

How Will We Celebrate Passover This Year?

Introduction to In Every Generation

Jessica Fisher

The injunction, *Bekhol dor vador chayav adam lir'ot et atzmo keilu hu yatzah mimitzrayim*, “In every generation, each person is obligated to see themselves as if they had participated in the Exodus from Egypt,” is one of the most evocative lines in the Haggadah. It is a call to empathy, to feel the suffering and redemption of our ancient ancestors as our own. It is also a command to use the story to bring meaning into our own contexts, as we imagine ourselves being lifted out of despair and into freedom.

Every year, we see ourselves in this story in a different way—this is part of what makes the seder such a lasting and powerful ritual. This year, the reverberating trauma of October 7, ongoing war in Gaza, thousands of Israelis displaced from their homes, rising antisemitism, and weakening bonds of allyship around the world give us new lenses for understanding the Exodus story. In some cases, the words of the Haggadah feel more relevant; in others, the Haggadah’s proclamations clash with reality. How can we celebrate a holiday of freedom when over 100 people are still held captive in Gaza? How do we call for all who are hungry to come eat at our tables when so many Israelis are not at their own seder tables and millions of Palestinians are on the brink of famine?

While there are no definitive answers to these questions, the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America has developed *In Every Generation: A Haggadah Supplement for 5784*, a collection of readings, essays, and questions inspired by *The Israeli Haggadah: Special Edition* (Hebrew, 2024) by Mishaël Zion and Noam Zion, celebrating the twentieth anniversary of their 2004 *Israeli Haggadah*, later released in English as *A Night to Remember: The Haggadah of Contemporary Voices*. We encourage you to read *In Every Generation* as you prepare for the holiday and then to bring it to your seder table, where we will reenter a generation-spanning conversation and envision ourselves anew in the Exodus story’s themes of persecution, resilience, and redemption.

After October 7, Mishaël began collecting and reading *haggadot* from the founders of the *kibbutzim* next to Gaza, finding strength in their determination and in the contemporary resonance of their additions to the Haggadah. He writes, “Reading their words, I was reminded that the power of the Exodus is not only in the covenant of common fate that we forged, but also a covenant of destiny.... It affirms that in every generation we can, and we must, change history.”

These *haggadot* include one created by founding members of what would become Kibbutz Be’eri, one of the *kibbutzim* in the Gaza Envelope that was attacked on October 7, 2023. The nascent group related to the Exodus story of suffering and redemption and, like generations of Jews before and since, they added new layers to the ancient texts, recording their aspirations for their new community through supplemental texts and illustrations. As Yigal Zorea describes in *Lines and Dots*, his blog about Kibbutz Be’eri, several years after that first Passover, the kibbutz members hired designer Paul Kor to embellish their initial efforts. The image below comes from the end of Kor’s version of the Haggadah. It depicts groups from ancient history including those scattered from the Tower of Babel, the Israelites enslaved in ancient Egypt, and the *ma’apilim* arriving in the land of Israel during the British Mandate period, all arriving and merging into one collective at Kibbutz Be’eri, where they receive comforting verses from the prophets, affirming that their hardship will be rewarded and the Jewish people will be gathered together once more.



The people who created the *Kibbutz Be'eri Haggadah* were in the early stages of building a safe and self-sustaining home in the desert, and their conditions were precarious. The Passover story of biblical enslavement and salvation served as the foundation for their own resilience. Their Haggadah is just one example from a rich history of Jews adapting the framework of the Haggadah to suit their contexts and to foster meaningful contemporary conversations. Many *kibbutzim* across Israel still make their own *haggadot* for Passover, timelessly drawing on the same hopes and questions that the founders of Kibbutz Be'eri included in 1946. But this year, six months after the kibbutz communities of the Gaza Envelope were attacked, it is particularly powerful to bring voices from these *kibbutzim*—their worry and their optimism—into our seder conversations, preserving this history of storytelling, even as the buildings and communities they built stand empty this Passover.

We invite you to use some or all the materials from *In Every Generation* to bring contemporary questions to an ancient ritual and story, and we encourage you to invite guests to bring their own supplemental materials, too. Like the founders of Kibbutz Be'eri, who created a Haggadah depicting the lush fields that surrounded them and quoting biblical texts, we hope the resources of *In Every Generation* will help you tell the story of the Exodus in a way that reflects the values, challenges, and aspirations of Jews today. The supplement includes excerpts from kibbutz *haggadot*; essays on understanding and responding to the “wicked child”; pieces on the role of hope in Jewish history and in the present; and more.

This year, when we say *Leshana haba'ah beyerushalayim*, “Next year in Jerusalem,” may we do so with the intention and prayer that next year, Jerusalem will be at peace.

A Guide for Seder Hosts and Facilitators

Dasee Berkowitz

Each year, the youngest present at the seder asks, “How is this night different from all other nights?” This seder night, the first since the events of October 7, the Israel-Hamas war, and a steep rise in antisemitism worldwide, many of us are wondering, “How will this seder be different from all other seders?”

- While on other seder nights, we retell the ancient story of our people’s liberation from Egyptian bondage, on this seder night, we are keenly aware that we, too, are actors in the unfolding of Jewish history. We may feel extra responsibility to make this Passover meaningful.
- While on other seder nights, we welcome grandparents, parents, and children to attend our seders, enacting the value of *l’dor vador* (from generation to generation), on this seder night, we know that generational divides can bring with them strong political differences. On this holiday of redemption, we may feel nervous about differences in perspectives feeling unredeemable.

- While on other seder nights, we seek to design a seder experience that is relevant, engaging, and real, on this seder night we might also seek to focus on what unites us and to avoid conversations that could divide us.

- While on other seder nights, the promise of spring and its renewal uplifts us, on this seder night we come to the table with mixed feelings. Some of us place an empty chair at our table to remember those still held hostage by Hamas. Others feel the painful absence of soldiers killed in combat. Many feel the ache for all of those who have been killed and are suffering due to the conflict. Longing and heartbreak accompany us this seder night.

For everyone hosting a seder, you are in a unique position. You have the opportunity to invite your guests to become active participants in an ancient ritual that holds the potential for healing, healthy discussion, and hope. The seder table is the stage for this ancient rite of retelling. Friends, family, and other guests are the actors. The Haggadah is our script. As you prepare the stage for the seder, I invite you to consider four conceptual frameworks to guide your preparation.

Framework 1

Set Intentions: Enable freedom within boundaries

As the convener, you set the tone for the evening, from the moment you extend the first invitation. By articulating your intentions for the evening clearly, you can put your family and other guests at ease. The journey toward freedom invites full participation and also requires structure. Just as children can express themselves freely when the boundaries are clear, your guests will feel comfortable sharing openly when boundaries are set and intentions are articulated.

Toward the beginning of the seder, share a few intentions (or in Hebrew, *kavvanot*) to encourage participation, questions, and mutual respect. To get the maximum amount of buy-in, you can set two intentions and ask folks to share what they would add. Consider choosing an intention from this list or choose one that is more suitable to your setting.

- 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.

Framework 2

Tales of Resilience: Make space for elders and their stories

This seder night, our path toward freedom must be paved by a resilient spirit. Lessons in resilience are most readily learned from our elders. We need their voices and their stories of how they have come out of Egypt over and over again. Draw out the lessons they learned from enduring adversity. Ask the children to be the bridge to the elders and have them ask the following questions or generate your own:

- Share a political or historical challenge you or your family has faced.
- How did you overcome or deal with these challenges?
- What is a lesson you have learned about resilience that you wish you had known when you were young?

Framework 3

Redemptive Questioning: Practice asking better questions

Passover is the festival of questions. Because slaves and those in bondage can't ask them, questions are a medium by which we know we are a free people. Freedom carries with it great responsibility. So many of us are not careful about how we speak, and what we ask. Asking combative questions can put others on the defensive (e.g., "what were you thinking?") and prevent true communication. As journalist and radio personality, Krista Tippett, once wrote:

Questions elicit answers in their likeness...It's hard to transcend a combative question. But it's hard to resist a generous question. We all have it in us to formulate questions that invite honesty, dignity, and revelation. There is something redemptive and life-giving about asking a better question. (*Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living*, pg. 30)

Asking generous questions is a skill we can invite our seder-goers to practice. Encourage people to ask open-ended questions like, "Who do you look up to? What inspires you about them?", "What brought you to that way of thinking?" or "What is a different way of understanding this?" Learning to ask better questions can help build a bridge with people around the table who seem hard to reach.

Framework 4

Celebrate Life: Elevate gratitude

Gratitude is a hallmark of resilience. It can hold space for loss even as we celebrate life. The structure of the Haggadah, which places a short Hallel selection (psalms of gratitude) in *Maggid* (the main section of the Haggadah) reflects the insight that words of praise and gratitude are always possible, even before we reach a redemptive ending. The Jewish people is a resilient people. To paraphrase resilience researcher, Dr. Lucy Hone, "Don't lose what you have to what you have lost" ("The Three Secrets of Resilient People," TEDx Christchurch, August 2019).

Take a moment at the beginning of the seder to have your guests look around the room to appreciate everyone who is there. At the end of the seder, ask everyone present to share a word of personal gratitude for the evening. Gratitude for what is present in our lives is that much more important in times when we know there is so much that is not yet redeemed.

Family relationships and friendships are long journeys of discovery and can hold discomfort. As you go through the seder night, invite your guests to ask questions about the texts in the supplement, and to bring their own perspectives. If arguments start to brew, welcome them. As the convener, if you find that a few people are dominating the conversation, invite other people to join the discussion by saying, "I wonder if there are other perspectives..." Remember your role at the seder is not to achieve world peace. Instead, it is to create an environment in which everyone can have an experience that will soon turn into a memory. Ensure that everyone around the table feels that they are valued, and they belong.

Our families, friends, and communities are the contexts in which we work out our ideas and ideals. Each person gathered around your table is meant to be there. We need everyone, young, old, loudly opinionated, and passive alike. In a world of so much strife and division, you are a gatherer. Inclusivity, patience, and love will pave your way forward.