



Talking About Israel and Palestine at the Passover Seder

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The Core of the Passover Seder

Version 1

וְהִיא שְׁעֵמֶדָה לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ וְלָנוּ. שְׁלֹא אֶחָד בְּלָבָד עָמַד עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ. אֲלֵא שְׁבִכָּל דּוֹר וְדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עָלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ. וְהַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְצִילֵנוּ מֵיָדָם.

Vehi She'amda, La'avotainu Velanu Shelo Echad Bilvad, Amad Aleinu Lechaloteinu Ela Sheb'chol Dor VaDor Omdim [Aleinu](#) Lechaloteinu V'HaKadosh Baruch Hu Matzilenu Miyadam.

And this is what sustained our ancestors and what sustains us. For, not only one arose and tried to destroy us, rather in every generation they try to destroy us, and God saves us from their hands.

Version 2

כָּל־דּוֹר וְדוֹר חַיָּב אָדָם לְרִאוֹת אֶת־עַצְמוֹ כְּאִלוֹ הוּא יֵצֵא מִמִּצְרַיִם.

B'chol dor vador chayav adam lir'ot et atzmo k'ilu hu yatza mimitzrayim.

In every generation each of us must consider ourselves as if we had come forth from Egypt.

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Engaging with the Seder as Spiritual Practice

1. Prepare yourself. As a guest at a seder, take some time (in the midst of all of your preparation for the holiday) to clarify your intentions as a conversation partner at the seder table. Remind yourself that the purpose of conversation will not be to debate or persuade people whose beliefs are different from your own. Commit to being honest about your own beliefs, and also respectful and kind toward others at the table. Promise yourself

that you will seek to engage in rigorous conversation that will contribute to relationship, not destroy it.

2. Conversation as Spiritual Practice. Prepare yourself to approach the seder conversation as spiritual practice, not just a time to blow off steam about the latest outrages you have read or heard. Sacred conversation is a discipline that includes clarifying your intentions, monitoring how much time and space you take up, and relating to others seriously and respectfully as whole human beings, including in the midst of disagreement.
3. Practice Self-Awareness. Ongoing self-awareness is essential to sacred listening and respectful speech, especially about highly charged issues. We are most likely to contribute negatively to a conversation and say things we regret when we have not attended to our own strong emotions. Consider taking three breaths before responding to a comment you find difficult. As you breathe, notice what is stirring in you, and give yourself some love if you notice you are feeling pain, anger, judgment or other strong feelings.
4. Empathy and kindness. Whether you will be at seder with loved ones or new friends, prioritize caring relationship. In this way, the seder can be a time for relationship-building and peacemaking, in the midst of a world at war. Remember that many of the people you are sharing seder with have been in great pain since October 7th, regardless of their particular views. Let Passover, above all, be a time when we offer comfort and care to one another.
5. Silence. Be prepared to hold your tongue if you get highly frustrated. Contrary to popular belief, silence does not imply agreement. It simply means you do not want to pour kerosene on a raging fire.
6. Self-care. Try to hang in even if the conversation gets a bit uncomfortable. But if you feel yourself getting overwhelmed, feel free to excuse yourself for a brief trip to the bathroom or kitchen. Sometimes a short break and change of scenery will be enough to allow you to rejoin in a better place.
7. Practice Curiosity. The seder is a night for questions, for learning and deepening our understanding. Commit yourself to learning at least one

thing that you hear from a perspective different from your own. Be prepared to ask the profound question, as the much-maligned “wicked” child asks in the Haggadah, “What does this mean to you?”

מָה הָעֲבֹדָה הַזֹּאת לָכֶם:

Ma ha'avodah hazot lachem?

What does this sacred practice mean to you?

(Exodus 12:26)

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Suggested Conversation Guidelines for the Seder

- Speak in the first person about your experiences and opinions.
- Share from a place of authenticity about what causes you pain and what brings you joy.
- Speak for understanding, not persuasion or agreement.
- Agree to be awkward and know that your contributions will be received with care.
- Give everyone at the table the benefit of the doubt.
- Approach each other with curiosity.
- Listen actively and generously.
- Love each other.

Drawn from Rabbi Dasee Berkowitz in Sholom Hartman: *In Every Generation - Haggadah Supplement for 2024*, p. 3 and from Rabbi Jan Uhrbach, “Across the Divide: Tips for Hard Conversations at the Seder Table,” bit.ly/49AevBp.

Suggested Message to Guests from Seder Host

Dear friends,

I am so excited that we will be together for the Passover Seder this year. We all have so many wonderful memories connected with this holiday, and I know that we will create new memories together.

At the same time, seder this year will be different from all other years. Because just six months ago, Israel suffered a horrific attack and the whole Jewish people is still grieving and deeply shaken. And because Israel is at war in Gaza, and is (at least partially) responsible for the deaths of some 33,000 Gazans, vast destruction of property, and catastrophic famine.

Together, I hope that we will gently and lovingly hold one another in the many powerful feelings this time has evoked in us, and bring our experiences into conversation with the ancient rituals. This is what Jews have always done —in good times and in bad.

What also may be different this year is that there may be very different perspectives on the war in Gaza among the people at the seder. I have heard from many people (beyond our circle) who are feeling apprehensive about how this conversation will go.

Some seder hosts may suggest that it is best to steer away from conversation that may be divisive at the seder. I recognize that for some gatherings that may be a wise strategy. But I believe that you and I can create a seder table that is a sacred container for everything that we bring: our joy about the holiday, our devastation about the events of the last six months, and our many different opinions and perspectives about this time.

In order to make sure that our conversation (especially about Israel and Palestine) will connect rather than divide us, I want to ask that each of you prepare yourself in a special way before coming to the seder. I ask that you take some time before the seder to clarify your intentions as a conversation partner at the seder table. Remind yourself that the purpose of conversation will not be to debate or persuade people whose beliefs are different from your own. Commit to being honest about your own beliefs, and also respectful and kind toward others at the table. Promise yourself that you will seek to engage in rigorous conversation that will contribute to rather than endanger relationship.

In addition, I will ask everyone to hold the following guidelines as an aspiration for our time together. They are listed below.

- Speak in the first person about your experiences and opinions.
- Share from a place of authenticity about what causes you pain and what brings you joy.
- Agree to be awkward and know that your contributions will be received with care.
- Give everyone at the table the benefit of the doubt.
- Approach each other with curiosity.

By Rabbi Dasee Berkowitz in Sholom Hartman: *In Every Generation - Haggadah Supplement for 2024*, p. 3

I know that we will not do this “perfectly,” nor do we have to! But I believe our time will be enriched if we all hold these aspirations in mind.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns about all of this.

Again, hag same’ach, and I look forward to welcoming you to our home on April 22nd/23rd.

With love,

Amy