

RESPONDING TO INTERNAL STRIFE: A SEDER SUPPLEMENT

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While the Seder by and large deals with the retelling and reenactment of the exodus from Egypt, and our resolve in the future to overcome any external enemy, this year we ought to consider focusing as well on the challenges we face within – specifically, the internal strife searing in Israel and all over the Jewish world. What follows are suggestions that relate aspects of the Seder to this internal crisis. It is a template meant to inspire thoughts wherein Seder participants can join in, sharing their own reflections and interpretations.

Kadesh:

Before reciting Kiddush, we begin the Seder by adopting the prayer recited by some before the morning daily service: “Behold, I accept upon myself the commandment of the Lord to love my neighbor as myself - הריני מקבל עלי מצות עשה של ואהבת לרעך כמוך.”

Urchatz:

Water is a symbol of life – we’re born through water, we became a people when the Red Sea waters split. Indeed, there is no single molecule of water. And so, before washing our hands for Urchatz, is an opportunity to talk about the importance of togetherness, of Jewish unity, foundational to the enduring life of the State of Israel. (A good starting point may be to consider the difference between unity and uniformity.)

Yachat:

As we split the matza, we may want to reflect on the divisions within our community, and ask each Seder participant how he or she would try to do more to heal the fractures.

Maggid:

Maggid tells the story of the exodus. Note that the Haggadah spends much time on our family roots, leading to the birth of Israel as a nation. In fact, the whole of the Book of Genesis deals with our lineage – fractured families that reunite. Then, and only then, does the Book of Exodus, the story of our nationhood begin, teaching that the best model of nation is family.

A cornerstone of my theology is that Am Yisrael must be viewed as a loving family. When considering the needs of Am Yisrael, the nation of Israel, I find myself substituting the word "family" for "nation" – and doing my best to act accordingly. And the test of family is not how we love when we agree, but how we love when we disagree.

Four Children:

Four children with different strengths are present at the Seder. (In the end, no matter our age, we're all children.) They sit together, hopefully in peaceful conversation. Of course, family doesn't mean we have no disagreements, what it does mean is that when we disagree we do so agreeably. Suggestions for what can be called the "ethics of disagreement" can be elicited from participants. Here are some ideas:

- Language must be used with care. While a word is a word and a deed is a deed, words lead to deeds.
- Dissent is acceptable, delegitimization is not. No purpose is served in invalidating the other.
- Right and left should recognize that it has no monopoly on loving the land and people of Israel. When disagreeing, we should not malign the motives of the other.
- As difficult as it is to imagine, each side has what to learn from the other.

Vehi She'amda:

This central paragraph reminds us of that which requires no reminder – that there are still external enemies that pose an existential threat to Israel. Given those threats, do Seder participants agree or disagree that IDF soldiers or reservists should never refuse army service as a means of political protest.

The Ten Makkot:

Here we list the Ten Plagues – in fact, the Haggadah mentions views that there may have been many more. In the spirit of imitatio Dei, when fighting an external enemy, our voices have often been loud, stark and abrasive. Yet, for me – and this is a matter Seder participants could

lovingly debate – there has always been a clear difference between fighting an external enemy, and disagreements within the Jewish community. In these internal disputes, we are, in effect, disagreeing with members of our own family. The rules, therefore, must be far more benevolent, based firmly on principles of acceptance, loyalty and love.

Dayenu:

With all the challenges we face, it's important to offer thanks for the blessings we have, and not focus on the blessings we lack. With the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the state upon us, what, concerning Israel, are we most grateful for?

Eliyahu:

The seder is divided in two. While the part before the meal deals with the past redemption, the part after deals with the hope for future redemption. Both halves begin with invitations to others to join in, with a major difference.

In the *ha lachma anya*, the invite of the past, our doors remain closed, reminiscent of the first Passover celebrated in Egypt, when only household members and registered guests could attend.

In contrast, the invite of the future involves actively opening the door for Elijah. Elijah could be anyone, someone we don't know, perhaps a fellow Jew with whom we disagree. Who knows, the person we think most unlikely to be Elijah, may have the key to redemption.

Karev Yom Asher Hu Lo Yom Ve'Lo Laila:

There is a mystical theory that people reflect the physical settings within which they live. In Israel, for example, the time between sunset and darkness seems relatively short. In other words, it is either day, or night. Most Israelis, I believe, think accordingly — in absolutes. You are either right or wrong, you're either with me or against me. Yes, it's either day or night.

As the Seder draws to a close, we sing out the melody *karev yom asher hu lo yom ve'lo laila* a hope for a redemptive time, when it is no longer absolutely day nor absolutely night, when the twilight is expanded, when people with opposite views can not only coexist, but flourish.

Closing:

My parents always ended the Seder with Hatikvah, declaring our hope is never lost. Here is a good time to end as we started, with *Hareni Mekabel*, and then declaring: I am a *kitzoni* – an extremist Jew: not on the right or left; but rather, an extremist in ahavat Yisrael, loving our fellow Jew.

May this Passover bring us closer to redemption, closer to an Israel united, an Israel of internal peace, of nation as family, of ahavat Yisrael.