have reached a spiritual crescendo. *Cheirut* — freedom — from everything that stops us from expressing ourselves as Jews who are committed to Torah and mitzvot.

The Passover seder is a link in the chain of the tradition that reaches back to the Exodus, brings us to the present and connects us with our future. Mark Twain wondered, "The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed, and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"

Our secret lies in the events that we relive during the Pesach seder. We are not merely a people with common ancestry, we are a nation, a nation that God created at the Exodus and gave us the Torah as our mission on Mount Sinai. As long as we carry the banner of God, seek to fulfill the Torah and transmit it to our children as we have since the Exodus, the Jewish people will remain immortal.

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