

The best way to experience the Seder is as an active participant. The Four Questions are just the beginning; everyone at the Seder is encouraged to ask, discuss and contribute as much as possible. The following tidbits are some food for thought, to ponder alone or share at the table. But – as it says in the Haggadah itself – the more, the better!

Ha Lachma Anya/This is the Bread of Affliction (Artscroll Youth Haggadah p.15)

“Whoever is hungry should come and eat!”

Q: Why does it take so long until we actually get to eat?

A: The Exodus is a lesson in faith. The Egyptian bondage might have seemed endless to the suffering Jewish slaves – but when the time came, they were freed so quickly that their dough didn’t even have time to rise.

Faith means having the patience to allow G-d’s plan to unfold – even when we can’t see the light at the end of the tunnel. At the Seder, we know we’ll eventually get to the meal, even if it takes a while. In life, we can learn to trust G-d’s plan, even when we don’t know exactly what’s in store.

Mah Nishtanah/The Four Questions: (Y.H. p.16)

Q: Why ask the same questions every year, when we already know the answers?

A: The Seder is designed not to convey information but to make the story come alive – so we can re-live the Exodus. “Even if we are all wise, we are all understanding, we all know the Torah – it is a Mitzvah upon us to retell the story of the Exodus...”

Questions and answers are not just for the ignorant. The question-and-answer format is ideal to stimulate involvement in the Haggadah, and if no children are present, the questions can be asked by a spouse, a friend, or even to oneself.

The Seder uses a variety of pedagogical methods to encourage participation and get everyone into the action: unusual rituals; use of concrete objects like Matzah and Maror; breaking down the big picture into individual components, as in the song Dayenu.

As we learn in Pirkei Avos, “The bashful one cannot learn.” Judaism encourages questions. Don’t be afraid to ask!

Avadim Hayinu/We Were Slaves (Y.H. p.17)

Q: Why must we thank G-d for taking us out of Egypt, if He was the one who put us there in the first place?

A: From a physical point of view, we would have been better off if we had never been slaves at all. But in spiritual terms, we could only achieve our destiny as a People by undergoing the Egyptian exile. The harrowing period of slavery purified and cleansed us, and the dramatic miracles of the Exodus were an unparalleled demonstration of G-d's infinite power and love. These experiences formed us a nation, and led directly to the next monumental event– the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

Since the Egyptian exile, our fortunes have waxed and waned; we have been subjugated again, in many centuries and in many lands. But the spiritual benefits of the Exodus remain with us forever.

VeHi She'amda/It Was This Which Stood (Y.H. p.21)

“In every generation, they rise against us to destroy us, but G-d saves us from their hands.”

Q: There certainly have been occasional enemies who wished to destroy us– but does this really happen in every generation?

A: Yes. Judaism's message – the Torah – inspires admiration in some, envy in others – an envy so powerful they yearn to exterminate the Jewish People.

In **Hallel**, we recite, “Praise G-d, all you nations.” Why do we ask *others* to praise G-d? Because often, only *they* know the extent of their evil plots – which are always thwarted by Divine intervention.

Rabban Gamliel/Three Essential Passover Themes (Y.H. p.32)

Q: Why is Matzah – a symbol of redemption – mentioned before Maror – a symbol of slavery?

A: After generations of slavery, the Jews in Egypt did not have impressive spiritual accomplishments; they were on a comparatively low level relative to other generations. But G-d does not measure Mitzvos on an objective scale; He looks at the effort involved, and the challenges that one had to overcome. In light of the overwhelming difficulties they faced, the Jews' spiritual record was impressive indeed.

We mention Matzah before Maror to show cause and effect: how did we earn the Matzah of Redemption? The Maror of slavery made our Mitzvos much more precious to G-d!

Bechol Dor VaDor/In Every Generation... (Y.H. p.35)

... one must view oneself as having personally gone out of Egypt.

Q: If the miracles of the Exodus contain such important lessons, why does G-d never repeat the performance?

A: "... G-d will not perform miracles and wonders in every generation for [the benefit of every skeptic]; He commands us to create a constant reminder and symbol of that which our eyes saw, and to repeat it to our children, and our children to their children..." [Ramban (Nachmanides)]

Rabbi Yisrael Salanter once stayed at an inn, whose Jewish proprietor confessed that he suffered from weakened faith. Rabbi Yisroel did not reply, but simply retired to his room.

Some time later, the innkeeper's daughter came home, bearing a citation from school for excellence in mathematics and music.

Rabbi Salanter asked the girl to sing for him, to prove that she was indeed qualified; when she refused, Rabbi Salanter complained to her father about her behavior.

When the innkeeper demanded an explanation, his daughter explained, "It would be inappropriate for me to get up and demonstrate my talent at the drop of a hat; this is not the time or place for it. Besides," she added, "didn't I already earn my certificate for excellence? Must I prove my credentials to every skeptic?"

Rabbi Salanter turned to the innkeeper and said, "G-d, too, has already proven His credentials in full view of the entire world – at the Exodus and other events in history – and we have documentation in the Torah to confirm it. Does G-d have to overturn the natural order anew to convince every skeptic?"

A great rabbi of the Eighteenth Century declared: the survival of the Jewish People through the ages, despite persecution and suffering, maintaining our identity and preserving the Torah intact – is a greater miracle than the Exodus!