



The Seder Night and our Lives

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At our seder table there are many people who come. Some of us have gone through transitions, some of us have faced illness, and some of us are ‘not redeemed’. In our lives we will all be this person at one time or another. Holidays are especially difficult, and ignoring these feelings can sometimes be even more painful. Using the haggadah and rituals in new ways can help us to ‘name’ those things which we are struggling with and help us to face these challenges, providing bridges towards wholeness and healing on individual, family, and communal levels.

Bedikas Chametz: Soul searching

What is my leavened bread, my “chometz” – what are the behavior patterns I practice and the beliefs I hold that keep me from being the best me that I can be? What would it take to allow me to feel liberated?

What part of my personality or my life or my world needs the light of faith or the light of renewal or the light of loving-kindness shed on it right now?

When I eat my “Chometz”, i.e. when I allow the behavior patterns that hold me back to manifest, I keep myself in my own, self-created Mitzrayim (Egypt). What does that Mitzrayim look like? *What is still appealing to me about “Mitzrayim”?*

PESACH NIGHT

Kadesh- Sanctification

I raise my cup of joy in thanks to God on Passover night. Jews celebrated Passover for millennia thanking God for their freedom when they personally were in the midst of exile. Even when things are difficult, can we find things in our lives for which to be grateful? Upon saying the ‘shehechyanu’, why is it important that the Divine has brought us to THIS day?

Urechatz: Wash n Go

What are the underlying belief systems that keep me in my Mitzrayim? Which of these would I like to let go of, to “rechatz”, to have washed away this year?

In Egypt we are told the Jewish people were on the 49th level of tum’ah, impurity. We were totally unconnected to God, and therefore ourselves? We needed to purify ourselves, to go to the *mikveh*? We need to symbolically immerse ourselves in the purifying water, for all of us emerged from the water of the womb. How would I like to be ‘reborn in this coming year’?

Karpas: Transitional Objects

While in the midst of thinking about “letting go” and allowing chametz and evolution to occur, it is important to remember the need for “supports” in our lives. What “Karpas”, what physical and spiritual supports, do I need right now to help me out of my Mitzrayim?

Our national birth as a people must be according to our tradition coupled with the springtime. Life may seem dormant- even dead- but new life is preparing. If the *karpas* is renewal, why dip it in the salt water? Life's changes always come with opportunities as well as loss, and both need to be embraced. The seder teaches us the dynamic of change. What changes have happened in my life over the past year? What new opportunities have been given to me that were not there before? What losses have I experienced?

Yachatz: Recognition of Present and Future

We crack the Matzah in to ‘create’ the poor man's bread, for poor people eat some now and save some for later. When I break the matzah, to recreate the poor man's bread of the land of Egypt, to I recognize my own brokenness.

Although we announce that we are poor, and this is our bread, we immediately invite others to share? In the midst of my life and challenges, have I been able to reach out beyond myself and still share? Have I been emotionally available for my friends, family and loved ones?

Maggid: Telling our story

Mah Nishtana: A different night

- What are some of the questions that I rarely allow myself to ask myself, to be asked, or to think about? Why is this gathering- this year with these people- different than my gathering in past years?

- In what ways do I allow my “Ma Nishtana”, my child-sourced wonder, curiosity, and creativity to manifest?

Avadim Hayinu: Enslaved

-Labor must be ennobling. To be alienated from what we do on a daily basis, not to own or take pride in our work, can be very distressing. Pharaoh made the build temples and palaces to foreign God's and kings, God's and kings who did not reflect their values. In our professional life, do we feel we are making a difference? Do we feel challenged and that our work has meaning? If so, how and why? If not, what changes must we make?

The 4 Children: The child within

- All four children- even the rasha- need to be at the table. How do each of the four children manifest in me? Have I held myself back from loving any of those child parts? Have I overdeveloped one aspect of my personality at the expense of other parts of my personality? Are there parts of myself that I need to further explore?

- Can I find an occasion when I was just being myself and I provoked an angry response or another difficult emotion from those around me? What have I learned from this situation?

Mitechila: The beginning

-If I were telling the story of my life during the past year, what event stands out as the one with which I would start? Why?

-God tells Abraham in the *berit ben habetarim*, the covenant of the parts, that we would be enslaved for four generations and then be redeemed. When Jacob went down to Egypt, he feared, because he knew that the future was unclear. Have we prepared ourselves on a personal level for when tragedy or transition occurs? Are we conscious of possible changes in our life's but prefer not to deal with them, or do we recognize and prepare for 'the days of oppression', just as we learn how to celebrate the 'days of happiness'?

Vehi Sheomdah: Behind the scenes

-Do I believe that I am never really alone, that there is something, someone, or some part of me that will "amdah", will always stand up for me, no matter what? If not, how can I add that into my life? We cannot do this alone.

Plagues

-Upon each of the plagues we take a little wine out of our cup to recognize our diminished joy. What have been the "makot", the plagues, that have befallen me, my people, my country, other people, other countries, or planet earth this year?

Dayenu

-Dayeinu does not mean it was enough that God did this. What would it mean to take us out of Egypt only to leave us vulnerable to Pharaoh's troops at the sea? It means it would have been enough for us to praise God. What are the areas of my life that I can say "Dayenu,"? Conversely, what are the areas in which I feel as if

I have been “making do” and so feel justified in asking for “more”? What do I really want right now?

Motzi Matzah: A taste of freedom

Just like the Matzah is the bread of affliction, it also is the bread of freedom at the same time! According to tradition, one should not eat much on Passover eve, or even eat matzah at all in the weeks leading up to Passover, in order to eat the matzah with gumption and enthusiasm. As we eat our matzah and celebrate our collective future, what things do I look forward to in the coming year? What do I hope for?

Maror

The bitterness is dipped into the sweet charoset, but why? It is indeed true that in the midst of suffering, we can find no redeeming qualities. However, in retrospect, we often see how these experiences ennoble us, made us more human and compassionate. Suffering is bitter, but sometimes it is a bitter medicine. The Jewish people came out of Egypt, and carried with them the lessons of being a 'stranger in a strange land'. That never left them... What bitter experiences have you needed to face this year- illness, divorce, unemployment, death of a loved one? How have you changed because of this? Looking back, have the lessons learned helped you in some way to make sense of your life in a new way?

What still brings up a sense of “Maror”, of bitterness, about my life? In what ways can I lighten this load in my life?

Shulchan Orech: The Set Table

-Is my “shulchan aruch” – my table set: do I eat with conscious awareness, being clear on what I put into my body, realizing that the type and quantity of food and drink I eat is the first key to maintaining my health?

-Are there those who should be at my table who are not, either because of distance, strife, or even death? How can I do my best to ‘set the table’ in light of those people who are missing?

Tzafun: Seeking wholeness

The second part of the matzah is put away for the *afikoman*, which represents the complete redemption, just as now the other half is reclaimed. However, we need to search for it? In those areas I need wholeness, and I have been able to identify what those areas are, have I created a strategy to get to where I want to go?