
A NIGHT OF QUESTIONS—
A PASSOVER HAGGADAH

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THE SEDER AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

The Seder mnemonic is an outline both for the Seder and for a spiritual practice of striving toward freedom:

Kadesh: We begin with a sense of holiness, not just the holiness in the world but most importantly the holiness found within. Each of us is created in the image of God.

Urehatz: Our first sense of cleansing--of the possibility of moving out of mitzrayim/the narrow place. The Hebrew root can also mean to lean on/to trust for these first steps require a trust in the universe and a willingness to lean on the other divine images around us as well as to trust ourselves.

Karpas: The green of spring to remind us that renewal is always possible. Life/the universe is in a constant cycle of change as represented by God's name ehyeh asher ehyeh/I will be what I will be, ---of birth, growth and death and then birth again.

Yahatz: With the reminders that we are part of the holiness of the world and the indications that change and renewal are possible, then we can confront that which is broken. We can even break that which seems whole and yet in truth needs to be first broken to allow for the necessary change and growth.

Magid: Confronting the broken, we tell our story. In that telling we hope to understand it clearly. Even if we have told it to ourselves so many times before, we still must tell it. The more you expand upon the telling, the more you focus upon it, the more clarity you may attain.

Rohtzah: We wash again to cleanse ourselves of the mire of our past. Yet, this second washing is different for we have added a "heh" to the end of the word. We can now bless this washing for we have come some distance on our path. We feel more connected to the holiness in the world, more trusting, more connected to the Holy One, the "heh".

Motzi Matzah: Then our task is to find/motzi the matzah. To discover the plain simple truths of our lives. To discover that just those middot/qualities which we considered our bread of affliction keeping us in mitzrayim---just those qualities could serve as the way out. They become the matzah they we carry on our shoulders, no longer a burden but a symbol of freedom and redemption.

Maror: Having tasted of freedom, we return once again to the bitter herbs of our lives. These bitter herbs are at times the work of our own hands and at times the illnesses and losses of mortal life. For the spiritual life is an ebb and flow between slavery and freedom. For the reality is we never leave Egypt nor make it to the Promised Land. We are always on the way. Yet by first tasting matzah, we are better equipped to confront the bitterness that is our lot.

Koreh: The deeper truth is that there is no slavery and no freedom distinct from each other. There is only a deep oneness underlying the universe. They are not separate realms. Thus we take matzah and maror and eat them together, no longer imagining that we can separate them. Korekh means entwined together. It also means to embrace---to embrace it all.

Tzafun: Before the oneness of the universe, we discover how much we don't know. We discover tzafun, that which is hidden. We acknowledge the limitations of our understanding of ourselves and the universe. In so doing we can achieve the blessings of unknowing, of being the child who does not know how to ask. We can accept and thus rest in the place of unknowing by ceasing to strive for that which is hidden.

Bareh: Without that incessant striving, we can experience all the blessings life has to offer.

Hallel: And express gratitude for those blessings and most of all for the blessing of life itself.

Nirtzah: Then our lives will be lives lived closer to our will (ratzon) and the will of the Holy One, meaning we will be the person that deep down we really want to be.

It is no co-incidence that there are 14 stages in the mnemonic.14=the Hebrew letters "dalet" and "yod". For when God (as Shaddai) created the world, God said "dai" (enough—the letters dalet and yod) to create particularity amidst the universal oneness. We live in that world of dayyenu—"enoughness". Yet it is our challenge to make the world and our internal universe more whole and holy. How? Through our outstretched arm (yad—the same letters in the opposite order) we can reverse the flow of creation---striving toward unity with deeds of loving kindness and compassion to others and to ourselves.