

## Questions... Questions... Questions...

*With a good haggadah and some preparation, these questions can provide an opportunity for people to talk not only about the text, but their life experiences, and how they see those experiences reflected in the story of Exodus.*

*Remember... the Exodus is a metaphor for us. We need to apply it to our lives.*

*Here are some great conversations for your seder table!*

- 1) The *mishna* states that in telling the story of Exodus we need to begin with the unfortunate events and end in praise to God. There is a dispute about what this means? According to the Talmudic rabbi Shmuel, we need to start with discussing the fact that we were once slaves in Egypt. According to the Talmudic Rabbi Rav, we need to start the fact that we began in Mesopotamia as idol worshippers (!). If you look closely in the Haggadah, both perspectives are incorporated. What is the true meaning of this dispute, and how does this affect our understanding of the Passover narrative? (Hint: Besides physical slavery, what other types of slavery are there?)
  - a. What are the types of slavery that you needed to release yourself from?
- 2) For seven days we are to eat matzoh and avoid chametz? Why? What does the chametz represent? Consider the following elements:
  - a. Matzoh is called the bread of freedom, and the bread of slavery at the same time.
  - b. In the kabbalah (Zohar), the matzoh is called *meikhla de-mehemnuta*, or food of faith. Why? What does it mean to have faith in God? (Hint: think about the speed in which the Jews left Egypt after 210 years!)
  - c. In Chasidic thought, matzoh represents humility, chametz represents arrogance.
- 3) The core of the telling of the Exodus is based upon the explication of four verses. Strangely, the text upon which the Haggadah comments is not even from the book of Exodus?! Rather it is the text that one was required to say when he brought his first fruits to the temple in ancient times on the holiday of Shavuot, celebrated five days after the first night of Passover. Here is the text.(Deut. 26:1-18; the highlighted area is the part )
  - a. And it shall be, when you come in to the land which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, and possess it, and live in it; That you shall take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which you shall bring of your land that the Lord your God gives you, and shall put it in a basket, and shall go to the place which the Lord your God shall choose to place his name there. And you shall go to the priest who shall be in those days, and say to him, I declare this day to the Lord your God, that I have come to the country which the Lord swore to our fathers to give us. And the priest shall take the basket from your hand, and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. And you shall speak and say before the Lord your God, A

wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous; And the Egyptians dealt ill with us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard slavery; And when we cried to the Lord God of our fathers, the Lord heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labor, and our oppression; And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great awesomeness, and with signs, and with wonders; And he has brought us to this place, and has given us this land, a land that flows with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first fruits of the land, which you, O Lord, have given me. And you shall set it before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God; And you shall rejoice in every good thing which the Lord your God has given to you, and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the stranger who is among you. When you have finished tithing all the tithes of your produce the third year, which is the year of tithing, and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, that they may eat inside your gates, and be filled;

- b. What are the rabbis trying to teach us by using this text as the source?
- 4) We thank God for taking us out of Egypt. However, read the haggadah (and the Torah) closely? God promised Abraham that he would send us into each for 430 years? If so, why are we thanking God? God put us there in the first place?
  - a. How has the fact that the formation of the Jewish people occurred in slavery important for our identity as Jews?
  - b. What messages- nationally and individually, were we supposed to learn from being slaves in Egypt.
- 5) When we recite the ten plagues, on each plague we spill a little wine for our cup. Interestingly Jewish commentaries have read this in two totally opposite ways. According to one opinion, the spilling of wine represents God's justice, ie. spilling the blood of those who would hurt us. On the other hand, wine represents joy, signifying the fact that we should not rejoice at the downfall of the wicked. (See A Different Night Haggadah, ed. Noam Zion and David Dishon, pp. 100-101)
  - a. Which view do you agree with, and why?
  - b. Are there specific times in history when one or the other response is more appropriate?