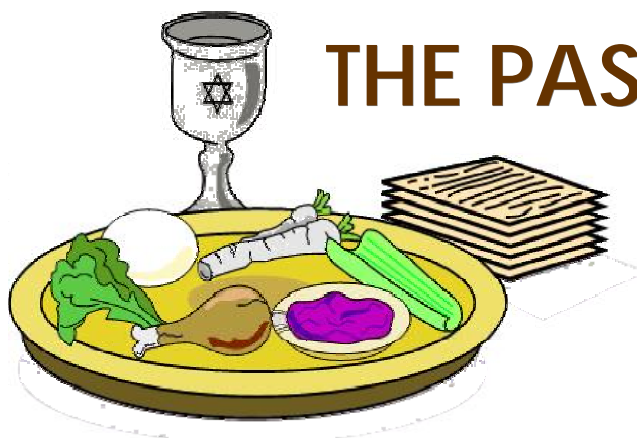


ENGAGING YOUNG CHILDREN AT THE PASSOVER *SEDER*



*"All people, in every generation,
should see themselves as having, personally,
experienced the exodus from Egypt"*

-The Passover Haggadah

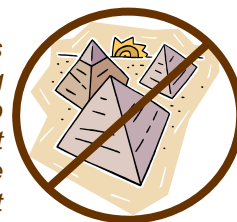
Pesah is the Hebrew word for "Passover." The *seder* is the festive meal with its readings and conversations on the first and/or second nights of the holiday. The *Pesah seder* is designed to help us remember and internalize the story of the Jewish people's exodus from Egypt. It provides an annual reminder of our liberation from slavery, of our responsibility to help others who are oppressed, and of our place in the chain of the continuity of the Jewish people.

For parents, however, the *Pesah seder* can feel like a herculean set of hurdles. Not only are there cleaning and cooking preparations for the holiday, but the anticipation of wiggling children sitting through a long evening (often in the midst of family and/or friends) can be a bit overwhelming. Fortunately, there are ways to create a meaningful, fun and engaging *Pesah seder* for young children.

Not all of the ideas on the following pages will be appropriate for all families – either because of family custom, or because of a family's adherence to *halahah* (Jewish law). But, with a little planning and creativity, parents will proudly proclaim: "Wow, what a great *seder*!"

A note about plagues & pyramids

Many ideas for "livening up a seder" found on the Internet and in books revolve around the plagues – putting toy frogs on the table, throwing ping pong balls as a representation of hail, and turning water magically red to represent blood. But when one really thinks about the plagues, it is clear that they caused suffering among the Egyptians. The ideas here don't include the plagues since here are so many ways to create a meaningful seder, without creating a fun-message about a tragic occurrence.



And what about pyramids? These were built hundreds of years before the Children of Israel were enslaved in Egypt. Furthermore, the area of Egypt where they lived and worked was far, far, far away from the pyramids. The biblical book of Exodus tells us that the Israelites were forced to build the storehouse cities of Pitom and Ra'amses and that a key task was making bricks from mud and straw... these certainly weren't the large stoneworks of the pyramids.



PESAH AND SEDER PREPARATIONS

Celebrate with Others: Think about who to have *seder* with! If hosting a *seder*, make up a guest list. If you won't be hosting a *seder*, get yourself invited to one! "Let all who are hungry come and eat!" is a very famous line from the *Pesah Haggadah* (the book used to tell the story around the dinner table). People love having guests! Contact a synagogue or your children's Jewish school director and ask if someone can match you to a family with room around its table. Don't be bashful – call!

Have Children Pitch-In with Preparations, they can:

- Make place cards for the guests.
- Help set the table.
- Clean the house



Engage the 'Jr. Chef.' Children can:



- Prepare *haroset*. This apple and nut concoction reminds us of the mortar used by the slaves in Egypt. For *haroset* recipes from around the world, see: http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Passover/At_Home/Food_and_the_Kitchen/Haroset.shtml
- Prepare salt water by stirring 1 tsp. salt + 1 cup warm water together. At the *seder*, parsley or some other vegetable is dipped in the salt water.
- Make edible, theme-appropriate snacks for the table. For example, after slicing jicama, children can use Judaic-shaped cookie cutters to make fun "appetizers" for nibbling on during the *seder*.

Prepare to Recline: To remind us of our freedom from slavery, pillows are often used to recline on during the *seder*.

- Children can go on a pillow hunt around the house, gathering pillows to be used at the *seder*.
- No-sew fleece pillows are easy and fun to make with young children. Small hands are especially helpful for stuffing pillows! Find simple no-sew fleece pillow instructions at: http://www.geocities.com/jillianmcc/Fleece_Pillow_Directions.html



Plan a B'dikat Hametz (search for leavened items): The night before the *seder*, do a *b'dikat hametz* (search for leavened items) with your family. This is done in the dark, by flashlight, as children look for 10 pieces of wrapped bread (or crackers) hidden throughout the house. Follow the link for details:



http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Passover/At_Home/Leaven.shtml

Make Afikoman Bags [The *afikoman* is a piece of *matzah* put aside in the middle of the *seder* that is then hidden for the children to go find!]:

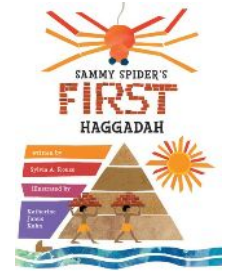
- Create *afikoman* bags for each child attending the *seder*. One way to create these bags is described here: <http://familyfun.go.com/parties/holiday/feature/famf0400passover/famf0400passover5.html> Hide *matzah* in each bag for each child to find after dinner.



AT THE SEDER

As you read the ideas below, remember that each family finds its own balance of tradition and creativity, based on family dynamics and personal attention to *halahah* (Jewish law). There are families for whom coloring would not be a problem, while for others it could pose a religious issue, or even imply disrespect to the family and its traditions. If unsure about a *seder* host family's customs, ask!

Choose a Haggadah: If you are hosting a *seder*, make sure that the *haggadah* you choose works for your family and invited guests. Local bookstores have a wide variety and some can be downloaded from the Internet. [One site with many resources, including alternative *haggadot* is <http://mcohen02.tripod.com/pesach.html>.] Take time in advance to look through the *haggadah* you plan to use and think about adding (or replacing) readings with child-friendly versions from other sources. [*Haggadot* for use with children ages 2-3 & 4-5 may be found here: <http://urj.org/educate/holidayhappenings>; scroll down to the Passover section.]



Think About Timing: Consider the starting time of your *seder*. Those who follow *halahah* will begin after sundown. But Jews on the liberal spectrum sometimes begin at 5:00pm or 6:00pm to increase the chance of little ones making it all the way through the *seder*.

Make Seder Goodie-Bags: Include stickers, paper and crayons, handi-wipes (to clean little fingers after all the dipping), finger puppets, a few *Pesah*-friendly snacks to munch on, etc.



Provide Snacks: Grumbling tummies can lead to squirmy children. Serving snacks throughout the *seder* may help avert children from asking the dreaded fifth question, "Can we eat yet?"

- Snack ideas: carrots, celery, apple-slices, soup nuts, raisins, jicama

Set the Stage: 'Setting the stage' will entice little ones and capture their attention:

- Consider conducting your *seder* in an informal space, away from the table, sitting on sofas, chairs, or on the floor in the living room.
- Drape sheets from the ceiling to create a 'tent' around the table.
- Ask guests to dress in Exodus-attire (a little creativity goes a long way with sheets, robes, pillowcases and towels).

Make it Interactive!

Consider alternative ways to tell (liven up) the *Maggid* (the section of the *haggadah* with the full *Pesah* story):

- Make a puppet show (kids can make puppets in advance)
- Use songs; a great music resource is: www.totshabbat.com
- Act out the story of the exodus.
- Switch to a children's *haggadah* with a simpler story line for this part of the *seder*.



Assign Roles: Give children important roles during the *seder*. While an older child can carry a pitcher of water for hand washing, a younger child can offer a towel for drying. A child can walk around the table with a plate of parsley (yes, even if it could just as easily be passed around the table hand-to-hand). And of course, a young child can open the door for Elijah (though some may feel "spooked" by opening the door for an imaginary person).



AT THE *SEDER* (continued)

Play Games!

- “I Spy” to identify or introduce ritual objects, *Pesah* foods or anything else at the *seder*, for example:



I spy something ... round on the table (*answer: seder plate*)
... squishy that Grandma gave you (*answer: a pillow*)
... hard and crunchy (*answer: matzah*)
... that reminds us of laying bricks (*answer: haroset*)

- Ask participants to think of one thing they would take with them if they were rushing from their homes to freedom like the Egyptians. Take turns finishing the sentence: “I’m leaving Egypt and I’m bringing...” Encourage them to think of what might be needed in the desert.

Use something “Unusual”!

- Place a toy phone at the table and every now and then have it ring (“ring-ring!”). Pretend to have a phone conversation with someone on the other end and then involve the children. For instance, have an animated conversation with Moses, “Oh, yes, I can imagine how hard it must be with Pharaoh.... What? You don’t think he’s listening to you? You need help with that? Oh, sure.” Then, hold up the phone towards the table and ask all the children to shout together “Let my people go!” Return to the phone and say, “Sure, Moses, it was our pleasure to help you!”



- When you get to the part of the *seder* with the exodus from Egypt and the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, take a bowl of water and sprinkle some pepper onto the surface. Without anyone seeing, place a small amount of dish soap on your finger. Talk about the miracle of the parting of the sea and place your finger in the water. The pepper will immediately separate on the water’s surface. Just know that if the children ask for you to do it again, nothing will happen! Miracles like these are one time occurrences!

Open a Treasure Chest!!

- Encourage question asking and conversation at the table! To support participation, keep a stash of treasure (candy or small toys/prizes) handy and whenever a child participates during the *seder*, throw (or pass) a piece of treasure his or her way.



- Purchase some of those little capsules that have a small sponge-shape squeezed inside. There are Jewish-shaped versions (check a local bookstore or do a Google search for “*Yom Tov* Magic Capsules”). Pass a few out with a cup of warm water to adults sitting next to a child. Children enjoy dropping these in water & stirring with a spoon to see what appears from the capsule...and it keeps them occupied for awhile.

**Wishing you and your family
a meaningful, enjoyable seder, and a happy & healthy *Pesah*!**

