

מגיד: Telling Our Story

The Ancestor Wall and *Maggid*

In an interview on the Shalom Hartman Institute's *Identity/Crisis* podcast episode, "Leadership Amidst Uncertainty," Erica Frankel, Executive Director of the Office of Innovation and co-founder of Kehillat Harlem, shared her family's unique practice of remembrance:

In our home, in our kitchen, my husband and I have what we call our ancestor wall. It's just a wall of ... any of the photos that we can track down, really, of our parents and our grandparents and our great-grandparents. That's about as many generations as we have photos of.

I remember that [each] generation ... looks incredibly different from one another. I have a portrait on my wall of my great-grandfather wearing a long black frock and a hat. I have pictures on my wall of the very next generation, my grandfather wearing a Hawaiian shirt and no head covering, setting up a *sukkah* in Cameroon where my dad lived. I have photos of my dad and my own family, the next generation, in a very different setting, in Georgia where I grew up. And then I look at my own Russian-speaking family in Harlem and think, how bizarre that this is just one generation later.

The collection of texts that makes up the *Maggid* portion of the Haggadah can have the power of an "ancestor wall," offering us multiple entry points as we tell the story of the Exodus and of the Jewish people overcoming obstacles across millennia. For this section, we offer a number of texts you might use to connect guests to different parts of *Maggid*.

Supplements for *Maggid*

Let All Who Are Hungry Come and Eat

The script of the Haggadah teaches us to open our tables to all who are hungry as we engage in the exercise of remembering our people's suffering. This year, in the face of new trauma, grief, and divisions, we offer two framings for this open invitation: to hold onto empathy and to find a place at our tables for a true sense of collective peoplehood, even when it is difficult.

Old and New Questions

Using questions from historic kibbutz *haggadot* as examples, we encourage you to invite seder participants to ask their own questions about what makes this night (or year) different from all others.

Adapting the Story in Every Generation

We have included four stories of people adapting the seder to meet a particular moment in history, modeling the ways Jews have translated and continue to translate the Haggadah and themes of Passover through the generations.

The Four Children

We conclude our supplement of *Maggid* with contemporary interpretations of how to address the prototypical four children today, including an account of someone who recently converted to Judaism and a roundtable of multiple approaches to understanding the wicked child.

Let All Who are Hungry Come and Eat

הָא לְחֶמְא עֲנִיָּא

Learning Empathy from the Bread of Affliction

Leah Solomon

Since October 7, many Jews in Israel and throughout the world have felt not only more vulnerable and afraid, but also more alone than ever before.

For six months, we have experienced a sense of unrelenting trauma, pain, and heartbreak as we grapple with the brutality of the October 7 attacks and the horrifying reality of more than 100 Israelis still being held hostage in the depths of Gaza. And we have watched as much of the world seems not only to have forgotten our pain and fear, but to have turned against us, painting Israel—and sometimes even those who care about Israel—as genocidal aggressors.

It is understandable that when we are feeling abandoned, attacked, and consumed with fear for our own people, we might find it difficult to truly see or care about Palestinians in Gaza. Though our minds know the magnitude of their suffering, our hearts, overflowing with our own pain, may struggle to hold space for the awareness that their lives, too, have been shattered.

Yet, as we begin *Maggid*, we recite, “Let all who are hungry come and eat.” At precisely the moment that we start narrating our people’s archetypal experience of oppression and suffering, suffering so severe that we had to eat the “bread of affliction” to survive, our tradition calls us to invite in all who are hungry and in need. Just when we might be most inclined to focus inward, the Haggadah reminds us of the link between remembering our own suffering and our obligation to care about all who are suffering.

In years past, this was easier. Before October 7, although we knew that Jewish history has seen many tragedies, few of us alive today had experienced such a cataclysm. Never, until now, were we confronted with the excruciating task of holding another people’s suffering even as our own is so vast and raw, let alone doing so when the perpetrators of the atrocities against us are members of that very people, and when the suffering of that people is being inflicted in large part by our own.

Yet, it is not despite this connection, but in profound awareness of it, that we must compel ourselves to see.

Two peoples live in this land, and both are here to stay. As Jews we have an even greater obligation to care about and to strive to end Palestinian suffering—not only because no human being deserves to suffer as Gazans are suffering, and not only because we should strive to be the kind of people who care about such suffering, but because our lives and futures are inextricably linked.

The horrors of this year have shown us that our suffering, too, is inextricably linked to the suffering of our neighbors: neither Jews nor Palestinians anywhere in the world will live in safety until we all do; and none of us will be truly free until all of us are free. Expanding our hearts’ capacity to hold the suffering of Gazans who are desperately hungry and in need is the first step in charting a path toward a better future, so that all Jews and Palestinians in Israel, Gaza, and throughout the world, might live in security and freedom.

Questions for Conversation

- The holiday of Passover and the Haggadah unpack the story of our ancestors, the ancient Israelites, who were oppressed by and then freed from enslavement. Yet, instead of calling on Jews to become more insular and not to trust others, we are taught that our experience of eating “the bread of affliction” calls us to open our tables to all who are hungry. What role does empathy play in your Jewish identity?
- How do you balance the desire to seek protection when feeling vulnerable with the command to open our doors and hearts to the suffering of others?

כָּל דְּכַפֵּין

Inviting the Jewish People to the Table

Yehuda Kurtzer

At the outset of the telling of the Exodus story, we issue a powerful call: All who are hungry, come and eat! This is not the standard “who’s hungry?” that rustles everyone to the table. The words are in Aramaic and they also reference the Paschal sacrifice, which means this formula is very old. In ancient times, the Passover feast was a group effort by necessity: any gathering of people celebrating the festival had to consume the Paschal lamb in its entirety, by daybreak. Guests and hosts had mutual interest in feasting together to complete their obligations.

The rushed eating of the Paschal lamb reenacted the core of the story that the seder tries to tell about the Exodus, marking the moment when we became bonded to one another as a people. We start the book of Exodus as a disparate group of tribes, but we leave Egypt together; and we mark that special collective bond with this feasting ritual of co-dependence.

Many of us try to reenact this in our homes today, filling our seder tables with guests, but I always feel a little regret when I reach these words in the Haggadah and it is too late to invite others. I long for the days when a group roasting its lamb outside its tent could just look around for the lonely and the not-included and invite them to participate. Passover should be one of those moments where we seal the cracks of exclusion in our communities, where we recognize that none of us will complete the obligations of peoplehood without all of us having tables at which to sit.

Today, I feel a deeper resonance. We are splintered as a community. War polarizes us and pushes us to separate tents, and it is harder and harder to imagine that we belong to the same people.

This invitation at the outset of the seder is our radical opportunity to try, at least this one time a year, to imagine an alternative, and perhaps it is also a moment for us to try to make our homes peaceful at the outset of a dinner that might include a lot of arguments. It is reminiscent of a similar formula that we recite in synagogue as the Yom Kippur fast begins, wherein we give permission to ourselves to “pray with the sinners.” Yom Kippur and Passover are similar in that they are biblical festivals for which the price of non-participation is that you are excised from the community. If you don’t join in, you are out.

Every Yom Kippur and Passover, there are a lot of people around the table who might feel that they are on the outside. Our liturgy asks us to set aside our biases and our skepticism, and to see, for just a moment, the radical diversity of the Jewish people represented by those who have come to sit with us for the evening. In both our feasts and our fasts, we strive—if only for one night—to be one people.

Questions for Conversation

- Yehuda Kurtzer describes the Haggadah’s open call, “Let who are hungry come and eat,” as an invitation into peoplehood. Share a moment from your own life where you experienced a sense of connection with the Jewish people.
- In his conclusion, Yehuda draws a parallel between this part of the Haggadah and Yom Kippur, noting that both pieces of liturgy open the door to participation for those who may feel on the outside. Are there times you have felt outside of the Jewish community? If so, what was the context? What institutional or cultural conditions cause some Jews to feel that they are on the outside of the Jewish community? How might we change these conditions so that next year we can feast together at one communal seder table?