

Seder Revisited

Five modern ideas to enhance your seder!



1. Valuing Your Time!

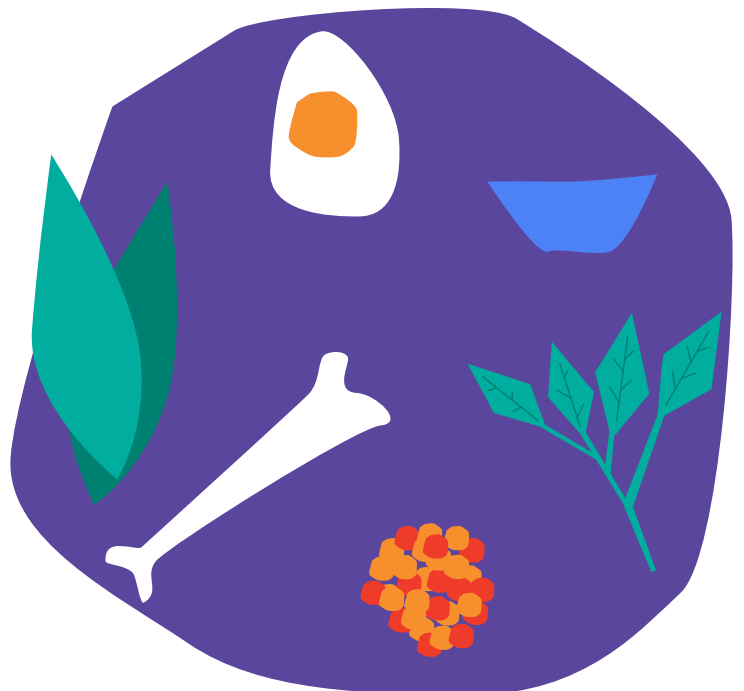
Blessed are You, O Lord, who sanctifies Israel and the appointed times [festivals]

At the kiddush on Seder night (and all other festivals) we make a blessing over the wine and conclude with the above blessing. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z”l, writes that this blessing is a reminder back to the first commandment given to the Jewish people while they were still enslaved in Egypt. The commandment was simple, set a calendar! While the ebb and flow of the days, weeks and year happen without any input from humanity, the months and therefore the festivals, are set by us. We see the moon. We declare time in this way and establish the division between the holy and the mundane.

Over the past year many of us have found new ways in which to appreciate time. There is a greater sense of work-life balance. We have been able to be more present in the lives of our immediate family. On Pesach we realise that to truly be free, means to have control over our time. To set our calendar. And to live every minute, hour, day, month and year with purpose.

How do you value time?

Over the past year, how have you changed the way you use the time?



2. Breaking The Matzot

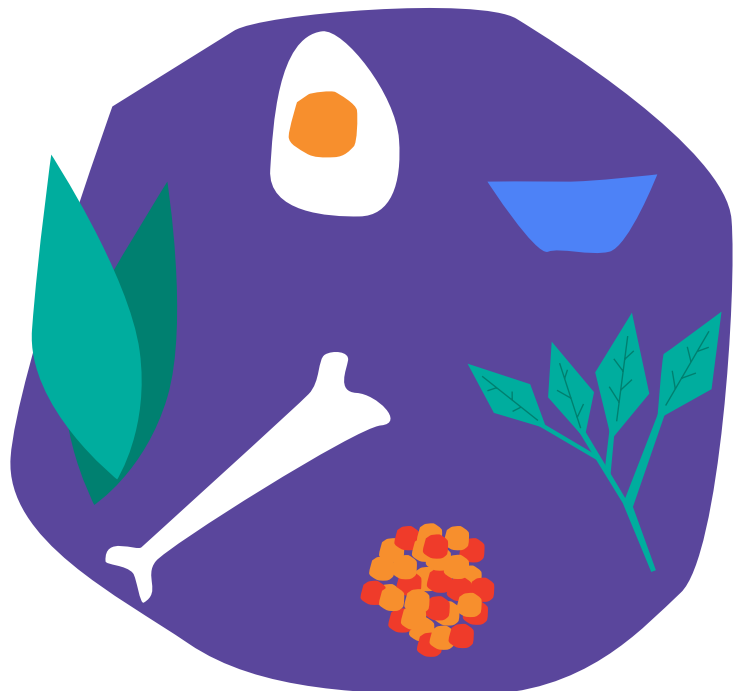
One of the more tactile moments of the Seder is when the middle matzah is broken into two pieces, one to be put back in between the other two whole matzot, the other to be used for the afikoman. Why do we break the matzah?

The answer is found in the eventual end of the matzo's journey when after the meal it is found by the children and brought back to the table to be reunited with its other half.

At the beginning of Seder night we find ourselves in the uncomfortable position of division. We know that there are so many divisions in the Jewish community - so many emotional and political issues that divide us. But by the end of the night, whether we like it or not, a transition from division to unity has occurred, most of the Jewish world has completed the seder. We have unified in joining together in the retelling of our shared history.

The children traditionally play the central role in this reunification. They are the one who hunt for the afikoman. Often bribed through promises of presents or treats. The children are non-plussed about the divisions or the politics. A child looks and sees everyone as equal. It is only when we teach them about division that they begin to mimic us.

How are you going to try to be a force for unity this year?



3. The Four children

During the seder we discuss the four children, who pose different questions (or remain silent) prompting the parental voice to answer.

The traditional understanding is to read these four children as distinct entities; however, it seems that this could have very negative consequences. In fact, the Lubavitcher Rebbe tells us that there is a fifth child, the one who is no longer present at the Seder table.

What the analogy of the four children does, is teach the parent the consequences of using the wrong approach in teaching Judaism.

At first the child comes inquisitively (the wise one), and we respond with an answer that goes over their head, is too dogmatic, too legalistic.

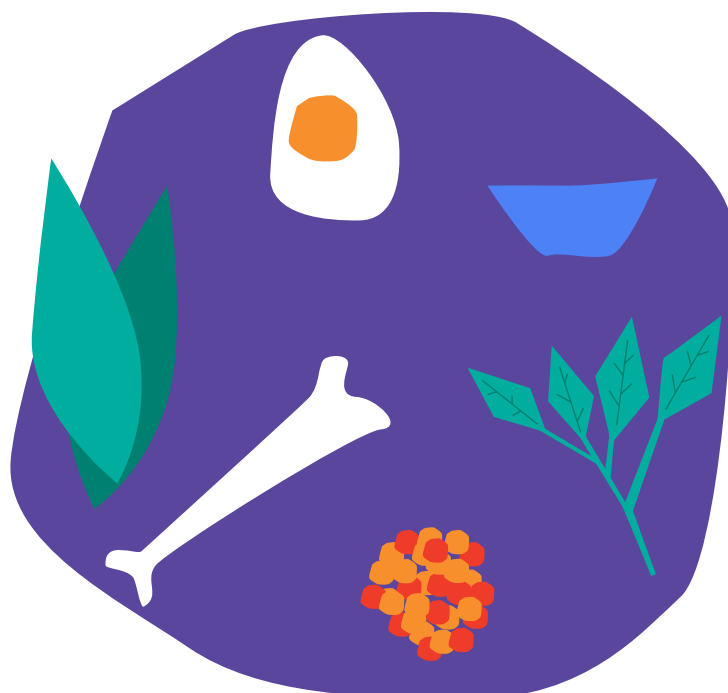
Then the next year, the child returns with a bit more chutzpah (the so-called wicked one), realising that these rules and regulations don't seem relevant, and tries to disassociate themselves from the ritual, what is this thing that YOU are doing?

The year after, the child is jaded (the innocent one), and can barely muster a question, just asking 'what is this?' in a nonchalant way.

The next year, the child sits at the table, but cannot be bothered to even ask a question (the one who does not ask).

Finally, the years go by, and the child is so disinterested that they do not even bother turning up.

The Seder teaches the parent that each child needs something to draw them in and engage them, something that is relevant to them and meets them at their level. The only way that the Jewish story will be passed from this generation to the next, is if they themselves find it interesting.



4. V'hi She'Amda

Pesach deals with the story of Pharaoh's enslavement of the Jewish people and our eventual freedom. One of the more emotive parts is when we recite v'hi she'amda, the song that discusses how this pattern has repeated itself. Someone has tried to rise up against us and destroy us, but we have been rescued from their hands.

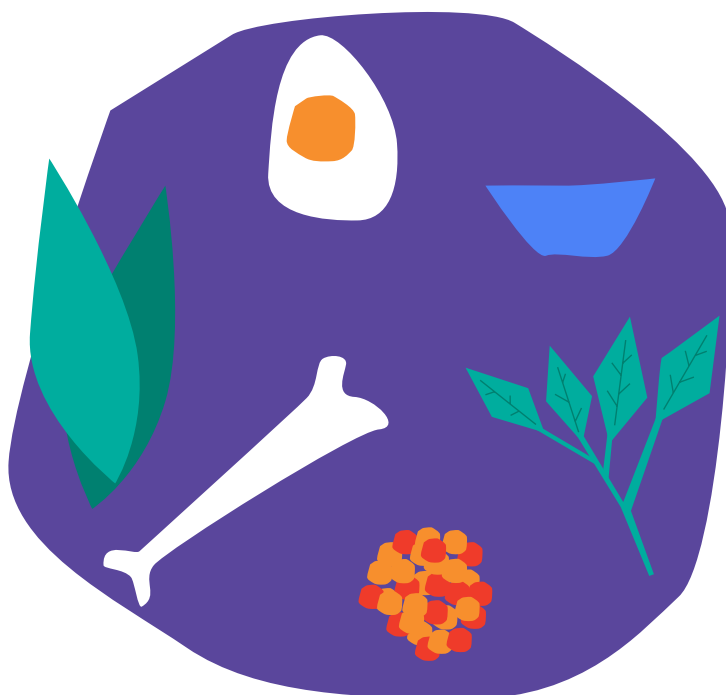
It is an often-used trope. We must stay Jewish because for so long we were persecuted, but we are still here. But how does that sit to the modern child or young adult who has never seen persecution and is deeply assimilated into the surrounding culture.

For the first time in a very long time, we are in a moment of choice, where the next generation of Jew gets to opt-into their Judaism. The notion of the need to survive is no longer as relevant. We are now in a moment of thriving.

The Haggadah takes us on a journey. Yes, it does remind us of our enslavement, of our dark moments of history; but it also dwells extensively on our good times, with Dayenu and the Hallel. It prioritises the importance of valuing the thriving moments.

We should learn to emphasise the thriving moments in our own Jewish lives.

What is one area of your Jewish experience that has been thriving or that you would want to see thrive?



5. The Bitter Herb

The maror, bitter herb, can be understood in two ways, depending on your perspective. Either it is the bitter herb that reminds us of everything bad that happened in Egypt and throughout Jewish history, or it can be seen as the spicy condiment that adds flavour and spice to the traditional matzah and lamb from the Paschal offering (like the spicy paste called schug found in a schwarma).

Both meanings are right. However, the first reason leaves you with disappointment – why would we keep remembering this negative aspect of our story especially as we are about to begin the festive meal? The second one gets you to take the negative situation, learn from it, and be enhanced positively by it. As the old saying goes, when life gives you lemons, make lemonade.

