



# Can We Make This Night Different From All Other Nights?

**Heshie:** In the seventh chapter of the Laws of Chametz and Matzah, the Rambam in his Mishneh Torah recounts the rules found in the Talmud Bavli in the last chapter of Tractate Pesachim. He speaks about the pivotal role that children play at the Passover *seeder*. In essence, they are the center of our attention on the night of Pesach. It is important for all parents and grandparents to remember that every child is different, and that the adults must make an effort to engage each child in his own way on the night of Passover.

Rambam suggests doing unusual things at the *seeder* in order to arouse the curiosity of the children around the table. He mentions giving out nuts at the table. In his time, perhaps that was something unusual. In every generation there are different things that might be enacted to make the *seeder* exciting and interesting. Over the years, we have given a lot of thought to ways to engage our children and grandchildren at this significant Jewish celebration. What follows are some ideas that we've culled have found fun and compelling. Perhaps some of these pre-Pesach and *seeder* night ideas will resonate with our readers. You may want

to keep a list and add to it every year when an original idea comes to you, or you hear something from friends.

**Rookie:** The seder is perhaps the most observed Jewish holiday of the entire calendar year. It even beats Chanukah for the number of Jews observing some family meal in which the exodus from Egyptian slavery into freedom, and then becoming the nation of Israel is celebrated.

The centerpiece of the seder is the telling of the story, which sounds like it is a Torah commandment through the words "*Ve'Higadeta l'Vin'cha*" (and you shall tell your children!) There are a lot of words in the Maggid section, and words don't always speak to all children. Here are some ideas we've gathered from friends and family about enhancing the *seeder* night experience for the children and grandchildren. Of course, in Israel it's easier. No second *seeder*!

*Sedarim* come in cycles. When there are young marrieds with small children, the *seeder* is focused on the fun and competition. When the children are grown, we enjoy long *sedarim* with lots of learned *divrei Torah*. And then when we have grandchildren, the *seeder* again comes around to entertaining and

engaging the children.

Some suggestions for both before the holiday and during the *seder* night:

Take children to a *sefarim* store before *yom tov* and allow them to choose a new illustrated Haggadah out of the many available.

Give kids a colorfully photographed Pesach cookbook and allow them to choose a dish they will help prepare. Let them compose the shopping list for the recipe.

Have a silver polishing “party” on the *mirpeset* or in the garden.

Assign each child a paragraph to read aloud at the *seder*. Not just Abba or Saba will read, but you will too. Make sure the child prepares his paragraph, so he will read fluently and accurately, with understanding and expression. (In 1990-1, we hosted an almost 13 year old Jewish boy from Poland who wanted to come to the US to get a year of Jewish life. He learned to read Hebrew while attending day school in our neighborhood. About six weeks before Pesach, we assigned him a paragraph. He diligently practiced it every day and was so proud to read aloud with the rest of our kids at the *seder*!)

Have a child practice a *dvar Torah* to actually present it, not just read it from a paper.

Buy a new costume item every year and add it to the collection. We have magnificent Pharaoh and Pharaoh’s wife hats that are a hit every year!

Sing whenever you can. Timeless words are remembered best when set to music. Even though my singing voice isn’t great, I always sing, saying that, if this is the voice God gave me, it must be the voice He wants to hear!

Bring a glass pitcher of tomato juice to the

table for *Makat Dam*.

Throw the plastic frogs around at each other at every opportunity.

Have the children pinch the adults, making believe the kids are lice.

Don animal gear and emit loud roars to imitate the wild animals of *Arov*.

Domestic animal cries like baa, neigh, moo, *kukuriku*, etc., can be vocalized and grow weaker as the deadly *dever* takes effect.

Red and white boils can be prepared on arm bands and face masks.

A laundry bag or pillow case with a towel inside can be hauled over one’s shoulder as the family exits *Mitzrayim b’yad rama!*

Take a blue table cloth and make waves with it, and have the children cross the sea!

Use the matzah covers, afikomen bags and pillow covers made in preschool! Though not so elegant, they provide a nostalgic tour down memory lane.

Finally, Pesach is a wonderful time to build family memories and family values. Are the kids hearing what we are saying? Are we conveying it clearly enough? Let’s make this Pesach the opportunity to continue the conversation that will last throughout the years and across the generations. ■

A recent **oleh**, **Heshie Billet** is Rabbi emeritus of the Young Israel of Woodmere and a past President of the Rabbinical Council of America. A recent **olah**, **Rookie Billet** retired from a long career as a Jewish educator, principal, synagogue rebbetzin, and yo’etzet halacha in the US.

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