

table talk

If you are looking for some inspiration for your seder or have any questions on Pesach related issues, please call our Pesach hotline on 020 8457 2110 or email ask@aish.org.uk. You can download an electronic copy of this sheet as well as our classic q & aish seder kit at www.sedernight.org

Pesach is about talking. The word *hagada* means to tell over a story. Moreover the very name Pesach is related to 'peh-sach' a talking mouth. It is a time for Jewish families to connect through meaningful conversation. Sometimes, however we need prompting. Here are some pertinent questions with suggested ideas which are really just the starting point for further discussion.

q. how is seder still relevant?

We live in a fast paced world with so much information at our fingertips. In a world of multiple social networks, often we can find ourselves lacking in genuine communication.

The Jewish calendar offers us space to pause and reflect. Perhaps seder night in the 21st century has more relevance than ever before as it provides us with an opportunity for us to engage with family and close friends in an authentic way.

The lessons of seder night are multi-faceted. On one level we are meant to focus inwardly and 'see ourselves as having left Egypt'. There are many aspects of the Seder that encourage us to focus on self development as a means to achieve personal freedom. Some of these ideas can be found overleaf.

On another level, a central theme of the seder is the Jewish family. The Torah says (Exodus 13:8) 'And you should relate to your children on that night...'. The Pesach story is family orientated because it is *our* story, rather than ancient *his* story. Tonight is a time to discuss why family is important and how to maintain a sense of cohesion in an ever changing world. This is our opportunity to engage in quality conversations.

q. what is freedom?

Whilst it is true that the Exodus provided us with freedom from our Egyptian overlords, were we just freed so that we should no longer be oppressed? Freedom can be divided into two categories, negative and positive. They are known as 'freedom from' and 'freedom to'. Whilst negative freedom is freedom from external restraint, positive freedom is the ability to fulfil one's own potential. Both of these elements are important and are an integral part of the Pesach story.

The Jewish people were freed from slavery in order to make a positive difference to the world. To be a moral voice, an example of goodness and G-dliness in order to enable humanity to achieve its potential.

On a personal level we ask ourselves what we would like to gain freedom from, and what we would like to accomplish with our new found liberty.

q. what does the word Pesach actually mean?

On our final night in Egypt, Hashem assures us that He will 'pass over' our houses during the death of the first born Egyptians. The Rabbis of the Talmud explain that a name is far more than an arbitrary label, it is a key to understanding the essence of what something is.

During the period of slavery, the Jews had become by and large assimilated into the dominant culture to the point where had they remained there any longer they would never have been able to leave. Part of the slavery was that we had a mindset that we were not worthy of liberation. The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzrayim*, related to the word *meitzarim*, limitations. Our captors reinforced this message of our worthlessness in all manner of demeaning ways.

Hashem, as it were, passed over our shortcomings and gave us a jump start to freedom. On Pesach as well as expressing our belief in Hashem, we focus on Hashem's belief in us and our unlimited potential.

q. why do we make such a fuss about getting rid of all the chametz?

In many homes, Pesach begins weeks in advance with scrubbing and cleaning, turning the house upside down to ensure everything is kosher for Pesach as even the smallest amount of chametz is off limits.

The fact that our homes look different and that we do so many unusual things at this time makes an indelible impression on children and creates vivid childhood Pesach memories for them in turn to pass on to their children.

On a deeper level, chametz is symbolic of the ego, that puffed up, over inflated sense of self that all too often causes more harm than good. As we search for chametz in our homes, we are also taught to search for chametz in our hearts so that we can truly experience this festival of freedom.

q. what's the message behind matza?

Some people spend their time between bites complaining that this year's matza tastes as if they are thousands of years old!

Granted that eating matza may not be a gourmet experience, nevertheless it can be a meaningful one. As we take our first bite, we can remember this is the food that our forefathers ate as slaves in Egypt and again upon liberation and see ourselves as links in the chain.

Matza is an expression of the bare minimum, additive free. It is symbolic of our essence. When we eat the matza, we have a chance to get in touch with who we really are, not who we pretend to be. We can think about what our priorities are in life, what is really important to us and what we would like to dedicate our lives to.