

הגדה של פסח

*The
Sephardic
Family
Haggadah*

Edited by
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KODESH PRESS

Foreword by Rabbi Yamin Levy

The Haggadah is one of the oldest¹ and most cherished of our rabbinic texts. It was originally compiled as a way to facilitate the Biblical commandment (Shemoth 13:8) of *Sippur Yétsiat Mitsrayim* – the obligation to teach our children of the Exodus from Egypt when Matsa and Marror are present during the Passover Holiday.

Sippur or *Le’Sapper* is a particular term and means to recount the events of the exodus as a storyteller. Not a lecturer or teacher but rather as a *storyteller*. Stories grab us, take us in, transport us and allow us to vicariously experience and inhabit another world. The storyteller shares not only to educate but also to deepen and accelerate an interpersonal connection with the listeners. Our sages knew that stories are retained much more effectively than facts, dates and data. Stories have a way of instilling core values and culture more efficiently than lectures.

Our sages insist that our story open with questions². Questions are the seeds that bloom into creative study. The curiosity that inspires “questions” ensures the listener’s attention and creates a stage for discussion and learning. Like all great

1. Heinrich Guggenheimer, *The Scholar’s Haggada, Ashkenazic, Sephardic and Oriental Versions*, Jason Aronson Inc, Northvale, New Jersey, London 1995

2. Mishneh Torah *Chamets U’Matza* 7:3

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stories the story of the Exodus from Egypt begins in crisis³, a people enslaved by an evil empire. And this story ends with a nation redeemed by Hashem whose absolute compassion, love and providence inspires the listeners to chant Hallel and sing praise to the Almighty.

Our story is not just told. The Haggadah mandates we re-experience the Exodus⁴ and this is why we eat bitter herbs, and other foods that allow us to directly experience a shade of the suffering, hard work and tears our ancestors shed in Egypt as slaves. We set a beautiful table and drink an abundance of wine and recline not only as an expression of our freedom and God's goodness but so that we feel the divine providence graced upon us. We also pour out some of our wine and discard it when we remember the suffering our enemies endured as a reminder that we do not rejoice in the downfall of any human being⁵.

The spirit behind the publication of this Haggadah is to facilitate the telling of that story for the many Sephardic head-of-households and all those who wish to share the story with others at their Seder table.

I had a number of goals in mind when preparing this Haggadah. First and foremost my objective was to make it affordable so that hosts can order many of the same text and make it available to each of their guests sitting at their Seder table. I want this Haggadah to be user friendly and so I made sure that the translation is clear and concise. I recognize that many who

3. Mishneh Torah *Chamets U'Matza* 7:4

4. Mishneh Torah *Chamets U'Matza* 7:6

5. *Pirke Avot* 4:24

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lead a Seder are not proficient in Hebrew and so I transliterated some key prayers and blessing so that all Seder leaders can recite the blessings in Hebrew. I also included some basic instructions on the flow of the rituals prior to the Seder and at the Seder night. I encourage those that use this Haggadah to learn about the unique customs and traditions of your community and of your family and use this text to turn your Pesach Seder into a memorable experience.

I hope our readers will appreciate the Andalusian (fancy for Maimonidean) traditions preserved in this Haggadah. HaRambam (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon) meticulously recorded the Geonic / Sephardic traditions for posterity in his many works. Publishing a Sephardic Haggadah without his influence would render it false.

I tried to make the transliteration easy to read. I followed the Israeli Mediterranean pronunciation. I used apostrophes freely to help the reader accentuate the text as precisely as possible.

A word of gratitude and appreciation is in order to those whose help I could not do without. I thank my dear friend Hazan Isaac Azose whose groundbreaking *The Ladino Haggadah* was a template for this project. Alec Goldstien at Kodesh Press enthusiastically embraced this venture. His professionalism and personal attention to detail and aesthetics produced the final product.

I am grateful to my wife Afsaneh for her unbridled support and encouragement. Her eternal optimism is a constant source of strength and inspiration. Our children, Amichai and Chana Gila, Yedidya, Hananel, Shira, Eliyahu, David and Olivia are the embodiment of life's purpose.

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I dedicate this Haggadah to the memory of my mother Esther bat Yamin veRahma who passed away the 8th of Sivan 5773, May 16th 2013. After celebrating Shavuoth with her children she asked to be taken home where she quietly joined her creator. This dedication feels especially appropriate because my mother loved the Holidays. The rich, flavorful, and aromatic-full memories of Moadim in my parent's home was a tribute to her selfless commitment and spiritual fiber. Her gentle kindness, her abundant love and her insightful wisdom will remain a lasting inspiration to those who knew her.

Odeh Hashem Bechol Levav. I am eternally grateful to the Ribbono Shel Olam.

Yamin Levy
Moadim LeSimcha
Passover 2015

The Leader's Guide for the Pesach Seder

by Yedidya Levy

Part 1: Preparation and Mindset

You are the leader! Take a moment to understand what it means to lead a Pesach Seder. You will determine the pace, depth and mood of the experience at your table. Excitement is infectious. Your excitement is their excitement. You are about to involve your family and guests in potentially the most comprehensive storytelling experience of their entire year. Make the Pesach Seder unique, make it memorable. Whether you are leading for the first time or are a weathered pro, the Pesach Seder requires preparation. Guarantee the success of your Pesach Seder. Success isn't a gamble it's a recipe. (1) Prepare the material. (2) Be animated. (3) Stimulate the flow of participation. (4) Be repeatedly grateful to your significant other.

Even Moshe had to go through a preparation process before he could lead. The Pesach Seder lives and breathes at the intersection of tradition and great storytelling. Every Pesach Seder consists of two elements, the first is tradition which includes texts and ritual acts, and the second is narrative. You decide the element that takes precedence. Know your audience. The following questions should be your compass for synthesizing tradition and narrative: Are there more children than adults at your table? To what degree are the guests affiliated with Judaism? What will make this Pesach Seder most meaningful?

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It's your turn to transmit the tradition to the next generation. If you don't know your family tradition now is the time to rediscover it. Prepare the texts, tunes and rituals. Exemplify a standard of fluency and knowledge. Tradition should be relevant. Tradition should transcend age differences and religious backgrounds. The Pesach Seder led by my father, Rabbi Yamin Levy, provides an example of this. At one point in the evening he goes around the table with the plate of symbolic items and holds it atop the head of each member at the table while singing a song that implies they too left Egypt in a hurry. Every year this ritual manages to make us laugh. Each person experiences the playful discomfort of having everyone at the table sing to them while my father holds a huge plate over their head. Make your traditions memorable. Appeal to the youth by being lighthearted and funny, but at the same time make tradition something that is rich and substantive.

Ironically being a great storyteller isn't about telling stories; it's about showing them. If you immerse yourself in the story, the guests will follow. Pick a favorite character, theme or message and tie the evening around it. Use tools like comedy, current events and family history to engage every member of the table in your unique retelling of the Pesach narrative. Think outside the box and surprise your guests on the night of the Pesach Seder. For examples of creative tradition and storytelling, see the end of this Leader's Guide.

The more you prepare the more confident you will be. You don't have to prepare alone. Let your oldest child join you in the preparation process. Turn your preparation of the Pesach Seder into a bonding experience. Encourage your child to prepare texts and insights on the narrative. Including your child will not

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only give your child an opportunity to lead and learn, but will also plant the seeds of anticipation and excitement as the Seder approaches.

Part 2: The Meal Begins

The Pesach Seder begins. You know your family traditions and you've reviewed your version of the narrative. The table is filled with guests. Take a deep breath and remember that you are with friends and family. Enjoy how wonderful it is to be surrounded by people you love and appreciate. Begin the night with a thank you. Thank individuals by name for making the evening possible. Great leadership is about redistributing attention to the people who deserve it most. It is about having a table full of guests and being able to say thank you to the individuals that made this opportunity a reality. After saying thank you, introduce the evening by reviewing with the guests the order of the Pesach Seder. Give a concise blow-by-blow of how the night will proceed and the expected length.

Leaders must be flexible. The Pesach Seder conversation will not go as planned, and during the evening wine will definitely spill all over the tablecloth. A leader must know how to loosen his grip on the reins but never let go. Keep the evening moving and always maintain a positive energy. No tablecloth is worth the ruin of the Pesach Seder family gathering. Your positive energy must be a constant. The individuals at the table drink your energy, it saturates them. It continually pours out of you. You are the burning bush, alight but never consumed.

Leaders empower their followers. Allocate the reading of texts to the members of the table. For those who can't read

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Hebrew, let them read English. Ask your guests if they have anything to say on the topics that are uncovered for discussion. Be prepared to be unprepared. Don't only ask questions you have the answers to. Stimulate and encourage the questions of the children and adults. The Pesach Seder is a time for asking questions. Let the questions flow stronger than the answers.

Once the Pesach Seder begins, the leader should be firmly conscious of involving everyone at the table. Being a leader is about bringing out the greatness in the people around you. Let everyone at the table feel heard, appreciated and special. If every member of the table manages to leave the Pesach Seder feeling they had contributed to the ceremony then the leader knows he's done a good job.

Throughout the Pesach Seder find opportunities to be grateful. Being grateful is central to the holiday of Pesach, and fundamental to leadership. When people feel appreciated, people feel good, and if the members of the Pesach Seder walk away feeling good at the end of the night you know you've provided them with an experience they will never forget.

Top Ten Traditions and Storytelling Techniques

1. **Afikoman**: This is the broken piece of *matza* meant to be eaten for dessert. Take this piece and hide it. Tell the children that if they manage to find the *afikoman* they can ransom it back to you for any present they want. The scavenger hunt ensues! The children divide and conquer! Who will end the night with this precious piece of *matza*?
2. **Ma Nishtana**: The youngest children practice singing the poem "*ma nishtana*" before the Pesach Seder and sing it all